



## ACID VIOLENCE: A BURNING IMPACT ON WOMEN OF BANGLADESH-CASE STUDY

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### Abstract:

**Background:** Acid throwing on the face and body of another person to cause or produce grievous injuries is a barbaric act of vengeance. For the last few years, it has been on the rise in both urban and rural areas of Bangladesh. The perpetrators are mostly men and adolescent boys. The victims are females and mostly young girls.

The objective of this study was to analyze some case studies to find out the reasons for attacks, and the application of acid control act and the result of its application and to estimate which age groups are more vulnerable for acid attacks. Cheap and easy availability of acids makes it the most effective weapon for man to use against girls' or young women for revenge and is one of the extreme forms of repression and violation of women's right.

**Methods and Materials:** The study population consisted of victims of acid throwing admitted in the Acid Survivors Foundation (ASF) and coming from all parts of the country. Face to face interview with the help of an interviewer administered questionnaire was conducted on 20 cases of acid victims.

**Result:** The study results reported that most of the acid victims were in the age group 10-14 yrs. (35%) and 15-19 yrs. (30%). Marital status of the acid victims revealed that majority of victims was unmarried (65%). Among the victims, 65% were students and 35% were housewives. Analysis of the causes revealed that 50% of cases was due to refusal of love/marriage/sex (50%) and 30% because of land/property/money dispute. Causes analysis also revealed that the acid victims, age group 10-14 yrs were mostly affected by acid violence due to refusal of love/marriage/sex (71.4%). The age group 15-19 yrs were also affected due to refusal of love/marriage/sex (83.3%) and the age group 20-24 yrs were due to land/property/money dispute (66.7%). The study also reported that 100% of these cases were filed at the police station but perpetrators were arrested in 65% cases and 35% were not arrested. Out of 65% cases, only 10% perpetrators were duly punished.



**Discussion & Conclusion:**

*The consequence of acid attacks on survivors brings dramatic change in their lifestyle. Most of them have to give up their education or work. Social isolation, fear of further attacks, and insecurity damage their self-esteem and confidence. Illiteracy, poverty, threats to further retribution, and ignorance about legal support increase their miseries. Gradual increase of acid attacks suggests that legal provisions and their enforcement are not adequate and effective. Social awareness, economical and psychological support, rehabilitation, and strict enforcement of laws are key to combat acid violence in Bangladesh.*

*Although it occurs throughout Bangladesh, there are limited data from reliable sources about the real number of attacks, the rehabilitation of survivors, and the outcomes for perpetrators. The study suggests that further research is required to fill these gaps and that consideration be given to capacity building data management at the point of service delivery, the application of acid control act and acid crime act and the result of its application as well as women empowerment.*

**Key Words:** *acid violence, case study, legal support, land dispute.*

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## **1.0 INTRODUCTION:**

Acid throwing on the face and body of another person to produce grievous injuries is a barbaric act of vengeance. Acid throwing is a very brutal form of violence. Acid is a corrosive substance that can corrode metal. Once in contact with skin, acid causes skin tissue to melt, exposing the bones underneath or leading to the loss of eye(s), ear, nose and or irreparable damage to hands or joints. Permanent physical disfigurement is unavoidable and serious disability is frequent. The legal use of acid is mostly industrial but it is easily available in the market. Although the acid control act was passed in 2002 in practice the sale of acid is unregulated. Acid burns differ from flame burns in its velocity and its effect on bones. Acid injuries are usually much deeper and acid effects the skin tissues faster than flame. Furthermore, flame burns are affecting the tissues and soft bones, not the hard bones, while acid is aggressive enough to cause permanent damage even to hard bones. For the last few years, it has been on the rise in both urban and rural areas of Bangladesh. The perpetrators are mostly men and adolescent boys. The victims are females and mostly young girls.

