

***Causes and Consequences of Acid Attacks on Women:
A Case Study of District Lahore, Pakistan***

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Abstract

The current qualitative study explores the psychological, economic, social and cultural aspects of acid attacks on women in District Lahore. The study aims to investigate the causes of acid attacks as well as their consequences which have become serious threat of our society. Purposive sampling is used to approach 10 respondents (married and unmarried women). Their age ranged from 15-35. Semi-structured in-depth interviews were conducted to collect the data. An interview guide is used for semi-structured interview which was prepared after literature review. Thematic analysis was done through all transcribed data of interviews. Major themes which emerged were physical and psychological violence. However, occurrence of eternal trauma and social isolation has also been found. The findings showed that most of the respondents who had faced one type of violence had faced other form of violence too. Findings are the contributing source in community awareness programs.

Keywords: Acid attacks, Psychological violence, Social isolation, Physical violence, Eternal Trauma

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Introduction

The Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women defines gender-based violence as, “violence directed against woman because she is a woman or which affects a woman disproportionately.” It includes physical, mental or sexual harm or suffering, threats of such acts, coercion and other deprivation of liberty (CEDAW, 1992).

Acid Survivors Foundation defines acid violence as, “Pakistani women are facing acid violence and most of the cases go unreported. In order to understand the phenomenon of this type of violence one must have good understanding about violence against women”. Its various forms prevailing in Pakistan as well as rest of the world (ASF, 2010).

United Nations Organization defines violence in its report as, “any act of violence that results in or is likely to result in physical, sexual or psychological harm or suffering to a person including threat of such act permanent or temporary deprivation of liberty whether occurring in the public or private life” (UN, 1993).

World Health Organization defines in its report that, “Jamaica is one country where women are reported to have resorted to acid violence against men more often than men against women. In Bangladesh and most other countries where acid violence occurs campaigners say that violence is typically against women, it is only in that countries where there is an Acid Survivors Foundation mobilizing public support and working with the government that action is taken” (WHO, 2011).

World Report on Violence and Health classifies the three types of violence: self-directed; interpersonal; and collective.

- Violence in which perpetrator and victim is the same individual. It is sub divided into self-abuse and suicide.
- Violence between individual and it is sub divided into family and intimate partner violence and community violence.
- Violence committed by larger group of individuals. It can be divided into social, political and economic violence.

United Nations International Children Emergency Fund defines acid violence as, “in the acid attack a person throws acid (the kind found in car) on the face or any part of body of other person. Any number of reasons can lead to acid attacks. Sulphuric acid is ubiquitously being the basic inexpensive ingredient for making lead acid batteries in all motor vehicles all over the world. There does not appear to any way of reducing its availability anyways” (UNICEF, 2000).

Acid violence is a worldwide phenomenon and it is common misconception that attacks are exclusive to the Indian sub-continent or that committers are Islamic fundamentalists punishing women for behaving outside the realms of what is considered as modest behavior. On the contrary research indicates that attacks are being carried out by many nationalities and are not limited by race, religion, creed and location (Vaughn, 2011).

Statistics of violence against women in Pakistan reported that there were 53 cases of acid throwing in 2009 and 29 cases in 2008 recorded. Report also shows that acid attacks have increased (37%) in 2011 which is reached at alarming stage in the society of Pakistan (Press Report, 2011).

Violence is involving the act of causing harm physically or emotionally to one self or other. Typical act of violence includes fighting assaults of all level self-inflicted injuries exclusion of other within peer group (Becker, 2000).

Objectives of Study

The objectives of this study are as follows:

- To find out the causes and consequences of acid attacks on women
- To document the feelings and thoughts of acid burn victims and fears for their families
- To explore the perception about quality of medical services provided to burn victims

Significance of the Study

Acid attack has damaging effects not only on women but also on society. The researcher wants to explore the causes of acid attack and their consequences on victims' lives. The researcher desires to know about the Crime Laws implementations and also wants to fulfill the gaps of previous research taken on this social issue by giving the suggestions based on research findings. By conducting this research the researcher requires to expose the invisible picture of the higher state of incidence of acid attack as well as causes and factors which are responsible for this humiliating act.

