

Qualitative Assessment of Psychosocial Needs of Acid Attack Survivors using a Conceptual Model

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Abstract

Acid attacks, a devastating form of gender-based assault, emerged as a grave social concern in many regions worldwide. Despite the availability of legal frameworks, the incidents of acid attacks are on rise. This case study delved into the psychosocial journey of the acid attack survivors and explored the factors that contributed to their resilience and healing. The objective of research is to shed light on emotional and psychosocial challenges faced by victims of such traumatic incidents and their coping mechanisms. By using the qualitative research method and a conceptual framework, the data was collected using five in-depth interviews of acid attack survivors and nine key informant (Lawyers, healthcare providers, functionaries of NGOs) interviews of experts working in the field. The study further tried to ascertain how acid attack survivors developed to navigate their way towards psychological recovery. A thematic analysis approach was used for data analysis. The real-life cases of acid attack victims were examined to measure the impact on survivors' psychosocial health. The study tried to understand survivors' emotional and behavioral responses, the felt need for mental healthcare services, interventions, and support systems that could aid in healing process. Acid attacks were identified as a multidimensional phenomenon, requiring a multisectoral response and tangible psychosocial support mechanisms to be made accessible by government.

Keywords: Acid attack, resilience, healing, coping mechanisms, emotional and psychological challenges

Introduction

In recent years, India has experienced a worrying increase in a horrific crime known as acid attacks (UNICEF, 2023). These attacks involve deliberately throwing corrosive substances on victims, causing severe physical and psychological harm. The rise of acid attacks in India is deeply concerning, rooted in socio-economic factors and patriarchal norms (Smith & Kumar, 2020). These acts are not only brutal and malicious, causing permanent physical scars, but they also inflict profound emotional and psychological trauma on survivors (Chatterjee, 2018). The deliberate use of corrosive substances to disfigure and harm individuals goes beyond physical violence, leading to lasting emotional consequences and deep psychological effects for the survivors (Singh, 2019). As per the provision of "Prevention of Offences (by Acids) Act 2008, (National Commission for Woman – Draft Bill)" constitute the definition of Acid Attacks and Acid. According to Section 3 of said Act-

“(a) “Acid” shall mean and includes any substance which has the character of acidic or corrosive or burning nature that can cause bodily injuries leading to scars or disfigurement or temporary or permanent disability.

(b) “Acid attack” means any act of throwing acid or using acid in any form on the victim with the intention of or with knowledge that such person is likely to cause to the other person Permanent or partial damage or deformity or disfiguration to any part of the body of such person.”

In a study conducted by UNICEF (2023) reveals, *“Acid attack is a serious problem all over the world, even children are become victim of acid attack in many cases. In an acid attack, acid is thrown at the face or body of the victim with deliberate intent to burn and disfigure. Most of the victims are girls, many below the age of 18, who have rejected sexual advances or marriage proposals. Acid attack or vitriolage is defined as the act of throwing acid onto the body of a person “with the intention of injuring or disfiguring them out of jealousy or revenge”.*

Rationale of the Study

Acid attacks represent a horrific form of violence with severe physical and psychological consequences for survivors. Despite the immense trauma, some survivors exhibit remarkable resilience, demonstrating an incredible ability to heal and rebuild their lives. The study aims to identify internal strengths, coping skills, and positive emotions that facilitate resilience following severe trauma. Additionally, it highlights the importance of family, friends, and professional counseling in the healing process. Addressing the stigma surrounding mental health issues among acid attack survivors, the research advocates for specialized psychological support tailored to their unique needs.

Beyond contributing to academic literature on trauma and resilience, the findings may influence policy development, leading to more effective support programs for acid attack survivors. Ultimately, this study seeks to deepen our understanding of psychological recovery after traumatic events, promoting empathy and compassion within society, and offering valuable insights for mental health professionals, support organizations, and policymakers.

Review of Literature

In India, approximately 500 acid attack cases occur annually, with 85% of the victims being female (Lodha et al., 2020). Globally, around 1500 cases are reported each year, predominantly involving women (Peck, 2012). Many of these attacks result from the rejection of sexual advances or relationship proposals. This underscores societal perceptions valuing a woman's beauty, with any damage to her appearance rendering her “useless” (Mittal et al., 2020). The National Crimes Report Bureau (NCRB) data reveals a significant increase in acid attack cases, with 70% of victims being women according to the Acid Survivors Foundation Annual Report (2015).

