EXTREMISM AND GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE IN SOUTH ASIA

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THE IMPACT OF EXTREMISM ON SEXUAL AND GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE IN INDIA

Swarna Rajagopalan and Natasha Singh Raghuvanshi

Although India officially recognises only violence by left-wing groups as extremist, communities across India are familiar with extreme violence. Sexual and gender-based violence—whether physical, sexual, verbal, emotional or economic—is a pervasive reality in patriarchal societies like India; conflict situations appear to exacerbate this. The research objective of this project is to understand whether the rise of extremism in the public sphere impacts levels of sexual and gender-based violence in society, and how the two are related.

India has infamously been declared one of the world's most dangerous places for women.[1] Deeply entrenched patriarchal beliefs and customs interacting with a rapidly changing socio-economic milieu, growing inequality and a state prone to regarding social and political mobilisation with mistrust have created a climate where violence at home and in public and official spaces is met mainly with silence and impunity.

This India overview looks at the rise of extremist politics and correlates it to sexual and gender-based violence levels. To this end, we briefly examine the history of extremism in four states since around 2000, and correlate that to changes in sexual and gender-based violence indicated in criminal records and other data. Going beyond simple correlation, however, we also report on manifestations of extremist misogyny that may not be counted in police databases as gender violence—for instance, moral policing and hate speech.

This is a desk-based study, drawing on academic (books and journals), media sources (reports and long-form articles) and official reports and data. The last includes UN resolutions and reports, Government of India reports to the Parliament and India's National Crime Records Bureau data.

The states we will focus on are Chhattisgarh, Assam, Kashmir and Karnataka, representing four kinds of "extremist" politics. Three of these contexts figure in the Government's internal security reports: "cross-border terror" groups in Jammu and Kashmir, "left-wing activities" in Chhattisgarh and "militant groups" in Assam. The fourth case we have chosen is the rise of radical Hindutva groups in Karnataka, whose brand of religious and cultural nationalism has targeted both Christian and Muslim communities in the state.

This overview is structured in three parts. The first part briefly describes the working definitions used here and their context. The paper derives a working definition of "extremism" in the context of Indian politics, taking cognisance of international discourse, the official definitions used by the Government of India and academic writing. It defines sexual and gender-based violence—what it is and how it has been related to security and conflict issues. The first section closes by setting the context for the India overview, operationalising sexual and gender-based violence for this paper. The second part includes four state case studies. Each includes the context of both extremism and gender politics,

and an analysis of whether extremism has made a difference in the nature and prevalence of gender violence. The final section offers a comparative analysis and speculates on the possible relationship between extremism and gender violence as suggested by these case studies.

DEFINITIONS AND CONTEXT

Extremism

Any study of extremism is hamstrung by the lack of shared understanding of the term. Historically, positions and politics marked "extremist" are defined by whatever constitutes the mainstream in a given age.[2] The dictionary definition of the term is tautological: "holding of extreme political or religious views", and synonyms include "fanaticism, radicalism, zealotry, zeal, fundamentalism, dogmatism, bigotry, militancy, activism, sectarianism, chauvinism, partisanship."[3]

Scholars across disciplines have attempted to define extremism.[4] Extremism may be defined in its opposition to and difference from traditional state agendas, including intolerance for those who disagree, restrictions on individual choice and a willingness to kill.[5] Extremism follows from categorising people into two competing groups or mutually exclusive identity collectives;[6] extremists glorify their group and ideology over others.[7] Scholars seek to distinguish between extremist goals and methods and violent and non-violent extremism.[8] Much of this analysis is based primarily on "Islamists" and Muslim communities in Europe.

The first United Nations General Assembly's resolution on the subject was titled *A World against Violence and Violent Extremism*. It affirmed that violent extremism was "a serious common concern for all Member States, threatening the security and well-being of human societies" and expressed alarm over "the acts of intolerance, violent extremism, violence, including sectarian violence, and terrorism in various parts of the world, which claim innocent lives, cause destruction and displace people."[9] In their Plan of Action to prevent violent extremism (2015), the United Nations Secretary-General granted Member States the prerogative of defining precisely what they understood by this term.[10]

The only context in which the Indian Government uses the term "extremism" is for Maoist groups active across Central India. In Annual Reports presented by the Indian Ministry of Home Affairs,[11] the chapter on Internal Security routinely discusses four challenges in four parts of the country—Kashmir, the North-east and Central India—with the fourth changing from Punjab to "terrorism in the hinterland" to ISI sleeper cells. The only official definition of "terrorist acts" available to Indian analysts is provided by Article 15 of the Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act, 1967. It lists bombings (fatal or otherwise), public property destruction, economic damages, assassinations and kidnapping.[12]

Taking cognisance of the many ways in which academics, the United Nations and the Indian Government understand "extremism", this paper side-steps the discussion on definitions to look at four contexts in which political activism may be considered extreme,

i.e., in its choice of radically different values from the constitutional and institutional mainstream, in its fundamentally different political objectives than those permitted within the status quo, or in its use of intimidation and violence to achieve desired outcomes that would not otherwise be permissible or possible.

Sexual and gender-based violence

The United Nations' definition of gender-based violence has usually been anchored in a feminist understanding of the term. General Recommendation 19 (GR 19) of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), adopted in 1992, opens by placing gender-based violence in the broad context of gender inequality as a form of discrimination.[13] Gender-based violence is "violence that is directed against a woman because she is a woman or that affects women disproportionately." Such violence may inflict physical, mental or sexual harm on the victim, including "coercion and other deprivations of liberty." GR 19 also identifies gender-based violence as a violation of multiple human rights.

In 1993, the United Nations General Assembly adopted the Declaration on the Elimination of Violence against Women,[14] which—reflecting CEDAW GR 19—defined violence against women as "any act of gender-based violence that results in, or is likely to result in, physical, sexual or psychological harm or suffering to women, including threats of such acts, coercion or arbitrary deprivation of liberty, whether occurring in public or in private life." The Declaration specifically recognised three forms of violence—physical, sexual and psychological. Over time, this definition came to include economic abuse as well.

The Beijing Platform for Action in 1995 added the contexts of conflict-related sexual violence, violence against human rights defenders and vulnerable groups of women (including minorities, indigenous and refugees and women living in conflict or militarised zones) to this definition.[15] In 2017, General Recommendation 35 referred to "gender-based violence against women" and stated that this was a social problem that states needed to address.[16] In parallel, international tribunals hearing conflict testimonies from (former) Republic of Yugoslavia and Rwanda affirmed the unacceptability of conflict-related sexual violence. In its call to the UN and Member States to include and integrate women and their perspectives into the prevention and resolution of conflict and peace-building, the United Nations Security Resolution 1325 (2000) set out four "pillars"—participation, prevention, protection and reconstruction.

The United Nations Security Council Resolution 2242 drew attention to the differential impact of violent extremism on the human rights of women and girls, noting that they were often the target of terrorist acts.[17] In a 2021 report, the United Nations Secretary-General drew attention to the complex interaction of patriarchy, the pandemic and conflict. This interaction increased the prevalence of sexual and gender-based violence and reduced victim-survivors' access to help and justice.[18]

Pablo Castillo Díaz and Nahla Valji argue that there is a correlation between misogyny—they use Kate Manne's definition: "a political phenomenon whose purpose is to

police and enforce women's subordination and to uphold male dominance"—and violent extremist acts.[19] They premise this argument on the misogynistic ideology of "most" terrorist groups and on "the individual personal histories of domestic abuse or documented misogyny in the majority of perpetrators in Western countries."[20] Diaz and Valji then point to the centrality of women's subordination in the ideology of a host of non-Western extremist groups. "For each of these groups, some of the earliest indications of the spread of their influence in an area was a quick and radical shift in the pushback on the rights of women—from dress to mobility to education," they write.[21] Their examples are the Taliban, Islamic State, Al-Shabaab and Boko Haram. In India, this also applies to Hindutva extremists.

THE INDIAN CONTEXT

Everyday violence is broadly indicative of the status of gender equality in society. Patriarchy victimises every gender on the spectrum in its own way. Men are privileged but limited by social expectations that obscure how they are vulnerable—age, caste, class and custody. Gender and sexual minorities are invisible; the discrimination, exclusion and violence they experience—from curative violence to forced marriage to sexual assault—are neither acknowledged nor considered as such. Women are the most common victims of sexual and gender-based violence, and this project focuses on them.

Indian women experience violence at every life stage, from conception—through sex-selective abortion—to elder abuse. To set this context, we have compiled data across two decades from *Crime in India*, the annual report published by the National Crime Records Bureau (NCRB). These reports combine data based on police and categorise them by the laws they invoke.[22] While NCRB data are the most accessible and, therefore, the most used data on gender violence in India, they have two inherent shortcomings. NCRB reports depend on people choosing to report violence to the police and how the recording police officer categorises reported violence.[23] Without detracting from its utility as a resource, these shortcomings make its data indicative rather than definitive.

We have drawn data from NCRB under four categories of violence experienced by women. These are shared for each site to supplement narrative summaries drawn from secondary sources.

1. Violence within the household and family

As Diaz and Valji underscore, misogynistic interpersonal and family violence histories seem common among perpetrators of extremist violence. Here, NCRB gathers data under four heads:

- The Dowry Prohibition Act, 1961, which reflects reported cases of giving or taking dowry. Dowry is a devaluation of women where their value must be compensated through an additional gift of money and goods.[24]

- Dowry Deaths, a record of reported cases where young brides were allegedly killed because their families did not meet dowry demands.[25]

- Cruelty by husband and relatives, which indicates criminal complaints about domestic violence.[26]

- Protection of Women from Domestic Violence Act, which follows CEDAW by covering physical, sexual, emotional, economic and verbal abuse by any household members against a woman living there.[27]

2. Rape and Incest Rape

Sexual assault in general and assault by immediate family members are reported separately by NCRB.[28]

3. Violence in public spaces[29]

- Molestation (later described as "Assault on women with intent to outrage her modesty")

- Sexual harassment (also described as "Eve-teasing" and "Insult to the modesty of Women")

4. Child marriage[30]

Studies in conflict zones and post-disaster settings show that in times of distress and uncertainty (like the COVID-19 pandemic), parents are in a hurry to get their daughters married.[31] A rise in child marriage suggests heightened insecurity.

FOUR CONTEXTS OF 'EXTREMISM' IN INDIA

Assam

Assamese politics is a complex of three forms of political contestation.[32] Hostility towards Bangladeshi migrants is based on fear of losing livelihoods and being swamped by those who speak a different language and follow a different religion.[33] Anxiety about the political consequences of this anticipated demographic change has become a long-standing grievance against the Indian state, fuelling civil disobedience and armed militancy. Simultaneously, ethnic communities within Assam have sought cultural recognition and autonomy. In the classic mode of ethnic-nationalist politics, nativist and separatist movements nestle tensely within each other. A prominent example is the movement for Bodoland and Karbi-Anglong autonomous districts.

Each wave of conflict has led to women and girls forming the majority of internally displaced persons who are additionally vulnerable to survival and security threats.[34] A procession of accords, variously signed by the Central Government, State Government and armed groups have failed to bring peace and security to people's lives.

Reading the status of women through gender violence statistics

Between 2000 and 2020, reporting of violence has increased in Assam (Appendix: figures 1-4). Within the home, dowry cases were on the rise with a peak in the years before the pandemic and dowry deaths generally became more common (Figure 1). Cases registered under the Domestic Violence law were negligible, but reports of cruelty by husband's relatives increased more than ten-fold in 20 years, registering a steeper increase since 2015. Child marriage—a reliable indicator of social crises—increased sharply from 2015-20, going from 14 to 134 reported cases (Figure 2).[35]

In the same five-year period, violence in public spaces rose, with molestation cases almost tripling (Figure 3). Incest rape is reported much more now than before, but rape cases have more than doubled in these 20 years, registering a dramatic increase in the second decade (Figure 4). The good news in this data is greater violence reporting, which indicates confidence in access to justice. The bad news is that a steady growth in violence is a sure indicator of the deterioration of women's status and the rise of social crises. The latter is borne of multiple conflicts simultaneously underway in Assam.

Conflict, extremism and sexual and gender-based violence

Starting in 1979, the All Assam Student Union (AASU) led protests demanding the detection of illegal Bangladeshi migrants so that only Indian citizens could vote. With the signing of the Assam Accord in 1985, the AASU became a political party—the Asom Gana Parishad. A militant movement for a "sovereign socialist Asom" was also set up in 1979—the United Liberation Front of Asom (ULFA).[36] ULFA is the main militant outfit operating in Assam, although non-Assamese communities have also formed militant outfits to press for their demands. Of late, reports indicate that the Neo Jammat-ul-Mujahideen Bangladesh are active along the Char areas on the northern banks of the Brahmaputra.[37]

> Women, after all are responsible in these situations as mothers of children and wives of the wounded, those killed and those who have "disappeared."; they are innocent victims of wars and conflicts not of their making. They suffer as civilians with greater restrictions placed on them. They are assaulted, raped, humiliated, beaten and murdered during conflicts. They are displaced, turned out of their homes, disinherited, widowed and orphaned; they lose their children to bullets and beatings. Many just disappear without a trace. Others are trafficked across state and national borders and face a nightmarish lifetime of sexual abuse and disease.
>
> The loss that they face is not just emotional or physical but transfers into the economic and social spheres as well. Most women face a decline in social legitimacy and find themselves relegated to the fringes of society with no one to care for them or to speak on their behalf.

