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A Comparative Exploration of Acid Attack Violence

Jane Welsh

Department of Anthropology

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**"IT WAS LIKE BURNING IN HELL":
A COMPARATIVE EXPLORATION OF ACID ATTACK VIOLENCE**

Jane Welsh

A thesis submitted to the faculty of the University of North Carolina at
Chapel Hill in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of
Master of Arts in the Department Anthropology

Chapel Hill

2009

Approved by:

Professor James Peacock

Professor Peggy Bentley

Professor Sue Estroff

Professor Kim Blankenship

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ABSTRACT

"IT WAS LIKE BURNING IN HELL" : A COMPARATIVE EXPLORATION OF ACID ATTACK VIOLENCE (Under the direction of Dr. Jim Peacock)

This thesis explores the issue of acid attack violence: a sadistic and cruel form of violence that involves the intentional throwing of corrosive acid onto another person with the intention of disfigurement. Acid attack violence occurs in many countries but is particularly prevalent in: Bangladesh, Pakistan, India, and Cambodia. Global statistics suggest that attacks are predominantly perpetrated by men as a result of shame and loss of face or loss of honour. Developing an understanding of the motivations and aetiology of this form of violence is the focus of this thesis as much of the current discourses and interventions are focused on the victims of these crimes, and do not address or investigate underlying root causes. Drawing on Heise and colleagues adapted socio-ecological model, this thesis will explore factors that contribute to the acid attack violence and will refer to high-profile cases in Cambodia, Bangladesh and India.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Numerous people contributed to this Masters thesis. I am grateful for the encouragement and guidance of my supervisors Dr Jim Peacock, Professor Peggy Bentley, Professor Sue Estroff at University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill and Professor Kim Blankenship at Duke University. I also appreciated the immeasurable financial and emotional support from my family, Denise, Bruce, and Scott Welsh, and Trisha and Andrew Pearce. Thanks to Anna Schurmann, Saydia Gurlkah, Alison Fields and Katheryn Bennett for their friendship, encouragement and suggestions. I would like to thank the Rotary World Peace Fellowship Programme who contributed financially to my Masters study programme at the University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill. Lastly, Chour Sreya and Boun Mao, I am always inspired by your courage.

Jane Welsh

DEDICATION

To my Mum and Dad

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ABBREVIATIONS AND ACRONYMS

ABC - Association of the Blind in Cambodia

AHRC - Asian Human Rights Commission

ASF - Acid Survivors Foundation Bangladesh

ASFU - Acid Survivors Foundation Uganda

ASFP - Acid Survivors Foundation Pakistan

ASTI - Acid Survivors Trust International

CASC - Cambodian Acid Survivors Charity

CSAAAW - Campaign to Stop Acid Attacks Against Women

GBV - Gender-based violence

GO - Government organisation

HRCP - Human Rights Commission of Pakistan

HRW - Human Rights Watch

ICRW - International Center for Research on Women

INGO - International non-government organisation

IRIN - Integrated Regional Information Networks

LICADHO - Cambodian League for the Promotion and Defense (sic, Fr.)

of Human Rights

LNGO - Local non-government organisation

MoWA - Ministry of Women's Affairs

NCRB - National Crimes Records Bureau

NGO - Non-government organisation

PADV - Project Against Domestic Violence

PAHO - Pan America Health Organization

PAT - Project Against Torture

PSI - Population Services International

SACW - South Asia Citizens Wire

VAW - Violence against women

WHO - World Health Organization

UK - United Kingdom

UN - United Nations

UNICEF - United Nations Children's Fund

UNFPA - United Nations Population Fund

USA - United States of America

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

Introduction to the issue of acid attack violence in Cambodia, Bangladesh and India

Acid attack violence is an act of intimate terrorism that involves the premeditated throwing of sulphuric, nitric, or hydrochloric acid onto another person (Cambodian League for the Promotion and Defense (sic) of Human Rights (hereafter LICADHO), *Living in the Shadows* 1). It is estimated that the earliest case of acid attack violence occurred in Cambodia in the 1960s, and since that time, the issue has become an epidemic in this small South East Asian country. In the late 1990s through to 2005, acid was a favoured weapon of choice for women and men looking to disfigure rivals and settle scores. Some activists contend that at least 60 people were attacked in one year alone.¹ Both women and men are attacked for a number of reasons, including: sexual jealousy and extramarital affairs, land or business disputes, domestic violence, personal or family disputes, robbery, or hate or revenge (LICADHO, Categories of Motives 1). In many cases reasons are unclear, and the attackers unidentified (LICADHO, Categories of Motives 1). However, so far as the pattern of motivations for acid attacks in Cambodia is concerned, it is women

¹ Morrison, John, Executive Director of Acid Survivors Trust International (hereafter ASTI), Fact-finding visit to Cambodia 3rd to 9th November 2005. York: ASTI, 2005.

attacking other women over sexual jealousy or 'crimes of passion' (LICADHO, Categories of Motives 1).

With regards to Bangladesh, recorded data suggests that the first attack in this country occurred in 1967 and that attacks have steadily been on the rise, and similar to Cambodia, peaked in the late 1990s and the early years of 2000 (Odhikar and Action Aid Bangladesh 3). Attacks are on the decrease in Bangladesh with 192 attacks recorded by a non-governmental organisation (hereafter NGO) in 2007. Akin to Cambodia, women and men are attacked with acid, however the motivations and the sex of the perpetrators differ. Predominantly, acid throwers in Bangladesh are men whose motivations are over land and business disputes followed by marital disputes.

