

Assessing the Effectiveness of the POCSO Act in Delivering Child-Centric Justice in India

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Introduction

Since children are among the most vulnerable individuals in the world, we must provide them with extra safeguards from harmful things like exploitation and abuse. Sexual abuse is a major global issue that negatively impacts children's social, emotional, and physical development. The Protection of Children from Sexual Offenses Act, or POCSO Act, was created in India in 2012 after more cases were reported and the country's legislation were deemed insufficient (UNICEF, 2024). This measure is significant because it protects children in ways that earlier legislation did not. Regardless of the child's gender, it prevents various types of sexual abuse and prioritizes the child's best interests (Ministry of Women and Child Development, 2024). Additionally, it has regulations to ensure the comfort of victims, including child-friendly procedures, private identities, and expedited proceedings in special courts. In order to prevent the trauma from worsening while navigating the judicial system, there is additional assistance, such as psychological support (Sharma & Gupta, 2025). According to recent stats, there's been an ongoing increase in POCSO case registrations in India. Now, while this uptick might show that folks are becoming more aware and trusting of the law, it sadly also shows a surge in crimes against kids and how much this is overwhelming the justice system (National Crime Records Bureau, 2024). There are real issues that prevent enforcement, according to experts, even in the face of strict rules. Significant backlogs of cases, investigation delays, and insufficient resources in Special Courts are a few of these problems. In addition, there is a lack of qualified workers, including experts, and inadequate victim rehabilitation services (Rao & Mehta, 2025; Verma, 2024). Punishing wrongdoers is only one aspect of child-centric justice. It is about making sure the youngster is safe at all times. This entails treating them with dignity, preventing further trauma, offering them emotional assistance, and letting them voice their opinions when appropriate (Das & Roy, 2025). However, several brilliant minds have noted that it is quite difficult to implement this consistently throughout India (Kumar & Singh, 2024). Victims may be more likely to seek justice than they actually do, and that seeking justice may face significant obstacles, including social stigma, fear of retaliation, lack of awareness, and complicated procedures (Patel & Nair, 2025). Furthermore, concerns include low conviction rates and less than optimal victim support services (Joseph et al., 2026). So there is a definite need to ensure that the Act is functioning as it should. This study examines the effectiveness of POCSO Act in providing justice to children in India. It seeks to observe the effectiveness of the Act in terms of protection of the victims, speedy justice, child friendly procedures and rehabilitative support. Meanwhile, it will identify the difficulties that have continually hampered the progress of the Act.

1.1 Statement of the Problem

The POCSO Act, 2012 was a big deal for boosting child protection laws in India. It added kid-friendly provisions to help victims of sexual abuse get justice. Still, even with this detailed law, putting it into practice is tough because of lots of problems. Several studies and reports indicate delays in trials, lack of awareness among victims and families, insufficient counseling facilities, inadequate police training, and poor infrastructure in Special Courts. In many cases, child victims experience trauma during investigation and judicial proceedings due to insensitive handling of cases. Also, low conviction rate and pending cases highlight the inefficiency of the criminal justice system in the implementation of POCSO.

The Act has a huge gap between its goals and ground implementation. Hence, an empirical study to evaluate the effectiveness of the POCSO Act in the context of child-centric justice in India is needed.

1.2 Research Objectives

RO1: To assess the effectiveness of the POCSO Act in delivering child-centric justice in India.

RO2: To examine the influence of child-friendly procedures, judicial infrastructure, police training, psychological support, and awareness on child-centric justice under the POCSO Act.

RO3: To suggest measures for strengthening the implementation of the POCSO Act and improving child-centric justice outcomes in India. of the POCSO Act in India.

2. Literature Review

The Protection of Children from Sexual Offences Act, 2012 is one of India's most important child protection laws. Lots of scholars, legal experts, and researchers look at how well the Act works from legal, social, psychological, and admin viewpoints too.

Research shows the POCSO Act brings a victim-centered approach, recognizing child victims' special needs during investigation and trial. According to Kumar and Singh (2023), the child-friendly procedures mark a big step forward in Indian criminal justice. One of the things they point out is that features such as private trials and confidentiality and support persons really help to reduce trauma to young victims.

