

Assessing the Effectiveness of the Chhattisgarh Tonhi Pratadna Nivaran Adhiniyam, 2005: A Critical Analysis of Legal Enforcement and Its Impact on Witch-Hunting in Chhattisgarh

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Chhattisgarh, one of the fastest-growing states of India, still struggles with various basic problems, one of which is the problem of witch-hunting, a problem that hurts women in rural and tribal areas. People accused of witchcraft often face terrible violence, including public shame, physical and mental abuse, and sometimes death. In 2005, soon after becoming a state, Chhattisgarh took a big step. It passed the Chhattisgarh Tonhi Pratadna Nivaran Adhiniyam 2005 to tackle and stop these cruel acts. But almost 20 years later, witch-hunting violence keeps happening, making people wonder if this law works well. This paper examines how the 2005 Act is implemented and enforced. It focuses on whether the law stops witch-hunting rather than looking at why it happens, which many have already studied. By looking at government data, like how many cases are filed under the Act, how many people are found guilty, and how many are let go, this study tries to see if the law has done what it was meant to. If witch-hunting cases keep rising even with the law in place, it might mean there are serious problems with what the law says or how it's enforced. This could show that the law is just for show, not working. This study also looks into whether ongoing neglect or poor management has made the law less effective over the years. Based on its findings, this research suggests specific changes to the law, improved enforcement, and targeted education programs to inform people about their legal rights. These steps aim to make the law better at protecting women at risk and stopping witch-hunting. In the end, this study aims to contribute to the broader discussion about protecting human rights in Chhattisgarh. It aims to make the Chhattisgarh Tonhi Pratadna Nivaran Adhiniyam 2005 a powerful tool to end witch-hunting and keep vulnerable communities safe and respected.

Keywords: Witch-hunting, human rights, women, Chhattisgarh

Introduction

Witch-hunting stands as one of the worst human rights abuses that affects women, particularly those from marginalised groups and tribal communities in India. Even with major legal advancements in many areas, claims of witchcraft still strip women of their basic rights to live, maintain dignity, and feel safe. This inhumane practice generally stems

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from various reasons, such as male dominance, economic hardship, cultural myths, etc. It remains a grave problem that police administration and the judiciary find hard to stop.

Although the roots of witch-hunting go back to ancient India, there is written evidence of it in modern Europe as well. Historically, people accused women of witchcraft if they questioned various religious norms, owned land, or didn't follow traditional roles. This led to various problems for women, such as torture, public shame, and even death. The mix of local beliefs and colonial-era myths made this practice particularly prevalent in rural and tribal areas, but this does not mean it is confined to rural areas; numerous studies show it is also prevalent in urban areas. Today, these accusations serve as a means of persecution against women who are perceived as threats to patriarchal societal structures.¹

India still faces many hurdles in the fight for women's rights and safety, especially when it comes to protecting their dignity. One such serious issue is the cruel practice of witch-branding. This harmful belief stems from obsolete cultural and traditional beliefs and deep gender biases prevailing in Indian society. Witch-hunting functions as a form of extrajudicial persecution involving harsh and inhumane treatment, systematic violence, and sometimes even torture and killing of women who are accused of having mystical powers. Various reasons, such as poverty, lack of access to education and basic health care facilities, and systemic gender inequality, add fuel to this problem, which leaves the women who are already marginalised with severe physical injuries, emotional scars, social isolation, and violations of their basic human rights for the rest of their lives. Hence, a comprehensive evaluation of the legal framework becomes imperative to address this form of violence against women.²

India has, from time to time, passed various laws to safeguard the rights of women, addressing issues like domestic violence, acid attacks and dowry-related crimes. However, tackling witch-hunting violence requires a closer look at existing laws and how they are enforced on the ground. This is important in places like Chhattisgarh, where such practices continue despite legal protections. Nestled in the heart of India, the state of Chhattisgarh is home to a lively tribal community that constitutes one-third of its population, yet it faces significant social and economic challenges. One such glaring issue is that of witch-hunting, which continues to harm women the most, particularly those from marginalised communities. The practice persists, despite several attempts to address it, showing resistance to change.

