



YOUTH GENERAL ASSEMBLY

Acid

Crimes in Pakistan

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Youth General Assembly (YGA) is an autonomous organization dedicated to providing a credible platform that fosters policy and strategy development, equitable administration, and non-traditional legislative activities. YGA empowers young individuals to engage in public discourse on social issues, preparing them to be future ambassadors and democratic leaders. Our mission is to inculcate the qualities of convening and engagement among the youth, expanding their perspective and knowledge of true democracy and parliamentary politics.

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1. Introduction

1.1 What are classified as Acid Attacks?

Acid attacks are a form of violent assault where acid or another corrosive substance is deliberately thrown at a person, typically a woman or girl, with the intent to maim, torture, or kill. These attacks are an extreme form of violence against women and girls, often intended to permanently scar the survivor both physically and emotionally. The focus on physical appearance, particularly for women, plays a significant role in why these attacks occur. Acid attacks are usually premeditated, with the victim often being targeted on the face.

In addition to causing immense psychological trauma, acid attacks inflict excruciating pain, lead to permanent disfigurement, increase the risk of severe infections, and often result in blindness in one or both eyes. Perpetrators may commit these attacks for various reasons, including revenge for rejecting marriage proposals or other romantic or sexual advances, land disputes, perceived dishonor, or jealousy.

While acid attacks are most common in countries like Bangladesh, Cambodia, India, and Pakistan, incidents have also been reported in Afghanistan, parts of Africa, and Europe. The prevalence of these attacks is partially attributed to the easy accessibility of acids in these regions. Statistics show that 80% of known acid attack victims are women, and nearly 70% of these victims are under 18 years of age.

2. What Are the Laws on Acid Attacks?

2.1 The Acid and Burn Crime Act, 2018

2.2 The Acid Control and Acid Crime Prevention Act, 2011

Acid attacks are heinous and violent crimes where perpetrators seek to inflict severe physical and psychological suffering on their victims, often targeting women. These attacks commonly stem from domestic violence, rejection of marriage proposals, denial of sexual advances, and other personal grievances. In many cases, the acid is deliberately thrown on the victim's face, with the intent to disfigure as an act of revenge. Racial and cultural factors, such as failure to provide dowry, political rivalries, and land disputes, also contribute to these attacks. Acid attacks can even occur during robbery attempts. The nature of these assaults is usually premeditated, as the perpetrator acquires the acid, stalks the victim, and carefully plans the attack.

One major cause of the prevalence of acid attacks is the lack of strict regulation and control over the manufacture and sale of acids, making it easily accessible. The **Acid Control and Acid Crime Prevention Act, 2011** (Criminal Law Second Amendment Act, 2011) addressed this by amending the Pakistan Penal Code and the Criminal Procedure Code to explicitly include acid attacks within the definition of "hurt." This amendment defines "hurt by dangerous means or substances, including corrosive substances or acid" as a punishable offense.

Through Section 336-B of the Pakistan Penal Code, the punishment for acid crimes was extended to life imprisonment, depending on the severity of the offense. Additionally, the Act

mandates that offenders pay a fine of no less than five hundred thousand rupees. The law also imposes penalties on unauthorized sellers of acid:

- **First conviction:** Imprisonment for one year, a fine of one hundred thousand rupees, or both.
- **Second and subsequent convictions:** Imprisonment for two years, a fine of two hundred thousand rupees, or both.

However, despite these legal provisions, the Act alone is not sufficient to prevent acid attacks. To combat this issue effectively, comprehensive mechanisms for investigation, prosecution, and victim support are crucial. The **Acid and Burn Crime Bill, 2012**, which builds on the 2011 Act, urges the government to implement additional measures for preventing acid attacks, protecting victims, and ensuring proper investigation and prosecution of offenders.

This proposed law calls for the establishment of reporting systems, emergency response protocols, and training for law enforcement agencies to handle acid violence cases more effectively. It also emphasizes the need for protective orders that prevent perpetrators from contacting their victims, as well as safe shelters for victims seeking refuge. The bill further advocates for free legal aid, medical treatment, and rehabilitation services for survivors of acid attacks.

