

## **A STUDY ON ACID ATTACKS AND ITS IMPACT ON THE VICTIM IN TAMILNADU**

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## ABSTRACT

Acid attack is the cruellest form of crime in our society. Acid attack is the act of throwing acid on the victim with the intention to cause deformity or disfigurement to any part of the body of the victim. For the past few years there have been an increase in cases of acid attacks in our country. Nearly 250 to 300 incidents of acid attacks are being reported in our country. Acid attack is a form of gender-based violence which aims at silencing and controlling women. In majority of cases of acid attacks victims are women. The main causes of acid attacks include domestic violence, jealousy refusal to marry, rejection for love and for other personal reasons. Acid attacks have a serious after effect throughout the life of the victim. It causes psychological trauma to the victim, severe pain, permanent disfigurement, infections and even leads to blindness of both the eyes. After acid attacks the victim suffers lot of mental trauma which changes their feelings, behaviour and perspective towards the society. They also try to withdraw from the society and isolate themselves. This eventually leads to depression. The society refuses to accept those victims as normal human being. They face discrimination everywhere. Due to their disability, they are unable to work at every place and they have to stay dependent on someone else. The paper discusses the motives behind acid attacks, laws on acid attacks, from after effects of acid attacks in the lives of acid attack survivors.

**Keywords:** acid attack, violence, trauma, society, depression, disability

## INTRODUCTION

Under Section 326A punishment for administering an acid attack is a minimum ten years which may extend to life imprisonment upon the court's discretion. The punishment for attempting to throw acid on a person is punishable for a time period of 5-7 years under Section 326B irrespective of the nature of the damage caused to the victim. The victim is liable for compensation, up to Rs. 3 lakhs. The compensation should be payable in addition to the payment of the fine by the culprit. Further Section 357B of the CrPC clarifies that this compensation mentioned in the predecessor section will be provided in addition to the compensation already provided under Section 326A and Section 326B of the IPC. Section 357C of the CrPC orders all hospitals, of any nature (local, public, private etc.,) to provide the victim with immediate emergency first-aid that is free. 1[357C. Treatment of victims. --All hospitals, public or private, whether run by the Central Government, the State Government, local bodies or any other person, shall immediately, provide the first-aid or medical treatment, free of cost, to the victims of any offence covered under section 326A, 376, 2[376A, 376AB, 376B, 376C, 376D, 376DA, 376DB] or section 376E of the Indian Penal Code (45 of 1860), and shall immediately inform the police of such incident. ]

Section 326 A Whoever causes permanent or partial damage or deformity to, or burns or maims or disfigures or disables, any part or parts of the body of a person or causes grievous hurt by throwing acid<sup>1</sup> on or by administering acid to that person, or by using any other means with the intention of causing or with the knowledge that he is likely to cause such injury or hurt, shall be punished with imprisonment of either description for a term which shall not be less than ten years but which may extend to imprisonment for life, and with fine;

Section 326 B Whoever throws or attempts to throw acid<sup>1</sup> on any person or attempts to administer acid to any person, or attempts to use any other means, with the intention of causing permanent or partial damage or deformity or burns or maiming or disfigurement or disability or grievous hurt to that person, shall be punished with imprisonment of either description for a term which shall not be less than five years but which may extend to seven years, and shall also be liable to fine.

Lakshmi v. Union of India (2015) is about a girl named Lakshmi who was only 16 years old when she was attacked with acid. This attack was motivated by a refusal to accept a marriage proposal. Lakshmi was brave, and in 2006 she filed a PIL in the Supreme Court of India, demanding not only compensation but also the development of new laws and the amendment of current laws in India connected to acid attacks. She requested a complete ban on the sale of acids to common people in markets.

The Supreme Court ruled the case in her favour and directed the Central and State governments to draft legislation on this subject after adequate thought and discussion.

As a result of this important judgement, the Supreme Court completely banned the counter sale of chemicals unless the seller kept a record of the buyer's addresses and other details, as well as the amount. Dealers can now only sell the chemical after being shown a government-issued photo ID and stating the reason for the purchase. Many steps were taken such as regulation of acid supply, use of acids and rehabilitation of women victims to prevent acid attacks. These steps were taken by passing the Acid Attack and Rehabilitation of Acid Attack Victims Bill, 2017.