In 1948, the United Nations adopted the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, a key framework for defending human rights worldwide. This document combats cruelty, prejudice, and violence rooted in irrational beliefs. It seeks to ensure all people live with respect and dignity while protecting those at risk from injustice and harm. Although India is a signatory to this, old traditions in areas like Chhattisgarh continue to cause harm through witchcraft accusations. The tragic loss of lives reveals a wide gap between India's promises and the reality on the ground.

Since the inception of the state in 2000, witchcraft accusations have led to the deaths of over 2,500 individuals. This shows how superstition, gender violence, and social exclusion shape some societies. The National Crime Records Bureau reported that 85 people lost their lives to such claims alone in 2022. Behind these numbers are real stories of women whose lives ended because of fear and ignorance. It's hard to read about this without feeling a knot in your stomach. The persistence of witch-hunting shows how much work is still needed, not just tougher laws, but a shift in how people think and treat one another. Changing this will take time, but every step toward education and compassion brings hope for a future in which no one suffers from baseless accusations.³

Chhattisgarh reported 25 cases, while Madhya Pradesh saw 20. Jharkhand recorded 11 victims, and Odisha listed 10. These numbers underline the gravity of the problem.⁴ In these rural, tribal-led states, people have strong faith in supernatural powers. Women, in particular, often face accusations of practising black magic. This leads to harsh social rejection, violent beatings, or even death by mob lynching. A lack of education and poor healthcare make communities fear the unknown more. This fear pushes them to blame certain people for things like natural disasters, mysterious deaths, or long-lasting illnesses.

Witch-hunting violence often targets specific groups. Most victims are widows, older women, single women, or those from disadvantaged communities, leaving them open to blame. Women without a male protector or who defy traditional gender expectations often face accusations. People accuse them of casting harmful spells that spread illness or cause bad luck in families or villages. These claims are often just excuses to take their land, fight over property, or settle personal grudges. In communities, influential individuals sometimes use superstitions to eliminate those they view as threats or competitors.⁵ Women become targets when economic hardships combine with male-dominated authority, leaving them without money or support. Being labelled a witch ruins a woman's standing in her community. She often suffers rejection, is forced to leave her home, or faces death in extreme cases. Reports mention that these women are insulted and beaten before worse abuses occur. Some face humiliation like being forced to eat human waste, stripped bare, or paraded in their villages before being killed.⁶ This abusive exploitation exposes deep-rooted gender-based violence in India, which persists because protective laws lack enforcement, and local authorities hesitate to act.⁷ A key issue in addressing witch-hunting is the need for a clear, unified legal framework across all states.⁸ Instead, the states with severe witch-hunting problems, such as Jharkhand, Bihar, Odisha, and Chhattisgarh, have enacted state-specific anti-witch-hunting laws. Still, these laws remain largely ineffective and dormant due to weak enforcement, limited responsiveness, and the deep-rooted social acceptance of the practice.

The Constitution of India promises everyone the right to life, dignity, and equality. Yet, witch-hunting continues to reveal deep flaws in policing and the legal system. Many victims get no justice because local officials often ignore these crimes, letting offenders go unpunished. India lacks a unified anti-witch-hunting law, which worsens the situation. States like Jharkhand, Bihar, Odisha, and Chhattisgarh have their own laws, but poor enforcement makes these rules ineffective. Witch-hunting will keep taking innocent lives unless strict punishments and steady legal efforts are in place.⁹

Two brutal incidents in September 2024 can tragically underscore the persistence of witch-hunting-related violence in the state of Chhattisgarh, both demonstrating the deep-rooted superstitions and extreme violence associated with these beliefs relating to witchcraft. The first case¹⁰ happened on September 12, 2024, when a horrifying act of vigilante violence unfolded in a quiet village. Five members of a family killed four neighbours, including an 11-month-old baby, accusing them of practising black magic. The accused, Ramnath Patle, aged 60, along with his family, carried out the attack using an iron hammer. The victims were Chetram, 34 years old, his sisters Jamuna Bai, 26, and Yashoda Bai, 30, as well as Jamuna Bai's infant son, Yash. The police report and FIR revealed that the Patle family believed the victims had cursed their ill daughter, thinking black magic caused her sickness. The family had made threats earlier, but no steps were taken to prevent escalation.

