

# ACID ATTACK ON WOMEN IN INDIA

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## Abstract

On October 7, 2024, a 14-year-old girl was walking near her home in Amroha, Uttar Pradesh, when she was attacked all of a sudden. A man reported that he was linked to a longstanding family feud, intercepting her and throwing acid on her face. This liquid immediately burned through her skin, causing severe injuries and even exposing fragile facial tissues. The girl was rushed to multiple hospitals, facing delays in receiving critical treatment because of a decrease in medical facilities in her region. Despite the efforts to save her, she passed away from her injuries after prolonged suffering. This incident triggered outrage, with people calling for stricter regulations on acid sales and improved medical response for the victims. *India, Times Of. 2024. "Turned Away by Clinic, Acid Attack Victim, 14, Dies after 350km Journey." The Times of India. Times Of India. October 8, 2024.*

<https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/city/meerut/tragic-death-of-14-year-old-acid-attack-victim-after-delayed-treatment/articleshow/114053347.cms>.

Acid attacks like this are a crime but also a display of male authority and anger over women. These attacks are mainly against women, leaving survivors with lifelong physical and emotional scars; they are horrific manifestations of violence based on gender. *"IV COMBATING ACID VIOLENCE in BANGLADESH, CAMBODIA, and INDIA*

*Report by the Avon Global Center for Women and Justice at Cornell Law School, the Committee on International Human Rights of the New York City Bar Association, the Cornell Law School International Human Rights Clinic, and the Virtue Foundation.” n.d.*

<https://www.ohchr.org/sites/default/files/Documents/HRBodies/CEDAW/HarmfulPractices/AvonGlobalCenterforWomenandJustice.pdf>.

Acid attacks are a type of honor-based violence. The violent acts that cause damage and bodily injury are generally fueled by revenge, jealousy, or even masculine assertion of dominance. “*IV COMBATING ACID VIOLENCE in BANGLADESH, CAMBODIA, and INDIA Report by the Avon Global Center for Women and Justice at Cornell Law School, the Committee on International Human Rights of the New York City Bar Association, the Cornell Law School International Human Rights Clinic, and the Virtue Foundation.*” n.d. <https://www.ohchr.org/sites/default/files/Documents/HRBodies/CEDAW/HarmfulPractices/AvonGlobalCenterforWomenandJustice.pdf>. India has some of the highest reported rates among countries that report the highest numbers yearly. According to the National Crime Records Bureau, in 2017, more than 300 cases of acid attacks were reported on average in India that year. In India, incidents of acid attacks are primarily reported in the states of West Bengal and Uttar Pradesh, most of which are triggered by reasons such as rejection of marriage, domestic arguments, and other issues. Rashmi, Dr, and Ram Hunnur. 2019. “*A Theoretical Overview on Acid Victims and Government Regulations in India*” 21: 35–41. <https://doi.org/10.9790/487X-2102023541>.

While his paper focuses on India, it is worth noting that rates are also high in Bangladesh, Cambodia, and Pakistan. “*Acid Attacks: Pakistan’s Worst Social Epidemic.*” 2023. Pulitzer Center. 2023. <https://pulitzercenter.org/stories/acid-attacks-pakistans-worst-social-epidemic>. However, Bangladesh has successfully reduced the rates by adopting strict

legislation, with cases dropping from 500 annually in the early 2000s to 50-100 today. *Human Rights Watch*. 2020. “*I Sleep in My Own Deathbed.*” *Human Rights Watch*. October 29, 2020. <https://www.hrw.org/report/2020/10/29/i-sleep-my-own-deathbed/violence-against-women-and-girls-bangladesh-barriers>. Notably, although also outside the scope of this paper, some countries have a different manifestation of acid attacks, like the UK, where most of the victims are males. *Human Rights Watch*. 2020. “*I Sleep in My Own Deathbed.*” *Human Rights Watch*. October 29, 2020. <https://www.hrw.org/report/2020/10/29/i-sleep-my-own-deathbed/violence-against-women-and-girls-bangladesh-barriers>. The UK has higher yearly reported rates than India, but this is often linked to gang violence, where men are more likely to be both victims and attackers. *Human Rights Watch*. 2020. “*I Sleep in My Own Deathbed.*” *Human Rights Watch*. October 29, 2020. <https://www.hrw.org/report/2020/10/29/i-sleep-my-own-deathbed/violence-against-women-and-girls-bangladesh-barriers>.

Although Section 326A of the Indian Penal Code prescribes severe punishment for an acid attack, easy availability and weak enforcement in India have made the problem grave. This requires comprehensive victim support systems.

The paper begins by exploring the causes, consequences, and potential solutions to acid attacks in India, a severe form of gender-based violence. It examines how cultural norms, weak legal deterrents, and societal stigma perpetuate this crime, creating an environment where they feel vulnerable. Although Section 326A of the Indian Penal Code prescribes severe punishment for an acid attack, easy availability and weak enforcement in India have made the problem grave. By investigating these factors, this discussion underscores the urgent need for stronger policies, societal reforms, and survivors' support systems to help address as well as prevent acid attacks effectively.

### **Historical and Social Roots of Acid Attacks in India**

Acid attacks on women in India stem from deep-rooted attitudes, societal stigmatization, and weak legal enforcement. Cultural factors involving rigid gender roles contribute to acts of violence against women, especially if women are perceived to be acting in a way that challenges male dominance. Legal shortcomings, weak enforcement regulations regarding acid sales, and slow judicial processes fail to serve. The problem is further compounded by societal issues such as the easy availability of acid and a lack of medical treatment and other support for survivors. Stronger frameworks will lead to better enforcement and social awareness and also help provide comprehensive support for survivors, which is needed to fight acid attacks.

This section examines the historical roots of the issue and the cultural and societal justifications for it.

### **Historical roots**

Acid attacks have a long and complex history, with their origins rooted in various socio-economic, cultural, and geopolitical factors. These attacks date back centuries, often tied to the availability of corrosive substances and their use in industrial and domestic contexts. Denmark, Helge Kragh, Niels Bohr Institute, University of Copenhagen. 2017. "Sulphuric Acid Was the Bedrock of the Industrial Revolution." [Www.sciencenordic.com](http://www.sciencenordic.com). November 9, 2017. <https://www.sciencenordic.com/chemistry-denmark-researcher-zone/sulphuric-acid-was-the-bedrock-of-the-industrial-revolution/1450988>. During the Industrial Revolution, sulfuric acid and other caustic chemicals made these substances more readily available. Watson, Cassie. 2017. "Acid Attacks in Nineteenth-Century Britain." *Legal History Miscellany*. *Legal History Miscellany*. September 13, 2017. <https://legalthistorymiscellany.com/2017/09/13/acid-attacks-in-nineteenth-century-britain/>. This accessibility inadvertently enabled acid to become a weapon in personal disputes, particularly in urban areas where industrial chemicals were prevalent. Watson, Cassie. 2017. "Acid Attacks in Nineteenth-Century Britain." *Legal History*

Miscellany. Legal History Miscellany. September 13, 2017.

<https://legalhistorymiscellany.com/2017/09/13/acid-attacks-in-nineteenth-century-britain/>. In

colonial-era societies, acid was sometimes used as a tool of retribution or punishment, frequently associated with personal conflicts, honor disputes, or economic grievances.

Denmark, Helge Kragh, Niels Bohr Institute, University of Copenhagen. 2017. "Sulphuric Acid Was the Bedrock of the Industrial Revolution." [Www.sciencenordic.com](http://www.sciencenordic.com). November 9,

2017. <https://www.sciencenordic.com/chemistry-denmark-researcher-zone/sulphuric-acid-was-the-bedrock-of-the-industrial-revolution/1450988>. While not confined to any single

region, these acts were documented across Europe, Asia, and the Americas.