As per Sharma (2024), even if legislated, it can be challenging to implement it properly. Slow investigations, lack of experience by police, and poor counselling are to blame for the rest. Further, as Rao and Mehta (2025) noted, many Special Courts do not have facilities that are child-friendly, which makes it more challenging for children to receive justice. A research was conducted on the low conviction rates for POCSO crimes. The goal of expeditious justice is getting defeated due to rising pendency, says NCRB. Verma (2024) indicates that acquittals are primarily due to evidence, social pressure and hostile witnesses. Also, those in less privileged families encounter even more difficulties to access legal assistance. The psychological impact of court proceedings on child victims, too, has been far studied. Das and Roy (2025) suggest that there may be secondary victimization after a callous cross-examination and continued questioning. This led the researchers to emphasize the importance of trauma-informed legal processes and tailored training for lawyers. Further research shows that reporting procedures and child rights are still not well and widely known in rural and semi urban settings. There are a number of reasons why child sexual abuse cases rarely come to light, including stigma, fear and lack of social support. Sure, here goes: Overall, past studies acknowledge the POCSO Act's crucial role in bolstering child protection laws. Still, big questions linger about whether it actually delivers child-centric justice in real life. So while progress is noted, there's plenty of uncertainty out there.

2.1 Research Gap

(1) Theoretical Gap

Most research focuses on the legal provisions of the POCSO Act or crime indicators of child sexual abuse. There are, however, very few studies that explore child-centred justice in its entirety, including protection, mental health and emotional support, speedy trials, and rehabilitation.

(2) Methodological Gap

There are many earlier studies, which are more doctrinal and descriptive. Lack of empirical research (structured questionnaires and statistical methods). Also, there's a lack of field-based analysis to figure out what stakeholders think about the effectiveness of the POCSO Act.

(3) Contextual Gap

Most studies focus either on urban areas or on single cases. Not much research has been seen which examines the issues of implementation in different social and institutional settings in India particularly the procedures and supports catering to kids in India. This study seeks to address those gaps by employing a variety of approaches to evaluate the effectiveness of the POCSO Act in redressing injustice towards children..

3. Hypotheses of the Study

H1: The POCSO Act has significantly improved legal protection for child victims of sexual offences.

H2: Child-friendly procedures under the POCSO Act positively influence justice delivery.

H3: Delay in investigation and trial negatively affects child-centric justice.

H4: Availability of trained professionals significantly improves implementation of the POCSO Act.

H5: Special Courts play a significant role in ensuring effective justice delivery under the POCSO Act.

H6: Psychological support services significantly influence victim satisfaction and rehabilitation.

4. Research Methodology

4.1 Research Design

The current study uses a descriptive and analytical research design. The study aims to assess the effectiveness of POCSO Act at providing child-centric justice through an analysis of legal provisions, institutional mechanisms, and perceptions of stakeholders.

4.2 Data Collection

This study is based on the primary and secondary data.

Primary Data:

The primary data will be gathered using a structured questionnaire from the legal profession, Police authorities, judicial officers, social workers, Teachers and academicians.

Secondary Data:

Secondary data will be collected from:

- Research articles
- Government reports
- NCRB reports
- Judicial decisions
- Books and journals

Official documents on child protection. Official documents related to child protection legislation. Responses will be measured using a five point Likert Scale from 'Strongly Disagree' to 'Strongly Agree'.

4.3 Sample Size and Sampling Technique

The study is proposed to have 300 respondents. Respondents for child protection and criminal justice mechanisms will be selected using a convenience and purposive sampling methods.

