



## Women Victims of Acid Attack: A Critical Appraisal

**Sumanth S Hiremath\***

*Department of Sociology, Rani Channamma University, Belagavi, Karnataka State, India*

**\*Corresponding Author:** Sumanth S Hiremath, Department of Sociology, Rani Channamma University, Belagavi, Karnataka State, India.

**DOI:** 10.31080/ASWH.2023.05.0488

**Received:** January 17, 2023

**Published:** March 10, 2023

© All rights are reserved by **Sumanth S Hiremath.**

### Abstract

In the 21st century, acid-throwing has become one of society's most barbarous appearances of crime. Acid violence is a heinous crime committed usually against women, intending to harm them. Acid throwing will cause permanent damage to the beauty of a woman and will thus make it difficult for her to lead a normal life in future. A perverse logic behind this could be a man's motive to destroy a woman's face, which she considers to be her fortune. Since acid throwing rarely results in death, the victim has to endure lifelong suffering.

Indian judiciary should provide appropriate compensation to victims. Enforcement of law and justice should work wonders, such that it creates terror in the minds of criminals with strict implementation of stringent punishment of legislation via transparent work by police and judiciary and not be just documented.

**Keywords:** Acid; Violence; Women; Law; Justice; Stringent Punishment

### Introduction

Nowadays, the concept of 'Crime' has been dazzled everywhere. This five-letter word has created so much detrimental in society that often, a question involves who commits such heinous work. Crime is not something Almighty has created; rather, it is the creation of human beings who commit crimes in numerous ways. As the days progresses, offenders are trained in new modernized ways or technologies for committing a crime.

The Sanskrit shloka-

Yatra Naryastu Pujyante Ramante Tatra Devata

Yatrai Tastu Na Pujyante Sarva Statra Phala Kriyah

Which means-

"Where women are honoured, there, the deities are pleased;

but where they are not honoured, no sacred rite yields rewards.

God dwells where women are worshipped".

In India, women are adored as Goddess Lakshmi, Saraswati, and Durga and chant 'Jai Mata di' as soon as a voyage or a journey commences. A nation that believes that Goddesses are most powerful, how ironic is it that the same nation tragically tops the global charts in acid attacks targeting women?

Women are expected to be subordinate to men in all ways. If they try to go ahead of men or decline any of their requests, then the male ego is so fragile it cannot take no for an answer, and the only solution to rejection or jealousy they have is - an acid attack. There was a time when people used acid for household purposes, but now the use of acid has revolutionised its way and is used to the carnage of the life of people. The awful act of attacking women with acid has been stirring across India. Acid-throwing is one of the

most barbarous appearances of crime in society. It is not to say that men have never been a victim of acid attacks, but a majority of the victims of acid attacks are women, according to the National Crime Records Bureau.

### What is acid attack?

An acid attack is also called 'Vitriolage', intended to disfigure, torture or kill. It is an act of throwing acid on another person's body to cause violent assault or to cause humiliation.

### Motives/reasons for acid attack

Due to the easy availability of acid and inexpensive, many people use it as a common cleaning agent in their homes. People easily get hold of it with little effort from pharmacies, automobile shops, etc. In India, since acid attacks generally involve male offenders and female victims, the main cause has been attributed to the patriarchal nature. It makes one wonder what could be the reason behind committing such a heinous crime. A wicked logic behind this could be a man's motive to destroy a woman's face, which she considers her fortune. Acid throwing will cause enduring harm to the beauty of a woman and consequently make it difficult for her to lead a normal life in future. As acid throwing infrequently results in death, the victim has to tolerate lifetime suffering.

Teenage girls are mostly victims of acid attacks because of refusal of love proposals, revenge and family disputes. Rejection by a woman to a man in any matter, whether love or marriage proposal, dowry, or physical favours, has a stubborn and adverse effect on the male egoist mindset. Moreover, this forces a woman to respond in this most harrowing manner, resulting in acid attack cases.