### **1.1 Global context:**

In some countries, women and girls are attacked with acid as a result of family disputes or rejected sex or marriage proposals. There are over 100 attacks recorded by the Acid Survivors Foundation in Uganda. Acid violence is a serious problem in Pakistan and the Human Rights Watch reported over 1,000 attacks in 2002. Acid Survivors Trust International (ASTI) has documented acid attacks in India, Nepal, Cambodia, Thailand, Hong Kong. It is also a problem in sub-Saharan Africa : newspapers report attacks in, for example, Kenya and South Africa. More research is needed to highlight the problem in this part of the world. In UK, there have been a few isolated incidents of violent attacks by throwing acid in the United Kingdom in places as diverse as Bristol, Swindon and Belfast. Corrosive acid is not as easily obtained in this country. Acid is therefore rarely used as a weapon here but the results are just as devastating<sup>1</sup>

### **1.2 Bangladesh context**

Bangladesh has the highest world-wide incidence of acid violence and acid burns constituting 9% of total burn injuries in Bangladesh. The incidence of acid attacks is increasing: accurate statistics on the number of attacks in Bangladesh are hard to come by, given the nature of rural communities in Bangladesh, but available evidence suggests an



alarming trend: 139 cases were reported in 1999 (May-December), 226 in 2000 (January-December), 343 in 2001 (January-December), 484 in 2002 (January-December), 410 in 2003 (January-December), 322 in 2004 (January-December) and 129 in 2005 (January-June). Among them, 80 women were reported in 1999 (May-December), 114 in 2000 (January-December), 138 in 2001(January-December), 221 in 2002(January-December), 204 in 2003(January-December), 183 in 2004(January-December), 104 in 2005 (January-September) .The number of unreported cases is thought to be high<sup>2</sup>.

### **1.3. The Laws Related to Acid Attacks**

In 2002, the Government of Bangladesh publicly acknowledged the problem of acid violence and took action to combat it. Two new laws relating to acid violence were enacted: The Acid Control Act and the Acid Crime Control Act. Although there are still gaps in the law enforcement, which needs to be addressed. These new laws are a remarkable step forward to protect victims of acid violence and punish the perpetrators. The Acid Control Act is regulating the import, export, use and waste management of corroding substances. It also introduced a National Acid Control Council and District Acid Control Committees to develop policies and monitoring systems regarding the production, trade and deposit of acid and provide medical, rehabilitation and legal support to victims of acid violence. ." The National Acid Control Council has been established under this act with the minister for home affairs as its chairperson. More importantly, according to this law, businesses dealing with acid need a license to do so.

The Acid Crime Control Act reduced the period of investigation for acid cases to a mandatory time not exceeding 60 days, after which the police investigation report has to be produced to the court. All acid violence related cases are now tried under one court, the Acid Tribunal Court, which per instructions should complete the trial within 90 days.

According to the Acid Crime Control Act, acid crimes are rigorously controlled by mandating stringent punishment ranging from between three years and 15 years and a hefty fine to life imprisonment and even capital punishment. The variations of punishment depend on the gravity of the crime<sup>3</sup>.

### **1.4. Factors that favor access to procurement of acid:**

Such cruel and inhuman action as acid throwing rarely happens in developed and more civilized countries. Acid burns occur frequently in Bangladesh because it is very easy to get



nitric and sulfuric acid. These are common sold in the markets and are very cheap. The reason they are so cheap because nitric and sulfuric acid are usually used to clean gold jewelry, sales and service centres of auto mobile battery manufactures, dyeing industries and tanneries. In some of the chemical shops in Dhaka a cup of sulfuric acid is being sold for only 7-8 taka. The other factors that favor access to procurement of acid: unrestricted and unregulated place of work using acid, illiteracy and ignorance of seller, unrestricted acid manufacturing sites.

#### **1.5. Factors that increase vulnerability of women to acid attack:**

Most of the acid victims are women. Acid Violence against women is compounded by discrimination on the grounds of race, ethnicity, sexual identity, social status, class, and age. Such multiple forms of discrimination further restrict women's choices, increase their vulnerability to acid violence and make it even harder for women to obtain justice<sup>4</sup>. They are also differentiated by rural and urban settings. Although women constitute half of the population, various indicators reveal that the status of women is much lower than that of men. Their literacy rate is only 43.2 percent, much lower than that of men 61.0. Excessive mortality among women due to discrimination has resulted in a sex ratio in the population of 105 men to every 100 women<sup>5</sup>. In female student, the long distance between the residence and the school/college makes them vulnerable to acid attack. Lack of transportation is another factor. Most of the acid violence occurs at night, so unsecured residence also responsible for acid attack.

