

# LEGALFOXES LAW TIMES

## POCSO ACT: A STRINGENT LAW AND CHILD SENSITIZATION MATTER

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### ABSTRACT

Children are the most precious and important part of the nation. They need special care and protection, but it is disappointing to say that there are several heinous offences taking place such as child pornography, sexual assault, kidnapping, child marriage, trafficking, and so on. The recovery from such offences is very difficult and sometimes kids never come out from the trauma. Due to an increase in the number of cases against the children and keeping in mind their vulnerability and being a member of the UN convention on the rights of the children, the Central Government of India introduced the POCSO Act (Protection of children from sexual offences ) 2012. It is a stringent law passed with the motive to protect and prevent children from sexual offences like child pornography, sexual assault, aggravated sexual assault, penetrative sexual assault, aggravated penetrative sexual assault, sexual harassment of any child below the age of 18 years. The cases related to such offences are to be settled down by the special court of trial for such offences and matters related therewith or incidental thereto. The idea behind this act is to protect the youth from such heinous crimes and provide them with facilities to develop in a healthy environment so that their freedom and dignity can be maintained in society. But with time, it was found that there is an urgent need to frame more strict laws in the act for creating the deterrence in the minds of the perpetrator. As a result, the Amendment in the bill was done by the Minister of Women and Child Development by SmritiZubinIrani. In this bill, the punishment has increased to the death penalty keeping in mind the interest and welfare of the children are paramount at every stage. This paper talks about the certain hindrances faced in securing justice even after the amendment like a less special court, matters related to a mutual sexual relationship, family pressure, misuse of Internet, lack of awareness in the public and also will death punishment can be a source for creating deterrence in minds of perpetrators?

## **INTRODUCTION**

Children are the most valuable and predominant part of society. They perform a significant role and are the future of any nation. They are the blessings of God and the symbol of love, innocence, and happiness in the world. But it is sorrowful that the children are facing lots of exploitation in the society such as child labour, child sexual assault, child sexual harassment, child marriage, trafficking, kidnapping, etc. these offences not only hamper the development of the children but also traumatize the child for a long period. In the 20th century, it was observed that the children are going through various injustice, harshness, and vulnerability. Children are the most sensitive and frail part of any country which needs to be protected by the elder members of the society. And to provide them all the rights just like an adult citizen, the Geneva declaration on the rights of the child was drafted in the year 1924 by Eglantyne Jebb. In which the fundamental rights of the children are summarized into five main points. The document deals with the well-being of children and recognized their right to relief, assistance, protection, and development. In the year 1946 UN introduced UNICEF (United Nations Children's Emergency Fund) to provide relief to the mothers and children affected by world war-II. The main motive is to promote the health, well-being, and development of the children. It is the most famous and worldwide spread social welfare organization. Later on, in 1959 UN adopted Declaration of the rights of the child and in the year 1966 UN members promised to provide equal rights and opportunities to the children. And finally, in the year 1989, the convention on the rights of the child was formed to prevent and protect the children from all kinds of offences and also to provide them all rights and facilities for their growth and development. The convention on the rights of the child is the widest ratified and rapid treaty followed by 194 countries as "state parties".

According to the World Health Organization (WHO), child abuse is physical and emotional ill-treatment, negligence, sexual abuse, and exploitation <sup>1</sup>World Health Organization. WHO in collaboration with the members of states and other partners is planning to monitor, maintain electronic information systems, develop, and implement evidence-based prevention strategies for addressing violence against the child. Child abuse is a hindrance for the child as well as for the developing and developed countries. The United States of America passed the Child Abuse Prevention and Treatment Act (CAPTA) 1988 for providing child protective services and prevents serious injuries to children along with the concept of mandatory reporting. India being a state party member of UNCRC is still facing a problem of child abuse and has reached the epidemic proportion. Keeping in mind the interest of the children the POCSO Act (Protection of children from sexual offences) 2012 was introduced on 14th November 2012.