Existing literature on acid attacks often highlights the incidental portrayal of the assault, primarily focusing on understanding the survivor's pain and the reasons behind the attack. Resilient individuals tend to exhibit less damage to their self-efficacy in handling difficult situations (Caffo & Belaise, 2003). An adaptive psychological mindset often contributes to resilience, while a maladaptive mindset can lead to feelings of hopelessness, suicidal thoughts, and unhappiness (Mittal et al., 2020).

Happiness, closely linked to resilience, refers to the emotional and mental state where individuals experience positive feelings and satisfaction with their lives. It serves as a protective factor against the risk of post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) in severe trauma victims (Bryan et al., 2020). Happy individuals tend to exhibit openness, warmth, and empathy, fostering satisfying relationships with friends and family. However, trauma victims, particularly those who have experienced home violence, sexual assault, community violence, or stalking, often find happiness questionable due to their

victimization, negatively impacting their adult lives (Diette et al., 2016). For acid attack survivors, these factors become uncertain territory as their social interactions, skills, and mental health are profoundly affected by their post-attack challenges, often leading to maladaptive thought patterns and thoughts of suicide (Mittal et al., 2020). Those with more severe burns experience lower life satisfaction, highlighting the profound societal challenges and prejudices faced by acid attack survivors in India (Pishnamazi et al., 2012).

This review of literature on resilience and healing in acid attack survivors emphasizes the significance of understanding the psychological journey of these survivors. By examining the factors contributing to resilience and healing, researchers and practitioners can develop targeted interventions and support systems that promote post-traumatic growth and recovery. Furthermore, the findings from this literature review can contribute to reducing the stigma associated with acid attack survivors' mental health issues, fostering a more compassionate and supportive environment for their healing process. This underscores the importance of integrating mental health care services, interventions, and support systems tailored to the unique needs of acid attack survivors, ultimately promoting their psychological recovery and well-being.

Research Questions

Based on above literature review following research questions were conceptualized:

1. What are the key psychological challenges faced by the acid attack survivor in the process of healing and recovery?
2. How does social support play a role in the psychological well-being and resilience of the acid attack survivor?
3. How does the survivor's perception of self and body image evolve over time, and what impact does this have on their overall psychological well-being?
4. To what extent does the survivor's ability to find meaning and purpose influence their psychological healing process?
5. How does the societal context, including perceptions of beauty and gender norms, influence the survivor's psychological journey and resilience?

Research Objectives

Following research objectives were formulated from the broader research questions:

1. To identify the key psychological challenges faced by the acid attack survivor in the process of healing and recovery.
2. To understand the role of social support in the psychological well-being and resilience of the acid attack survivors.
3. To find out the impact of survivor's perception of self and body image on their overall psychological well-being.
4. To understand the survivor's ability to find meaning and purpose and how it influences their psychological healing process.
5. To examine the influence of societal perceptions on beauty and gender norms of acid attack survivors and its impact on their well-being.

Methodology

Research design:

The exploratory case study, using qualitative research method was used for data collection,

involving in-depth interviews of acid attack survivor's and key informants interviews i.e. Lawyers, Functionaries of Non-Governmental Organization/s and Healthcare providers. In addition to this the desk review of newspapers (national dailies in English and Hindi) for the last five years we also reviewed. Paper publications, reports, blogs were also desk reviewed for last five years 2018 to 2024 (till date) were also reviewed.

Sampling frame: A total of five case studies on acid attack survivors were reviewed from the secondary source i.e., newspapers, articles, etc. In order to collect the primary data, a total of five acid attack survivors were reached for qualitative data collections. Nine key informant interviews, three each among Lawyers, Functionaries of Non-Governmental Organization/s and Healthcare providers were held for the data collection.

Research tools: Key informant topic guides were developed based on the literature review and by referring other research studies. The research tools were piloted and finalized. The study delves into the survivors' personal history, mental health background, and pre- and post-attack experiences to gain a comprehensive understanding of their psychological well-being and resilience. Combining the interviews obtained via a secondary source, observations, and relevant documentation, the research aimed to offer a nuanced and comprehensive depiction of the survivors' psychological journey and the need to bring in mental health care services, interventions, and support system.

Data Analysis: Thematic Analysis framework has been used for the data analysis of qualitative research.

