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2 **THE POCSO ACT (2012): A CRITICAL ASSESSMENT AFTER A DECADE OF ITS**
3 **ENACTMENT & ENFORCEMENT.**
4

5 **Abstract**

6 **Background:** After ten years of implementation, the Protection of Children from Sexual Offenses
7 (POCSO) Act, 2012, which was once heralded as a "watershed moment" for Indian child law, is now
8 in the "Implementation Exhaustion" stage. The disparity between "punitive populism" and trial reality
9 is the main subject of this study, which assesses the systemic progression of the Act.

10 **Method:** Between 2022 and 2026, a doctrinal–empirical qualitative meta-synthesis of Indian
11 scholarship was carried out. The study, which is based on the Implementation Outcomes Framework,
12 uses a Calibration Matrix to standardize indicators between Uttar Pradesh and Uttarakhand, the focal
13 case-states.

14 **Results:** The recorded Procedural Efficiency Ratio (PER) was merely 14.2% in UP and 21.8% in the
15 UK, signifying a notable "Procedural Myth." In urban regions, the mean duration of trials was 842
16 days, exceeding the legal mandate of 365 days by over 2.3 times. Safeguard Implementation Scores
17 (SIS) have plummeted to as low as 3.2/10 in rural areas, indicating a persistent "Geography of
18 Justice" imbalance. Furthermore, adolescent consensual relationships constitute 26.4% of the
19 caseload, indicating that teenagers possess a 3.4-fold greater likelihood of acquittal compared to
20 younger children. Regression models indicate a 64% correlation ($R^2 = .64$) between witness hostility
21 and trial delay.

22 **Conclusion:** In order to restore adjudication integrity, the report recommends moving from "Punitive
23 Populism" to "Implementation Integrity". Two proposed improvements include a decentralized
24 forensic infrastructure to overcome systemic inertia and long-term DNA report delays, and a "Tiered
25 Consent Model" to standardize teenage agency.

26 **Keywords:** India, Implementation Exhaustion, Adolescent Consent, Judicial Delay, POCSO Act, and
27 Implementation Science.
28

29 **Introduction:-**

30 For Indian jurisprudence, the Protection of Children from Sexual Offences (POCSO) Act's passage in
31 2012 was hailed as a turning point ([Sinha, 2023](#)). For many years, the Indian Penal Code's antiquated,
32 adult-centric silos were used by the judicial system to cram child sexual abuse, frequently ignoring the
33 minor's unique vulnerability. That was altered by POCSO. It created a unique procedural environment
34 intended to reduce re-traumatization, prioritized the "best interests of the child," and offered a gender-
35 neutral framework ([Sinha, 2023](#)). Ten years into its implementation, we should ideally be witnessing a
36 streamlined "reporting-to-conviction" pipeline with quick, kid-friendly proceedings and high
37 deterrence rates. However, the actual situation—which is reflected in the growing backlog of cases
38 and a conviction rate that is unable to surpass the 35% threshold—indicates that systemic inertia is
39 stifling the legislative intent ([2024](#)).

40 This research fills a crucial "Implementation-Gap." The institutional machinery is still ill-prepared to
41 handle the volume, even though the law has successfully sparked a massive surge in reporting—a sign
42 that the silence surrounding child abuse is breaking ([Maity & Chakraborty, 2023](#)) ("Exploring Mutated
43 Depictions of Rapes and Justice Distrust in Contemporary Indian Cinema," 2024). A progressive,
44 rights-based statute operating inside an overworked, punitive court culture is what we are
45 experiencing. Prior researchers have mostly concentrated on the Act's doctrinal features or the
46 immediate effects of the 2019 changes. Although these studies have played a significant role in
47 drawing attention to the trend toward more severe penalties, such as the death penalty, they frequently
48 ignore the "how" and "why" of the trial-level errors. As we've shown, increasing a sentence's
49 harshness has minimal effect if its likelihood is still statistically unlikely.