#### **1.6. Horrific effect of acid throwing:**

Acid burn injuries represent a special type of burn injury, with a pathophysiology depending on the type of acid, concentration, strength, quality, duration of contact and penetrating power. Strong sulphuric, nitric or hydrochloric acid has a catastrophic effect on human flesh – it dissolves skin and flesh, can even destroy bone. If it reaches the eye it can cause irreparable destruction and blindness. A survivor of an acid attack, even if she has been able to get good and early treatment, will for the rest of her life have a scarred and often disfigured face. All too often she then will have to cope with social isolation and ostracism which further undermines her self-esteem and confidence. She'll probably have great difficulty in finding work and if unmarried will have little chance of finding a husband. So



the trauma is not only physical but psychological and social. Acid violence is a fundamental breach of human rights<sup>6</sup>.

### 1.7. Violence against women:

Violence against women is a common occurrence in most societies whether the violence is physical or mental. In South Asia it is a daily and often deadly fact of life for millions of women and girls. Women and girls are generally looked down upon, trapped within cultural framework, molded by rigid perceptions of patriarchy. As a result violence against women is viewed as a .normal. phenomenon even from the women.s perspective. South Asian women suffer multiple forms of violence including domestic violence, rape, dowry deaths, sexual harassment, suicide, forced marriage, trafficking and other psychological and financial oppression. Violence against women has become one of the most visible social issues in this region.

As a South Asian country, Bangladesh is no different from its neighbors. Violence against women is amongst the most serious threats to overall development and progress in Bangladesh. Widespread violence and repression in numerous forms puts women's lives at risk in almost all parts of the country. This is further compounded by the gender bias against women in the society. Before discussing the nature and extent of violence against women it is important to focus on the general socio-economic and legal rights of women in Bangladesh.

The following data has been taken from 22 police stations in the capital city over the last three years<sup>7</sup>.

**Reported incidents of violence against women**

<b>Forms of violence</b>	<b>Year</b>			<b>Total</b>
	<b>2001-2002</b>	<b>2002-2003</b>	<b>2003-2004</b>	
Rape	228	281	291	800
Sexual Harassment	74	87	136	297
Abduction	262	380	425	1067
Dowry	274	381	451	1106
Child Trafficking	31	36	38	105
Woman Trafficking	25	29	67	121
Burn	16	20	22	58
Ransom	35	25	47	107
<b>Total</b>	<b>945</b>	<b>1239</b>	<b>1477</b>	<b>3661</b>



The objective of this study was to analyze some case studies to find out the reasons for acid attacks, and the application of acid control act and the result of its application, recommendations for implementation of acid control acid and to estimate which age groups are more vulnerable for acid attacks.

## **2.0.METHODOLOGY**

### **2.1. Study design:**

The study design was descriptive observational type of case study that was conducted in Acid Survivors Foundation (ASF). The case design is appropriate for the study because: acid burns are relatively few in number, few participants are found who are interested to participate in the research, many acid victims do not want to open themselves up to the outside, it is not possible to take a large sample because there is a limitation of time and money.

### **2.2.Study population**

The study population consisted of acid victims belonging to different educational, occupational and socioeconomic background who were in the Acid Survivors Foundation (ASF).

### **2.3.Sampling and sample size**

A sample of 20 acid victims were taken by convenience sampling technique.

### **2.4.Data collection instrument**

The data collection tool was an interviewer administered questionnaire with items on socio-demographic characteristics, causes of acid violence, brief history of incidence, medical support and legal support for victims.

### **2.5.Data collection procedure and ethical issues**

All data were collected from the interviewing of cases, reviewing of medical case report and annual report of Acid Survivors Foundation (ASF), a renown national non-government organization coordinating work to tackle this problem. The method which was applied to collect information was face to face interview and some information was collected by reviewing medical reports of the cases. Prior to data collection, the objectives of the study were explained in understandable language to the study participants and their written informed consent were obtained.



## 2.6. Data management and analysis

After collection of data, all data were entered into computer. The data was analyzed by WINDOWS 2000 and SPSS program.

## 3.0. RESULT:

The questionnaire was answered by 20 acid victims women age ranging from 10 to 35 yrs. Their socio-demographic characteristics and history of acid violence are shown in table 1 & table 2. The association between age and causes of acid violence are shown in table 3.