Acid attacks are an example of one of the most significant forms of violence: honor-based violence. This type of violence includes activities such as acid attacks, honor killings, and even forced marriages. This violence is frequently justified as protecting or helping to restore family honor when traditional gender roles or rejected marriage proposals happen.

Another enduring type of violence is domestic violence, which has long been treated as a private affair. The abuse can be physical, emotional, or sexual, and it is often not reported in India due to societal acceptance and a lack of sufficient legal protection. Many countries have put domestic violence laws into place, but enforcement has been uneven, leaving countless women at risk.

Rape, harassment, and other forms of sexual violence have been employed as a means of oppression and control for many centuries. "THE HISTORY of MOVEMENTS to END SEXUAL VIOLENCE." n.d.

[https://www.mecasatoolkit.org/uploads/4/4/3/6/44365787/hih\\_chapter\\_4\\_final\\_web.pdf](https://www.mecasatoolkit.org/uploads/4/4/3/6/44365787/hih_chapter_4_final_web.pdf).

Countering discrimination since the company's focus on it historically, it has been weaponized during multiple conflicts, such as the partition of India. In peacetime, it remains

a universal phenomenon, invading both public and private spaces. Recent movements made the problem more visible and showed how these acts are prevalent across societies.

### **Cultural issues**

Having identified the historical roots of the problem, I now proceed to list some of the cultural issues that make acid attacks prevalent in societies today. Acid attacks in India are not just random acts of violence but are connected to deep cultural issues. In South Asia, patriarchal norms and gender-based inequalities foster an environment where violence against women is often used to enforce societal expectations. Raiser, Martin. 2022. "Standing up to Fight Gender-Based Violence in South Asia." World Bank Blogs. December 9, 2022. <https://blogs.worldbank.org/en/endpovertyinsouthasia/standing-fight-gender-based-violence-south-asia>. One of the biggest reasons is the belief that men can have control over women. In many communities, men were taught to believe they had the right to dictate how women behaved, including how they should act, dress, and even live their own lives. "*The Case for a Feminist Approach to Gender-Based Violence Policymaking in India.*" n.d. Orfonline.org. <https://www.orfonline.org/research/the-case-for-a-feminist-approach-to-gender-based-violence-policymaking-in-india>. When a woman stands up for herself, it is like saying no to her relationship and asserting her ability to choose her path. Some men feel angry with their choices and use acid as a way to punish them and show power. "*Challenges and Solutions in Combating Acid Attacks against Women in India | Legal Service India - Law Articles - Legal Resources.*" 2019. [Legalserviceindia.com](https://www.legalserviceindia.com/legal/legal/legal/article-18066-challenges-and-solutions-in-combating-acid-attacks-against-women-in-india.html). 2019. <https://www.legalserviceindia.com/legal/legal/legal/article-18066-challenges-and-solutions-in-combating-acid-attacks-against-women-in-india.html>.

Other concepts are “honor” and “shame,” which are particularly powerful in some Indian societies. Many people are convinced that a woman’s conduct reflects the honor of her family. If a woman does something “wrong,” such as having the freedom to choose her partner or living independently, some believe this brings shame to their family. Unfortunately, some men attempt to “correct” this so-called shame and take revenge with acid attacks. “*Challenges and Solutions in Combating Acid Attacks against Women in India | Legal Service India - Law Articles - Legal Resources.*” 2019. *Legalserviceindia.com.* 2019. <https://www.legalserviceindia.com/legal/legal/legal/article-18066-challenges-and-solutions-in-combating-acid-attacks-against-women-in-india.html>. Acid attacks frequently arise from personal disputes, such as the rejection of romantic advances, dowry-related conflicts, or perceived dishonor. “Redirecting.” 2024. *Google.com.* 2024. [https://www.google.com/url?q=https://phys.org/news/2024-02-acid-violence-women-law.pdf&sa=D&source=docs&ust=1754705087008474&usg=AOvVaw26\\_DaNjNAFtTr0DS E2pbLK](https://www.google.com/url?q=https://phys.org/news/2024-02-acid-violence-women-law.pdf&sa=D&source=docs&ust=1754705087008474&usg=AOvVaw26_DaNjNAFtTr0DS E2pbLK). Economic factors further exacerbate the issue, as the availability of inexpensive acid used for cleaning, agriculture, and industry makes it an accessible weapon. Sharma, Dinesh C. 2013. “India Promises to Curb Acid Attacks.” *The Lancet* 382 (9897): 1013. [https://doi.org/10.1016/s0140-6736\(13\)61961-3](https://doi.org/10.1016/s0140-6736(13)61961-3).

Rejection is yet another one. In India, arranged marriages remain extremely common, and women often have to say yes to whoever asks. Some men find it insulting or humiliating when women do not comply. When they do get rejected, rather than deal with their feelings in a mature way, they take out their frustration by attacking women with acid as a way of punishing their actions. *Meghna Bajpai, Ms, and Singh. n.d. “ACID ATTACK: A BURNING ISSUE in INDIA.”* [https://www.galgotiasuniversity.edu.in/pdfs/Acid-Attack-A-Burning-Issue-in-India\\_Meghna-Bajpai-Sugandha-Singh.pdf](https://www.galgotiasuniversity.edu.in/pdfs/Acid-Attack-A-Burning-Issue-in-India_Meghna-Bajpai-Sugandha-Singh.pdf). One of the most famous cases is Laxmi Agarwal, who was struck in 2005 when she was 15 years old in New Delhi after rejecting the

advances of a 32-year-old man. He and his accomplice poured acid over her in broad daylight, brutally disfiguring her. Laxmi survived and became a prominent activist, internationalizing awareness of acid violence and campaigning for stronger laws and control of acid sales in India. Kedia, Shruti. 2019. "How Acid Attack Survivor Laxmi Agarwal's Story Has Not Just Inspired Deepika Padukone, but Millions of Other Indians." *YourStory.com*. June 17, 2019. <https://yourstory.com/socialstory/2019/06/acid-attack-survivor-laxmi-agarwal-deepika-padukone>.

In India, acid attacks became more prominently reported in the late 20th century, coinciding with increased media coverage and advocacy for women's rights. The motivations behind these attacks often reflect cultural factors such as the control of women's autonomy and the concept of honor. Women who reject marriage proposals, assert independence, or challenge traditional gender roles are frequently targeted. While urban areas tend to report more cases due to more excellent media coverage and awareness, rural regions may experience underreporting. Moreover, the visibility of acid attacks in the media may contribute to imitative violence, perpetuating a cycle of such crimes.

### **Legal problems**

The criminalizing of acid attacks, though enacted, can be laxly enforced. In India, for example, the Criminal Law (Amendment) Act of 2013 inserted Sections 326A and 326B into the Indian Penal Code, which are aimed explicitly at acid attacks. The sections impose a minimum of 10 years (extendable to life) for causing grievous hurt with acid and a maximum of 7 years for an attempt. However, despite these laws, enforcement is often weak. In some instances, victims are blamed rather than the attackers, reinforcing harmful social norms. These mindsets make it easier for assailants to justify their actions and less likely for them to face punishment.

Additionally, the lack of stringent regulations on the sale and distribution of corrosive substances allows acids to remain readily available despite legal efforts to restrict their use. *“South China Morning Post.”* 2022. *South China Morning Post*. October 8, 2022. <https://www.scmp.com/week-asia/people/article/3195251/worse-murder-why-are-acid-attacks-still-common-india-after-2013>.

The easy general availability of inexpensive, concentrated acids such as sulfuric, nitric, and hydrochloric acid continues to be a significant factor in the proliferation of acid attacks. Laws in place to regulate the sale of such products are not adequately enforced, and hence, easy access to them by perpetrators continues to be a problem. For instance, in India, concentrated acids are found readily over the counter as local cleaning agents, sometimes for as little as 25 rupees per bottle. This is despite legislation that attempts to control their distribution, thereby perpetuating the violence of acid attacks.

