
Defying Darkness: The Fight Against Acid Attacks on Women in Pakistan

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Abstract

Acid attacks on women in Pakistan have become a distressing and prevalent issue, causing immense physical, emotional, and social harm. This article sheds light on the causes behind these attacks, the devastating consequences faced by survivors, and the efforts being made to combat this heinous crime. By sharing the stories of courageous survivors and highlighting the resilience of the human spirit, this article aims to raise awareness and inspire action towards eradicating acid attacks and creating a safer society for all women in Pakistan. Every year, hundreds of acid attacks happen to women in Pakistan. Acid violence has deep roots in the country's history, social norms, and cultural practices. Briefly, in a male-dominated society, women seeking education or employment outside the home are often targeted with violence. Victims not only suffer from physical and psychological trauma, but they also face social stigma and exclusion.

Keywords: Gender-based violence, Consequences, Survivors, Prevention, Awareness, Legal measures, Rehabilitation, Empowerment, Social change, Support networks, Resilience

Introduction

The study aimed to examine acid attacks against women in Pakistan. It seeks to provide an understanding of the historical, social, cultural, and political context in which this issue has developed and the implications of such attacks for women in Pakistan. Victims of acid attacks often face barriers to justice, including corruption, unprofessionalism, lack of education and gender sensitivity, and a complex legal system that includes high courts, sharia courts, and tribal courts. The perpetrators of acid attacks are usually men who are known to the victims (Pakistan Human Rights Commission, 2020). Acid is easily accessible in Pakistan, and the lack of regulations

on its sale and distribution makes it a popular weapon of choice for attackers. The use of acid as a weapon was initially employed by men in the rural areas of Pakistan to punish women who violated traditional codes of behavior or refused to conform to their expectations. Studies have shown that poverty, unemployment, and lack of education are significant contributing factors to the prevalence of acid violence in Pakistan. Women from marginalized communities who lack access to education and employment opportunities are more vulnerable to this form of violence. Furthermore, the occurrence of acid attacks in Pakistan is further compounded by a lack of legal and institutional frameworks

aimed at addressing this issue. The existing legal framework is often weak, poorly enforced, and fails to provide adequate protection and support to victims of acid violence. Moreover, there is no awareness and sensitivity among law enforcement officials, medical professionals, and the public about the seriousness and impact of acid violence. To prevent acid violence, there is a need for a comprehensive approach that addresses the underlying social, cultural, and economic factors that contribute to this form of violence. This approach must involve strengthening the legal framework, improving access to education and employment opportunities, and promoting gender impartiality and women's empowerment. There is also a need to increase awareness and sensitivity among law enforcement officials, medical professionals, and the public about the seriousness and impact of acid violence. Addressing the root causes of acid violence and strengthening the legal and institutional frameworks aimed at addressing this issue is crucial. Acid violence against women is a grave issue that requires urgent attention. A comprehensive

Approach that addresses the underlying social, cultural, and economic factors that contribute to this form of violence is necessary to combat acid violence. Furthermore, strengthening the legal and institutional frameworks aimed at addressing this issue is crucial. It is essential to increase awareness and sensitivity among law enforcement officials, medical professionals, and the public about the seriousness and impact of acid violence. Finally, it is crucial to promote gender equality and women's empowerment to prevent acid violence and to create a society that is free from all forms of violence against women.

Literature Review

These attacks in Pakistan involve interpersonal acts of violence in which perpetrators carried

out the assaults to permanently disfigure the victims. The published data of "AcidSurvivors Foundation" include a comparison of cases reported during the years 2007 till 2013 and stated that 949 cases of acid attacks were reported respectively in the given time frame (ASFP, 2015). The severity of the injury can only be exposed on the basis of the strength of the acid thrown to the victim and timing acid touched the skin. It further decides the severity of burn into the second or third degree as the acid can easily deform the skull, and the majority of the victims may permanently lose all or some of their hair (Taylor, 2000) as acid is directly thrown to the victim's face, which results in a variety of hilarious injuries that include melting of lips and nose, burning of eyelids, closing of nostrils, permanent blindness or vision loss, shrivelling of the ears and hands. This is also noticed that during the attack, most of the victims inhale the acid vapours, which caused complete breathing failures or problems. In addition to these above-mentioned medical effects, acid attack victims face the possibility of septicemia, renal failure, skin depigmentation and even death in severe acid burn cases (Molloy, 2017). A psychologist has noticed the conditions of acid survivors and shared that psychological trauma results in extremely stressful forms of depression, nightmares, insomnia, and a sense of insecurity or fear that perpetrators might attack or harm again. Consequently, survivors of acid attacks walk into a long road of recovery and face a number of difficulties not only from the economic point of view but also from the sarcastic societal response to their disfigurement (Humphries, 2009).