— Bearing Witness[38]

While women have actively participated in many struggles and conflicts in Assam, decades of violence have deepened their vulnerability to violence. Mainstream Indian patriarchy is reinforced in North Cachar Hills and Karbi Anglong by the prevalence of customary laws restricting women's inheritance rights. In these regions, women are up against the patriarchy of both militant groups and the state. An early 2000s report on violence against women by the National Commission for Women (NCW) and Northeast Network identified four ways in which women are adversely affected by conflict.[39] First, they are suddenly left to run households without being allowed to work outside. Second, they become targets for sexual violence as representatives of the "other." The third is the travails of displacement. Finally, displacement and resettlement have resulted in the loss of their land rights.

While violence is not a new reality, what is different in conflict is that "even the state, which is supposed to be a guardian of their lives and rights, poses a threat to them."[40] The NCW report stated that domestic violence was becoming more common and more acceptable and noted that the practice of dowry was beginning to gain ground in this region.[41]

In the conflicts between the Indian Government, the Assam Government and various insurgent groups, women become pawns and victims.[42] Doctrinal commitments by militant groups to equality do not translate into action, and women must constantly negotiate their space. Women, as mothers, are considered symbols of the resistance against the state, while militant groups target them as spies. During this process, women suffer both mental and physical agony.[43] Assamese women experience violence resulting from extremism depending on whether they are members of a resistance movement, a local tribe or religion, or an ethnic group.[44] Among other factors, issues of sex trafficking point toward population displacement due to floods and development projects, decades of conflict, insurgency and communal clashes.[45] Exploitative patriarchal structures and militarisation together harm and degrade women.

In sum

Within the broader context of rising levels of reported sexual and gender-based violence in a patriarchal culture, conflict-related violence in Assam seems to arise primarily as "collateral damage" in many localised contests across the state. As much as militants and police target women as representatives of their opponents, they are also vulnerable as a function of other changes engendered by conflict—bereavement, displacement and landlessness. Seeking a direct correlation between the politics of various groups and their acts of violence will require deeper textual analysis and fieldwork. Still, in an overview, the accounts we gather allow us to point to the indirect ways in which living with multiple conflicts increases the possibility and probability of experiencing violence.

Chhattisgarh

Home to a large percentage of India's indigenous communities, the mineral-rich heartland of India has also witnessed left-wing mobilisation and subsequently become a battlefield for mutual hostilities between Maoist (or Naxalite) and statist forces. In official accounts, the only context to which the word "extremism" is applied— "Left-Wing Extremism" or LWE—is Maoists. This region includes several states—Andhra Pradesh, Telangana, Bihar, Chhattisgarh, Jharkhand, Madhya Pradesh, Maharashtra, Odisha, Uttar Pradesh and West Bengal—and was infamously characterised by Indian Prime Minister Manmohan Singh in 2006 as the "the single biggest internal security challenge ever faced by our country."[46]

Reading the status of women through gender violence statistics

Chhattisgarh shows a clear pattern of increased reports of gender-based violence between 2007 and 2013. (Appendix: figures 5-8) This exists despite what Ahuja and Bhardwaj call the "phenomenon of non-reporting."[47] In the Salwa Judum years, reporting of violence within the household and family did not change much from year to year, but right after the militias shut down in 2013-14, there was a spike in reporting (Figure 5). The same pattern is evident for rape, incest rape and violence in the public sphere (Figure 8). Sexual and gender-based violence were most reported between 2013-2016. A tell-tale sign of crisis in Chhattisgarh was the spike in child marriages in 2009—child marriages and forced marriages become far more common when a community feels insecure about its future (Figure 6). Rationalised under the pretext of security concerns, a climate of impunity pervades Chhattisgarh, as in other contexts of extremist politics.

Conflict, extremism and sexual and gender-based violence

In their annual reports, the Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA) only provides information about casualties and deaths, describes some incidents and details government counter-insurgency measures. However, a 2008 Planning Commission report on the causes—and ergo, remedies—for the rise of LWE placed this issue in context: "these causes, specific to the Naxalite movement are part of an overall scenario of poverty, deprivation, oppression, and neglect in large parts of the country."[48] The report does not mince words: "The causes are, therefore, complex. The intensity of unrest resulting in extremist methods and effort to resolve issues through violent means as a challenge to state authority is in response to the gathering of unresolved social and economic issues for long durations. It creates the impression that policy making and administration responds to extreme means."[49]

The MHA reports depict the situation as a law and order problem. However, the Planning Commission report observes: "This has appeared in the public perception as a simplistic law-and-order face-off between the official coercive machinery and this more radical extremist political formation. The social consequence results, then, in undermining instruments of social and economic amelioration as well as processes of democratic exchange to resolve persisting issues. This is the crux of the problem."[50]

The 2008 report then details several factors that contribute to the appeal of Maoist groups: landlessness, traditional forest use rights and land acquisition (usually for extractive industries), internal displacement and forced evictions ("caused by irrigation/mining/industrial projects, resulting in landlessness and hunger")[51], loss of livelihoods (either due to the loss of homes, lands or to outsiders taking over), caste oppression and bonded labour, and finally, "non-governance" or "mal-governance," under which rubric the report discusses harassment by forest officials, non-performance of duties, corruption and the lack of resolution mechanisms for disputes beyond the community.

In addition, the report talks about policing: "it is as frustrating an experience to go to the police station as a complainant as it is fraught with danger to go as a suspect. Women who go to a police station to complain of sexual abuse or domestic harassment are made painfully aware of this fact."[52] It recognises that Naxalites have been able to protect the weak against the strong.[53] Research and journalist accounts reinforce this analysis.[54]

It should be noted that in the most recent publicly available MHA Annual Report (2019-2020), the Ministry retains their law-and-order view: "The overall improvement in the LWE scenario can be attributed to greater presence and increased capacity of the Security Forces across the LWE-affected States, better operational strategy and better monitoring of development schemes in affected areas."[55]

Bastar division, located in south Chhattisgarh—which borders Maharashtra, Telangana, Andhra Pradesh and Odisha—is the state's main location for Maoist activity.[56] By most accounts, Maoists expelled from Andhra Pradesh in the early 1980s turned their attention to Chhattisgarh. A small number of these expelled activists organised themselves into three groups and entered Bastar (now in Chhattisgarh, then Madhya Pradesh), seeking new communities to mobilise. The class war model did not work as neatly in the Adivasi communities they met, so they mobilised around and advocated for local issues. In Chhattisgarh, the issues listed by the Planning Commission report were further complicated by an extraction-based development model led by outsiders and the demographic change caused by other communities settling in what were primarily Adivasi areas. The conflicting interests and aspirations of Adivasis and settlers of all castes led to their alignment along antagonistic lines, where the Maoists identified with and drew recruits from Adivasi communities.

Marxism accommodates gender issues within the framework of class war.[57] Marxist feminists believe that structural factors like class (and caste in India) determine issues of various groups of women—akin to today's intersectional approach. For Indian Maoists, the mobilisation of women was imperative to the success of their revolutionary struggle. Although the leadership and practice of the movements have remained patriarchal, throughout history, women have flocked to a variety of left-wing movements. Patriarchy was one dimension of the socio-political complex that had to be overthrown but could not be addressed in isolation. Indeed, Kamra quotes Anuradha Ghandy saying that other feminisms that isolate gender issues cannot succeed but only reinforce oppressive systems that must be overthrown together.[58] Kamra quotes writings by other women Maoist activists across contexts, suggesting that while romantic and sexual relationships were

taboo within the cadres, women were expected to be silent about sexual predators in the interests of the revolutionary cause. However, in a conversation with Gautam Navlakha, Maoist cadres said, "We do not kill, loot or rape."[59] Instead, they pointed fingers at the Salwa Judum.

In 2005, the Chhattisgarh Government sponsored and supported a private vigilante movement called Salwa Judum, where local tribal youth were trained and armed to ferret out, inform on and counterattack Maoists in their midst. Salwa Judum operated between 2005 till 2011 when the Supreme Court ordered the Chhattisgarh Government to shut it down. The state accommodated the volunteer vigilantes in the Chhattisgarh Auxiliary Force and the District Reserve Guard.[60] Ahuja and Bhardwaj write: "Even before one military operation ends, a new one is launched; the only constant is the absolute denial of basic fundamental rights to the affected community. A large share of the violence in the conflict is targeted at women and is sexual."[61] They write that Maoist women become targets for sexual violence because they challenge patriarchal and state repression.

In the case of Chhattisgarh, there is some evidence to say that extremism has led to a rise in sexual and gender-based violence, that is, violence perpetrated with impunity by those engaging in counter-insurgency operations. Ahuja and Bhardwaj use "fact-finding reports, academic papers, judicial documents, complaints to the National Human Rights Commission (NHRC), media reports and testimonies of villagers" to offset what they describe as "the phenomenon of non-reporting on a mass scale" between 2005-11. They summarise:

> Women suffered as internally displaced refugees when they were forced to leave their homes for makeshift camps without privacy and almost no access to food, health care or toilets; they suffered as wives whose husbands were killed in extrajudicial killings or jailed on false charges; they suffered as minor students who were pushed into Kanya ashrams (girls' hostels) by the state administration where they were sexually abused…; they suffered as special police officers (SPOs) who were denied access to their homes and forced to spend nights with their male counterparts; as prisoners detained for alleged Naxalite crimes in police custody where they were sexually tortured; as supposed 'Naxalite' sympathizers, making them targets of the patriarchal lust and hatred of the armed forces and civil militias; and they suffered as victims of sexual violence and torture whose right to remedy was completely blocked.
>
> —*Nobody's Children*[62]

In sum

In Chhattisgarh, levels of gender-based violence are reported to have risen sharply from around 2007 onward, marking the Salwa Judum period and its immediate aftermath. While the Maoists have not generally been associated with perpetrating sexual and gender-based violence, government-sponsored vigilantes have. When the militias shut down, reporting appeared to have gone up, reinforcing our speculation of a relationship between the two. Without fieldwork, it is harder to establish how years of insurgency and counter-insurgency have impacted the language of everyday relationships in this region.

Karnataka

In annual reports published by the Ministry of Home Affairs, Karnataka is rarely mentioned in the chapter on Internal Security. In the context of extremism, media attention on Karnataka has been centred around jihadist recruitment and sleeper cells. The South Asia Terrorism Portal lists Karnataka as one of the states affected by Maoist extremism. However, the most striking source of strident rhetoric and violent assaults are not in contexts usually associated with extremism. In this region, our interest lies in the rise of Hindutva groups who engage largely with individual behavioural choices. Of the three stands of extremist mobilisation, this is the one that has most explicitly problematised women's choices.

Reading the status of women through gender violence statistics

While it is impossible to posit a causal relationship between rising reported violence against Karnataka women and the spread of extremist thinking, it does appear that violence has become customary in both public and private spheres. (Appendix: figures 9-12) Violence within the household rose steadily—peaking between 2009 and 2014—the most common type of violence reported being cruelty by husbands and relatives (Figure 9). Incest rape showed a sudden surge in 2015. Child marriage rose steadily between 2015 and 2020, reflecting the widely reported pandemic effect. Public spaces, too, became more unsafe.

There is no evidence to link these changes to extremist activity directly. What is clear is that the spread and influence of extremist ideas about a threat to "Indian culture" has created a climate of impunity where high levels of violence against minorities and women are normalised. In Karnataka, the misogynistic discourse of extremist politics is striking.

Conflict, extremism and sexual and gender-based violence

Karnataka alone has had a Hindutva party in power among India's southern states. While it has not experienced pogroms like Gujarat or Odisha, in the last decade, there has been a steady escalation of hostile rhetoric and violent attacks on Christians and Muslims. Christians have experienced anti-conversion polemic—culminating in the Karnataka Right to Freedom of Religion Bill, 2021—and attacks on congregations of church-goers.[63] Anti-Muslim rhetoric has centred around campaigns against inter-faith marriages labelled "love jihad" and most recently, barring girls wearing head-scarves and veils from attending

educational institutions, which was endorsed in March 2022 by the Karnataka High Court.[64] Groups that have campaigned against minorities have also undertaken moral policing of what they perceive as "Western" values directed at young women.