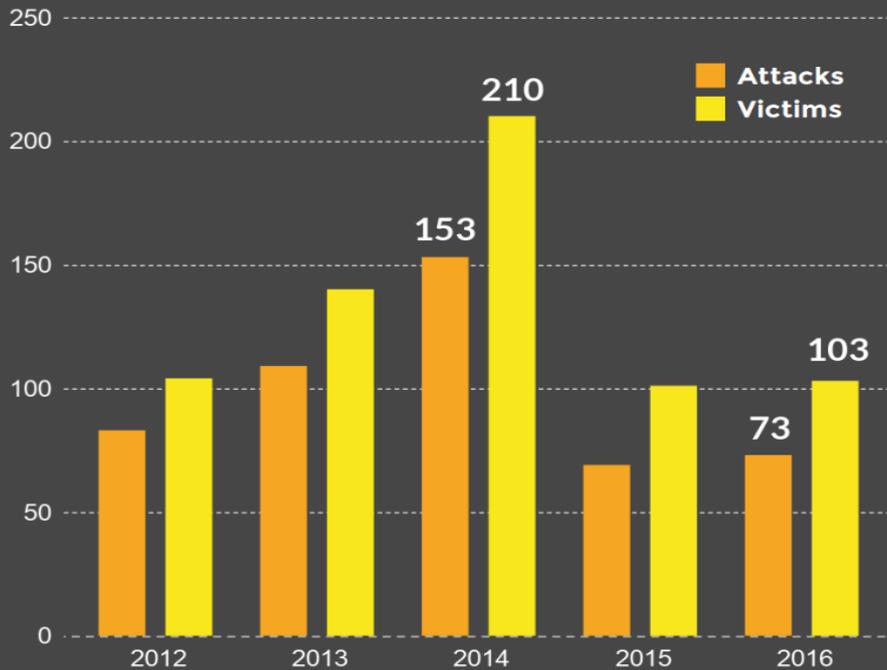
To reduce acid crimes meaningfully, the state must adopt and enforce these measures, ensuring a comprehensive framework for prevention and protection.

3. Reported vs. Unreported Acid Attacks

Acid burning incidents across Pakistan have decreased by more than half over a three-year period, according to a 2017 report by the Acid Survivors Foundation (ASF) Pakistan. Valerie Khan, Chairperson of ASF Pakistan, stated that "Pakistan is the only country in the world to have reduced any form of violence against women in the past 10 years," in reference to the decline in acid attacks. ASF Pakistan, a non-profit organization established in 2006, has been providing medical and legal support to acid attack survivors while actively advocating for legislation to prevent such violence. ASF is recognized for maintaining the most comprehensive database on acid violence in the country. According to its report, acid attacks decreased from 153 cases in 2014 to 73 cases in 2016, marking a 52% reduction.

Decline in Acid Violence

The number of acid attacks and victims has decreased since 2014.