Women's denial to bringing less dowry, inability to bear a child or a boy child, refusal to obey, refusal to have physical contact, suspicion, property disputes, family disagreements, etc. or her vocal nature has been taken as disobedience and rebelled against by her husband or family members, resulting in disturbing and traumatic events. For instance, in the case of Ram Chaittar v/s. the state of U.P., the matter was related to a property dispute, and acid was thrown at their brothers' wife and daughters, resulting in their death.

One of the major causes of throwing acid is if a woman has rejected a marriage proposal or she denies the advances of a male person; it is taken as malice and out of revenge; acid is used on the woman to teach her a lesson. Such people fail to realize that the lesson they are teaching is not momentary but is everlasting; it spoils not only the looks of the woman but also has a devastating effect on her life. Moreover, in some cases, to shield and safeguard the honour of the family, people have resorted to using acid to forbid women from retaliating against the accepted norms and ethnicities of the family.

The motives behind acid attacks may be due to cultural, situational or personal. It might be gender or economic issues, class-based inequalities, or the culture of revenge. Jealousy is a critical factor that has resulted in such dreadful occasions. In the competitive world, people want to excel and be ahead in business, corporate, education, etc. Further, most people do not wish to see women improve their societal status. It is an affair of embarrassment and disgrace that such incidents have occurred because of absolute envy. Such acid attacks have been employed to bring a jerk and halt to women's bright and prosperous careers. Men have always dominated women in India. Women are given secondary positions and cannot take even minor decisions. One foot is chained with societal dogmas, and the other is set free, visible to the world, giving it the name of women empowerment. However, the fact is that they need to be given complete freedom.

### Impact and consequences of acid attacks

The attackers have a preconceived impression that beauty is the most important feature of being a woman. Thus, the attackers' plan to destroy women's beauty is aimed at the face of the victim and also at a woman's private parts. The consequences of an acid attack on the victim's body, mind, confidence and social life are long-lasting and break the victim from the inside.

An acid attack tends to inflict severe physical and psychological injuries that may be temporary or permanent. It damages the body and causes disfigurement of the face and internal organs, leading to long-lasting complications for the victim. The impact that follows after a victim is injured by acid is everlasting. The person's appearance becomes so dreadful and frightful that victims become social outcasts, either by society or by themselves. Many acid

attack victims are forced to give up their education and occupation and carry out normal activities due to their physical appearance or physical disabilities. There is always a sense of nervousness and sneering from the people around them. The victims lose the chance of getting married due to blindness, deafness etc., and the mindset of society is not that open to accepting a disabled woman as their wife.

On the other hand, society is also hesitant to accept such victims and avoid their company with disgraceful feelings. Apart from severe and immediate physical damages, the acid attack has devastating psychological effects. It leaves the survivors terrified, insecure and psychologically distressed; they lose their self-esteem. Gradually, it builds so much of an inferiority complex in the victims that they shun away from society.

Acid attack rarely kills but causes severe physical, psychological and social scarring. The victims face psychological effects like trauma, stress, frustration, fear, and suicidal plans. The psychological consequences are adverse in many instances rendering the survivors mentally retarded. Their family and relatives ignore them; taunt them about their condition, which leads to humiliation. The victims are traumatized and forced to live a life of seclusion in the family and community. The long-lasting psychological effect on the victim makes it very difficult for them to return to their normal routine.

### Measures to combat acid attacks

The cheap availability of acid has made it a potent weapon in the hands of the offender. Acid is utilized in numerous industries and factories and experimented with in laboratories; it is impossible to ban its sales completely. In India, people use acid as a toilet cleaner, which is available for fewer prices per litre. Acid is easy to carry, and one may use a bottle, jar, beaker, jug or even water gun to throw it from a distance. It looks like water, so it can be carried around without arousing suspicion. It is silent and does not create any sound except in water-splashed cases.