Although statistics are scarce, observers note that the incidence of acid attacks is increasing in India, with approximately 174 known cases taking place over the past five years (Swanson 4). Although acid attacks in other cultural contexts can be committed against men, acid is predominantly thrown against women in India. Motivations for attacks against women in India are: spurned love and affection, sexual jealousy, economic or land disputes, hate or revenge (Campaign to Stop Acid Attacks Against Women (hereafter CSAAAW) qtd. in Carney). Some of the causes for acid attacks in all three contexts are: the easy and cheap availability of acid; traditional perceptions of women; changing gender roles; influences from the media; and notions of shame, loss of face and loss of honour, revenge and retribution. However, insofar as authentically addressing these aetiologies, to date, the medicalised, legal and development approaches and interventions have not been

successful. I argue that a multi-faceted approach and a heuristic device is needed to understand root causes. Thus, this thesis aims to address this gap.

Historically, acid attacks were also widespread in France, the United Kingdom and other parts of Europe from the 18th century onwards (Forster 6). Today, in addition to acid attacks in Cambodia, Bangladesh and India, they are also reported widely in other parts of South East and South Asia; the Middle East; Central and Northern Africa; and, to a lesser extent acid attacks also occur in North America and Europe. These attacks seldom kill but result in serious disfigurement and suffering which confine women to their homes, thereby leading to economic hardship, social isolation and depression (Human Rights Watch (hereafter HRW)).

Purpose of the study

This study investigates the issue of acid attack violence. The purpose of this research is to develop an increased understanding of acid attack violence through a comparison of cases in several countries and to speculate as to why it occurs. Its objectives are:

1. To identify and enumerate the different ways of understanding acid attack violence including the scale and scope of the issue.
2. To explore the socio-cultural imperatives of shame, loss of face, loss of honour and retribution to ascertain how they impinge upon this form of violence.
3. To determine the various motivations and causes for acid attacks with particular reference to Cambodia, Bangladesh and India.

4. To discuss the ways in which NGOs and the community grapple with and address this violence.

There are complex and inter-related agendas that can assist in understanding acid attack violence. The most significant of these are from women's rights movements, the NGO community and government. This thesis will also explore the ways in which these three groups explain and address the issue.

Acid attack violence is a multi-causal problem, with risk factors such as patriarchal structures and locally specific reasons such as a loss of face or honour and retribution that contribute to the incidence and severity of acid attack violence. An adapted socio-ecological model is useful in understanding this interplay of cultural, societal, situational and personal imperatives that combine to underpin and proliferate acid attack violence in various cultural settings. This approach argues that no one process is the sole causative or underpinning factor, and it is an intricate network of processes together in combination, rather than in segregation, that are the factors responsible (Bandyopadhyay and Rahman Khan 65). For example, in this model, cultural imperatives such as traditional views towards women, along with other processes, combine with personal level imperatives such as a potential perpetrator's education level to determine the likelihood of acid attack violence (Heise 262-290; Comeau and Thampi 6; Bandyopadhyay and Rahman Khan 66; refer to Appendix One for socio-ecological model).

This research has relevance given the diminutive quantity of research into this issue and particularly the interface and the interplay between personal, situational, societal and cultural factors that promote and perpetrate acid attack violence.

Rationale for the study

My interest in this particular research area emerged whilst working along side acid attack survivors at the Association of the Blind in Cambodia (2002-2005). In 2005 I produced an Honours thesis on acid attack violence in this country. In 2006, I worked at the Acid Survivors Foundation in Bangladesh and during this time I visited a burns unit and NGOs who assist acid attack survivors in India.

There are several justifications for this research. Firstly, in exploring the literature on the extent and context of acid attack violence, the most salient feature is the dearth of research on this issue. However, whilst various academic reports on acid attack violence have been published from overseas (particularly from Bangladesh and Uganda), there appears to be limited research from other cultural settings where acid attack violence is a problem.² Of the many newspaper and internet reports written on acid attack violence, most describe titillating physical consequences of acid throwing or the background of the relationship between the perpetrator with the survivor/victim and does not acknowledge many of the root

² See: Rachel Forster, *Baseline Survey with International Comparative Analysis of the Legal Aspects of Acid Violence in Uganda* (Kampala: Acid Survivors Foundation Uganda, 2004); Elora Chowdhury, "Feminist Negotiations: Contesting Narratives of the Campaign Against Acid Violence in Bangladesh," *Meridians: feminism, race, transnationalism* 6.1 (2005) 163; Afroza Anwar, "Acid Violence and Medical Care in Bangladesh: Women's Activism as Carework," *Gender & Society* 17.2 (2003) 305-313; Anowar Ara Begum, "Acid Violence: A Burning Issue of Bangladesh - Its Medicolegal Aspects," *American Journal of Forensic Medicine & Pathology* 25.4 (2004) 231-323'; Jordan Swanson, "Acid Attacks: Bangladesh's Efforts to Stop the Violence," *Harvard Health Policy Review* 3 (1); Firoz Alam Bhuiyan and Ferdushi Haque Lovely, "Acid Violence: A Burning impact on Women of Bangladesh-Case Studies," *Impacts of Global Issues on Women and Children* (Dhaka 2006); Mridula Bandyopadhyay and Mahmuda, Rahman Khan, "Loss of Face: Violence Against Women in South Asia," *Violence Against Women in Asian Societies*, ed. Lenore Manderson and Linda Rae Bennett (London: Routledge Curzon, 2003) 61-92; Jamil Asaria, Olive Kobusingye, B.A Khingi, B.A Balikuddembe, Manuel Gomez, and Massey Beveridge, "Acid Burns from Personal Assault in Uganda" *Burns* 31.2 (2004) 78-81; Ammu Joseph, "Acid Test For Being Women" *The Hindu* (2004); P Micheau, F Lauwers, Say Bon Vath, Thoeurng Chan Seilha, C Dumurgier, and B Joly, "Acid Burns. An Experience of 24 Patients Treated in Cambodia," (sic. Fr) *Annales de Chirurgie Plastique Esthétique* 49 (2004) 239-254.

causes of acid attack violence nor many of the compounded complications survivors contend with.