On that dreadful evening, the perpetrators stormed into the victims' home and pounded them to death with the hammer. The gruesome murder of the toddler highlighted the horrifying

nature of witch-hunting-related violence, where superstition and irrational beliefs overpower basic humanity and common sense. This crime exposed how deeply rooted such dangerous beliefs are in the rural parts of Chhattisgarh state, where fear and lack of education often lead to such inhumane violence. The police administration arrested the suspects after the horrifying incident, but the broader concern remained. How could such a terrible crime happen despite laws against witch-hunting? The Balodabazar incident is a grim example of the deep-seated issues behind these gruesome acts—lack of education, weak legal systems, and no strong action to remove these superstitions can be the reason behind the same. Though this case grabbed wide attention, another horrific crime soon happened in the state, underscoring the urgent need to strengthen both public action and laws to prevent such tragedies. Three days later, on September 15, 2024, Sukma district saw another horrifying act of mob violence tied to accusations of witchcraft. This event shows that even with legal bans, fear among people and mob violence persist unchecked.¹¹

The Sukma Lynching happened in Ektal village, a remote area where an outraged group of villagers, using batons and makeshift weapons, killed five members of one family, including a police constable. The mob blamed the family for using witchcraft on the villagers when several strange deaths happened in the village. Fear and panic among them fueled the violent actions. Many villagers, as reports revealed, thought the family caused the deaths in unnatural ways by using witchcraft on them. They rejected every logical or medical explanation. In such situations, whispers and distrust led to this dangerous violence. The victims got no chance to defend themselves or tell their side of the story to the villagers. Overwhelmed by superstition, the mob ignored common sense and carried out attacks that lasted for hours. The police, in their investigation, discovered that around 15 people were involved in the assault, but arrested only five suspects. Many of those individuals involved in the incident remain unidentified.¹² The Balodabazar Massacre and the Sukma Lynching reveal the disturbing reality of witch-hunting-related violence, revealing significant gaps in law enforcement's capability to stop or counter such events. Chhattisgarh's Tonhi Pratadna Nivaran Adhiniyam 2005 makes the practice of witch-hunting unlawful and sets punishments for alleging others of practising black magic and witch-hunting. Even with the law in place, these offences show that present legal safeguards fail to prohibit such heinous acts. The Sukma Lynching stands out because it shows how an entire village can take such violent action against their own neighbourhood members, all based on just false and baseless accusations. The fact that a police constable, someone tasked with upholding the law, was murdered makes it even more alarming and a sign that no one is safe from such dangerous beliefs. This highlights an urgent, widespread issue that requires immediate attention from state and central governments and the community at large.

These occurrences act as dreadful reminders that the state of Chhattisgarh still has a long way to go to end the malpractice of witch-hunting. Arrests were made in these cases, but solving the problem requires more than just punishment. Authorities must focus on improving law enforcement, spreading awareness, and addressing the cultural mindset that keeps these harmful superstitions alive. If no strong action is taken, more lives will fall victim to this cruel mix of fear and mob justice. It is now essential to push for legal reform and to involve communities in initiatives to eliminate witch-hunting practices.¹³

Trends in witch-hunting cases

The report gathers data collected by the State and follows a clear, consistent method for recording crimes. Over time, it has expanded to cover more areas of crime, indicating that criminal patterns in India are shifting. A recent addition includes murders linked to witchcraft, which used to fall under the general homicide count.

Indicating witchcraft-related murders, i.e. where the practice of witchcraft serves as a motive for murder, as a separate category in the NCRB data is a major move to emphasise the cruelty of witch-hunting, which still exists in various parts of India. This new categorisation makes it simpler to see how prevalent these crimes are and supports plans to expand policies and legal actions. But the problem of witch-hunting is still an enormous issue linked to gender bias, personal grudges, long-standing fights over land or property, and expulsion from society. The fact that such offences continue to occur shows that legislation alone may not solve the long-standing problem. Determinations like appropriate implementation and spreading awareness are necessary to end this type of violence.