The appeal of Hindutva has different roots in North and South Karnataka.[65] In the same Presidency as Nagpur, Belgaum was a part of the RSS' initial outreach.[66] The ideology's journey in South Karnataka was different. Originally, resentment on the part of local Hindu elites began as early as 1815, with the establishment of missionary schools imparting English education.[67] Some students from upper-caste homes converted to Christianity. Conversion was the first rallying point for Hindu mobilisation and remains a central issue even in 2021-22.

Anti-Muslim sentiment is far more recent in this area. Kuthar dates it to around 2001, the start of our study period. Mobilisation against Muslims and Islam occurred around "love jihad", described by one leader as: [where] "Hindu women are brainwashed by Muslim men to convert and marry them. These women are then used for different purposes, either to produce many babiess *[sic]* or for some anti-national activities."[68] Rumours about "love jihad" became common and merged with accounts of conversion to Islam, evoking earlier anxieties about Christian conversion.

Between 2000 and 2022, acts of anti-Christian and anti-Muslim violence have become more commonplace in Karnataka (in addition to anti-rationalist violence). The organisations most often implicated are the Bajrang Dal and Shri Ram Sene, which are anchored in Hindutva ideology. Conversion appears to be the main pretext for anti-Christian mobilisation, and interfaith relationships and marriages for anti-Muslim mobilisation.[69] The January 2022 vigilantism against girls wearing hijab or burkha to school and college is a relatively new strand.

Misogyny, however, is not. In January 2009, members of the Shri Ram Sene attacked young women and men at a pub in Mangalore, claiming it was against Indian culture for women to visit pubs.[70] "Young women ran as they were chased by a mob, slapped, kicked and dragged by their hair. As the terrified women tried to dodge the blows, some stumbled and fell and others were pushed to the ground."[71] In 2018, a local court dismissed the case despite video evidence of the incident. The same month, the Shri Ram Sene said it would target couples celebrating Valentine's Day, provoking a much-publicised response from young women around India who sent pink *chaddis* (underwear) to their office.[72] The organisation continues to campaign against Valentine's Day.

Chronologies of communal violence are usually incomplete lists of incidents spread over short periods and are found in news backgrounders or fact-finding reports. Extracts from some of these reports illustrate growing communalisation, or more precisely, the extremist or violent escalation of communal ideologies.

- In 1999, a Human Rights Watch (HRW) report stated that the number of Christians being attacked was still relatively small (in India), but it correlated the rise in numbers to the elections in late 1999.[73] HRW identified several common

patterns in these attacks: the role of Sangh Parivar organisations and local media, "exploitation of communal differences to mask political and economic motives underlying the attacks, local and state government complicity in the attacks, and the failure of the central government to meet its constitutional and international obligations to protect minorities." The report tallied 199 attacks across India listing Karnataka as one of the many states witnessing them, but without further details about this state. Forms of violence included "violence against the leadership of the church, including the killing of priests and the raping of nuns, to the physical destruction of Christian institutions, including schools, churches, colleges, and cemeteries." It also mentioned conversion to Hinduism.

- In 2011, a fact-finding commission headed by Justice Michael Saldanha investigated incidents of violence against Christians in Karnataka from 2008-2009.[74] Justice Saldanha noted that in the 500 days between September 14, 2008, and January 26, 2010, a thousand attacks on churches took place in Mysore. Meticulous field investigations of over a dozen attacks were recounted in the report. While the report did not take a gender perspective, in the description of almost every incident, it was noted that most victims were women—female worshippers in the congregation.

- In December 2021, the People's Union for Civil Liberties investigated and documented 39 incidents of hate crimes against Karnataka Christians that year. Identifying patterns in these attacks, they state, "Women and children are also at the receiving end of such physical assault. Hindutva groups use casteist, sexually explicit and derogatory language against women, and in cases where women have tried to respond to violence, they molest and sexually assault them."[75] Eyewitness testimonies speak not only to the trauma of being attacked but also to witnessing them.

The anti-hijab mobilisation of early 2022 in Karnataka schools continues this narrative. This time, not only are girls being prevented from attending classes, but there is a counter-mobilisation—youth are wearing saffron scarves, as if to precipitate a physical conflict. The relative apathy of the administration in enforcing the rights to freedom of conscience, expression and education is a measure of how deeply communal feeling has permeated the culture of Karnataka. Once more, the court worked in favour of Hindutva vigilantes as the Bengaluru High Court upheld the state's order to support uniforms in educational institutions.[76] Local clamour and decisions to ban Muslim vendors from temple complexes, bans on amplifying *azaan* using loudspeakers and shutting down eateries advertising halal meat underscore a polarised climate where any type of violent vigilantism in the name of majoritarian cultural politics is becoming acceptable. [77]

In sum

Misogyny is profoundly and overtly embedded in the extremist discourse in Karnataka. Anti-Christian feeling is expressed through attacks on church-goers of all genders

and venues and customs associated with Western/Christian culture. Anti-Muslim sentiment is strongly expressed in anti-hijab and anti-halal protests but more insidiously in "love jihad" attacks on young people suspected to be interfaith romantic couples. While the attacks remain local and personal, they are gendered.

Kashmir

Two conflicts are said to intersect in Kashmir—an inter-state dispute between India and Pakistan on the question of sovereignty over the region, and a dispute between the people of Jammu and Kashmir (now Kashmir) and the Government of India. Undergirding these two conflicts are the separatist aspirations of Kashmiris for an independent Kashmir. While the chequered history of both conflicts dates back to the moment of decolonisation and state formation in the subcontinent, 1989 is usually said to mark the origins of the present movement for *Azadi* or independence.[78]

Reading the status of women through gender violence statistics

Increasing incidence of sexual and gender-based violence within households and in public spaces have been reported in Kashmir in the 2000-20 period. (Appendix: figures 13-16) However, they are consistently lower if you compare numbers in Kashmir to the rest of India. Low numbers may reflect low incidence rates, but they can also be explained by the stigma attached to reporting sexual and gender-based violence, especially when it is conflict-related.[79] It is hard to imagine any patriarchal society devoid of gender-based violence across contexts, so we might surmise that a history of conflict (and, possibly, a lack of trust in the police) has deterred reporting.

Other reasons include the remoteness of locations where violence has occurred or the reluctance of police to register FIRs against members of the security forces for fear of offending them.[80] Whatever the reasons, low incidence rates undermine the argument that sexual and gender-based violence is a predictor of conflict or that extremism exacerbates such violence.

While the numbers may be lower than elsewhere, the fact that they are rising within Kashmir suggests that despite the challenges of reporting during the telecommunications ban and the pandemic lockdown, sexual and gender-based violence is growing in this region.

Conflict, extremism and sexual and gender-based violence

Grievances related to poor governance, development deficits and interference in the working of elected state governments set off protests in the late 1980s. If organisations like the Jammu and Kashmir Liberation Front (JKLF) were fighting for independence and spoke to the idea of an inclusive Kashmiri identity, other groups identified more closely with Islamist ideologies.[81] Religious radicalisation has been taking root among Muslim youth in Kashmir, and extremist political, social and religious ideas are marginalising the militancy's initial pro-nationalist agenda. Youth are drawn to the struggle by visions of a paradise that awaits martyrs, widely believed and celebrated by extremists.[82] Clerics indoctrinate youth to see it

as their duty to capture power, impose Sharia law (Islamic Law), and, in some instances, establish a global caliphate.[83] Part of this ideology is the duty of violent jihad. Social media amplifies this radicalisation.

In recent years, especially following the death of young Kashmiri protesters, young people who were not part of any militant groups have participated in protests, pelting stones and calling out slogans.[84]

The Government of India has considered Kashmir an internal security issue but primarily describes the problem as "cross-border terrorism."[85] From its point of view, there are two Kashmir problems to resolve—an international one and a resilient insurgency. Over the years, solutions which favour dialogue have been quickly set aside whenever there is an incident of violence. Dissolution of Jammu and Kashmir's special status in the Constitution of India has long been seen by the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP)—ruling India at the time of writing this—as a way to close the question of Kashmiri integration into India. In August 2019, they introduced and successfully passed a Constitutional amendment to this effect. In its wake, Jammu and Kashmir was divided into three separate parts, and a communications lockdown was imposed on Kashmir for two years until September 2021.[86]

In Kashmir, it is possible to draw out four ways which relate the rise of extremism to the rise of sexual and gender-based violence. The first is at the level of ideas. Attempts by militant groups to impose veiling on Kashmiri women is an obvious illustration. However, the misogyny expressed by Indian politicians in their responses to the abrogation of Article 370 also foreshadows violence. The second is conflict-related sexual violence. Here, sexual violence and intimidation allegations have been made primarily against the Indian army and paramilitary forces. The third is the impact of a protracted armed conflict which leaves women from families (whose men have joined the fighting, been wounded, killed, abducted or are likely to face arbitrary arrest) to fend for themselves. There are accounts of Kashmiri women's agency in these times, but very little yet on another long-term impact: what happens when men learn to communicate with violence because they have been brutalised through fighting, and return to their homes with no help to heal or be rehabilitated?

Finally, the 2019-21 lockdown presaged what the rest of the world experienced a year later as a "shadow pandemic" of domestic violence. For years, Kashmiri women have been confined to their homes by curfews or lockdowns.

In the 1980s, religious extremist undertones of the militant movement for *Azadi* had repercussions for women in the form of the imposition of the veil. With the beginning of an armed insurgency, militant groups such as Jamaat-e-Islami, Tablighi Jamaat, Jamiat-e-Ahli Hadith and Allah Tigers ordered women to wear the burqa, a diktat also enforced by the women of the Dukhtaran-e-Millat (DEM).[87] Several warnings were published in the local press against women who refused to wear the veil.[88] Enforcement included incidents where young fundamentalists threw acid on a 14-year-old girl on her way home from school.[89] In 1992, members of the DEM threw paint and ink on women who refused to wear a burqa.[90]

The increasingly militarised response of the Indian state to what it regards as "terrorist acts" enables and responds to gendered violence in the state. The Indian state invokes Kashmiri women's experiences to legitimise its actions; for example, citing the use of women and children as shields by militants. In a commentary on Kashmir, you hear this on both sides: "what kind of 'brutal' army (or security force) shoots bullets and pellets at women and children?" and "But what kind of people put their women and children in the forefront of a violent demonstration that is contrived to draw fire?"[91]

"Saviour" polemic is at play where the Indian state rescues Kashmiri and other Muslim women from their oppressive societies.[92] In 2019, as the government scrapped Article 370 of the Constitution of India, some Uttar Pradesh politicians made misogynist comments expressing their excitement that the decision enabled them to marry "fair-skinned" Kashmiri girls.[93]

Second, allegations of sexual violence as a consequence of the valley's militarisation have been pervasive. Two landmark instances were Kunan-Poshpora in 1991 and Shopian in 2009. During the night of 23 February 1991, security personnel sexually assaulted 35 women in Kunan and Poshpora villages.[94] On February 23-24, 1991, a cordon-and-search was conducted in villages in Kupwara, adjacent to Kunan-Poshpora.[95] Soldiers raped minors as young as 13 and women as old as 60, not even sparing the pregnant.[96] In May 2009, two women from Kashmir's Shopian district were raped and murdered.[97] Civil society groups have also reported sexual violence against male detainees.[98] Most incidents of targeted sexual violence of women by state forces remain unresolved.

The protracted conflict has a long-term impact on people—it brutalises them. Men who join combat learn to speak through violence, and if they are demobilised but not disarmed, easy access to a gun facilitates interpersonal (predominantly domestic) violence. There are no accounts of this in Kashmir, but since an entire generation has grown up amid violence, it is highly likely.

Finally, we are just beginning to measure the impact of the communications ban followed by pandemic-induced lockdowns in Kashmir.[99] In August 2019, following the abrogation of Article 370, a telecommunications shutdown was imposed on Kashmir for almost two years, overlapping with COVID-19 lockdowns. The inability of women to call their families (let alone helplines)—while they were locked in their homes and liable to be sexually harassed by Indian forces outside—is still being documented. Pandemic-induced lockdowns exacerbated these challenges. This health crisis disproportionately burdened Kashmiri women.[100] Jammu and Kashmir's State Commission for Women suspended its activity during lockdowns, so women lost a key official advocate of their interests.[101]

In sum

Relatively low reporting of everyday violence in Kashmir suggests both a lack of access (due to curfews and violence) and a lack of confidence in the police. Beyond this, when we look at over three decades since the beginnings of this round of insurgency, there are four ways in which women have become more vulnerable to sexual and gender-based

violence, two of which are deeply significant—the misogynistic ideology of extremist groups that seek to express their protest by controlling dress and behaviour of women, and the misogynistic ideology of state forces that see women as fair proxies for a conflict over which—as locals who belong, blend into the community and know the terrain—militants enjoy some advantage.