Acid attack is a worldwide problem affecting all regardless of age, caste, and religion. It is the foremost heinous type of gender-based violence against women. Acid attack is also referred to as acid violence or vitriolage, which emerged as a brutal act that shows the gravity of the continued atrocities and human rights violations. The perpetrator's aim isn't to kill the victim but to leave the victim in a very pathetic condition. Injuries on the body heal and leave scars not only on the body but also physically and psychologically. Violence against women has become a critical issue of discussion at every platform all over the world. In India, majority of victims were inclined to Love issues, sexual assault, Ex accomplices' revenge, Extra marital relations, Dowry, inappropriate activities, Land Issues, Property issues, and alternate reasons. However, the 226th Law Commission of India Report as well as the Justice Verma Committee Report admits that the heinous crime of acid attacks features a specific gender dimension in India. Acid attackers generally target young girls with the intention of disfiguring the face of the victim. The most common kinds of acids used to attack victims are hydrochloric, sulphuric and nitric acids. The main reasons behind commission of the brutal act of acid throwing are many, namely rejection of affection or marriage proposals, refusal to pay dowry, rejection of sexual advances, property or family dispute or marital disputes like refusal to offer divorce. (Dean) Acid attacks end in severe physical, psychological and socio-economic consequences and makes the lifetime of the victim worse than death. Acid attack may be a complex and multi-dimensional problem that creates it very difficult for the survivors to return to normalcy. Women in India are at higher risk of being victims of acid attacks, 72% of reported acid attacks in India have involved women. In India, about 350 cases are legally reported per year, while separate research conducted by an organization named Acid Survivors Foundation India, estimated approximately 500–1000 cases per year in India, excluding unreported incidents. So, in order to prevent acid attack crimes, the government made many initiative steps. The issue of handling acid attacks has been taken on priority basis by the government of India and several other steps are taken so as to stop the incidents additionally to provide for treatment and compensation to the victims of such attacks. The criminal law (Amendment) Act 2013 inserted Sections 326A and 326B to IPC and sections 357B and 357C of Cr. P. C so as to curb the menace of acid attacks. Acid attacks have long lasting consequences. Survivors' life becomes a gutter. They become traumatized and embarrassed to walk out of their homes and carry out simple tasks. Even if they try to pursue a normal life, society never treats them as normal beings. Acid attack rarely kills but causes severe physical, psychological and social scarring. The victims mainly face psychological effects like trauma, stress, frustration, fear and also suicidal plans. The psychological consequences are adverse in many instances rendering the survivors mentally retarded. The acid attack survivors face social isolation. They are ignored by their family and relatives usually taunt them about their condition. They feel isolated and lonely. Society refuses to accept them and treat them like normal beings. The severity of bodily injury depends primarily on the concentration or the type of acid used for the attack, and secondarily on the amount of time the body was exposed to the acid. The longer a body is exposed the more damage the victim will endure. Acids are so corrosive they rapidly dissolve skin, fat and muscle, and even reach bones and organs in some cases. Victims endure complete

or partial destruction of essential body parts such as eyelids, ears, nose, nostrils, mouth, lips, eyes, cheeks, chin, neck, forehead, skull, breasts, shoulders, and hair, all of which impair a victim for life. Victims also inhale toxic fumes from the acid and burned body parts, which causes a poisonous reaction in a victim's lungs or swelling of the throat, which can lead to difficulty breathing and death due to asphyxiation. The healing of acid attack burns leaves thick scars and causes skin to tighten or turn leathery, which exposes victims to further deformity and difficulties such as: inability to close eyelids, which makes the eyes vulnerable to blindness due to excessive drying; inability to open or close mouth, which causes teeth to decay and leads to difficulty in eating; destruction of ear cartilage, which increases the vulnerability to future infections and hearing loss. Victims also suffer severe psychological trauma, primarily due to the pain and terror they undergo during an attack, and secondarily due to the realization that they have a permanently disfigured body. This destruction of the victim's primary identity exposes them to severe psychological diseases over the lifespan. Victims report suffering severe depression, insomnia, recurring nightmares, fear of another attack, headaches, and reluctance to face the world or participate in society. Victims also experience increased anxiety. Victims also become physically dependent on family and friends for essential daily activities as the attack destroys their prospects of marriage or employment. Victims often become a subject of pity, stares, and mockery due to their scars and disfigurement, which ultimately results in relinquishment of education and hope for the future. **The main aim of this paper is to study the after effects in life of an acid attack victim.**