Research Questions

Q1: Why acid attacks are gradually increasing and causing the women lives in Pakistan?

Q2: What are the key causes and growing rate of acid burn victims?

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study is to explore the reality and the unseen socio-economic and cultural causes behind the heinous crime of acid attack on women. By working on this topic this research can aware the concerning organizations which are functioning for the eradication of women violence from our society. This topic is selected because there is less work done before on this issue.

Operational Definitions

Violence

“The intentional use of physical force or power, threatened or actual, against oneself, another person or against a group or community that either results in or has a high

likelihood of resulting in injury, death, psychological harm, mal-development or deprivation” (WRVH, 2002).

Acid Violence

“Acid violence is deliberate use of acid to attack another human being. The victims of acid violence are usually women and children, and attackers often target the head and face in order to maim, disfigure and blind. Acid attacks rarely kills but causes severe physical, psychological and social scarring, and victims are often left with no legal resources, limited access to medical or psychological assistance and without the means to support themselves” (ASTI, 2011).

Limitations and Delimitations

Limitations of the Study

In the present study there are some limitations as following:

- The study was only conducted in urban areas so the researcher focused to the limited population of urban area.
- The reason of selecting the urban area for data collection was that researcher herself lived in this area and it was easy for her to approach the target population. Although choosing that urban area was a subjective decision but due to limitation of time and resources researcher had to rely on subjective judgment.
- Researcher has not enough resources and time to increase the area of research.

Delimitations of the Study

The following were the delimitations of the study:

- The women who live in Lahore city.
- The women (married and unmarried) their age ranged from 15-35.
- Both educated and uneducated women were selected by researcher for this study.

Literature Review

Page, W. (2005) conducted the research study on “no justice for Pakistan acid victims”. According to the Pakistan Human Rights Commission, the number of acid attacks on women in Pakistan has increased with nearly 400 annually. The main purpose of the study was to report the role of Pakistani police regarding victims’ justice why police discouraged them from seeking justice. The study revealed the story of 26 years old woman, suffered in unspeakable pain. The findings of this study illustrated that acid attacks are most common in rural areas which often the results of infertility, rejected marriage proposals, doubt of illegal relations and in-laws matters. The research study examined the results, the legal centre has been working to encourage greater government participation in looking for prosecutions and federal law reforms, but offer to treat acid attacks as attempted murder and placing limitations on sulphuric acid sales have proved fruitless.

Ali, S. M. (2008) investigated the study on “the acid attack phenomenon”. Incidences of the acid attacks prevail across the world but major amounts of reported occurrences

are concentrated in South Asia, particularly in Bangladesh, India and Pakistan. In the study it had observed that no acid throwing cases are reported and even less figure of acid burn victims are provided any justice; acid is measured an extremely accidental tool and as such often harms not only the planned target but also eyewitnesses. The main findings of this study explained that ordinary causes of acid attacks related to close and familial relationships where the doubt of an extra marital concern or other power tussles becomes inspiration for the act, moreover; some incidents have been known to take place because of land disputes which also effect other forms of gender violence such as honor killing, although acid attacks can rise above the gender lines, women are not only disproportionately represented among the survivors, but are also known to be perpetrators of acid attacks. The purpose of this study was to explore that why this phenomenon is so common in our region seems to be the ready accessibility of cheap acid; in order to know, with just a small number of rupees anybody can purchase this weapon to run another person's life in just a few seconds, to know more, there are various chemical shops on both sides of famous GT road Lahore where acid sold openly. The results of this study indicated that acid attacks impact the physical, emotional, social and economic surface of survivors lives, these victims often need to experience a long-lasting process of surgical treatment and psychological rehabilitation, furthermore, physical consequences of acid attacks can be severe, depictive survivors blind and disabled in other ways. Acid burn scars are not only painful but lead to physical distortions which lead many survivors to feel so embarrassed that they become victims of isolation.