SPECULATIVE CONCLUSIONS ON THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN EXTREMISM AND SEXUAL AND GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE

To truly comprehend the impact of extremism on sexual and gender-based violence, one needs to invest in ethnographic fieldwork over an extended period. A study like this, however, zooms into details in existing photographs and draws out questions and notes. Nevertheless, despite its obvious methodological limitations, one can speculatively arrive at certain conclusions which may form the basis of more in-depth studies in the future.

1. During a conflict, misogynistic thinking is the most certain predictor of sexual and gender-based violence

In two of the four cases of extremist politics reviewed here, there is nothing significantly misogynistic in the politics of extremist groups. However, patriarchal habits and relationships may persist within them. Agendas of Assamese militant groups and Chhattisgarhi Maoists are primarily gender-blind. In Assam, women are caught in the crossfire between groups and in Chhattisgarh, state-backed militias are responsible for the violence.

By contrast, misogyny forms part of extremist polemic in both Karnataka and Kashmir. In Karnataka, it informs the expression of anti-minority ideology by attacks on Christian and Muslim women, prohibitions on hijab and campaigns against interfaith relationships. In Kashmir, controlling dress and behaviour of women in the public sphere has been a point of departure for successive waves of intensifying mobilisation. Here, misogyny has also been embedded in the state's response to extremist mobilisation, with allegations of harassment and rape by security forces and politicians' sexist statements. Deepening militarisation deepens women's vulnerabilities to sexual and gender-based violence.

2. Security forces in a counter-insurgency operation and extremist groups are both likely to be perpetrators of sexual and gender-based violence

The question posed at the outset of this overview presupposes that the impact of extremism on gender-based violence lies in the actions of extremists. However, in three of the four cases reviewed here, security forces are at least as much to blame as extremists. In Assam, violence occurs not only in internecine fighting but also at the hands of security forces. In Chhattisgarh and Kashmir, this is abundantly documented, although certain reports have dismissed such charges. In Karnataka, what is striking is that the state apparatus seems to reinforce the views of Hindutva groups. This is not surprising given their ascendancy in state politics—but it still raises the question of whether extremism should be

defined in terms of contrast with the politics of a ruling elite or as the state's founding charter.

3. In addition to the everyday violence of patriarchy, complex emergencies precipitate humanitarian crises that create a new overlay of vulnerabilities

The undeniable experience of gendered insecurity in conflict zones is a function of both planned acts of violence and the humanitarian crises precipitated by complex emergencies, i.e., when multiple crises or conflicts intersect. In Assam, Chhattisgarh and Kashmir, conflict combined with the loss of land and livelihoods, enforced disappearances, displacement and the breakdown of family and community networks force women to fend for themselves and provide for their families without access to any support. This leaves them open to exploitation, making trafficking, early or forced marriage, child marriage and sexual abuse more common. These consequences are not yet visible in Karnataka; perhaps the situation is cushioned by the state's relative prosperity. Karnataka is also the only state in this study where military or paramilitary forces have not been deployed for long periods.

4. The impact of protracted conflicts on everyday violence, in their brutalisation of individuals and the availability of small arms is not fully documented or understood

While cases in this overview do not contain enough information on the long-term, everyday impact of growing up with violence and having relatively easy access to small arms, it is essential to note that in all four cases, the violent phase of conflicts or their genesis have spanned the lifetime of multiple generations. It is crucial to study how this has changed gender relations, the communication between those who are socially unequal (whether by gender, class or other factors) and local political and economic equations.

5. Databases that compile reporting data offer indicative snapshots of women's status in general but are more reliable for suggesting whether people are coming forward to report or not—that is, whether they have access to and confidence in existing procedures

This study uses data compiled by NCRB's annual *Crime in India* reports, but it does so cognisant of the limitations of these records. They depend on reporting by victims, so incidence data does not reflect what happened but how a case was interpreted and filed. In any case, many women who report violence face dismissal, stigma and isolation in their families and communities, which is naturally a deterrent to speaking out. The database does not record the kinds of violence this study is interested in—conflict-related sexual and gender-based violence—and its custodial violence records are not disaggregated by context. In short, NCRB data has limited utility as a pointing device but not as an explanatory one.

What one can speculate about to a small degree, though, is whether the public has access to the police at a given time and whether it has confidence that the police will deliver relief or justice. The capacity to collect and curate "big data" on gender violence remains beyond the capacity of academic and civil society projects. It is also not possible to make reliable generalisations from local fact-finding or ethnographic research projects.

Finally, it is important to note that we have neither data nor field-based ethnographic accounts of the impact of rising levels of extremism on those already marginalised to the point of invisibility by patriarchy—gender and sexual minorities. We need studies that describe and document their vulnerabilities and agency.

Conclusion

In this study, we adopted a working definition of "extremism" that led us to examine extremist politics across four states—Assam, Chhattisgarh, Kashmir and Karnataka. The nature and issues of extremist groups are different in each region.

Drawing together the lessons of these four cases, we can point directly to three common factors. First, misogyny in ideology will find violent expression in actions. Second, in a climate of increasing political violence, security forces, militants and ordinary people are all equally likely to be perpetrators of sexual and gender-based violence. Impunity for such violence is reinforced by the push-pull between state and non-state forces. Third, complex emergencies that follow conflicts create new vulnerabilities and opportunities to perpetuate violence. In addition, we have observed that there is insufficient evidence about the brutalising impact of conflict and that while crime databases are accessible resources, they cannot answer the most critical questions.

APPENDIX: STATE-WISE CHARTS OF GENDER VIOLENCE INCIDENCE, 2000-2020

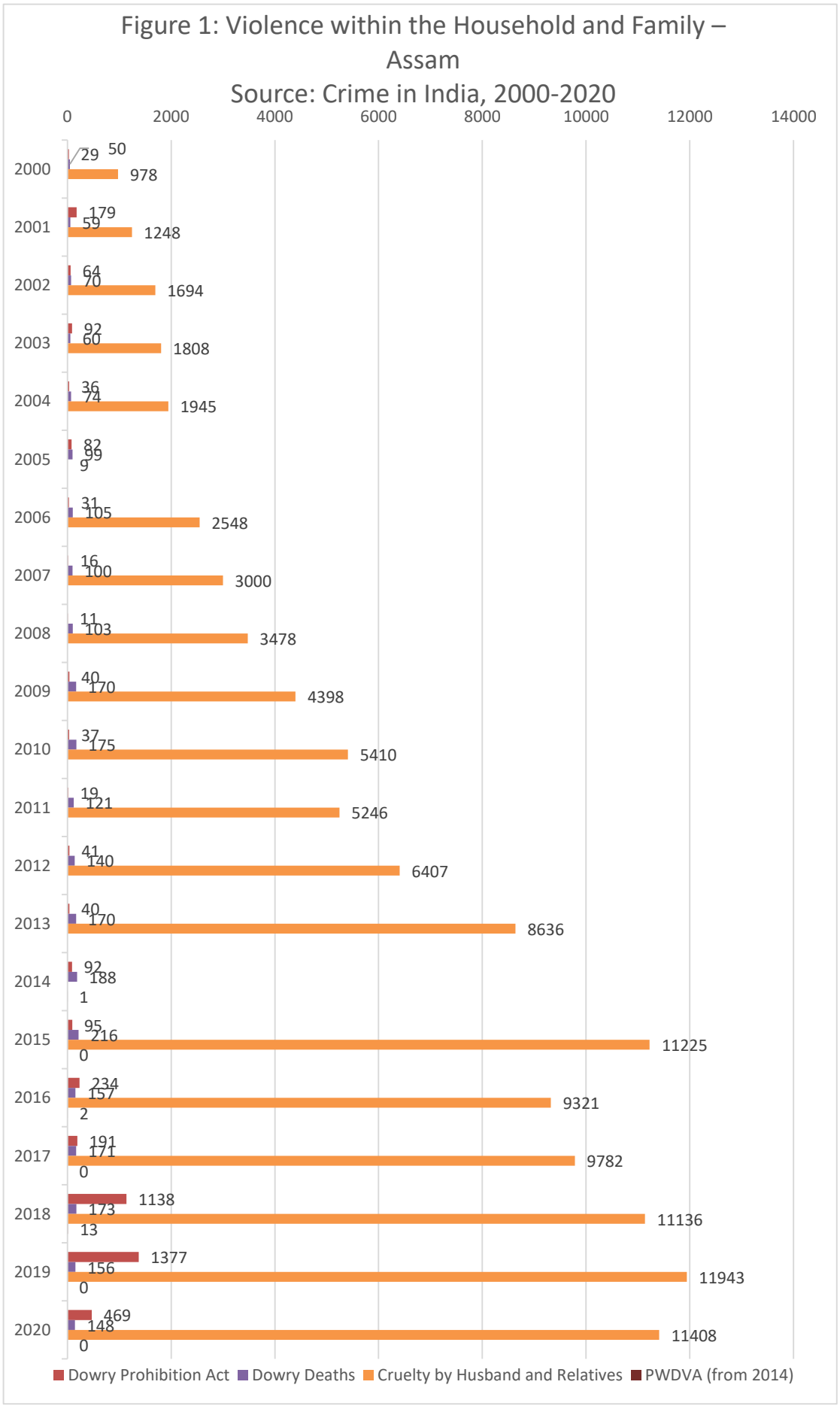


Figure 2: Child Marriage – Assam
Source: Crime in India, 2000-2020

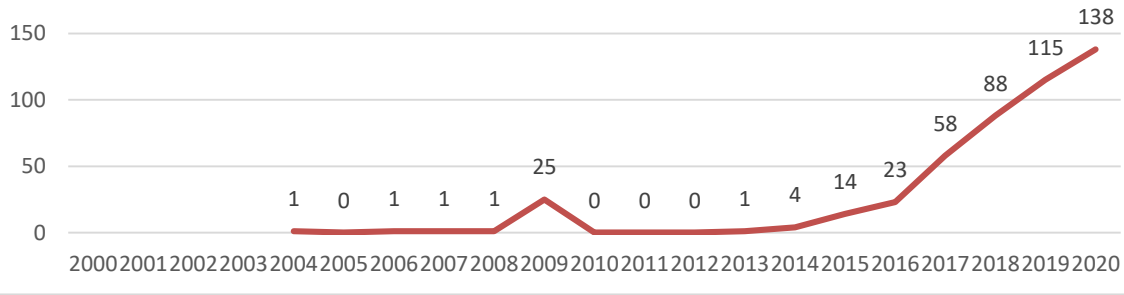
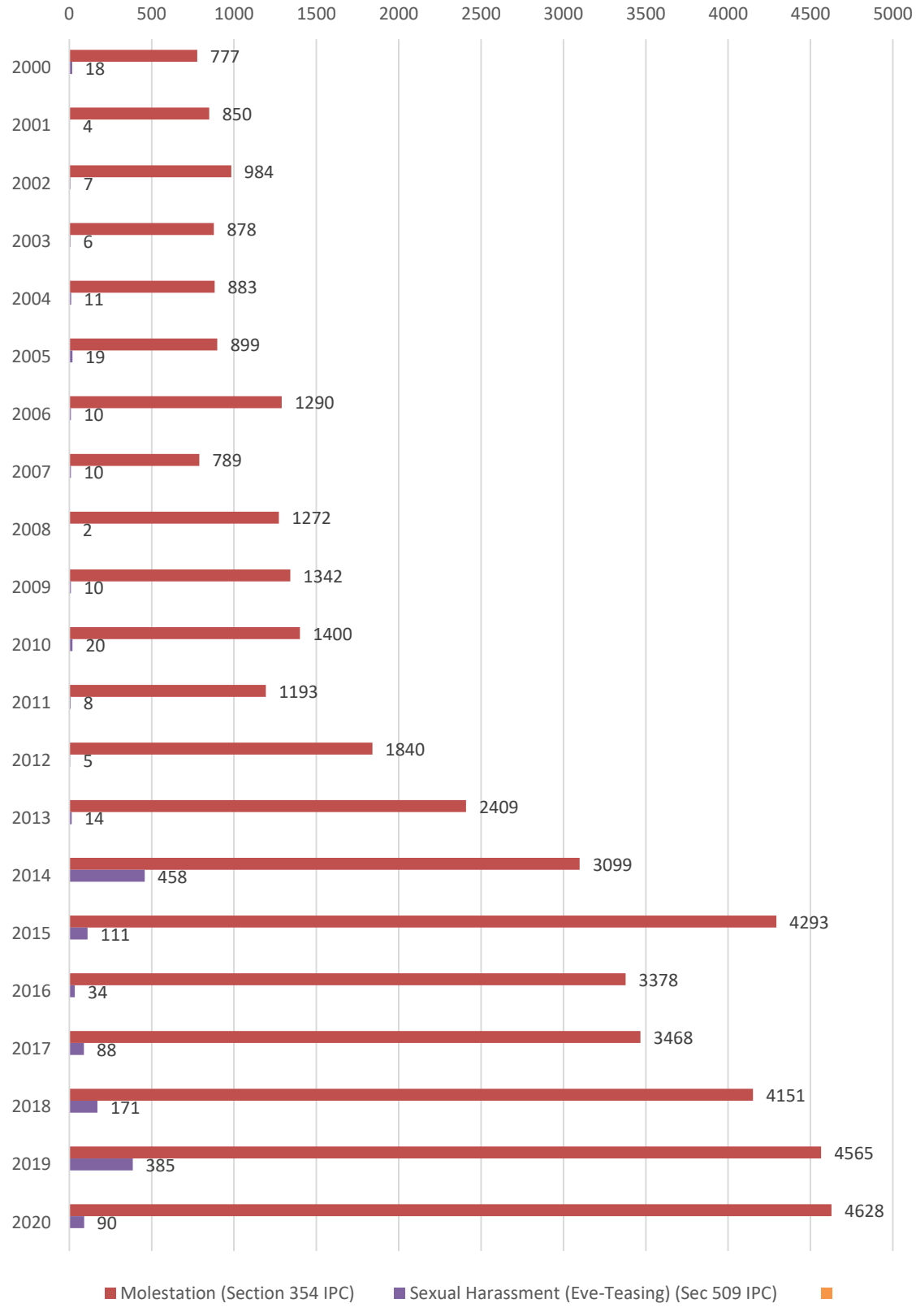


