

Prevalence of Acid Crime Victimization in South Asia: A Review

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Abstract

The study was conducted to shed light on the acid crime and victims in South Asian developing countries (i.e., demographic subdivision Bangladesh by name). The objective of this paper is to draw thriving strategies to make exploitation free life on the basis of the existing laws eradicating the acid crime victimization in the world as a global village. The data was collected mainly from secondary sources. The perceived causes of acid violence included dowry, family dispute, property dispute, marital dispute, refusal of love etc. Subsequently, the consequences incorporated death, disfigurement, disability, chronic poverty, isolation from job, family and community, lack of security and so many concerns. The study was recommended to take a collaborative action to all the stakeholders to create awareness to the family and society enforcing laws by government to eclipse these sorry tales.

Keywords

Violence Against Women, Acid Crime, Human Rights, Victimization, South Asian Countries, Review Study

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1. Introduction

Acid attacking is a rampant occurring trait throughout the world, especially in South Asian countries remarking Bangladesh having some of the highest recorded incidence of acid violence. There have been 3,662 reported acid attack victims in Bangladesh during 1999 to 2015 [1]. Acid violence involves intentional acts of violence in which perpetrators throw, spray or pour acid onto victims' faces and bodies [2]. It also describes an attack against an individual in which sulfuric, hydrochloric or nitric acid is employed as a weapon to cause severe burns. The results are permanent disfigurement, often blindness and sometimes hearing loss, depending on where the acid falls. Overall, the findings revealed that the incidence of acid attacks is escalating as reported more frequently in the press. Yet, in the country,

arrest and conviction of perpetrators are low and the police require persuasion to pursue a case. Most survivors, predominantly women, being from poor families with little access to education, are ignorant of their legal rights and the judicial system and so rely on legal aid organizations to assist them. It is also found that acid is readily available to perpetrators, mostly men who are aggrieved because they have experienced rejection of their advances [3-6].

When Acid is thrown on a person, the results can be horrifying. Nitric, hydrochloric, or sulfuric Acids all have a catastrophic effect on human flesh. It causes the skin tissue to melt, often exposing the bones below the flesh, sometimes even dissolving the bone. When Acid attacks the eyes, it damages these vital organs permanently. Many Acid attack survivors have lost the use of one or both eyes. The victim in traumatized physically, psychologically and socially [7,8].

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An Acid attack on the body would dramatically change the life. Most survivors of an acid attack are forced to give up their education, their occupation and other important activities in their lives. This is because recovering from the trauma takes up most of their time and because the disfigurement they have to bear debilitates and handicaps them in every conceivable way. Bangladesh enacted two laws in 2002—one that heightens criminal penalties and improves criminal procedures and another that attempts to decrease the availability of acid. Acid attacks have decreased by 15% to 20% in Bangladesh each year after the country adopted specific laws to address acid violence [9-11]. With the aim of contributing to efforts to design effective laws and policies to combat acid violence, the study analysis of acid attack perpetrators, motives, victims, and the impact of attacks on victims in Bangladesh as a South Asian country [12-14].

2. Causes of Acid Attack

Acid violence has several causes, which was interlinked with the various social problems of Bangladesh. The root causes, were patriarchal society which developed based on power. The ostensible causes were dowry, family dispute, property dispute, marital dispute, refusal of love etc. The causes of Acid attack varies case to case basis and more than one person could be attacked by a single incident. As such, more people's life and livelihood could be spoiled due to a single incident of Acid violence [15, 16].

3. Consequences of Acid Violence

The victim of acid attack suffered physically, psychologically, socially and economically. Also, they had to struggle at every stages of life after being a survivor. From home to outside, they had been ignored and neglected by some portion of the people. Thus rights were not ensured proportionately for the Acid survivors. The survivors could not return fully to the previous life where they lived with all supports from the family and community. The Acid attack not only disfigured the faces, but also spoiled the full and secure life over a multitude of dimensions. The consequences of Acid violence were numerous, some major consequences had been revealed by the study. The consequences include disfigurement, negligence from family and society, separation from job and education, marital barrier, disability, poverty etc.