50 A secondary victimization that is, in many respects, just as harmful as the abuse itself is the direct
51 result of this gap. Child victims frequently lose their resolve, families experience intimidation, and the
52 "hostile witness" problem becomes the norm rather than the exception when a trial stretches on for
53 four years—much longer than the one-year mandate. This indirectly causes what are known as
54 "Romeo-Juliet" cases to "clog" the Special Courts. The Act unintentionally treats teenagers as
55 criminals by failing to distinguish between adolescent consensual relationships and predatory
56 violence, taking valuable court resources away from the same predators it was intended to target
57 [\(2022\)](#).

58 A thorough, long-term evaluation of how its "one-size-fits-all" approach to age and required reporting
59 has actually affected the conviction-to-acquittal ratio is a crucial gap in current research. Building on
60 the seminal work on juvenile justice by [\(Bajpai, 2023\)](#), this paper examines judicial tendencies from
61 2022 to 2025 that point to a "judicial rebellion" against the strictness of the Act. This study assesses
62 the POCSO Act as a living tool that interacts with police behavior, forensic delays, and societal
63 biases, guided by a Socio-Legal framework.

64 The main goals of this study are to critically assess the socio-legal consequences of the 18-year
65 consent age and to examine the effectiveness of Special Courts in fulfilling statutory deadlines. This
66 study is important because, in the absence of a change in direction, the POCSO Act runs the risk of
67 becoming ineffectual—feared by the innocent and navigated by the guilty.

68 This study initially creates the legislative territory by following the Act's development from 2012 to
69 the present in order to generate a research space for this investigation. The discrepancy between the
70 "punitive populism" of recent amendments and the reality of trial pendency is then used to identify the
71 niche. In order to ensure that the second decade of POCSO is defined by the certainty of justice rather
72 than the severity of the code, it finally fills this gap by proposing a "Tiered Consent Model" and
73 procedural improvements.

74

75 **Literature Review: A Decadal Critical Assessment Of The POCSO Act, 2012:-**

76 The Indian Penal Code's (IPC) restrictive, adult-centric definitions gave way to a specialized, gender-
77 neutral protective regime with the passage of the Protection of Children from Sexual Offenses
78 (POCSO) Act, 2012 [\(Handa & Goswami, 2024; Mohanty & Banerjee, 2021\)](#). This represents a
79 fundamental change in India's criminal justice philosophy. Prioritizing the "best interests of the child"
80 and implementing mandatory reporting are two of its main design elements. The latter is being closely
81 examined as a problematic procedural requirement that might interfere with teenage autonomy
82 [\(Kumar, 2024; Pitre & Lingam, 2021\)](#). The systemic realities of the Indian legal system and these
83 legislative goals are deeply at odds, as demonstrated by ten years of enforcement [\(Kharb, 2025; Singh
84 et al., 2025\)](#).

85 **Legislative Intent and the "Punitive Populism" Debate**

86 Since 2012, POCSO's legislative trajectory has shown a growing emphasis on "punitive populism," as
87 evidenced by the 2019 changes that added the death penalty for aggravated penetrative sexual assault
88 [\(Kaur & Garg, 2024\)](#). Examining this change seriously, contemporary researchers find a sizable
89 "deterrence gap" [\(V, 2023\)](#). This is consistent with more general criticisms of legislation pertaining
90 to sexual violence, which raise concerns about whether harsher penalties actually lower incidence or
91 raise conviction rates [\(Singh, 2025\)](#).

92 Additionally, academics point out that in response to procedural delays, POCSO courts are
93 increasingly using digital technologies and holding online hearings, even if the 2019 revisions
94 increased restrictions against child sexual exploitation material (CSEM) [\(Acharya & Acharya,
95 2020\)](#). However, there is still a lack of empirical data regarding the impact of these digital shifts on
96 trial outcomes, and the legislative expansion into digital offenses frequently surpasses the
97 enforcement apparatus's medico-legal readiness [\(Suraj et al., 2025; Swetapadma & Chatteraj, 2024\)](#).

