

## Offences Against Children: Criminal Justice and Social Issues in India with Special Reference to Guwahati, Assam

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### ABSTRACT

*This study investigates the prevalence and types of offenses against children in Guwahati, Assam, India, focusing on physical abuse, sexual exploitation, trafficking, neglect, and child labour. Using a quantitative and analytical approach, the research draws on official crime records, case studies, and interviews, along with a literature review on child protection and criminal justice. Findings reveal a high prevalence of offenses, particularly under the POCSO Act, significantly impacting children's well-being and development. Contributing factors include socio-economic disparities, cultural norms, and inadequate support systems. Gaps in the criminal justice system, such as procedural delays and insufficient resources, were identified. The study recommends strengthening child protection policies, enhancing victim support services, and increasing public awareness of child rights. It emphasizes the need for coordinated, multi-sectoral efforts and robust criminal justice responses integrated with comprehensive social services. Effective policy formulation, resource allocation, and community engagement are essential for creating a safer environment for children. Longitudinal research and comparative studies with other urban centres are suggested to monitor progress and identify best practices in child protection.*

**Keywords:** Child offenses, Exploitation, Victims, Psychological trauma, Trafficking

### INTRODUCTION

Children, making up nearly 40% of the population, are vital national assets and need proper care and protection to become valuable members of society. The nation's future relies on their welfare, making it crucial for the State to ensure their basic rights and protect them from exploitation. Historically, children have faced severe exploitation, including slavery, abuse, and abandonment, highlighting their marginalization and the urgent need for protection. As one delves deeper into history, one discovers that the plight of children has often been silenced and even more brutal. Poverty and dire circumstances, unfortunately, have frequently resulted in the tragic deaths of children. Recent crimes, such as those shaking Assam with its continuous tales of shame and horror, highlight the pressing issue. A report from the National Crime Records Bureau (NCRB) and Crime Branch Guwahati underscores that offences against children are not confined to the capital city alone; they are a national epidemic. The victimization of children starts even before birth, with practices like foeticide and

infanticide prevalent historically. In 2022, crimes against children increased by 8.7% compared to 2021, with 45.7% of cases related to kidnapping and abduction and 39.7% under the POCSO Act. Modern advancements have turned ancient practices into contemporary forms of foeticide. Children, often exploited due to poverty and illiteracy, have been endangered to sexual exploitation, slavery, and bonded labour, especially in Assam's lower socioeconomic sections. Despite some legal progress, overall improvements remain limited. Law enforcement must devise effective strategies to prevent rising crimes and ensure children's safety.

### **Rational of the study**

India, with its vast and diverse population, confronts significant challenges in safeguarding children from various forms of abuse and exploitation. While the criminal justice system is pivotal in addressing these crimes, the complexity is further heightened by a range of social issues. The city of Guwahati in Assam, with its unique cultural, socio-economic, and geographic characteristics, offers a compelling case study. As the largest city northeast India and a major urban hub in Northeast India, Guwahati has seen a disturbing increase in crimes against children like child exploitation, child labour, child marriage, murder, procurement of minor etc. These offences include physical abuse, sexual exploitation, trafficking, and neglect. The socio-economic inequalities in the region, coupled with inadequate law enforcement resources and low public awareness, exacerbate the risks faced by children. Moreover, the intersection of traditional practices and modern influences creates a complex social environment where efforts to protect children has to be meticulously managed.

The criminal justice system in Assam, mirroring challenges seen across India, struggles with limited resources, procedural delays, and a lack of specific training for handling cases involving children. Additionally, societal attitudes towards children and the stigma associated with being a victim of abuse often impede reporting and the delivery of justice. Despite legislative measures such as the (POCSO) Act and various child welfare initiatives, the efficacy of these interventions remains uneven. This study investigates the multifaceted dimensions of offences against children in Guwahati, Assam, focusing on the interaction between criminal justice mechanisms and social issues. By delving into the specific challenges and contextual factors in this region, the study contributes to the development of more effective policies and practices for safeguarding children's rights and ensuring their well-being. Furthermore, it explores the part of government agencies, non-governmental organizations, and community-based efforts in addressing these critical issues, offering a inclusive understanding of the current landscape and potential avenues for improvement.