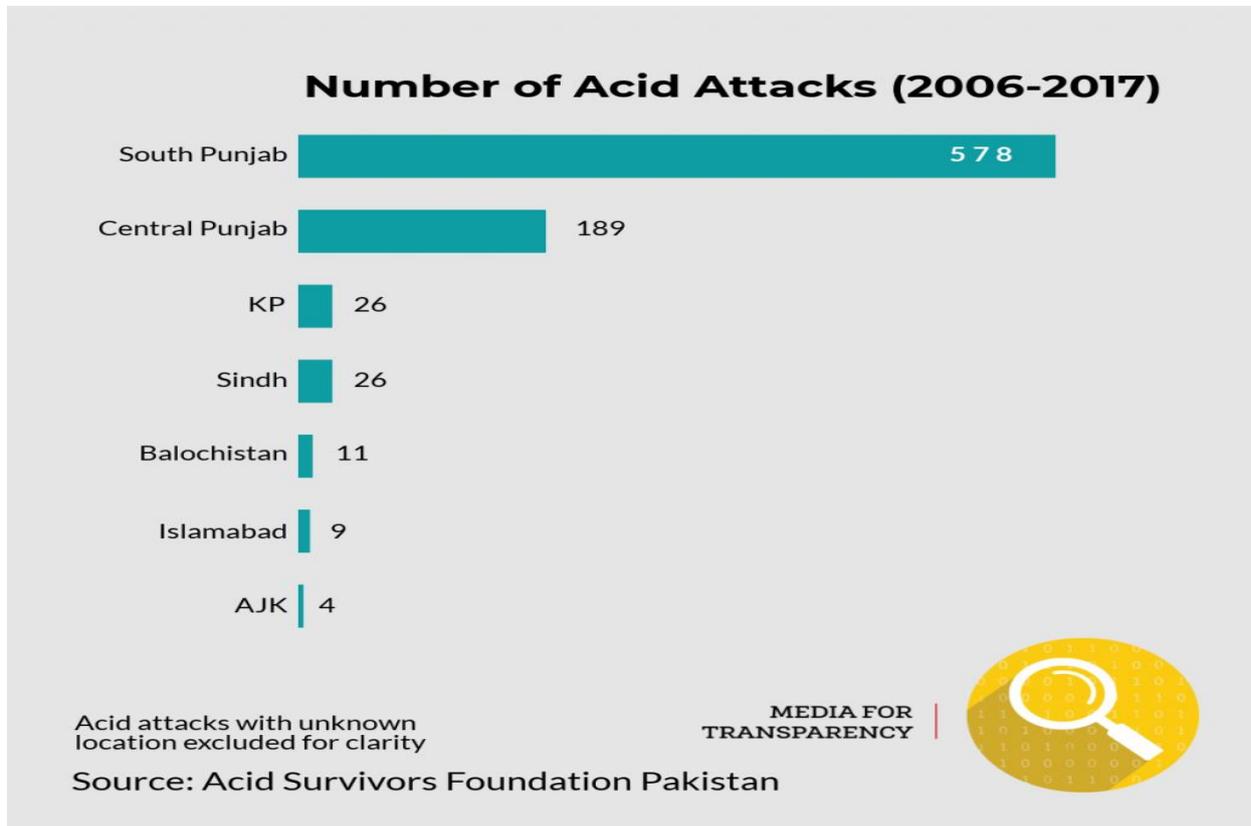


Source: Acid Survivors Foundation Pakistan

Women have been the most affected by acid violence in Pakistan. According to ASF data, around 56% of the 1,375 reported victims of acid attacks between 2007 and 2016 were women. However, since ASF relies on multiple sources to confirm reports, the gender of some victims remains unidentified due to a lack of details. There are 168 such unidentified victims in ASF's 10-year database. If we assume that most of these victims were women, the percentage of women affected by acid violence could rise to around 68% overall. In the 73 acid attacks reported in 2016, nearly 7 in 10 victims were women. The data also shows that transgender individuals are increasingly becoming targets of acid violence, with at least one transgender victim recorded in 2016. "We have noticed an increase in acid attacks within the transgender community," said Valerie Khan, Chairperson of ASF Pakistan.

The ASF report highlights that most acid attacks between 2007 and 2016 occurred in Punjab, particularly in South Punjab. This region accounts for just over half of all acid violence cases during the period. The South Punjab districts of Multan, Bahawalpur, Rahim Yar Khan, and Muzaffargarh were identified as having the highest rates of acid burn violence. It is therefore unsurprising that Dr. Naheed Ahmad, who heads the burn unit at Nishtar Hospital in Multan, has observed no decrease in acid attacks in the area. "I haven't seen any positive change in the number of acid victims," Dr. Ahmad said. "They are about the same as before in Multan."

Ms. Khan also pointed out that Multan remains one of the districts with the highest number of acid attack incidents, a claim corroborated by data from the Punjab Commission on the Status of Women. The data reveals that Multan had the most police cases registered for acid burn violence between 2014 and 2016. Already in January of this year, a man threw acid on his wife in Multan after a domestic dispute.