All of these reasons highlight how such unfair attitudes towards women and men’s roles in society lead to these horrific attacks. For this to stop, there needs to be a change in the way people think about gender and women as equals. It is not only a question of making legislations stricter or sentences for attackers worse, as important as that might be; it is also about instilling respect and understanding for women from early childhood, recognizing that they have every right, just as men do. Schools, families, and society must raise the questions openly and introduce to boys and girls the sense of valuing each other as equals. The media can also play a significant role by portraying strong, independent women in a positive light and challenging stereotypes. These deep-rooted beliefs take time to change, but the only way to create a society is when everyone is safe, respected, and free to live their lives without fear or violence.

## Social media platforms

Social media platforms have transformed the way people connect, share information, and influence societal norms. However, this digital shift has also heightened some negative behaviors, such as cyberbullying, hate speech, and the promotion of revenge narratives. Ray, Geraldine, Christopher D McDermott, and Mathew Nicho. 2024. "Cyberbullying on Social Media: Definitions, Prevalence, and Impact Challenges." *Journal of Cybersecurity* 10 (1). <https://doi.org/10.1093/cybsec/tyae026>. These factors can create a cultural atmosphere, whether directly or indirectly, that encourages gender-based violence, including the alarming issue of acid attacks.

One of the most concerning issues with social media is how it amplifies revenge narratives. Reynolds, Emily. n.d. "Why There's No 'Silver Bullet' for Ridding the Web of Revenge Porn." *Wired*. <https://www.wired.com/story/venge-porn-facebook-social-media/>. These stories often shared through videos, memes, or posts, can all make violence seem like a justified reaction to rejection, perceived dishonor, or defiance of societal norms. Women, in particular, are frequently the targets of these damaging narratives. Specific targets of these detrimental narratives are common in India, especially those who speak up or seek to live on their terms. In the "Sulli Deals" and "Bulli Bai" cases, for example, photographs of Muslim women, some of whom were journalists and activists, were taken from social media and put into mock online "auctions" with their consent. These acts were meant to shame and frighten the women. It illustrates the use of social media to spread hatred and bully individuals merely because they are confident and autonomous. Kumar, Vidhik. 2021. "Acid Attacks in India: A Socio-Legal Report." *DigitalCommons@URI*. 2021. <https://digitalcommons.uri.edu/dignity/vol6/iss1/5/>. In India, patriarchal values still dictate that a woman's value is linked to her adherence to traditional roles. Evans, Jonathan, Neha Sahgal,

*Ariana Monique Salazar, Kelsey Jo Starr, and Manolo Corichi. 2022. "Gender Roles in the Family." Pew Research Center's Religion & Public Life Project. March 2, 2022. <https://www.pewresearch.org/religion/2022/03/02/gender-roles-in-the-family/>.* When women assert their independence or turn down advances, some individuals may feel justified in retaliation, viewing acid attacks as a means to punish and leave lasting scars on the victims, both physically and emotionally.

The rapid spread of messages and images on social media amplifies the issue. Public shaming, online harassment, and the circulation of degrading content targeting women create a harmful atmosphere that downplays or even glorifies acts of violence. Weale, Sally. 2024. "Social Media Algorithms 'Amplifying Misogynistic Content.'" *The Guardian*, February 6, 2024, sec. Media. <https://www.theguardian.com/media/2024/feb/06/social-media-algorithms-amplifying-misogynistic-content>. For example, when women's private information, photos, or videos are shared without their consent, the resulting backlash can prompt offenders to escalate their behavior in real life. In this context, acid attacks shift from being simple acts of personal vengeance to becoming public displays of power and control. In this context, acid attacks change from being simple acts of personal vengeance to becoming public displays of power and control. They are often carried out to shame or silence women who are visible or vocal online, making them a dangerous extension of digital harassment into the real world.

Research has indicated that Indian women are victims of online harassment at far higher rates than men. In a study in 2023 by the National Crime Records Bureau (NCRB), it was found that cybercrimes against women were 11% higher than the total rate of cybercrime. Plan International, in a survey, reported that 58% of young women in the age group of 15 to 25 years in India have faced online harassment, including threats of rape and death. As these threats spread without consequences, they foster a climate of fear and intimidation that hinders

women's full engagement in both public and online arenas.unitednations. 2023. "How Technology-Facilitated Gender-Based Violence Impacts Women and Girls." United Nations Western Europe. November 28, 2023. <https://unric.org/en/how-technology-facilitated-gender-based-violence-impacts-women-and-girls>.

The increase in online intense matches is especially evident in India, where deep-rooted gender inequalities intersect with the rapid growth of digital technology. Studies show that women in India experienced online harassment at much higher rates than their male counterparts. This harassment often includes violent threats, such as acid attacks. As these threats proliferate without repercussions, they create an atmosphere of fear and intimidation that restricts women's ability to participate fully in both public and online spaces. With such threats increasing in number with impunity, they bring fear and intimidation, prohibiting women from exercising freely in both public life and cyberspace. In the "Bulli Bai" case, for example, Muslim women were posted on a hypothetical auction app without their knowledge. Some victims included journalists, activists, and outspoken voices in the online sphere. The public exposure of the harassment prompted some victims to take a break from social media and skip public appearances, worrying about their safety and dignity.

Despite these challenges, social media can be a powerful tool for positive change. Activists, NGOs, and survivors of acid attacks have leveraged these platforms to raise awareness, share their experiences, and push for policy reforms. Initiatives like #StopAcidAttacks have garnered global attention, showcasing how social media can elevate voices demanding justice and change. Activated in India, the #StopAcidAttacks campaign uses digital media to raise awareness of the appalling fate of acid attack survivors and break the social stigma that ostracizes them. Drawing on emotional survivor testimonies, photographs, and advocacy efforts, the campaign has mobilized popular opinion, changed policy discussions,

and compelled the authorities to act against acid violence more effectively. Social media has allowed survivors to reclaim their narratives, organize solidarity, and shift public sympathy from pity to empowerment. This is a good example of how digital activism can be a powerful vehicle for social justice, turning hashtags into movements that fight for real-world change. Nonetheless, to harness this potential, we must make dedicated efforts to tackle the negative aspects of social media's impact.

To address the influence of social media in facilitating acid attacks, a comprehensive strategy is necessary. This should involve stricter enforcement of anti-harassment policies by social media platforms, strong legal measures to ensure that offenders are held accountable, and extensive educational initiatives aimed at countering misogynistic attitudes. Furthermore, it is vital to empower women to engage in digital environments confidently and to promote a culture of respect online, as these are key actions in decreasing the occurrence of gender-based violence.

Social media has certainly created opportunities for advocacy and raising awareness, but it has also played a role in normalizing and perpetuating gender-based violence in India. Acid attacks, which are a particularly horrific form of this violence, underscore the pressing need for systemic changes in both online and offline spaces. By confronting the harmful narratives and behaviors that flourish on social media, we can make significant progress toward building a safer and more equitable environment for women.

To address the influence of social media in facilitating acid attacks, a comprehensive strategy is necessary. This should involve stricter enforcement of anti-harassment policies by social media platforms, strong legal measures to ensure that offenders are held accountable, and extensive educational initiatives aimed at countering misogynistic attitudes. Furthermore, it is vital to empower women to engage in digital environments confidently and to promote a

culture of respect online, as these are key actions in decreasing the occurrence of gender-based violence.

