EDITORIAL

The nature of acid violence is such that it leaves its victims both physically and psychologically damaged, meaning the need for psychological and/or psychosocial support is as much as the victims’ need for medical and physical support. However, the availability of psychosocial support in Bangladesh does not meet the existing demand.

Whenever survivors of acid violence with severe disfigurements look at themselves, or present themselves in front of the society they are faced with trauma, whether it is due to the recollection of the violent experience or due to the inability of accepting themselves with their disfigurements. This often leads to such immense mental pressure that they are unable to return to their normal lifestyles and are left feeling hopeless, doubtful and as though they are a burden to society. These feelings are reinforced and heightened when survivors try to return to their families, communities, workplaces and/or education institutions and are faced with all sorts of problems, which leave them feeling discouraged and with a sense of bitterness towards life. This in turn results in the loss of survivors’ inner potential for livelihood and growth.

Under such dire circumstances, we do not have the necessary psychosocial support system nor the quality care required for survivors of acid violence. However, the Acid Survivors Foundation (ASF) is continuously striving to fill this gap through its holistic bio-psychosocial approach which provides and ensures for necessary medical, physical, psychological and psychosocial support.
National Acid Survivors’ Conference

A National Survivors’ Conference was organized by the Acid Survivors Foundation in order to prevent acid and other forms of violence against women and girls and ensure that survivors of acid violence receive necessary psychosocial support. The two day program was held on 25th and 26th October, 2013 at the Human Resource Development Centre of Proshika (Koitta, Manikganj). On the first day of the conference survivors were divided into three groups (women, men and children) and were asked to undertake various group activities. The activities focused on discussing the various problems they faced after their incidents and finding solutions to them. The group activities were facilitated by representatives from the Department of Clinical Psychology of Dhaka University who listened to survivors’ problems and helped them seek solutions. Mr. Tarikul Islam, Secretary to the Ministry of Women and Children’s Affairs was present on the last day of the conference as the Chief Guest. Also present on the day were Special Guests Mr. Shawkat Mostafa, Joint Secretary, (Legal & Planning) to the Ministry of Home Affairs and President of the Acid Case Monitoring Cell, other respected guests included Ms.
ACTIVITIES OF THE NATIONAL CONFERENCE

Ashrafunnessa, Joint Secretary to the Ministry of Women and Children’s Affairs, Mr. Kamal Uddin Ahamed Chowdhury, Associate Professor, Department of Clinical Psychology, Dhaka University and Mr. A.K. Masood Ahmed, Treasurer, ASF Board of Trustees. The program was chaired by Dr. Iftekharuzzaman, Chairperson of ASF and the welcome speeches were delivered by ASF’s Executive Director Ms. Selina Ahmed and Advisor Ms. Monira Rahman. Chief guest Mr. Tarikul Islam in his speech said that the Ministry of Women and Children’s Affairs will always support the survivors and has invited them to take
part in the various trainings organized by the Ministry. Special guest Mr. Shahkat Mostafa in his speech said that although the Government has various limitations it at the same time also has a responsibility towards the survivors and ensures the survivors that he will always remain beside them in their times of distress. The survivors shared their feelings and recommendations in front of the guests, which they listened to and ensured will inform all relevant levels of the Government. The conference was brought to an end by Dr. Iftekharuzzaman who thanked all speakers and participants for their commitment in the success of the conference.
Press Conference on Acid Violence