## **POCSO ACT 2012**

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<sup>1</sup>World Health Organization, "<http://www.who.int/topics/childabuse/en/2007>

This Act was created to prevent and protect children from sexual offences and provide them a child-friendly environment. It is specific legislation applicable to whole India (including J&K)<sup>2</sup> The word "except the state of Jammu and Kashmir" omitted by act 34 of 2019 Ss.95, 96 and schedule V ( w.e.f. 31.10.19) and has 46 provisions as a result the scope of reporting has been expanded. The Act has described sexual offences like penetrative sexual assault<sup>3</sup> , aggravated penetrative sexual assault<sup>4</sup>, sexual assault<sup>5</sup>, aggravated sexual assault<sup>6</sup>, sexual harassment<sup>7</sup> and pornography<sup>8</sup>

POCSO Act is a comprehensive and stringent law framed to provide justice to the children against the sexual offences by providing them a healthy and friendly environment, recording of evidence, investigation and speedy trial with the help of the special court. The Act is gender-neutral and covers all the children below the age of 18 years. Earlier, the cases of sexual offences against children were dealt with under the Indian Penal Code. Comparing to IPC<sup>9</sup>,POCSO has safeguarded more as it guarantees victims immediate compensation, an in-camera trial along with anonymity. The victim is kept hidden from the accused and his identity will be kept secret until there is an interest of the children. The Act also punishes the accused with imprisonment of 3yrs, imprisonment of life, fine, with or without depending upon the severity of the crime.

Central and state must make provisions for the development of the children. But it was observed that after the POCSO Act 2012, the cases are increasing. Many cases came to light such as the Kathua rape case<sup>10</sup> and the Unnao rape case where the victim was a minor. The minister of women and child development Smriti Irani stated that in 2016 total of 36,022 cases were registered under the POCSO Act. The cases registered increased by 0.2% in 2015 over 2014, also by 4.4% in 2016 over 2015.

According to the data of NCRB<sup>11</sup>, 109 children are sexually abused every day in India in 2018. The cases reported in 2017 were 32,608 while in 2018 it was 39,827 under the POCSO Act. The highest number of child rape cases was observed in Maharashtra at 2,832 followed by Uttar Pradesh and Tamil Nadu at 2,023 and 1,457 respectively. As per the NCRB data, the crime against children has increased six times more from 2008 to 2018. The major crime against the children in 2018 was abduction and kidnapping which was at 44.2% followed by the POCSO

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<sup>2</sup> The word "except the state of Jammu and Kashmir" omitted by act 34 of 2019 Ss.95, 96 and schedule V ( w.e.f. 31.10.19)

<sup>3</sup> The Protection Of Children From Sexual offences Act 2012 (32 of 2012) s.7

<sup>4</sup> Protection Of Children From Sexual Offences Act 2012 (32 of 2012) s.5

<sup>5</sup> The Protection Of Children From Sexual offences Act 2012 (32 of 2012) s.7

<sup>6</sup> Protection Of Children From Sexual Offences Act 2012(32 of 2012) s.9

<sup>7</sup> Protection Of Children From Sexual Offences Act 2012 (32 of 2012) s.11

<sup>8</sup> The Protection Of Children From Sexual Offences Act 2012 (32 of 2012) s.13

<sup>9</sup>The Indian Penal code (45 of 1860)

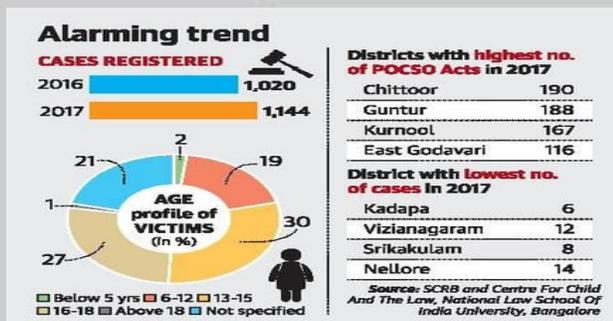
<sup>10</sup>Mohd. Akhtar v.s State Of Jammu & Kashmir, ( 2018) 5SCC 497

