
COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS OF RISING CHILD ABUSE AND PREVENTIVE MEASURES IN INDIA, U.S. AND U.K

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ABSTRACT

This research titled “ Comparative Analysis of Rising Child Abuse and Preventive Measures in India, U.S, and U.K” examines the prevalence, legal responses, institutional mechanisms, and preventive strategies adopted in these three countries between 2000 and 2025. It analyses major legislations including the POCSO Act, 2012 (India), CAPTA (U.S.), and the Children Act, 1989 (U.K.), along with the functioning of child protection institutions. The findings reveal that while all three countries have strong legal frameworks, the effectiveness of prevention and protection depends largely on implementation, early intervention, and inter-agency coordination. The U.S. and U.K. demonstrate relatively stronger preventive systems through home-visiting programs, safeguarding partnerships, and school-based education, whereas India faces challenges of underreporting, socio-cultural stigma, and uneven enforcement. The study concludes that prevention-oriented, child-centred, and coordinated approaches, supported by international cooperation, are essential to reduce child abuse and safeguard children’s rights.

1. Introduction:

Child abuse (or child maltreatment) is a global phenomenon affecting hundreds of millions of children each year. WHO estimates that over half of all children aged (2–17) years, experience some form of violence annually, including physical punishment, emotional abuse, or sexual violence¹. However, only a fraction receive support, and much abuse remains unreported.

Prevalence estimates in India vary widely due to differences in study methods and underreporting. Research indicates that different forms of child abuse are physical, sexual, emotional, and neglect are highly prevalent but often hidden due to stigma and lack of reporting. Child sexual abuse estimates range from 4%–66% for females and 4%–57% for males. Official crime data shows a rising trend in reported crimes against children over the years, but these figures represent only a portion of actual abuse. Comparatively, community surveys suggest far higher prevalence rates but are limited in scope.

In the U.S., surveillance systems like the CDC's child maltreatment data provide structured estimates. Reported referrals to Child Protective Services (CPS) consistently number in the millions annually, reflecting both incidence and robust reporting systems².

In U.K, the ONS data shows that nearly 30% of adults in England and Wales report having experienced abuse in childhood (emotional, physical, sexual, or neglect). Recent data also indicate rising reports of online related child sexual offences³. While this captures retrospective experiences rather than annual incidence, it signals high lifetime prevalence.

2. Similarities and Differences in Legal and Institutional Responses

2.1 Legal Framework

India's legal framework is built around POCSO and the Juvenile Justice Act, focusing on sexual abuse and rehabilitation. Implementation and enforcement quality vary across states, and stigma continues to impede reporting. The U.S. framework under CAPTA emphasizes

¹ Susan Hillis et al., *Global Prevalence of Past-Year Violence Against Children: A Systematic Review and Minimum Estimates*, 137 *Pediatrics*, e20154079, at [page number] (2016).

² Centres for Disease Control and Prevention, *Preventing Child Abuse and Neglect: Fast Facts*, Atlanta, GA, USA: CDC, (2023).

³ Office for National Statistics, *Childhood Abuse and Neglect in England and Wales: Adult Retrospective Survey*, Newport, UK: ONS, (2020).

mandatory reporting, standardized procedures, and federal funding tied to compliance. Each state also has its own child protection statutes, making enforcement broad but moderately variable by state practice. The U.K. legal framework is centred on the Children Act (1989 & 2004) and safeguarding duties across public services, with strong criminal statutes for sexual offences, including online harms.

2.2 Institutional Structures

- India: Child Welfare Committees⁴, Juvenile Justice Boards, NCPDR, Childline 1098 helpline.
- U.S.: Child Protective Services⁵, multidisciplinary child advocacy centres, family/juvenile courts.
- U.K.: Local Safeguarding Children Partnerships (LSCPs)⁶, social services, NSPCC and related NGOs.

All three countries have formal institutional responses, but the U.S. and U.K. systems benefit from stronger inter-agency coordination and dedicated funding mechanisms, whereas India's structures often face resource and capacity constraints.

3. Comparative Effectiveness of Preventive Measures

3.1 Primary Prevention:

India's "Safe Touch" school programs are effective but struggle with rural penetration. The U.K.'s mandatory RSE curriculum is the most structured and evaluated.

3.2 Secondary Prevention:

The U.S. Home Visiting Model (MIECHV) is the "Gold Standard" for preventing neglect in at-risk families⁷. India's Anganwadi system is a massive infrastructure for this but is currently

⁴ Juvenile Justice (Care and Protection of Children) Act, 2015, No. 2, Acts of Parliament, 2016 (India).

⁵ Victims of Child Abuse Act of 1990, 34 U.S.C.,20301–20307.