**Table1: Percentage distribution of acid victims by socio-demographic characteristics  
(n=20)**

<i>Socio-demographic characteristics</i>	<i>Frequency</i>	<i>Percentage</i>
<b>Age in years</b>		
10-14	7	35.0
15-19	6	30.0
20-24	3	15.0
25-29	2	10.0
30+	2	10.0
<b>Total</b>	20	100
<b>Mean ± SD(years) : 18.35 ± 6.67</b>	<b>Range (years) : 10-35</b>	
<b>Marital Status</b>		
Married	7	35
Unmarried	13	65
<b>Total</b>	20	100
<b>Occupation</b>		
Student	13	65
Housewife	7	35
<b>Total</b>	20	100

Among 20 acid victims, the mean  $\pm$  SD of age in years is  $18.35 \pm 6.67$  ranging from 10 to 35 years. Most of the acid victims (35%) were in the age group 10-14 years followed by 15-19 years 6 (30%) and least of the victims 2 (10%) were in the 25-29 and 30+ age group. Marital status of the acid victims revealed that majority of victims (65%) were unmarried followed by 35% were married. Among 20 acid victims, the majority of victims (65%) were students followed by 35% were housewives.





**Table 2: Percentage distribution of the causes, reporting to the police station and arrest of perpetrators (n=20)**

<i>History of acid violence</i>	<i>Frequency</i>	<i>Percentage</i>
<b>Causes of Acid Violence</b>		
Dowry	1	5.0
Marital dispute	1	5.0
Family dispute	2	10.0
Land/property/money dispute	6	30.0
Refusal of love/marriage/sex	10	50.0
<b>Total</b>	20	100.0
<b>Case filed at police station</b>		
Yes	20	100
No	0	0
<b>Total</b>	20	100
<b>Perpetrators arrested</b>		
Yes	13	65
No	7	35
<b>Total</b>	20	100

The causes of acid violence revealed that 50% cases occurred due to refusal of love/marriage/sex followed by 30% due to land/property/money dispute and only 5% cases occurred due to dowry and marital dispute. Out of 20 acid victims 100% cases were filed at the police station but perpetrators were arrested in case of 65% cases and 35% were not arrested. Out of 65% cases, only 10% perpetrators were sentenced.

**Table 3: Percentage distribution of acid victims by age & causes of acid violence (n=20)**

<i>Causes of acid violence</i>	<i>Age of acid victims in year</i>										<i>Total</i>	
	10-14		15-19		20-24		25-29		30+		No.	%
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
Dowry	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	50	0	0	1	5
Marital dispute	0	0	0	0	1	33.3	0	0	0	0	1	5
Family dispute	1	14.3	0	0	0	0	1	50	0	0	2	10
Land/property/money	1	14.3	1	16.7	2	66.7	0	0	2	100	6	30




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dispute												
Refusal of love/marriage/sex	5	71.4	5	83.3	0	0	0	0	0	0	10	50
<b>Total</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>20</b>	<b>100</b>

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The acid victims, age group 10-14 yrs were mostly affected by acid violence due to refusal of love/marriage/sex (71.4%). The age group 15-19 yrs were also affected due to refusal of love/marriage/sex (83.3%) and the age group 20-24 yrs were due to land/property/money dispute (66.7%)

#### 4.0. DISCUSSION:

Acid throwing is an extreme form of violence where the majority of throwers are men and the majority of victims are women. Acid is a corrosive substance that can burn holes in wood and corrode metals. Bangladesh is not the only country, where acid attacks are reported. Acid violence occurs in Pakistan, India, China, Malaysia, Nigeria, Cambodia and Uganda. Unfortunately in Bangladesh has the world-wide highest rate of reported acid violence cases. According to estimations, there are more than 1900 acid survivors in Bangladesh today. In other respects the situation in Bangladesh regarding acid violence differs from other countries: The Bangladesh Government is publicly acknowledging the problem and is taking legislative action to combat it. Even if the law enforcement is not always satisfactory, this is a major step forward. The majority of the victims are women. However, in their hate and rage, the perpetrators put up with the fact of seriously injuring or killing even small children, who happen to sleep beside their target. Acid violence is motivated by a number of reasons. The highest number of attacks occurred over land and family disputes, as retaliation or revenge for filing legal cases or police complaints. Around 20% to 30% of the cases are instigated by patriarchal violence, such as refusal of marriage proposals, sexual advances and dowry demands. Furthermore, in cases of land or family disputes it is mainly the women and children, who are targeted<sup>8</sup>.