3.1. Biological Consequences

Acid causes skin tissues and soft bones to melt. Acid injures were usually much deeper and acid effects the skin tissues faster than flames. Furthermore flame burns were affecting

the tissues and soft bones not the hard bones, while Acid is aggressive enough to cause permanent damage even to hard bones. Any parts of the body could be injured through acid throwing. The face, however, was the most targeted area of the miscreants. In many cases, some parts of the body were being disabled by acid throwing. The eyes, ears, nose, face were mostly injured in and around the cases of Acid violence. Those sensitive areas were also vulnerable to be disfigured quickly. As the faces are always open in nature, the organs of this area have greater possibility to be disabled.

3.2. Security Issues

In the community, the perpetrators were threatening the survivors for withdrawing the cases against them. Sometimes, it was found that the survivor and their family had been attacked more than one time because of continuing Acid case. Moreover, due to lower social status and economic power of the survivors, they faced trouble to survive at their locality by ignoring the threat of the perpetrator. Sometimes due to the threat from the perpetrators the victims might also lose their homes and shelter [11]. According to the follow-up report of ASF, 2009, it was found that around 40% survivors were threatened by the perpetrators [1].

3.3. Sociological Consequences

Due to disfigurement, sometimes the family and society could not treat an Acid victim as earlier. Besides, social stigma was another cause of negligence from family and community, which results separation from family or divorce etc. The victims became anxious, uncertain or even depressed because of their separation of the family and society. Chronic illness, social conflict, husbands' torture, family torture etc, were other forms of negligence to survivors creating separation [17-20].

3.3.1. Separation from Job and Education

After becoming an acid victim, the survivors were undervalued by their peers, colleague and friends and also from the community. Besides they had to struggle to get the earlier environment at their institutions or school/college. Even in some cases, they could not get the family and community support as they wanted. Sometimes the employer was not satisfied to survivors because of their disfigured out looking/face. Thus, the survivors were mentally depressed causing separated from their jobs and droop out from education [21-24].

3.3.2. Marital Barrier

Due to the facial disfigurement in most cases, the youngest girls were deprived from marriage [1]. The victim's family, community and local people had less interest to arrange marriage for an Acid victim. This condition, furthermore, morally depressed the survivors to involve with their earlier community.

3.3.3. Lack of Participation at Social and Cultural Programs

Gender violence represents an expression of human behaviours and attitudes and is deep rooted in the society [11]. In the case of Acid violence, the survivors got less importance in participating at social and cultural festival because of their physical and psychological condition. This also created a permanent problem in the survivor’s mind that again falls in mental shock. Sometimes the survivors were not interested to participate in the social and cultural gathering due to their facial disfigurement and the fragmented social environment [25-27].

3.4. Economic Consequences

Acid attacks had hurtful effect-physically, psychologically and socially. This disability obstructed the survivors to work continuously and thus they cannot earn as earlier. A survivor cannot work long time under the sun as their affected areas get in infections, which reduced their working ability tremendously in home and outside, causing poor to poorest as most of the survivors living under the poverty line. It was found that 65%survivors were living under poverty line as per the calculation as per poverty definition cited at HIES, 2005. While 28 percent populations live under poverty line [7]. After becoming an Acid victim, ones could not meet their family demand. Sometime the survivors had to depend on external support for their survival. Bi-variate analysis also reiterated the strong relationship between domestic violence and poverty [11]. Violence both systematic and random was part of the condition of poverty in as much as poverty is associated with relative powerlessness and the poor are least able to defend themselves or to remove themselves from threatening situations [10].

4. Legal Remedies of Acid Victimization

Section 4 of Acid Crime Control Act, 2002, Causes the death of another person by a person Acid such person shall be punishable with death or imprisonment for life and shall be liable in excess of these exceeding one lakh BDT [28].

Section 5 says that if any other person in any way hurt by acid

- a) Wholly or partly lost sight or hearing, or face, breasts or genitalia is mutilated or destroyed such person shall be liable to imprisonment for death or imprisonment for life.
- b) The body’s other organs, glands or in part is deformed or damaged, or anywhere in the body, then that person was injured, but not less than seven years’ rigorous imprisonment for a term which may extend to fourteen years and it shall be liable to an additional term not exceeding fifty thousand taka.
- c) If any person, or to any other person sough on the Acid, then do so because of the person’s physical, mental or otherwise, do no harm, though, but at least three years’ rigorous imprisonment for a term which may extend to seven years and shall be liable to fine of fifty thousand taka [29,30].

5. Statistical Findings

Figure 1 shows that, in 2015 total number of Acid attack were 59 and the 74 persons were victimized. In October, the number of Acid victimization was highest in this year and lowest were in December while most of them were women.

