
FROM REPORTING TO JUSTICE: EXAMINING UNDERREPORTING, INSTITUTIONAL BARRIERS, AND ACCESS TO JUSTICE UNDER THE POCSO ACT IN INDIA

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ABSTRACT

The study presents the implementation of the Protection of Children from Sexual Offences Act, (POCSO Act) 2012 in India, with focus on the justice for child victims. The aim of the study is to examine the factors that leads to non-reporting and considers obstacles facing by child victims during the justice process, namely obstacles related to reporting, investigation, medical examination, prosecution and judicial proceedings. The methodology of the study is qualitative, analytical and legal, especially focused on secondary sources of information for the entire research, i.e. case law, official reports, government documents, research literature and other legal documents relating to the subject matter. The provisions considered the Act as, substantive, procedural and institutional sections of 3-15, 19-21, 24-30, 32 and 33-40. The finding shows that underreporting happens due to stigmatization, shame and silence, fear of reprisal, worry over family reputation, dependence on the offender, interaction with the offender, and lack of knowledge of the law. The result showed that institutional and procedural obstacles may cause delays, inaccessibility, unresponsiveness, unfairness, untimeliness and inefficiency of justice. The discussion highlights that statutory safeguards alone cannot ensure child-sensitive justice without consistent institutional implementation. Therefore, the study focused on institutional coordination, specialised training, child-friendly reporting mechanisms, effective procedural safeguards and victim-support measures.

Keywords: POCSO Act, Child Sexual Abuse, Underreporting, Institutional Barriers.

1. Introduction

Child sexual abuse is an unforgiving infringement of a child's right to dignity, physical integrity and personal autonomy. In India, offence is committed against an individual who is less than eighteen years of age, and considered as child under Section 2(d) of the Protection of Children from Sexual Offences Act, 2012 ("POCSO Act")¹. Such abuse may take place through penetrative sexual assault, sexual harassment, child pornography and exploitation by any person. Such person may be one who is not known to the child, such as a stranger, or a person the child is familiar with, such as, person in a trusted or powerful position, as a teacher or relative².

- **Need for Special Legal Protection for Children**

The need for child specific legislation arises due to factors of age, dependency and vulnerability that, articulate and react appropriately to any sexual abuse. Therefore, POCSO was introduced as a child-specific law and provides for numerous safeguards along the course of the justice process. Sections 24-27³ mandate evidence recording and Medical Examination and Section 28⁴ lays down the provision of Special Courts. Section 33⁵ outline the special procedures of such courts, including safeguards relating to child testimony. There is provision for assistance of expert and legal practitioner in the special courts, in accordance with Sections 39 and 40⁶, respectively⁷

- **Overview and Importance of the POCSO Act (2012)**

This Act is with the aim of combating sexual offences against children. It defines a child under Section 2 (d) and reports sexual crimes under (Section 3-12)⁸. The Act also tackles aggravated

¹ Section 2(d) of the Juvenile Justice (Care and Protection of Children) Act, 2000, the child is to be forwarded to jurisdictional CWC, On a profound consideration of the ground realities, the definition of "Child" under Section 2(d) of the POCSO Act can be redefined as 16 instead of 18."

² - Vikas Choudhry, Radhika Dayal, Divya Pillai, Ameeta S. Kalokhe, Klaus Beier & Vikram Patel, *Child Sexual Abuse in India: A Systematic Review*, 13 PLOS ONE, no. 10, e0205086 (2018).