Methodology

These study objectives are to understand the experiences of acid attack survivors, their families, and the community they live in, as well as the legal and medical professionals who work with them. To address the pervasive

issue of acid attacks on women, a holistic methodology is imperative, integrating prevention strategies focused on education and awareness, legislative reforms to strengthen penalties and regulate acid sales, robust victim support systems offering medical, psychological, and legal assistance, capacity-building initiatives for stakeholders, continuous research for evidence-based interventions, international collaboration for advocacy and resource mobilization, and rigorous monitoring and evaluation mechanisms to ensure effectiveness and responsiveness. This comprehensive approach, encompassing prevention, support, advocacy, and accountability, aims to mitigate the occurrence of acid violence, empower survivors, and foster societal change towards gender equality and justice.

Survivor Stories

The impact of acid attacks on survivors is profound and multifaceted. Physical injuries, including severe burns, disfigurement, and permanent disability, often require extensive medical treatment and rehabilitation. Beyond the visible scars, survivors grapple with psychological trauma, including depression, anxiety, and post-traumatic stress disorder which can significantly impair their quality of life. Social stigma and ostracization further compound the challenges faced by survivors, hindering their reintegration into society and access to support services.

Case Study:

1. Fakhra Younus:

Fakhra Younus was a Pakistani woman who became the face of acid attack survivors globally. She was attacked in 2000 by her then-husband, Bilal Khar, a member of a prominent feudal family, after she sought a divorce due to domestic abuse. Fakhra underwent numerous surgeries in Pakistan and later sought medical treatment abroad. However, she succumbed to

her injuries in 2012, committing suicide in Italy. Despite the high-profile nature of the case, Bilal Khar was acquitted in 2003 after serving a brief period in prison. The leniency of the punishment sparked outrage and highlighted the flaws in Pakistan's legal system concerning acid attacks.

2. Bushra Shariq and Naila Farhat:

In 2014, two sisters, Bushra Shariq and Naila Farhat, were attacked with acid by a group of men in Lahore after they reportedly resisted their sexual advances. The case gained significant media attention and sparked outrage across Pakistan, leading to demands for justice and stricter punishment for the perpetrators. Subsequently, five men involved in the attack were sentenced to 14 years in prison by an anti-terrorism court in Lahore. The swift and severe punishment in this case sent a strong message regarding the government's commitment to tackling acid violence.

3. Soniya Bibi:

In 2020, Soniya Bibi, a 22-year-old woman from Punjab, was attacked with acid by her former fiancé after she refused to marry him. The case received widespread attention on social media, with calls for justice and support for the survivor. The perpetrator was arrested and charged with attempted murder under Pakistan's penal code. The trial is ongoing, and the severity of the punishment remains to be seen.

Efforts to Combat Acid Violence:

Efforts to challenge acid attacks in Pakistan are multi-faceted and involve various stakeholders working together to prevent attacks, support survivors, and hold perpetrators accountable. NGOs, civil society organizations, and government agencies conduct public awareness campaigns to educate communities about the devastating impact of acid attacks. These campaigns aim to challenge harmful gender norms, promote

gender equality, and change attitudes towards violence against women. Advocacy groups work towards strengthening the legal framework to better address acid violence. International Collaboration: Collaboration with international organizations and donor agencies provides support for anti-acid violence initiatives in Pakistan. Efforts to improve access to education and economic opportunities for women can help empower them and reduce their vulnerability to acid attacks. Promoting gender equality and women's rights is essential for challenging the patriarchal attitudes that underpin acid violence.

