

# The history of acid throwing criminology essay



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It is defined as the act of throwing acid onto the body of a person with the objective of injuring or disfiguring out of jealousy or revenge. Perpetrators of these attacks throw acid at their victims, usually at their faces, burning them, and damaging skin tissue, often exposing and sometimes dissolving the bones. The long term consequences of these attacks include blindness and permanent scarring of the face and body.

These attacks are most common in Cambodia, Afghanistan, India, Bangladesh, and Pakistan and other nearby countries. Globally, at least 1500 people in 20 countries are attacked in this way yearly, 80% of whom are female and somewhere between 40% and 70% under 18 years of age.

## **ATTACKS IN SOUTH ASIA**

In South Asia, acid throwing attacks have been used as a form of revenge for refusal of sexual advances, proposals of marriage and demands for dowry. Scholars Taru Bahl and M. H. Syed say that land disputes are another leading cause.

## **AFGHANISTAN**

In Afghanistan in November 2008, extremists subjected schoolgirls to acid attacks for attending school. Attacks or threats of attacks on women who failed to wear hijab or were otherwise “immodestly dressed” have been reported in Afghanistan.

## **BANGLADESH**

In Bangladesh, where such attacks are relatively common, they are mostly a form of domestic violence. The Acid Survivors Foundation counted 91 attacks in Bangladesh in 2011. The chemical agents most commonly used to commit

these attacks are hydrochloric acid and sulfuric acid. According to Mridula Bandyopadhyay and Mahmuda Rahman Khan, it is a form of violence primarily targeted at women. They describe it as a relatively recent form of violence, with the earliest record in Bangladesh from 1983. The scholar Afroza Anwary points out that acid violence occurs not only in Bangladesh but also in Pakistan, China, and Ethiopia and has occurred historically in Europe.

## **CAMBODIA**

In Cambodia, it was reported that these attacks were mostly carried out by wives against their husbands' lovers.

## **GAZA**

In 2006 a group in Gaza calling itself "Just Swords of Islam" claimed to have thrown acid at a young woman who was dressed "immodestly," and warned other women to wear the hijab.

## **INDIA**

The Thomas Reuters Foundation survey says that India is the fourth most dangerous place in the world for women to live in as women belonging to any class, caste or creed and religion can be victims of this cruel form of violence and disfigurement, a premeditated crime intended to kill or maim her permanently and act as a lesson to put her in her place. In India, acid attacks on women who dared to refuse a man's proposal of marriage or asked for a divorce are a form of revenge. Acid is cheap and easily available and is the quickest way to destroy a woman's life. The numbers of acid attacks have been rising in India and there have been 68 reported acid

attacks in the state of Karnataka since 1999. Most of the female victims suffer more because of police apathy in dealing with cases of harassment as that of a safety issue as they refused to register a police case despite the victim being attacked thrice before meriting police aid after an acid attack. One such incident would be Sonali Mukherjee's case where the perpetrators were granted bail after being sentenced to nine years of Jail. Thereafter, when her family approached High Court, all the legislators, and MPs in search of justice, all she got in return was assurances and "nothing else". The perpetrators got away scot-free.

Indian acid attack survivor Shirin Juwaley founded Palash Foundation to help other survivors with "psycho-social rehabilitation". She also spearheads research into social norms of beauty, speaks publicly, and blogs regularly at Do I Look 'Normal'? In 2011, the principal of an Indian college refused to have Juwaley speak at her school for fear that Juwaley's story of being attacked by her husband would make students "become scared of marriage". Tom O'Neill of National Geographic reported that acid throwing is also used to enforce the caste system in modern India.

## **PAKISTAN**

According to New York Times reporter Nicholas D. Kristof, acid attacks are at an all time high in Pakistan and increasing every year. The Pakistani attacks he describes are typically the work of husbands against their wives who have "dishonored them".

According to another New York Times article, in 2011 there have been counted 150 acid attacks, after 65 in 2010.

## **LEGISLATION**

In 2002, Bangladesh introduced the death penalty for throwing acid and laws strictly controlling the sale, use, storage, and international trade of acids.

The acids are used in traditional trades carving marble nameplates, conch bangles, goldsmiths, tanneries, and other industries, which have largely failed to comply with the legislation, derided by Salma Ali of the Bangladesh National Women Lawyers' Association as a “dead law”. Under the Qisas law of Pakistan, the perpetrator may suffer the same fate as the victim, and may be punished by having drops of acid placed in his/her eyes. This law is not binding and is rarely enforced according to a New York Times report.

According to Afshin Molavi, in the early years of the revolution, and following the mandating of the covering of hair by women in Iran, some woman were threatened with an acid attack by the Islamic vigilantes for wearing a Hijab. Today, Iran has had several laws against acid attacks which is treated as a capital offense, and sentenced an attacker to be blinded in 2008. However, as of July 31, 2011, Ameneh Bahrami pardoned her attacker, thereby absolving Majid Movahedi of his crime and halting the retributive justice of Qisas.

Lower House of Parliament in Pakistan unanimously passed the Acid Control and Acid Crime Prevention Bill On May 10, 2011. As punishment, according to the bill individuals held responsible for acid throwing face harsh fines and life in prison. Over the past few years, acid throwing has been recognized by many countries as one of the latest and most excruciating forms of violence committed against women.

## **STATISTICS**

Acid violence remains under-reported but scores of women are victimized by this brutal act in South Asia every year.

The United Nations defines violence against women as ‘ any act of gender-based violence that results in physical, sexual or mental harm or suffering to women.’ Throwing acid on a woman is by far the cruelest form of abusing a person, leaving the individual paralyzed and psychologically unable to face society confidently again.

