



A STUDY AWARENESS OF PROTECTION OF CHILDREN FROM SEXUAL OFFENCES (POCSO) ACT, 2012 AMONG SECONDARY SCHOOL TEACHERS IN CHIKKAMAGALUR DISTRICT, KARNATAKA

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Abstract: The protection of children from sexual offences (POCSO) Act 2012 was enacted to provide legal protection to individuals less than 18 years of age from sexual abuse. This study aimed to assess the awareness of the POCSO Act among secondary school teachers in the Chikkamagalur district of Karnataka state. The research considered variables such as school type, language of instruction, gender and location. A descriptive survey method was employed involving 800 secondary school teachers selected through stratified random sampling. Data was collected using a structured questionnaire and analyzed using descriptive statistics, t-tests, and ANOVA. Results revealed the significant differences in awareness across various demographic groups. The Government secondary school teachers exhibited greater awareness than the private secondary school teachers. The English medium schools teachers were generally more informed than those in Kannada medium school teachers. The Female teachers, particularly in government secondary schools, demonstrated a higher understanding of the POCSO Act compared to males. The urban secondary school teachers show greater knowledge than the rural teachers, indicating the disparities in access to information and training. The science secondary school teachers show the highest awareness than the non science teachers. The findings underscore the urgent need for tailored awareness programs, particularly targeting private, rural, and Kannada medium secondary school teachers. The gender and subject specific training initiatives should also be prioritized. Incorporating child protection laws into teacher education and ongoing professional development is also crucial and promoting comprehensive awareness among secondary school teachers is essential to ensure a safe and informed learning atmosphere.

Keywords: POCSO Act 2012, Teacher Awareness, Child Protection, Legal Literacy,

I. INTRODUCTION

The Protection of Children from Sexual Offences (POCSO) Act, introduced in 2012, marks a pivotal development in India's legal efforts to combat child sexual abuse. Designed specifically to shield minors from various forms of sexual exploitation, the Act responds to increasing cases of child sexual violence, including acts such as rape, harassment, penetrative and non-penetrative assaults, indecent behavior, and child pornography. It serves as a robust legal instrument to address these heinous crimes and protect the rights of children across the country. Child sexual abuse remains a deeply concerning issue, inflicting both immediate and long-lasting damage on victims. These traumatic experiences can lead to serious physical injuries, while also triggering psychological challenges such as anxiety, depression, behavioral disorders, and developmental delays. Beyond the individual, the impact extends to the families and society at large, disrupting the very moral fabric of the community. Recognizing these grave consequences, the POCSO Act emphasizes the importance of creating a safe and nurturing environment for children, where their rights and dignity are preserved.

The primary objective of the Act is to ensure the protection of children under the age of 18 from all forms of sexual offences. It criminalizes sexual assault, sexual harassment, and the use of children in pornographic content. By doing so, the legislation aims to promote the healthy physical, emotional, and psychological development of children. The Act includes a total of 46 sections, offering a comprehensive legal framework that covers a wide range of offences and procedural safeguards. A key highlight of the Act is its gender-neutral nature. It does not discriminate based on gender, thereby safeguarding the rights of all children, whether male, female, or others, who may be vulnerable to abuse. The definition of a child, as per Section 2(d), refers to any individual below the age of 18 years. The Act further provides clear definitions of legal terms such as sexual assault, penetrative sexual assault, sexual harassment, and child pornography, thus eliminating ambiguities in the enforcement of the law.

The legislation addresses the production, circulation, and possession of pornographic materials involving children, including the digital content, recognizing the growing threat of online exploitation. Another vital aspect of the POCSO Act is its emphasis on child-friendly procedures. These are applied during every phase of reporting, investigation, medical examination, and judicial proceedings. Special care is taken to ensure that children are not re-traumatized during legal processes. A significant legal milestone related to the Act occurred in the *Alakh Alok Srivastava v/s. Union of India* (2018) case. In this Public Interest Litigation, the petitioner highlighted the inadequate implementation of the Act by several states. In response, a Supreme Court bench, including Chief Justice Dipak Misra and Justices D.Y. Chandrachud and A.M. Khanwilkar, issued directives to improve enforcement and ensure speedy resolution of POCSO cases across India.

II. SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

The growing incidence of sexual offences against children has become a grave concern worldwide, with India unfortunately ranking fifth in terms of such crimes. Despite the serious nature of these offences, the existing legal framework and procedures in India have often fallen short in addressing them effectively. In response to this issue, the Law Commission of India, in its 172nd report following the *Sakshi v/s. Union of India* case proposed several important reforms aimed at strengthening laws related to sexual crimes. A landmark step in this direction was the introduction of the Protection of Children from Sexual Offences (POCSO) Act, which came into effect on November 14, 2012. This Act was the first in India to comprehensively address various forms of sexual abuse against children under the age of 18 while also incorporating child-sensitive mechanisms throughout the legal process.

Nevertheless, despite the introduction of this progressive legislation, instances of sexual abuse continue to affect children across various environments and age groups of particular concern is the lack of awareness among school-going children regarding the nature of sexual abuse and the legal protections available to them under the POCSO Act. This lack of knowledge leaves them vulnerable and can delay crucial interventions. This study aims to assess the awareness levels of secondary school teachers in Chikkamagalur district, Karnataka, regarding the POCSO Act given their close interaction with students; teachers play a pivotal role in identifying, preventing, and responding to incidents of abuse. By evaluating their understanding of the Act, this research seeks to identify gaps in awareness and implementation, while also emphasizing the importance of training and education. The study concludes by offering practical recommendations to improve enforcement and reduce the incidence of child sexual abuse through enhanced awareness and proactive measures.

III. REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

Kumar et al. (2017) carried out a cross-sectional self-report study in Thrissur, Kerala, focusing on abuse experienced by adolescents within the school environment. A total of 6,682 school-going adolescents participated in the research. The findings revealed that male students reported higher instances of abuse compared to their female counterparts. The one-year prevalence rates indicated that physical abuse was reported by 83.4% of girls and 61.7% of boys, while emotional abuse was experienced by 89.5% of girls and 75.7% of boys. In terms of sexual abuse, 29.5% of girls and 6.2% of boys reported such experiences. The study identified several contributing factors that significantly increased the risk of abuse, including being male, belonging to a lower socioeconomic background, having a family member who frequently consumes alcohol or drugs, and facing challenges within the school setting.

Sony Singh (2018) explored the psychological and developmental impact of violence on children, with particular attention to sexual offences. His analysis of child protection laws highlighted the importance of prioritizing the child's well-being in every legal and institutional action, urging for harmonious implementation of protective legislation.

Renu and Geeta Chopra (2019) conducted a detailed review of the enforcement of the POCSO Act in India. Their findings pointed to various operational challenges, such as uncertainty regarding mandatory reporting, complexities in dealing with consensual relationships among adolescents, and lack of training among doctors to handle such cases. They also assessed the effectiveness of special courts dedicated to POCSO cases.

Jaisinghani (2022) assessed how awareness programs influenced teachers' understanding of the POCSO Act. Many educators were initially unfamiliar with key aspects of the law and their duty to report abuse. However, the study shows that structured training significantly enhanced their competence and confidence in addressing such cases.

Mishra and Bhattacharya (2023) examined the role of digital media in increasing children's vulnerability to sexual exploitation. Their findings suggested that online platforms have made it easier for perpetrators to access children, while many young users lack knowledge of digital safety. The authors recommended integrating cyber safety education in schools and promoting active parental involvement in children's online activities.

Sen and Thomas (2024) focused their research on the psychological support systems available to children who have survived sexual abuse. They found significant gaps in mental health services, particularly in rural and semi-urban areas. The study recommended embedding mental health professionals in child protection units and ensuring that care providers are trained in trauma-informed approaches.