The acid attack leaves the survivors traumatized, disfigured and often disabled. Socially excluded and economically vulnerable. It changes their lives dramatically and forever. Acid survivors require intensive and long term medical treatment, including several surgeries to save their lives or vital organs. Coming from predominantly poor families survivors are



usually unable to pay the costs of this highly specialized medical treatment. Furthermore, during the lengthy recovery the survivors have to stop their education or work. Even beyond this period many are not able to get back to their previous educational institutions or work due to disfigurement and physical disability. Unmarried women attacked with acid are unlikely to be able to marry. This consequence is particularly harsh in the context of Bangladesh where women still gain full social acceptance only with marriage and motherhood. Therefore, following the medical treatment, survivors need rehabilitation to continue their education or develop alternative livelihood options. Despite of the recent enactment of new laws to combat acid violence, it is estimated that only 10% of the attackers are ever brought to trial. Impoverishment and general lack of legal knowledge obstructs survivors from going to court<sup>9</sup>. This study reported that about 100% cases were filed at the police station. Moreover, the legal process is time consuming and inefficiencies of the legal system makes it difficult to gain legal justice. For the most part, perpetrators of acid violence go unpunished, while the survivors have to live with the devastating effects of their crime for the rest of their lives<sup>9</sup>. This study also found that perpetrators of acid violence were arrested in case of 65% cases and 35% were not arrested. Out of 65% cases, only 10% perpetrators were sentenced.

In 2004, Acid Survivors Foundation recorded 266 incidents of acid violence. During these attacks 322 persons were injured. Of these 57% were women. The number of attacks reached a peak in 2002 with a new attack being recorded almost every day. Since 2003 there has been a downward trend in attacks. This trend continued in n 2004 with attacks down by 21%.

The number of women and girls attacked with acid is more than 2 ½ times higher than the number of men and boys. One quarter (25.7%) of the total attacked persons, are adult women between 25 and 34 years old<sup>7</sup>. The second largest age group are women between 35 and 44 years of age (16.1%). Girls between the age of 13 and 18 years old constitute the third largest age group<sup>10</sup>. It is assumed that the majority of these girls are directly targeted by the acid thrower. This study found that most of the acid victims (35%) were in the age group 10-14 years followed by 15-19 years 6 (30%) and least of the victims 2 (10%) were in the 25-29 and 30+ age group.



Survivors, their families and friends have also faced serious difficulties in attaining legal recourse. Their poverty and ignorance of the (overloaded and inefficient) legal system combined with unsympathetic or corrupt officials have led to poor results from the legal system. Laws exist to combat acid violence but are ineffective. The throwers and their families are often able to subvert legal proceedings or escape scot-free<sup>11</sup>.

Acid throwing is a vicious form of violence against women. This differs from one society to another. Acid throwing is a particularly vicious and damaging form of violence against women in Bangladesh. There are cases of acid throwing in other countries but these are isolated incidents, nowhere near the number of attacks that occur in Bangladesh. When acid is thrown on a person, the results are horrific. Nitric or Sulphuric Acid has a catastrophic effect on the human flesh. It causes the skin tissue to melt, often exposing the bones below the flesh, sometimes even dissolving the bone. When acid attacks the eyes, it damages these vital organs permanently. Many acid attack survivors have lost the use of one or both eyes. The victim is traumatized physically, psychologically and socially. An acid attack on your body would dramatically change your life. Most survivors of an acid attack are forced to give up their education, their occupation and other important activities in their lives. This is because recovering from the trauma takes up most of their time and because the disfigurement they have to bear debilitates and handicaps them in every conceivable way<sup>12</sup>. This study reported that the most affected part of women were face, eye, ear, nose, chest and hand.