## OBJECTIVES

- To identify the reason behind acid attacks
- To study the afterlife of acid attack survivors
- To study the laws against acid attack in India
- To find the problems faced by the victim after an acid attack

## REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Everything that comes into being must have a cause. Acid attacks too can be categorised under certain common causes and factors. The reasons of a person behaving in a particular way differs from country to country, the surrounding environment and the overall environment a person is brought up into. (*Acid Attacks: A Study of the Underlying Causes of Acid Attacks Against Women in India and the Nature of State Response*)The intentional throwing or pouring of acid with a motive of defacing or killing a person is used as a brutal way of taking revenge. Though this act can be and is in reality committed against persons irrespective of sex, age or other such classifications; it is mostly committed against women who are in the prime of their youth. (**Bose**)The psychological consequences and trauma faced by victims in crimes like molestation, rape, acid throwing is grave. It is very difficult for the victims to depict the incident, lodge a complaint and fight for justice. Complications to this difficult situation are further added with police, family and society's wrong attitude and way of handling such victims. (**Chung et al.**)Laws and regulations play a vital role in controlling deviant behaviours of members of a society. Crimes like acid attacks affect not only the person concerned, but have a tendency of disturbing the smooth functioning of the society. Marriage and family related issues, rejection, male honour etc. to the vital reasons that results into the brutal violence of acid attack. It is also pointed out that poor interpersonal relationships and domestic intolerance towards women also contributes greatly towards commission of violence against women. (**Khurshid**)Acid has a devastating effect on the human body, often permanently blinding the victim. The aftermath being the inability to do many everyday tasks such as working and even mothering is rendered extremely difficult if not impossible. (**Hopkins et al.**) There is a high survival rate amongst victims of acid attacks. Consequently, the victim is faced with physical challenges, which require long term surgical treatment, as well as psychological challenges, which require in- depth intervention from psychologists and counsellors at each stage of physical recovery. The victims are often left with no legal recourse, limited access to medical or psychological assistance,