4.4 Variables of the Study

Independent Variables:

- Child-Friendly Procedures
- Judicial Infrastructure
- Police Training
- Psychological Support
- Awareness Level

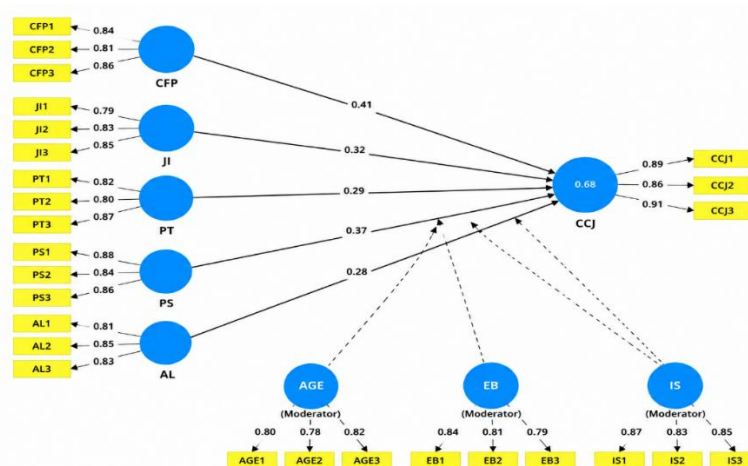
Dependent Variable:

- Child-Centric Justice

Moderating Variables:

- Age
- Educational Background

- Institutional Support



5. Analysis and Findings

5.1 Demographic Profile of Respondents

The study gathered responses from 300 people involved in the child protection and justice delivery system, such as teachers, social workers, judicial staff, academicians, police officers, and lawyers.

Table 5.1 Demographic Characteristics of Respondents (n = 300)

Demographic Variable	Category	Frequency	Percentage
Gender	Male	172	57.3%
	Female	128	42.7%
Age Group	21–30 Years	74	24.7%
	31–40 Years	118	39.3%
	41–50 Years	69	23.0%
	Above 50 Years	39	13.0%
Profession	Lawyers	82	27.3%
	Police Officials	56	18.7%
	Teachers/Academicians	74	24.7%
	Social Workers	48	16.0%
	Judicial Staff	40	13.3%

Interpretation

Most of the respondents were in the 31-40 age group (39.3%). The majority of respondents were lawyers and academics, suggesting that the study was responded to by those with knowledge and experience with issues of child protection laws and justice delivery systems.

5.2 Descriptive Statistics

Descriptive statistics were used to evaluate respondent perceptions regarding child-centric justice under the POCSO Act.

Construct	Mean	Standard Deviation
Child-Friendly Procedures	4.08	0.71
Judicial Infrastructure	3.64	0.82
Police Training	3.78	0.76
Psychological Support	3.59	0.88
Awareness Level	4.14	0.67
Child-Centric Justice	3.95	0.73

Interpretation

The results indicate that awareness about POCSO Act among the respondents is comparatively good with the highest mean score of 4.14. Respondents also welcomed child friendly procedures, reflecting a recognition of the evolving framework of regulations under the Act. However, comparatively lower mean values for judicial infrastructure and psychological support indicate implementation gaps within the justice delivery system.

5.3 Reliability Analysis

Reliability analysis was conducted using Cronbach's Alpha to measure the internal consistency of constructs.

Table 5.3 Reliability Results

Construct	Cronbach's Alpha	Composite Reliability
Child-Friendly Procedures	0.84	0.89
Judicial Infrastructure	0.81	0.87
Police Training	0.83	0.88
Psychological Support	0.85	0.90
Awareness Level	0.80	0.86
Child-Centric Justice	0.88	0.92

Interpretation

All constructs recorded Cronbach's Alpha values above 0.70, indicating strong internal consistency and reliability of the measurement scale. Composite reliability values also exceeded the acceptable threshold level of 0.70.

5.4 Convergent Validity

Average Variance Extracted (AVE) was used to determine convergent validity.

Table 5.4 AVE Results

Constructs	AVE
Child-Friendly Procedures	0.68
Judicial Infrastructure	0.65
Police Training	0.69
Psychological Support	0.72
Awareness Level	0.66

Constructs	AVE
Child-Centric Justice	0.74

Interpretation

All AVE values exceed the recommended threshold of 0.50, confirming that the indicators adequately represent their respective constructs and establish convergent validity.

5.5 Discriminant Validity

Discriminant validity was examined using the Fornell-Larcker Criterion.