The attack initially removes survivors' ability to work or study. Following treatment, survivors also need rehabilitation to continue with education or develop livelihoods through training, credit or a grant. Survivors also suffer from severe emotional and psychological trauma for which they need support. Not only as victims of extreme violence but also since the gross disfigurement and frequent disability left by acid attacks makes it impossible for unmarried survivors to marry and have a family. Even married survivors face much greater difficulty in being a full part of their community and wider society. This consequence is particularly harsh in the context of Bangladesh where women in particular only gain a full emotional and social life from marriage and parenthood and where the disfigured and disabled are marginalized<sup>13</sup>. The scars left by acid are not just skin deep- victims are most often faced with social isolation and ostracisation that further damages their self esteem,



self-confidence and seriously undermines their professional and personal future. Women who have survived acid attacks have great difficulty in finding work and if unmarried, as many victims tend to be, they have very little chance of ever getting married, which in a country like Bangladesh is socially isolating<sup>14</sup>. This study found that majority of acid victims (65%) were unmarried followed by 35% were married. This study also shown that the majority of victims (65%) were students followed by 35% were housewives.

The victims are attacked for many reasons. In some cases, the attack takes place because a young girl or woman has spurned the sexual advances of a male or has rejected a proposal of marriage. These attacks are often the result of family or land disputes, dowry demands or a desire for revenge. Reasons for acid attacks during the years, the highest rate of occurrence took place over Land Disputes and Family dispute, the next highest rate of these brutal incidents are due to refusal of relationship/sex throughout the country.

In 2004, the highest rate of attacks took place over land & property conflicts (45%), followed by attacks due to refusal of marriage, romance or sex (15%). Around 9% of the attacks were motivated by family disputes, another 9% by marital disputes. Conflicts over dowry demands count for 6% of the acid attacks. In 2005 up to September 43.5% acid attacks were due to land/property/money dispute followed by 18.18% due to refusal/rejection of love/marriage/sex and 12.91% due to marital dispute. 11% cases did not know why they affected. 51.6% acid victims were women<sup>15</sup>. The case studies shown that women were attacked for a number of reasons: refusal of love/marriage/sex, intra-family disputes over land/property/money, family dispute, marital dispute and dowry-related issues. The study also found that 50% acid violence occurred due to refusal of love/marriage/sex followed by 30% due to land/property/money dispute and only 5% cases occurred due to dowry and marital dispute.

The maximum sentence of acid throwing is death penalty and those who assist to commit the crime will receive the same punishment as the perpetrator. This study shown that in spite of the new laws the conviction rate of acid violence crimes remains very low. Only 10% of the acid throwers are sentenced. Almost all convicted persons appeal to the High Court. This appeal takes five to six years. The low conviction rate is a result of different factors: In most cases, the acid victim is poor, illiterate and inexperienced to handle legal matters. In addition, many survivors experienced the local police as ineffective and corrupt



and are therefore reluctant to seek legal redress. They feel that the investigating police or the public prosecutor are usually not sensitive to the victim's situation and open to compromise the case with the perpetrators family. During the trial, many witnesses feel threatened or are bribed by the acid throwers and their families and restrain from testifying. Many experts are unwilling to witness, as their loss of income due to long waiting hours and frequent postpones of trials is not compensated. Moreover lack of evidence in proving the case causes serious difficulties.

## **5.0. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION:**

### **Conclusion:**

Acid violence not only threatens the health of the victims but also it has a devastating long term effect on their economic and social life. Most survivors have to cope with a dramatic change in their life. Their future plans and prospects, their long cherished dreams are destroyed. The attack changes their life plans forever. Due to lengthy recovery or permanent disability, the survivors have to interrupt their education or drop out for ever. Disabled, disfigured survivors often face social isolation, which is damaging their self-esteem and effecting their economic opportunities. In a society where the beauty of a woman is her capital, an unmarried woman disfigured by an acid attack is unlikely to marry again. This consequence is particularly harsh in Bangladesh, in a society where women still gain full social acceptance only with marriage and motherhood, and where grown-up children are usually the only economic source of security in old-age . Social awareness, economical and psychological support, rehabilitation, and strict enforcement of laws are key to combat acid violence in Bangladesh.

### **Recommendation:**

Violence against women is a global phenomenon depending on the level of development or on the level of affluence of the society, but varies in terms of severity and manifestations. Among the different violence against women, acid throwing is a gross violation of the human rights of women. With the recognition of women's unpaid contribution to the economy and the need to incorporate women's perspectives in development planning, women's issues were gradually placed in the forefront of decision-making procedures.

Along with the changes in the concept of women's status world wide, the society of Bangladesh started to feel the impact of change. Several laws have been enacted with aim



to improve women's lot, but seldom have the reforms in these laws helped to serve women's cause.

