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Q18

The National Commission for Protection of Child Rights has to address the challenges faced by children in the digital era. Examine the existing policies and suggest measures the Commission can initiate to tackle the issue.

UPSC Civil Services Mains 2025 · GS II · 15 marks · Governance and Policy

Government policies and interventions for development in various sectors and issues arising out of their design and implementation.

Core demand of the question

- Name the digital-era harms to children
- Map existing Indian law and policy
- State what NCPCR's mandate already allows
- Suggest concrete Commission-level measures, not a new ministry

Revision summary

- **Harms:** grooming, bullying, addictive design, data profiling, deepfakes, influencer labour, and exclusion without devices.
- **Law:** **POCSO**, IT rules, JJ Act, DPDP 2023 parental consent, NEP caution on ed-tech.

NCPCR can inquire, recommend and move courts under the 2005 Act.

- **Measures:** age-assurance, school device rules with offline equity, **POCSO** e-evidence protocol, ed-tech data audits, 1098 integration, influencer-work codes, privacy-by-default for minors.

The Commission should regulate design, not become a meme censor.

Introduction

- **Children now grow up** inside platforms: school WhatsApp, free games, algorithmic video, and sexualised or violent content that does not wait for a gatekeeper. The **National Commission for Protection of Child Rights** is a **statutory watchdog** under the **CPCR Act, 2005**. It cannot unplug the internet. It can **set standards, summon platforms, push ministries, and speak for the child** when the parent, the school and the company pass the parcel.

Body**Harms**

Cyberbullying and doxxing; **POCSO** offences facilitated online; **grooming**; addictive design and sleep loss; body-image and betting ads; **deepfakes**; data profiling of minors; unpaid **child labour** in influencer homes; exam-leak and cheat-app ecosystems. The **digital divide** is also a harm: a child without a device drops out of the only homework channel.

Existing policy

POCSO Act; **IT Act** (including 67 and intermediary rules); **JJ Act**; **DPDP Act, 2023** (verifiable parental consent for under-18s, ban on tracking/ads targeting children in the strict

reading); **NCPCR** guidelines on digital devices in schools; **NEP 2020** on ed-tech caution; **National Cyber Crime Portal** and **1098**; **NCERT** cyber-safety material; **MeitY** blocking and **I&B** OTT codes. **UNCRC** Optional Protocols inform the Commission's language. Implementation is the gap: consent is a checkbox, age-gating is weak, and schools fear the parent more than the app.

What NCPCR can initiate

The Commission can **inquire, recommend, inspect, and approach the Supreme Court or High Courts**. Concrete measures:

- **Age-assurance standards** with MeitY - not a single fragile self-declaration - and public grading of platforms the way BIS grades helmets.
- **Model school rules** on phones, with **no child left offline** for homework (assisted labs), issued with DoE and States.
- **POCSO e-procedure** training for SJPU and child-welfare committees on taking evidence without re-traumatising, and on **section 15** (child pornography storage) applied to ordinary teens with proportion.
- A **children's data audit** of ed-tech and gaming, referred to the Data Protection Board.
- **Helpline integration** 1098-cybercrime-NCPCR with quarterly published numbers, not a PDF once a year.
- **Influencer-parent codes** on hours and earnings, with the Labour Ministry, so "cute content" is not unregulated work.
- **Push** platform default: **high privacy, no autoplay, no loot-boxes for minors**.
- **Federal coordination** with State CPCRs; digital harm is not only Delhi's.

NCPCR should not become a **censor board of memes**. It should become the **child's regulator of design**, the way a food authority regulates additives.

Flow diagram

Digital harms -> POCSO IT DPDP
 NCPCR -> Standards audits schools
 NCPCR -> Platforms and MeitY
 NCPCR -> Courts if needed

Conclusion

Digital childhood is a protection gap, not a gadget gap. Law already names **POCSO**, DPDP and intermediaries. NCPCR's useful next work is standards, audits, school models and a live helpline - design rules for platforms, not a moral panic.

Facts & figures

CPCR Act, 2005

Creates NCPCR with inquiry, inspection and recommendation powers, and access to higher courts.

DPDP Act, 2023

Treats persons under 18 as children for consent and restricts tracking and targeted advertising aimed at them.

POCSO

Sexual offences against children, including those committed or recorded through digital means.

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