³ Vidhi Judicial Academy, *Sec. 24 to 27, Chapter VI: Procedures for Recording Statement of the Child, The Protection of Children from Sexual Offences Act*

⁴ <https://sahodar.in/section-28-in-the-protection-of-children-from-sexual-offences-act-2012/>

⁵ Vidhi Judicial Academy, *Secs. 33–38, Chapter VIII: Procedure and Powers of Special Courts and Recording of Evidence, The Protection of Children from Sexual Offences Act*,

⁶ Vidhi Judicial Academy, *Secs. 39–46, Chapter IX: Miscellaneous, The Protection of Children from Sexual Offences Act, 2012*,

⁷ Jyoti Belur & Brijesh Bahadur Singh, *Child Sexual Abuse and the Law in India: A Commentary*, 4 Crime Sci. 26 (2015),

⁸ <https://indiankanoon.org/doc/189755549/>

offences in given situations. The significance of the legislation is it amalgamates criminal substantive laws with procedural safeguards. Sections 19-21⁹ govern reporting and the penalties for failure to report; Section 28 discusses Special Courts; Section 32 refers to Special Public Prosecutors; and Sections 35-38¹⁰ focus on immediate, child-friendly trial and support¹¹

- **Reasons Behind Underreporting**

Underreporting of child sexual abuse refers to cases of child sexual abuse that are not reported to the criminal justice system and sexual abuse that goes unreported to the police. Social, family and institutional factors can all influence it victims feel sense of shame, fear, stigma, family or community status, financial dependency or their interaction with the abuser. The Act tries to improve reporting by Section 19¹², which demands for an offence or an apprehended offence to be reported to the Special Juvenile Police Unit and the local police that to be reported to the local police force and the Special Juvenile Police Unit. Section 21¹³ prescribes punishment for non-reporting or non-recording.

- **Challenges Faced During Reporting and Legal Proceedings**

The reporting of a POCSO offence is just the beginning of the justice process. Children may face problems while registering the complaint, giving statement, undergoing medical examination, investigation, prosecution and trial. Sections 24-27 provide for safeguarding recording of statement and medical examination, Sections 28¹⁴ and Section 33 provides for Special Court and procedure, Sections 35¹⁵ and Section 36¹⁶ provide for period within which the child shall give evidence and disposal of cases and protection of child from sight of the accused while giving evidence, section 37¹⁷ makes trial in camera while section 38¹⁸ caters to

⁹ <https://indiankanoon.org/doc/3699126/>

¹⁰ Justice Durga Prasad, *Protection of Children from Child Sexual Offences Act, 2012* (MCRHRDI, 2025),

¹¹ Rakesh Kumar Handa & Shivani Goswami, *The Protection of Children from Sexual Offences Act (POCSO), 2012: The Precincts of the Law and Judicial Expositions*, 7 NLUD J. Legal Stud. 191, 191–204 (2024),

¹² Drishti IAS, *Section 19 of POCSO Act*, Drishti IAS,

¹³ CaseMine, *Trauma-Informed Interpretation of Section 21 POCSO Act: Exoneration of Mothers in Delayed-Reporting Cases*, (Apr. 25, 2025)

¹⁴ <https://www.apnilaw.com/bare-act/pocso/section-28-protection-of-children-from-sexual-offences-act-pocso-designation-of-special-courts/>

¹⁵ <https://indiankanoon.org/doc/121636560/>

¹⁶ Draft Bot Pro, *Section 36(1) in the Protection of Children from Sexual Offences Act, 2012*,

¹⁷ Samarjit Hawaibam, *A Glimpse of the POCSO Act, 2012*, Legal Eagle Elite (June 15, 2022),

¹⁸ ConstitutionofIndia.in, *Section 38 of the Protection of Children from Sexual Offences Act, 2012*,

the need of Interpreter or experts.¹⁹

- **Significance and Scope of the Study**

The study highlights POCSO's importance beyond punishment by examining underreporting, institutional barriers, and access to justice. The study explores the impact of provisions mandating reporting (Sections 19-21); provisions requiring child friendly procedures (Sections 24-27), and the prescribed child-friendly procedures under the provisions on the Special Courts (Section 28); presumption created by the provision (Sections 29-30)²⁰ and the Child Friendly Procedure (Sections 33-40)²¹ on access, child-appropriate and effective procedure, fair and objective process, and prompt and effective response.