Figure 3: Gender Violence in Public Spaces – Assam
Source: Crime in India, 2000-2020



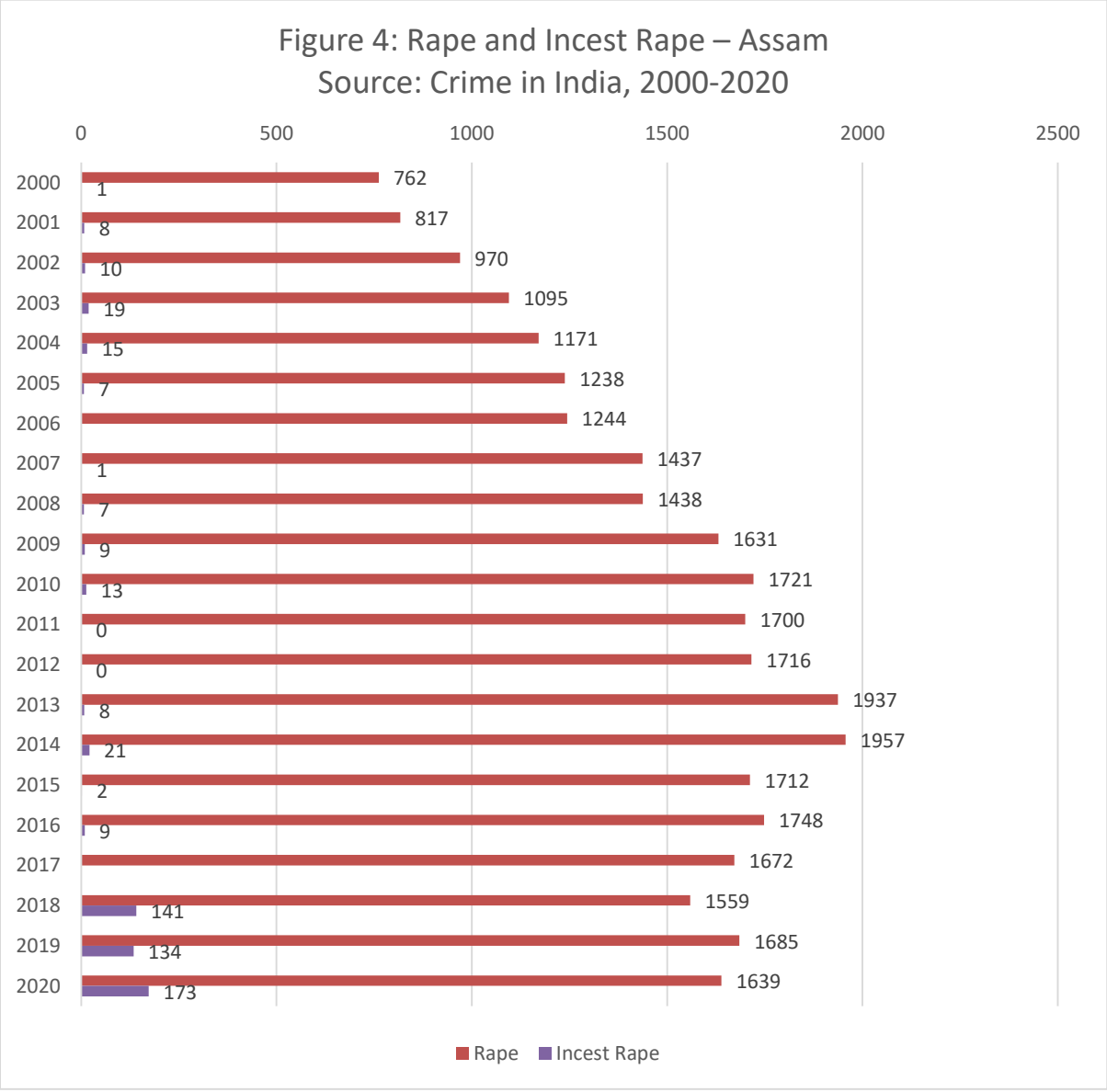


Figure 4: Rape and Incest Rape – Assam
Source: Crime in India, 2000-2020
0
500
1000
1500
2000
2500
2000
762
1
2001
817
8
2002
970
10
2003
1095
19
2004
1171
15
2005
1238
7
2006
1244
2007
1437
1
2008
1438
7
2009
1631
9
2010
1721
13
2011
1700
0
2012
1716
0
2013
1937
8
2014
1957
21
2015
1712
2
2016
1748
9
2017
1672
2018
1559
141
2019
1685
134
2020
1639
173
Rape
Incest Rape

Figure 5: Violence within the Household & Family – Chhattisgarh
Source: Crime in India, 2000-2020

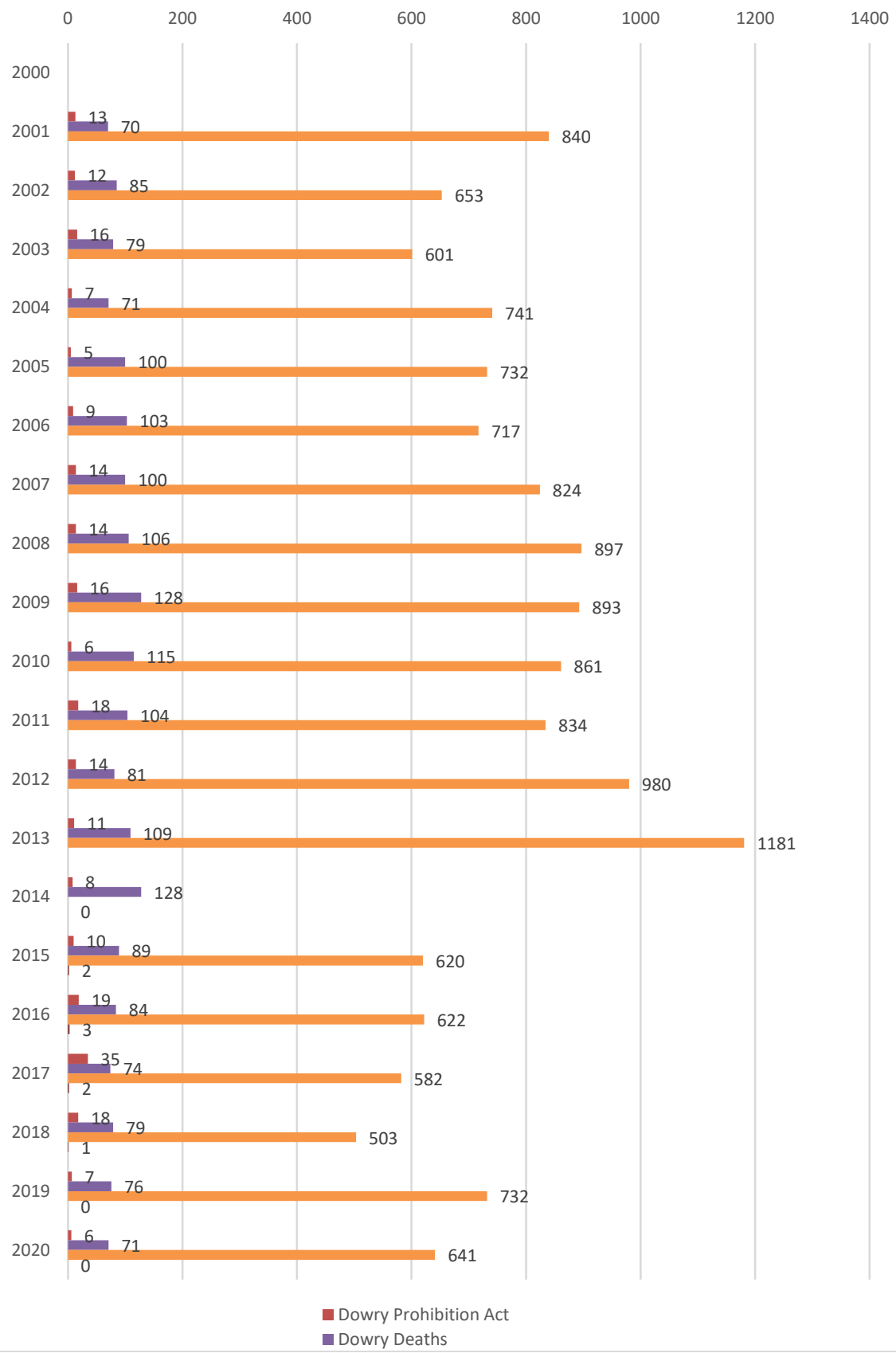


Figure 6: Child Marriage – Chhattisgarh
Source: Crime in India, 2000-2020

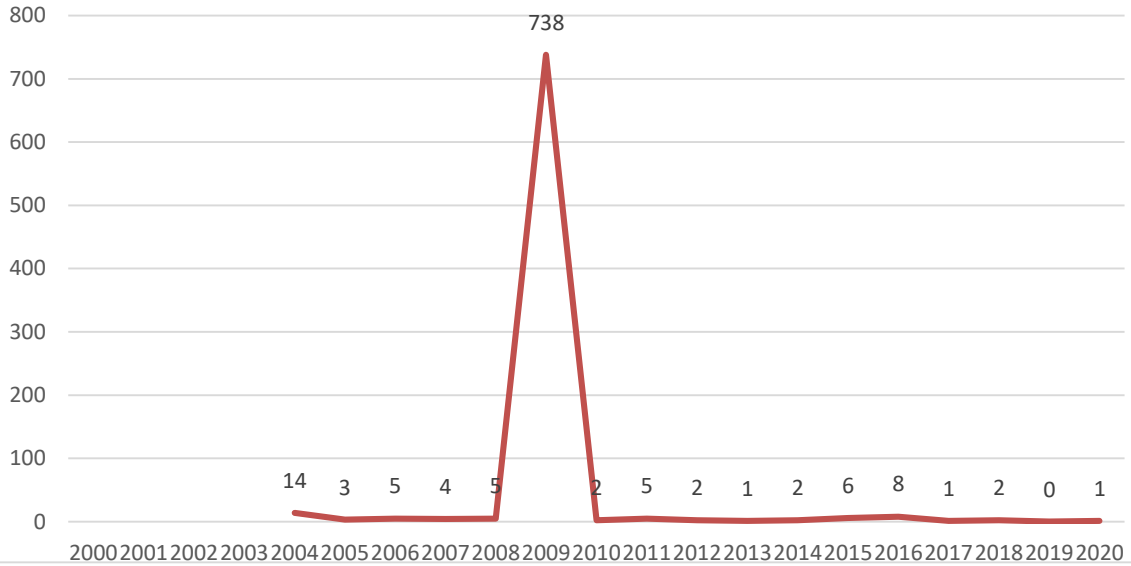
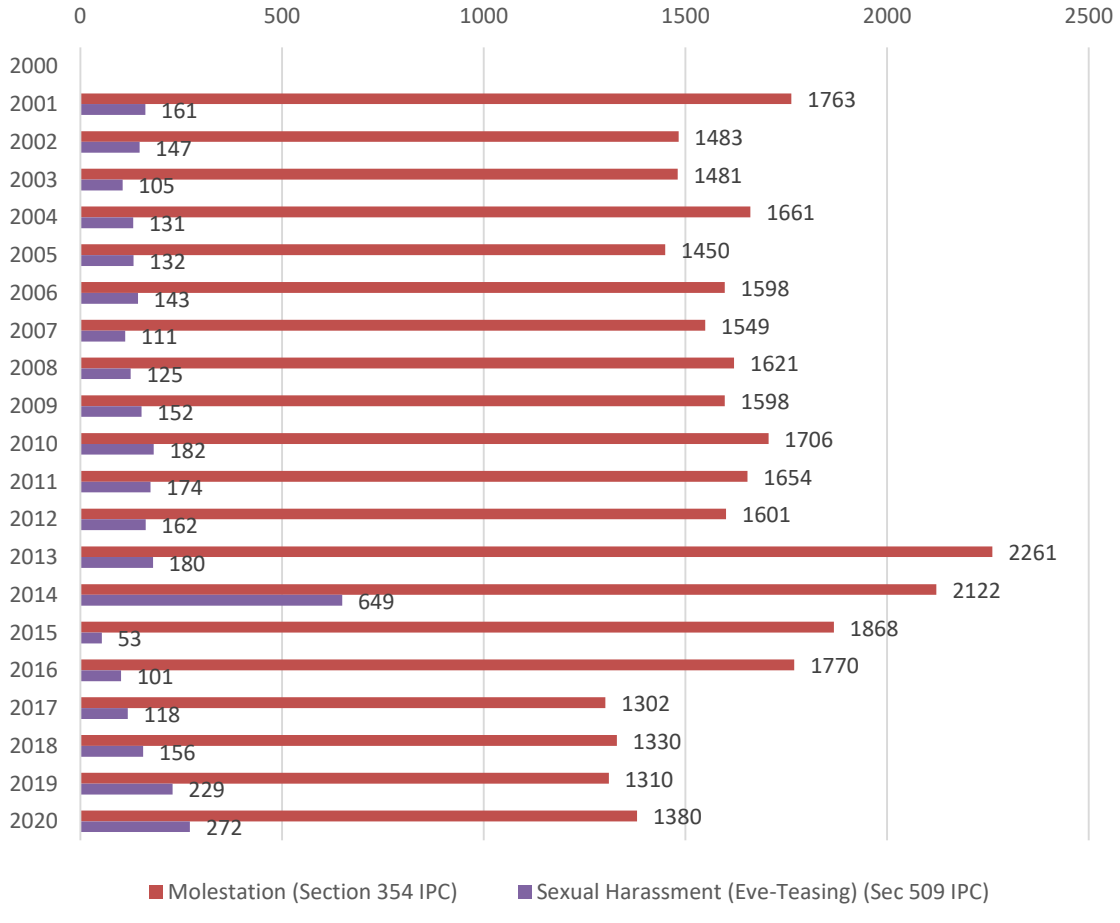