<sup>11</sup>The National Crime Record Bureau 2018

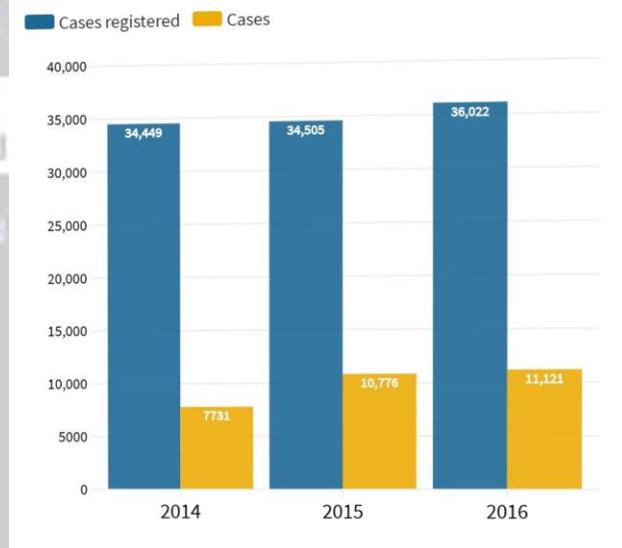
cases which accounted for 34.7% in the data. In, 2018 there were 781 cases registered on child pornography or storage of pornographic material which was double of 2017 by 331. The reports also mentioned that the cases of sexual harassment in shelter homes for women and children have increased by 30% from 544 cases recorded in 2017 to 707 in 2018 Press Trust Of India, "109 children sexually abused every day in India in 2018<sup>12</sup>: NCRB", India Today, January 16, 2020.State wise segregation reveals that 51% of crimes against the children are reported from Uttar Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh, Maharashtra, Delhi, and Bihar.

"The increase in the number of crimes against the children are extremely alarming, it also suggests an increasing trend in filing the case which shows the positive sign as it reflects people's beliefs and faith in the judiciary system", said PritiMahara, Director of Policy Research and Advocacy at CRY. The graphical representation of three years shows the total cases registered and disposed of in that particular year, are given below (Picture 1).

Inthe give picture it is clearly showing that the cases registered are more in comparison with the disposed one.



Picture: 1



<sup>12</sup> Press Trust Of India, "109 children sexually abused every day in India in 2018: NCRB", India Today, January 16, 2020

The following graph shows the number of cases pending under POCSO act 2012 in 2016 (Figure

### CASE PENDENCY: MAHA TOPS LIST

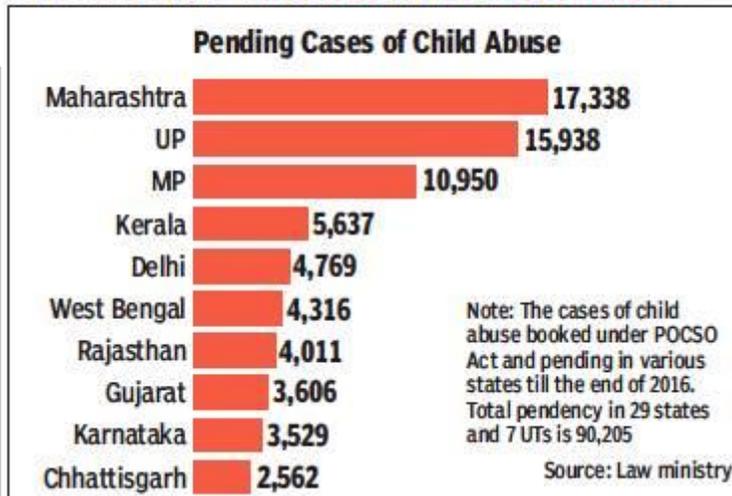
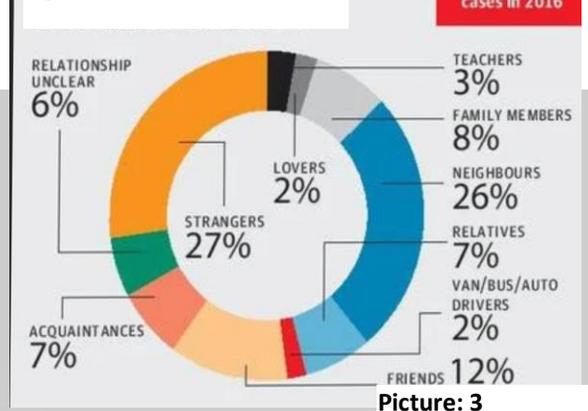