2. Legal and Conceptual Framework

- **Meaning and Nature of Child Sexual Abuse**

The term "child sexual abuse" describes sexual behaviour that violates the child's bodily integrity, dignity and personal autonomy. The POCSO Act, 2012 is a children specific law dealing with crimes against children, falling within the ambit of the people above age of 18. Sections 3-12 pertains to penetrative sexual assault, aggravated forms of sexual assault, while Sections 13-15 pertains using minors for obscene content. The Act is based on a gender neutral approach and acknowledges that children may be exposed to sexual offences in varying situations. Its wording reflects adopting of both offence-specific definitions and increased protection linked to the age of a child.²²

- **Concept and Causes of Underreporting**

Child sexual abuse is underreported when it is not reported to the police and other responsible authorities. These underreporting of sexual abuse of children may result from shame, embarrassment, threat and coercion, family honour, financial dependence, and the child's lack of knowledge of legal rights. A child who suffers abuse may be reluctant to disclose it because

¹⁹ Vidhi Centre for Legal Policy, *A Decade of POCSO: Examining the Implementation of the Protection of Children from Sexual Offences Act, 2012* (2022),

²⁰ Drishti Judiciary, *Sections 29 and 30 Under POCSO Act*, Apr. 16, 2024,

²¹ Vidhijudicial, *Sections 33 to 38: Chapter VIII—Procedure and Powers of Special Courts and Recording of Evidence*, Vidhijudicial,

²² Vikas Choudhry et al., *Child Sexual Abuse in India: A Systematic Review*, 13 PLOS ONE e0205086 (2018),

of the fear, embarrassment, or the difficulty of describing it. The child may also refuse to report to the authorities if the abuser is known to the family. Reporting is mandatory under section 19 of the Act and punishment is prescribed in section 21²³

- **Meaning of Access to Justice**

Access to Justice under POCSO is also more than the right to approach a court. It refers to safe reporting of abuse, recording of complaint, investigation, legal aid, victims support, child-friendly court proceedings and to achieve justice that is accessible, accountable, equal, timely and effective for child victims. The POCSO Act facilitates this through the Special Courts (Section 28), Special Public Prosecutor (Section 32), Legal Assistance (Section 40) and compensation provisions. Access to justice, thus, necessarily entails the child's protection through an entire process from time of reporting, to investigation, to trial and finally to a meaningful outcome²⁴

- **Important Provisions of the POCSO Act**

The chapters in the Act dealing with substantive offences (sections 3-15)²⁵ major sexual offences and pornography related offences and punishment for the offences, and provisions related to mandatory reporting and consequences of nonreporting (sections 19-21), and safeguards relating to statement recording and medical examination section (24-27). Section 28 has Special Courts, Section 32²⁶ has Special Public Prosecutors and these section contain provision regarding appointment, jurisdiction, powers of Special Courts. Sections 29-30 contain the presumption regarding the minimum age of the victim and it has evidentiary value. Sections 35- 38²⁷ contain provisions regarding Record of the child's evidence, timeline of the trial, protection against direct exposure to the accused, in camera trial and the assistance of interpreter or expert.²⁸

²³ Vikas Choudhry et al., *Child Sexual Abuse in India: A Systematic Review*, 13 PLOS ONE e0205086 (2018)

²⁴ India Law Offices, *POCSO Act: Bombay HC Issues Guidelines for Protection of Rights of a Victim*,

²⁵ <https://indiankanoon.org/doc/10002733/>

²⁶ Draft Bot Pro, *Section 32 in the Protection of Children from Sexual Offences Act, 2012*,

²⁷ ApniLaw, *Section 38 – Protection of Children from Sexual Offences Act (POCSO) – Assistance of an Interpreter or Expert While Recording Evidence of Child*, Apr. 13, 2025,