Network, T. I. (2009) carried out a research on "Pakistan acid attack victims suffer in silence". The report uncovered the story of a woman aged 25, burnt from face down to her thighs. The intention of this report was to find out that whether burn centers of hospitals in Pakistan are really worked for burnt victims or not. The objective was to explore the recorded cases that were referred to hospitals by Progressive Women's Association (PWA). The target population of this report was women acid victims in age of 18-25. In this report, in-charge of the intensive care unit of the Burns Centre at Civil Hospital reported that one of the most horrifying forms of gender-based violence in Pakistan is throwing acid usually sulphuric acid on women with cruel aim to take revenge, deface and damage them which has long-lasting physical and psychological consequences. The findings of this report revealed that causes strengthened morbid jealousy, unkindness, proposal refuse, betrothed and vengeance intended to eternally punish the women.

Base., A. (2010) had conducted the study on "acid attacks and their consequences". Statistically, the main purpose of this study was to discover figure of acid attacks on women are rising all through the world at the present time, particularly South-East Asian countries and Middle-East countries; some of countries passed very severe punishment to those who do this matter. In 2002, Bangladesh introduced the death sentence for throwing acid and severely controlling the sales of acids. Under the Qisas Law of Pakistan, the assailant may undergo the similar destiny as the acid victim and possibly punished by having drops of acid poured in his eyes. In this study it has observed that acid throwing is a form of physical attack. Assailant of such attacks fling acid commonly sulphuric, nitric or hydrochloric acid at victims, frequently at their faces. The objective of this study was to know causes and consequences of acid attacks. The findings of this study demonstrated that love relationships among a female and a male, bitterness between divorced a husband or a wife, attractive of a

female, opposition between two groups lead to acid throwing between them, religious extreme. In addition, there are various other reasons for which acid attacks take place. It has also found that (80%) of victims are women which almost (40%) victims are under the age of 18. The consequences of these acid attacks are most common including long-term surgical treatment, psychological challenges, anxiety, depression, loss of sight, enduring disfigurement of the face and body. In this study it had measured that acid attacks are more common in Cambodia, Afghanistan, India, Bangladesh, Pakistan and other countries of the world. This fact is also very ordinary in African and Latin American countries, doesn't matter the country is rich or cultured.

Yusufzai, A. (2010) conducted a study on "Pakistan moves to counter acid attacks". This study described that country enacted a law that increases punishment for perpetrators and is restricting acid sales in an effort to get better defensive women. This research study exposed the story of a girl aged 18, suffered from disfiguring acid assault after rejected the marriage proposal. The purpose of this study was to explore the awareness regarding the government passed the Criminal Law Amendment Act in 2011, according to this law; attacker would tolerate the penalty of 14 years to life custody and a fine of Rs. 1 million (US \$9, 400). Furthermore; passing that law the provincial government has controlled the sale of an unadulterated acid. In this study it had investigated that the traders frequently import additional acid than the lawfully allowable, which caused the various problems; 50 drug inspectors have taught to make sure a total forbid on the sale of acid apart from for its legally allowable commerce use. The limitations of this study were to demonstrate how the new law was working to bring justice to the victims. The objective of this study was to explore the major causes of domestic and gender-based violence. The findings showed that gender-based aggression is common adding that acid attacks against women who rejected marriage proposals are frequent. Additionally, in this study it had found that the sale of pure acid should ban except for special authorized holders. The results of this study revealed that acid attack is a crime it doesn't only disfigure a face and cause burns, those who undergo it suffer eternal psychological trauma.

Methodology

Technique / Method of Study

The current qualitative study focused on major causes of acid attacks. The study aims to investigate the consequences of acid attacks on women at psychological, physical, socio-economic and cultural level. The case study technique is used for this study.

Population of Study

Population refers to all constituents of clearly describe objects and group of people who for research purpose are designed as being the focus of an investigation. To define the population of study:

Geographical Area

- Diplex Smile Again Foundation
- Jinnah Hospital

- Mayo Hospital

Human Universe

Human universe of the study was victim women of acid attacks.

