What is acid attack?

Acid violence is a vicious and one of the worst forms of gender-based violence attributed to a combination of three inter-related factors: gender inequality and discrimination in a predominantly patriarchal social structure; easy availability of acid; and deficit in effectively punishing the perpetrators.

Acid violence is a heinous act of burning, deformation and destruction of the face and other parts of the body of the victims, often causing disabilities and deaths by throwing acid as a means of revenge for resisting sexual harassment, refusing marriage proposal, or failure to pay dowry, etc. Acid violence is a form of vengeance for other types of social conflicts like dispute over land or other properties between families, neighbourhood conflicts or even political rivalry, in most cases the women, young and adolescent girls and the girl child are the victims. It is a criminal act having huge psychological and moral breakdown as well as a deep sense of insecurity of the survivors.
Consequences of acid attack

Acid is highly corrosive chemical has a catastrophic effect on human flesh. It causes the skin tissue to melt, often exposing the bones, sometimes even dissolving the bone. When acid attacks the eyes, it damages them permanently. Many acid attack survivors have lost the use of one or both eyes.

But the scars left by acid are not just skin deep. Many survivors suffer from psychological breakdown including identity crisis because of their lost and distorted appearance. Most stop their education or work during the lengthy recovery period or beyond, due to disfigurement. Survivors often face social isolation which further damage their self esteem and socioeconomic status, even position in their own family. An unmarried woman attacked with acid is very unlikely to get married ever.

The acid survivor is not the only one affected. Parents, siblings and other relatives often incur a huge economic, social and psychological burden in caring for the survivor. Instances were reported where families sold their land and assets to pay for medical care. Many are forced to leave their house and village, due to fear of safety, especially fear of retaliation against legal action.

In the cases, where victims are children or adolescents, special physical and psycho-social supports are needed for them as they grow and mature with these incurable scars. In the worst type of acid violence when a daughter is attacked by her father she may completely lose trust in men and in all forms of human relationship including marriage.

You can help

It would not have been possible for ASF to be where it stands today without the generous support of the Government, international donors, corporate bodies, and individuals like you!

You can make a real difference by becoming a friend of the Acid Survivors Foundation. Besides financial and material contribution to support the work of the Foundation, you can dedicate your support to an individual survivor directly by sponsoring her treatment, education or vocational training or establishment of an income generating schemes which will allow her to live an independent and self-reliant life with dignity, equality and honour.

All donations and contributions to ASF are subject to stringent financial control, fully transparent reporting and independent audit.

Help the acid survivors - join hand in hand with the indomitable courage...

For further information please contact at

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The reason for acid attack

Acid violence reflects gender inequality and discrimination in society. Often acid attacks are perpetrated against women because they transgress conventional norms that relegate women to subordinate positions. Indeed, a significant portion of attacks occur when a woman exercises decision-making power by rejecting a marriage or “love” proposal. Acid attackers aim for a woman’s face in an attempt to destroy what many members of society consider to be one of her most important assets—her beauty.

Majority of female victims are between 13 to 35 years of age. Most acid attacks are perpetrated by the people known to the victims and the attacks are often triggered by refusal to sexual advances or marriage proposals or failure to pay dowry or by land disputes.

Historically, a vast majority of attacks are against women, with 99% of the perpetrators being men. In recent years there has been an increase in crimes staged against men too, mostly related to the disputes over land and other property.

One fourth of the reported victims are children. There were reports that father showered his own daughter with acid as he wanted a boy child. Sometimes, children get hurt as they stay close to the main targets (mothers).

The Acid Survivors Foundation (ASF)

Acid Survivors Foundation (ASF) is a centre of excellence with a vision of Bangladesh free from acid violence, where burn victims, especially women and children, live with dignity.

It is an independent, non-government, non-profit organization, set up as a Trust and registered with the NGO Affairs Bureau of the Government of Bangladesh. It is the only specialized NGO in Bangladesh working to prevent acid and burn violence; empower survivors, especially women and children; and campaign for prevention and elimination of this violence. ASF works with an integrated approach, using a holistic (bio-psycho-social) multi-stakeholder approach backed by research, experience and evidence.

Acid violence takes place in many societies but very few have faced it head on. Before late nineties acid throwing was not recognized as a form of violence against women in Bangladesh too, until the Acid Survivors Foundation (ASF) was set up on 12 May 1999 as the first organization to challenge this scourge. Since then ASF has emerged as a global pioneer in tackling the problem of acid violence.
Major achievements of ASF

The work of ASF has been recognized by the international bodies like Buckingham Palace, Amnesty International, World Health Organisation (WHO), Americans for UNFPA (the United Nations Population Fund), UN Human Rights Council and the World’s Children’s Prize Foundation which is considered as children’s Nobel Prize.

Seeing the success of Bangladesh many country like Pakistan, India, Nepal, Cambodia and Uganda have also taken similar initiatives to combat acid violence.

ASF runs a 20-bed licensed hospital specialized for acid and burn violence victims, which is fully equipped for standard burn care services including plastic and reconstructive surgery, though in a very low-resource set up. Since an overwhelming majority of the victims are impoverished, the ASF Hospital offers completely free services benefiting around 700 acid victims annually (including survivors from previous years).

ASF has provided treatment, education and rehabilitation opportunities to a large number of survivors. Many victims are now professionally active in ASF itself and beyond. Survivors are represented in the governing body of ASF. They are now in leading positions in ASF management and program implementation. ASF has also transformed many ‘survivors’ into ‘survivor ambassadors’ who function as a platform for a collective voice to demand justice, protect rights, and act as an agent for prevention and integration into family and the society. Victims of an acid attack living in remote rural places now have access to psychosocial support from these ‘survivor ambassadors’.

ASF’s rights-based campaign has led to many unprecedented institutional and policy reforms. Thanks to ASF’s persistent efforts, Bangladesh is the only country to have enacted two laws in 2002—one that heightens criminal penalties and improves criminal procedures and another that controls the availability of acid. In order to implement these laws effectively, ASF works with the National Acid Control Council of the Government, the highest level inter ministerial body and its district committees. The National Acid Control Council and the Social Welfare Ministry have created a special fund to compensate the medical, legal and rehabilitation costs. However, survivors’ access to these resources is still insignificant. As such ASF’s role to advocate meeting the needs of each survivor remains as continuous process.

ASF’s multi-dimensional and multi-stakeholder prevention campaign has contributed to significant reduction of the number of acid attacks over the years. Before the ASF prevention campaign started in 2002, there were over 500 recorded attacks. In 2010 the number decreased to around 153, which nevertheless remains a grave concern with one attack in every two and half days. The challenge is to sustain the downward trend and eliminate this violence of unspeakable nature.