Furthermore, underreporting makes it tough to analyse witch-hunting-related crimes using only the NCRB data. Victims, particularly those in rural areas, stay away from reporting cases due to fear of criticism from their communities or even the police. This leads to many of the occurrences not being registered or labelled. Cases registered under state laws, such as the Chhattisgarh TonhiPratadnaNivaranAdhiniyam 2005, are often absent from various national-level crime records. These local or state-specific laws operate under state rules, not under the BharatiyaNyayaSanhita (BNS), which replaced the Indian Penal Code (IPC). The NCRB tracks only cases under various national laws; crimes recorded under state laws do not appear in its reports. This divergence leaves a significant gap in recognising the prevalence of witch-hunting, making it much harder to evaluate how well laws are working in the particular state. Witchcraft-related murders remain a persistent issue even with specific laws in states like Chhattisgarh.

Assessing how successful these laws are is necessary to eliminate the malpractice of witch-related violence. The state of Chhattisgarh was one of the first states to create legal measures to fight the evils of witch-hunting, but various newspaper reports from recent years suggest such cases still happen often. Examining conviction rates, acquittals, and court proceedings can reveal whether law enforcement and the courts are properly applying the 2005 Act. Comparing this with states with similar laws, such as Jharkhand and Odisha, can help identify weak points and suggest improvements for Chhattisgarh. While the Crime in India report by NCRB provides vital information on crime patterns, gaining insight into witch-hunting-related offences requires more than numbers alone. Confronting deep-rooted superstitions and beliefs requires more than just legal frameworks; it also needs the collective efforts of civil society. Efforts such as stronger enforcement, improved victim support, and community education and involvement programs are necessary. This study aims to connect data to real-life social and legal challenges, examining how effectively Chhattisgarh has enforced its 2005 TonhiPratadnaNivaranAdhiniyam. By studying crime statistics alongside judicial effectiveness, it hopes to suggest ways to improve the fight against witch-hunting. The goal is to ensure laws do more than exist on paper; they must protect the lives and rights of the vulnerable through effective enforcement. It seems you've forgotten to provide the original content you want rewritten. Please share the text you'd like me to paraphrase, and I'll rework it in accordance with the given guidelines.¹⁴

Table 1. Year-wise incident/case data across Indian states and union territories (2016-2022)

No.	State/Ut	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022
1	Andhra Pradesh	8	2	9	2	4	6	8
2	Arunachal Pradesh	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
3	Assam	1	3	0	2	0	0	1
4	Bihar	0	1	0	15	4	4	0
5	Chhattisgarh	17	6	8	22	16	20	25
6	Goa	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
7	Gujarat	14	6	4	3	3	2	5
8	Haryana	2	0	3	0	4	0	0
9	Himachal Pradesh	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
10	Jammu & Kashmir	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
11	Jharkhand	27	19	18	15	15	3	11
12	Karnataka	0	3	0	0	0	0	0
13	Kerala	0	0	0	0	0	0	1
14	Madhya Pradesh	19	13	10	16	17	18	20
15	Maharashtra	2	5	0	2	3	0	3
16	Manipur	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
17	Meghalaya	2	0	0	1	2	0	0
18	Mizoram	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
19	Nagaland	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
20	Odisha	24	9	5	13	14	2	10
21	Punjab	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
22	Rajasthan	1	2	1	1	1	1	0
23	Sikkim	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
24	Tamil Nadu	0	0	1	0	0	0	0
25	Telangana	11	3	2	1	1	11	1
26	Tripura	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
27	Uttar Pradesh	3	1	1	9	4	1	0
28	Uttarakhand	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
29	West Bengal	3	0	0	0	0	0	0
Total		134	73	62	102	88	68	85

Witchcraft-related murders in India: analysing trends and the persistent challenge of superstition

Witch-hunting is still a big problem in India in rural areas, where beliefs in superstition and fear lead to violent acts. The National Crime Records Bureau (NCRB) reported data from 2016 to 2022, which shows an alarming pattern of witchcraft-related murders. These cases rise and fall unpredictably. Even with laws in place, the issue continues, proving that rules alone can't solve this problem. States like Chhattisgarh, Jharkhand, and Madhya Pradesh stand out as the most affected, underscoring the need for broader steps beyond simply passing laws.¹⁵

When looking at the national pattern, witchcraft-related killings in India dropped, going from 134 cases in 2016 to 62 by 2018. But in 2019, cases climbed back up to 102. Numbers fell slightly in 2020 and 2021 before rising again in 2022, reaching 85. This unstable trend shows that while law enforcement and awareness improved for certain years, those changes didn't stick, leading to repeated spikes in these crimes. The jump in 2019 may point to either a real rise in such incidents or better reporting systems that prompted more victims to speak out.