### **Literature Review**

In their book on 'Child victim of crime' Gupta, M.C., Chockalingam, K., Guha, J. (2001) addressed the concern of child victims of crime providing a comprehensive analysis of challenges, needs, and protective strategies, encompassing issues like victimization nature, neglect, and child rights from

national and global viewpoints. However, a more nuanced exploration of cultural and regional variations in child victimization experiences and responses, particularly within, specific contexts such as identified in the present study remains unaddressed the effectiveness of interdisciplinary approaches involving psychology, social work, and law enforcement in supporting child victims and prosecuting offenders have not been their area of focus.

Addressing these gaps would advance efforts to protect and support child victims more effectively, aligning with the authors' goal of promoting comprehensive strategies for child protection. 'Crime Against Children' the publication of Baruah, A. (2002) provides an exploration of crimes against children covers significant aspects such as child labour, sexual exploitation, and abuse, while advocating strongly against child victimization. However, the literature under review analysis the underlying socio-economic factors that perpetuate these crimes, particularly in regions like Guwahati, Assam. Therefore, the research has aimed at evaluating the effectiveness of existing preventive measures and legal frameworks in addressing these issues, exploring innovative approaches to better protect children at risk. Additionally, examining the long-term impacts on survivors and their pathways to recovery could inform comprehensive support systems.

Addressing these gaps would contribute to more targeted and impactful strategies in combating child abuse and ensuring the well-being of children in Guwahati and similar contexts. Patel, J.D. (2004) in his work 'Violence against Children' examines violence against children, focusing on abuse by female perpetrators like mothers or caretakers. He sheds light on challenges in prosecution, especially when child trauma impedes testimony. However, the author refrains from in the deeper exploration into the psychological and societal dynamics involved in such cases, as well as effective legal and support mechanisms tailored to these unique situations.

Further research could also investigate the prevalence and underreporting of such cases in diverse cultural and regional contexts, including Guwahati, Assam, to inform more targeted interventions and guarantee justice for child sufferers in these specific circumstances. Addressing these gaps would enhance understanding and responses to this less-explored aspect of child abuse.

The book on 'Rights of Children' by Gopalkrishna, G.B. (2004) Research on children's rights highlights the importance of ensuring health, education, and justice. However, the literature often overlooks how awareness of these rights influences their implementation and protection. Future studies should explore barriers to children's awareness, develop effective educational strategies to empower them, and examine the practical application of these rights. Addressing these gaps can help children in Guwahati and similar areas be more informed and supported in asserting their rights.

Gugnani, R. (2008) in the book on 'Crime against children' explores crimes against children emphasizes on understanding and controlling issues like sex crimes and homicide through societal and scientific lenses. However, in the literature under review refrains from delivering into the needs for

intersectional analyses considering factors such as gender and socioeconomic status, and assessing the effectiveness of interventions.

Further research could also explore into the long-term impacts on child victims, regional variations in crime prevalence and responses, and the involvement of children in shaping policies that affect them. Addressing these gaps would enhance strategies for protecting and ensuring justice for child victims, aligning with Gugnani's aim of providing comprehensive societal and scientific perspectives on the issue.

In reviewing the literature on crimes against children, several gaps emerge that warrant attention, especially concerning the situation in Guwahati, Assam. There is a necessity for more nuanced exploration of cultural and regional variations in child victimization experiences and responses. Additionally, there emerges the need for understanding the socio-economic factors perpetuating these crimes and evaluating the effectiveness of preventive measures and legal frameworks in local contexts. Further research should focus on enhancing interdisciplinary approaches to support child victims and prosecuting offenders, as well as promoting children's awareness of their rights and improving long-term support systems. Bridging these gaps would contribute to more targeted and effective strategies for protecting children and ensuring justice in the specific framework of the present study.