²⁸ Shrabanti Maity & Pronobesh Ranjan Chakraborty, *Implications of the POCSO Act and Determinants of Child Sexual Abuse in India: Insights at the State Level*, 10 Humanities & Soc. Sci. Commc'ns 6 (2023),

- **Role of Courts and Child-Protection Institutions**

Section 28 of the POCSO Act prescribes the establishment of Special Courts to try the POCSO offences. Section 33 of the POCSO Act lays down the powers of the Special Court and the procedure to be followed and emphasizes that the proceedings should be child-sensitive. Section 39 allows engagement of persons in the fields of social work, psychology, physical and mental health, and child development to assist the child both before and during the experiment. If the guardians and family of the child are unable to retain legal counsel through the Legal Service Authority, Section 40 provides legal help.²⁹

3. Review of Literature

- **Previous studies on child sexual abuse.**

Kakati, I. (2024) examined the POCSO Act 2012, a civil law that dealt to protect all children from all types of sexual abuses and exploitation. Although the Act mostly concentrates on persecuting the sexual offenders, on the other hand, the Act also acknowledges the importance of POCSO offence. The study explored the nature of the compensation schemes in India, and examination of the provision and its successful implementation of POCSO Act 2012 and its amendment 2020. The study had thrown light on the issues of the female victims and the male victims too in the State of Assam. The study had been conducted on the doctrinal method using the secondary data comprising literature review, data obtained from the National Crime Record Bureau (NCRB), research papers and reports along with the reports of the Law Commission of India. The study had used the analysis of the provisions and implementation of the POCSO Act and also focussed on the rules that framed to look into the issues faced by victims in getting the compensation³⁰

Centre for Child and the Law, (2018) investigated the entire legislation that protects minors from sexual harassment and pornographic offenses while also preserving and defending their interests at every stage. The Act was gender neutral, meaning that it recognizes that criminals and victims may be male, female, or of a third gender. The act, which established special courts,

²⁹ Centre for Child & the Law, National Law School of India University, *Implementation of the POCSO Act, 2012 by Special Courts: Challenges and Issues Based on CCL-NLSIU Studies on the Working of Special Courts in Five States* (2018)

³⁰ Indrani Kakati, *Beyond Conviction: The Role of Compensation in POCSO Offences, Its Challenges and Implementation*, Indian Journal of Law and Legal Research, Vol. VI, Issue IV (2024).

increased police sensitivity, recorded a girl child victim's statement by a female police officer, gave victims legal protections, and, most importantly, resolved cases within a year, was a long-awaited reform in the criminal justice system. The researcher has made an effort to look at the penalties for protecting minors from sexual offenses and to emphasize the legal implications of the terms "child" and "age."³¹

- **Studies on POCSO and its implementation**

Pushparani, M. (2026) examined that the (POCSO) Act, 2012 is a crucial legislative step taken to prevent the sexual assault of children. It created a child-friendly legal framework which considers the "best interests of the child" as central and also provides special courts, child-friendly procedures for recording evidence, not allowing the accused to cross-examine the child, gender neutrality, mandatory reporting, and prioritisation of the treatment of the victim. Nevertheless, the Act faced a number of extraordinary obstacles in the implementation of the Act, including the low conviction rate, the delay in trials, lack of infrastructure and the sparse allocation of Special Courts. Victim and witness protection must be considered as serious issues and the criminalisation of consensual relations between young people because of a uniform age of consent.³²

Kumar, A., & Bhagat, R. K. (2026) presented the paradigm shift in the field of child protection by addressing the sexual offences against children. The study gave a detailed analysis of the provisions of the Act and the challenges faced in its implementation, the jurisprudence evolved over the Act and its socio-legal implications. Empirical studies, case law and multi-disciplinary perspectives had been used to study the Act. There was an increase in child-protection mandates through gender-neutral provisions and reporting requirements, but at the same time, investigation procedures, witness-protection, and alternatives to punishment within the framework of reformatory justice remain substantial challenges. The study informed current deliberations and offers evidence-based recommendations for legislative and procedural changes.³³

³¹ Damini Chauhan, *An Analysis of the POCSO Act, 2012*, Indian J. L. & Legal Res., Vol. III, Issue I (2021).