Despite the high number of acid attacks in South Punjab, the ASF report suggests that acid violence has been on the decline since 2014. This is particularly notable given that the data previously indicated a gradual rise in attacks each year before 2015. The swift and significant decrease is likely the result of successful awareness campaigns and the introduction of key legislation. One such law that made an impact was The Acid Control and Acid Crime Prevention Act of 2011.

The conviction rate for acid violence cases in 2016 was 9.58%, which is significantly higher than the national average conviction rate for violence against women, which stood at just 0.6% for cases between 2008 and 2014, according to the ASF report. Valerie Khan, Chairperson of ASF Pakistan, attributed the decline in acid attacks to the passage of this Act, which criminalized acid burn violence. Under this law, offenders face a minimum fine of Rs. 1 million and a minimum sentence of 14 years in prison.

In 2012, the Punjab government directed its police and prosecution departments to charge acid attack perpetrators under the Anti-Terrorism Act. This resulted in several cases being swiftly tried in anti-terrorism courts, where life imprisonment sentences were handed down, setting a strong legal precedent against acid burn violence.

In 2014, Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz politician Marvi Memon introduced the Acid and Burn Crime Bill in the National Assembly. This bill, which is now ready for voting, criminalizes all forms of burn attacks, not just acid burns but also those caused by fire or hot substances. It also includes provisions for speedy trials and strict punishments.

4. Pakistan Penal Code & Other Statutes

Instead of introducing a separate law, the Criminal Law (Amendment) Act, 2011 was enacted in December 2011 to punish those who cause harm by using corrosive substances, including acid. This law is applicable throughout Pakistan.

The Act introduced amendments to the Pakistan Penal Code (PPC) and the Code of Criminal Procedure (CrPC). It imposes a maximum sentence of life imprisonment and a minimum of 14 years, along with a fine of Rs. 1 million, for the offense of injuring a person with corrosive substances.

An important aspect of the law is that causing harm through corrosive substances is now a non-compoundable offense under Section 336-B of the PPC, meaning no compromise or settlement can be reached in such cases. However, if the injured person dies from burn injuries, the case is then treated under Section 302 of the PPC, which is a compoundable offense, allowing the legal heirs of the victim to reach a compromise with the accused. Section 336-B of the PPC states: “Whoever causes hurt by corrosive substance shall be punished with imprisonment for life or imprisonment of either description which shall not be less than 14 years and a minimum fine of one million rupees.”

5. Role of Main Organizations in Pakistan Dealing with Acid Attacks

Acid attacks cause immediate disfigurement, long-lasting medical complications, social ostracism, and psychological damage for victims and their families. In Pakistan, it is estimated that up to 400 women experience acid attacks every year, most committed by their husbands or in-laws. The Acid Survivors Foundation (ASF) Pakistan is a non-profit organization founded in 2006 with the support of the Acid Survivors Trust International, a UK-based organization. The organization aims to support survivors of acid attacks in Pakistan by helping them get medical help and legal support. British aid from the Department for International Development (DFID) has supported ASF’s efforts to eradicate acid violence in Pakistan and promote the rights of acid and burn survivors. According to the Acid Survivors Trust International (ASTI), 80% of acid attack victims are women, making it part of gender-based violence. Although men are also targeted by attackers, the issue affects women disproportionately and is more likely to occur in societies with pronounced gender inequality. This practice perpetuates gender inequality and reflects the poor position of women in Pakistani society, who are at serious risk of attacks at any moment, not only from strangers but often also from their own husbands and family members.

The UK directly funded ASF from 2008 to 2012. Through this funding, ASF was able to provide medical care for survivors, lobby for legislation on acid crime control (which was eventually passed), and train police, lawyers, and medical staff to implement the law.

DFID continues to support ASF indirectly through funding for the Acid Survivors Trust International (ASTI). ASTI works to prevent acid attacks and to help survivors of acid and burns violence in Pakistan and Nepal. Ending all forms of violence against girls and women is

a priority for the UK government. DFID is investing up to £25 million over 5 years in a new **Violence Against Women and Girls Research and Innovation Fund**. This pioneering fund will drive innovation, generate new evidence to understand what works in tackling the root causes of violence against women and girls, and support new violence prevention programs.