Methodology

Acid attack survivors are predominantly women, and as such they experience compounded exclusion, marginalisation and persecution for a number of different reasons. To address the gaps identified in the literature and to make the analysis comprehensive, feminist, public health and anthropological perspectives guide this study. An extensive multi-country literature review and a qualitative exploration of three recent acid attack cases from Cambodia, Bangladesh and India are also employed.

Guiding Principles / Explanations / Hypotheses

This study seeks to explore the issue of acid attack violence and to highlight cultural, historical, societal and individual influences that underpin it. It also extrapolates upon the findings of data collected from organisations and individuals with the purpose of proving the following guiding principles / hypotheses:

1. That socio-cultural, situational and individual determinants contribute to acid attack violence.
2. That motivations and causes for acid attack violence vary from location to location.

3. That shame, loss of face or loss of honour are imperatives that perpetuate attacks and marginalise acid survivors.

Secondary guiding premises of the research will include:

- That the experiences and roles of women acid attack survivors are irrevocably changed post attack including preclusion to marriage and employment.
- That the socio-economic status of the survivor/victim pre-attack impacts upon opportunities and access to resources post-attack.

Framework of the Thesis

This thesis comprises five chapters. Chapter One introduces the central theme of this study: acid attack violence. It delineates the broad directions of this research (including the purpose and rationale of this study), and introduces the academic theory it is based upon. Chapter Two is a review of literature from many international settings. It explores various texts, journals and reports to understand the ways in which various societies and cultures grapples with, and perpetuates this violence. Chapter Three offers three cases, one each from Cambodia, Bangladesh and India, to highlight the predominant love oriented punishment for throwing acid and experiences of survivors post-attack. Chapter Four delineates the theoretical and methodological concepts and tools, and draws upon various inter-disciplinary fields, particularly feminism, public health and anthropological theory. This chapter also looks at personal, situational, societal and cultural processes that underpin acid

attack violence. And lastly, Chapter Five concludes the thesis and offers recommendations for future research and the design and implementation of gender, cultural and impairment sensitive interventions to assist acid attack survivors and prevent further attacks.

Note on reference style

The referencing style adopted for this thesis conforms with the MLA Style Manual, Modern Language Association of America, New York (Gibaldi). This MLA style does not include the year in parentheses. In addition, this version permits commentary as well as documentation of references in footnotes (Gibaldi).

Search Strategy

The information presented in this literature review master's thesis was gathered primarily from peer-reviewed journal articles, books, organisational project reports, newspaper articles and Internet websites. Journal databases used included PubMed (MEDLINE) and EBSCOhost (via NCLive). The general University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill and Duke University catalog was also searched. Archival searches of newspapers were conducted. Search terms in both the databases and the catalog included various combinations of the following terms: violence against women, gender-based violence, acid attacks, acid violence, acid baths, acid throwing, vitriol throwing, violence, dowry, dowry deaths, Cambodia, Bangladesh, India, crime, crimes against women, women's rights, and human rights.

CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW

"My face suddenly felt tight and it was burning all over. The smoke emanating from my face was suffocating me. Fearing the acid would eat up my face, I ran home. My mother opened the door and went into shock to see her daughter's face being swallowed up by acid fumes. I received third degree burns on my face, right hand and chest. My features were completely distorted, and it was difficult for my own friends to recognise me. Since my eyelids had shrunk, I couldn't close my eyes, and this made it very difficult for me to sleep. Every night, I'd sit on my bed waiting for dawn."

Shirin Fuwaley, attacked with acid by her husband

This chapter examines the existing literature relating to acid attack violence and identifies limitations in coverage. It then explores gender-based violence (hereafter GBV) and acid attack violence, globally but with particular emphasis on three Asian contexts: Cambodia, Bangladesh and India. An exploration of the incidence and motivations for acid attack violence by geographical regions is also discussed. The chapter concludes with a snapshot of global and local NGOs working on the issue of acid attack violence.

Existing literature on acid attack violence

In order to understand the complex interrelated factors involved in *how*, *why* and *where* acid attack violence takes place and occurs, this study also examines the underlying personal, situational, societal and cultural forces behind them, drawing in

part on existing literature to inform this examination. The rationale for this focus is that some policy decision makers, judges and lawyers, community leaders, journalists, community members and others, nominate acid attack survivors as the *cause* of acid attack violence, which contributes to their further marginalisation.

Since the first century AD artificially prepared liquid acid has been used to purify gold and fabricate imitation precious metals in ancient Greece, however, acid attacks have only been *recorded* in Cambodia since 1993, India since 1982 and Bangladesh since 1967 (Stevens). Since the 1990s many medical reports have been written about the physical impact of acid on the body particularly in Cambodia, West Africa, Uganda and Bangladesh.³ However, research for this thesis has revealed a dearth of published books, reports and journal articles on the topic of acid attack violence from an individual and socio-cultural perspective. Responding to the paucity of available literature on this specific aspect of acid attack violence, this literature review addresses the gaps in that literature, and in the broader literature related to this study.

The media, medical agencies and human rights organisations working with acid attack survivors have compiled the predominant body of work on this issue.