### Physical, Psychological, and Social Consequences

The following statistics give a general view of acid attack cases in India, involving the profile of victims and offenders and the physical, psychological, and social impacts of violence. From documented reports and case studies, the statistics represent salient trends, age and sex of victims, places of occurrence, and motives for attacks. They also reveal the alarming trends in acid availability, legal responses, and the longer-term consequences imposed on survivors. These figures not only quantify the size of the issue but also reflect the imperative for change in the systems, public awareness, and victim protection mechanisms.

**Table 1.**

*Kumar, Vidhik. 2021. "Acid Attacks in India: A Socio-Legal Report."*

Category	Statistics	Details
Victim Age	18.20.68%	The youngest victims are often minors
	18-22:24.13%	Majority in early adulthood
	23-27:3.44%, 33+ years: 13.79%	
	Not mentioned:17.24%	
Victim Gender	Female: 82.75%	Women overwhelmingly targeted
	Male:17.24%	Few cases involve male victims.
Victim Residence	Urban:84.48%	Higher prevalence in urban areas
	Rural: 15.51%	Fewer cases, but they are still significant

Physical Harm	Disfigured Face: 37.93%	The most common physical consequence
	Victim Death:6.89%	Severe impact on quality of life
	Hearing Lost:1.72%	Fatalities due to severe injuries
	Other injuries:27.58%	Burns on chest, neck, hands, etc
Psychological Impacts	High Anxiety and Depression	Most victims report chronic emotional distress
	suicides:1.72%	Linked to post-attack trauma
Social Consequences	Job Loss: 1.72%	Physical appearance impacts employment
	Abandoned by Spouse: 1.72%	Divorce or separation is common.
	Ostracized by Society: 1.72%	Victims face societal rejection
Perpetrator Gender	Male: 84.48%	Predominantly male perpetrators
	Female: 33.44%, Both: 6.89%	There are a few cases involving females.
	Not Mentioned: 51.17%	
Victim Perpetrator	Known: 74.13%	Relatives, neighbors, spurned lovers
	Unknown:20.68%	
	Not Mentioned:5.17%	
Reasons for Attack	Thwarted Lovers: 18.96%	The most common reason for acid attacks
	Family/Neighbor Disputes: 13.79%	
	Seeking Revenge: 8.62%	
	Resisting Sexual Assault: 8.62%	
	Other reasons: 25.87%	Includes property disputes, dowry, refusal to marry, etc
Legal Framework	Compensation: 3 lakhs	Directed by the Supreme

Acid Accessibility	Price: 30 rupees	Court, other delayed or inaccessible Sulfuric, Nitric, and hydrochloric acid are widely available despite bans.
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*DigitalCommons@URI*. 2021. <https://digitalcommons.uri.edu/dignity/vol6/iss1/5/>.

Most of the victims in India of these acid attacks are young women: 24.13% of the victims fall in the age bracket of 18-22 years, and 20.68% are under 18 years old, which evidences that minors and young adults are targeted. Kumar, Vidhik. 2021. "Acid Attacks in India: A Socio-Legal Report." *DigitalCommons@URI*. 2021. <https://digitalcommons.uri.edu/dignity/vol6/iss1/5/>. Women constituted the majority, with 82.75% of the victims being female, indicating that the crime is hugely gendered. A lesser proportion of victims, 17.24%, is comprised of males, and many of these cases arise from disputes unrelated to gender-based violence. Namita Bhandare. 2015. "Acid Violence Knows No Gender." *Mint*. January 6, 2015. <https://www.livemint.com/Politics/nsFOWQPFyWWVNoTMknCekK/Acid-violence-knows-no-gender.html>.

Most of the acid attacks were reported from urban areas because of greater population density and better media coverage, at about 84.48%. Kumar, Vidhik. 2021. "Acid Attacks in India: A Socio-Legal Report." *Dignity: A Journal on Sexual Exploitation and Violence* 6 (1). <https://doi.org/10.23860/dignity.2021.06.01.05>. However, it has not left the rural areas untouched, and 15.51% of cases have also been reported from backward and inaccessible regions of the country, where victims face more significant challenges in which delayed medical treatment and lesser legal aid are included. Patel, Mamta. 2014. "A Desire to

*Disfigure: Acid Attack in India.*” *International Journal of Criminology and Sociological Theory* 7 (2). <https://ijcst.journals.yorku.ca/index.php/ijcst/article/view/39702>.

The physical impact of acid throwing has long-term effects in the form of serious injuries. Facial disfigurement leads to a change in appearance and socio-cultural alienation of the victim in 37.93% of cases. In comparison, in 8.62% of cases, there is a loss of vision, and other potentially fatal events occur in 6.89% of cases. Others suffered permanent loss of hearing 1.72% to the throat, chest, and hand. This indicates the multi-faceted, long-lasting physical effect of acid-throwing

The psychological effects are also too terrible to relate. Most often, victims report high rates of depression, anxiety, and social withdrawal, and this gets heightened by a rejective attack. Survivors sometimes face job losses( 1.72%) and abandonment by the spouse, resulting in financial and emotional solitary confinement. Besides, the social exclusion surrounding them usually makes their process of reintegration too difficult, further exacerbating their depression.

Most perpetrators are males, at 84.48%, and in most cases, they are known to the victim, at 74.13%. These include family members, neighbors, and those who have expressed romantic interest in the victim. Unrequited love is the leading motive for 18.96% of thwarted lovers. This is followed by family or neighbor disputes at 13.79%, revenge at 8.62%, and resistance to sexual assault at 8.2%. This data shows that such crimes are nurtured through interpersonal relationships and societal power dynamics. The fact that many acid attacks are committed by someone who knows the victim, a relative, neighbor, or spurned suitor, highlights the way that intimate relationships become a source of danger in strongly patriarchal environments. These are generally asymmetrical relations in which men feel entitled to control or punish women for claiming independence or rebuffing overtures. In addition, society's indifference to gender-

based violence and lack of accountability to its perpetrators once again support such imbalanced dynamics and make such crimes possible, allowing them to persist and escalate. It thereby turns acid attacks from merely being acts of individual brutality into expressions of systemic oppression.

### Legal Reforms

Legal reforms have attempted to address acid attacks with harsher laws and higher compensation. The Supreme Court has mandated a minimum salary of 3 lakhs for victims, but accessing these funds often proves to be a bureaucratic hurdle. The government mandatorily requires a minimum of 3 lakhs as compensation for acid attack survivors, but getting these funds is typically an administrative hurdle. In November 2024, for example, the Delhi High Court intervened after a survivor was allotted only ₹ 30,000 as interim relief, significantly less than the minimum stipulated amount. The court explained that once a decision to award compensation was made, it could not be reduced at whim and ordered that the full 3 lakh was to be awarded. *Anushka. 2024. “‘Once Decision Is Made, Compensation Cannot Be Arbitrarily Reduced below Minimum Threshold’; Delhi HC Directs Acid Attack Victim to Be Awarded 3 Lakhs as Compensation.” SCC Times. November 29, 2024. <https://www.scconline.com/blog/post/2024/11/29/delhi-hc-directs-acid-attack-victim-awarded-3-lakhs-compensation-once-decision-made-compensation-cannot-arbitrarily-reduced-below-minimum-threshold/>. Acid attacks are categorized as non-bailable offenses, carrying jail terms ranging from 10 years to life imprisonment. “BNS Section 124 - Voluntarily Causing Grievous Hurt by Use of Acid, Etc | LawRato.com.” 2025. Lawrato.com. 2025. <https://lawrato.com/bharatiya-nyaya-sanhita/bns-section-124>.*

The availability of inexpensive, concentrated acids, such as sulfuric, nitric, and hydrochloric acid, remains one of the primary factors contributing to the prevalence of these

attacks. In many countries, perpetrators can quickly obtain such substances despite legislation regulating the sale of acids. Accessibility, besides weak enforcement, sustains this circle of violence.