Looking at state data, you can see that Chhattisgarh, Jharkhand, and Madhya Pradesh reported high counts of murders tied to witchcraft. In 2016, Jharkhand had 27 cases, which then began to decline in the following years. However, numbers went up again in 2019. They dropped significantly by 2021 but increased again in 2022. Madhya Pradesh also saw numbers change, with 19 cases reported in 2016 and 20 by 2022, showing the issue hasn't gone away even though its severity shifts. These crimes being common in states with large tribal populations indicates cultural beliefs, along with economic and social factors, have a big role in keeping witch-hunting alive. Chhattisgarh shows a very unstable trend among these states. In 2016, authorities recorded 17 cases. The number fell to just six in 2017, but then soared again to 22 cases in 2019. Over the years, the data kept changing, peaking at 25 in 2022. The state of Chhattisgarh brought in the Chhattisgarh TonhiPratadnaNivaranAdhiniyam 2005 to address violence related to witch-hunting. Nonetheless, the current state of these cases raises doubts about their success.

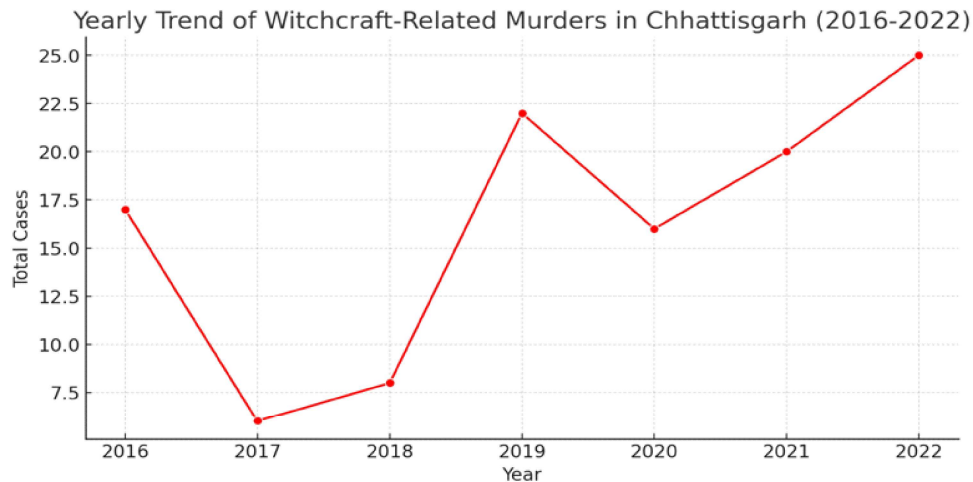
Table 2. Year-wise incident/case data of Chhattisgarh. (2016-2022)

No.	Year	Chhattisgarh
1	2016	17
2	2017	6
3	2018	8
4	2019	22
5	2020	16
6	2021	20
7	2022	25
Total		114

Superstitions run deep in rural and tribal areas of Chhattisgarh, which is a big reason behind the prevalent witchcraft-related violence. Villages often blame women, widows or older people for things like mysterious illnesses or financial troubles. Local healers or religious leaders stir up accusations of witchcraft, and this pushes people toward mob violence, shaming in public, or even killing. Even though laws make such actions a crime, fear of otherworldly powers still pushes many to act against those they believe are witches.

The COVID-19 pandemic might be linked to a rise in murders tied to witchcraft in the past few years. Job losses, financial struggles, and people feeling more alone could strengthen irrational beliefs, pushing communities to blame weaker individuals. From 2020 to 2022, the growing number of these cases backs this idea. Communities hit hard by money issues may have turned to old beliefs to explain their problems, which led to more attacks on those accused of witchcraft.