Media coverage needs to be treated cautiously as some tend to highlight the worst-

³ See: A Faga, D Scevelo, M.G Messetti, and S Scevelo, "Sulphuric Acid Burned Women in Bangladesh: A Social and Medical Problem" *Burns* 26 (2000) 701-709; Shahidul Bari and Iqbal Choudhury, "Acid Burns in Bangladesh", *Annals of Burns and Fire Disaster* 14.3 (2001); E.K Yeong, M.T Chen, R Mann, T.W Linn and L.H Engray, "Facial Mutilation After and Assault with Chemicals: 15 Cases and Literature Review", *Journal of Burn Care and Rehabilitation* 18.3 (1997) 234-237; C.U Ukponmwan, "Chemical Injuries to the Eye in Benin City, Nigeria" *West African Journal of Medicine* 19.1 (2000) 71-76; J Pitkanen and M.M Al Qattan, "Epidemiology of Domestic Chemical Burns in Saudi Arabia" *Burns* 2.4 (2001) 376-378; Ph Micheau, F Lauwers, B Joly and S Bon Vath, *Aggression by Acid – An Experience of 22 Patients Treated in Cambodia* (sic. Fr.) (Phnom Penh: Opération Sourire, Médecins du Monde, 2002); J.U Achebe and F.C Akpuaka, "Chemical Burns in Enugu" *West African Journal of Medicine* 8.3 (1989) 205-208.

case stories or can be overly sensationalistic or simplistic. This is also relevant to the particular contexts of acid attack violence in Cambodia, Bangladesh and India.

Gender-based violence:

1. worldwide

Manderson and Bennett explain that gender-based violence (hereafter GBV) is endemic worldwide, cutting across age, marital status, religion, ethnicity, class, urban or rural locations, race, sexual identity, monetary circumstance, and thus poses human rights violations and public health concerns (1). According to Heise, Ellsberg, and Gottemoeller “between 10% to 50% of women have experienced some act of physical violence by an intimate partner at some point in their lives” (qtd. in Pan America Health Organization (hereafter PAHO). The World Bank statistics indicate that GBV is a significant cause of fatality and injury to women and girls (qtd. in Surtees 22).

GBV is about oppression and control of women, and manifests in many different forms. The United Nations General Assembly defines GBV as:

“...any act...[t]hat results in, or is likely to result in, physical, sexual, or psychological harm or suffering to women, including threats of such acts, coercion, or arbitrary deprivations of liberty, whether occurring in public or private life” (United Nations Population Fund (hereafter UNFPA) 2).

It includes crimes of honour, acid attack violence, child marriage, female genital mutilation, dowry-related murder, forced abortion, forced use of contraceptives, pre-natal sex selection female infanticide, enforced sterilisation or pregnancy, sexual harassment, rape and sexual assault, stalking, heterosexual and same sex domestic violence, forced prostitution, international HIV transmission, enslavement of women,

and trafficking, (Skinner et al 2; Heise, Ellsberg, and Gottemoeller qtd. in PAHO). GBV also includes non-fatal and non-physical outcomes such as emotional and/or financial abuse (Nosek and Howland 1).

2. in Cambodia

In Cambodia, GBV is an insidious and insistent issue. Due to the silent and hidden nature of violence, there are no extensive statistics on how many women are victims and survivors of violence in Cambodia (Lim 1). However, it is known that the reporting of GBV is increasing in Cambodia with many of the most malevolent forms of violence being committed against women (Lim 1). Much of the literature relating to GBV in Cambodia discusses the scenario of violence from 1970 to 1991 – a period of time that created the precarious situation many Cambodian women now find themselves in (Sodemann 8). Numerous reports and studies of the various manifestations of VAW in Cambodia have been completed, particularly on the issues of domestic violence and trafficking.⁴ This could be attributed to the fact that “domestic violence is by far the most common form of gender-based violence” (UNFPA 3). Domestic violence encompasses a broad spectrum of harmful behaviour, from physical and sexual violence to psychological cruelty and

⁴ See: Project Against Domestic Violence (PADV), Domestic Violence in Cambodia: A Study of Health Care Providers Perceptions and Responses (Phnom Penh: Author, 1999); PADV, Divorce and Domestic Violence in Cambodia (Phnom Penh: Author, 1998); MoWA and PADV, Household Survey on Domestic Violence in Cambodia (Phnom Penh, PADV, 1996); Rebecca Surtees, “Cambodian Women and Violence: Considering NGO Responses in Cultural Context,” Diss; Gerald Vogin, “An Analysis of Domestic Violence in the Catholic Rural Communities in Kompong Cham Cambodia: An Exploratory Study,” Diss; K Kumar, H Baldwin and J Benjamin, Aftermath: Women and Women’s Organizations in Postconflict Cambodia (Washington: Center for Development Information and Evaluation, U.S. Agency for International Development, 2000); C Zimmerman, Plates in a Basket Will Rattle: Domestic Violence in Cambodia (Phnom Penh: The Asia Foundation and USAID, 1994); J Lim, Violence Against Women in Cambodia (Phnom Penh: Author, January 2006).

manipulation (Integrated Regional Information Networks (hereafter IRIN) 115). International Center for Research on Women (hereafter ICRW) extends this definition to include ‘control (restrictions, sanctions, surveillance) and emotional violence. Statistics on domestic violence in Cambodia suggest that one in four women will experience violence (Zimmerman 241), however, due to the moral codes of behaviour for women (*Chbap Srey*) where women are expected to be demure and discreet, and the culture of avoiding shame and protecting face and honour, there is considerable under-reporting of this issue (Vogin 6; Bit 100; O’Leary and Nee 55). Poverty and the culture of violence and aggression – systemic from the war and subsequent occupation are some of the contributing factors to domestic violence in Cambodia (Lim 3). Symbolic legislation was recently introduced in Cambodia: ‘Law on the Prevention of Domestic Violence and the Protection of Victims’; this provides guidelines and definitions of domestic violence (Lim 10).