³² M. Pushparani, *The Journey of a Child Victim Through the Criminal Justice System: A Victimological Analysis of the POCSO Act, 2012*, Indian J. L. & Legal Res., Vol. VIII, Issue IV (2026).

³³ Ashutosh Kumar & Raju Kumar Bhagat, *The POCSO Act: A Critical Analysis of India's Legislative Framework for Child Protection Against Sexual Offenses*, Indian J. L. & Legal Rsch. (2026).

- **Studies on underreporting**

Baid, K. (2026) demonstrated that the chronic underreporting of sexual violence in India and should not be understood as one survivor's failure to report but as a strategic survival response to institutions that have routinely breached the trust invested in them. Using prevalence and conviction data at the national and Indian levels, a series of high-profile cases, the study traced, how discretion at the point of registration, delay, re-traumatisation, unscientific forensic practices and poor institutional oversight, plays out in a system in which cases are only 'heard' when they cross a visibility threshold. The comparative section compares India's institutional failure with the similar attrition story that exists in the US and UK, demonstrating that this is not a legal backwater but a structural phenomenon that developed countries are also forced to respond to.³⁴

Anand, P. (2025) examined the Child sexual abuse to be a major concern in India but male children continue to be overlooked in law and policy debates. The gender-neutral framework under the POCSO, 2012 views every child as a potential victim and bridges the loopholes in Section 37 of the Indian Penal Code and the draft Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita. Being gender neutral and not excluding child victims who are married, POCSO is best suited to extend protection to male child victims of sexual abuse. Court decisions showed that convictions under POCSO are still possible in cases involving male victims, but data from the field showed that problems persist with underrepresentation of boys, while sex-disaggregated results are barely available for investigations, prosecutions and convictions. Societal and institutional obstacles such as masculinity, victim-blaming and indifference prevent reporting and access to justice. The study employed doctrinal, empirical and policy research to assessed the law, and offers adequate protection to male children.³⁵

- **Studies on institutional and procedural barriers**

Das, M., & Kalyan, S. (2026) examined the (POCSO) Act, which protects children from sexual assault offenses and establishes Special Courts to try cases related to or incidental to such offenses. It was the first law on sexual abuse of children in India. It laid down procedures as child-friendly measures and recognises the "best interests of the child". The POCSO Act

³⁴ Khushi Baid, *Silenced by Design: Institutional Failure and the Underreporting of Sexual Violence*, 8 Indian J. L. & Legal Rsch. (2026).

³⁵ Preety Anand, *Gender Neutrality in Practice: Protection of Male Child Victims of Rape Under the POCSO Act, 2012*, 7 Indian J. L. & Legal Rsch. (2025).

struggles with various exceptional problems of implementation at the ground level such as the consistently low conviction rate, abnormally long trials, or the lack of infrastructure and the establishment of Special Courts. Victim and Witness Protection and Criminalization of consensual relations between young people due to a uniform age of consent are critical.³⁶

Srivastava, A., & Srivastava, A. (2024) examined POCSO as a law that addressed child abuse in India and play an important role in child abuse to attack the convicts. Medical evidences are important during trial under POCSO, especially when case does not have witnesses, then medical examination becomes an important source of guilty proof. The study was know to have the evidentiary value of medical examination during sexual offences in child, and to critically analyze the role of medical examination during child abuse cases and proves certain element of an offense, and how they face trial.³⁷