Figure 7: Gender Violence in Public Spaces – Chhattisgarh
Source: Crime in India, 2000-2020



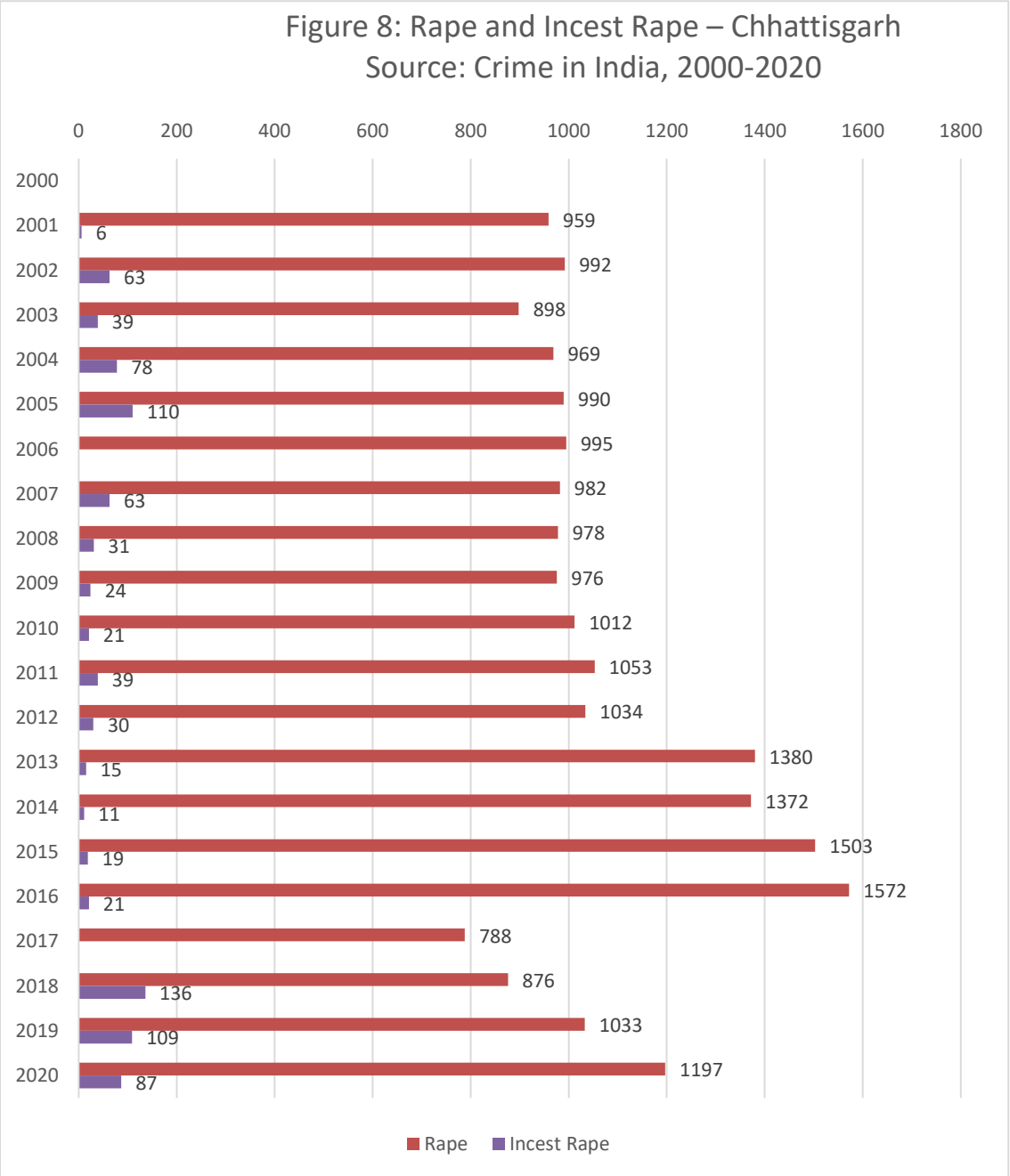


Figure 8: Rape and Incest Rape – Chhattisgarh
Source: Crime in India, 2000-2020
0
200
400
600
800
1000
1200
1400
1600
1800
2000
2001
2002
2003
2004
2005
2006
2007
2008
2009
2010
2011
2012
2013
2014
2015
2016
2017
2018
2019
2020
959
6
992
63
898
39
969
78
990
110
995
982
63
978
31
976
24
1012
21
1053
39
1034
30
1380
15
1372
11
1503
19
1572
21
788
876
136
1033
109
1197
87
Rape
Incest Rape

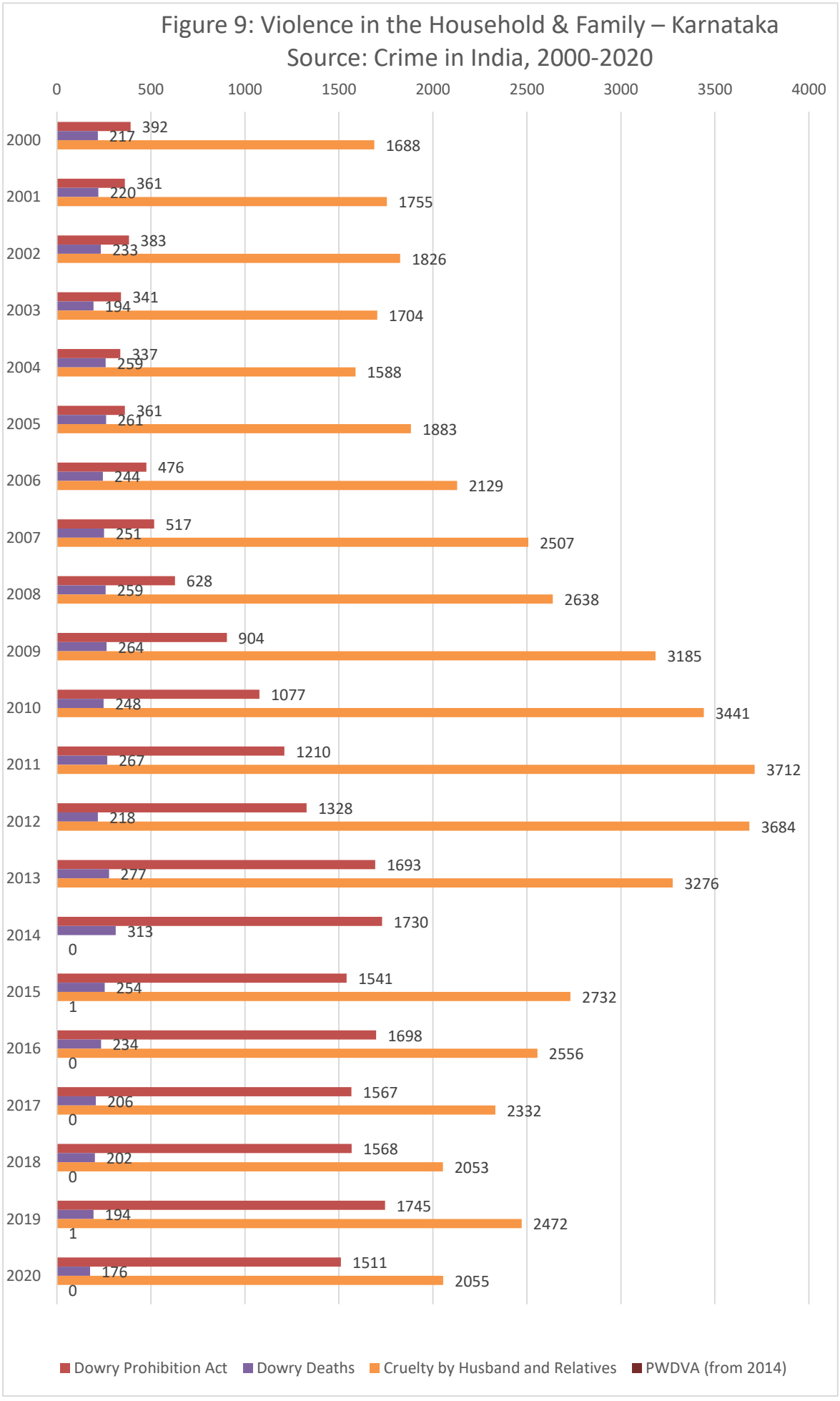


Figure 9: Violence in the Household & Family – Karnataka
Source: Crime in India, 2000-2020
0
500
1000
1500
2000
2500
3000
3500
4000
2000
392
217
1688
2001
361
220
1755
2002
383
233
1826
2003
341
194
1704
2004
337
259
1588
2005
361
261
1883
2006
476
244
2129
2007
517
251
2507
2008
628
259
2638
2009
904
264
3185
2010
1077
248
3441
2011
1210
267
3712
2012
1328
218
3684
2013
1693
277
3276
2014
1730
313
0
2015
1541
254
1
2732
2016
1698
234
0
2556
2017
1567
206
0
2332
2018
1568
202
0
2053
2019
1745
194
1
2472
2020
1511
176
0
2055
Dowry Prohibition Act
Dowry Deaths
Cruelty by Husband and Relatives
PWDVA (from 2014)