Like most social change, reforms against acid attacks in Pakistan are still moving too slowly for Pakistani women of today, who remain at a high risk of acid attacks. Women in Pakistan are a minority group, marginalized and discriminated against in law and society. ASF Pakistan speaks about how throwing acid in a woman's face is a normalized act of anger in the patriarchal Pakistani society. Women must not be objects to claim or oppress, and revenge should not be sought from a "disobedient" woman by attacking her face and body with acid. The Pakistani government must start enforcing its laws against acid attacks to bring about real change and respect for women's rights in the country.

Acid Survivors Trust International (ASTI) is a British registered charity (no. 1154961) and the only international organization whose sole purpose is to end acid and burns violence. Its mission is to eradicate acid violence and ensure survivors live with dignity and without fear.

Acid violence is a particularly vicious form of premeditated violence, where acid is thrown, usually at the face, to disfigure, maim, and blind, but not to kill. The targets are mostly women and girls. Acid causes the skin and flesh tissue to melt, often exposing and dissolving the bones beneath. Survivors face permanent disfigurement and often social isolation, devastating their self-esteem and psychological well-being. A survivor needs immediate specialist medical treatment, sanctuary, reconstructive surgery, follow-up physiotherapy, counseling, and long-term support to rebuild their life. A survivor often requires dozens of surgical procedures. Child victims require long-term specialized care from pediatric surgeons (reconstructive and ophthalmic), physiotherapists, and counselors—specialized skills that are often lacking in many countries where acid violence is prevalent. Most attacks occur in developing countries where this support is not available. Acid attacks have lifelong, tragic consequences for their victims and their families.

ASTI was founded in 2002 and now works with a network of six Acid Survivors Foundations in Bangladesh, Cambodia, India, Nepal, Pakistan, and Uganda, which it has helped to form. ASTI has provided medical expertise and training to its partners, raised valuable funds to support survivors of acid attacks, and helped change laws.

6. Ministry of Human Rights

Article 25 of the Constitution of Pakistan guarantees gender equality and empowers the State to make special provisions for the protection of women, including safeguarding their life, liberty, economic empowerment, and education. Pakistan has also ratified various international human rights instruments aimed at securing equal rights for women, including the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) and International Labor Organization (ILO) Conventions No. C-100 (Equal Remuneration Convention) and C-111 (Discrimination in Employment and Occupation). CEDAW obliges member states to eliminate all forms of discrimination against women and ensure both de jure and de facto equality between men and women. It also requires states to take legislative, administrative, and other measures to secure women's enjoyment of economic, political, and cultural rights. ILO Conventions No. 100 and 111 promote equality of opportunity and treatment in all employment matters, including remuneration.

At both the federal and provincial levels, Pakistan has enacted legislation to protect women from sexual harassment, forced marriages, denial of inheritance, and acid attacks. The government has also established the National Commission on the Status of Women under the National Commission on the Status of Women Act (2012) to monitor and facilitate the implementation of laws protecting women. However, the status of women in the country remains poor. Patriarchal attitudes and deeply ingrained stereotypes continue to subjugate women within families and society. Gender-based violence, including domestic violence, remains one of the most significant challenges to gender justice and women's empowerment in Pakistan.

In recent years, Pakistan's legal frameworks to address violence against women have been significantly strengthened. While these legislative efforts are commendable, their impact is weakened by poor implementation. According to the 2016 Global Gender Gap Index by the World Economic Forum, Pakistan ranked 143 out of 144 countries, making it the worst-performing country in Asia. The 2012-13 Pakistan Demographic and Health Survey (PDHS) found that one-third of ever-married women aged 15-49 had experienced physical violence at least once, and approximately 40% had suffered various forms of spousal abuse. Critically, 52% of the women who had experienced violence never sought help.

There is an urgent need to improve transparency, accountability, and the effectiveness of the legal system, as well as the services provided to survivors of gender-based violence. Access to justice remains a challenge for women, and the low level of female participation in political and public life, especially in decision-making positions, is concerning. Gender inequality is also pronounced in education, with high illiteracy rates among women, low enrollment rates for girls, and high dropout rates, particularly in rural areas. Traditional customs and practices limit the involvement of rural women in development programs and prevent them from inheriting or acquiring land and property.