4. Research Gap

Earlier works have explored some aspects of POCSO in detail like the statute, gender neutral framing, special courts, reporting, challenges in implementation and legal procedures. Research on underreporting has also shown the impact of societal stigma, familial coercion, weak faith in government institutions, police reporting, delays in processes, and weak forensic capabilities. And more research has looked at the pathway a child takes from medical exams and investigation to Special Court procedures, post-trial compensation and rehabilitation, exploring secondary victimisation and the role of institutional co-ordination. These themes have not been studied holistically. However, an integrated socio-legal study connecting underreporting with institutional barriers and access to justice at each stage of reporting, investigation, prosecution and adjudication and yet to be undertaken. Analysing the available literature can also be seen that access to POCSO and also reduced to the situations of registration, prosecution and does not constitute child centred justice. So, the study aims to analyse the whole reporting to access to justice continuum by correlating barriers to disclosure and reporting with institutional response.

³⁶ Ananya Singh, Naina Mishra & Harshika Srivastava, *Is the POCSO Act Enough? A Socio-Legal Analysis of Gaps in Child Protection*, Indian J. L. & Legal Rsch. (2025).

³⁷ Aditi Srivastava & Ajay Srivastava, *Evidentiary Value of Medical Examination in POCSO Cases*, 6 Indian J. L. & Legal Rsch., Issue I (2024).

5. Research Questions

1. What are the major social, familial and institutional factors that contribute to the underreporting of child sexual offences under the POCSO Act, 2012 in India?
2. What institutional and procedural barriers are encountered by victims during the reporting, medical examination, prosecution and judicial stages of the POCSO process?
3. To what extent are the statutory safeguards and child-friendly procedures provided under the POCSO Act that effectively implemented throughout the reporting to justice process?
4. How institutional practices and procedural challenges affect accessibility, responsiveness, fairness, and effectiveness of access within the POCSO framework?
5. What measures can strengthen the implementation of the POCSO Act and improve the transition from reporting to meaningful, for child victims in India?

6. Research Objectives

1. To identify the social, familial and institutional factors contributing to the underreporting of child sexual offenses in accordance with the POCSO Act.
2. To examine the institutional and procedural barriers encountered by victims during the reporting, medical examination, prosecution and judicial stages of the POCSO process.
3. To assess the extent to which the statutory safeguards and child-friendly procedures provided under the POCSO Act and are effectively implemented throughout the justice process.
4. To analyse the impact of institutional practices and procedural challenges on accessibility, responsiveness, fairness, timeliness and effectiveness of access for victims under the POCSO framework.
5. To suggest measures for strengthening the implementation of the POCSO Act and improving the transition from reporting to child-sensitive access to justice for child victims.

7. Research Hypotheses

H1: Social, familial and institutional factors significantly contribute to the underreporting of

child sexual offences under the POCSO Act, 2012 in India.

H2: Institutional and procedural barriers significantly affect the experiences of child victims during investigation, medical examination, prosecution and judicial stages of the process.

H3: The statutory safeguards and child-friendly procedures provided under the POCSO Act are not effectively implemented throughout the reporting-to-justice process.

H4: Institutional practices and procedural challenges adversely affect accessibility, responsiveness, fairness, and effectiveness of access for child under the POCSO framework.

H5: Strengthening institutional coordination, specialised training, child-friendly procedures, reporting mechanisms and victim-support measures can improve the implementation of the Act and facilitate meaningful access to justice for victims.

8. Research Methodology

This work employs the analytical and doctrinal approach to legal research to evaluate the POCSO Act, 2012, specifically in regard to children. This is a qualitative analysis, and the study uses secondary legal and institutional sources, such as Indian law, decisions, reports and publications of the government and other authorities, etc. The POCSO Act is examined through its substantive, procedural and institutional provisions, particularly (Sections 3–15, 19–21, 24–30, 32 and 33–40), relating to sexual offences, mandatory reporting, recording of statements, Special Courts, evidentiary presumptions, prosecution and child-friendly procedures. The relevant criminal, procedural, child-protection and victim-support laws are also reviewed. Judgements of the Supreme Court and the High Courts are studied to understand the judicial interpretation and implementation of POCSO especially on child-friendly processes, evidence, medical examination, secondary victimisation, and disposal of cases in a reasonable time. Official reports such as NCRB data, Data from Ministry of Women and Child Development are used to make institutional and other context-based evidence. Thus, the material is subject to thematic analysis, and analyse under-reporting, institutional deficiencies, procedural issues and the access to justice.