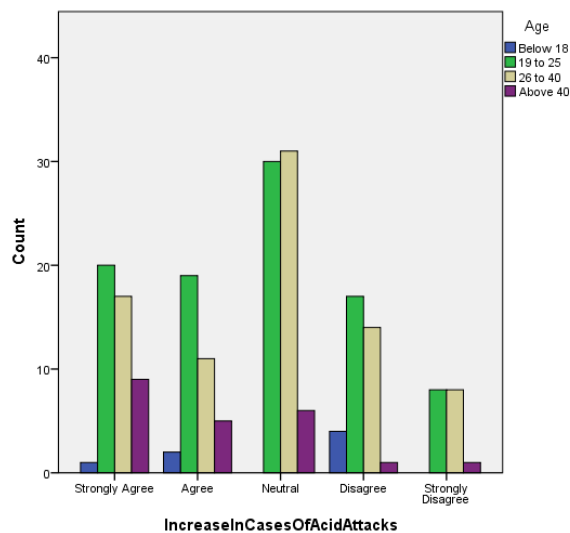
and have no means to support themselves. **(Gillon)** Acid attack is a global incident that is not restricted to a particular age, caste, religion, gender, or geographical location. Acid attack is a form of gender-based violence aimed at silencing and controlling women. This kind of acid attack is used as a weapon against women who refuse sexual or other advances. **(Findlay)** The use of acid as a weapon began to rise in many developing nations, specifically in South Asia. Since acid can be easily purchased in these countries and is relatively cheap as compared to other weapons like guns, it was a preferred weapon. The first recorded acid attack occurred in India in 1982. **(Lefranc et al.)** In India, it is analysed that most of the time this attack related with women and young girl and the observable reason being is the rejection of marriage and love or refusal by woman of sexual advances and dowry disagreements. The other noted reason for such an attack could be land, property and any kind of business disputes. **(Gandhi et al.)** Women still cannot fight for their rights which are the basic human right of every individual. Women are still regarded as “possession”, and a man is the sole decision maker as per our modern society. And when a woman refuses a man, it is seen as destroying his reputation, prestige and honour, and he restores it by burning her face with acid. **(Mittal et al.)** Acid attack violence is a form of gender-based violence. Under the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), states parties are obligated to prevent and adequately respond to all forms of gender discrimination, including gender-based violence. **(Natarajan)** Gender-based violence is any form of violence that either disproportionately affects women or results from gender discrimination and inequality. The CEDAW Committee has noted that gender-based violence both results from and perpetuates traditional discriminatory attitudes that confine women and girls to stereotypical, subordinate roles and positions. **(Pass)** Acid violence results from gender discrimination and inequality. Although acid violence occurs in many countries, it is particularly prevalent in contexts in which there is significant gender discrimination. 72% of reported cases of acid attacks are perpetrated against women. **(Clark et al.)** Acid attacks are interpersonal acts of violence and are rarely specifically motivated by a desire to promote fear among other women. Nonetheless, individual incidents of acid attacks may make women fearful of transgressing social norms that keep them in subordinated positions. **(Lewis and Marine)** India is witnessing a socio-cultural and politico-economic transformation that has been taking place recently. The complexity of a problem like acid violence should be understood within the context of this transformation. Exact statistics for acid attacks are difficult to determine as many cases go unreported or underreported for various reasons including ignorance, fear, and apprehension of a further attack. **(Hutchinson)** The aftermath and repercussions of an acid attack are extremely profound and often debilitating for victims. More than a palliative approach, an attitudinal change is where the solution of this problem rests. An acid attack victim is left with little hope to move forward in life. **(Donaldson et al.)** Although statistics are scarce, incidence of acid attacks seems to be increasing and most of the victims are women. The increasing occurrence of acid attacks observed in several countries, such as Iran, is a call for medical, social, and government authorities to explore solutions to prevent such terrible acts from happening and mitigate further complications to their victims, such as burns complications, mental health, and stigma. **(Solotaroff and Pande)** Acid attacks should receive wider media coverage than they do at present: detailed information about the crime's irreversible and terrible outcomes and the legal penalties should be stressed to the public. Furthermore, education around safety issues could reduce the incidence of chemical burns and their consequences. **(Nakray)** The damage caused by an acid burn is dependent on the concentration and quantity of acidic solution used and the duration of contact with the skin. Acid attack injuries are initially treated by neutralising the inciting solution. **(Mehrotra)** Today's world is witnessing an alarming rate of incidences of acid violence, especially against women. The situation in India is too inexpressible. In most of the reported cases of acid attacks in India, the women become the sufferer for spurning suitors, refuse marriage proposals or denying dowry, and so on. **(Pike)**

## METHODOLOGY

The research method followed here is empirical research. A total of 200 samples have been taken out of which is taken through simple random sampling. The sample frame work taken by the researcher is form the public area. The independent variables taken here is of age, gender, occupation and education qualification, Marital Status, Annual Income. The dependent variables are increase in acid attacks, effective implementation of laws, causes, psychological consequence to victims, preventive measures. The statistical tool used by the researcher is graphical representation.