The data reflects the grim picture of acid attacks in India, with young women being the worst sufferers of this heinous crime. The physical and psychological trauma inflicted is devastating; systemic failures of medical support, social rehabilitation, and legal redress further add insult to injury. Although there have been some successes with legal reforms and compensation schemes, the key causes of acid attacks gender inequality, societal attitudes, and unregulated sales of acid- must be dealt with to prevent attacks and support survivors in rebuilding their lives.

Acid attacks have been harrowing manifestations of systemic failures in governance and societal attitudes in India. Though there are stricter regulations concerning acid compared to in the past, accessibility to acid remains a critical factor for such heinous crimes. *“How Is the Sale of Acid Regulated in India? - Nyaaya.”* 2022. Nyaaya. May 11, 2022. <https://nyaaya.org/legal-explainer/how-is-the-sale-of-acid-regulated-in-india/>. Acids such as sulfuric, hydrochloric, and nitric acid have wide applications in industries like cleaning and construction, as well as in jewelry and agriculture. This industrial demand translates into a high supply, making acid readily available in urban and rural areas.

### **Legislation on the issue**

Though the Supreme Court of India passed guidelines in 2013 to check on the sale of acid due to the case known as Laxmi v. Union of India, there has been no satisfactory enforcement of these guidelines at best. *“How Is the Sale of Acid Regulated in India? - Nyaaya.”* 2022. Nyaaya. May 11, 2022. <https://nyaaya.org/legal-explainer/how-is-the-sale-of-acid-regulated-in-india/>. Acid retailers have to maintain records of who bought acid from them

and their valid identity proofs, while suspicious purchases also have to be reported to the higher-ups. The reality on the ground is different. The acid sold by unlicensed street sellers, open markets, and small retailers is not backed by any record-keeping process. Buyers are hardly asked about the use of acid, and age is never explicitly asked. Snigdha Poonam. 2017. “Four Years after Ban, Acid Sales in Free Flow under Supreme Court’s Nose | Latest News India - Hindustan Times.” Hindustan Times. April 3, 2017. <https://www.hindustantimes.com/india-news/four-years-after-ban-acid-sales-in-free-flow-under-supreme-court-nose/story-00tu9xW1AEFGwMChlrp7ML.html>.

It becomes even more accessible due to a general lack of awareness among the public concerning legislation and ineffective mechanisms for its enforcement. On the local level, officials often cannot or do not know how to, or are unwilling to, check the sales and distribution of acid. The problem becomes graver in rural areas due to a decline in regulatory oversight. The situation becomes more severe in rural areas because of increased vulnerability to regulatory oversight. A study by LawBhoomi, for instance, highlights that in many rural districts, shop owners continue to sell acid without maintaining purchase records or verifying buyer identification despite the Supreme Court's clear directions. This lack of monitoring makes obtaining acid for malicious motives easy and significantly increases the possibility of unreported attacks in these areas. This gap between policy and practice reflects many failures that allow acid to remain accessible to potential perpetrators. “How Is the Sale of Acid Regulated in India? - Nyaaya.” 2022. Nyaaya. May 11, 2022. <https://nyaaya.org/legal-explainer/how-is-the-sale-of-acid-regulated-in-india/>.

However, there has been an even deeper insight into how acid is such an accessible form of weaponry and into how its use reflects embedded social and cultural conflicts in India. Acid attacks target women in disproportionately large numbers for having refused advances,

marriage proposals, or demands related to dowry. In such attacks, the roots can be found in patriarchal notions of entitlement to women's autonomy and appearance. In most cases, acid attackers target a woman's face to punish her by ruining what society identifies as her beauty and self. The face is not just a physical feature; it represents visibility, dignity, and social acceptance. Destroying it helps to shame and exclude the victim, making the violence not only physical but profoundly psychological. This approach is one in a series aimed at dominating and silencing women, especially those who resist male domination. *Kumar Makkar, Ashok. 2017. "Acid Attacks on Women: Legal Response." International Journal of Law 62 International Journal of Law 3 (6): 2455–2194.* <https://www.lawjournals.org/assets/archives/2017/vol3issue6/3-6-85-202.pdf>.

The problem is compounded by the fact that gender-based violence has gained acceptance in Indian society. Acid attacks seem extreme, though not entirely unimaginable, in the context of living where violence against women, whether in the forms of domestic abuse, honor killings, or sexual harassment, is appallingly common such normalization results in perpetrators justifying these crimes and sometimes escaping punishment lightly.

The difference is between the cheap price of acid and the catastrophes it causes in India. Acid is available at a few rupees per liter, around 30-50 rupees, or less than \$1. This is so negligible that the accessibility of this substance is alarming. "How Is the Sale of Acid Regulated in India? - Nyaaya." 2022. Nyaaya. May 11, 2022. <https://nyaaya.org/legal-explainer/how-is-the-sale-of-acid-regulated-in-india/>.

Acid attack survivors in India continue to face not only physical trauma but also residual social and economic hurdles. Severe burns, loss of eyesight, multiple reconstructive surgeries- and an incomplete list of immediate medical effects. Yet, the financial toll hardly

stops with treatment. The estimated medical care of a single acid attack survivor ranges from 7 lakh to 10 lakhs, which is around \$8.

Equally profound are the social repercussions: Survivors often experience discrimination and social exclusion, as disfigurement in acid attacks may become a physical mark of the trauma. Many women are blamed for having brought the attacks on themselves, thus blaming the victim for maintaining the culture of blame and deterring reporting and justice. With the slow pace at which India's judicial system runs, this stigma means that many survivors continue to face very slow legal battles or trials with less hope for resolution.

To tackle the easy availability of acid and its usage as a weapon, India has taken a few legislative measures. Under the Criminal Law Amendment Act 2013, acid attacks became a separate offense, particularly under Sections 326A and 326B of the Indian Penal Code. The sentence of imprisonment would range from 10 years to life imprisonment, and it is also provided that the compensation amount would be payable to survivors by the offender themselves. It further ordered that sales of acids must be restricted, and greater government accountability was required for providing medical and rehabilitative services.

Despite these measures, challenges remain. Law enforcement agencies are usually not well-trained in handling cases of acid attacks sensitively and efficiently. Compensation mechanisms, though required, are rarely practiced, and survivors have to sort out the bureaucratic obstacles for financial support themselves. Rehabilitation programs, including employment assistance and psychological counseling, are either not available or too scarce, especially in rural areas where survivors face extra barriers in seeking justice and care.

Making sure acid is more challenging to access in India requires better regulation and a more profound cultural shift. Some more relevant recommendations include:

### **Intelligent Enforcement Mechanisms:**

State governments should devise ways to monitor acid sales and distribution regularly. Occasional audits among retailers, penalties for non-compliance, and publicity regarding the legal prerequisites for selling acid will be required.

### **Public Awareness Campaigns:**

Public education about the dangers of acid attacks and the punishment thereafter could go a long way in saving potential victims. The campaigns also need to challenge gender-based violence and promote gender equality to root out the very causes of acid attacks.

### **Strengthening Support:**

Comprehensive rehabilitation must include free/subsidized medication, psychological counseling, skill development, and employment opportunity provision. Similarly, setting up special support centers for the acid-attacked victims in each state would go a long way to giving them a proper life.

There should be fast-track courts for trying cases of acid attacks so that the survivor gets timely justice. More severe punishments should be exercised for selling acid against the law.

### **Encouragement of reporting:**

Safe environments for reporting attacks, together with protection from harassment and retaliation, are necessary to combat underreporting.