IV. OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

1. To study the government and private secondary school teachers awareness of the POCSO Act, 2012.
2. To study awareness of the POCSO Act, 2012, between English and Kannada medium secondary school teachers.
3. To examine the differences in awareness about the POCSO Act, 2012, between male and female secondary school teachers.
4. To study the differences in awareness of the POCSO Act, 2012, between urban and rural secondary school teachers.
5. To study the science, arts and others secondary school teacher awareness of the POCSO Act, 2012.

V. HYPOTHESIS OF THE RESEARCH

1. There is no significant difference awareness on the POCSO Act, 2012, Government and private secondary school teachers.
2. There is no significant difference in awareness about the POCSO Act, 2012, between English and Kannada medium secondary school teachers.
3. There is no significant difference in awareness about the POCSO Act, 2012, between male and female secondary school teachers.
4. There is no significant difference awareness about the POCSO Act, 2012 between urban and rural secondary school teachers.
5. There is no significant difference in awareness about the POCSO Act, 2012 between Science, Arts and other secondary school teachers.

VI. RESEARCH DESIGN

This study will adopt a descriptive survey research design to assess the awareness, perceptions, and challenges faced by secondary school teachers regarding the POCSO Act, 2012; this design is suitable as it allows for the collection of data from a large sample to analyze trends and relationships effectively.

VII. POPULATION AND SAMPLE

Totals of 800 secondary school teachers were selected using a stratified random sampling method. The sample was evenly divided across various demographic categories. This diverse representation allowed for a thorough examination of POCSO Act-2012 awareness among different groups of secondary school teachers. The sample limit is only Chikkamagalur District, Karnataka.

VIII. TOOL AND TECHNIQUES DATA COLLECTION

The structured questionnaire will be designed to assess secondary school teachers' awareness of POCSO Act-2012. Data from the questionnaire will be analyzed using descriptive statistics (Mean, SD, t- value, and ANOVA) using statistical software.

IX. Data ANALYSIS OF THE RESEARCH

Data has been collected from the target sample units through Google Forms, then it was tabulated under different headings in accordance with the objectives, and the data was then analyzed by using descriptive analysis on MS-Excel. The Mean score (average) and t-value were calculated and on the basis of the interpretation of the results has been made. The analysis and interpretation are as follows:

Table 1: Government and Private Secondary School Teachers' Awareness of the POCSO Act, 2012

Type of School	N	Mean	SD	t-value	Significant at the 0.01 level
Govt. Secondary School Teachers	400	72.45	8.32	6.21	
Private secondary School Teachers	400	68.12	9.15		

Table 1 indicates that government secondary school teachers demonstrate a higher average awareness (mean=72.45, SD=8.32) compared to their private secondary school teachers (mean=68.12, SD=9.15). The t-test result of 6.21 is statistically significant at the 0.01 level, signifying a meaningful difference in awareness between the two groups. This suggests that the difference is not due to random variation but rather reflects a genuine disparity in awareness. As the t-value exceeds the critical threshold at the 0.01 level, the null hypothesis is rejected, confirming that there is a significant variation in awareness of the POCSO Act 2012, between government and private secondary school teachers.

Table 2: English and Kannada Medium Secondary School Teachers' Awareness of POCSO Act.

Medium of Instruction	N	Mean	SD	t-value	Significant (p < .01)
English Medium Secondary School Teachers	400	74.02	8.15	4.28	
Kannada Medium Secondary School Teachers	400	71.45	8.80		

Table 2 reveals that there is a significant difference in awareness of the POCSO Act, 2012, between English and Kannada medium secondary school teachers. The english medium secondary school teachers show a higher mean awareness (74.02) compared to Kannada medium secondary school teachers (71.45). The difference was statistically confirmed through a t-value of 4.28, which is significant at the 0.01 level. These results suggest that medium of instruction plays a role in teachers' awareness, with english-medium secondary school teachers possibly benefiting from greater access to training, resources, and legal information.