98

99 **Implementation Gaps: Pendency, Bail, and Infrastructure**

100 The mandate for "speedy trials" through Special Courts was one of POCSO's main goals (["Exploring](#)
101 [Mutated Depictions of Rapes and Justice Distrust in Contemporary Indian Cinema,"](#)
102 [2024](#)). Nonetheless, the literature notes a recurring "pendency crisis," with statistics showing that
103 pendency rates above 80% in some jurisdictions ([Kumar & Paswan, 2024](#)). The 2020 Rules' trauma-
104 informed objective is undermined by these delays and poor compensation, which are frequently linked
105 to court vacancies and dispersed forensic support (Singh, 2025; Renu & Chopra, 2019; Ahmed and
106 Baruah, 2025).

107 The literature also identifies an understudied causal pathway in which victim re-traumatization is
108 probably caused by the lack of child-friendly safeguards, such as screens, separate waiting areas, and
109 awareness among medical professionals, law enforcement, and the judiciary ([Agnihotri & Das, 2015;](#)
110 [Joshi & Panchbhai, 2020; Sharma, 2022](#)). The high rate of victims becoming "hostile," which results
111 in acquittals, could be attributed to this trauma ([Saagarika, 2023](#)). Additionally, experts on bail and the
112 rights of the accused contend that stringent bail requirements coupled with lengthy mandatory
113 minimum penalties produce a coercive atmosphere that frequently resembles "process as
114 punishment" ([Pawan et al., 2025](#)).

115 **Age of Consent and Adolescent Autonomy**

116 The 18-year-old consent age is a "double-edged sword" that over criminalizes consenting adolescent
117 sexuality, according to a large body of research ([- & Singh, 2023; Dawda & Fadnavis,](#)
118 [2024](#)). According to studies, consenting peer-to-peer relationships are involved in 18–30% of POCSO
119 incidents (Sinha & Singh, 2023). This is consistent with medico-legal record studies where
120 approximately 29% of cases involved 16–18-year-olds, most of whom reported consent ([Pitre &](#)
121 [Bandewar, 2024; Shukla et al., 2024](#)).

122 The "Cases involving Consensual Adolescent Relationships" are increasingly viewed as a barrier to
123 adolescents' access to sexual and reproductive health services, as mandatory reporting requirements
124 often deter minors from seeking medical assistance (Pitre & Lingam, 2021). While scholars have
125 called for "close-in-age" exemptions or "Romeo and Juliet" clauses, these remain normative reform
126 suggestions rather than established positions in Indian law (Kumar, 2024; Dawda & Fadnavis, 2024).

127 **Identified Gaps and Proposed Contributions**

128 The existing literature highlights three primary areas where research remains thin:

- 129 • **Causal Modelling:** While infrastructure deficits and low conviction rates are documented
130 separately, there is an absence of robust quantitative studies correlating specific procedural
131 failures to witness hostility and acquittal outcomes.
- 132 • **Digital Transitions:** The efficacy of digital hearings and the impact of the 2019 digital
133 amendments on the reporting-to-conviction pipeline remain under-studied.
- 134 • **Emerging Judicial Responses:** While High Courts are increasingly navigating the consent-
135 abuse dilemma through discretionary quashing of FIRs, this **emerging judicial response** has
136 not been systematically analyzed as a counter-current to legislative rigidity.

137 This study intends to address these gaps by analyzing the correlation between procedural safeguards
138 and trial efficiency. Building on established calls for reform, the researcher proposes a "**Tiered**
139 **Consent Model**" as a normative framework to harmonize adolescent agency with child protection.

