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POCSO act in India: Overcoming hurdles in reporting child sexual abuse cases

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Background: The Protection of Children from Sexual Offences (POCSO) Act, 2012, was enacted in India to safeguard children from sexual abuse and exploitation. While the Act provides a strong legal framework for reporting, investigating, and prosecuting such offenses, its implementation faces significant challenges. This study examines socio-cultural, systemic, and procedural barriers that hinder the effective application of the POCSO Act and suggests solutions to bridge the gap between policy and practice.

Method: A qualitative analysis of literature, case studies, expert opinions and about 10 awareness programme was conducted between the various stakeholders to identify key challenges in reporting child sexual abuse cases. The study also explores best practices from various jurisdictions at Deoghar, Jharkhand.

Results: Findings indicate that a lack of awareness among victims, families, and professionals leads to underreporting, especially in rural and tribal areas. Cultural stigma, victim-blaming, and fear of social consequences discourage families from seeking legal recourse. Additionally, insufficient training for law enforcement and healthcare professionals, along with a lack of child-friendly investigative procedures, results in the mishandling of cases. Prolonged judicial processes further deter victims from pursuing justice.

Conclusions: Addressing these challenges requires comprehensive awareness campaigns, specialized training for professionals, improved inter-agency coordination, and the establishment of child-friendly reporting mechanisms. Leveraging technology, such as anonymous online reporting portals and mobile apps, can enhance accessibility and confidentiality. Strengthening these measures are crucial for the POCSO Act to fulfil its intended role in protecting children and ensuring justice.

Keywords: POCSO Act, child sexual abuse, legal barriers, reporting mechanisms, law enforcement training.