On 24th August 2013, the Acid Survivors Foundation organized a press conference in a move to protest against and prevent the recent horrific acts of acid violence. The conference took place at the VIP lounge of the National Press Club. The event was chaired by ASF’s Chairperson Dr. Iftekharuzzaman, also present were ASF’s Executive Director Ms. Selina Ahmed, Advisor Ms. Monira Rahman and Executive Director of the Manusher Jonno Foundation Ms. Shaheen Anam. Ms. Selina Ahmed and Ms. Monira Rahman informed participants of the recent situation of acid violence and gave examples of particularly disturbing cases. Ms. Shaheen Anam informed participants that in times of political instability violence against women and girls increases and that necessary initiatives be taken in light of the situation. Survivor representative and Officer-Survivor Support Services of ASF, Ms. Tahmina Islam urges cooperation among all relevant organizations to see to the prevention of the recent horrific forms of acid violence. The speakers answered various questions posed by journalists and also discussed the case of when a particular acid case was dismissed after political consideration. The speakers also informed of the necessary initiatives that are required regarding the issues of illegal selling and use of acid, the Police’s role in acid cases, lack of implementation of the acid laws, the overdue meetings of the Nation Acid Control Council and District Acid Control Committees. Advisor Monira Rahman also urged journalists to regularly follow up and write about acid violence incidents. At one point Dr. Iftekharuzzaman expressed...
shame in the fact that most acid violence incidents are perpetrated by men.

The press conference also discussed issues relating to necessary socio-economic development of survivors and ensuring ways to make sure that allocated funds that are due to the survivors are properly distributed; using electronic media on a regular basis to officially protest and prevent acid violence through various forms of advertising; undertaking TV talk shows, round table meetings protesting and preventing acid violence; Government based initiatives ensuring survivors’ education and development; and ensuring that relevant duty bearers undertake necessary actions to ensure proper acid case proceedings.

Orientation Workshop on Upcoming Three Years

The Acid Survivors Foundation (ASF) organized a two day orientation workshop from 26th to 27th September, 2013 at the Ahsania Mission Auditorium. The aim of the workshop was to address the three year work plan of ASF. It was attended by a total of 40 participants including ASF’s Executive Director Ms. Selina Ahmed, Advisor Ms. Monira Rahman and staff representatives from all ASF units. The participants were asked to discuss with their respective units ways of ensuring necessary service provision for survivors and the future implementation plan. The workshop also addressed ways of promoting positive interpersonal relationships among staff members, their future needs, ways of adequately executing staff roles and responsibilities, the Child Safety Policy and the Gender Policy.

ওরিয়েন্টেশন কর্মশালা অনুষ্ঠিত

গত ২৬-২৭ সেপ্টেম্বর, ২০১৩ চালু আহ্সানিয়া মিশন অভিযোজক এস.এসএফ এর আহ্সানেন অনুষ্ঠিত হয়ে গেল ইনিস্যাপী এক ওরিয়েন্টেশন কর্মশালা। কর্মশালায় এস.এসএফ এর সকল ইনিস্যাপীর কর্মী এবং কর্মীরা দিয়ে পরিচালনা সেলিনা আহমেদ এবং উপনির্দেশি মনিলা রহমানের স্বাভাব মোট ৪০ জন অংশগ্রহণ করেন। আহমেদের তিন বছরের প্রতিষ্ঠানের কর্মীর কর্মজীবন নিয়ে আলোচনা করা হয়। অর্থাধিকারীদের ইনিস্যাপ ইনিস্যাপের ভাষা হয় শাহীতার জন্য সেলিনা এবং তিনির কর্মজীবনের কর্মজীবন যুগের জন্য চেষ্টা করেন। তত্ত্বাবধায়ক কর্মীর বায়বায়ন, কর্মীদের মধ্যে সমাজিক বায়বায়ন রাখা, ভিত্তি চাহিদার সাধারণতার, নিয়ন্ত্রণ ভুমিকা ও দায়িত্ব সঠিকভাবে পালন, নিয়ন্ত্রণ নীতি এবং জেনারা নীতিমালা নিয়ে কর্মস্থলে আলোচনা করা হয়।
Survivors’ Conference at Bogra and Netrokona

Survivors’ conferences were organized in order to ensure the prevention of acid violence and treatment, rehabilitation and due justice for survivors. This year the theme for both conferences was “Days for Positive Transformation” and they were held on 16th and 24th September at Bogura and Netrokona and organized by Light House and Sabalambry Unnayan Samity respectively and funded by the Acid Survivors Foundation (ASF). The survivors look forward to attending the conferences at least once a year and almost all invited survivors turn up as the events give them a new sense of hope to live and return to their homes. This was evident even this year when almost 400 people including survivors from two districts showed up for the events.