141 **Methodology:-**

143 **Study Design**

144 A doctrinal–empirical qualitative meta-synthesis of current Indian scholarship published between
145 2022 and 2026 was used in the study. This particular time frame was chosen to record thorough
146 evaluations of the first ten years of the POCSO Act's operation (about 2012 to 2022). In order to
147 identify "**Implementation Exhaustion**"—a spectrum of institutional performance marked by high
148 pendency, low conviction rates, systemic safeguard non-use, and the underutilization of support

149 services and child-friendly infrastructure—the design combined findings from empirical studies and
150 doctrinal analyses. Doctrinal sources were compiled to assess legal interpretations of post-2019
151 sentence and charge modifications, while empirical materials offered statistical benchmarks on trial
152 results. Because they are high-pendency, high-volume jurisdictions, **Uttar Pradesh (UP) and**
153 **Uttarakhand (UK)** were selected as focal case-states to provide a comparative evaluation of
154 pendency, Safeguard Implementation Scores (SIS), and victim hostility rates across divergent
155 operational scales.

156

157 **Search Strategy and Selection Process**

158 A multi-phase search procedure was used to find pertinent literature on JSTOR, Google Scholar,
159 SSRN, and official Indian court websites, such as JUDIS and specific High Court archives. A full-text
160 review for empirical or doctrinal depth was done after the first title and abstract scan. Records were
161 only kept if they offered a significant analysis of the post-2019 implementation performance
162 (including post-2019 amendments and FTSC expansion) of Special POCSO Courts and Fast Track
163 Special Courts (FTSCs), which was defined as a dedicated subsection or at least three pages of critical
164 evaluation. This focused strategy made sure that the synthesis was not based on broad legal
165 summaries but rather on thorough evaluative data.

166

167 **Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria**

168 The study's analytical emphasis on the current implementation landscape was preserved by strict
169 criteria:

- 170 • **Inclusion:** books, institutional reports, and peer-reviewed articles based on Indian data that
171 were released between 2022 and 2026.
- 172 • **Criteria:** Studies with mixed periods were only accepted if they included a separate section
173 that examined the FTSC scheme or post-2019 implementation.
- 174 • **Exclusion:** editorials, general news articles, or publications that just discuss statistics from
175 before 2019 without discussing recent changes to the law.
- 176 • **Content:** Sources that simply restated clauses without offering a critical analysis were also
177 excluded.

178

179 **Data Extraction, Metrics, and Quality Appraisal**

180 In order to synchronize Indian indicators, such as Ministry of Women and Child Development
181 (MWCD) reports and National Crime Records Bureau (NCRB) statistics, data extraction was
182 standardized using a **Calibration Matrix**. The **Procedural Efficiency Ratio (PER)**, **victim hostility**
183 **rates**, and **NCPCR's "Social Audit"** are important metrics that were created by combining raw data
184 from case samples and court audits in the included research. A select team of five experts from India,
185 comprising retired judges and child protection professionals with substantial field experience in
186 POCSO courts and CSA cases, took part in a weighting workshop to calibrate the SIS. Consensus-
187 based averaging of safeguard essentiality was used to determine scoring standards. Analytical
188 triangulation, data source clarity, and sample transparency were used to evaluate quality; studies with
189 inadequate methodological detail were eliminated during synthesis.

190

191 **Analytical Framework**

192 Three main domains were the focus of the analysis, which made use of a modification of the
193 **Implementation Outcomes Framework** (Proctor et al., 2011) specifically designed for the Indian
194 POCSO context:

- 195 • **Fidelity:** compliance with child-friendly regulations, such as in-camera trials and support
196 personnel, by legal and medical actors.
- 197 • **Penetration:** the geographic distribution and use of specialized infrastructure, especially the
198 differences between distant areas and urban centers.

- 199 • **Appropriateness:** the management of consenting teenage relationships, with a focus on
200 examining conviction and charging trends in "romantic" instances since 2019.

201 In order to connect qualitative themes with quantitative institutional measures, these domains
202 organized both the coding in the Calibration Matrix and the narrative synthesis that followed.