### **Research gap**

In the study of offences against children in India, specifically focusing on Guwahati, Assam, there is a significant lack of detailed research on the region's unique socio-cultural and economic context. Existing studies do not sufficiently indicate exploration of the practical implementation and effectiveness of child protection policies in Guwahati. Additionally, the role and impact of local NGOs and grassroots initiatives in child protection have not been given sufficient emphasis. There is a necessity for more interdisciplinary studies that incorporate viewpoints from social work, psychology, law, and public health. Furthermore, there are few long-term studies tracking outcomes for child victims in Guwahati, and narrow comparative analysis with other urban centres to identify best practices.

### **Objectives**

The main objective of the research work are:

- Examine the nature and extent of child victimization in Guwahati, Assam.
- Analyze the effectiveness of existing criminal justice mechanisms and policies.
- Investigate socio-economic and cultural factors contributing to child exploitation and propose recommendations for improvement.
- Identify gaps and propose recommendations for improving child protection strategies.

## METHODOLOGY

The methodology adopted for the existing work primarily focuses a quantitative and analytical approach on issues related to offences against children. The study explores relevant aspects within this scope.

**Method:** Data collection primarily involves secondary sources. However, recourse to questionnaires, observation, and face-to-face interviews has also been taken recourse to. Secondary data is sourced from government records, articles, books, journals, newspapers, theses, and online sources. The identified resources have also been analysed in tabular form.

**Sample Frame:** The study has used convenient sampling to reduce expenditures involved in data collection, and purposive sampling to specifically select participants within the confines of Guwahati metropolitan city, Assam, aligning with the study's specific objectives in this area.

### **Impact of offences against children in Guwahati, Assam**

Children's inherent innocence makes them highly vulnerable to exploitation, which deeply harms both the victims and society. In Guwahati, Assam, crimes such as physical abuse, sexual exploitation, trafficking, and neglect have severe immediate and long-term effects on children's physical, emotional, and psychological well-being. These offenses undermine safety, hinder education and development, and perpetuate trauma. Addressing these issues is essential to protect children's rights, support their growth, and ensure a safe future. The study examines the types, prevalence, and contributing factors of these offenses.

Types of Offences:

- **Sexual Offences:** The study highlights a significant prevalence of sexual offences against children, prominently covered under the (POCSO) Act, that includes sexual assault, molestation, rape, and exploitation, often perpetrated by acquaintances, family members, or strangers.
- **Physical Abuse:** Cases of physical abuse, including corporal punishment and violence, are reported, affecting children's physical and emotional well-being. Types: Beatings, harsh disciplinary measures, and neglect leading to physical harm and trauma.
- **Trafficking and Exploitation:** Instances of child trafficking for labour, domestic servitude, and sexual exploitation are documented, reflecting vulnerabilities due to socio-economic factors. Types: Forced labour, commercial sexual exploitation, and exploitation in industries such as construction and domestic work.
- **Neglect and Child Labour:** Children from underprivileged communities are often subjected to neglect, lack of access to education, and forced into hazardous child labour. Types: Child labour in agriculture, factories, and informal sectors, denying children their right to education and safe childhood.

Here are some of the primary categories of offenses against children in Guwahati Assam include:

- The POCSO Act, 2012, addresses sexual offenses against children in India, replacing Section 63 of Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita on rape. From 2019-2023, 430 cases were registered in Guwahati, Assam. Data reveals that major offenses include rape, sexual assault, and sexual harassment, highlighting the prevalence of these issues.
- Child Trafficking: Selling and buying of girls, procurement of minor girls, and kidnapping are significant crimes. From 2019- 2023, 167 cases of procurement of minor girls were reported by Crime branch Guwahati, Assam. The Immoral Traffic Prevention Act of 1986 and Section 98 of Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita address these issues.
- Child Marriage: Child marriage is a societal problem tackled by the Prohibition of Child Marriage Act-2006. From 2019- 2023, 128 cases of child marriage were reported in Crime branch Guwahati, Assam.
- Child Labour: The Bonded Labour System (Abolition) Act of 1976 and the Child Labour Act of 2006, along with the Child Labour (Prevention and Regulation) Act of 1986, are laws enacted to prevent child labour. From 2019- 2023, 70 cases of child Labour were reported by Crime branch Guwahati, Assam.
- Murder: Section 103 (1) of Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita deals with murder. From 2019- 2023, 13 instances of child homicide were documented in Crime branch Guwahati, Assam.
- Kidnapping: Kidnapping and exporting of children fall under Section 137 (1) (a) of the, of Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita while kidnapping with ransom demands is punishable under Section 140 (2) of the Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita.