Ethical considerations: This included informed consent, participant's information sheet, ensuring privacy, confidentiality, respect & for dignity for the participant was rigorously followed. In accordance with ethical research practices and the sensitivity of the population involved—namely, acid attack survivors—the identities of the real victims have been anonymized. This measure ensures adherence to ethical norms and protects the survivors from any potential personal harm or threats.

Results

In this section, the rich tapestry of results and findings that have emerged from our qualitative assessment of the psychosocial needs of acid attack survivors, guided by comprehensive themes, suggested interventions and a conceptual model has been mentioned. By using the qualitative research method and a conceptual framework, the data was collected using five in-depth interviews of acid attack survivors and nine key informant (Lawyers, healthcare providers, functionaries of NGOs) interviews of experts working in the field.

Thematic analysis framework has been used as qualitative research method to identify, analyze, and report patterns (themes) within a dataset. Here's a thematic analysis table for responses from acid attack survivors:

Serial No.	Theme	Subtheme(s)	Responses
1.	Immediate Psychological Impact	PTSD and Trauma	I still have nightmares about the attack.
		Depression and Anxiety	I often feel overwhelmed and anxious.
		Body Image and Self-esteem	My self-esteem plummeted after the attack.

2.	Social Challenges	Stigma and Discrimination	People stare at me and treat me differently.
		Isolation and Loneliness	I feel so alone; it's hard to connect with others.
3.	Physical Recovery	Surgeries and Medical Care	I've had multiple surgeries to repair the damage but the access to medical facilities was eventually delayed.
		Pain and Physical Discomfort	The physical pain is a constant reminder.
4.	Rehabilitative Challenges	Rebuilding Life	Finding a job has been incredibly challenging.
		Education and Training	It is hard to get work because my face has been tampered.

5.	Coping Strategies	Emotional Coping	I've decided to live through my children's dream.
		Problem Focused	When no hospital entertained me, I resorted to actively find solution by covering myself in surgical bandages.
		Social Support	I never had any support from my family and I was abandoned as filing the case might also impact the family.
6.	Advocacy	Raising Awareness	I want to raise awareness about acid attacks.
		Legal Pursuits	I'm determined to seek justice.
7.	Resilience	Overcoming Challenges	I'm working hard to rebuild my

			life.
		Personal Growth	Despite everything, I'm becoming stronger.

This table provides

an organized overview of the key themes, subthemes, and the interview responses from acid attack survivors. These themes would possibly help the researchers and practitioners understand the common issues and experiences faced by survivors and can inform the development of targeted interventions and support systems.

The paper listed out some key psychological themes and patterns, psychological and active interventions/strategies as mentioned in Figure 1.