Women make enormous contributions to the economy—whether in businesses, on farms, as entrepreneurs or employees, or through unpaid care work at home. Women's economic empowerment is essential for human rights, development, and economic growth. Bridging gender gaps can lead to substantial gains, including higher incomes, better access to and control over resources, and greater security, including protection from violence.

7. Case studies specific to Pakistan on Acid Attacks

7.1 Laxmi vs. Union of India and Ors.

Dated: 10.04.2015

This case is a public interest litigation filed by Laxmi, an acid attack survivor who runs a campaign to prevent such attacks and operates an NGO called 'Chaanv Foundation' to support victims and survivors. At the age of 15, Laxmi was attacked with acid in New Delhi by three men on a bike, seeking revenge for her refusal to marry one of them. She suffered immense physical and mental trauma as a result. Despite undergoing seven surgeries, no financial assistance was provided to her by the government. The attackers were charged with attempt to murder (Sec. 307) read with Sec. 120-B (criminal conspiracy), but they were later granted bail. To add to the trauma, one of the perpetrators married within a month of his release on bail.

The Delhi High Court upheld the sessions court's decision and ordered that the accused pay the victim compensation of 3 lakh rupees under clause 1 sub-clause (b) of Sec. 357 of the CrPC,

1973 ("Order to pay compensation for any loss or injury caused by the offence"). Due to the absence of a specific law to penalize acid attacks at the time, the perpetrators were charged under Sec. 320 (grievous hurt), Sec. 325 (punishment for voluntarily causing grievous hurt), and Sec. 326 (causing grievous hurt voluntarily by dangerous weapons or means) of the IPC, 1860. The punishment was insufficient to account for the immense trauma and damage to her physical and mental health. This led Laxmi to file a PIL in the Supreme Court, raising concerns about the easy availability of acid in the market, the lack of specific legislative provisions for acid attacks, and the regulation and rehabilitation of survivors.

The Supreme Court, after recognizing the seriousness of the matter, issued several guidelines:

- Minors are prohibited from purchasing acid.
- Buyers must provide identification and specify the reason for purchasing acid. This information must be reported to the nearest police station within three days.
- Sellers are required to submit reports of acid stocks to the SDM every 15 days. Failure to do so can result in a fine of up to 50,000 rupees and the seizure of unreported stocks.
- Institutions or labs purchasing acid for academic or research purposes must maintain a register of credentials, which must be submitted to the SDM.
- An authorized person must scrutinize the storage and handling of acid in these institutions, keeping records of everyone entering and exiting.

The Supreme Court also directed legislative changes through the "Criminal Amendment Act, 2013," resulting in the following amendments:

- **Sec. 326-A (Voluntarily Causing Hurt by Use of Acid, etc.)** was inserted in the IPC. It penalizes individuals who cause partial or permanent damage, deformity, or disfigurement by administering acid, with the intention or knowledge that the act is likely to cause harm. The punishment can extend to life imprisonment or at least 10 years, along with a fine sufficient to cover the victim's medical expenses.
- **Sec. 326-B (Voluntarily Throwing or Attempting to Throw Acid)** was introduced, with a punishment ranging from 5 to 7 years, along with a fine. The term 'acid' includes any corrosive substance capable of causing injury or damage to the body. The injury need not be irreversible to constitute an offense.
- **Sec. 114-B** was added to the Indian Evidence Act, which presumes that a person throwing or attempting to throw acid has both the intention and knowledge to cause harm.
- **Sec. 357-A** was inserted into the CrPC, requiring the central and state governments to establish a scheme for compensating survivors. The compensation is determined by the legal services authority based on court recommendations. Even if the offender is acquitted or remains unidentified, the survivor or their dependents can apply for compensation.
- **Sec. 357-B** was added to clarify that the compensation under CrPC is separate from any fine imposed under Sec. 326-A and B of the IPC.

