

Original Article

Socio Demographic Status of Victims in Vitriolage Cases- A Medico Legal Study

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Abstract

Vitriolage or acid violence is a burning human right violation problem of our country. Over the last few years, acid throwing in Bangladesh was a regular phenomenon where most of the victims were female. This descriptive 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 Hospital and also at the rehabilitation and treatment clinics of acid Survivors Foundation (ASF). Among the victims 92% were female and 25% belonged to 21-30 years age group. Most of the victims were from low socio economic background. Failure in marriage (22%), refusal of indecent proposal for sexual relationship (17%), failure in love affairs (13%) were the main causes behind acid violence. Fifty four percent (54%) had injuries in hand, 51 % (51) had injuries in neck and throat, 43 % (43) in back of body and 41 % (41) in face. 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 etc can improve the situation.

Key wards: Vitriolage, Injury, Socio demographic status.

Introduction

Throwing of corrosive acids on another person's body in a hostile manner for the purpose of disfiguration out of revenge is called vitriolage¹. 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 affected². Violence against women is an important topic of human rights violation in today's world, which are caused due to inequality and discrimination in political, economic, social and cultural contexts³. The dimension of gender based violence include acid throwing, rape, sexual exploitation, physical torture, mental abuse, women trafficking, domestic violence, dowry deaths, provocation for suicide, forced marriage under threat or blackmailing and other psychological and financial oppression⁴⁻⁵.

Objective

The objective of this study was to find out the socio demographic status of the victims of vitriolage along with causes and consequences of this heinous crime.

Materials and methods

This descriptive 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 Hospital and also at the rehabilitation and treatment clinics of acid Survivors Foundation (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/ figures.

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Results

A total fo 100 victims were interviewed. The respondents were very cooperative. Among the subjects 92% (92) were female and 8% (8) were male. Five percent (5) belonged to age group 1- 10 years, 9% (9) belonged to age group 11- 20 years, 25% (25) to 21-30 years, 21% (21) to 31- 40 years, 30% (30) to 40-50 years and 10% (10) in more than 50 years. (Table-I).

Table-I: Age distribution of vitriolage affected persons (n= 100)

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

Among the victims 34 % (34) were married and 66 % (66) were unmarried. Regarding occupation, most of the victims 51 % (51) were students, followed by house wives 27 % (27) and others 13 % (13). Main reason behind vitriolage was 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-II).

Table-II: Distribution of vitriolage cases as per cause (n-100)

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

Table-III: Incidents of Acid violence since 1999 to 2013 (ASF Report 2013)2.

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
Total	3184	3512

Most of the perpetrators 69 % (69) were known to the victims and majority of the incidents 76 % (76) took place at or near the victims house. Income of most of the victim/ or their family (67%) are taka 5,000/- per month. Most of the victims received their injuries in hand 54% (54) followed by 51% (51) in neck and throat, 43% (43) in back of body, 41% (41) in face, 38% (38) in chest area, and 31% (31) had injury to eyes (Fig-1).