Selection of Sampling and Sample Size

The current qualitative study focused on married and unmarried women of District, Lahore. The study aims to investigate the causes of acid attacks as well as their consequences which have become serious threat of our society. Purposive sampling is used to approach 10 respondents (married and unmarried women). Their age ranged from 15-35.

Tool of Data Collection

Interview schedule is used as a tool of data collection. Semi-structured in-depth interviews were conducted to collect the data. To conduct semi-structured interviews an interview guide was prepared after literature review.

Data analysis

Thematic analysis was done through all transcribed data of interviews. Major themes which emerged were physical and psychological violence. However, occurrence of eternal trauma and social isolation has also been found.

Results and Discussions

Interviews were analyzed descriptively and thematically. The present research focused on the causes and consequences of acid attacks. Amongst total population, (60%) females were married; (30%) were unmarried and (10%) were divorced. The age of the respondents varied from 15-35 years; (60%) of respondents were living in joint family, while (20%) each of respondents were living in nuclear and extended families respectively. Almost (40%) respondents were illiterate; (30%) studied up to matriculation; (20%) were intermediate, whereas (10%) were primary passed. (This information is given in tabular form in Annexure-I).

Transcription of data was analyzed through thematic analysis which resulted into major themes: Physical violence, psychological violence and social isolation. Most of the respondents experienced more than one form of violent behavior at the same time.

History of Burning

The results of the present study highlighted the history of burning; approximately half of the respondents (60%) reported that they had same kind of acid burn reasons in which doubt on character, refusal of marriage proposal, drug addiction, marital affair and dowry were very severe.

A female respondent reported,

My cousin burnt me because he wanted to get marry but my family refused his

proposal. He threw acid on my face and body when I was alone at home. My parents took me to hospital and I am under treatment for 3 weeks. This incident was immediately reported and the police arrested him (cousin). I demand strict punishment for the perpetrator.

Most of the respondents were suffered from aforesaid situations. Whereas the occurrence of second marriage threat, marital disputes, land disputes, jealousy have also found.

One female respondent said,

My husband always used to beat me and have hatred feelings towards me. He wanted to get second marriage and threaten to pour acid on my face. One day he threw acid on my face and body and cut my nose cruelly. He used sulphuric acid.

According to media monitoring by Human Rights Commission of Pakistan, until the end of year (2013) 44 women became targets of acid attacks in the country, seven of whom had died due to their injuries, and another 44 women were set on fire; 11 had died in such attacks (HRCP, 2013).

Psychological Effects

Majority of the respondents (70%) that they had to face psychological effects which included sympathetic behavior of family, ignorance of children and taunting behavior of relatives. The findings reflected that females were mentally disturbed and they trying to reduce their stress through weeping and shouting on others. Following transcriptions of different respondents indicate the nature of *Psychological Effects*.

A female respondent said,

My relatives used unbearable words for me and say my parents to stop my treatment and let me die in hospital. My relatives mock at me and have hatred feelings towards me. I usually start to shout and cry but in vain. I want to get die due to this bitter condition.

Other psychological effects like eternal trauma, social isolation and suicide plan were also found. While other belongings like fear, threatening and frustration were very high.

One female respondent reported,

When I looked at me first time after acid attack then I had planned to suicide. Psychologically I will feel free when I punish my husband with same pain as I am bearing. I am depressed and appeal for justice.

Major findings indicated that acid attacks adversely impact all aspects of the survivors' lives. The psychological consequences were severe in many instances rendering the survivors mentally retard and eternally shocked.

Social Isolation

Social isolation emerged as sub them of psychological effects. Majority of the respondents (60%) reported that they feel themselves isolated from their society. Many respondents said that they were being ignored by their family members and relatives. Most of the respondents were facing loneliness and isolation. It might be due to the fact they are not allowed by their parents and siblings to move outside with them.

A female respondent said,

I am disturbed and isolated by ignorant and impolite behavior of my family and relatives. After burning incident I never used to go for family functions just because of unkind attitude of family members.

Other social isolation factors like ill-mannered behaves, lack of courage, people gossips and children's unkind behavior were also along with helplessness and hopelessness.