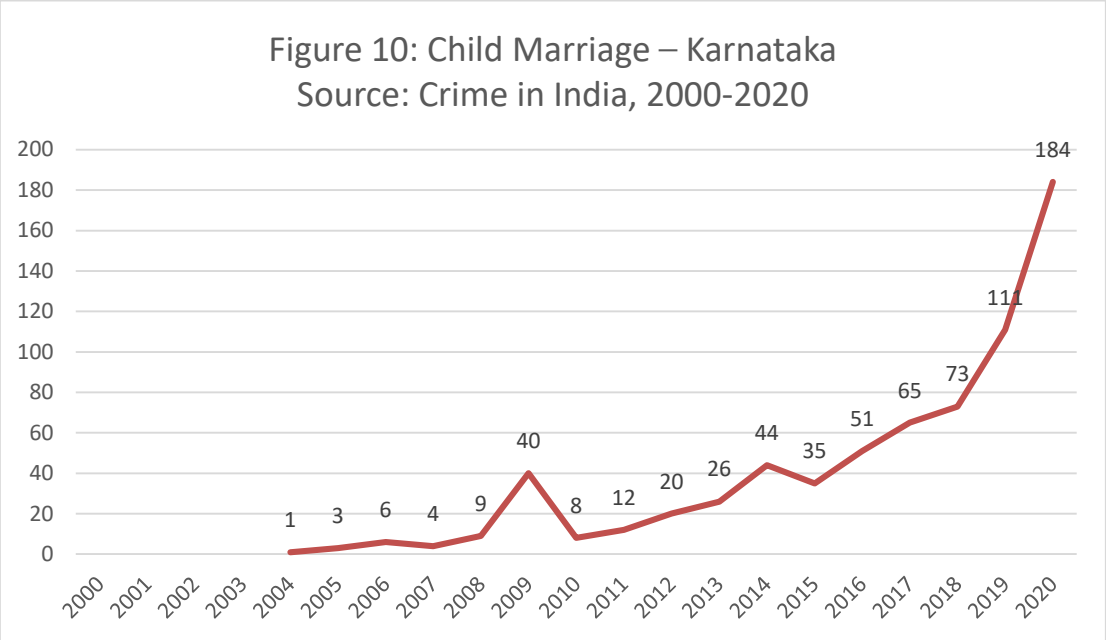
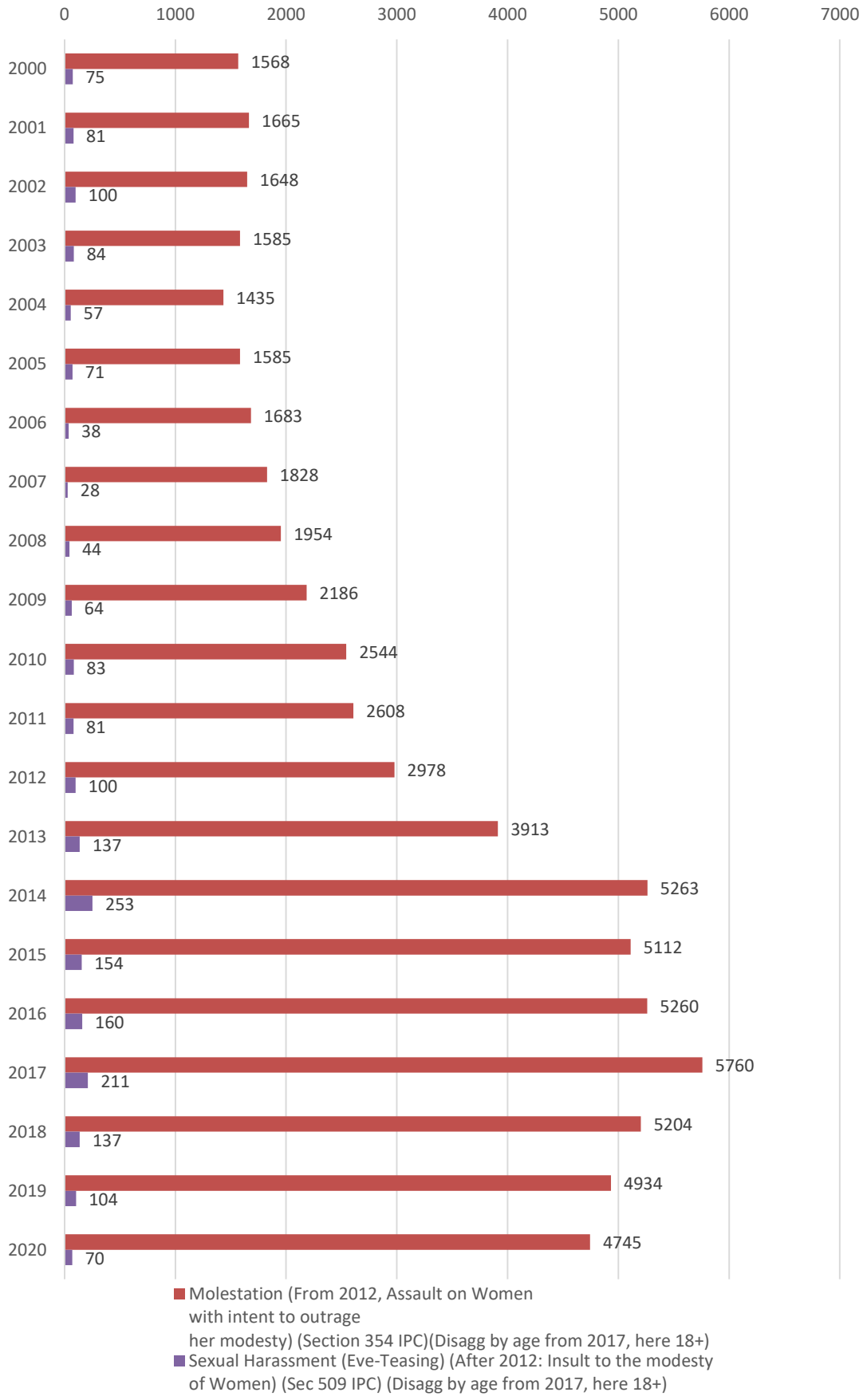


Figure 10: Child Marriage – Karnataka
Source: Crime in India, 2000-2020
200
180
160
140
120
100
80
60
40
20
0
1
3
6
4
9
40
8
12
20
26
44
35
51
65
73
111
184
2000
2001
2002
2003
2004
2005
2006
2007
2008
2009
2010
2011
2012
2013
2014
2015
2016
2017
2018
2019
2020

Figure 11: Violence in Public Spaces – Karnataka
Source: Crime in India, 2000-2020



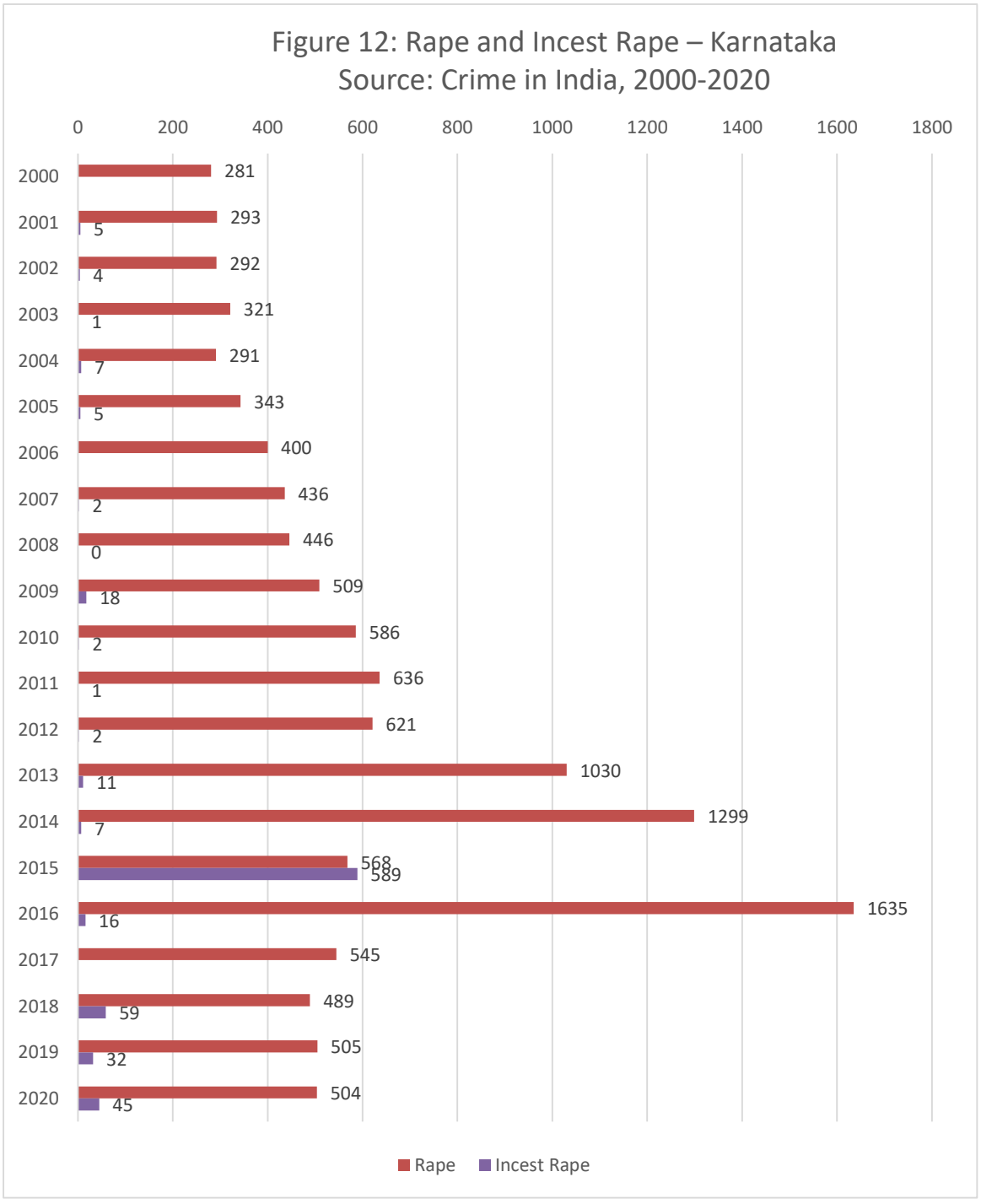
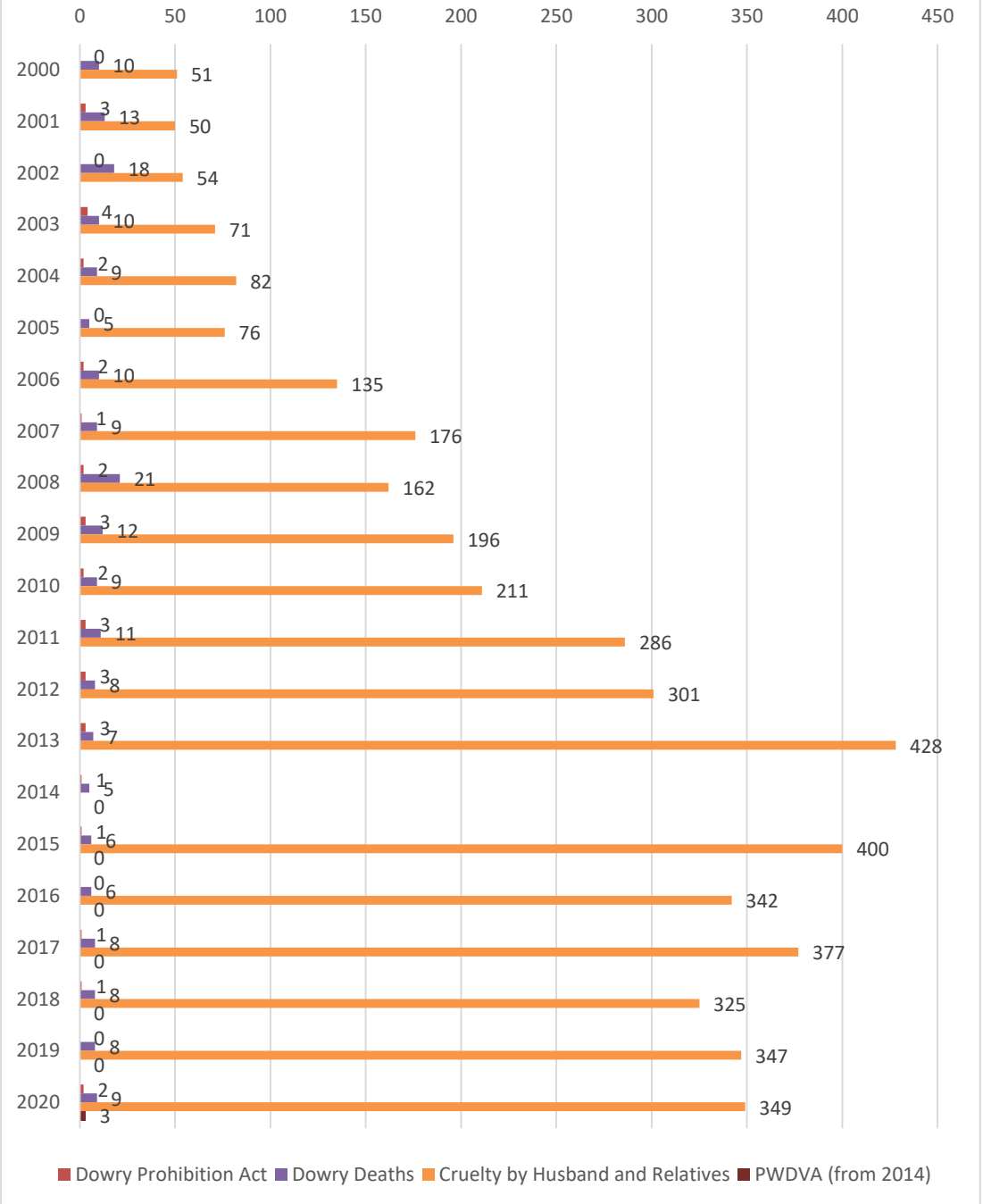