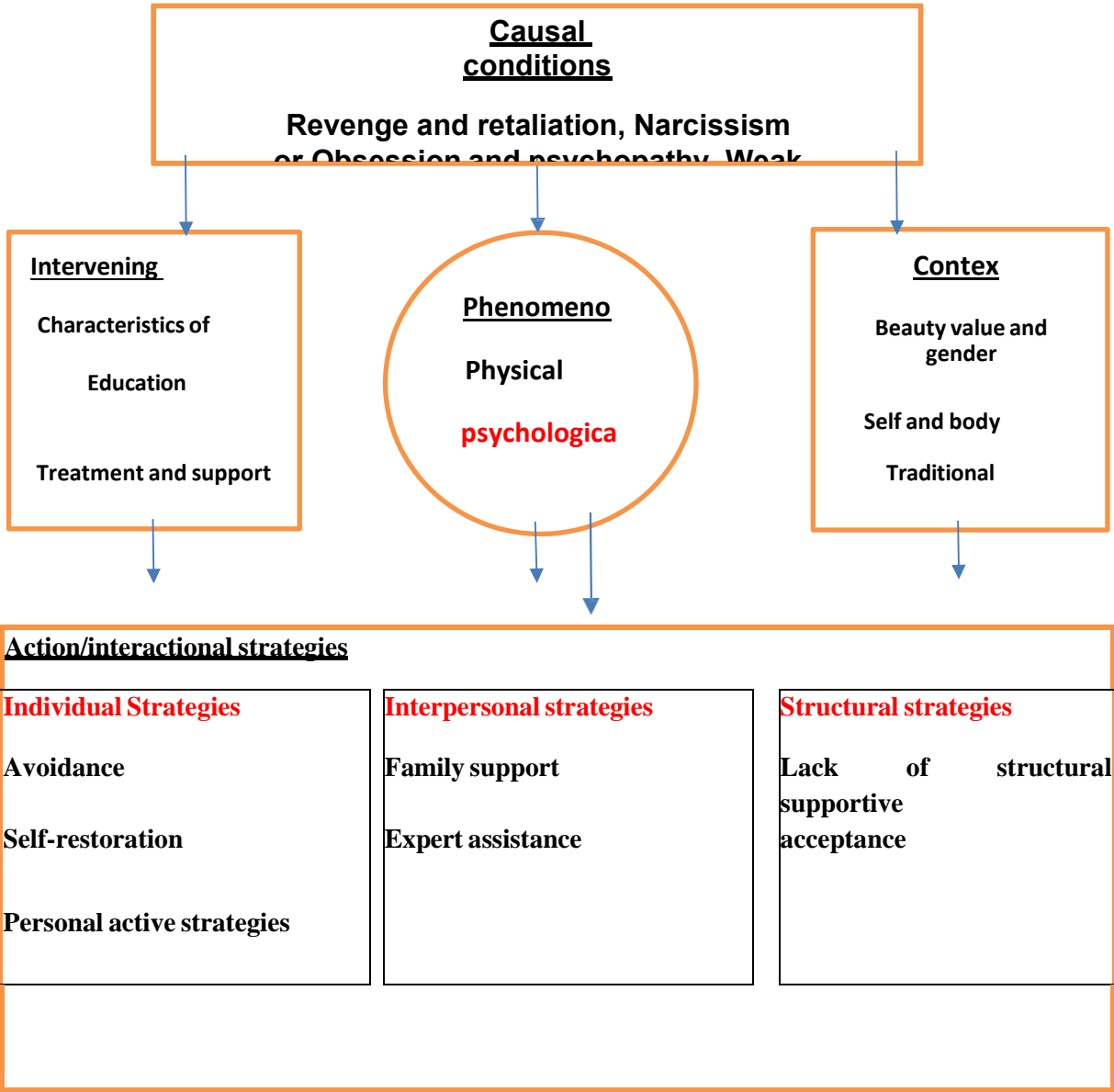
Qualitative assessment
Subjective experiences and perspectives of the survivors
Intricate nuances of the survivors' emotions, coping strategies and challenges
In-depth interviews, thematic analysis

Key psychological themes and patterns	Active Interventions/Strategies	Psychological Interventions
Immediate Impact	Informed Support Programs	Trauma Informed Therapy
Immediate Psychological Impact	Advocacy and Awareness	Supportive Counselling
Emotional turmoil and shame	Policy and Legal Reforms	Group Therapy
Communication Barriers	Empowerment	Art and Expressive Therapies
Limited Coping Mechanism		Mindfulness and Relaxation Techniques
Family Dynamics		Body Image Therapy
Legal and Justice System		Support for Families

Community Stigmatization	Rehabilitationand OccupationalTherapy
Resilience andHealing	Long Term Follow-up

Figure 1: The diagram above helps to understand and address the psychosocial needs of acid attack survivors

The Conceptual Framework: A conceptual framework serves as the backbone of this qualitative assessment needed for understanding and addressing the needs of acid attack survivors, is essential to provide a structured approach to comprehending the multifaceted challenges they face and guiding efforts to support their recovery and rehabilitation. Here’s a conceptual framework for acid attack survivors:



Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD), Depression, Anxiety disorders, Isolation and Social Withdrawal, Low self-esteem and self-worth, Trust issues, Body Image Issues, Guilt and Shame, Flashback and Nightmares, Difficulty in Emotional Expression

Figure 2: Conceptual model of acid attack survivors based on survivors' experiences

Case Description:

Acid attacks constitute cruel and devastating acts of violence, inflicting severe physical, emotional, and psychological wounds on victims (UNICEF, 2023). This case study unveils the poignant narrative of a married mother of three who endured an acid attack, shedding light on her mental well-being, coping strategies, and her resilient journey amid adversity and recovery. The study delves into the profound repercussions of the attack on Sanjana's life, her family, and the formidable challenges they confronted while endeavoring to reconstruct their shattered world.

Background of the Acid Attack Survivor: Ms. Sanjana Rawat, a 36-year-old homemaker in Saharanpur, New Delhi, faced an acid attack by three neighbors due to a grudge against her husband, altering her life dramatically.

Discussion

Based on the research objectives of the study and thematic analysis framework following themes emerge out. These themes have been compared and explained in the light of other studies published in the form of research publications, blogs and reports.