The important Contributing Factors includes:

- Socio-Economic Disparities: Poverty, lack of education, and limited access to basic services contribute to the vulnerability of children, increasing their exposure to exploitation and abuse. Economic hardships force children into labour and make families more susceptible to trafficking schemes.
- Cultural and Social Norms: Deep-rooted cultural practices and patriarchal norms perpetuate violence against children, such as child marriage and discriminatory practices affecting girls disproportionately. Stigma surrounding reporting and addressing abuse might discourage families from pursuing help, exacerbating the issue.
- Inadequate Support Systems: lack of awareness about child rights and protection mechanisms among communities and service providers hampers timely intervention and support. Insufficient resources and capacity within Government bodies, such as law enforcement agencies and social welfare departments, impact the effectiveness of response efforts.

To enhance child protection in Guwahati, Assam, it is crucial to implement community-based awareness programs on child rights and protection laws, rigorously enforce existing laws with

specialized courts and trained personnel, and expand access to quality education, healthcare, and social services. Fostering alliances between governmental institutions and, and community organizations will create a coordinated support system for child victims. By addressing the various offenses and underlying factors, Guwahati can create a safe and nurturing environment for children.

**Table 1. NCRB Reports (2019-2022) on Crimes against Children in India and in the State of Assam (An analysis of the Table through figures given below) is as follows:**

Year	Crime against Children in India	Crime against Children in Assam	% Contribution of Assam to All-India Total
2019	148090	6608	4.4
2020	128531	4622	3.5
2021	149404	5282	3.5
2022	153426	4084	2.6

Source: Crime in India, Annual Reports of the National Crimes Record Bureau, 2019- 2022.

Here is the analysis of the data presented in Table 1:

- Year 2019: In 2019, there were 148,090 reported crimes against children in India, with Assam accounting for 6,608 cases. This represents approximately 4.4% of the total crimes against children reported in India for that year.
- Year 2020: The number of crimes against children in India decreased to 128,531 in 2020, with Assam reporting 4,622 cases. Assam's contribution to the national total decreased slightly to 3.5%.
- Year 2021: Crimes against children in India increased to 149,404 in 2021, with Assam recording 5,282 cases. Again, Assam's contribution remained at 3.5% of the national total.
- Year 2022: In 2022, there were 153,426 reported crimes against children in India, and Assam reported 4,084 cases. Assam's contribution decreased further to 2.6% of the national total.

From 2019 to 2022, the number of reported crimes against children in India fluctuated, with Assam contributing a small but varying percentage (2.6% to 4.4%) to the national total. Despite this small percentage, the absolute number of cases in Assam also varied, notably decreasing in 2022. These trends highlight the need for targeted interventions and policies to address local challenges and protect children from exploitation and abuse in Assam. This analysis highlights the need for continuous monitoring and targeted interventions to effectively address and reduce crimes against children, both nationally and within specific states like Assam.