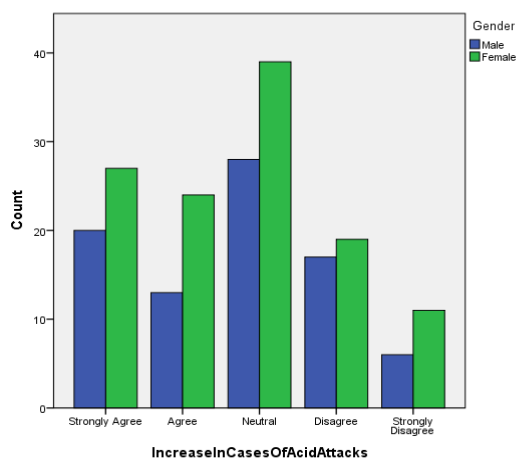
## ANALYSIS

**Figure 1**



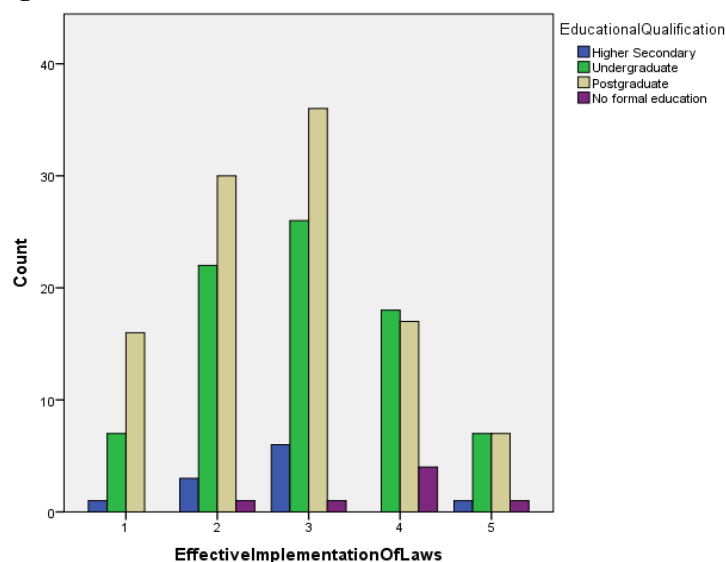
**Legend :**Figure 1 shows the responses for the question if the respondent agrees that there has been an increase in cases of acid attacks in recent years with the options Strongly disagree, Disagree, Neutral, Agree, Strongly Agree. The responses were collected from various age groups of people.

**Figure 2**



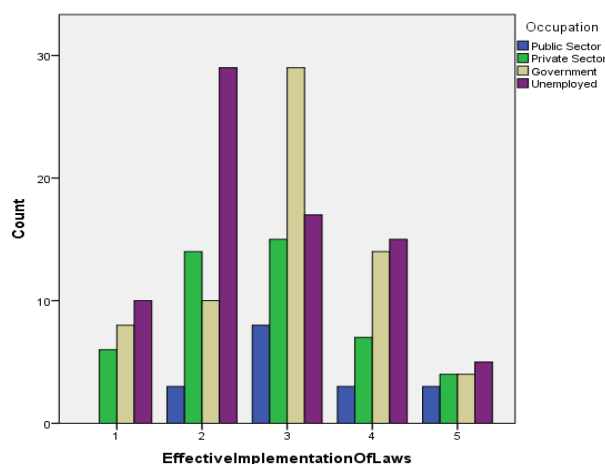
**Legend :**Figure 2 shows the responses for the question if the respondent agrees that there has been an increase in cases of acid attacks in recent years with the options Strongly disagree, Disagree, Neutral, Agree, Strongly Agree. The responses are compared with the independent variable gender.

**Figure 3**



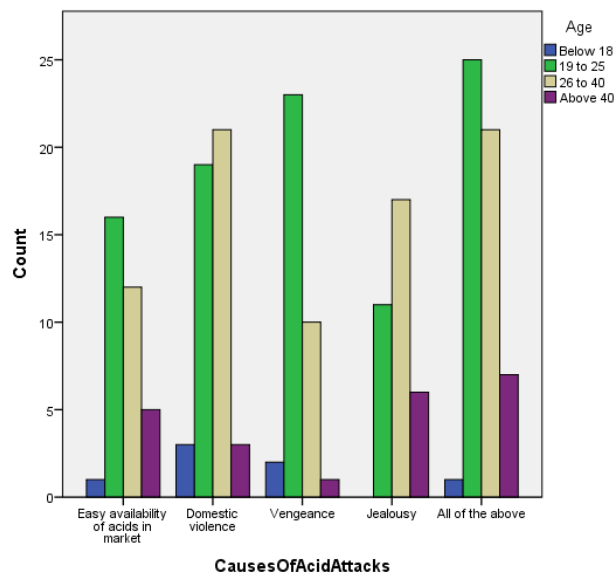
**Legend :**Figure 3 shows the responses for the question to rate the effective implementation of laws against acid attack on the scale of 1 to 5. The responses were collected from people of various educational backgrounds.

