

Original article

Vitriolage: A Curse of Human being

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Abstract:

Objectives : Acid throwing or vitriolage is a form of violent assault. In Bangladesh, the growing numbers of acid assaults reflect an epidemic of gender violence and are a reaction to women's advancing economic and social status. The objective of this study was to identify the causes and consequences of the victims of vitriolage.

Methods : A retrospective cross sectional study was done in Dhaka Medical College under went to treatment at one stop crisis centre (OCC) and burn unit and also rehabilitation and treatment clinics of ASF. After obtaining necessary permission and maintaining all the ethical issues the victims were interviewed. The data received were later on analyzed by computer and organized in tables.

Results : A total of 100 victims were interviewed. Among the victims 92% were female and 25% belonged to 21-30 years of age group. Most of the victims were from low socioeconomic conditions & failure in marriage 22%, refusal of sweat proposal for sexual relationship 17%, failure in affairs 13% were the main background behind acid throwing. There was injuries in the hand fifty four percent (54%), injuries in the neck and throat fifty one (51%), injuries in the face & back of the body forty one (41%) were the commonest findings in cases of vitriolage.

Conclusion : The victims of vitriolage suffer in the form of physical, social, mental and economical ways. Rehabilitation centre for the victims, prevention of indiscriminate sale of acids, prompt trial of the accused, creation of acid crime tribunal in each district can improve the situation.

Keywords : Vitriolage, Injury

Introduction

Acid throwing, also called an acid attack, a vitriol attack or vitriolage, is a form of violent assault¹, defined as the act of throwing acid or a similarly corrosive substance on the body of another with the intention to disfigure, maim, torture or kill². Perpetrators of these attacks throw acid at their victims, usually at their faces, burning them and damaging the skin tissue, often exposing and sometimes dissolving the bones. The most common types of acid used in these attacks are sulfuric and nitric acid. Hydrochloric acid is sometimes used, but is much less damaging³. The

long term consequences of these attacks may include blindness, as well as permanent scarring of the face and body, along with far reaching social, psychological and economic difficulties⁴.

Although acid attacks occur all over the world, including Europe and the United States, this type of violence is mainly concentrated in South Asia⁵.

Information proved that a significant number of attacks by acid violence occur in South and Southeast Asian countries, like Bangladesh, India, Nepal, Pakistan, Uganda, Cambodia, where the cheap and easy availability of acid gives access to a dangerous weapon⁶.

Since the 1990s, Bangladesh has been reporting the highest incidence rates for women⁷, with 3,512 Bangladeshi people acid attacked between 1999 and 2013.

Acid is highly corrosive chemical has a catastrophic effect on human flesh. It causes the skin tissue to melt, often exposing the bones, sometimes even dissolving the bone. Scar tissue develops after healing hinders day to day activity of the victim. When acid attacks the eyes, it damages them permanently. Many acid attack survivors have lost the use of one or both eyes. This amounts to Grievous injury according to BPC section 320.

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Materials and methods:

This retrospective cross sectional study was carried out from July 2011 to June 2012 among the victims of vitriolage who underwent treatment at One stop Crisis Centre (OCC) and burn unit of Dhaka Medical College and also at the rehabilitation and treatment clinics of CID Survivors Foundation (ASF). After obtaining necessary permission and maintaining all the ethical issues the victims were interviewed. The data were analyzed using computer and organized in tables & figures.

Results

A total 100 victims were interviewed. The respondents were very cooperative. Among the subjects 92% were female and 8% were male (Table-I). Five percent belonged to age group 1- 10 years, 9% belonged to age group 11-20 years, 25% to 21-30 years, 21% to 31-40 years, 30% to 40-50 years and 10% in more than 50 years (Table-II). Among the victims 34% were married and 66% were unmarried (Table-III). Regarding occupation, most of the victims (51%) were students, followed by house wives (27%) and others (13%). Reasons behind vitriolage were failure in marriage 22%, refusal of indecent proposal for sexual relationship 17%, failure in love affairs 13%, followed by family problems 11%, dowry 8% and others. (Table- IV). Income of most of the victims or their family (67%) are taka 5,000/- per month (Table-VI). Most of the victims received their injuries in hand (54%) followed by 51% in neck and throat, 43% in back of body, 41% in face, 38% in chest area, and 31% had injury to eyes (table-VII).