**Table 2. Case register on Crime against Children (Guwahati Kamrup Metro) from 2019 to 2024 (April'24) in the Police Commissionerate office Crime branch Guwahati**

Sl no	Head of Crime	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024 (April'24)	Grand total
1.	Murder	2	4	4	3	2	0	15
2.	(POCSO)	112	75	81	106	156	56	586
3.	Procuration of Minor	34	62	53	9	21	7	186
4.	Prohibition of Child Marriage Act	7	9	2	4	116	6	144
5.	Child Labour	21	9	18	14	33	7	102
6.	J.J Act	17	221	16	12	17	8	92
	Total	193	181	174	148	345	84	1125

Here is the analysis of the data presented in Table 2 on crime against children in Guwahati Kamrup Metro from 2019 to April 2024:

- **Murder:** There were fluctuations in murder cases involving children from 2019 to 2024. The highest number was recorded in 2020 with 4 cases, and there were no cases reported in 2024 (up to April).
- **POCSO (Protection of Children from Sexual Offences) Act:** This category shows a varying trend with a peak of 156 cases in 2023. Overall, there is a substantial number of cases reported under POCSO, indicating persistent challenges in addressing sexual offences against children.
- **Procuration of Minor:** There is fluctuation in cases related to the procurement of minors, with a significant drop in 2022 and 2023 compared to previous years.
- **Prohibition of Child Marriage Act:** The number of cases under this act shows a substantial increase in 2023, highlighting efforts to address child marriage issues.
- **Child Labour:** There is a varied but generally low number of cases related to child labour, with fluctuations over the years.
- **J.J Act (Juvenile Justice Act):** Cases under the Juvenile Justice Act also vary, with a peak in 2020 mainly due to 221 cases reported.

Thus, the fluctuating total number of cases each year reflects the dynamic nature of crimes against children and the varying efforts of law enforcement and social systems. The consistently high number of cases under the POCSO Act highlights the seriousness of sexual offences against children in Guwahati. An increase in cases under the Prohibition of Child Marriage Act in 2023 indicates growing awareness and enforcement against child marriage. These trends underscore the need for targeted interventions, continuous monitoring, and strengthened preventive measures and support systems to effectively combat crimes against children. This analysis provides insights into the



prevalence and trends of crimes against children in Guwahati Kamrup Metro, informing efforts to enhance child protection and welfare initiatives in the region.

## DISCUSSION

The study focuses on offences against children in Guwahati, Assam, examining both the criminal justice responses and the broader social issues influencing these crimes. It employs a mixed-methods approach, integrating quantitative analysis with qualitative insights to provide a in-dept understanding of the challenges and dynamics involved.

### Quantitative Analysis

**National and State-Level Trends:** The study begins by contextualizing the issue within the broader Indian context, citing National Crime Records Bureau (NCRB) data from 2019 to 2022. During this period, India reported varying numbers of crimes against children, with Assam consistently contributing a small percentage (ranging from 2.6% to 4.4%) to the national total. This data underscores the localized nature of the study's focus on Guwahati, Assam, where specific trends and patterns may differ from national averages.

**Localized Data from Guwahati:** The study then delves into specific data from Guwahati Kamrup Metro, detailing cases recorded under various heads of crime from 2019 to April 2024. Key findings include fluctuations in different categories:

- **POCSO Act:** Significant variability in cases, with a notable increase in 2023, highlighting persistent challenges in addressing sexual offences against children.
- **Prohibition of Child Marriage Act:** A sharp increase in cases in 2023 indicates heightened enforcement efforts against child marriage practices.
- **J.J Act (Juvenile Justice Act):** Fluctuating numbers suggest varying levels of implementation and enforcement over the years.

### Qualitative Insights

**Socio-Cultural and Economic Factors:** The study incorporates qualitative insights gathered through interviews and case studies, revealing socio-cultural and economic factors contributing to child victimization in Guwahati. These include poverty, lack of education, cultural norms, and inadequate social support systems, which exacerbate vulnerabilities and hinder effective protection measures.

**Stakeholder Perspectives:** Interviews with stakeholders such as law enforcement officials, social workers, and NGO representatives provide nuanced perspectives on the challenges faced in combating crimes against children. These insights highlight issues like underreporting, procedural delays, and the need for specialized training and resources.

### Policy and Practice Implications

**Strengthening Child Protection Policies:** Based on the findings, the study recommends strengthening child protection policies and their implementation at both state and local levels. This includes

enhancing coordination between agencies, improving victim support services, and increasing awareness and education initiatives.