Figure 12: Rape and Incest Rape – Karnataka
Source: Crime in India, 2000-2020
0
200
400
600
800
1000
1200
1400
1600
1800
2000
281
2001
293
5
2002
292
4
2003
321
1
2004
291
7
2005
343
5
2006
400
2007
436
2
2008
446
0
2009
509
18
2010
586
2
2011
636
1
2012
621
2
2013
1030
11
2014
1299
7
2015
568
589
2016
1635
16
2017
545
2018
489
59
2019
505
32
2020
504
45
Rape
Incest Rape

Figure 13: Violence within the Household & Family – Kashmir
Source: Crime in India, 2000-2020



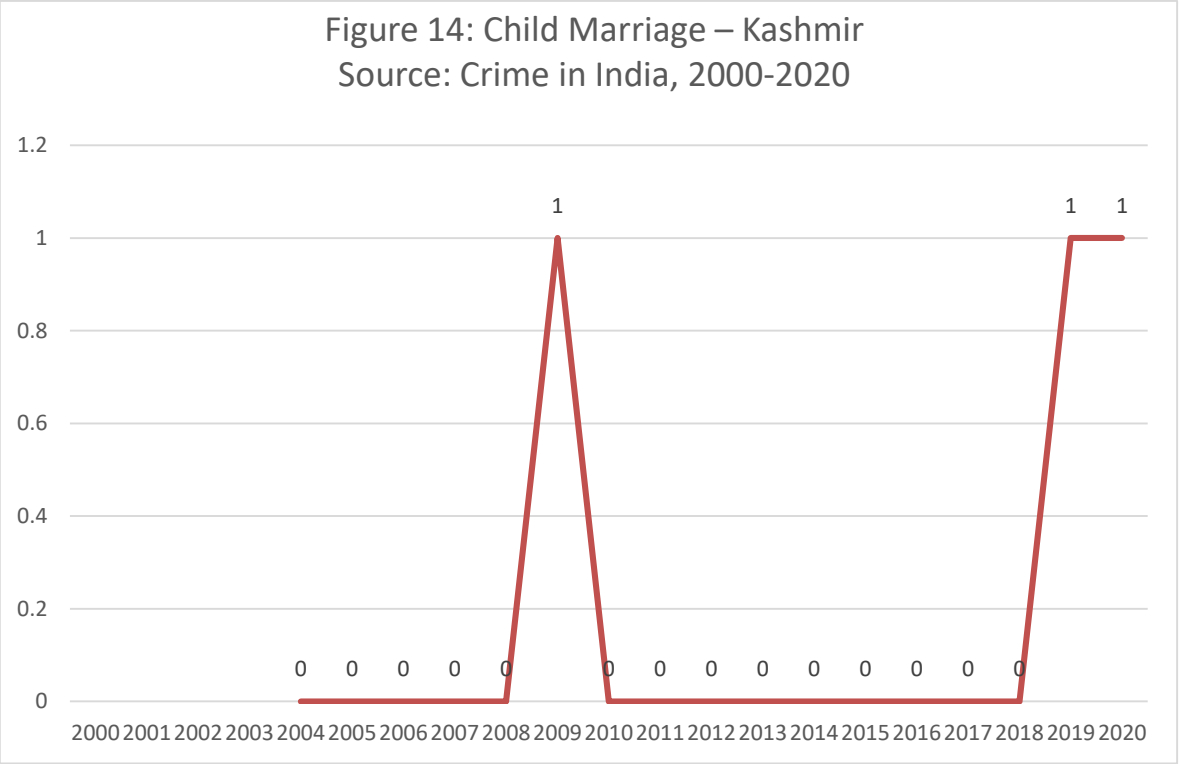


Figure 14: Child Marriage – Kashmir
Source: Crime in India, 2000-2020
1.2
1
0.8
0.6
0.4
0.2
0
0 0 0 0 0 1 0 0 0 0 0 0 0 0 0 1 1
2000 2001 2002 2003 2004 2005 2006 2007 2008 2009 2010 2011 2012 2013 2014 2015 2016 2017 2018 2019 2020

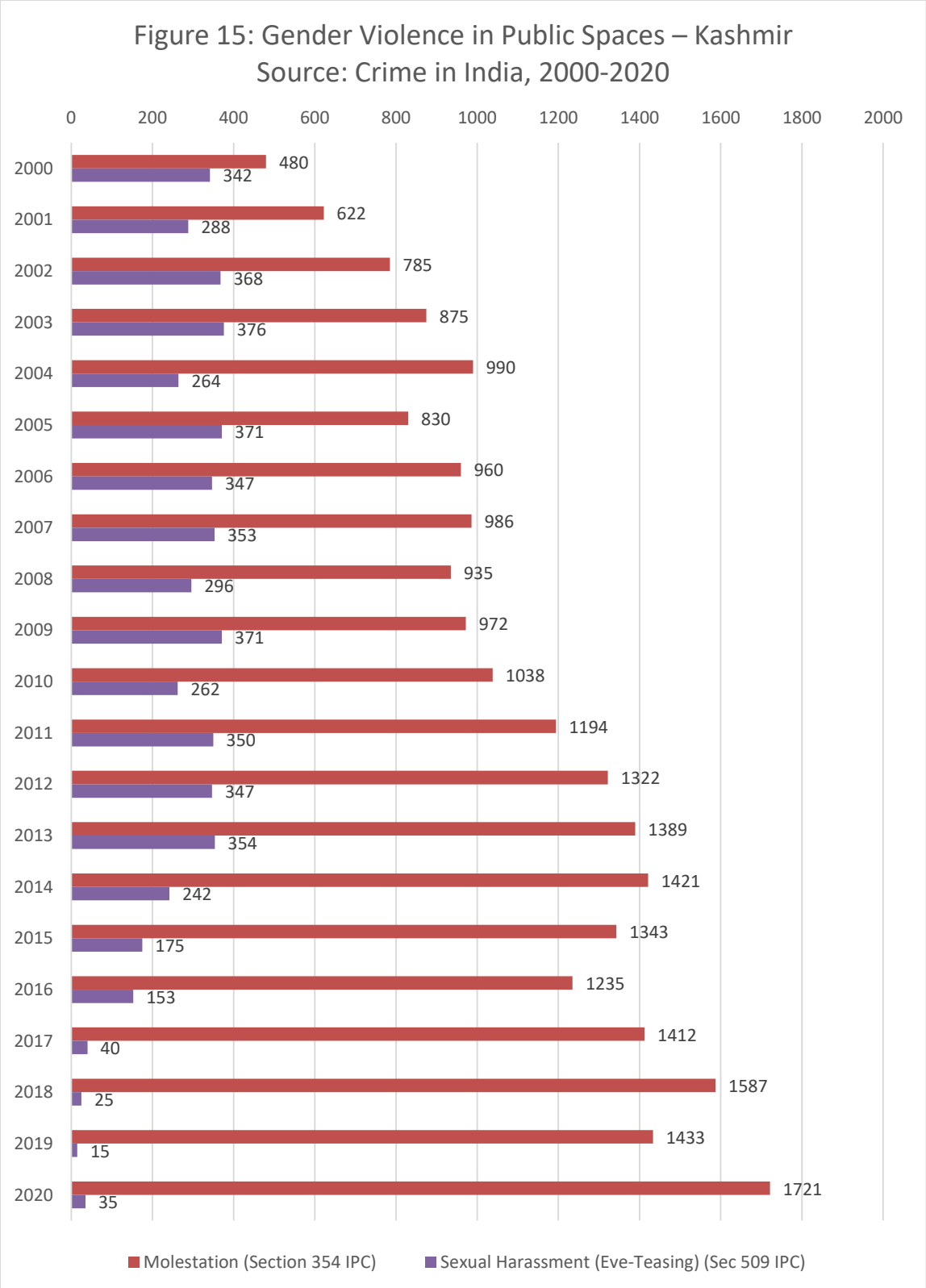


Figure 15: Gender Violence in Public Spaces – Kashmir
Source: Crime in India, 2000-2020
0
200
400
600
800
1000
1200
1400
1600
1800
2000
2000
480
342
2001
622
288
2002
785
368
2003
875
376
2004
990
264
2005
830
371
2006
960
347
2007
986
353
2008
935
296
2009
972
371
2010
1038
262
2011
1194
350
2012
1322
347
2013
1389
354
2014
1421
242
2015
1343
175
2016
1235
153
2017
1412
40
2018
1587
25
2019
1433
15
2020
1721
35
Molestation (Section 354 IPC)
Sexual Harassment (Eve-Teasing) (Sec 509 IPC)

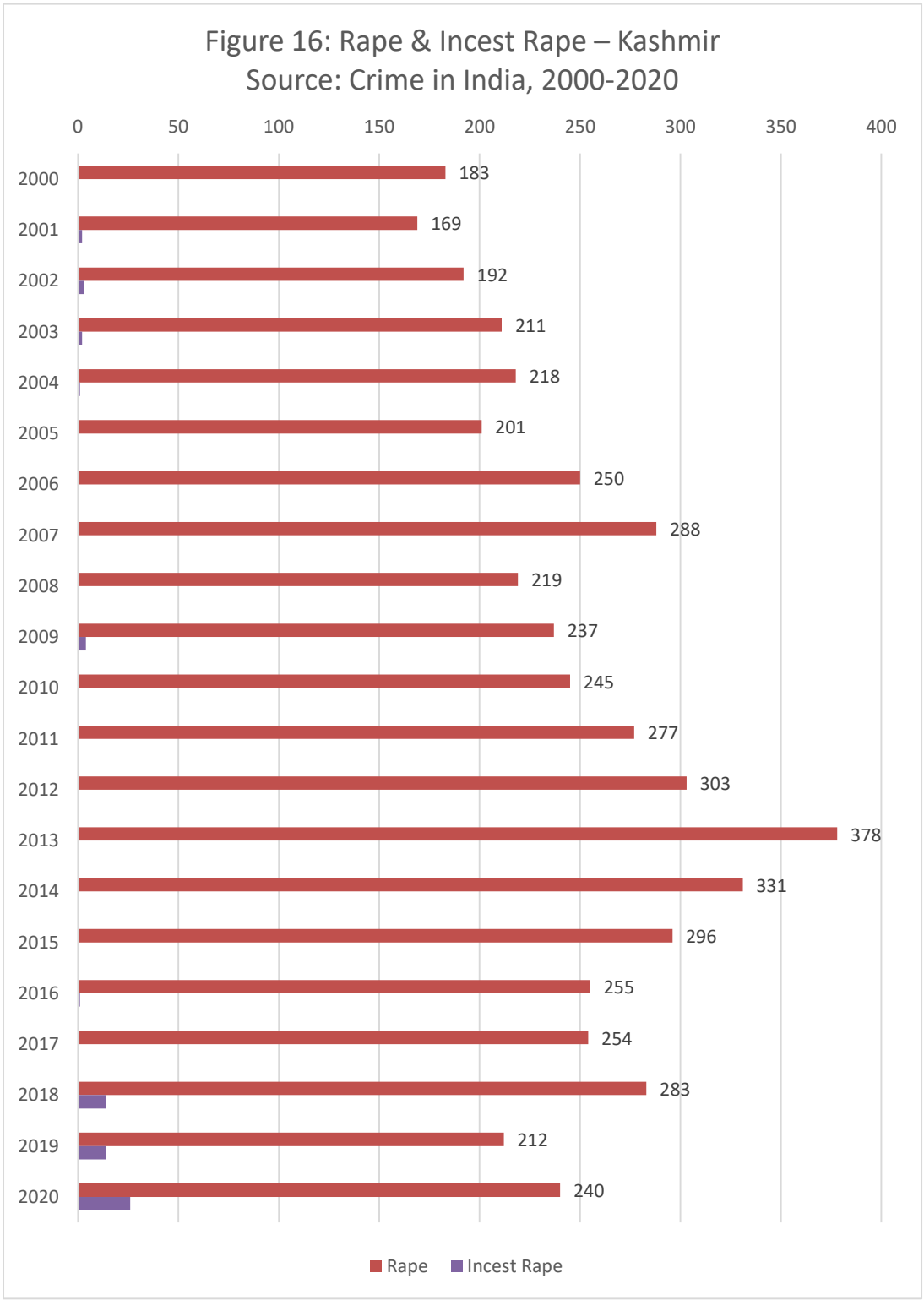


Figure 16: Rape & Incest Rape – Kashmir
Source: Crime in India, 2000-2020
0
50
100
150
200
250
300
350
400
2000
183
2001
169
2002
192
2003
211
2004
218
2005
201
2006
250
2007
288
2008
219
2009
237
2010
245
2011
277
2012
303
2013
378
2014
331
2015
296
2016
255
2017
254
2018
283
2019
212
2020
240
Rape
Incest Rape

End Notes

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