

WOMEN PLUS

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An acid attack on women is principally the manifestation of male hegemony or supremacy. Most often it is young girls who are the victims — a brutal acid attack on them can disfigure as well as cause permanent or temporary disability. This not only inflicts intense physical pain but severe psychological trauma as well.

According to records obtained from the National Crime Records Bureau (NCRB), in between 2014 and 2018, 1,483 women became victims of acid attack. Also, around 386 acid attacks took place on women in between 2018 to 2022. Uttar Pradesh, West Bengal and Delhi top the list of states in acid attack cases.

Unfortunately, the number of people chargesheeted is much less than the number of victims. The judicial system takes a lot of time to complete the trials and a good number of culprits walk out free, faking help of various loopholes in the legal system and for the lack of adequate proof. So innocent victims cry in silence with disfigured bodies and immense mental trauma, losing out on opportunities and a normal life, sometimes even sinking into a world of dark uncertainty.

A study by The Logical Indian reveals that in 78 per cent of the cases, the main cause behind such a culpable offence is the rejection of marriage proposal or the refusal to indulge in sex by the girl. The scorned male fails to accept this refusal and throws acid on the girl out of sheer revenge. The dent on the male ego due to a girl's independent opinion on any matter, conflict

A heinous crime

An acid attack is another sick manifestation of violence against women, something that is still rampant in India.



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of interest, inability to fulfil financial expectations of the family, and property dispute are some other reasons. Men have also become victims of such barbaric attacks, but their numbers are very low in comparison to women-related incidents.

Such cases aren't that rare in our State too. In February 2021, in

Dibrugarh district, a 50-year-old man threw acid on a 32-year-old woman, leaving her severely injured. As his marriage proposal had been rejected by the girl, the man attacked her in the worst way possible.

In another incident in Upper Assam's Lakhimpur district, rejection of marriage proposal prompted a man to throw acid on a girl, who was later admitted to hospital with horrible burn injuries on her face, chest and arm. In August, 2022, in the Karimganj district of Barak Valley, a young man was severely beaten up by miscreants and acid was thrown on his face.

From the legal perspective, though Sections 320, 322, 325, 326 and 307 of the Indian Penal Code (IPC) had been framed to protect victims of physical assault, according to 'Legal Services India' report, nowhere in these sections was there a proper definition of 'acid attack'.

In 2005, Laxmi Agarwal, aged 15, was brutally attacked by a 32-year-old man in Delhi, who mercilessly threw acid on her face,

disfiguring her lovely appearance. She had to undergo seven surgeries over seven years. But that did not discourage her. It was Laxmi who then filed a petition in the Supreme Court, with 27,000 signatures collected from people from all walks of life, to impose a ban on the open sale of acid. In a landmark judgement in 2013 — *Laxmi vs. Union of India and Others*, the court banned over-the-counter sale of acid. The court laid down stringent regulations that buyers with proper ID cards can only purchase from selected licence-holding stores. The State/Central Government was asked to provide the acid victim with a compensation of three lakhs for aftercare and rehabilitation.

In another welcome judgement, the Verma Committee amended the old IPC acts by inserting two new sections, i.e. 326A and Section 326B through the 'Criminal Law (Amendment) Act, 2013', which criminalised acid attacks. Section 326A provides that an acid attacker can be imprisoned for a minimum of ten years, which might be extendable to life imprisonment with a fine.

Unfortunately, despite the Supreme Court order, acids are still openly available in markets, and can be procured without any proper ID and such brutal attacks are increasing by the day. Strict implementation of Supreme Court laws, a concerted mass movement against the menace, more and more acid victims coming up to lodge their complaints without fear, and teaching children about gender parity are some of the steps that are urgently needed to stop this evil.