

## SOCIO-DEMOGRAPHIC CHARACTERISTICS OF ACID VICTIMS IN BANGLADESH

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### Abstract

This descriptive cross sectional study was carried out on acid victims, who were admitted to Dhaka Medical College Hospital (DMCH) and were present in Thikana and Jibontara (clinic cum rehabilitation centre) of Acid Survivors Foundation (ASF). Most of the acid victims from every corner of the country come to DMCH for their treatment and ASF provides both curative and rehabilitative assistance as well as legal procedural help. A total number of 90 (ninety) acid victims, both old and new cases were selected purposively in the study to determine their socio demographic characteristics and also to identify the possible causes and the perceived perpetrators. Victims' age range was 01 to 50 years and Mean  $\pm$  SD of age was  $20.03 \pm 8.83$  years. Ninety percent (81) of the victims were female, 58.9% (53) were adolescent, 60% (54) were unmarried, 53.3% (48) were below secondary level educated, 51.1% (46) were student and 32.2% (29) were housewife by occupation. Sixty nine percent (62) victims were from semi-urban area and 40% (36) from Dhaka division (capital city) and 62.2% (56) victims from income < 5,000 taka per month. Fifty five percent (50) causes were due to various refusals and 14.4% (13) were due to dowry, 64.4% (58) perpetrators were rejected suitor and 16.7% (15) were husband. Eighty percent (72) incidences were occurred at home and 93.3% (84) occurrences were at nighttime. Ninety one percent (82) victims received threat before the incidence and 52.3% (33) filed general diary (GD) in local police station before the occurrence. Seventy nine percent (71) survivors had no knowledge about acid, its source and its consequences before the incidence. This study depicts the national scenario of the socio-demographic characteristics of acid victims and perceived perpetrators in Bangladesh.

**Key words :** Acid victims, Bangladesh, victim age.

### Introduction

Violence against women is a universal phenomenon but incidence and pattern differs from one society to another. Violence against women within South-Asia includes rape

and sexual abuse, trafficking, prostitution, domestic violence, dowry related deaths and psychological abuse<sup>1</sup>. Acid throwing is a new dimension and extreme form of violence against women in Bangladesh. Acid violence is not exclusive in Bangladesh, it also found in several other countries but the incidence is isolated, nowhere the number of attacks is near to that occurring in Bangladesh<sup>2</sup>. The alarming increase in its frequency in recent years is a cause of concern.

Acid violence is probably the worst form of revenge, which causes permanent injury and disfigurement, which is very fast becoming the most lethal weapon of revenge in Bangladesh<sup>3,4</sup>. The earliest acid attack in Bangladesh, that has been documented, took place in the early sixties. A young man threw acid at the face of a young woman for refusal of marriage<sup>2</sup>. Recently, there have been acid attacks in children, older women and sometimes also in men. Acid victims have less mortality rate but their morbidity rate is very high, the scars left by acid are not just skin deep; victims suffer for the whole life, become the burden of the family, society and the nation. Most victims experience a dramatic change in their lifestyle; they often face social isolation, which damage victims' self-esteem and economic position. The trauma stems from excruciating pain and unbearable shock compounded by social rejection even by the own families. Most of the acid victims stop their education or work during lengthy recovery and beyond due to disfigurement<sup>4-8</sup>.

The Acid Survivors Foundation (ASF) was established in 1999 with the aim to provide assistance to acid victims in treatment, rehabilitation and reintegration into society and also to prevent acid attacks in Bangladesh<sup>1</sup>. Thikana and Jibontara are two clinics cum rehabilitation centre of ASF where the victims get shelter, treatment and legal support<sup>1,9-12</sup>. Available evidence suggests an alarming trend; 80 cases were reported in 1996 and this figure became 340 only within 5 years in 2001<sup>13,14</sup>. The number of unreported cases is thought to be even higher<sup>1,15-22</sup>. This study was planned to find out the victims' socio-demographic characteristics, identify the possible causes and to the perceived perpetrators.

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**Materials and Methods**

This descriptive cross sectional study was conducted from January to June 2005 on acid victims who were admitted in DMCH and were present in Thikana and Jibontara of ASF. Ninety victims, both old and new cases were selected purposively in the study. Most of the acid victims from every corner of the country come to DMCH for their treatment and ASF give both curative and rehabilitative assistance to them. This is to mention that ASF works with Government and non-government organization of Bangladesh and also with international community to ensure that the victims have better access to quality medical care, legal justice systems and also that they can continue their lives through education, training for new skill or employment. By taking permission from the appropriate authority all the subjects were interviewed face to face privately on a pre-tested structured questionnaire after informed consent. By using computer software all the collected data were organized and presented in tables and charts.