An acid attack is a deliberate act of throwing acid on a victim, mostly women, usually on the face that causes severe pain, permanent disfigurement, subsequent infections and often blindness in one or both eyes. The chemical agents most commonly used to commit these attacks are hydrochloric and sulfuric acid. The attacker commits acid attacks for a number of reasons, including revenge for refusal of a marriage proposal or other romantic or sexual advances; land disputes; perceived dishonor; and jealousy. Valerie Khan, Director, Acid Survivors Foundation (ASF) says, “ 60 % of these attacks occur as the epitome of an already existing cycle of violence.” While acid attacks are most prevalent in Bangladesh, Cambodia, India and Pakistan, they have also been widely reported in Afghanistan and in parts of Africa and Europe.

In Pakistan, approximately only 30% of acid cases are reported. Exact statistics on acid attacks in Pakistan are not available but roughly around 200 acid attacks take place in Pakistan every year; at least 9000 acid attacks were reported between 1994 and 2011, according to data compiled by the

Progressive Women's Association (PWA). A weak judicial system and lack of support from the police is partly to be blamed for the under reporting of such cases. Another major reason is that the victim's families reach out of court settlements due to financial pressure, which prevents the compilation of any official statistics.

Acid attacks, a leading act of domestic violence, are common for a number of reasons. Acid is readily available not only in major cities but also in small towns across rural areas, costing less than Rs 100 a liter and is often used for household cleaning or for cotton processing in rural areas. Shopkeepers are unaware of any regulatory requirement concerning the sales and anyone can purchase an unlimited amount without question.

An important precaution, one that many are unaware of, is that the victims of acid burn should quickly douse themselves with water, for at least 30 minutes as it is important to neutralize the severity of the acid as quickly as possible. Given the limited medical care facilities available in Pakistan, this might be the victim's only chance to reduce the severity of the attack.

In other South Asian countries, the government has also taken a proactive approach to the crime. In 2002, Bangladesh introduced the death penalty for throwing acid and implemented laws strictly controlling the sales of acids. In 2011, Pakistan passed a law in the form of Acid Control and Acid Crime Prevention Bill that established tougher penalties for an acid-attack conviction — 14 years to life behind bars and a fine of up to \$11, 000.

But women's rights activists are demanding greater regulation of the sale and distribution of acid to prevent these attacks. Better rehabilitation

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services are also crucial for victims so they can rebuild their lives. After an attack, the victim faces physical challenges, which require long-term surgical treatment, as well as psychological challenges, which demand in-depth counseling from psychologists at each stage of physical recovery

Reports of acid burn cases are alarmingly on the rise but legislation to counter this remains wanting. Many hope that Sharmeen Obaid-Chinoy's Oscar winning film, " Saving Face," exploring acid-attacks, will bring the much needed pressure to transform the Acid Control and Acid Crime Prevention Bill into action.

Every year, scores of Pakistani women are disfigured in acid attacks, usually at the hands of husbands or relatives. The attacks, often brought on by fits of jealousy or rage, go largely ignored and are rarely prosecuted. Only in the last decade, has the media increased coverage of such social issues.

The use of acid as a weapon has deep roots in Pakistani society. Short of murder, an acid attack is the most devastating form of aggression, transforming the victim into a figure of horror and an outcast. If this is not the time to do something about this atrocious act of violence, then one wonders if there ever will be a right time.

## **VICTIMS AND TREATMENT**

Brutality of the damage depends on the concentration of the acid and the period of time before the acid is thoroughly washed off with water or neutralized with a neutralizing agent. The acid can rapidly eat away skin, the layer of fat beneath the skin, and in some cases even the underlying bone. Eyelids and lips may be completely destroyed, the nose and ears severely

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damaged. According to the Acid Survivor's Foundation in Pakistan, there is a high survival rate amongst victims of acid attacks. Consequently the victim is faced with physical challenges, which require long term surgical treatment, as well as psychological challenges, which require in-depth intervention from psychologists and counselors at each stage of physical recovery.

In Bangladesh, the Acid Survivors Foundation, Nairpokkho, Action Aid, and the Bangladesh Rural Advancement Committee's Community Empowerment & Strengthening Local Institutions Programmed assist survivors in Bangladesh. The Acid Survivors Foundation in Pakistan operates in Islamabad offering medical, psychological and rehabilitation support. The Acid Survivors Foundation in Uganda operates in Kampala and also provides counseling and rehabilitation treatment to victims of acid attacks, as well as their families if need be. Additionally in Cambodia, LICADHO, the Association of the Blind in Cambodia and the Cambodian Acid Survivors Charity all assist survivors of acid attacks. The Acid Survivors Trust International provides specialist support to its sister organizations in Africa and Asia through its specialist team who work across the organizations transferring medical, psychological and social rehabilitation skills whilst supporting knowledge sharing and best practice.

## **CONCLUSIONS**

An acid attack involves the premeditated throwing of acid on a victim, usually on her face. In addition to causing psychological trauma, acid attacks result in severe pain, permanent disfigurement, subsequent infections, and often blindness in one or both eyes. Perpetrators commit acid attacks for a number of reasons, including revenge for refusal of a marriage proposal or

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other romantic or sexual advances; land disputes; perceived dishonor; and jealousy. While acid attacks are most prevalent in Bangladesh, Cambodia, India and Pakistan, they have also been reported in Afghanistan and in parts of Africa and Europe. Experts attribute the prevalence of the practice in part to the easy availability of acids.