## Accessibility of Acid as a Weapon

Accessibility of acid is a grave societal issue in India, as it's way easier to determine the prevalence of running acid attacks. It does so even after the stringent poison law regulations and decisions from the Supreme Court of India. Using acid as an essential ingredient in industries like cleaning and manufacturing has made acid something that is generally sold. However, the procedures associated with its selling are flimsy. Store operators hardly pay heed to the protocols linked to maintaining sales records and even checking on the identity and purpose of buyers. Snigdha Poonam. 2017. "Four Years after Ban, Acid Sales in Free Flow under Supreme Court's Nose | Latest News India - Hindustan Times." *Hindustan Times*. April 3, 2017. <https://www.hindustantimes.com/india-news/four-years-after-ban-acid-sales-in-free-flow-under-supreme-court-nose/story-00tu9xWIAEFGwMChlrp7ML.html>. This negligence, meanwhile, permits any individual to obtain acid quite quickly. So, a chemical that is used in everyday life is turned into a weapon of massive, immediate effect by straightforward abuse.

Furthermore, corruption only makes the situation a little more visible. There's the alternative: an under-regulated black market with makeshift provision tanks for unmonitored acid sources. Acid is an industrial and household chemical, but through sheer abuse, it is a weapon of immediate and devastating impact. Chemicals like hydrochloric or sulfuric acid, employed in drain cleaners and other ordinary products, are cheap and easily accessible. This makes it remarkably easy for attackers to purchase and use them without supervision. Even with legal constraints, acid is readily available without documentation or identification in local markets. Even worse, there is an under-regulated black market, and acid is being supplied through makeshift provision tanks and unmonitored outlets. Such illegal supply channels evade weak enforcement systems, especially in rural areas. As a result, criminals can get acid without a trace, turning ordinary material into an agent of deliberate violence.

Nepotism and inefficiency contribute to forestalling any half-hearted effort by the local police and licenses against such activities. Consequently, crimes go on uninterrupted thanks to several lacunae in the law, making it impossible to get noticed while purchasing acid pretty quickly.

One of the most upsetting things about acid attacks is how cheap acid is compared to the awful damage it does to victims. You can buy a bottle of acid for just 20-50 rupees, which makes it one of the cheapest and easiest weapons to get. TNN. 2022. "Delhi Acid Attack: Online Platforms under Fire over Acid Sale." The Times of India. Times Of India. December 16, 2022. <https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/city/delhi/delhi-acid-attack-online-platforms-under-fire-over-acid-sale/articleshow/96268139.cms>. Because it is so affordable and can cause such bad permanent injuries, acid appeals to attackers who want to hurt people without spending much money or effort.

On the other hand, acid attacks have a profound and lasting effect on those who survive them. The physical damage from these attacks is agonizing and irreversible. Victims often end up with bad burns, scarring, blindness, and long-term pain. Many need several operations, constant medical attention, and therapy to deal with their injuries. The cost of these treatments can be crushing, often reaching hundreds of thousands of rupees, way more than most families can handle.

The consequences go well beyond physical wounds. People who survive often face major social shame, being shunned by their neighbors due to their appearance. Jobs and schooling are usually hard to get as survivors deal with both the real problems from their injuries and unfair treatment by society. This leads to a cycle of being poor and alone, which makes the trauma from the attack even worse. The emotional damage cuts deep, with many survivors dealing with feeling down, worried, and haunted by what happened to them.

Adding to the problem is that the perpetrators are not brought to book. For example, in the highly publicized 2015 Bihar acid attack, the accused was released on bail and went on to threaten the survivor's family, further extending the judicial process. Despite open evidence and brutal injuries inflicted on the victim, the slow pace of the justice system and lenient bail policies allowed the offender to go free with little consequence for a long time. Such delayed justice sends a frightening signal that even after committing a violent and life-altering crime, criminals can go free with little punishment. The ease with which acid can be acquired and the minimal initial investment required makes acid attacks an attractive option for individuals seeking retribution or control. This low-cost crime, paired with the challenges survivors face in seeking justice, underscores the urgent need for stronger regulations and better support systems.

To combat acid attacks effectively, a multi-pronged approach is essential. First and foremost, the regulatory framework governing acid sales must be rigorously enforced. This includes implementing mandatory registration and identity verification for buyers, as well as requiring sellers to maintain detailed records of all transactions. The same year, the Supreme Court of India laid down guidelines to regularize the sale of acid to avoid easy availability.<sup>1</sup> *Laxmi v. Union of India & Ors.*, AIR 2015 Supreme Court 3662, decided April 10, 2015, Supreme Court of India, accessed via Indian Kanoon, <https://indiankanoon.org/doc/90443079/> According to the guidelines, acid was only to be sold to persons above 18 years of age, and that, too, on showing proper photo identification. The seller had to maintain detailed records of buyers. Any non-compliance with the above guidelines would attract stringent punishment, including fines and imprisonment. However, notwithstanding such strict measures, acid sales have yet to be effectively checked.

However, their implementation has remained a challenge. Acid is still freely available in local markets, and the restrictions on its purchase are hardly enforced. Besides, judicial delays add to the agony of survivors. In most acid attack cases, court procedures remain very slow and painful for survivors and their relatives, while the offenders remain far from receiving timely justice. Low conviction rates further reveal these systemic flaws, with poor investigation, a lack of evidence, and legal loopholes being the main deterring factors in delivering justice.

The slow pace of justice in cases of acid attacks is another pressing issue. The Indian judiciary is notorious for delays, and acid attack cases are no exception. “Scars of Life: Thousand Acid Attacks in India in 5 Years, yet Very Few Survivors Got Justice.” n.d. India Today. <https://www.indiatoday.in/diu/story/acid-attacks-in-india-over-thousand-in-5-years-yet-very-few-got-justice-2309627-2022-12-15>. Many survivors have to fight their battles in courts for years to seek justice, which prolongs their trauma and, at times, discourages them from pursuing their cases. It takes years for the majority of survivors to fight their cases through courts to receive justice, extending their trauma in the process and, in some cases, discouraging them from pressing charges. To illustrate, in a 2013 Meerut, Uttar Pradesh acid attack incident, the victim, suffering from 100% disability, waited over 11 years to receive the complete compensation she was entitled to. Although she was seriously injured, the award was 5 lakh. It was subsequently disapproved by the court when it condemned the local authorities for not releasing the other 1 lakh from the Prime Minister's National Relief Fund. Rai, Sandeep. 2025. “UP Government Faces HC Ire for 11-Year Aid Delay to Acid Attack Survivor.” The Times of India. Times Of India. February 19, 2025. <https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/india/up-government-faces-hc-ire-for-11-year-aid-delay-to-acid-attack-survivor/articleshow/118397557.cms>. Fast-track courts that deal specifically with cases of gender-based violence, including acid attacks, could significantly improve the situation. Such

courts would prioritize these cases, allowing trials to be conducted efficiently and offenders to be brought to justice without delay. “Supreme Court Tells Acid Attack Survivors to Approach Legal Services Authority for Compensation Delay.” 2025. LawChakra. March 20, 2025. <https://lawchakra.in/supreme-court/supreme-court-acid-attack-survivors/>. Similarly, services related to legal aid have to be made more accessible to survivors, especially those from marginalized communities, so that their right to justice is not denied due to financial or social constraints.