Human trafficking in Cambodia is at epidemic proportions, so much so that “in 2005, Cambodia became officially recognised as one of the worst countries for trafficking of women” (Lim 20). It is unclear how many women are trafficked within and out of Cambodia, however, as an indicator, global figures estimate that between 600, 000 and 800, 000 people are trafficked each year, and the majority is for sexual exploitation (UNFPA 4). Poverty and migration are two factors that contribute to the susceptibility of women being trafficked internally within Cambodia and also further afield. As Bandyopadhyay and Rahman Khan point out: “women who live in poverty are more likely to experience violence than women of higher status” (65), and

traffickers specifically target uneducated, impoverished women in rural villages to be sold unwittingly into brothels or domestic work (UNFPA 4).

3. in Bangladesh

Similar to Cambodia, VAW is at endemic levels in Bangladesh. Wahed and Bhuiya note that “domestic violence, acid throwing and burning, sexual harassment and indecent assault, rape, kidnapping and abduction, trafficking and importation for immoral purposes and forced prostitution” are the more widespread types of VAW (341). Buttressing the observed popularity of domestic violence against women globally, Bangladesh is ranked second in world for rates of domestic violence (Akter and Ward). Schuler and colleagues note that “47 per cent of the reproductive-aged women in rural Bangladesh were physically abused” (1729). Further, Bates and colleagues contend that “66 per cent of the rural married women were physically abused (slapped/pushed/hit) regularly during their married life, whereas 33 per cent were kicked/burned/hit by sticks” (191). According to WHO’s Multi-country Study on Women's Health and Domestic Violence against Women by Garcia Mareno and colleagues (Bangladesh was one of the countries highlighted in the study), there are many factors that can contribute to a woman’s vulnerability of experiencing domestic violence. Based on a socio-ecological framework, some of these include:

- *Individual* factors – education, financial autonomy, previous victimization, level of empowerment and social support, and whether there was a history of violence in her family as she was growing up.
- *Partner* factors included the male partner’s level of communication with her, use of alcohol and drugs, employment status, whether he had witnessed violence between his parents as a child, and whether he was physically aggressive towards other men.
- Factors related to the *immediate social context* included the degree of economic inequality between men and women, levels of female mobility and autonomy, attitudes towards gender roles and violence against

women, the extent to which extended family, neighbours, and friends intervene in domestic violence incidents, levels of male-male aggression and crime, and some measure of social capital.

Another insidious form of VAW in Bangladesh is sexual violence. The World Health Organization (hereafter WHO) defines sexual violence as:

“any sexual act, attempt to obtain a sexual act, unwanted sexual comments or advances, or acts to traffic, or otherwise directed against a person’s sexuality using coercion by any person regardless of their relationship to the victim, in any setting, including but not limited to home and work”.

Another violent and detestable forms of sexual violence enacted in Bangladesh is rape. Rape is a substrate of sexual violence and is “physically forced or otherwise coerced penetration – even if slight – of the vulva or anus, using a penis, other body part or object” (Krug 149). Rape is a horrific type of terror as the consequences of this criminal act continue to torment the survivor. That is, women are often reluctant to seek justice for fear of: reprisals from the perpetrator (or his family); stigmatisation leading to possible unmarriagability; and the shame and loss of honour can be considered more intimidating and punitive against the woman. Thus, statistics on rape and sexual assault against women in Bangladesh are problematic at best. WHO reports that indeed, this is a common form of VAW in Bangladesh, with 1434 cases of rape being reported in 2002, with 35 percent of these being gang rapes, and that 10% of rapes were followed by murder (Wahed and Bhuiya 346). There are many causal factors and social determinants for rape against women and girls in Bangladesh. Some of these are: traditional and dominant ideas of masculinity; perceived obligation that women and girls should engage in sexual intercourse if they are married; men are the head of the family and thus have conjugal rights; rigid gender roles; high levels of alcohol consumption; and previous sexual abuse as a

child (Wahed and Bhuiya 341-349).

4. in India

To understand why the phenomenon of acid attack violence happens in India, it is helpful to outline the basic nature of VAW in this country. Numerous reports and studies of the various forms of VAW in India have been completed, particularly on the issues of domestic violence and Dowry Death.⁵ Statistics on domestic violence in India suggest that 45 percent of women are slapped, kicked or beaten by their husbands (Ministry of Women and Child Development). According to the Crime Against Women Report by the National Crimes Records Bureau (hereafter NCRB), in 2007, 20, 737 women reported being raped, 75, 930 women reported being tortured and 38, 734 women reported being molested (2). However, despite these grim statistics, due to the sheer scale of the country and other factors including under-resourcing at medical centres and police stations, there is considerable under-reporting of this issue in India. Contributing factors of domestic violence in India are closely linked to those of acid attack violence, and include: societal stratification, changing gender roles, insecurity, shame and loss of honour, jealousy, patriarchy, aggression and frustration.