Any recommendations relating to gender-based violence and law and order should be a concerted effort to combat both law and order situation and gender-based violence.

At the decision making level, the government should undertake several concrete measures, along with strict implementation of laws to protect Women and children's security and improve the condition of law and order situation.

**1.** The government should take up measures to appoint two separate principal persons, one to oversee the law and order situation and another to oversee the issue of acid violence. The persons chosen, should have no political affiliation. Their duties should include collecting information on existing law and order situation and incidences of acid violence on monthly basis; identifying the general pattern and trends of incidents; identifying the sources of procurement of illegal acid in the country and suggesting separate measures to combat each of the issues. The offices of principal persons should assist in forming a "Data Bank on Acid Violence" and another "Data Bank on Law and Order Situation" at the national level with analysis and description of events. The offices should publish monthly data of the collected information in the mass media, along with the full socio-economic account of both the victim and the accused. But they should do so without disclosing the victim's identification in both cases and people affected by deteriorating condition of law and order. The follow-ups of each and every incident should be published accordingly.

**2.** The government should set up a co-ordination committee, comprising members of the civil society, human rights activists, legal activists and others, to assist the office of the assigned persons to oversee overall activities and monitor the general situation.

**3.** The government should also take measures to decentralize administration and ensure the independence of judiciary, to establish public accountability of all components of law enforcing agencies.

**4.** Women's issues, particularly gender-based violence should be incorporated in the high school level of study to remove gender biases from a young age. The Education Board should eliminate role stereotypes from textbooks and change the traditional role models.

**5.** The government, co-ordinating with NGOs should set up a "Cell to Protect Specially Women against Acid Violence" at the grassroots level to collect and disseminate



information; initiate gender-sensitive programmes to raise awareness on the issue and help eradicate acid violence against women and children.

**6.**Economic independence is a necessary precondition for self-reliance. Therefore, self-sustaining and self-generating economic activities targeted towards women should be and must be encouraged by the government. The government should make legal aid available to all-from rural to urban area; provide economic assistance to the victim where necessary and ensure speedy free, and fair trial of the cases.

**7.**There should be a Cell for Protecting Women against acid Violence at every police station where cases of acid violence against women can be reported. Such a Cell can also assist the work of the office of the assigned persons.

**8.**The victims of gender-based violence should be provided immediate medical facilities and treated by female medical staffs.

**9.**Counseling and registration of marriages should be ensured and supervised thoroughly by the governmental authority. Active cell to be set up especially in rural areas to monitor incidences of dowry related violence.

**10.**There should develop a community protection mechanism for women and children and a mechanism to encounter illegal activities taking place in the community. The elderly and learned people of the community should take up the responsibility to manage the affairs of the community. Such a mechanism should be totally free from any political affiliation.

**11.**The community should collect information on gender-based violence taking place in the community and maintain liaison between each community and the offices of both the assigned persons can interact with each other to improve law and order situation and curb gender-based violence.

**12.**There should be a women's forum in the community to look after women's issues and specially incidences of violence against women in the community.

#### **Specific Recommendation For the Police Force**

The government should take some immediate measures to restore the faith and confidence of the general public in the law-enforcing agency, especially the police. In this context the followings measures can be pursued.





1. Students with good academic background should be encouraged and given preference during recruitment to the police force.
2. The potential candidates for police force should have impeccable record.
3. The police force must be disjointed from vested interests of the government sectors. Police force must be accountable to public. The members of civil society, including leading authors, poets, university teachers, and local community- all should be involved in the recruitment process.

#### **For Women Activists and Human Rights Organizations**

Women and human rights activists should act as "watch dogs" to monitor the overall situation; prepare their own reports regarding the issues and present it to the offices of the assigned persons and suggest measures that would assist to improve the existing situation.

#### **For the Victims**

The traditional attitude of society regarding the victims of violence should be changed through gender-sensitive programs and in this respect the mass media has a significant role to play. The victims must be encouraged to "break the silence" of violence perpetrated against them. The family of the victims must immediately assist the victim to overcome the situation. The victims must be assisted and supported mentally, physically and socially to rebuild their lives, so that they can live normal lives in the society with their families. The acid victims should participate in talk shows, in interviews, in health program, in seminars and share their experience and their recommendation and suggestions must be given priority for dealing with this heinous act against women.

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