Rehabilitation and support for survivors continue to remain a grey area where India has shown limited improvement. Although the centers' and states' governments have various schemes, including compensation for medical treatment and financial assistance, survivors struggle to access them due to bureaucratic obstacles. Many states have hardly allocated sufficient funds to rehabilitate survivors. Several Indian states have been criticized for not offering sufficient funding to rehabilitate survivors of acid attacks. In a 2015 ruling, the Supreme Court held that the minimum compensation of ₹ 3 lakh was inadequate. It directed state governments to increase monetary support and treat survivors on par with individuals with disabilities, allowing them access to social welfare programs. Despite such orders, numerous survivors continue to face inordinate delays in receiving compensation. A case in point is a survivor from Meerut, Uttar Pradesh, who waited over 11 years for additional assistance, attracting the Allahabad High Court's censure over the state's "apathetic handling" of her case. These instances reflect systemic issues within fund distribution and disbursement, highlighting the absolute necessity for states to prioritize and rationalize aid toward rehabilitating acid attack victims. Choudhary, Amit Anand. 2015. “Compensation of Mere Rs 3 Lakh No Help to Acid Attack Survivors: SC.” *The Times of India*. *Times Of India*. December 7, 2015. <https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/india/Compensation-of-mere-Rs-3-lakh-no-help-to-acid-attack-survivors-SC/articleshow/50083666.cms>. The result is that survivors continue to remain

at the mercy of NGOs for reconstructive surgeries, psychological counseling, and vocational training programs. The government is supposed to ensure timely compensation and the implementation of survivor-centric policies in all states. Creating centralized databases for case tracking, disbursements, and survivor outcomes can enhance accountability and transparency.

### **Understanding the Acid Attacks that Happen in India**

The statistics from 2010 until 2023 indicate a highly alarming trend of acid attacks across India. Although the reported cases increased from 80 in 2010 to 203 in 2023, the highest recorded was 249 in 2015. Despite the rise in reporting, the conviction rates have been abysmal over the years. In 2010, only 5% of the cases reported to have been convicted, and in 2023, it was reduced to 0%. Consequently, the pendency rate, though relatively low in the early years, began increasing again as of 2023 and pointed toward court delay. The above statistics illuminate the systemic inability to render justice to the survivors and record the significance of implementing more effective prosecution and reforms within courts in acid attack cases.

#### **Table 2.**

*“Scars of Life: Thousand Acid Attacks in India in 5 Years, yet Very Few Survivors Got Justice.” n.d. India Today. <https://www.indiatoday.in/diu/story/acid-attacks-in-india-over-thousand-in-5-years-yet-very-few-got-justice-2309627-2022-12-15>.*

<b>Year</b>	<b>Reported Acid Attacks</b>	<b>Convection Rates</b>	<b>Pending cases</b>
2010	80	5%	0%
2015	249	8%	5%
2020	182	2%	0%
2023	203	0%	2%

## Stories of Resilience and Advocacy

Survivors of acid attacks are those who have emerged to overcome extreme physical and emotional trauma to restart their lives and inspire real change. One famous example is that of Laxmi Agarwal, who turned her tragedy into a crusade for justice and reform. When she was only 15, Laxmi survived an acid attack. *Kedia, Shruti. 2019. "How Acid Attack Survivor Laxmi Agarwal's Story Has Not Just Inspired Deepika Padukone, but Millions of Other Indians." YourStory.com. June 17, 2019. <https://yourstory.com/socialstory/2019/06/acid-attack-survivor-laxmi-agarwal-deepika-padukone>*. Thereafter, she became one of the most influential voices to fight against stringent regulations on acid sales in India. Her activism led to the historic Supreme Court judgment that restricted over-the-counter acid sales and aligned the legal framework more clearly toward punishing culprits. *Laxmi v. Union of India & Ors., AIR 2015 Supreme Court 3662, decided April 10, 2015, Supreme Court of India, accessed via Indian Kanoon, <https://indiankanoon.org/doc/90443079/>*. On the other side, Reshma Qureshi also dismantled the traditional stereotype of beauty and bravery while becoming an internationally known crusader against acid violence. From New York Fashion Week catwalks to heading awareness campaigns, Reshma's life is the saga of survival and the survivor spirit's ability to contest societal perception. *Lui, Kevin. 2016. "Acid-Attack Survivor Reshma Qureshi Hits the Catwalk at New York Fashion Week." TIME. Time. September 9, 2016. <https://time.com/4485099/reshma-qureshi-new-york-fashion-week-acid-attack/>*.

The advocacy by survivors extends beyond personal narratives to the very roots of the incidents themselves, and it calls for systemic change in the aftermath of the incidents. Survivors work at large to create gender equity, sensitization on domestic violence, and increased enforcement of laws related to acid attacks under Sections 326A and 326B of the Indian Penal Code. They also call for increasing access to medical care, mental health support, and vocational training to help survivors restart their lives. Survivors not only pursue justice

through advocacy but also in the prevention of further attacks and creating a safer environment for women. “Stop Acid Attacks | Chhanv Foundation | Chhaya Foundation | Uttar Pradesh.” n.d. Chhanv Foundation. <https://www.chhanv.org/>.

Organizations like the Chhanv Foundation have been at the forefront of this initiative, providing a road to recovery, empowerment, and dignity for survivors of such attacks. The most highlighted initiative is the Sheroes Hangout chain of cafes, which is entirely run by acid attack survivors. “*Stop Acid Attacks | Chhanv Foundation | Chhaya Foundation | Uttar Pradesh.*” n.d. Chhanv Foundation. <https://www.chhanv.org/>. Sheroes Hangout is an Indian chain of restaurants that is wholly composed of survivors of acid attacks. The initiative was set up by the Chhanv Foundation to empower survivors by giving them a workplace, instilling confidence, and making them part of the mainstream. The initiative began operations with a café in Agra in 2014 and expanded to other cities like Lucknow and Varanasi.

In Sheroes Hangout, not only do survivors make food and beverages but also share their experiences, creating awareness of acid violence and challenging social norms of beauty and identity. The café operates on a "pay what you wish" model, promoting inclusivity and visitor support and allowing survivors to live with dignity and autonomy. This makes them economically independent and creates a space where their voices can be heard and their resilience celebrated. The foundation supports the survivors through medical surgeries, psychological counseling, and legal aid to ensure justice is given. (*India Today*)

However, to achieve these objectives, such organizations face several serious challenges. The first significant challenge is the irregularity of funding and resources. “*Acid Attack Survivors Need Support to Break the Bias.*” 2022. *India Today*. March 13, 2022. <https://www.indiatoday.in/impact-feature/story/acid-attack-survivors-need-support-to-break-the-bias-1924764-2022-03-13>. Operating initiatives like Sheroes Hangout and paying for the

costly reconstructive surgeries takes deep pockets, usually from donations and grants. Social stigma against survivors can also make reintegration efforts even more difficult. Employment and social discrimination are also common among many survivors, adding to the complications on their journey to independence. *Chakraborti*. Advocacy organizations face resistance even as they push for increased enforcement of laws and regulations, as systemic issues such as bureaucratic delays and lack of accountability impede progress. *Chakraborti, Aarushi. 2024. "Decoding the Psychological Impact of Acid Attack on Indian Acid Attack Victims." International Journal of Current Science 14: 2250–1770. <https://rjpn.org/ijcspub/papers/IJCSP24D1112.pdf>.*

However, at the same time, organizations like the Chhanv Foundation have made a massive difference amidst all the difficulties. Despite administrative hold-ups, restricted funds, and widespread social stigma, the Foundation has grown as a source of sustenance for many acid attack victims in India. In addition to initial treatment, it provides long-term services like reconstructive surgeries, counseling, legal aid, and vocational training. One of its most significant initiatives is the Sheroes Hangout coffee houses, where survivors earn a livelihood and rebuild their self-esteem by interacting with society and sharing their stories. At the policy level, the organization also works by pushing for vigorous enforcement of legislation for acid sales and comprehensive rehabilitation programs. Chhanv, through these efforts, has transformed the lives of numerous people and emerged as an influential model of change initiated by survivors. Organizations are making the case for systemic change by providing supportive communities where survivors can be reinvented, recover from specific traumas, and struggle to make their voices louder. It empowers survivors and builds a wave of shaming societal norms, leading to mass action against gender-based violence.