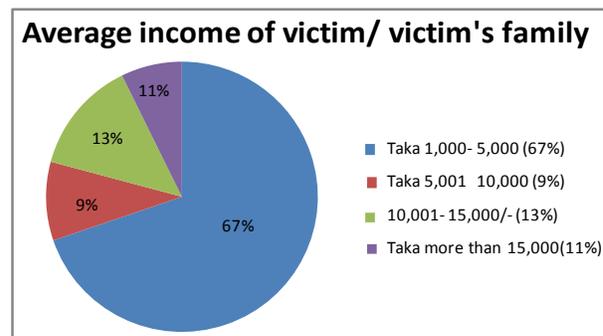


Figure-1

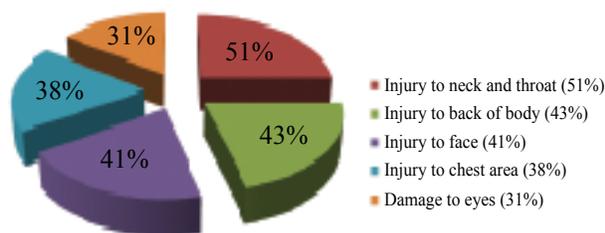


Figure - 2

Discussion

Violence against women (VAW), is a form of discrimination and mistreatment of women 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 ages⁷; and is one of the most disgraceful expressions of human rights violation across the world. In this study among the subjects 92 % (92) were female and 8% (8) were male. Acid attack victims are primarily women in Bangladesh, and perpetrators' motives are often tied to gender inequality and discrimination. Statistics demonstrate that, since its inception from 1999 to 2013, 3563 women, children and men were attacked with acid 2 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 men. Women and girls make up about fifty percent of the population of Bangladesh⁸. 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 acid is cheap and easily available. Considering age⁹ 5% (5) belonged to age group 1- 10 years, 9% (9) belonged to age group 11- 20 years, 25% (25) to 21-30 years, 21% (21) to 31- 40 years, and 30% (30) to 40-50 years and 10% (10) in more than 50 years. Among the victims 34 % (34) were married and 66 % (66) were unmarried. Children become affected because they remain in close contact with their mother (the victim). Main reason behind vitriolage was 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. The

young generation due to lack of proper care and monitoring by guardians, spend a lot of time watching porn films in computer/ mobile phones. This type of leisure items provoked them for sexual fantasy. Drug addiction is another cause of sexual violence. Easily available drugs in our country like Yaba, alcohol, low dose of cannabis all act as aphrodisiac agents. Male victims and older persons are attacked due to family disputes over land or monetary matters. These results are in consistent with previous studies done before¹⁰⁻¹¹.

Regarding occupation, most of the victims 51% (51) were students, followed by house wives 27% (27) and others 13% (13). Income of most of the victim/ or their family (67%) are within taka 5,000/- per month. It means most of the victims are from families of low socio economic conditions. It becomes very difficult for them to bear the expence of treatment and rehabilitation of the victim.

Most of the perpetrators 69 % (69) were known to the victims and majority of the incidents 76% (76) took place at or near the victims house. The perpetrators usually wait near the house to attack, when the victims return home from school/ college coaching or working place at evening or night. These results are in consistent with previous studies done before¹⁰⁻¹¹. The culprits choose night time so that they can fled away after committing the crime and no one can identify them.

More over in the darkness of night it is easy to attack the female, especially in village area or in slums there are no attached toilets in house. So when the victim go outside to response call of nature, attackers through acid on them, which are easily available at cheap rate in various chemical shops and motor mechanics garage from old battery. Regarding injury, 45 % (45) had serious injuries all over the body, whereas 55% (55) had moderate injuries in their bodies. Same victim had multiple area involved, among these 54% (54) had injuries in hand, 51% (51) had injuries in neck and throat, 43% (43) in back of body, 41% (41) in face, 38% (38) in chest area, and 31% (31) had injury to eyes. The perpetrators choose face of the victim for disfiguration after acid throwing. But since they hurriedly throw the acid and run away some times instead of face other body areas are affected. Sometimes the victim cover the face with hands and clothes, so hands get affected. The acid melts body tissue, sometimes affect the underlying joints. Scar tissue develops after healing hinders day to day activity of the victim. 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. 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. The victims of vitriolage suffer in the form of physical, social, mental and economical ways. They can not go out side their house, because being neglected by others. The education in school/colleges is stopped by guardian. Many survivors suffer from psychological breakdown including identity crisis because of their lost and distorted appearance. The disfigurement prevents them from joining in family and social programmes. Most stop their education or work during the lengthy recovery period or beyond, due to disfigurement². Lack of support in job places throw them towards an unsecured economically measurable life. Even no one agrees to marry them, thus the victims become isolated in a small world. They truly suffer from post traumatic stress disorder. 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 miseries¹².

Conclusion

Domestic violence like acid throwing in Bangladesh is a major concern of human rights violation. The survivors could not return fully to the previous life where they lived with all supports from the family and community. The acid attack not only disfigured the faces, but spoiled the full and secure life over a multitude of dimensions. The consequences included disfigurement, negligence from family and society, separation from job and education, marital barrier, disability, poverty etc. Rehabilitation centre for the victims, prevention of indiscriminate sale of acids, prompt trial of the accused, creation of acid crime tribunal in each district etc can improve the situation.

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