1. **Immediate Impact:** Ms. Sanjana Rawat, like many acid attack survivors, suffered severe burns to her face, neck, and upper body, resulting in excruciating pain and irreversible damage. The attack profoundly altered her physical appearance, causing her to withdraw from social interactions and grapple with shame and self-consciousness. Her story mirrors those of other survivors, including Ms. Sonali Mukherjee, Ms. Laxmi Agarwal, Ms. Preeti Rathi, Ms. Ritu Saini, and Ms. Laxmi Aggarwal, emphasizing the devastating consequences of acid attacks and the urgent need for comprehensive support and legal reforms (Khurana, 2021; Sharma, 2020; Singh, 2019).

Ms. Sonali Mukherjee, who was attacked while she was asleep, experienced complete loss of vision and severe disfigurement due to acid poured on her (Pandey, 2015). Ms. Laxmi Aggarwal, attacked at 15, displayed incredible courage and resilience despite her disfigurement (Ali, 2016; Sharma, 2014; Sinha, 2018). Ms. Preeti Rathi, another survivor, endured severe burns, extensive surgeries, and excruciating pain (The Times of India, 2013; Roy, 2014; Mishra, 2015). These cases collectively highlight the physical and emotional trauma endured by acid attack survivors and underscore the importance of seeking justice and support for them (Chakraborty, 2017; Sen, 2019; Kapoor, 2020).

2. **Immediate Psychological Impact:** Ms. Sanjana's acid attack shattered her sense of identity and self-worth, leaving her in shock and disbelief, struggling to process the trauma and emotionally distressed. In contrast, Ms. Sonali's case gained international attention for its brutality and her resilience in the face of adversity (Jain, 2013). Despite her plea for justice, she became a symbol of mercy. Ms. Laxmi Agarwal, another acid attack survivor, highlighted the severe

psychological impact of such attacks, including PTSD, depression, isolation, body image issues, trust issues, and low self-esteem (Ali, 2016). She advocated for survivor rights and inspired change. Ms. Preeti Rathi, also an acid attack victim, suffered from PTSD, depression, anxiety, and social isolation, exposing flaws in the legal system and the urgent need for better support and protection for survivors (Mishra, 2015). These cases underscore the profound psychological toll of acid attacks and the importance of addressing the mental health needs of survivors, alongside legal reforms and public awareness.

3. Emotional Turmoil and Shame: Ms. Sanjana's limited education and understanding of trauma exacerbated her emotional turmoil. She grappled with overwhelming shame and guilt, believing her altered appearance burdened her family. This self-imposed guilt intensified her isolation and hindered her ability to communicate her emotions to loved ones. The emotional and psychological trauma of the attack had a profound impact on Sanjana's mental well-being, leading to anxiety, depression, and post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). She also wrestled with body image issues, avoiding mirrors and public situations. Consequently, she felt isolated and rejected by society. Similarly, Ms. Lakshmi Aggarwal, Ms. Preeti Rathi, and Ms. Sonali Mukherjee, all acid attack survivors, endured profound emotional turmoil, including shame, as they coped with disfigurement, trauma, and societal stigma resulting from these horrific attacks (Jain, 2013; Ali, 2016; Mishra, 2015).

4. Communication Barriers: Ms. Sanjana's difficulty in articulating her emotions and seeking appropriate help presented considerable challenges. Her limited vocabulary made it hard for her to convey her pain, fear, and anxieties, hindering her ability to communicate her needs and access essential psychological support and counseling services. In addition to Sanjana, acid attack survivors like Lakshmi Aggarwal, Preeti Rathi, and Sonali Mukherjee often encounter communication barriers due to their physical disfigurements (Jain, 2013; Ali, 2016; Mishra, 2015). These altered appearances can result in social isolation and stigmatization, impeding their interpersonal interactions and affecting their capacity to express themselves and establish connections with others.

5. Limited Coping Mechanisms: Ms. Sanjana's limited education also hindered her ability to employ effective coping mechanisms. Unable to process her trauma through verbal expression or emotional regulation, she turned to avoidance behaviors, withdrawing from social interactions and internalizing her suffering. Likewise, acid attack survivors such as Ms. Lakshmi Aggarwal, Ms. Preeti Rathi, and Ms. Sonali Mukherjee often grapple with restricted coping mechanisms due to the physical and psychological aftermath of these horrific attacks. They endure disfigurement, chronic pain, and multiple surgeries, all of which can erode their self-esteem and body image. The resulting trauma frequently leads to post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), depression, anxiety, and social withdrawal. Their struggles with self-acceptance, self-worth, and integration into society underscore the urgent need for comprehensive support systems, legal reforms, and mental health assistance to aid these survivors in rebuilding their lives and self-confidence (Jain, 2013; Ali, 2016; Mishra, 2015).