## Role of Education, Awareness, and Social Challenges

Awareness campaigns have a very crucial place in fighting these acid attacks and such social attitudes. The media has been extensively used to raise awareness, provide a voice to the victims, and rebuild public perception of acid violence. The media has also been employed extensively to raise awareness, voice the victims, and regain the public image of acid violence. One of the best examples is the viral video campaign "Beauty Tips by Reshma," launched by Make Love Not Scars. In the campaign video, acid burn victim Reshma Qureshi gives makeovers while discreetly revealing just how easy it is to buy acid in India despite prohibitive laws against it. The campaign reached the newspapers and went global. Ultimately, it transitioned from sympathizing to empowering, and new calls were made for additional restrictions on the sale of acids. *BBC News*. 2018. "Home - BBC News." *BBC News*. 2018. <https://www.bbc.com/news>. Documentaries, social media campaigns, and news demand more excellent laws and societal support as they detail survivors' struggles. Films such as *Chhapaak*, which drew inspiration from Laxmi Agarwal's life, brought it into the foreground, stimulating public discussions and sympathies. *Aron*. Social media is also proving effective for building survivor support, collecting medical treatment funds, and campaigning for justice on their behalf. *Boss, Asian*. 2020. "Giving New Hope to India's Acid Attack Victims." *Milaap.org*. *Milaap*. February 6, 2020. <https://milaap.org/fundraisers/support-daulat-bi-khan>.

Efforts toward gender equality at school and community levels are crucial to preventing violence against women. School awareness programs can educate young minds on mutual respect, equality, and rejection of common gender stereotypes. "Redirecting." 2025. *Google.com*. 2025. <https://www.google.com/url?q=https://knowledge.unwomen.org/en/topics/ending-violence-against->

[women/education&sa=D&source=docs&ust=1754782070048449&usg=AOvVaw2D1WLbFA2cpOnF5afpLAVQ](https://www.copfgm.org/tools-materials-and-campaigns-to-work-on-masculinities-for-a-gender-transformed-society/). Community campaigns through workshops and public discussions help have conversations around toxic masculinity, consent, and women's rights. Umurungi, Cynthia. 2023. "Tools, Materials, and Campaigns to Work on Masculinities for a Gender Transformed Society. - CoP FGM-MGF %." CoP FGM-MGF. May 19, 2023. <https://copfgm.org/tools-materials-and-campaigns-to-work-on-masculinities-for-a-gender-transformed-society/>. We can cultivate a culture of equality and empathy by embedding these values in our educational and social systems, thus making it less likely for gender-based violence to happen.

The root causes of acid attacks, among other types of brutalities, emanate from a lack of awareness of the issues. This calls for teaching at an early age, including subjects such as consent, respect, and healthy relationships from school to university levels. "Preventing Violence in Education Settings." 2024. UN Women Knowledge Portal. November 25, 2024. <https://knowledge.unwomen.org/en/topics/ending-violence-against-women/education>. Such teaching could help children learn personal boundaries and respect for other people's choices in life. Besides this, programs on emotional intelligence and conflict resolution can also provide young people with the proper tools to build good and respectful relationships. For example, Promundo's "MenCare" campaign partners with schools and communities to engage boys and young men in discussions on caregiving, gender equality, and nonviolence. Assessments of the program are seen to have caused participants to learn more respectful behaviors towards women and become less prone to violence or abuse.

Except for attending school, Social campaigns targeting the broader population can break down harmful cultural norms. Awareness about changing attitudes that view violence as acceptable or perpetuating gender inequality has to be pursued. Such reforms in education will have a multiplier effect, involving teachers, parents, and community leaders, and eventually

give birth to an inclusive and safe society. For example, India's Bell Bajao ("Ring the Bell") campaign called upon ordinary citizens, especially men and boys, to take a stand against domestic violence by intervening when they witnessed abuse occurring, say, by ringing the doorbell. The campaign mobilized millions of individuals through community action and media advocacy, making it clear that it is everybody's business to stop violence. *"Redirecting."* 2025. *Google.com*. 2025. [https://www.google.com/url?q=https://inbreakthrough.org/bell-bajao&sa=D&source=docs&ust=1754782172699391&usg=AOvVaw3036GO\\_XmzAXgOEvSnzmDp](https://www.google.com/url?q=https://inbreakthrough.org/bell-bajao&sa=D&source=docs&ust=1754782172699391&usg=AOvVaw3036GO_XmzAXgOEvSnzmDp).

In that context, men's involvement becomes essential in trying to prevent gender-based violence. Changing this narrative requires involving men as friends in the feminist fight. The education system and awareness should be targeted toward toxic masculinity, breaking down patriarchal standards that have been inculcated into men and encouraging men to speak up against violence and harassment. Events like the #HeForShe campaign have proved how much men can advocate for women's rights and change certain societal expectations. *UN Women*. 2023. *"HeForShe | Global Solidarity Movement for Gender Equality."* *Heforshe.org*. 2023. <https://www.heforshe.org/en>. The campaign calls for them to raise their voices against gender-based violence and discrimination and actively participate in shaping inclusive societies. The campaign also went global after the speech made by actress Emma Watson at the United Nations, where she reiterated that gender equality is not only a women's matter but a human rights matter requiring all people to work together. Since its inception, #HeForShe has mobilized millions globally, including political leaders, universities, and companies, to commit concrete actions toward achieving gender justice.

The involvement of men in discussions on gender-based violence helps them to realize their role in preventing it. Men have to admit that standing up against violence and in support

of survivors is not just a women's issue but a human rights issue. Men can play a vital role in changing societal attitudes and creating a culture where violence against women is never tolerated by cultivating empathy, respect, and accountability. *“Engaging Men through Accountable Practice to Prevent Violence against Women and Girls (EMAP) Resource Package - GBV Responders’ Network.”* 2022. *GBV Responders’ Network. September 21, 2022.* <https://gbvresponders.org/prevention/emap/>. Additionally, mentorship programs and community outreach can foster boys and young men into powerful early advocates for gender equality, creating a future where respect and equality are considered the minimum standard. For example, the MenEngage Alliance operates globally to engage boys and men in peer education, school-based mentoring, and community dialogue. In India, projects partner with local grassroots organizations to implement workshops that challenge boys to think about gender roles, challenge toxic masculinity, and make pledges to end violence against women in their communities.

India's acid attacks are a horrific expression of gender inequality, firmly entrenched in patriarchal presuppositions, cultural norms, and legal and educational institutional failure. These crimes are usually precipitated by the rejection of marriage proposals, of lovers' advances, or of the woman's entitlement to independence and serve as a function of violent assertion of control and retribution. Though the Criminal Law Amendment Act of 2013 introduced harsher penalties and tried to regulate the sale of acid, the enforcement is uneven. Delays in justice, weak regulation, and the fact that acid is still easily accessible mean that survivors must fight not just for healing but also for justice. The effects of such attacks move far beyond the physical to result in profound psychological trauma, social isolation, and long-term obstacles to education, work, and autonomy.

Yet, there is an emerging tide of reform and resilience. Survivors like Reshma Qureshi and Laxmi Agarwal have emerged as icons of bravery, utilizing their voices to seek change. Institutions like the Chhanv Foundation offer tangible avenues for healing through healthcare, legal services, and job opportunities, such as the Sheroes Hangout cafés. Solutions will need to go beyond legal structures: the integration of gender sensitivity and respect into education systems, empowering young people with knowledge about consent, and the involvement of men as allies in campaigns like #HeForShe are essential in preventing future violence. Social media, technology, and grassroots mobilization can strengthen these efforts by highlighting injustice and mobilizing public opinion. Suppose society, institutions, and individuals commit to cultural change and sustained action. In that case, India can begin to work towards the end of acid violence and a future where all individuals, men, and women, can live with equality, safety, and dignity.

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