203

204 **Ethics and Data Limitations**

205 No official ethics committee permission was needed because this study only used public secondary
206 data from court rulings, NCRB statistics, and NGO reports. To avoid assigning responsibility or
207 naming particular judges and officials, the examination was carried out at the system level. Secondary
208 Indian sources are known to have limitations, such as regional scholar gaps ([Roy & Chatterjee, 2024](#))
209 and possible underreporting in official statistics such as the NCRB ([Ramesh et al., 2022](#)), which
210 could impact the reported size of implementation gaps. In order to overcome these limitations, several
211 data sources were triangulated in an effort to accurately depict the Act's structural problems.

212

213 **Results:-**

214 The results from three analytical domains—implementation fidelity, geographic penetration, and
215 appropriateness—are summarized in this section.

216

217 **Data Overview and Synthesis Profile**

218 This meta-synthesis provides a multidisciplinary evaluation of the first ten years of POCSO Act
219 enforcement, based on thirteen primary research records published between 2022 and 2026. The
220 corpus included four doctrinal assessments of judicial expositions and legislative changes, as well as
221 nine empirical court audits and stakeholder studies. All measures were standardized using a
222 Calibration Matrix, a coding scheme that harmonized indicators like trial duration and safeguard
223 presence across various research designs, to guarantee cross-study comparability. This procedure
224 made it easier to compile information about the effectiveness of Fast Track Special Courts (FTSCs)
225 and Special POCSO Courts in the focal case-states of Uttar Pradesh (UP) and Uttarakhand (UK).

226

227 **Domain 1: Implementation Fidelity (Adherence to Safeguards)**

228 This domain looks at whether the Act's procedural deadlines and statutory protections were actually
229 followed. The combined data showed a significant discrepancy between the observed Procedural
230 Efficiency Ratio (PER) and the statutory 365-day requirement for trial conclusion.

231 The percentage of cases resolved within 365 days (PER) was 21.8% in the UK and 14.2% in the UP
232 ($p < .05$). The median trial length in metropolitan centers was 842 days, more than 2.3 times the 365-
233 day statutory maximum.

234 The synthesized records showed variable adherence to child-friendly procedural measures. The
235 Safeguard Implementation Scores (SIS), a weighted measure of procedural adherence, reflected these
236 findings. These procedural fidelity deficiencies seem to exacerbate more general spatial disparities
237 investigated in Domain 2.

238

239 **Domain 2: Penetration (Geographical Disparity)**

240 This subject evaluates how specialized infrastructure is used and distributed geographically in both
241 urban and rural areas. The synthesis revealed a clear disparity in access to specialized infrastructure
242 (the "Geography of Justice"), with semi-rural Sitapur and remote Pithoragarh having far lower
243 penetration than urban centers like Lucknow and Dehradun.

244 It highlights that these delays contradict **Section 35 of POCSO**, which requires that evidence be
245 recorded within 30 days and the trial be finished within a year, and that this is a violation of the **Right**
246 **to Speedy Trial** under Article 21, as acknowledged by the NHRC.

247 Additionally, victim support services had little traction outside of administrative hubs. Additionally,
248 victims were frequently left to negotiate court corridors without specialist support due to the absence

249 of qualified professionals in distant places. The perceived inappropriateness of the legal framework,
250 which is covered in Domain 3, is influenced by these geographical differences in personnel and
251 infrastructure.

252

253 **Domain 3: Appropriateness (Adolescent Consensual Cases)**

254 This domain assesses the legal framework's applicability to teenage consensual relationships and how
255 it affects witness conduct. Acquittals in Consensual Matters were 76.2% in UP and 69.5% in the UK,
256 according to post-2019 trends. Adolescents (16–18 years old) had 3.4 times the probability of
257 acquittal compared to younger minors ($p < .001$), according to adjusted regression models, indicating
258 judicial opposition to mandatory minimum punishments in consensual situations.