**Results**

To determine the socio-demographic characteristics of acid victims and to identify the perceived perpetrators and the responsible factors total 90 victims were interviewed and all the respondents were cooperative enough and there was no missing or incomplete data. Victims' age range was 01 to 50 years and Mean  $\pm$  SD of age were  $20.03 \pm 8.83$  years and 58.9% (53) victims were adolescent (10 to 19 years), 36.7% (33) were > 20 years of age (table-I). Among the survivors 90% (81) were female and only 10% (09) were male (Fig-1). In relation to socio-demographic characteristics of the victims, 60% (54) were unmarried, 43.3% (39)

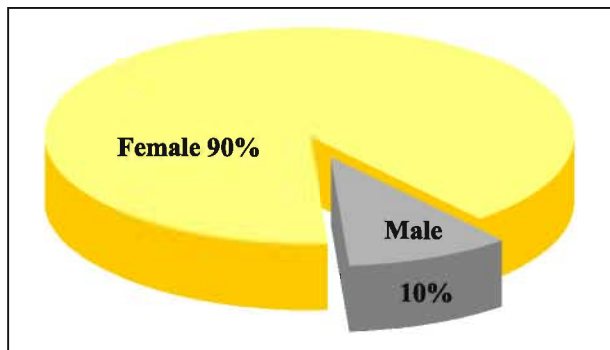
had secondary level of education, 10% (09) had university level and 25.6% (23) were illiterate. By occupation 51.1% (46) were student and 32.2% (29) were housewives and 62.2% (56) had monthly family income <5,000/- taka (table-II). Most of the victims 69% (62) were from semi-urban and 21% from rural area (Fig-2). Forty percent (36) victims were from Dhaka, 18.9% (17) from Rajshahi, and 16.7 % (15) were from Khulna Division (Fig-3). Possible cause and perceived perpetrator are presented in table-III; reason for acid throwing in 55.6% (50) cases were due to various refusals, 21.1% (19) were due to different type of dispute and 14.4% (13) were due to dowry, 64.4% (58) perpetrator was rejected suitor and 16.7% (15) were

**Table-II :** Distribution of acid victims by Socio-demographic characteristics (n = 90).

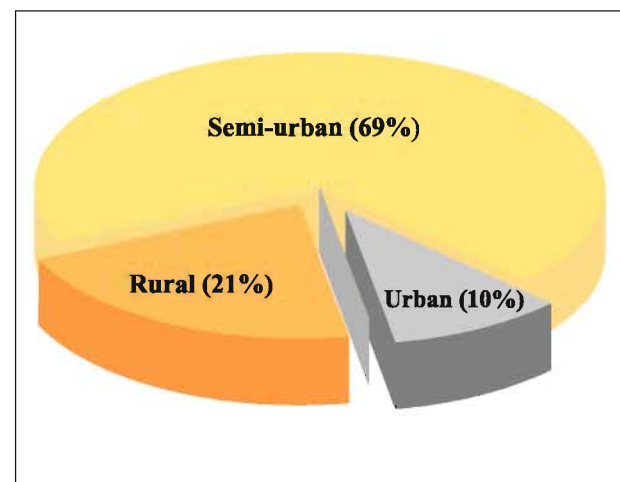
Variables	Frequency	Percentage
<b>Marital Status</b>		
Married	36	40
Unmarried	54	60
<b>Education</b>		
Illiterates	23	25.6
Below SSC	48	53.3
University	09	10.0
Others	10	11.1
<b>Occupation</b>		
Students	46	51.1
Housewife	29	32.2
Others	15	16.7
<b>Family Income (Taka / month)</b>		
< 5,000	56	62.2
> 5,000	34	31.8

**Table-I:** Distribution of acid victims by age (n = 90).

Age group (in years)	Frequency	Percentage (%)	Age Mean $\pm$ SD
01 - 09	04	04.4	20.03 $\pm$ 8.83 years
10 - 19	53	58.9	
20 - 50	33	36.7	
Total	90	100	