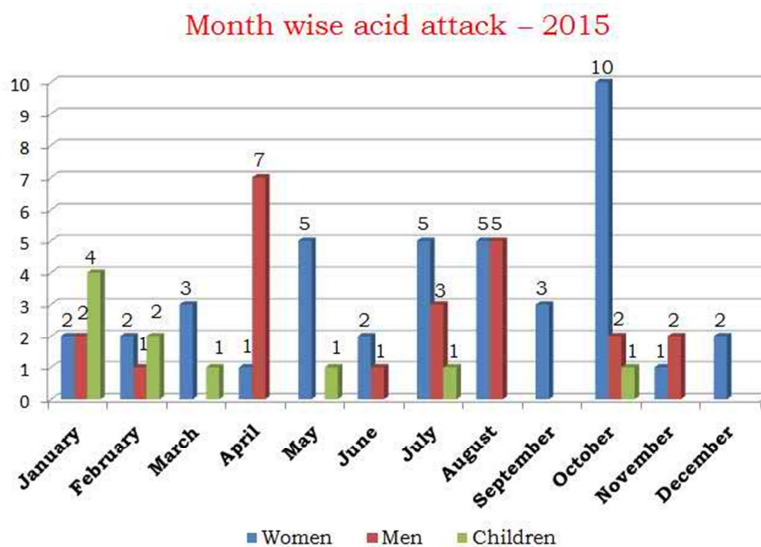


Figure 1. Acid Attack Statistics-2015 [1].

Figure 2 display year basis number of Acid attack from 1999 to 2015. There were reported 3303 incidents and total 3662 victims during that period. According to this statistics the number of Acid attack were gradually increased in 1999 to 2002. However, after 2002 the number of Acid attack is decreasing respectively by the year.

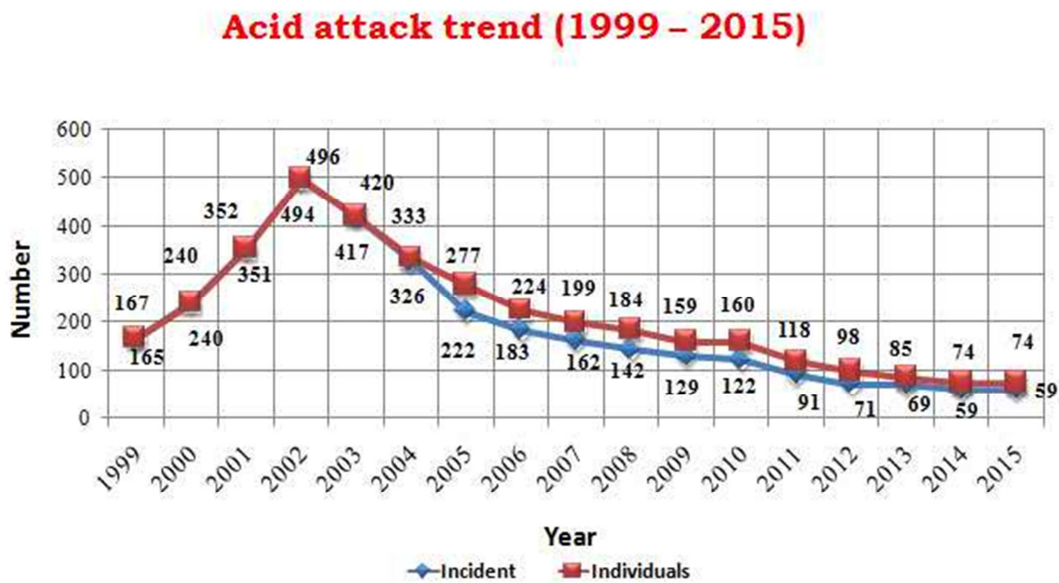


Figure 2. Acid Attack Statistics (1999-2015) [1].

In 2015 total number of Acid victim was 74 including 24 male and others 50 female. Maximum women victim were between 26 to 35 years of age (Table 1).

Table 1. Age group of Acid Victims 2015 [1].

| Age grouping of acid survivors - 2015 | | |
|---------------------------------------|------|--------|
| Age group | Male | Female |
| Under 18 | 1 | 9 |
| 19-25 | 5 | 10 |
| 26-35 | 9 | 17 |
| 36-45 | 3 | 6 |
| 46-55 | 2 | 8 |
| Over 55 | 4 | - |

Table 2 presented that, dowry, family related dispute and property dispute works mostly as motivational factor for Acid attacks.