**Figure 4**



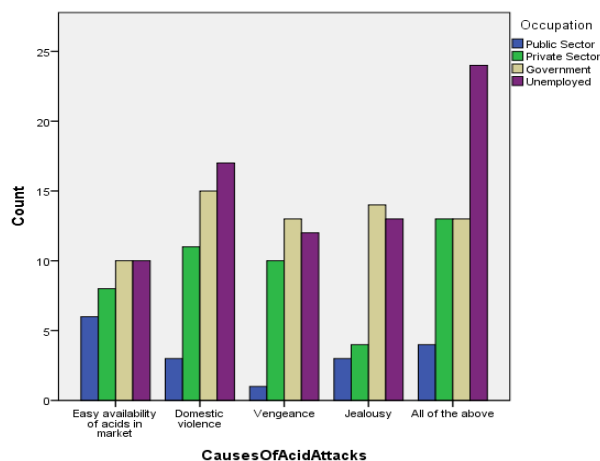
**Legend :**Figure 4 shows the responses for the question to rate the effective implementation of laws against acid attack on the scale of 1 to 5. The responses were collected from people in various sectors of occupation.

**Figure 5**



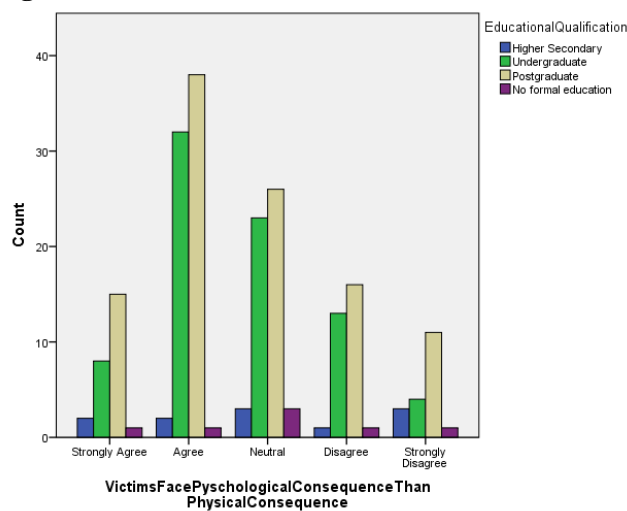
**Legend :**Figure 5 shows the responses for the question on major causes of acid attacks with the options of easy availability of acids in the market, domestic violence, vengeance, jealousy, all of the above . The responses were collected from people of various age groups.

**Figure 6**



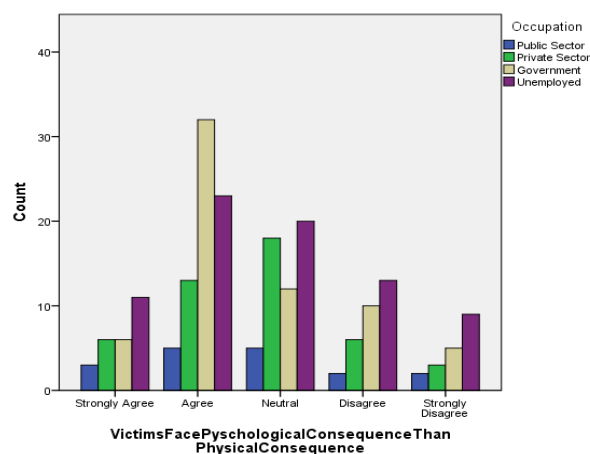
**Legend:-** Figure 6 shows the responses for the question on major causes of acid attacks with the options of easy availability of acids in the market, domestic violence, vengeance, jealousy, all of the above . The responses were collected from people in various sectors of occupation.