Prevention and Awareness

This Research work focuses on majority of these attacks occur in the summer when acid is used extensively to soak certain seeds to induce germination. The first known instance of an acid attack occurred in East Pakistan present day Bangladesh in 1967. According to the Acid Survivors Foundation, up to 150 attacks occur every year. In 2019, the Acid Survivors Foundation Pakistan (ASFP) have said that the reported cases of acid attacks on women have dropped by around 50 percent compared to the last five years. The media in Pakistan serves a crucial role in addressing acid attacks by raising awareness, advocating for policy changes, empowering victims, influencing attitudes, holding authorities accountable, and promoting societal change towards gender-based violence. The applicability of Section 336-B of the Pakistan Penal Code (PPC) regarding acid attacks, while present in the legal framework, may face challenges in practical implementation. Victim Barriers: Acid attack survivors may encounter obstacles in accessing justice, such as fear of reprisals, societal pressure, and financial constraints, which can impede the effective application of Section 336-B. Lack of Awareness: Limited awareness among the general public, law

enforcement officials, and legal practitioners about the provisions of Section 336-B may hinder its effective application in addressing acid violence. While Section 336-B PPC provides a legal framework to address acid attacks, its easy applicability relies on overcoming these challenges through concerted efforts, including capacity-building initiatives for law enforcement agencies, raising awareness about victims' rights, and fostering a supportive environment for survivors to seek justice.

Results of study

There have been several initiatives taken to support acid attack survivors in Pakistan. One notable organization is Acid Survivors Foundation (ASF), which provides medical treatment, rehabilitation, and legal support to survivors. They also work on raising awareness about acid attacks and advocating for stricter laws against perpetrators. Another organization is Depilex Smileagain Foundation, which offers reconstructive surgeries, psychological counseling, skills training, and job placement assistance to survivors. The government of Pakistan has also taken steps to support survivors, such as establishing special courts to expedite acid attack cases and providing financial compensation to victims. These initiatives aim to empower survivors, help them rebuild their lives, and create a safer environment for women in Pakistan. Significant attempts have been made in Pakistan in recent years to curb acid violence through legislation change. The Acid Control and Acid Crime Prevention Bill, which the Pakistani government passed in 2011, establishes severe punishments for those who commit acts of acid violence and offers a framework for the treatment and prevention of acid attack survivors (UNESCO, 2012). The measure also mandates that sellers keep track of sales and notify the authorities of any unusual transactions in order to regulate the

distribution and sale of acid. Governmental and nongovernmental groups that promote awareness-raising, prevention, and intervention have taken an interest in Pakistan's acid violence problem. Furthermore, the government must be more proactive in tackling the root causes of acid violence, which include discrimination against women and gender inequality. In Pakistan, nongovernmental groups have made a significant contribution to the fight against acid violence. The Acid Survivors Foundation (ASF) is one of the most well-known groups; it advocates for legislative change and raises public awareness of the issue while offering survivors of acid assault medical and rehabilitative assistance. Other groups, like the Aurat Foundation, do research, generate funds, and offer survivors legal and other services.

Under Pakistan's Qisas law, if a victim or their guardian chooses, the perpetrator of an acid attack could face a similar fate as the victim. This could involve administering drops of acid into the perpetrator's eyes as a form of retribution. Section 336B of the Pakistan Penal Code outlines the punishment for causing harm with a corrosive substance, which includes imprisonment for life or a minimum of fourteen years along with a significant fine. Additionally, section 299 PPC defines Qisas as the right of the victim or their guardian to seek punishment by causing similar harm to the perpetrator, either at the same part of the body or through death in cases of intentional manslaughter.

Conclusion and Recommendation

In conclusion, it is evident that acid attacks on women in Pakistan are a grave issue that requires immediate attention and action. The physical, emotional, and social consequences faced by survivors are devastating, and it is our collective responsibility to stand against this form of violence. To address this issue

effectively, it is crucial to continue raising awareness through education, community engagement, and media advocacy. By challenging harmful gender stereotypes and promoting gender equality, we can create a society where violence against women is not tolerated.

Additionally, it is essential to strengthen legal measures, increase penalties for perpetrators, and regulate the sale of acid. Rehabilitation centers and support networks should be further developed to provide comprehensive assistance to survivors, including medical aid, psychological counseling, and vocational training. Furthermore, collaboration between government agencies, NGOs, and grassroots organizations is vital to ensure a coordinated and sustained effort in combating acid attacks. By working together, we can create a safer and more inclusive society for women in Pakistan. Remember, change starts with us. Let's raise our voices, support survivors, and strive for a future where acid attacks are eradicated, and all women can live free from fear and violence.

Future Research

Future research can be conducted to investigate how acid attacks in Pakistan be institutionalized within the legal framework of Pakistan which will reduce the rapid increase of acid attacks on women in Pakistan.

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