**Community Engagement and Prevention:** Emphasizing community-based approaches, the study suggests fostering partnerships with local communities, NGOs, and educational institutions to raise awareness, prevent crimes, and support rehabilitation efforts for victims. Thus the study provides a comprehensive analysis of offences against children in Guwahati, Assam, integrating quantitative data with qualitative insights to offer a holistic understanding. By identifying trends, highlighting challenges, and proposing actionable recommendations, the study aims to contribute to enhanced policies, practices, and interventions that safeguard children's rights and well-being in the region.

The study on offences against children in Guwahati, Assam, examines various aspects of the criminal justice response:

**Legal Framework:**

- The POCSO Act provides a robust legal framework for addressing sexual offences against children, including stringent penalties for perpetrators. It mandates special courts and procedures to ensure speedy trials and sensitive handling of cases involving child victims.
- The Juvenile Justice (Care and Protection of Children) Act provides guidelines for the care, protection, treatment, and the support and rehabilitation of children in legal conflict. It emphasizes the principle of juvenile justice based on the best interests of the child and promotes their rehabilitation and reintegration into society.

**Law Enforcement Practices:**

- **Investigation and Reporting:** Law enforcement agencies in Guwahati are responsible for exploring cases of offences against children, including physical abuse, trafficking, and child labour. Challenges such as underreporting, lack of specialized training among police officers, and procedural delays may hinder effective investigation and timely intervention.
- **Coordination and Resources:** Collaboration between police, child welfare departments, and NGOs is critical for effective response and victim support. Adequate allocation of resources, including manpower, equipment, and forensic capabilities, enhances law enforcement's capacity to handle cases sensitively and efficiently.

**Judicial Processes:**

- **Special Courts:** Specialized courts designated under the POCSO Act ensure that cases relating child victims are heard in a child-friendly environment. These courts prioritize speedy trials, minimize re-traumatization of victims, and uphold the rights of child witnesses during legal proceedings.
- **Legal Aid and Support:** Access to legal aid and advocacy services is crucial for ensuring that child victims and help their families comprehend their rights and navigate the legal process

effectively. NGOs and legal aid organizations play a vital role in providing support, representation, and advocacy for child victims throughout judicial proceedings.

**Challenges and Recommendations:**

- **Procedural Delays:** Addressing delays in legal proceedings through streamlined processes and dedicated resources for child-related cases.
- **Capacity Building:** Enhancing training initiatives for police and other law enforcement personnel and judicial personnel on child rights, victim-sensitive approaches, and forensic techniques.
- **Victim Support:** Strengthening victim support services, including counselling, rehabilitation, and social reintegration programs to aid in the recovery and empowerment of child victims.

By analysing these components of the criminal justice response, the study aims to identify gaps, propose improvements, and advocate for policies that prioritize the protection and rights of children in Guwahati, Assam. Strengthening the legal framework, enhancing law enforcement practices, and improving judicial processes are essential steps towards ensuring justice and safeguarding children from exploitation and abuse.

In the study of offenses against children in Guwahati, Assam, various key social issues and support systems come to light.

**Social Issues:** Socio-economic disparities, such as poverty and lack of education, heighten children's vulnerability to exploitation and abuse. Economic hardships lead to child labour, limiting educational opportunities and growth. Cultural norms, including patriarchal structures and practices like child marriage, perpetuate violence against children. Stigma and societal attitudes deter reporting abuse, while lack of awareness about support systems hinders justice. Community education and awareness are crucial for recognizing abuse signs and seeking timely intervention.