**Figure 7**



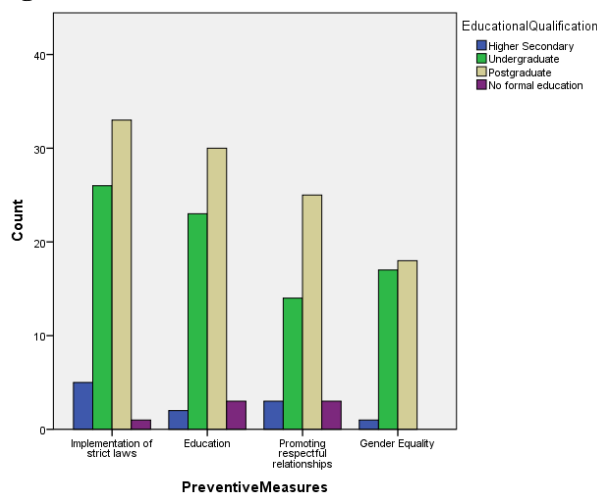
**Legend:** Figure 7 shows the responses for the question if the respondent agrees that the victim faces psychological consequences than physical consequence with the options Strongly disagree, Disagree, Neutral, Agree, Strongly Agree. The responses are collected from people of various educational backgrounds.

**Figure 8**



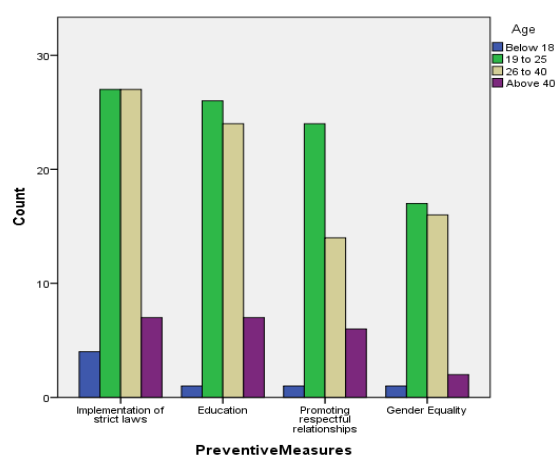
**Legend:** Figure 8 shows the responses for the question if the respondent agrees that the victim faces psychological consequences than physical consequences with the options Strongly disagree, Disagree, Neutral, Agree, Strongly Agree. The responses are collected from people in various sectors of occupation.

**Figure 9**



**Legend :**Figure 9 shows the responses for the question on preventive measures against acid attacks with the options implementation of strict laws, education , promoting respectful relationships, gender equality. The responses are collected from people of various educational backgrounds.

**Figure 10**



**Legend :**Figure 10 shows the responses for the question on preventive measures against acid attacks with the options implementation of strict laws, education , promoting respectful relationships, gender equality. The responses are collected from people of various age groups.

## RESULTS

From **figure 1** it is found out that the highest number of responses were given by people from the age group of 19-25 to the option neutral and lowest number of responses were given by people above age 40 to the option strongly disagree. From **figure 2** it is found out that the highest number of responses were given by females and least number of responses were given by male respondents. From **figure 3** it is found out that the highest number of responses were given by postgraduates who rated on the scale of 3. From **figure 4** it is found out that the highest number of responses were given by unemployed people and least number of responses from people working in public sector. From **figure 5** it is found out that the highest number of responses answered to the option all of the above and least number of responses answered to the option jealousy. From **figure 6** it is found that the majority

of the responses answered to the option all of the above to the causes of acid attacks. From **figure 7** it is found out that the public agreed that victims face psychological consequences more than physical consequence. From **figure 8** it is found that majority of responses were from people working in public sector who agreed that victims face more psychological consequences than physical consequences. From **figure 9** it is found that the majority of the responses stated that implementation of strict laws is one of the preventive measures to control acid attacks. From **figure 10** it is found that the majority of the responses were from people of the age group 19 to 25 who stated implementation of strict laws to be the preventive measures.