**Fig-1:** Distribution of acid victims by Sex (n = 90).



**Fig-2:** Distribution of acid victims by Locality (n = 90).

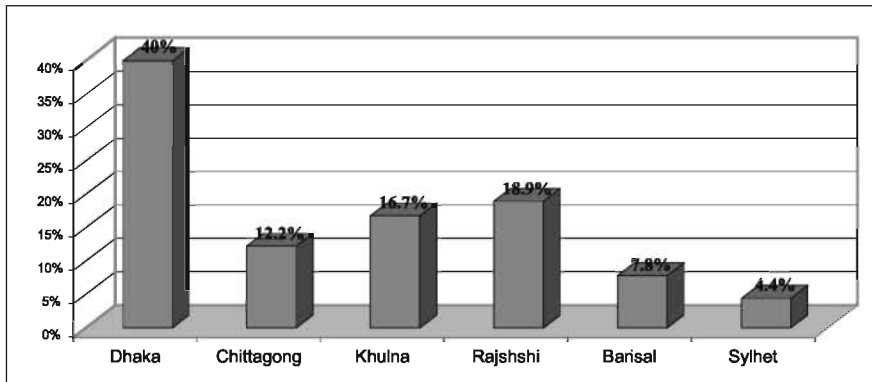
husband. Eighty Percent (72) incidences were occurred at home, 93.3% (84) occurrences were at night time, 91.1% (82) received threat before the incidence but only 36.6% (30) about throwing of acid, 52.3% (33) filed GD in local police station before the occurrence and 78.9% (71) victims had no knowledge about acid, its source & its consequences before the incidence.

**Table-III:** Distribution of acid victims by possible causes and perceived perpetrator (n=90).

Variables	Frequency	Percentage
<b>Reason</b>		
Various Refusals	49	54.4
Different Disputes	41	45.6
<b>Perpetrator</b>		
Rejected suitor	58	64.4
Others	32	35.6
<b>Place of Incidence</b>		
At Home	72	80
Outside Home	18	20
<b>Time of Occurrence</b>		
At night	84	93.3
Day time	06	06.7
<b>Knowledge about Acid</b>		
Yes	19	21.1
No	71	78.9

study conducted in Bangladesh<sup>11,17,20</sup>. Sixty Percent victims were unmarried, 43.3% were below secondary level educated & 25.6% were illiterate, 51.1% were student & 32.2% were house-wife by occupation, 62.2% had monthly family income < 5,000/- taka. This indicates that most of the victims were from low socio-economic condition and less educated. Sixty nine percent victims were from semi-urban locality, 40% victims were from Dhaka Division. This may be due to easy availability, overcrowding and negative impacts of urbanization in and around Dhaka. These findings are consistent with the findings of Tasnim F<sup>20</sup> and also with Bari et al<sup>11</sup> excepting the occupation and locality, they found only 32.4% were student and > 50% were from rural area, they categorized the locality in rural and urban area.

Regarding possible cause and perceived perpetrator; the most common cause (55.6% ) of acid violence found in this study was refusal of marriage, sex or romantic relationship and dowry stood next (14.4%). It also found that 64.4% perpetrator was rejected suitor and 16.7% were husband. This finding was relevant to other studies in Bangladesh<sup>11,20</sup>. Eighty percent incidences were occurred at home, 93.3% occurrences were at night time, 91.1% received threat before the incidence, 52.3% filed GD in local police station before the occurrence, and 78.9% victims had no knowledge about acid, its source & its consequences before the incidence. These indicate that most of the perpetrators took the cover of darkness and they know the victims residence very well on the other hand most of the victims were very innocent, they had no knowledge about acid. These findings are consistent with other similar studies<sup>17,20,22</sup>.



**Fig-3:** Distribution of acid victims by their residing Division.

### Discussion

Acid violence constitute near about 6% of total violence in Bangladesh<sup>14</sup>. As the mortality rate is not very high and the morbidity rate is more in case of acid violence, this cross sectional study tried to explore the socio-demographic characteristics of acid victims and to identify the reason for acid attack and also to find out the victims' treatment seeking pattern and the legal and rehabilitation status. Survivors' age range was 01 to 50 years, 90% were female and 58.9% were adolescent. These findings are consistent with other similar type of

### Conclusion

Acid throwing is a new dimension and extreme form of criminal acts in this sub-continent especially in Bangladesh. Women, especially the adolescent girls are the most frequent victims of acid violence.

Most of the victims are from low socio-economic group of population and they have no idea about acid and their primary management. Availability of acids and urbanization has impact on acid violence and most of the perpetrators are rejected suitor. The cases of acid violence have shaken the conscience of the nation in a way in which few such criminal activities have been able to do in the past. To prevent further deterioration of this trend, the policy makers, law enforcing agencies, lawyers, doctors, and the conscious citizens should work united and only then we can hope to free ourselves from such heinous crime.

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