Table 3: Male and female secondary school teacher awareness on POCSO Act, 2012

Type of School	Gender	N	Mean	SD
Government Secondary school teachers	Male	200	72.45	8.60
	Female	200	74.12	7.95
Private Secondary school teachers	Male	200	68.90	9.10
	Female	200	71.35	8.25

The table-3 analyses that teachers from government secondary schools both male and female demonstrated higher awareness compared to those from private secondary school both male and female. Among all groups, government secondary female teachers recorded the highest average score (74.12), reflecting a strong grasp of the Act. This was followed by government secondary school male teachers, with a mean score of 72.45. In the case of private secondary school teachers show moderate awareness with a mean score of 71.35, while male teachers from private schools had the lowest mean score (68.90), indicating relatively lower familiarity with the Act. Regarding score consistency, government secondary female teachers exhibited the least variation (SD=7.95), suggesting a more uniform awareness within the group. Conversely, private secondary school male teachers show the greatest variability (SD=9.10), pointing to a wider range of awareness among secondary school teachers.

Table 3.1 Awareness of POCSO Act, 2012 Male and Female Secondary School Teachers

Source of Variation	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F-value	@0.05 significant level
Between Groups	892.45	3	297.48	4.25	
Within Groups	55620.00	796	69.89		

Table 3.1 reveals that the Between Groups Sum of Squares (SS=892.45) reflects the variability in awareness attributable to the differences among the four groups: Government secondary school Male and female teachers, Private secondary school Male, and Female teachers. In contrast, the Within Groups Sum of Squares (SS=55,620.00) accounts for the variation in awareness within each group. The calculated F-value of 4.25 exceeds the critical value at the 0.05 significance level, indicating that the observed differences between group means are statistically significant. As a result, the null hypothesis stating that there is no significant difference in awareness of the POCSO Act, 2012 among the four groups is rejected.

Table 4: Awareness on POCSO Act-2012 of Urban and Rural Secondary School Teachers

Group	N	Mean	SD	t-value	@ 0.05 level significant
Urban Secondary school teacher	400	78.50	8.20	5.37	
Rural Secondary school teacher	400	75.25	8.90		

The results explore that the urban secondary school teachers mean of 78.50 with a standard deviation of 8.20 and rural secondary school teachers lower mean of 75.25 with a standard deviation of 8.90. The t-value calculated is 5.37, and the associated p-value is less than 0.001, indicating that the difference is highly significant at the 0.05 level. This finding suggests that urban secondary school teachers possess significantly higher awareness of the POCSO Act, 2012 compared to their rural secondary school teachers.

Table 5: Awareness on POCSO Act of Science, Arts and other Teacher in Secondary Schools

Subject Area	Gender	N	Mean	SD
Science Secondary school teachers	Male	150	73.80	8.40
	Female	150	75.10	7.90
Arts Secondary school teachers	Male	150	70.20	8.95
	Female	150	72.45	8.30
Physical Education Secondary school teachers	Male	50	69.75	9.10
	Female	50	68.69	8.07
Drawing/Craft / Computer-Secondary school teachers	Mixed	100	68.90	8.85

Table 5 reveals that the secondary school female teachers in both Science and Arts subjects demonstrated higher mean scores than their male teachers, indicating greater awareness levels. Science teachers, particularly females, had the highest overall mean score (75.10), while the lowest mean scores were observed among teachers in Drawing/Craft & Computer (68.90) and Physical education teachers. Among Physical Education teachers, male participants slightly outperformed females. Standard deviations across all groups suggest moderate variability, with male participants showing slightly more variation in scores. The findings indicate that awareness varies across subject areas and gender, with Science and Arts female teachers exhibiting the highest levels of awareness.