## DISCUSSION

From **figure 1** it is observed that the highest number of responses given by age group 19 to 25 to the option neutral for the question on if there is increase in cases of acid attacks. It can be implied from the responses that there is no much decrease in cases of acid attacks. From **figure 2** it is observed that the highest number of responses given by female respondents. The responses were to the option neutral which implies there are no decrease in cases of acid attacks. From **figure 3** it is observed that the highest number of responses answered rated on the scale of 3 which implies that there is no proper effective implementation of laws to regulate acid attacks. From **figure 4** it is observed that the majority of the unemployed people rated on the scale of 3. This implies that there must be proper laws to regulate acid attacks. From **figure 5** it is observed that the highest number of responses were recorded from people between the age of 19 to 25 who answered to the option all of the above. From **figure 6** it is observed that majority of the responses answered to the option all of the above which implies there are various causes of acid attacks. From **figure 7** it is observed that the majority of responses were recorded from postgraduates who are aware of the psychological consequences to the victims than the physical consequence. From **figure 8** it is observed that the majority of responses were recorded to the option agree which implies that the victims face great psychological consequence. From **figure 9** it is observed that the majority of the responses answered the option implementation of strict laws which implies that there is no strict punishment for the criminals who commit acid attack. From **figure 10** it is implied there must be severe punishment for criminals who commit acid attacks.

## LIMITATION

The major limitation is limited access to data, time constraints in collecting samples, issues with sample and selection, insufficient sample size for statistical measurement.

## SUGGESTIONS

The researcher would suggest that the society must step forward to improve conditions of the acid attack victims. Another effective measure is to provide greater awareness about the acid attack provisions. The government should also provide a value-based education. Educating and working with young boys and girls promoting respectful relationships and gender equality. Education is critical in prevention of acid attacks and other forms of violence against women and girls. Prevention should start early in life, by educating and working with young boys and girls promoting respectful relationships and gender equality. But while the law is in place, implementation is badly needed. There are also many glitches in the justice system which allows the perpetrators to flee without being convicted. We need better police investigations, trials and treatment for victims. A lot needs to be done to safeguard the rights of women. Steps should be taken to prevent more acid attacks. Emphasis should be taken toward ensuring the equality of women and educate society about the rights of women. The laws regarding acid attackers should be implemented sternly. Offenders should be given severe punishments, to set an example for the future

## CONCLUSION

From the above study the researcher has established the gravity of acid attack in this paper, focusing extensively on the physical, psychological and economic effects that have on the victims. A discussion has also been carried out on the lacunae in the Indian Law and the way essential it is to have a particular law in this regard. Acid violence is widespread and prevalent in our society that remains often invisible. Women are unsafe and are frequently victimized even in their homes and sometimes by their immediate family members. Women are vulnerable to every sort of violence. The study aimed to research the causes of acid attacks also as their consequences. Refusal of marriage proposals and family disputes are one of the most important causes of acid. The government made several laws and schemes, like restriction of sales of acid, harsher punishment for the perpetrators, and free access to healthcare facilities to acid attack victims, have been laid by our lawmakers; however, the main focus should be restricted to prevention. Several measures, like strengthen the NGOs, electronic, print, and social media campaigns, should be adapted to change the orthodox sociocultural norms, which are justifying the violence against women. Laws have been made to relieve the victim with financial help in the type of compensation. The state government came ahead to assist these victims a little more as they launched a scheme named Rani Laxmi Bai Mahila Samman Kosh Yojana which helps the victims by not only giving the compensation but also providing free treatment without cost limits. The researcher concludes that the people have knowledge about the acid attacks in India and also the acid attack welfare provisions are very effective and nowadays acid attacks are getting reduced. But still acid attacks prevail in some areas. The legislation did their work properly but women aren't properly utilising it. These are the conclusions obtained by the researcher through the random and convenient sampling method with samples of about 200.

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