The conference held at Bogura was chaired by the President of the Bogura Acid Crime Control Committee and the District Commissioner Md. Shafiqur Reza Bishwas was present as the Chief Guest. The Special Guests of the events were Deputy Director Mr. ABM Mostofa Kamal, of the district’s Department of Social Services, Senior Assistant Police Super (circle-B) Md. Ashraful Islam, a prominent humanitarian worker Mr. Anwarul Islam Bacchu, Public Prosecutor of the Bogra Judge Court Md. Helalur Rahman, District Representative of the Bangladesh Television Mr. Jahidur Rahman Jadiu.

Chief Executive Officer Mr. Md. Harun-ur-Rashid of Light House, Bogura and Manager –Survivors Support Services Ms. Fatema Pervin Putul of ASF informed participants of the situation of acid violence in Bogura and throughout the country respectively. The Chief Guest of the event said in his speech that it will not be possible to stop the free
selling of acid through licenses only, rather it can be stopped through social movements and individual responsibility.

District Commissioner Mr. Anis Mahmud, was invited as the Chief Guest of the Netrokona survivors conference and Additional Police Super Mr. Delower Hossain, Deputy Civil Surgeon Mr. Bijon Kanti Sarker were invited as the Special Guests. Local journalists, acid users, development workers and representatives of different professions were also present at the conference. In his speech the Chief Guest urged law enforcement agencies to take immediate action against illegal acid users. Other participants also expressed the need to eradicate acid violence from the society and ensure that victims of acid violence receive the allocated funds set aside for them. They committed themselves to providing any form of assistance possible in this regard. Survivor representatives in their speeches demanded that perpetrators of acid violence be found and given due punishment and that survivors are able to return to their lives.

At the end of both Bogura and Netrokona conferences the chairmen urged that acid violence is a horrific crime and informed participants of the different organizations that are working to prevent it. They thanked ASF and all partner organizations for organizing the conferences.
Human Chains and Rallies Protesting Acid Violence

Examples of acid violence can be seen in various districts of the country in the past 6 months. Among these incidents are those of Kakoli and her husband Panju Sheikh of Kushthia, Sadia Islam Shona of Joypurhat, Mitu and her mother Nasima of Madariapur, and Arjina of Dhaka. In aims to protest and prevent such horrific acid attack incidents the Acid Survivors Foundation undertook immediate actions by organizing distant level human chains and meetings to mobilize and sensitize local authorities and members of the community. All participants of the events expressed their condemnation of the attacks and demanded the arrest and due punishment of the perpetrators. Many of the participants also expressed the role of the Police after the attacks, especially after having seen how the Police initially hesitate to file cases and only after pressure from members of the communities they comply.

Students, academics, representatives of the civil society, print and electronic media journalists, local BRAC officers and local people were present at the various human chains and meetings organized at the district levels. During the events the public were requested to ensure the safety and security of the survivors to which various representatives of the locales vouched to ensure. The ASF team also undertook meetings with relevant law enforcement agency officials to ensure the safety and security of the survivors and their families and give them information on specific cases. Thousands of people took part in the protests and prevention initiatives undertaken by ASF and all those who were specifically approached for support assured the team that they will take necessary initiatives.
Dialogue with Acid Sellers and Users