Dowry Death is described as a particularly menacing and distinct form of VAW in India. According to Vimochana, dowry crimes are “motivated mainly by

⁵ See: Subadra Panchanadeswaran and Catherine Koverola, The Voices of Battered Women in India in Violence Against Women 2005; 11; 736; Ramaswami Mahalingam and Jana Haritatos, Essentialism and the Cultural Psychology of Gender in Extreme Son Preference Communities in India, American Journal of Orthopsychiatry 2007, 77; 4; 598; L Jeyaseelan, Shuba Kumar, Nithya Neelakantan, Abraham Peedicayil, Rajamohanam Pillai, and Nata Duvvury, Physical Spousal Violence Against Women in India: Some Risk Factors, J. Biosoc Sci, 2007, 39; 657; B.R Sharma, Dasari Harish, Vivek Sharma, Krishan Vij, Kitchen accidents vis-à-vis dowry deaths, Burns 2002, 28; 250; Mudita Rastogi and Paul Therly, Dowry and Its Link to Violence Against Women in India, Trauma, Violence and Abuse, 2006, 7; 66.

greed, the crime is committed within the four walls of a home on an unsuspecting wife by her own husband or his family” (qtd. in Menon).⁶ It involves the pre-meditated throwing of kerosene or another solvent agent, and then the victim then set alight. Jutla and Heimbach note that dowry is a:

“concept that arose from the fact that Indian women cannot inherit property...[and] that dowry started in ancient times as ‘varadakshina’ given in all humility by the parents of the bride to the groom voluntarily, out of love and affection and to honor him. But now, Sharma et al state that the stridhan (clothes, ornaments, utensils) given to the bride by her parents has become an integral part of the dowry and is claimed as a right by the in-laws” (165).

Dowry Death is at epidemic proportions in India, so much so that the Crimes Against Women Report 2007 states that 8093 women were reported killed over Dowry Death. In addition, there were 5623 complaints lodged for the breach of the Dowry Prohibition Act 1961 in 2007. However, Rugene and Basu cite that more than “15 000 women are killed over Dowry in India each year, most commonly by being doused in kerosene and set ablaze” (qtd. in Jutla and Heimbach 166).

Dowry Death is a nationwide phenomenon, however it is most prevalent in the Northern States of Uttar Pradesh, Bihar and in the Southern State of Karnataka (NCRB, Crime in India 2006). Data is sketchy and as mentioned above in relation to acid attack violence, there is also a dearth of reporting mechanisms and statistics on Dowry Violence. However, one estimate suggests that in Bangalore, the capital of Karnataka, one woman every three days is murdered or burnt (The Times of India II City plagued by dowry deaths). Vimochana, dispute this and cite that in Bangalore and its surrounding areas at least three Dowry Deaths occur every day (qtd. in The

⁶ Vimochana are a women’s rights NGO based in Bangalore Karnataka.

Times of India IT City plagued by dowry deaths). Similarly, another scholar contends that there are 90 admissions each month to the Victoria Hospital burns ward in Bangalore “with 90% of these women having been set on fire” (qtd. in Jutla and Heimbach 166).

Although Dowry Death is a form of domestic violence, the primary motivations and circumstances are economic forces, the subordinate role of women, “a lack of human rights...[a]n absence of support services for victims, and impunity for perpetrators” (IRIN 102). Menon notes that kerosene survivors and victims are predominantly “young, married, and from lower, middle class or poor backgrounds” (qtd. in Jutla and Heimbach 166). This complies with much evidence that: “women who live in poverty are more likely to experience violence than women of higher status” (Bandyopadhyay and Rahman Khan 65), however, others state that Dowry Violence is practiced across all classes, castes, socio-economic and religious backgrounds (IRIN 102). For example, Vimochana has rigorously compiled data on the phenomenon since 1999 through the Joint House Committee on Atrocities Against Women and have found that it is also women from the upper echelons of society that are preyed upon by greedy in-laws and husbands (qtd. in Menon).

Some scholars speculate as to why fire and kerosene are the chosen tools for killing women over dowry disputes. One postulation by Sharma and colleagues contend there are religio-historical influences at play: “fire and its searing/cleansing powers have been held in great reverence and fear in the Indian psyche” (Sharma, Harish, Sharma and Vij 251). The outlawed act of Sati (whereby widows voluntarily

or forcibly committed suicide by burning themselves alive) and Sita are two such examples:

“an Indian mythological story wherein Lord Rama, after rescuing his wife Sita from the clutches of the demon King Ravana, made her publicly walk through fire to prove her chastity. This extended to cleansing and blessing of human bonds and relationships over it. (havens and pheras – Hindu rituals wherein the blessings of “Agni” the God of fire are sought...[E]ven Shushruta’s ancient medical treatise gave it the final sterilising/cleansing authority. From this background, setting oneself on fire may have been arrived at, as an Indian means of honourable suicide” (Sharma et al 252).

However, whilst self-immolation or setting a woman on fire are considered by some as honourable, the mutation of these types of traditions into the modern day burning of brides over economic greed, is a perversion of the auspiciousness of Sati. Kerosene, most often used as the ignition fluid in Dowry Violence, is commonly found in kitchens in India and is cheap, legal, and accessible. In cases where Dowry Deaths are investigated, often they are classified by authorities as Dowry Accidents whereby a stove has burst or there is a kitchen accident (Jutla and Heimbach 166).