A look at other states shows that Chhattisgarh remains one of the hardest-hit areas, but Odisha and Jharkhand have also faced similar problems. Odisha reported 24 cases back in 2016. By 2021, that number dropped to just two cases, though it climbed again to 10 in 2022. This drop and rise may indicate that Odisha's focus on law enforcement and public awareness has had some effect, but the 2022 increase shows the problem persists. Jharkhand had some of the highest numbers of witchcraft-related murders in the past. Cases dropped after 2019, which might point to better law enforcement or social programs creating change. It looks like you've posted placeholders without actual content to work on. Could you please provide the original text you'd like me to paraphrase? A major hurdle in ending witch-hunting lies in victims' hesitating to come forward. Survivors and their families often avoid reporting cases because they fear being shunned by society, face threats from locals, or doubt the police will help. In developing states like Chhattisgarh, where informal justice systems still control many outcomes, these issues are often handled within society, avoiding legal outcomes. This shows the importance of building local initiatives to teach communities about laws against witch-hunting and the legal safeguards they can use; in this regard, Legal Aid can be utilised effectively.



Conclusion & Suggestions

Our country takes pride in championing human rights, as outlined in documents like the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. However, the harsh truth of witch-hunting violence shows how these safeguards can prove inadequate. In regions such as Chhattisgarh, a state with strong tribal connections and few inhabitants, old-fashioned ideas continue to deny women their basic rights. It's unsettling to consider that Chhattisgarh, despite its small size, leads the nation in killings linked to witchcraft accusations. This goes beyond ineffective laws—it highlights deeper problems, such as poor education, limited awareness, and insufficient community support, that allow these awful events to continue. The rules intended to stop witch-hunting have failed to change the situation on the ground. Even when people save victims, they often bear unseen wounds and face exclusion from their own communities. Empty words and quick fixes won't solve this problem anymore. We need genuine, long-term answers that not only shield these women but also empower them to start over with self-respect. It's time to stop just talking and start taking steps that will help survivors. So how can we address this deep-rooted problem in a place like Chhattisgarh? To start, the legal system needs a major revamp. Stricter state laws with harsher punishments could discourage offenders, but we also need a national law to handle witch-hunting across India. This issue persists in other parts of the country beyond Chhattisgarh, and a unified strategy would demonstrate our commitment to ending it. In addition to legal help, survivors need financial backing, therapy, and initiatives to help them rebuild their lives. Safe shelters, vocational training, and psychological support can give them a real shot at reclaiming their lives. Communities must also contribute by offering financial assistance and showing victims they matter and have support, not that they're outcasts.

But legislation and assistance alone can't eliminate the myths driving this brutality. We must alter perspectives, beginning with the young. Schools in Chhattisgarh could incorporate lessons on equality, compassion, and logical reasoning into their curriculum—perhaps through stories or verses that resonate with children. At the local level, the Panchayati Raj system could establish hotlines and community hubs where individuals can seek help or voice concerns before violence breaks out. By combining stricter rules, neighbourhood support, and education, we can erode the beliefs that sustain witch-hunting. It's a lengthy journey, but with shared dedication, we can create a community where no one fears old beliefs, and all receive the respect they merit.

Notes:

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- ⁴ Crime in India - 2022, Ministry of Home Affairs Department of States National Crime Records Bureau (NCRB), Available at : <https://www.ncrb.gov.in/uploads/nationalcrimerecordsbureau/custom/1701607577CrimeinIndia2022Book1.pdf>
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- ⁶ 4 Of Family Assaulted, Made To Eat Human Excreta Over Witchcraft Suspicion, NDTV (Sept. 27, 2022), <https://www.ndtv.com/others-news/4-of-family-forced-to-consume-human-waste-over-witchcraft-suspicion-3380906>.
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- ¹¹ Times Of India, 5 Of Family, Including 3 Women, Murdered On 'Witchcraft' Suspicion; 5 Held, Times of India (Sept. 15, 2024), <https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/city/raipur/5-of-family-including-3-women-murdered-on-witchcraft-suspicion-5-held/articleshow/113370485.cms>.
- ¹² Ibid.
- ¹³ Ibid.,
- ¹⁴ National Crime Records Bureau (NCRB), 'Crime in India' report, NCRB, 2022. Available at <https://www.ncrb.gov.in/en/crime-india>
- ¹⁵ Ibid.,

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