Figure 2



2).The picture reveals that Maharashtra come in the top position followed by UP and MP

### POCSO (AMENDMENT) BILL 2019

To combat increasing cases of child sex abuse the protection of children from sexual offences, POCSO (Amendment) Bill 2019 was introduced by Smriti Irani on July, 18<sup>13</sup>. The intention is to protect the interest of the children in times of distress and to safeguard their dignity. The bill has imposed harsh punishment in the POCSO Act 2012 against the perpetrators. It has increased the punishment from seven years to ten years, imprisonment of life, the death penalty for the rape of a child below 12 years, and also imposes fines to curb child pornography. In the Amendment 2019 Bill<sup>14</sup>, the words "sectarian violence" or "communal" have been removed and are replaced with "violence during a natural calamity or in a similar situations". The Bill justified the central punishment by referring to the judgments pronounced by Supreme Court in Machhi Singh and Devender Pal Singh<sup>15</sup> in which court has clearly stated that the death penalty can be imposed in rarest of rare cases. The intention behind the bill is to create a deterrence effect on the perpetrators and to provide an environment of "zero tolerance". Smriti Irani cited a report of NCRB from 2016 for indicating an increase in the number of cases under the Act in the percentage form. The cases increased are by 44.7% in 2013 over 2012, 178.6% in 2014 over 2013 and there is no fall in the number of cases thereafter. She also stated

<sup>13</sup>India Today Web Desk, "what is POCSO (Amendment) bill 2019?", India Today, September 4 2019

<sup>14</sup>The Protection of Children From Sexual offences Act 2012(32 of 2012), s.2; s.4; s.5; s.6; s.9; s.14; s.15; s.34; s.42; s.45

<sup>15</sup>Anubhav Kumar, "A point to ponder over in the POCSO bill", The Hindu, August 12 2019  
Machhisingh and others v.s state of Punjab 1983 AIR 957, 1983 SCR(3)413

that there is an urgent need to take more stringent measures against child sexual abuse. And the government is working to create 1023 fast track courts under the Nirbhaya Fund so that the speedy justice could be delivered.

The Amendment has defined child pornography, punishment for using a child for pornographic motive, and storage of pornographic material for commercial purposes. But still, the problem arises and the only solution to get justice is by making Amendments in the law. Although Ms. Jaya Bachchan in an emotionally charged speech stated that "only Amendments will not solve the problem and time-bound investigation was crucial along with prosecution and proportionate compensation. Also, we are looming on a cultural crisis so if laws were executed well, the scenario would have been different" <sup>16</sup>

. Many other problems need to be taken into consideration apart from making changes in the Act.

The following table1 shows the total number of cases reported in all the states and union territories of 2014-17

**TABLE1**

S.NO	STATE/UT	2014	2015	2016	2017
1	STATE	79758	84189	98344	120651
2	UNION TERRITORIES	9665	9983	8614	8381
3	TOTAL	89423	94172	106958	129032

### **MISUSE OF INTERNET**

The Internet is a very essential ingredient for the development of the country. But at the same time, there has been a growth in cybercrimes like stalking, morphing of an image, child pornography, and bullying. This is a new form of child abuse by the advancement of technology. In India, around 134 million children have smartphones with fast internet. The Internet has provided opportunities for accessing important material, but at the same time, it is influencing the children to watch the wrong things. The consumption of child pornography during the lockdown period has gone up by 95%<sup>17</sup>. As per the online data monitoring website, it was found that the demand for the search of "child porn", "sexy child", and teen sex videos has increased. The survey in 100 cities was conducted by the India Child Protection Fund (ICPF) and found that on an average of 5 million downloads per month was done in December 2019. The ICPF was set up in January 2020 to fund NGOs for curbing the exploitation of children. The child victim of cybercrime can lodge their complaint at POCSO e-Box.