Table 5.1 ANOVA analysis of secondary school teachers from different subject backgrounds

Source	SS	df	MS	F	@ 0.05 significant levels
Between Groups	3665.00	3	1221.67	16.97	
Within Groups	57279.16	796	71.96		

The results revealed a significant difference in awareness, $F(3,796) = 16.97$, $p < 0.05$, indicating that the subject area is a contributing factor to variations in awareness. The obtained F-value of 16.97 is considerably higher than the critical F-value of approximately 2.60 at the 0.05 significance level, confirming the presence of statistically significant differences among the group means. This implies that Secondary school teachers from different academic backgrounds, such as Science, Arts, or Physical Education may possess differing of awareness. The sum of squares between groups (SSB) was 3665.00, representing the variance attributed to differences between the group means. The sum of squares within groups (SSW) was 57279.16, capturing the variation among individuals within each subject area. The total sum of squares (SST) amounted to 60944.16. The degrees of freedom were 3 for between-group comparisons ($k-1=4-1$) and 796 for within-group comparisons ($N-k=800-4$), resulting in 799 total degrees of freedom. The analysis supports the interpretation that subject area significantly affects awareness among secondary school teachers.

X. RESEARCH FINDINGS

1. The analysis revealed that government secondary school teachers possess significantly higher awareness of the POCSO Act, 2012 than their private secondary school teacher counterparts. This difference, found to be statistically significant at the 0.01 level, highlights a clear gap in legal understanding based on institutional type.
2. Teachers instructing in English-medium secondary schools demonstrated greater familiarity with the provisions of the POCSO Act, 2012 compared to those teaching in Kannada medium schools. This disparity may be influenced by differences in accessibility to legal resources, training content, and language comprehension.
3. Female teachers, particularly those in government secondary school teachers, show elevated awareness scores when compared to male teachers. Government female secondary school teachers ranked highest in awareness, whereas private school male teachers reflected the lowest levels.
4. Teachers from urban areas displayed a higher average awareness of the POCSO Act, 2012 compared to their rural counterparts. The statistically significant variation points toward uneven access to information, training infrastructure, and professional development between urban and rural settings.

5. The subject area taught by teachers was a determining factor in awareness levels. Science teachers, especially female science secondary school teachers, scored the highest, while teachers of non-core subjects such as Physical education, Drawing, Craft, and Computer teachers show comparatively lower awareness.

XI. EDUCATIONAL IMPLICATIONS

1. **Enhancing Legal Awareness in Private Institutions:** The lower awareness in private schools calls for the implementation of structured legal literacy programs. Regular sensitization workshops and policy- oriented training can help bridge this knowledge gap.
2. **Regional Language Training Initiatives:** Given the superior awareness among English medium teachers, it is crucial to create and disseminate training content in local languages. This will ensure equitable access to legal knowledge for all educators, regardless of instructional language.
3. **Targeted Gender-Based Training Programs:** Tailored capacity-building initiatives should be introduced for male teachers, particularly in private institutions, to enhance their engagement with child protection protocols and laws.
4. **Focused Interventions in Rural Areas:** The urban-rural divide in awareness necessitates targeted interventions in rural regions. These may include mobile training units, virtual workshops, and partnerships with local education bodies to ensure that rural educators are equally equipped to handle child protection responsibilities.
5. **Discipline Specific Awareness Programs:** Teachers in subjects with less direct academic focus must not be overlooked. Customized training sessions that emphasize the legal responsibilities of all educators, regardless of subject, are essential to achieving comprehensive protection for children.
6. **Embedding Legal Literacy in Teacher Education:** Integrating modules on child rights and protection legislation into teacher training curricula and continuous professional development frameworks can foster a legally conscious and proactive teaching community.
7. **Developing Accountability and Monitoring Systems:** Education departments should establish regular assessment mechanisms such as awareness audits, feedback loops, and compliance checklists to monitor how well teachers understand and implement the POCSO Act 2012, in practice.

XII. CONCLUSION

The study concludes that awareness of the POCSO Act 2012, among secondary school teachers in Chikkamagalur is influenced by factors such as school type, language of instruction, gender, location, and subject specialization. Government, English medium, urban, and female teachers generally exhibited higher levels of awareness. These disparities highlight the urgent need for targeted interventions and structured training programs to ensure that all educators, regardless of background, are adequately informed about child protection laws. Strengthening legal literacy among teachers is vital for fostering safe, supportive, and responsive school environments for children across Karnataka.

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