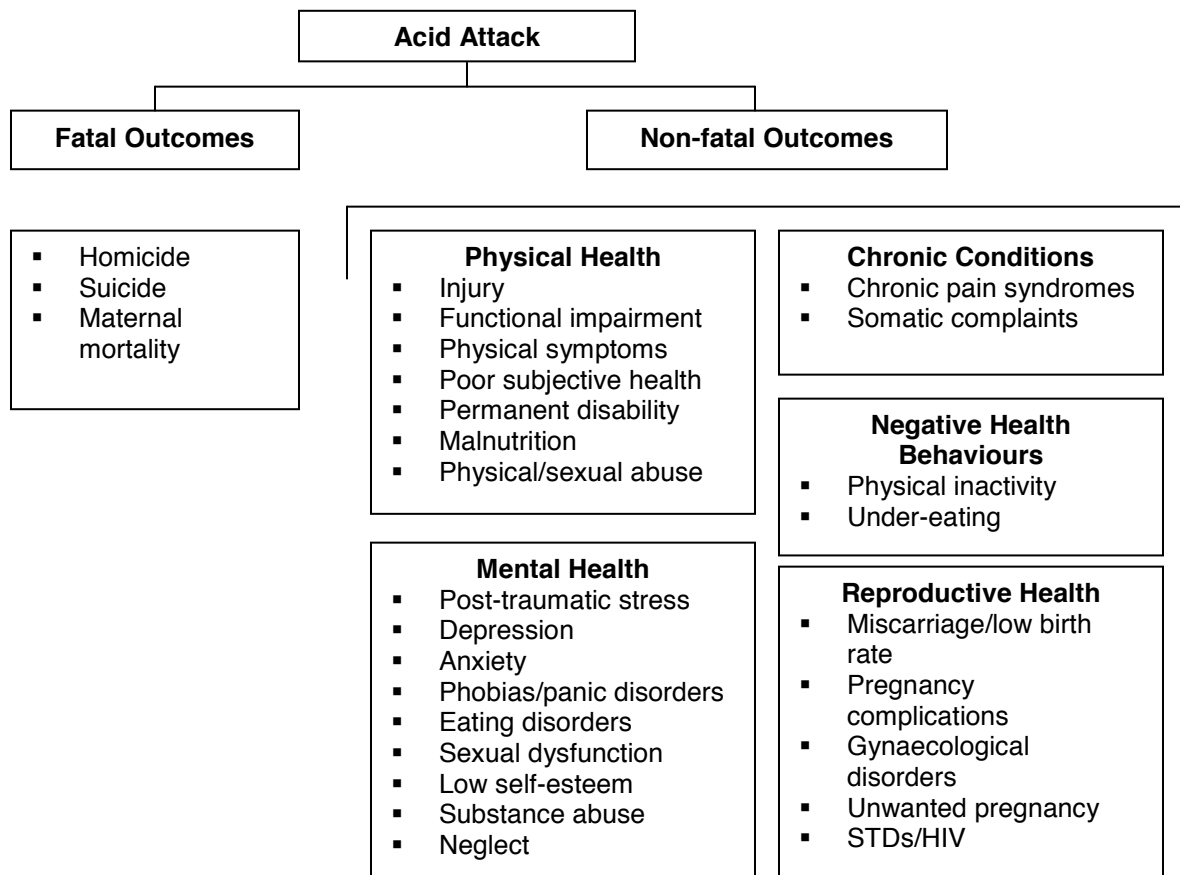
Acid attack violence:

1. broad global definitions

Bellamy explains acid attack violence as being culturally, politically, legally, economically-sanctioned and often homicidal violence directed at girls, women and men, and perpetrated by both women and men who kill or seriously injure family and community members with impunity (qtd. in Forster 9). LICADHO in Living in the Shadows goes on to explain that acid attack violence is a brutal form of pre-meditated torture as it involves the throwing of sulphuric, nitric or hydrochloric acid

onto another person, leaving them physically, socially and emotionally scarred for life. Specifically, this violent method of retribution “melts human flesh and even bones, causing excruciating pain and terror, and leaves the victims mutilated and scarred for the rest of their lives” (1). Consequently, acid attack violence is an insidious human rights issue, that is, “throwing acid is one of the worst crimes that a person can commit” (LICADHO, Living in the Shadows 1). An outline of health outcomes of acid attack violence are found below in Figure One:

Figure One: Health outcomes of acid attack violence



Source: adapted from Heise, Ellsberg, and Gottemoeller (18).

Perpetrators of this act will usually use sulphuric acid, nitric acid or hydrochloric acid – all of which are cheaply and readily available (ASF, 6th Annual Report 7; LICADHO, Living in the Shadows 3):

“Sulphuric acid is the world's largest volume industrial chemical. It is used to manufacture explosives, other acids, dyes, glue, wood preservatives, and automobile batteries. It is used in the purification of petroleum, the pickling of metal, copper smelting, electroplating, metal work, and the production of rayon and film” (Department of Environment and Heritage).

Sulphuric acid is also used in the production or process of: cotton looming; weaving; microphone repair; amphetamine drugs; vinegar; traditional medicine; and radio and television repair (ASF, Report on Focus Group Discussion 1; LICADHO, Living in the Shadows 3). In many instances, acid throwers can purchase it at motorbike mechanic shops for approximately 40 cents per litre (LICADHO, Living in the Shadows 3). In contrast, goldsmiths, jewellers, brass makers, and informal gold polishers use nitric acid to purify gold and metals, and perpetrators can easily purchase this from many of the gold and jewellery shops for about \$1.50 per litre (ASF 1; LICADHO, Living in the Shadows 3). Hydrochloric acid is also used in acid attacks, this is (also) used to polish jewellery and make soy sauce, cosmetics, traditional medicine and amphetamine drugs (LICADHO Living in the Shadows 3).