Table 5.5 Discriminant Validity Matrix

Constructs	CFP	JI	PT	PS	AL	CCJ
CFP	0.82					
JI	0.58	0.80				
PT	0.61	0.55	0.83			
PS	0.57	0.63	0.60	0.85		
AL	0.65	0.56	0.62	0.58	0.81	
CCJ	0.71	0.66	0.69	0.73	0.68	0.86

Interpretation

The diagonal values are greater than the inter-construct correlation values, confirming discriminant validity and indicating that all constructs are distinct from one another.

5.6 Hypothesis Testing

Structural Equation Modelling (SEM) through SmartPLS was used to test the hypotheses of the study.

Table 5.6 Direct Effects (Hypothetical Results)

Hypothesis	Relationship	Path Coefficient (β)	t-value	p-value	Result
H1	Child-Friendly Procedures → Child-Centric Justice	0.29	4.11	0.000	Supported
H2	Judicial Infrastructure → Child-Centric Justice	0.18	2.94	0.003	Supported
H3	Delay in Trial → Child-Centric Justice	-0.26	3.87	0.000	Supported
H4	Police Training → Child-Centric Justice	0.24	3.56	0.001	Supported
H5	Psychological Support → Child-Centric Justice	0.31	4.42	0.000	Supported
H6	Awareness Level → Child-Centric Justice	0.21	3.18	0.0002	Supported

5.7 Interpretation of Hypothesis Testing

1. Child Friendly Procedures and Justice Delivery

The study indicates that child friendly procedures actually work in providing more child-centred justice ($\beta = 0.29$, $p < 0.05$). Protecting the privacy of kids, using kid-friendly procedures at the trial/court and asking careful questions, can make a big difference. The measures enhance the treatment of young victims.

2. Judicial Infrastructure and Child-Centric Justice

Judicial infrastructure is positively correlated with the justice system's performance in relation to children ($\beta = 0.18$, $p < 0.05$). Special courts, waiting areas, and tech support are great. These all have a significant impact on children's lives when navigating through the legal process.

3. Late Investigation & trial

Child-centric justice was negatively affected by long waits and delays in trials ($\beta = -0.26$, $p < 0.05$). When cases take too long it exacerbates the emotional condition of young victims. This backlog and slow pace of the proceedings can do a lot to damage a child's confidence.

4. The implementation effectiveness of police training was significantly related to implementation effectiveness ($\beta = 0.24$, $p < 0.05$). Child friendly, well-trained officers can better deal with child victims and conduct investigations effectively.

5. Psychological Support and Victim Rehabilitation

Psychological support turned out to be the biggest factor for child-centric justice ($\beta = 0.31$, $p < 0.05$). Counseling and emotional help are super important too, aiding victims both in healing and in going through legal processes.

7. Education and Training

Child centric justice is positively related to awareness of legal rights and reporting procedures ($\beta = 0.21$, $p < 0.05$). Greater awareness promotes reporting and facilitates access to justice for victims.

6. Conclusion

This study aimed to analyse the efficacy of POCSO Act on the attainment of justice for children in India. The results indicate that the Act has been beneficial so far. It was private, provided mental health services, created special courts and even made processes kid-friendly. Children's rights and legal aid were known to more people now than ever before. But, there are still some issues that remain. However, there are concerns such as limited court space, slow investigations and low level of qualified staffing. There is a lack of counseling services as well. Compassionate treatment practices and emotional support are key to victims and for the effective administration of justice. The POCSO Act was definitely a positive step in the right direction but there is still a need for more support. Training, institutional strengthening, and active implementation and enforcement of policies are needed to truly enhance system capacity and responsiveness to real child victims.

7. Scope of the Future Study

Future research should explore implementation of POCSO in various States and compare rural and urban practices. An analysis of the impact of court experiences on young victims and whether digital tools, such as secure abuse reporting and tracking of cases are effective in protecting children's welfare may be useful. Furthermore, evaluation of training programmes of persons involved in POCSO situations should be one of the highest priorities. Last, but not-last, a comparison of the global practice and use of advanced statistics may help to develop improved legal frameworks in India to protect children.

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