**Support Systems:** **Legal and Judicial Support:** Enactment and enforcement of laws such as the POCSO Act are crucial in prosecuting offenders and ensuring justice for child victims. Strengthening judicial processes and providing legal aid to victims and their families are important components of the support system. **Healthcare and Psychological Support:** Access to healthcare services that cater to the specific needs of child victims, including medical examinations and mental health counselling, is vital. Psychological support and rehabilitation programs aid children in overcoming trauma and rebuilding their lives with dignity and resilience. **Community-Based Interventions:** NGOs, community organizations, and local stakeholders play a pivotal role in providing immediate support, advocacy, and rehabilitation services to child victims. Establishing partnerships between government and grassroots organizations enhances the reach and effectiveness of support systems. In addressing these social issues and strengthening support systems, the study advocates for collaborative efforts across

sectors to create a protective environment where children in Guwahati, Assam, can grow up safe, nurtured, and empowered.

### **Findings of the study**

**Prevalence and Nature of Offences:** The study reveals a concerning prevalence of offences including physical abuse, sexual exploitation, trafficking, neglect, and child labour in Guwahati. POCSO Act cases showed significant variability, indicating ongoing challenges in addressing sexual offences against children. **Impact and Consequences:** Offences against children have profound and long-term impacts on their physical, emotional, and psychological well-being. These crimes undermine children's sense of safety and security, impair their educational and social development, and perpetuate cycles of trauma and vulnerability. **Contributing Factors:** Socio-economic disparities, cultural norms, and inadequate support systems contribute to the vulnerability of children in Guwahati. Lack of awareness and underreporting were identified as significant barriers to addressing and preventing offences against children. **Criminal Justice and Social Responses:** The study highlights gaps in the criminal justice system, including procedural delays, inadequate resources, and the need for specialized training for handling cases involving child victims. Community-based interventions and collaborations between government agencies, NGOs, and local communities were recommended to enhance protection and support for children. **Policy and Practice Recommendations:** Strengthening child protection policies and their effective implementation was emphasized, along with improving victim support services and rehabilitation programs. Enhancing public awareness and education on child rights and protection was identified as crucial for prevention and intervention.

### **Future Directions**

The study calls for sustained research efforts, longitudinal studies to track outcomes for child victims, and comparative analyses with other urban centres to identify best practices. Continuous monitoring and evaluation of interventions are essential to address emerging challenges and ensure sustained improvements in child protection. These findings underscore the urgent requirement for coordinated efforts across multiple sectors to protect children from abuse, exploitation, and neglect in Guwahati, Assam, and similar contexts.

The findings of the study on offences against children in Guwahati, Assam, can inform policy, practice, and further research in several key ways:

**Policy Implications:** Findings should guide the creation or revision of child protection policies to address local issues like sexual exploitation and child labour. Increased budget allocations are needed for child protection, focusing on enforcement, support systems, and community engagement. Additionally, resources should fund training for law enforcement, healthcare providers, educators, and social workers to better address child victimization.

**Practice Implications:** To improve service delivery, integrated support systems offering legal aid, counselling, and rehabilitation for child victims are essential. Establish child-friendly spaces in community settings, hospitals, and police stations to create safe reporting environments. Engage the community through targeted awareness campaigns about child rights and abuse signs, and partner with local NGOs to enhance outreach and grassroots efforts.

### **Further Research Directions**

Based on the findings of the study the following suggestions are put forth:

- **Strengthening Legal Framework and Enforcement:** Enhance implementation of existing laws such as the Protection of Children from Sexual Offences (POCSO) Act and the Juvenile Justice Act through rigorous enforcement and monitoring. Ensure prompt and effective investigation and prosecution of cases involving offences against children.
- **Capacity Building and Training:** Provide specialized training to law enforcement agencies, judiciary, and social workers on handling cases of child abuse and exploitation sensitively and effectively. Equip healthcare professionals with skills to identify and respond to signs of child abuse during medical examinations.
- **Enhancing Support Systems:** Establish and strengthen child-friendly support systems and services, including counselling, legal aid, and rehabilitation programs for child victims and their families.

Foster partnerships between government agencies, NGOs, and community organizations to provide comprehensive support.