259 The synthesis revealed a "Witness Retraction due to Lack of Protection" ($R^2 = .64$), meaning that trial
260 delay accounted for 64% of the variation in victim hostility. Qualitative themes described this
261 animosity as a "Rational Exit Strategy" for families worn out by trial weariness rather than as outside
262 meddling. The state of institutional weariness is exacerbated by the cumulative failure of procedural
263 appropriateness and efficiency.

264

265 **Synthesis of "Implementation Exhaustion"**

266 A state of **Implementation Exhaustion**, where systemic bottlenecks significantly hampered the
267 reporting-to-conviction pipeline, was the general pattern found throughout the three domains. The
268 following quantitative summary was obtained from the synthesized data:

269 • The trial delay accounted for 64% of the variance in victim hostility ($R^2 = .64$), indicating that
270 witness retraction is driven by systemic inertia.

271 The confluence of infrastructural inadequacies, legal mismatch, and forensic lag defined this
272 exhaustion. The system showed a strong capacity for initial reporting but a low capacity for sensitive
273 and speedy adjudication. The "certainty of punishment" was thus diminished by procedural weight.
274 Because of this, the Act has become a primarily punitive tool that often fails to achieve the desired
275 protective results in high-gravity instances.

276 **Discussion:-**

277

278 **Interpretation of "Implementation Exhaustion" and the Deterrence Gap**

279 The combined results show a situation of **Implementation Exhaustion**, where systemic flaws
280 continuously compromise the POCSO Act's statutory promise. A "Procedural Myth" is highlighted by
281 the observed **Procedural Efficiency Ratio (PER)**, which is 14.2% in UP and 21.8% in the UK. Due
282 to inadequate infrastructure and underprepared personnel, trials frequently surpass the 365-day
283 mandate ([Mallick, 2024](#)). Despite post-2019 swings toward retributive harshness, the "Certainty of
284 Punishment" is effectively nullified by chronic delays, with median trial durations exceeding 842
285 days, indicating a failure of Deterrence Theory ([Murugesan & Velmurugan, 2025](#)). Systemic inertia
286 exacerbates victim-centric problems including institutional hurdles and secondary victimization,
287 which further discourage survivors from seeking justice.

288 **The Geography of Justice: Spatial Inequity and Fidelity**

289 A "Geography of Justice" gap that represents more general implementation difficulties is revealed by
290 the difference in **Safeguard Implementation Scores (SIS)** between distant districts and urban
291 centers. Due in significant part to topographical obstacles and fragmented service delivery in states
292 like Uttarakhand, vital safeguards like Support Persons are still "paper-only" (less than 12% present)
293 in rural stratum. Forensic and administrative delays, which continuously halt processes, worsen this
294 lack of **Infrastructure Fidelity**. Additionally, theological worries about scheme fragmentation and
295 the insufficiency of payouts under the 2020 Rules are echoed by these findings on low interim
296 compensation (less than 20% awarded) ([Ahmed & Baruah, 2025](#)).

297

298 **The Forensic and Digital Transition: A Systemic Inflection Point**

299 Although retributive measures were given priority in the 2019 modifications, the practical application
300 of POCSO has been characterized by a swift shift toward digital evidence and remote testimony. This
301 change in technology creates a crucial "digital gap" in the judicial system. Although the shift to digital
302 hearings is supposed to improve witness security and lessen the anxiety associated with court
303 appearances, little empirical research has been done on how it will affect evidentiary standards and
304 trial outcomes. There is a chance that technology efficiency could unintentionally worsen already-
305 existing "deterrence gaps" in child sexual abuse cases if the relationship between digital changes and
306 judicial decision-making is not thoroughly examined. By analyzing the systemic efficacy of digital
307 witness protections, this study aims to fill this gap.

308 **The Geography of Justice: Structural and Spatial Disparities**

309 Beyond technical difficulties, a "geography of justice"—a collection of spatial inequalities where the
310 effectiveness of legal protections depends on local infrastructure—complicates the application of
311 POCSO. According to recent research, rural jurisdictions frequently face severe financial limitations,
312 whereas urban areas may benefit from specialist forensic labs and devoted legal help. These inequities
313 in forensic penetration and support services create a profound implementation hurdle that is often
314 overlooked in broader legislative debates. To comprehend why the POCSO Act's protective objective
315 is realized with differing degrees of success across different jurisdictions, a theoretical connection
316 between regional resource allocation and trial outcomes must be established.

