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ACID ATTACKS: A SOCIO-LEGAL ANALYSIS

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INTRODUCTION

Acid Attack is a pathetic offence penalised under section 124 of Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita (BNS), 2023. However, the victim of this offence faced severe pain beyond the physical injuries. They lost their confidence and precious phase of life, this is for everyone, not restricted to youth, as every phase of life is valuable. Physical injuries include deep burns, loss of vision, and permanent disfigurement. Apart from this they faced psychological impacts include trauma, depression, PTSD, and suicidal ideation, and, social consequences include stigma, isolation, and barriers to education or employment. Instead of being viewed as isolated, emotional outbursts, acid attacks should be recognized as premeditated crimes born out of a societal culture of gender inequality and control. In this Blog, the statistical data, societal perspective and legal remedies are examined. Along with this, the role of finance in rebuilding a new life is an important aspect of this Blog.

BEHIND THE STATISTICS: A CULTURE OF SILENCE AND SURVIVAL

The acquittal of the accused in the 2009 Shaheen Malik acid attack case underscored the immense challenges survivors face. Her grueling 16-year legal battle laid bare systemic failures in police investigation, prosecution, and judicial empathy. Data reflects a broader, troubling trend: a 2024 analysis by the Acid Survivors Trust International (ASTI) revealed that nearly 75% of acid attacks against women in India stem from personal relationship conflicts, domestic abuse, dowry demands, or suspicions of infidelity. Furthermore, National Crime Records Bureau (NCRB) data shows a steady rise in these crimes, with reported acid attacks climbing to 207 in 2023 (up from 202 in 2022 and 176 in 2021), alongside 65 attempted attacks.

BEYOND THE SCARS: THE FIGHT FOR LEGAL ACCOUNTABILITY

Under the updated Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita (BNS) of 2023, these attacks carry severe penalties, including a minimum of ten years to life imprisonment which may extend to imprisonment for life, alongside fines explicitly designated to cover the survivor's medical expenses. Even attempts to throw acid is also penalized under section 124(2) of Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita, 2023, with minimum five year imprisonment which may extend to seven years and fine. Furthermore, the legal framework mandates that all hospitals provide free medical care to survivors and strictly regulates the sale of acid by requiring sellers to maintain records and verify buyers' photo identification.

The landmark *Laxmi vs. Union of India* ruling catalyzed critical amendments to the Indian Penal Code (IPC), specifically criminalizing acid attacks and distinguishing them from general injury offenses. The Supreme Court has mandated that acid attack survivors receive a minimum compensation of ₹3 lakh to assist with their recovery. To ensure immediate financial relief, ₹1 lakh of this amount must be paid within 15 days to cover urgent medical treatment. The remaining ₹2 lakh is to be disbursed within two months to fund the survivor's long-term aftercare, rehabilitation, and essential reconstructive surgeries. It banned the over-the-counter sale of acid, mandating that sellers keep a comprehensive register documenting both the purchaser's identity and the volume sold.

Despite these robust statutory protections, real-world implementation remains weak, marred by widespread illegal acid sales and lenient enforcement of retail regulations.

FINANCING REHABILITATION: THE COST OF REBUILDING A LIFE

Acid attack survivors who are employed face immense workplace challenges that make retaining jobs difficult, while unemployed survivors encounter severe hiring discrimination, forcing them into financial dependency. This crisis is worsened by the exorbitant cost of medical rehabilitation, which requires multiple specialized surgeries, skin grafting, and long-term medication.

To address these socio-economic hurdles, the Government of India has instituted several critical measures. Following directives from the Supreme Court, the Ministry of Home Affairs requested all States and Union Territories to establish formalized Victim Compensation Schemes. To reinforce these local efforts, the Central Government provided a one-time grant of ₹200 crore under the Central Victim Compensation Fund to supplement existing state-administered relief frameworks. Furthermore, to ensure swift temporary relief during the critical aftermath of an assault, an additional emergency grant of ₹1 lakh is provided to

survivors through the Prime Minister's National Relief Fund. This financial assistance acts as an immediate top-up, delivered over and above the standard compensation amounts mandated by individual state schemes. To ensure the standardized execution of these vital welfare and rehabilitation provisions across the nation, the Ministry of Home Affairs issued comprehensive legal guidelines on November 9, 2016.

CONCLUSION

Acid attack cause physical injuries, psychological trauma, and other social consequences. The data regarding the number of acid attacks shows its roots of patriarchal nature of society, as mostly the victims are females, rejections and their 'NO' are not accepted by the offenders. Currently, acid attack and its attempt, both are punishable under section 124 of Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita, 2023. For the improvement and development of the victims, both, physically and mentally, the government took various initiatives and measures. Conclusively, Acid attack is an egregious offence in society. It is an alarming matter of concern and its education needs to be disseminated. Since, legal provisions are not enough until it is thoroughly enforced in society.

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