6. Family Dynamics: The acid attack had a profound impact on Ms. Sanjana and her family. Initially, her family, including her children and husband, struggled to understand her emotional state and provide the necessary support. They distanced themselves from her for eight months, fearing that pursuing legal action would endanger the entire family by making them potential targets for the assailants. Limited education and awareness within the family complicated their efforts to assist Ms. Sanjana in coping with her trauma. Similar family dynamics are observed in the cases of acid attack survivors like Ms. Lakshmi Aggarwal, Ms. Preeti Rathi, and Ms. Sonali Mukherjee (Jain, 2013; Ali, 2016; Mishra, 2015). These survivors face unique challenges that can strain familial relationships.

Families often grapple with shock and helplessness, but many provide essential emotional and financial support during the recovery process. However, some victims experience abandonment or social ostracization due to societal stigma. These cases emphasize the crucial role of family support in the healing journey of acid attack survivors (UNICEF, 2023). Nevertheless, they also emphasize the need for broader societal awareness and change to combat acid attacks effectively and provide comprehensive support to survivors.

7. **Legal and Justice System:** Ms. Sanjana and her family faced significant challenges navigating the legal system in their quest for justice, which was slow and frustrating. The perpetrator's influence and societal biases against gender-based violence complicated matters. Acid attack survivors like Ms. Lakshmi Aggarwal, Ms. Preeti Rathi, and Ms. Sonali Mukherjee often encounter similar hurdles within the legal and justice systems (Jain, 2013; Ali, 2016; Mishra, 2015). While some countries have strengthened laws, enforcement remains inconsistent, leading to delays and complex proceedings. Social stigmas and biases can affect case outcomes, and survivors may endure re-traumatization during trials (Davis and Lee, 2019).

Improvements in legal processes, victim protection, and awareness are imperative to ensure prompt, fair, and compassionate justice for acid attack survivors. The resilience of survivors has driven advocacy for stronger legal safeguards and societal change.

8. **Community Stigmatization:** Ms. Sanjana's rural community's lack of awareness about mental health and its tendency to stigmatize acid attack survivors exacerbated her distress. She felt isolated and judged by neighbors and acquaintances, intensifying her shame and impeding her social reintegration. Similar challenges are faced by acid attack survivors like Ms. Lakshmi Aggarwal, Ms. Preeti Rathi, and Ms. Sonali Mukherjee, who often experience profound community stigmatization (Jain, 2013; Ali, 2016; Mishra, 2015). Society's beauty standards and norms magnify their struggles, as the visible scars from acid attacks can result in social exclusion, harsh judgments, and limited opportunities (Ahmed, 2015). This ostracism can lead to low self-esteem, anxiety, and depression among survivors (Puri, 2017; Bhushan & Chaturvedi, 2020). Their stories highlight the urgent need for societal change and support systems to combat the pervasive stigma acid attack survivors face and facilitate their reintegration into society.

9. **Resilience and Healing:** Despite facing overwhelming challenges, Ms. Sanjana's innate resilience began to shine through. After receiving justice, her family accepted her once more. As her physical wounds slowly healed, she found solace in daily routines and the support of her children. Determined to overcome adversity, Ms. Sanjana gradually regained her self-confidence and learned to manage her emotional and psychological scars.

Similarly, Ms. Lakshmi Aggarwal, Ms. Preeti Rathi, and Ms. Sonali Mukherjee exemplify remarkable resilience in the aftermath of horrifying acid attacks (Jain, 2013; Ali, 2016; Mishra, 2015). Ms. Lakshmi, an activist and survivor, not only overcame her trauma but also became a powerful advocate for acid attack survivors' rights, leading to legal reforms and increased awareness in India. Preeti's tragic case sparked national discussions on the need for stricter regulations and support systems. Her legacy continues to drive change towards a safer and more compassionate society. Sonali's story accentuates the importance of mental strength and loved ones' support in the healing process, as she advocates for survivors' rights and raises awareness about this issue. These women's stories showcase the human spirit's ability to overcome adversity and inspire change, offering hope and healing to others who have faced similar trauma (Kaur, 2020).