Table-1 : Sex Distribution of vitriolage affected person

Percentage of Sex Distribution	Percentage
Female	92%
Male	8%
Total	100%

Table-II : Age distribution of affected persons

Age of the victims	Percentage
1-10 years	5%
11-20 years	9%
21-30 years	25%
31-40 years	21%
41-50 years	30%
> 50 years	10%

Table-III : Distribution of vitriolage cases as per marital status

Marital Status	Percentage
Married	34%
Unmarried	66%
Total	100%

Table-IV : Distribution of vitriolage cases as per occupation

Occupation	Percentage
Students	51%
Housewife	27%
Others	22%
Total	100%

Table-V : Distribution of vitriolage cases as per income of victim/victim's family

Amount of Taka	Number of Vitriolage cases
1000/- to 5000/-	67%
5001/- to 10000/-	14%
10001/- to 15000/-	13%
More than 15000/-	6%
Total	100%

Table-VI : Distribution of vitriolage cases as per cause

Causes	Percentages
Marriage	22%
Sexual relations	17%
Love affairs	13%
Family problems	11%
Dowry	8%
Disputes for property monetary matter	8%
Attack by husband	7%
Failure in kidnapping	6%
Multiple marriage by husband	5%
Other causes	3%
Total	100%

Table-VII : Distribution of vitriolage cases as per injuries in various areas of the body in case acid violence

Area of Injury	Percentage of Area of Injury
Injury to the face	54%
Injury to the neck & throat	31%
Injury to the back of the body	07%
Injury to the hand	04%
Injury to the chest area	03%
Damages to the eyes	01%
Total	100%

Table-VIII : Incidents of Acid violence since 1999 to 2013 (ASF Report 2013)

Month	Number of Incidents	Number of Survivors
1999	165	167
2000	240	240
2001	351	352
2002	494	496
2003	417	420
2004	326	333
2005	222	277
2006	183	224
2007	162	199
2008	142	184
2009	129	159
2010	122	160
2011	91	118
2012	71	98
2013	69	85

Discussion

Violence against women (VAW), is a form of discrimination and mistreatment which results in physical, psychological, and socioeconomic costs to women. WHO multi-country study (10 countries including Bangladesh) demonstrates that most of the women in the study areas experience physical and sexual spousal violence in their lifetime, ranged from 15% to 71%⁶ VAW is as much fatal as any serious diseases or accidents that causes deaths of women of reproductive ages. And is one of the most disgraceful

expressions of human rights violation across the world⁸.

In this study, regarding sex distribution majority of the subjects were female. Acid attack victims are primarily women in Bangladesh, and perpetrators' motives are often tied to gender inequality and discrimination⁹. Statistics demonstrate that, since its inception from 1999 to 2013, 3563 women, children and men were attacked with acid². Majority of them (68.36 percent) were women and girls. Bangladesh has the second worst record in the world for violence committed against women by men¹⁰. Women and girls make up about fifty percent of the population of Bangladesh⁸. Considering age, children also affected because they remain in close contact with their mothers (the victim). Male victims and older persons are attacked due to family disputes overland or monetary matters^{12, 13}.

Regarding occupation, most of the victims were students and from low socio economic conditions. It becomes very difficult for them to bear the expenses of treatment and rehabilitation of the victim. These findings are in consistent with previous studies¹⁰⁻¹¹.

Regarding reasons behind vitriolage findings are consistent with Report by UN. Male victims and older persons are attacked due to family disputes over land or monetary matters^{14, 15}.

The victims of vitriolage suffer in the form of physical, social, mental and economical ways. They cannot go outside their house, because being neglected by others¹⁶. They truly suffer from post traumatic stress disorder¹⁷. 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 miseries¹⁸.

Acid attack is not committed against women alone it is committed even on men and children. Acid attack has a gender dimension in India, with majority of the victims being women. Perpetrators throw acid into their victims' faces with effort to severely disfigure them, the reason for committing acid attack is vary for many reasons. The following are some of the reported reason for the acid attack. Revenge for any past incidence occurs between victim and offender, the refusal of an offer of marriage proposal, the refusing to have a sex or relationship, failure of a girl to bring a dowry to her husband, business disputes, domestic fights, disputes over property, for committing Robbery, hate or jealous, extra affair, political rivalries, rarely it is accidental, that is presence of victim at

the scene¹⁰.

Conclusion

Over the last few years, acid throwing in Bangladesh was a regular phenomenon where most of the victims were female, sometimes adult males and children were also affected. Violence against women is an important topic of human rights violation in today's world, which is caused due to inequality and discrimination in political, economic, social and cultural contexts²⁰.

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