<sup>16</sup>PTI, "Rajya Sabha passed POCSO (Amendment) bill, 2019", The Hindu , July 24 2019

<sup>17</sup>Special Correspondent, "Coronavirus lockdown| 'Online child porn traffic rises by 95%'", The Hindu, April 13 2020

Due to increase in the number of child pornography, there is a need to make some amendments in the IT Act<sup>18</sup>. And also the Internet Service Provider (ISP's) must take active participation in detecting and blocking Child Sexual Abuse Material from the websites. According to Cyber Peace Foundation Founder Vineet Kumar, "cyberspace has no boundaries hence the offensive can be originated from any country. What is missing is the support and cooperation of countries in cracking the crime.

### **FAMILY PRESSURE: A BARRIER IN THE JUSTICE**

Family plays an essential role in the upbringing and development of the child. They are the safest and secure place for the child but it is sorrowful to say that now a day's families are failing to provide such environments to the children. According to the reports, the crime related to POCSO is generally conducted by the known persons of the child such as neighbours and family members. But due to the societal image and status, problem families generally manipulate the child and convince them to convert hostile. As a result, perpetrators are not charged for their offences and get another chance to exploit the life of the child.

According to the research report, it is declared that "many families prefer the settlement procedure by taking money offered by the accused rather than going to court for the sake of justice. Also, it was found that the families are threatened to not to approach the police and maintain silence in the matter as a result the child rapists walk away freely due to the hostile witness<sup>19</sup>. Therefore the families are also barriers in getting justice to the child as they always suppress the child and advise them to compromise.

### **LESS FAST TRACK COURT: AN ISSUE FOR THE NATION**

The legal maxim "Justice delayed is justice denied" means that the judicial remedy is available but is not given time to the person. The reason behind the delay in justice is less number of courts. Currently, only 664 fast track courts are operating. According to the report of NCRB 2016 that there were 1.33 Lakh rape cases and 90,205 POCSO cases that are pending. Although the government is planning to establish 1023 fast track courts for POCSO and rape victims<sup>20</sup>

. Even under the POCSO Act 2012, it has been mentioned that every district should have an exclusive court to deal with sexual offences. However, the delay in the trial is because of a lack of seriousness on the part of the state. The state must take all the necessary steps and make provisions for such protection.

<sup>18</sup> Press Trust Of India, "RS panel calls for mandatory monitoring apps on all devices to curb child pornography", Hindustan Times, January 25 2020

<sup>19</sup> Aneasha Bedi, "Intimidation, family pressure: when child rapists walk free due to hostile witnesses", Hindustan times, December 30, 2018

<sup>20</sup> PTI, "For speedy trial of 1.66 lakh rape, POCSO cases, govt to set up 1023 spl fast-track courts", Economic times, September 15 2019

POCSO Act mandates that the investigation should be completed within two months and trial in six months. To ensure the fast and speedy justice there has been a provision to establish special courts in the districts where the cases registered exceed 100. The department of justice in law ministry will control and monitor the trial of each fast track court connected to the National Judicial Data Grid (NJDG).