The Supreme Court further directed that:

- Victims must be paid a minimum compensation of 3 lakh rupees.
- Hospitals cannot refuse treatment to acid attack victims, citing a lack of medical facilities. Denying treatment makes the hospital liable under Sec. 357-C of the CrPC. First aid should be given the highest priority.

- Hospitals treating the victim initially must issue a medical certificate for further reference.
- Both central and state governments must streamline private hospitals to treat acid attack victims as well.

Despite these stringent laws and guidelines, not much progress has been made by the government to date. Most victims rely on public support and NGOs for treatment and rehabilitation. Even seven years after the amendments, significant work remains to fully implement these provisions.

7.2 Parivartan Kendra vs. UOI & Ors. (WP (CIVIL) No. 867/2013),

In this Public Interest Litigation (PIL) concerning acid attack cases, the Supreme Court directed the Bihar Government to compensate an acid attack survivor, C, with Rs. 10 lakhs and her sister, S, with Rs. 3 lakhs. C and S, two sisters from the Dalit community in Bihar, were brutally attacked with acid on October 21, 2012. C suffered burns covering 28% of her body and 90% of her face as a result of the attack.

Parivartan Kendra, a women's group, filed the petition with support from the Human Rights Law Network (HRLN). The petition sought to ensure that acid attack survivors are rehabilitated properly and receive immediate care, sensitivity, and skilled treatment. It also pointed out that the Rs. 3 lakhs compensation granted under the Supreme Court's orders in **Laxmi v. Union of India & Ors. (WP (Crl). No. 129 of 2006)** was grossly inadequate, particularly when survivors like C suffer severe injuries. The petition further argued that the Laxmi judgment should not be seen as restrictive when determining compensation amounts.

In addition to the compensation, the Court directed all States and Union Territories to consider the plight of acid attack survivors and take steps to include their names on the disability list. This is a significant directive, as it would allow survivors to gain employment under the state's reserved categories, offering them better opportunities for rehabilitation and social integration.

8. Conclusion and Policy Recommendations

The primary reason behind the continued occurrence of acid attacks is that there is no control over the availability of acid. The study clearly demonstrates that acid is very easily accessible and available. The prosecution only steps in after the incident and there is no regulation on the sale of corrosive substances despite the 1919 Poisons Act.

No action is taken against the seller of the acid even when there are successful criminal prosecutions, as the law stipulates separate proceedings and procedures under the 1919 Poisons Act can be initiated. The lack of interconnectedness between the criminal prosecution for the offence and the action to be taken against the provision of acid has led to almost all sellers ending up scot-free. Effective implementation of the provisions of the Poisons Act and the Rules thereunder, along with the application of immediate measures to curb the wide availability of acids, are important steps in reducing this type of crime.

In many of the cases prior to the inclusion of special provisions for acid attacks analysed, where there had been a resultant death, the validity of the dying declaration of the victim was questioned by the accused and some of the acquittals were on this account. The delays incurred at every step of the criminal justice system play a major role in reduced punishments. The study shows that an average case lasts anytime between three to five years and this leads to ineffective trials since witness accounts are not very clear with the passing of time, and the leniency shown towards the accused also increases with time. In many cases, there is a delay even at the stage of initiating the First Information Report. In addition, the length and cost of pursuing legal proceedings discourages many victims from coming forwards. It remains to be seen whether the presence of special offences criminalizing acid attacks leads to a better conviction rate. The study of the victim profiles and the motives for the crimes demonstrates that even though men are also victims in some cases, the majority of attacks are against women and are perpetrated by men. These prosecutions need to be fast tracked along with other cases of crimes against women, and clear timelines should be drawn up for the trials, which should be completed in a timely manner.

The absolute lack of compensation in most cases is once again reflective of the lack of a victim friendly atmosphere in the criminal justice system. The authorities need to ensure that proper medical attention is provided and that the costs are covered by the State in addition to the victim being compensated for their trauma and suffering. The challenge lies in converting the symbolic presence of the legislation, rules and schemes into systems that function effectively and consistently by addressing the systemic concerns.

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