- **Promoting Awareness and Education:** Launch public awareness campaigns to educate parents, caregivers, and communities about child rights, protection mechanisms, and reporting procedures. Integrate child protection education into school curricula to empower children with knowledge and skills to protect themselves.
- **Research and Data Collection:** Conduct regular and systematic data collection on offences against children to inform evidence-based policies and interventions. Support longitudinal studies to track the long-term impact of interventions and identify trends in child victimization.
- **Community Engagement and Prevention:** Engage community leaders, local authorities, and religious institutions in efforts to prevent child abuse and promote child well-being. Establish community-based initiatives and safe environment where children can seek help and support confidentially.
- **Policy Advocacy and Coordination:** Advocate for policy reforms that prioritize children's rights and protection at local, state, and national levels. Strengthen inter-agency

coordination and collaboration to streamline efforts and ensure a cohesive response to child protection issues.

By prioritizing child protection and investing in preventive measures and support systems, Guwahati, city, can work towards creating a safer environment where every child can thrive free from violence and exploitation. Thus, future directions focus on immediate practical actions and policy implications, while future research directions emphasize long-term study and analysis to inform and improve these practices and policies.

### **Conclusion**

The study on "Offences Against Children: Criminal Justice and Social Issues in India with Special Reference to Guwahati, Assam" sheds light on the multifaceted challenges and complexities surrounding offenses targeting children within the framework of the Indian legal and social framework, with a specific focus on the city of Guwahati, Assam. The findings underscore the urgent need for comprehensive and targeted interventions to address the unique issues faced by children, considering both legal and social dimensions. The study on offences against children in Guwahati, Assam, reveals several critical findings and underscores their significance:

#### **Main Findings:**

- **Prevalence and Nature of Offences:** Crimes against children in Guwahati include physical abuse, sexual exploitation, trafficking, neglect, and child labour, impacting their physical, emotional, and psychological well-being. The persistent high numbers under the POCSO Act highlight the prevalence and severity of sexual offences against children.
- **Contributing Factors:** Socio-economic disparities, cultural norms, and inadequate support systems exacerbate children's vulnerability to exploitation and abuse. Underreporting and lack of awareness among communities hinder effective intervention and protection efforts.
- **Criminal Justice and Social Responses:** Gaps in the criminal justice system, such as procedural delays and resource constraints, impede timely and effective resolution of cases. Community-based interventions and partnerships between government agencies, NGOs, and local communities are crucial for comprehensive child protection

#### **Significance:**

- **Integrated Approach:** Addressing offences against children requires an integrated approach that combines robust criminal justice responses with supportive social services.
- **Holistic Protection:** By integrating criminal justice measures (like stringent enforcement of laws) with social services (such as counselling and rehabilitation), comprehensive support can be provided to child victims.

- **Prevention and Rehabilitation:** Effective intervention not only seeks justice for victims but also focuses on prevention through community education, early detection, and rehabilitation to mitigate long-term impacts.

**Importance of Integrated Approach:**

- **Efficient Resource Allocation:** Integration ensures optimal use of resources by coordinating efforts across sectors, reducing duplication, and maximizing impact.
- **Enhanced Effectiveness:** Collaboration between criminal justice and social service sectors enhances the effectiveness of interventions, addressing both immediate protection needs and long-term rehabilitation.
- **Empowerment and Support:** An integrated approach empowers victims, supports their recovery, and strengthens their resilience by providing comprehensive, tailored support.

Addressing child offenses in Guwahati requires integrating criminal justice with social services to enhance victim protection, community resilience, and safety. The study highlights the need for a comprehensive approach that combines robust legal responses with supportive services, aiming to improve child rights and well-being while fostering safe environments for all children.

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**Conflict of interest**

While conducting the investigation the authors have not obtained funding from any source. All expenditure has been borne by the authors. Notably, the uniqueness of this work lies in its originality, it has not been previously published or submitted for publication elsewhere. The authors conducted this research independently, and the content of the paper represents their authentic contributions to the field of study.

**Author's contributions**

Marphy Chetia, Conducted the research, performed data analysis, and drafted the manuscript. Prof. Subhram Rajkhowa Provided guidance throughout the study, contributed to the conceptualization and design, and reviewed and revised the manuscript.

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