In Bangladesh, Sirajgonj, Bogra, and Comilla have been identified as districts with the highest number of acid attacks. The Acid Survivors Foundation (ASF) organized meetings with acid sellers and users in these districts as well as in Netrokona and Satkhira in cooperation with partner organizations Manab Mukti Sangstha (MMS), Light House, AID-Comilla Sabalambay Unnayan Samity and Agragati Sangstha in November 2013. The participants of the dialogue sessions included relevant District Commissioners, Additional District Magistrates, Assistant Police Super, Deputy-Director of the Department of Social Services, Social Welfare Officers, Officers from women’s organizations, local NGO workers, BRAC representatives, relevant district Judges, Advocates, Journalists, representatives from acid violence prevention committees, owners of acid seller and user organizations, representatives of the weaving community, representatives of the Bangladesh Jewelers Society and 200 other participants.

The meetings began with welcome speeches from the Chief Guests, an explanation of the purpose of the meetings, followed by a presentation of the consequences of acid violence, ASF’s activities, the Acid Control Law and Acid Crime Control Law and of 2002. The roles of the District Acid Control Committees were also discussed during the process.

Participants from relevant Government and non-government organizations presented their views and promised to take necessary initiatives to prevent acid violence and the illegal selling and usage of acid. Acid sellers and users promised to be cautious of the illegal selling and usage of acid. In their dealings they also vouched for the maintenance of an acid selling register and the listing of all organizations and individuals who use and/or sell acid without a license and ensure they are present in future meetings. Officials also committed to ensuring that legal action is taken against those who illegally sell and use acid and if necessary mobile court initiatives will be undertaken.
Visit by Australian Minister Julie Collins, British MP Nicky Morgan, DFID Representative Jane Marshal and UNICEF Representative Mr. Pascal Villeneuve

Australia’s Minister for Community Services, Indigenous Employment and Economic Development and the Status of Women and Housing and Homelessness Ms. Julie Collins visited the Acid Survivors Foundation on 18th June, 2013. During the visit, ASF organized for the presentation of a check of worth BDT 28,20,000 for legal support to 44 survivors of acid violence, which was funded by one of ASF’s major donors, AusAid. The check was handed over to the survivors by Ms. Julie Collins. Also present during the occasion were Ms. Lisa Mirco, Chief of Staff of the Office for Women, Department of Families, Housing and Community Services and Indigenous Affairs and Branch Manager, Ms. Mairi Steel, Mr. Tim Bolotnikoff, Charge D’affaires, Australian High Commission, Ms. Simeen Sabha, Senior Research and Communication Officer, Australian High Commission, Ms. Ameena Chowdhury, Corporate Operations Manager, AusAid, Ms. Priya Powell, Counselor, AusAid and Ms. Jackie Powell, First Secretary, (Development Cooperation), AusAid. Other visitors during the period also included British Minister of Parliament Mr. Nicky Morgan on 19th June, 2013, Ms. Jen Marshall, Head of Profession Social Development, Department for International Development (DFID) on 2nd July, 2013 and Mr. Pascal Villeneuve, UNICEF Country Representative on 12th September, 2013. During the visits they heard from survivor representatives and reassured them of their continuous commitment and support towards the survivors.

Australian Minister Miz Julie Collins

British MP Nicky Morgan

DFID’s Landon representative Jane Marshall

UNICEF representative Mr. Pascal Villeneuve
Visiting Survivors’ Groups

The Acid Survivors Foundation has undertaken initiatives to form survivors groups with the assistance of its six implementing partners in specific intervention districts. The aim of the groups is to build survivors’ inner confidence, organize and empower them so that they are able to work towards changing their own fates and be acknowledged by their communities. Currently there are 21 groups in six districts with a total of 291 group members. A team of ASF representatives visited a few of the groups at Satkhira to observe the group activities on 26th to 28th August, 2013. During the visit the groups and the individual group members were interviewed from which it was found that the survivors are more self confident and brave than they were before. The survivors expressed that they themselves hope to take initiatives through their groups and fight all forms of negative practices in society.
Training of Psychosocial Support