9. Results and Discussion

Obj 1: To examine the social, familial and institutional factors contributing to the underreporting of child sexual offences under the POCSO Act, 2012 in India.

Result: The study reveals that non-reporting of child sexual offences under the POCSO Act is driven by complex social, family and institutional factors. Social and family stigma, feelings of shame, fear of shame or criticism, and harmful effects on the family reputation and family members' social standing come out as significant reasons for failure to report to authorities. Fear of reprisals and the known family member or the known offender's involvement with the child or the family on whom the child has a close bond, makes reporting more difficult. Lack of awareness about rights and reporting procedures, and the institution's hesitation to approach authorities brings more challenges.

Obj 2: To analyse how procedural barriers encountered during reporting, investigation, medical examination, prosecution and judicial proceedings affect justice for victim under POCSO framework.

Result: The study reveals how institutional and procedural safeguards may be weak or compromised at any stage of the POCSO process and hinder access to justice for child victims. The different stages of the reporting investigation, medical examination, legal assistance, prosecution and the court proceedings may all involve various access, process and outcome challenges that may hinder access to justice for children and make it more difficult. The study reveals that the successful implementation of a comprehensive set of child friendly procedures, safeguards for protection and assistance, and evidence related safeguards is integral to ensuring access to justice.

Discussions

The findings demonstrate that underreporting of child sexual offences and procedural barriers within the POCSO framework are closely interconnected. The first objective shows that social and familial pressures, including stigma, shame, fear of criticism, concern for family reputation, and fear of reprisals, can discourage victims and families from approaching authorities. These difficulties become more complex when the alleged offender is a known person or a family member with whom the child or family shares a close relationship. Limited awareness of rights and reporting procedures further restricts access to formal justice. The second objective indicates that reporting alone does not ensure justice, as children may

encounter institutional and procedural difficulties during investigation, medical examination, legal assistance, prosecution, and court proceedings. Weak implementation of child-friendly procedures, protection measures, assistance mechanisms, and evidence-related safeguards can create additional obstacles. Thus, meaningful access to justice under POCSO requires both improved reporting mechanisms and consistent implementation of safeguards throughout the entire justice process³⁸

10. Conclusion

The study states that the (POCSO Act), 2012 is an comprehensive law that is designed for the well-being of a minor from any type of sexual abuse and encompasses the procedural and institutional safeguards through the justice process. The Act introduces mandatory reporting, procedures for recording of statement and medical examination, Special Court, evidentiary safeguards, child-friendly procedures and provisions for legal assistance. Fear of stigma and shame, retaliation, family reputation, economic dependence, peer pressure, relation to the alleged offender, and lack of information on legal rights can prevent disclosure, limiting the involvement of victims in the formal justice system. On the other hand, child victims may face institutional and procedural obstacles from reporting to investigation, medical examination, prosecution, and during judicial proceedings. Delay, restrictions on justice measures and procedural difficulties can influence the child's overall justice experience. Thus, the study illuminates how coordinated institutions, specialist training, user-friendly child-centric investigative techniques, child helplines and victim support systems are necessary to bridge the gap between statutory protection and child friendly justice along the reporting-to-justice continuum.

³⁸ Rakesh Kumar Handa & Shivani Goswami, *The Protection of Children from Sexual Offences Act (POCSO), 2012: The Precincts of the Law and Judicial Expositions*, 7 NLUD J. Legal Stud. 191, 191–204 (2024),