Present Condition and Treatment

Majority of the respondents (80%) reported that they had scars on their bodies and faces. Many of the respondents are under treatment and some of other respondents were recovered (20%) while others were satisfied with their treatment. Most of the respondents were getting the facilities of cosmetic surgery from Deluxe Smile Again Foundation free of cost.

One female respondent reported,

I am treated in hospital since seven months. Though cosmetic surgery was required but I could not bear expenses for that treatment as it was very expensive. So I took help from Deluxe

Smile Again Foundation. DSF is still bearing my expenses. I am (70%) burnt and (20%) recovered.

Most of the respondents reported that they were burnt head to toe while some of them lost their eyes. Many of the respondents' nose and lips were melted. Majority of the respondents (50%) were having hateful feelings towards their perpetrators. Rest of the respondents' children behavior was very unkind and hurtful.

Future Planning

Majority of the respondents (70%) reported that perpetrators were their husbands and they do not want to compromise with them in any case while other respondents reported they have appealed for severe punishment and demand for justice. One female respondent said,

I demand strict punishment for committer (husband). I want to get divorce. How could I compromise as he (husband) done very bad with me.

Many of the respondents were reported that in future they would never get marry again as they have hateful feelings for committers while some of them were interested to re-marry. Most of the respondents were unable to take legal action against perpetrators as they belonged to poor families. Some of the respondents were required the custody of their children and have desired to take legal action for their protection.

Women Violence and Role of Media

Majority of the respondents (60%) were reported that major causes of women violence in our society is authoritative behavior of males, gender gap, and illiteracy. Almost all of the respondents were said that women violence could be eliminated from society by giving strict punishment to the perpetrators and by improving judicial system of our country.

A female respondent said,

Women violence takes place because judiciary system is not strong in Pakistan. Women violence can be eliminated by giving strict punishment to perpetrators and implementation of crime laws in our society.

Many of the respondents reported that media and judiciary is playing very positive role to address and eradicate the acid violence against women. Most of the respondents said that Government, private agencies and media should take collective measures to eliminate the evil of acid throwing and provide awareness among women about the Acid Control Act and Acid Prevention Act, 2010.

The study of Welsh, J. (2009) stated that acid violence is a form of premeditated violence, usually against women involves throwing corrosive acid at the face of the victim. Acid throwing has traumatic physical, psychological and social consequences. The data of this study revealed that acid attacks rarely cause sudden deaths but it always destroys lives often young lives. The intent behind the attacks is to permanently disfigure.

The study of Rather, P.B. (2012) identified that acid throwing is another form of violence against women which is increasing at alarming rate. The findings of this study revealed that the young and teenage girls are victims of acid burn because of refusal of marriage and rejection of love proposal, personal revenge, family disputes and kinship.

Conclusion

Acid violence is widespread and prevalent in our society that remains often invisible. Women are unsafe and are frequently victim even in their homes and often by their immediate family members. Women are vulnerable to every form of violence.

The researcher concludes that acid attack is present in society of Lahore, which has been reported in different appearances like history of burning, psychological effects as well as social isolation. The study aimed to investigate the causes of acid attacks as well as their consequences. Refusal of marriage proposal and family disputes are one the major causes of acid attacks practiced against women. Another major cause reported by respondents was they did not bring enough dowries with them. This present study uncovered that our society is lacking of sense of belongingness which often results in insecurity and unstable environment. That is why women of our society are much suppressed.

The findings showed that most of the respondents who had faced one type of violence had faced other form of violence too. Findings are the contributing source in community awareness programs.

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Table No. 1: Age of the Respondents

Age	Frequency	Percentage%
15-20	2	20
21-29	7	70
30-35	1	10

Table No. 2: Marital Status of the Respondents

Age	Frequency	Percentage%
Married	6	60
Un-married	3	30
Divorced	1	10

Table No. 3: Qualification of the Respondents

Age	Frequency	Percentage%
Illiterate	4	40
Primary	1	10
Matriculation	3	30
Intermediate or above	2	20

Table No. 4: Family System of the Respondents

Age	Frequency	Percentage%
Joint	6	60
Nuclear	2	20
Extended	2	20