Table 2. Motivation of Acid Attack 2015 [1].

| Motivation of Acid attack - 2015 | | | |
|----------------------------------|-----|-------|----------|
| Reasons | Man | Woman | Children |
| Dowry | - | 5 | - |
| Family related dispute | 3 | 6 | - |
| Land/property/money dispute | 8 | 8 | - |
| Marital dispute | 1 | 8 | - |
| Refusal/rejection of love | - | 2 | 3 |
| Refusal/rejection of marriage | 1 | 1 | 5 |
| Refusal/rejection of Sex | - | 2 | - |
| Not know | 8 | 6 | - |
| Others | 2 | 3 | 2 |

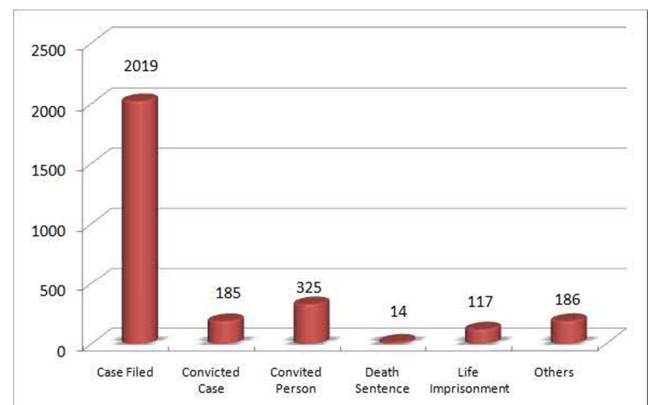


Figure 3. Conviction Status (2002 to October 2015) [1].

It is found that, total 2019 cases were filed to law enforcing agency and court from 2002 to October 2015. Including those only 325 perpetrators had convicted of 185 cases. Among them 14 perpetrator convicted to death sentence and 117 perpetrators had convicted to life time imprisonment (Figure 3).

6. Discussion

Around 90% survivors were victimized before 40 years of age during 1999 to 2015. Of the total, 68% victim of acid attack was women and children and 32% victim was men and boys [1]. Besides, 65% had been living under poverty line and half of them did not study at any level of education. In 2000, the number of acid victim were 234 and the acid attack increased rapidly in the next year and in 2002, it reached at apex where

490 people were attacked by acid throwing. After 2002, the acid attack reduced dramatically and in 2003, it was 411 people and this trend continued up to 2015. In 2015 the number of acid attack was 74 people. A new type of socioeconomic modelling and policy analysis tools such as spatial microsimulation models [31-34] can be useful in these cases to design effective policies and see the governments and NGOs, environmental and spatial effects across different countries [35-39] in South Asia using the galore popular 1/n counselling in social statistics [40-45].

7. Recommendation

To eradicate acid violence, governments must address its root causes: gender inequality and discrimination, the availability of acid, and the impunity of perpetrators. Below we provide concrete recommendations that government and corporations can immediately undertake in an effort to combat acid violence.

7.1. Government Initiatives

In furtherance of their duty to exercise due diligence to prevent acid violence, governments should:

- Enact criminal laws that specifically address acid violence and effectively regulate the production, distribution, use, sale, and handling of acid;
- Effectively enforce and implement laws designed to deter acid violence; and
- Provide victim redress, including compensation for healthcare costs.

7.2. NGOs Initiatives

In furtherance of their emerging duty to exercise due diligence to minimize the negative human rights impacts of their activities, companies that produce, distribute, use, or otherwise handle acid should:

- Assess the ways in which they can reduce the negative human rights impacts of their activities; and
- Support industry and government efforts to regulate the safe-handling, storage, labelling, transfer and disposal of acid by manufacturers, distributors, and other business and individual users of acid in order to deter the unauthorized use of acid.

8. Conclusion

Acid violence is a prohibited form of gender-based violence under national and international law that both reflects discrimination against women and perpetuates it. Even if Acid violence increased at an alarming rate in Bangladesh, by the

passage of time this rate decreased significantly after the initiative of the government of Bangladesh, donors and NGOs. The education and awareness levels of the victims were not reached up to the mark for claiming the rights. Due to unempowered socially and commercially, they had been deprived even from the basic civic amenities and human rights while most of them were lived under the poverty level. So, a collaborative action is badly needed by all the stakeholders to create awareness and enforcing laws to curb these global perils.

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