### **AGE OF CONSENT OR REDEFINING OF “CHILD”**

Under the POCSO Act, the word "child" has been defined as any minor below the age of 18 years will be treated as a child. But it has been observed that because of change in a social and cultural environment in recent times, the teenagers are intelligent and sensible enough to understand the complexity and the implications of their conduct. Many countries like the USA, China, Japan, Canada, Australia, Europe, and Russia fall under the list where the age of consent is below 16 years. According to the UN convention, the Rights of the child might be protected up to 18<sup>21</sup>

As per the POCSO Act, any sexual relationship with a person below 18 years will constitute a statutory sexual offence and is punishable under the Act. Justice V Parthiban suggested reducing the age of the child from 18- 16 years under the POCSO Act. The NCRB report shows that half of the cases are registered under the police are dealing with the age of 16- 18 years old children, are consensual. These cases are reported at the behest of girl's parents who disapprove of the conduct of the teenager. Now the question arises that whether the teenager is capable of giving free consent?

Few provisions of laws are suitable and relevant like any action done by a child of 7-12 years would not be considered as an offence because they are not matured enough to judge the nature or consequences of their conduct. But if the activity is conducted with mutual consent between 16-18 years should not be punished. However, it is an issue of a broader deliberation and the removal of cases of consensual sex under POCSO will help the police to divert its attention towards the serious matter. Madras high court has redefined the age of a child as 16 instead of 18 years. The reason behind it is to prevent from rigorous punishment in case of mutual consent.

### **WLL DEATH PENALTY BE A SOURCE OF TERROR**

POCSO Act 2012 is a comprehensive law to protect children from sexual offences. But it is disappointing to say that the number of cases from 2008 to 2018 has increased by six times as a result the central government has passed an Amendment Bill 2019. The Bill imposed a severe

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<sup>21</sup> RK VIJ, "India should consider lowering the age of consent", Hindustan Times, May 07 2019

punishment on the perpetrator like an increase in imprisonment punishment and death penalty in case of aggravated sexual assault and aggravated penetrative sexual assault.

The death penalty is capital punishment mentioned in the criminal judicial system. The objective behind such punishment is to create deterrence against heinous crimes. Under POCSO Amendment Bill 2019 the death penalty can be given in the case of aggravated sexual assault which leads to the death of the child or any assault during natural calamity. But the question arises will is the death penalty a source of deterrence in society?

According to EnakshiGanguly of the HAQ HT Correspondent,<sup>22</sup>said, "The death penalty does not necessarily be effective to give justice, but the rightful conviction has shown to bring these cases down. And the capital punishment (death penalty) will inversely, endanger more lives"

According to Shailabh Kumar, lawyer and co-director of HAQ: Centre for child rights, a death penalty could reduce the registration of several cases and may discourage the people to approach courts due to its slow proceedings. And can cause harm to the victim or the witness of the case

### **LACK OF AWARENESS IN THE PUBLIC**

. Child sexual abuse is a menace in the society Vis-a Vis Judicial perceptive and no law will be effective until and unless the citizens of the nation are aware of it. POCSO Act 2012 was introduced to eradicate heinous crimes of sexual abuse against children, the responsibility was assigned to National Commission for Protection of Child Rights (NCPCR) and State Commission for Protection of Child Rights (SCPCR). The commission includes NGOs, social workers, experts, or persons of psychology. The motive behind this collaboration is to create and spread knowledge of the POCSO Act 2012. It will help the children to develop and make them aware of "bad and good touch."

Usually, it is seen that sexual abuse of children begins from the family, whereby the relatives, elders, neighbours are involved in such offences. Due to family and external obligations, children hesitate to deliver their information to their parents. Even if they do, the matter was suppressed down and advice to compromise by forgetting the situation. It is important to make the family members aware of their fundamental duties,<sup>23</sup> and their responsibilities towards their child. Such offences not only destroy the child physically but also mentally and emotionally. A child of tender age is unable to differentiate the touch as good or bad. Therefore the guardian, parents must take all the steps and make their kids aware of "bad and good touch". The children can be guided through animated educational short movies, cartoons to make them understand the abuse they prone to at their age. They should be aware of the child helpline number to report and give details of the sexual abuse when parents try to suppress them. This will make them attentive and confident to share their matters with their parents. In 2012, under POCSO the touch and non-

<sup>22</sup>HT Correspondent, "Union cabinet clear death penalty under POCSO Act", Hindustan Times, July 10 2019

<sup>23</sup>The constitution law 1950, art 50(A)

touch behavior has been included in the ambit of sexual abuse. Even the sections of IPC<sup>24</sup> are also included in the act to crack down on child abuse. CBSE affiliated schools shall be training on good touch<sup>25</sup>.