⁶ Children Act 1989, c. 41 (UK).

⁷ Charles Michalopoulos et al., Off. of Plan., Rsch. & Evaluation, U.S. Dep't of Health & Hum. Servs., OPRE Report 2019-08, The Mother and Infant Home Visiting Program Evaluation (MIHOPE): Early Findings on the Effects of MIECHV-Funded Programs on Family Outcomes (2019).

under-utilized for child protection compared to nutrition.

3.3 Tertiary Prevention:

The U.S. Child Advocacy Centres (CACs) are the most effective model for holistic victim recovery. India's Fast Track Courts are effective for disposal speed but often lack the therapeutic support found in U.K. or U.S. systems.

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4. Country-Specific Recommendations

4.1 India

Amend the POCSO Act to include a judicial discretion clause for consensual adolescent relationships (ages 16–18). This would prevent the "criminalization of romance" and reduce the 25% burden of non-predatory cases in the judiciary.

Introduce a statutory requirement for all educational and medical staff to undergo biennial "Safeguarding Certification," similar to the U.K. model, to ensure early identification. Empower Village Child Protection Committees (VCPCs) with dedicated budgets under *Mission Vatsalya* to handle local-level monitoring and secondary prevention⁸.

4.2 United States

Standardize the definition of neglect across all 50 states to explicitly exclude "poverty-related factors" (lack of food/housing due to financial hardship), preventing the unnecessary separation of low-income families. Double federal funding for Evidence-Based Home Visiting programs, as they have proven to reduce maltreatment entries by nearly 50%.

4.3 United Kingdom

Create a statutory register for home-educated children to ensure they remain visible to

⁸ Min. of Women & Child Dev., *Mission Vatsalya: Operational Guidelines for Implementation of the Scheme* (2022) (India).

safeguarding partners, closing the loophole of the "hidden child." Ring-fence national funding for local authority "Early Help" hubs to prevent families from reaching the "crisis threshold" before receiving support.

5. Policy and Ground-Level Interventions

Establish a "Global Digital Safety Standards" treaty to compel tech companies to use proactive AI detection for grooming and CSAM⁹, moving liability from the victim to the platform provider (following the U.K. Online Safety Act). Implement "Mobile Safety Clinics" in rural India and the U.S. to provide mental health screenings and "Body Safety" education in areas with low school attendance.

5.1 Capacity Building and Awareness Strategies

Shift the training of Juvenile Police Units from "interrogation" to "Forensic Interviewing," focusing on non-leading questions that prevent the re-traumatization of the child. Move beyond "Safe Touch/Unsafe Touch" to "Digital Consent and Grooming Awareness" for parents. Campaigns should focus on destigmatizing the act of seeking help for mental health issues before they escalate into abusive behaviour. Create institutional roles for adult survivors of child abuse to consult on policy, ensuring that the "lived experience" shapes the legal response.

5.2 Monitoring, Evaluation, and Data Improvement

Transition from counting "referrals" to counting "outcomes." Data should track the long-term mental health and education status of victims for 5 years post incident. India should integrate NCRB data with the Baalswaraj portal to allow real-time tracking of a child's journey from report to rehabilitation. Commission annual independent audits of Child Care Institutions (CCIs) and Foster Care placements to identify "hidden abuse" within the state system itself.

6. Conclusion

Child abuse is a global epidemic that ignores borders, but its solutions are found in the intersection of Law, Technology, and Empathy. Law provides the deterrent, but it must be child-centric and distinguish between developmental exploration and predatory

⁹ Dep't for Sci., Innovation & Tech., Online Safety Act: Explainer and Implementation Roadmap (2025) (UK).

harm.¹⁰Technology is the new frontier of abuse, but it also provides the tools for direct reporting and evidence collection. Empathy is the most critical component by shifting societal focus from "punishing monsters" to "supporting families," we can break the intergenerational cycle of violence.

This comparative study concludes that while the U.S. excels in research, the U.K. in safeguarding culture, and India in legislative speed, a hybrid model incorporating all three is the only way to achieve the UN SDG 16.2 goal of ending all forms of violence against children by 2030¹¹.

The measure of a society's progress is its ability to protect its most vulnerable members. This study also concludes that the law must not just be a "shield" that protects children from harm, but a "foundation" that supports their growth. In the coming decade, the success of India, the U.S., and the U.K. will depend not on how many abusers they imprison, but on how many children they successfully safeguard from ever experiencing abuse in the first place.

¹⁰ Nat'l Crime Recs. Bureau, Ministry of Home Affs., *Crime in India 2024* (2025).

¹¹ NITI Aayog & UNICEF, *SDG India Index 3.0: Special Report on Child Protection and Violence Prevention* (2025) (India).