10. **Experts' views on acid attacks:** Lawyers were approached to understand the grim reality of acid attack cases and the discussion is mentioned here precisely. It was stated by the experts that acid attacks are a grave issue in India, but significant strides have been made in addressing them legally

and socially. While the legal framework exists to prosecute perpetrators and support survivors, challenges such as underreporting and slow legal proceedings persist. Lawyers, activists, and policymakers must continue working together to create a society where acid attacks become a rare and unthinkable crime, and survivors receive the justice and support they deserve.

Interventions to address acid attacks require a comprehensive and multifaceted approach spanning legal, medical, and societal dimensions. Legally, it is crucial to bolster existing legislation, imposing stringent penalties on perpetrators, expediting trial processes, and rigorously enforcing regulations governing the sale of acid (Dubey, 2019). Providing legal aid and support to survivors throughout the judicial process is equally essential. On the medical front, specialized burn units within hospitals must be established to deliver immediate and long-term medical care, encompassing surgeries, rehabilitation, and psychosocial support (Rao, 2021).

Additionally, raising awareness and educating the public about the gravity of acid attacks, their legal consequences, and the importance of reporting incidents is vital. Education programs should emphasize gender equality and denounce violence. Establishing dedicated support centers for survivors, offering counseling, vocational training, and assistance in accessing compensation, is imperative to facilitate their recovery while safeguarding them from further harm. Community engagement is equally vital, fostering a culture of solidarity and support for survivors and encouraging bystanders to intervene and report suspicious activities (Smith & Kumar, 2020). Promoting economic empowerment through skill development and job placement programs reduces survivors' vulnerability to further attacks and discrimination. International cooperation can enhance knowledge sharing, data collection, and the development of a global framework to combat acid attacks. Encouraging responsible media reporting, refraining from sensationalism, and respecting survivors' privacy and dignity are essential steps in promoting a more empathetic and informed society (Ali, 2016). Collaborative and sustained efforts involving government agencies, non-governmental organizations, legal experts, healthcare professionals, and the broader community are crucial to effectively combat acid attacks, provide justice for survivors, and foster their recovery.

Acid attacks represent one of the most horrifying forms of violence, causing severe physical, emotional, and psychological trauma to survivors (UNICEF, 2023). Understanding the psychosocial needs of acid attack survivors is essential for providing comprehensive support and facilitating their recovery (UNICEF, 2023). Nevertheless, the significance of conducting a qualitative assessment of these needs using a conceptual framework is highlighted. The topic of acid attacks has long been overlooked in research and literature. Existing works predominantly concentrate on the attacks themselves, along with the associated challenges and hardships faced by the victims. However, there is a noticeable gap in understanding how these individuals successfully navigated and emerged from their difficult circumstances.

The primary data collected in this study is from the detailed interview received from an acid attack survivor which is mentioned in the research study and has been related to several other landmark cases which gained attention nationally and internationally. A total of three participants were approached for the detailed interview, out of which one acid attack survivor completed the interview. This study attempted to qualitatively assess and understand their levels of life journey by noting down the subjective experiences and perspectives of the survivors, intricate nuances of the survivors' emotions, coping strategies and challenges using in-depth interviews.

The psychological challenges endured by acid attack survivors are profound and intricately linked to various facets of their lives, encompassing self and body image, the significance of social support, and the influence of societal notions concerning beauty and gender norms. It is a crime committed primarily by men in order to maintain their manhood, making it a form of gender-based violence (Khan

& Hussain, 2008). These attacks are intended to disfigure, maim, torture, or murder the victim (Patel, 2014). The attacker's primary goal is to diminish women's beauty, which is regarded as an asset in India (Lodha et al, 2020).

These formidable challenges play a pivotal role in shaping the psychological well-being and resilience of these survivors. Firstly, acid attack survivors grapple with a multitude of psychological hurdles, ranging from the haunting symptoms of Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD), characterized by distressing flashbacks, nightmares, and overwhelming anxiety, to the profound depths of depression, marked by persistent sadness, hopelessness, and the erosion of once-enjoyed activities (Ali, 2016). Anxiety, particularly social anxiety stemming from the fear of judgment and the physical alterations caused by the attack, also becomes a significant issue. This emotional turmoil often leads to isolation, the erosion of self-esteem, and a struggle to trust others, all of which profoundly affect the mental well-being of survivors. Victims suffer physical harm as well as psychological distress and torture. Most of the time, these victims have mental health concerns such as depression, sleeplessness, substance misuse, and anxiety, but these go unreported because the major focus is on physical healing (Mannan et al, 2006).