.SmritiIrani also mentioned in the parliament that the students of CBSE- affiliated schools will be given classes on "good and bad touch" along with them the training session will be organized for the teachers also.

According to NCRB, a total of 14913 cases were registered in 2015 among which Uttar Pradesh was at the top of the list with 3078 cases. The national council of education research and training suggested Centre and state government carry a list to deal with such cases. Teachers must take efforts to educate students and help them to differentiate between "good and bad touch".

Justice Oka stated that it's high time to evaluate the procedural lapses which are causing suppression of victims and denial of justice. Many children don't even understand what happened with them so they silently suffer the pain. Also, the mothers of the victim are scared to report the case as they don't want to demolish their statutes in society. Principal District and session judge P. Sreesudha has said that every citizen should contribute his mites for the establishment of a society free from crime. Additional District Judge Goutham Prasad stated that it was the responsibility of lawyers and officers to generate awareness among the public about the act and its values and repercussions of the crime.

SarojiniHemram (BJP Member) supported the bill and said that media and television were negatively impacting the minds of children. She said the schools should take an initiative to guide the students "about good and bad touch" and should work for providing them self-deference training.

KahkashanPerween (JDU) also supported the bill and called for awareness campaigns to reach every woman and child. She also suggested joining hands with the ministry of information & broadcasting as television and social media are playing a vital role.

The central government and state government shall provide periodic training including orientation programme, educate them regarding their responsibility, to guide them to protect themselves and to make them aware about child helpline services number -1098. The intensive courses should be available for the police officers and forensic experts for building their skills and capacities in their respective roles.

## **SUGGESTION**

<sup>24</sup>The Indian Penal Code(45 of1860), s.375; s.376; s.377; s.67

<sup>25</sup>Vaibhavjha , "Noida kids educated on good touch, bad touch", Hindustan Times, July 08 2017

Child sexual abuse is a disgraceful crime against a child, society, and also against humanity. It is a sensitive matter which needs the attention of all the people including the government. It is an alarming situation for the whole country and requires the necessary steps to eliminate such heinous crimes. There is an urgent call to make amendments under the IT Act and monitor the cybercrime-related issues, especially during the pandemic situation. Also, the law will be successful only when the government monitors and apply the concept of mandatory reporting. Along with creating awareness in the public about the POCSO act and their fundamental duties mentioned under Art50 (A). The government should implement more fast track courts for speedy justice and should provide counseling to teenagers. I would suggest taking active participation in recording or informing such crimes. And negligence of such heinous crimes may result in disobedience of law. Both Judiciary and society need to work together to eradicate such crimes from our society and make it a friendly environment for the children.

### **CONCLUSION**

POCSO Act of 2012 was enacted to protect children from sexual offences and maintain their dignity and security in society. The Act imposes penalty against the perpetrator and provides compensation to the victim. The cases under the POCSO Act should be settled down by the Fast track courts and their identity will not be disclosed as per the guidelines of the Supreme Court. After the amendment under the POCSO Act, the laws made were more stringent and helpful for the victims. The amendment increased the punishment level and introduced child pornography under POCSO Bill 2019. The government has taken many steps to control sexual offences against children. Ministry of home affairs and ministry of women and children's development have issued many advisories to take necessary steps and including detection, registration, and investigation of crime against a child. Certainly, some loopholes make the law inefficient. To rule out the inefficiencies of law the government is planning to launch a cybercrime portal which helps in curbing social media problems. Thus the scope of the research is that it helps in identifying the POCSO cases and Penalty in the law. It also helps the government to take effective steps to reduce and make timely amendments in the law

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