A training on providing psychosocial support to survivors of acid violence was organized by the Acid Survivors Foundation and funded by UNICEF on 6th and 7th September, 2013 at the Manab Muki Sangrtha, Sirajganj. The aim of the training was to ensure that survivors receive adequate psychosocial support by capable psychosocial counselors. The participants of the training included Survivor Ambassadors and Peer Counsellors at ASF’s partner organizations and ASF staff members. The training was conducted by ASF’s Executive Director Ms. Selina Ahmed and Psychologist Mr. Aminul Islam Mukul who gave the participants an understanding of psychosocial support, mental health, the psychosocial issues faced by survivors of acid violence, an understanding of proper counseling methods, mental stress and trauma and ways of addressing them. Role playing exercises were also undertaken to demonstrate proper counseling methods.

Training on Immediate Post-Burn Actions for Acid and Other Burn Patients

Essential Burn Care trainings were undertaken since June-November 2013 to develop the capacity of doctors and nurses in providing immediate care to acid and other burn patients. The trainings were conducted at the Dinajpur Medical College Hospital, Uttara Adhunik Medical College Hospital and Sir Solimullah Medical College Hospital. A total of 200 participants including nurses, intern doctors, surgeons and assistant professors from the hospitals took part in the trainings. Hospital Directors and representatives from ASF were also present. The main facilitators of the training were Assistant Professor Dr. Sharif, former Head of the Plastic Surgery Department of Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujib Medical College Hospital along with Associate Professor Dr. Kamruzzaman, Burn and Plastic Surgery, National Cancer Hospital and Dr. Rashedul Islam, Burn and Plastic Surgery, BIRDEM General Hospital. The trainings were organized and implemented by the Acid Survivors Foundation. The training sessions were ended with the distribution of certificates to all participants.
District Based Community Clinics for Survivors

Community Clinics for survivors of acid violence are held in various districts in order to ensure that survivors receive group and individual counseling and psychotherapy sessions for the psychosocial challenges they face during social rehabilitation. The Community Clinics also help establish the survivors into their communities by providing them advice on treatment, legal and overall rehabilitation related issues. Typically in an ASF Community Clinic survivors bring up the challenges they face and the facilitators provide advice on possible solutions and encourage them to also undertake initiatives to support other fellow survivors.

New ASF Executive Director

Founder member Ms. Monira Rahman resigned from her post as the Executive Director of ASF on 30th June, 2013 and is currently working as ASF’s Advisor. The new Executive Director Ms. Selina Ahmed joined ASF on 1st July, 2013.

Agreement between ASF and the Hunger Project

An agreement has been signed between the ASF and the Hunger Project on 9th November, 2013 in order to mobilize the country’s youth to address acid and other forms of violence against women and children.
Acid attack trend (1999 – November’ 2013)

- 1999 – November’2013, 3,506 persons were acid attacked from 3,179 incident.

Acid attack statistics - reasons
Year -1999 to Nov’ 2013

- Refusal/Rejection of love/marriage/sex: 18%
- Dowry: 5%
- Family related dispute: 7%
- Marital dispute: 9%
- Land/property/money dispute: 38%
- Not known: 12%
- Others: 11%

Conviction Status: Duration 2002 to March 2013

- 1812 cases filed
- 298 cases convicted
- 172 cases convicted in court
- 13 cases convicted by death sentence
- 114 cases by life imprisonment
- 171 others

Source: Acid Case Monitoring Cell

Acid attack statistics - gender perspective

- 1999 – Nov’2013: 2,405 (68.60%) were female, 1,101 (31.40%) male.

Acid Survivors Foundation

Statistics of Acid Burn Violence 1999 to November 2013

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Note:
- Report is generated as per the available data in the computerized database of ASF.
- Information is taken from newspapers, local NGOs, local journalists, individuals and survivors who come directly to ASF.
- The above statistics are used in the relevant acid violence victimization report.