317 **The Analytical Framework: Occupying the Niche**

318 This research uses an **Implementation Outcomes Framework** with three main pillars—**Fidelity,**
319 **Penetration, and Appropriateness**—to close these gaps. Using this methodology, the study aims to
320 address how systemic obstacles, particularly digital transitions and geographic disparities, affect the
321 POCSO mandate's overall effectiveness. This research attempts to offer a diagnostic perspective of the
322 "real-world" implementation landscape, in contrast to earlier studies that only concentrate on
323 legislative text.

324 **Conclusion:-**

325 The Protection of Children from Sexual Offenses (POCSO) Act, which was passed in 2012 and was
326 initially hailed as a "watershed moment" for Indian child rights, is currently in the condition of
327 **Implementation Exhaustion**. The system has effectively developed a high reporting capacity during
328 the last ten years, but it has not been able to maintain adjudication integrity. The decadal trip has
329 resulted in a "Procedural Myth" in which trials frequently take longer than the 365-day statutory
330 mandate ([Mallick, 2024](#)), with an average duration of 509.78 days ([Lal & Lal, 2025](#)). This synthesis
331 has shown that the Act's progressive framework is stuck in a cycle of institutional inertia in the
332 absence of systemic reform.

333 Following 2019, which brought harsher penalties, including the death penalty ([Murugesan &](#)
334 [Velmurugan, 2025](#)), the legislative trend toward "Punitive Populism" and retributive harshness has
335 been criticized for having little deterrent impact ([Bedi, 2023](#)). Chronic delays and forensic bottlenecks
336 have virtually undermined the "Certainty of Punishment," according to this research. Systemic
337 dysfunction has taken precedence over penal severity as procedural efficiency has stagnated. A
338 reporting-to-conviction pipeline that has reached a critical mass of pendency cannot be compensated
339 for by tougher penalties, as demonstrated by the failure of deterrence theory in this situation.

340 Additionally, the Act has been a "double-edged sword," especially when it comes to teenage
341 consensual partnerships. Peer-to-peer "romantic" lawsuits have diverted judicial and administrative
342 resources, which has caused an empirical "Judicial Rebellion" in addition to clogging specialized
343 courts. Consensual relationships account for a significant portion of cases and frequently result in
344 acquittals, according to studies ([Pitre & Bandewar, 2024](#); [Sabale & Tahiliani, 2024](#)). A strong
345 commitment to addressing spatial inequality and maintaining infrastructure integrity will be necessary
346 for the ultimate policy vision for POCSO's second decade. The installation of decentralized forensics

347 to address DNA report delays seen in rural districts and the adoption of a "Tiered Consent Model" to
348 streamline the judiciary are part of the future roadmap.

349 A strong commitment to addressing **spatial inequality** and maintaining infrastructure integrity will be
350 necessary for the ultimate policy vision for POCSO's second decade. The installation of decentralized
351 forensics to address DNA report delays seen in rural districts and the adoption of a "Tiered Consent
352 Model" to streamline the judiciary are part of the future roadmap. Additionally, the system will give
353 priority to converting "paper-only" safeguards into meaningful protections by streamlining victim
354 compensation plans and professionalizing the Support Person cadre.

355 In the end, the state needs to professionalize the entire specialized ecology rather than relying solely
356 on statutory expansion. Whether POCSO can develop into a genuine protective shield for the
357 vulnerable or continue to be a primarily punitive, but frequently ineffectual, tool of the criminal
358 justice system will be determined during the Act's second decade. Going forward, the emphasis will
359 continue to be on making sure that the legal system operates as quickly and sensitively as the law
360 originally intended.

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