

# Acid Attacks on Women in Bangladesh

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## 1. Introduction

Cruelty towards women has increased enormously in Bangladesh and has become an important social problem. Violence against women in Bangladesh appears in myriad forms such as rape and sexual harassment, psychological abuse, domestic violence, dowry killings, trafficking, forced prostitution and acid throwing []. Surprisingly Acid attacks on women and girls have risen dramatically in Bangladesh especially in the last few years. There were 130 cases of acid attacks in 1997 and in 1998, there were over 200 reported cases. In 2001, total 341 cases of acid attack were reported by ASF whereas in 2002, that number increased to 485[]. The purpose of my research is to investigate why acid attacks on women are on the rise by examining the socio-cultural scenario of Bangladesh.

## 2. Result, Discussion and Significance

The descriptions and interpretations of acid violence in Bangladesh are derived from interviews with acid survivors, relatives, and people from government and non-government organizations (NGO). Additionally feminists, doctors and journalists who are taking a prominent role in the movement against acid violence in Bangladesh were interviewed.

Acid is now being used as a weapon of choice to disfigure and kill females. Acid is inexpensive and easily available; a glass of acid goes for only taka ten-twenty (less than ten cents) in Bangladesh which can be bought from weavers, tanneries, auto shops, glasses and Hardware Stores, school laboratories and colleges and goldsmiths[]. Acid attacks have traumatic consequences: physically, psychologically, and socially. When acid is thrown onto somebody it feels like water. Acid wets the body and a burning sensation begins that gradually increases intensity. The affected skin becomes black and leathery. Usually the perpetrator attempts to disfigure the face, eyes, nose and genital organs[]. Nitric and sulphuric acid are mostly used for this heinous purpose. Those cause skin tissue to melt and in some cases the bones underneath are left exposed and sometimes dissolve. Acid attacks leave victims permanently scarred and often blinded. . Additionally, a disfigured girl or woman bears a physical stigma that makes her liable to public suspect and questions her moral integrity. Thus victims' family honor and prestige also get stained. Survivors experience a dramatic change in their lifestyle. Many stop their education and work during a lengthy recovery due to the injury.

Rejection of love offers, refusal of indecent proposals, vengeance, family disputes, dowry, land disputes, political conflict are some of the causes of acid throwing. There are some common factors in many cases. The girl is usually a teenager. The targets are primarily females between twelve and twenty five years of age, though recent trends have shown a change in the profile of the targets with older women, children and even men being attacked. Many girls were students and met their aggressors on the way from or to school. The attacks often took place at night at the girl's house and in some cases the attacker announced his threat. All of this was often planned in advance [].

Why women are getting attacked by acid is a complicated question. As a matter of fact, women in Bangladesh have a lower status in nearly all aspects of life. Socially, women become vulnerable to violence due to their subordinate positions in power relationships sustained between men and women by kinship structures, patriarchy, class, and ideology. The vulnerable situation of women often can be triggered by nation- state and sometimes by international economic systems. Acid attacks on women are not a result of any single phenomenon. I believe acid attacks are outcome of many social factors. There is a growing tendency towards acceptance of violence in the society of Bangladesh mainly due to certain socio-political factors, such as poverty, unemployment, illiteracy corruption and so forth. patriarchal gender ideology and gender relations updated for postmodern period in all the social structures, including family, community and the state; increasing poverty and adverse conditions brought about by changing socio-economic process[]; Society's basic reluctance to drastically change patriarchal laws and politics which perpetuate male dominance over women. The gender issue is engrained in the society. The situation is more complicated in Bangladesh as the country is crippled with illiteracy, ignorance and wide-ranging discrimination against women. Under this situation, the male has got a new form of freedom. Particularly, if this group of men happens to be the members of a political group. Violence in Bangladesh is a means to solve disputes of various kinds. As a weak state, the law and order situation is not

sound in the country. Nevertheless, due to corruption in every level of society, perpetrators often stay away from punishment. As a result women suffer lifelong injuries and mental anguish.

There are three main patterns of acid attacks. The first one, refusal of love or marriage proposal can be understood in relationship to gender relations. The second pattern of acid violence is clearly connected to marital relations, domestic conflict and the hierarchies of command inside the family. The aggressor is usually the husband backed by other in-laws or an ex-husband. The motives are generic quarrels, jealousy, disobedience, and dowry. Many victims were attacked by their ex-husbands since women after divorce often become the victims of acid violence or other physical and sexual assaults. Even after divorce, ex-husbands do not want to lose the right to control a woman. He expects that his ex-wife must fulfill his sexual urges whenever he demands. If she does not agree, the result is battering or acid throwing. The third pattern of acid violence concerns cases of disputes over land between different families. The rationale of throwing acid on women belonging to a rival family may be understood by referring to the cultural value of honor, *izzat*. This word *izzat* (honor) is often heard in men's talk, particularly when the discussion is about conflict, rivalry, and struggle. A family's *izzat* must be preserved at all costs and increased whenever possible and "if the honor of a family's women is lost, so also is the family's entire public position" []. Therefore the best way to insult a family is to diminish the honor of the women of that family.

### 3. Conclusion

Acid violence in Bangladesh is the reaction to rejection, while men are trying to have either love or sex with females. Women and girls are causing damage to the male ego by rejecting the male or damage to desire; desire to have somebody or something (as in some cases property or dowry are involved). Women's refusal is an insult to men's sense of *izzat* (honor). Resulting which jilted men throw acid on women. The motivation of acid attack is mainly revenge. In Bangladesh, an exchange of looks, or just the fact that a man likes a woman, means to him that she is obliged to like or love him. Men take acid not just as a weapon to treat a disobedient woman but to teach her a lesson for the rest of her life. Thus it is obvious that acid attacks on women have increased due to socio-economic-political factors as in Bangladesh as discussed in the research. Lack of awareness and education are also responsible for diminishing morals of people.

### 4. Acknowledgments

I express my profound gratitude to my supervisor, Dr. Deborah A. Gordon, Associate Professor, for her guidance, extreme patience and understanding from the very beginning of this research. I owe a special debt to Sherin Ferdous of Acid Survivors Foundation of Dhaka, Bangladesh for her support and time, especially for giving me the basic information on Acid attacks. My special gratitude goes to all my interviewees and informants as without their information this research would not be possible.

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