The best way to end acid violence is to prevent it from happening in the first place by addressing its root causes. Education is decisive in preventing acid attacks against women and girls. Prevention should start early socialization by educating and sensing with

young boys and girls, promoting respectful relationships and gender equality. Societal support is essential to normalize the lives of acid attack victim-survivors. Likewise, parental and family support can help recover from the traumatic incidents of acid attack, which greatly helps mental and physical well-being.

Quality research is needed to evidence the need for change as it would help to understand the causes and effects of acid violence. It helps in identifying practical and feasible policy solutions. It enables consensus in favour of the change, particularly in persuading policy-makers to change policies, laws or implementation.

After an acid attack, many patients suffer from changes in life perspective, behaviour, feelings, social withdrawal, social isolation, and depression. Formal and informal social support is vital for restoring acid burn victims' proper and complete rehabilitation and developing positive feelings. The government should form separate public help centres for such victims. However, the need of the hour is the invention of proper legislation to prevent this heinous crime. The regulation of acid sales is an absolute must to avoid falling into criminal hands. Acid attacks can be eliminated from society by imposing strict punishment on perpetrators and improving the country's judicial system. The government, media and private agencies can play a positive role in eradicating acid attacks. Awareness needs to be created among women about the Acid Control Act and the Acid Prevention Act of 2010.

### To sum up

The rising number of acid attack cases in India makes every girl and woman shiver with fear when leaving the safe vicinity of the home. It makes them arrest their mind for thinking or deciding freely as they never know who will throw acid on them by someone who cannot digest women's freedom. We know many victims suffer from changes in life perspective, behaviour, feelings, social withdrawal, social isolation, and depression. Public hospitals must be equipped with proper tools and services for rehabilitation [1-17].

There is a need to raise a general awareness campaign for the general public to inform the citizens of their rights as a victim. Perpetrators of acid attacks must be tracked down and brought to justice on a priority basis. The government needs to formulate solid policies and rules to help the victims recover from traumatic

situations and prevent such accidents. The Supreme Court of India suggests a special agency to lead the victim's case and provide justice. The criminal justice system must take seriously stringent punishment that creates terror in the minds of criminals. Enforcement of law and justice should work wonders in such situations by strict implementation of legislation via transparent work by police and judiciary and not be just documented.

Women are the most beautiful and interesting creations in this world.

They must be adored and respected at the same time.

### Bibliography

1. Ghosh S and Sen S. "Data/where does India stand in the global gender gap index?" *The Hindu* (2020).
2. Gupta P. "India is failing acid attack survivors, here is the data". *She the people* (2020).
3. Karlamangla S. "Column one: This cafe in India is fully run by acid attack survivors". *Los Angeles Times* (2019).
4. Kaur N. "Acid attacks on women in India a socio legal study with special reference to Delhi". *Shodhganga* (2018).
5. Ministry of Home Affairs. "Advisory on expediting cases of acid attack on women" (2015).
6. Paul G Cassell., et al. "Crime victims' rights during criminal investigations? Applying the crime victims' rights act before criminal charges are filed". *Journal of Criminal Law and Criminology* 59 (2014).
7. Ranjot Singh. "Expanding horizons of restorative justice in acid attacks in India: An analytical study". Dissertation, for the award of LL.M., submitted to the Lovely Professional University, Phagwara. India (2017).
8. Roopali Mohan. "Hidden face does not imply silence – Acid attacks as infraction of human rights". 6.2 NULJ 67 (2017).
9. Se Kwang Oh., et al. "How Can Humans be Damaged from Sulfuric Acid?". *Journal of Clinical Toxicology* (2017).
10. SS Mangrulkar. "Compensation to crime victim in India- A tool of Restorative Justice". 2 (2017).
11. Kumar Vidhik. "Acid Attacks in India: A Socio-Legal Report". *Dignity: A Journal on Sexual Exploitation and Violence* 6.1 (2021): 5.
12. <http://delhi.gov.in>
13. <http://lawcommissionofindia.nic.in>
14. <https://feminisminindia.com>
15. <https://scroll.in/>
16. <https://www.hrw.org/news>
17. <https://www.omicsonline.org>