Secondly, the role of social support emerges as a crucial factor in the psychological recovery and resilience of acid attack survivors. The unwavering support of family and friends offers emotional solace and a sense of belonging, nurturing the healing process (Dubey, 2019). Peer support groups provide avenues for survivors to connect with individuals who share similar experiences, effectively mitigating the sense of isolation. Equally vital is the involvement of professional mental health support through therapy and counselling, helping survivors develop essential coping strategies and facilitating an improvement in their mental well-being (Kapoor, 2020). Moreover, the impact on self and body image looms large in the aftermath of acid attacks. Survivors often grapple with the challenge of accepting their altered physical appearance, which significantly influences their self-image and self-worth. This struggle can manifest in avoidance behaviours such as avoiding mirrors and shying away from public situations, further deepening their sense of isolation (Jain, 2013). Negative perceptions of their own bodies become an additional burden, leading to distress and self-consciousness.

Lastly, societal perceptions of beauty and the rigid adherence to gender norms play a pivotal role in exacerbating the psychological challenges faced by acid attack survivors (Kaur, 2020). Stigmatization and discrimination stemming from societal beauty standards can lead to a profound sense of alienation. Societal pressure to conform to these beauty ideals further intensifies the survivors' struggle with self-acceptance and self-esteem. Additionally, the disproportionate targeting of women in acid attacks underscores the significance of challenging and dismantling deeply ingrained gender norms, as these norms often contribute to the root causes of such acts of violence. People that are happy are more open, friendly, and empathic, and they have greater satisfaction in their relationships with friends and family. Because of their victimisation, trauma victims' pleasure is called into doubt. They could be victims of domestic violence, sexual assault, community violence, or stalking at various phases of their lives, resulting in adult unhappiness (Diette et al, 2016). One of the common themes that emerged during their interviews was their ability to adapt, which allows them to make decisions and gain control over adverse situations and behaviours by increasing their sense of self-awareness and avoiding situations that increase their stress (Mittal et al, 2020). Personal belief systems and social support received by them are components that support their ability to adjust.

Acid attack survivors face significant physical and psychological challenges, highlighting the vital need for mental health care services, therapy, and a strong support system. These survivors often experience PTSD, depression, anxiety, and body image issues, necessitating mental health care for

healing. Counseling and therapy aid in boosting self-esteem and confidence. Societal stigma, multiple surgeries, and the struggle to rebuild their lives compound their difficulties. Rehabilitation, vocational training, and support help survivors reintegrate into the society (Ahmed, 2015). Mental health services also raise awareness and reduce ignorance, fostering inclusivity. A comprehensive approach, including mental health resources and a supportive environment, empowers survivors to heal and rebuild. Society must acknowledge and support acid attack survivors in leading fulfilling lives.

The study highlights important implications for future research. Investigating the psychological impact of acid attacks through case studies can have a far-reaching educational impact. It is crucial for enhancing the skills of mental health professionals, raising awareness, driving policy changes, and fostering a more compassionate and informed society.

There are several avenues for further research. Examining more acid attack cases can yield nuanced insights into victims' resilience factors, cultural and contextual influences, intervention effectiveness, quality of life, trauma recovery, peer support, family impact, stigma reduction, prevention strategies, cross-cultural comparisons, and technological interventions (Caffo and Bellaise, 2003). It is an urgent and deserving area of attention to address the unique psychological needs of acid attack survivors and promoting their well-

being is an urgent and deserving area of attention. Conducting further research on the psychological aspects of their experiences is essential for a deeper understanding and to inform meaningful interventions.

Conclusion

Sanjana's case and the other acid attack survivors' experiences outlined in this paper provide valuable insights into the psychological journey of these survivors. They underpin the critical importance of establishing effective psychological support models and providing education as integral components of the recovery process, particularly for survivors who may have limited education. Sanjana's story, characterized by immense struggle and resilience, serves as a poignant reminder of the imperative for societal change to prevent such atrocities and to empower and support survivors in their healing journey. This emphasizes the necessity for culturally sensitive and linguistically appropriate mental health services to address the unique challenges these survivors face. Their journey, marked by profound trauma and incremental self-healing, serves as a testament to the resilience of the human spirit. However, it also highlights the urgent need for widespread awareness, empathy, and accessible mental health resources to support survivors on their path to psychological recovery.

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