2. an historical context

Literature relating to acid stems back to ancient Greek times, where in the first century AD, physician Dioscorides recorded that vitriol (a hybrid of sulphuric acid) was used to purify gold and fabricate imitation precious metals. The literature goes on to say that vitriol was also used by the ancient Sumerians, Romans,

Persians, Arabs, and Indians from the second century AD up until late medieval writings (Karpenko and Norris 2). Vitriol appeared in Europe during the 16th century, and a recorded case of an acid attack occurred in 17th century France under the rule of Louis XIV (Bodnar, Rougo, Grolleau et al 4). Many reports suggest vitriolic attacks were in vogue during the late nineteenth century in the United Kingdom and Europe (Guillais 149; Shapiro 79; Harris 238; Hartman 239). A ‘wave of vitriolage’ occurred, particularly in France, where in 1879, 16 cases of vitriol attacks went before the assize court; and from 1888 to 1890 there were 83 reported cases (Hartman 240; Guillais 149). The rhetorical and theatrical term *La Vitrioleuse* was coined, and their violent acts were widely reported in the popular press as ‘crimes of passion’, perpetrated predominantly by women against other women, and “fuelled by jealousy, vengeance or madness and provoked by betrayal or disappointment” (Shapiro 139). *La Vitrioleuses* intentions were to disfigure the individual facial features of their disloyal mate or female rival, therefore robbing him or her of the possibility of further amorous or sexual activity (Harris 238). The crime of vitriolage produced widespread cultural myths about these women’s based crimes and the “responses to it (which) presumed that the victim had participated in creating the conditions that inevitably spilled over into violence” (Shapiro 139). During the late 19th century several Art Nouveau artists also popularised the image of *Vitrioleuses* and Grasset’s 1893, disturbing, yet beguiling, ‘La Vitrioleuse’ print is considered an Art Nouveau masterpiece (see Figure Two below).⁷

⁷ Also see *La Vitrioleuse* by Fernand Pélez.

Figure Two: La Vitrioleuse

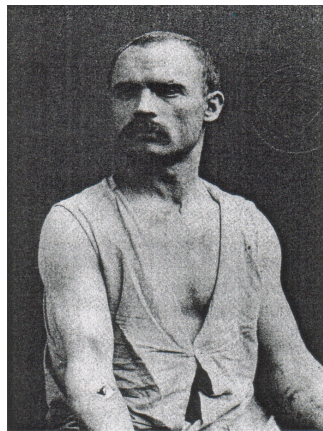


Source: Arwas (64-65)

Whereas sulphuric acid was used in industrial machinery factories, Shapiro explains that vitriol was a popular household cleaner, and many *Vitrioleuses* procured vitriol cheaply and easily from grocers, dispensaries and hardware dealers (77). According to 19th century criminal writer Paul Aubry, the majority of *Vitrioleuses* were poor women who chose this weapon when they believed themselves to be economically vulnerable, with no leverage or resources (qtd. in Hartman 240). However, the widespread hysteria and publicity about the use of

vitriol in 'crimes of passion', which for a short time made such crimes even more prevalent, promoted an increase of cases where middle-class and bourgeois women also threw acid (Aubry qtd. in Hartman 240). Commentators have also suggested that in many cases juries often excused women's premeditated, violent acts as they had 'honourable motives' in avenging their loss of love, loyalty and social position (Harris 238: Shapiro 83). The 1885 case of Marie Couffin is testimony to this, when in front of nearly five hundred people she attacked her husband and his mistress. This 'crime of passion' was deemed less revolting than her husband's errant ways, and she was acquitted of the crime.

Figure Three: Mr Couffin and his mistress



M. Couffin and his mistress, victim of an attack with vitriol.



Image Source: Shapiro (85)

Whilst there is a plethora of information on case studies outlining the motivations and perpetrators, little literature exists on why vitriol attacks ceased in the United Kingdom (hereafter UK) and Europe. Possible explanations are that acid became scarce during World War II, or that reporting of such attacks changed in light of increased coverage of the war (Watson). Chowdhury suggests that the decline in attacks was attributed to the strengthening of police and judicial systems (Chowdhury 163). The transformation of gender roles with women joining the war effort and intimate relationships between men and women, could also be contributing factors to the decrease of attacks during this time (Goldstein). Further research needs to be conducted in understanding the history and the demise of vitriol attacks, which will assist in understanding why attacks continue to occur, and ways to develop interventions for the present and future.

Prevalence of and motivational trends for acid attack violence:

1. internationally

Acid attacks are not confined only to post-conflict, post-colonial, or developing countries, but have recently been reported in many other places. Researchers and activists typically list Bangladesh, India, Pakistan, Nepal, Cambodia, Vietnam, Laos, Hong Kong, China, the United Kingdom, Kenya, South Africa, Uganda and Ethiopia as countries where acid attacks occur.⁸ However acid attacks are more widespread than this, and have also been reported in many other countries including: Indonesia,

⁸ See: Chowdhury 163; Anwary 305-313; Bhuiyan and Lovely 18; LICADHO, Living in the Shadows 18.

Malaysia, Myanmar, Thailand, Taipei, Sri Lanka, Afghanistan, India, Iraq, Turkey, Egypt, the Republic of Yemen, Saudi Arabia, West Bengal, Nigeria, Gabon, Italy, France, Bulgaria, the United States of America (hereafter USA), Canada, Australia, Argentina, Cuba, and Jamaica.⁹ There are anecdotal cases of acid attacks also occurring in other countries in Central and North Africa, the Middle East, Central Asia and South America, although acid attacks have not been reported in the media covering these attacks.

Additionally, “acid attacks have escalated in recent years...[a]s a novel and insidious technology of violence against women” (Bandyopadhyay and Rahman Khan 61). Countries that have reported increases in attacks in the last three years include Cambodia, Pakistan and India. Possible factors contributing to the escalating level of acid attack violence include: the ready availability of acid; that it is a cheap weapon of choice in comparison to guns, knives or grenades; and that corrupt police officers and weak legal systems ensure that perpetrators often avoid justice (LICADHO, Living in the Shadows 2).

Attempting to calculate the frequency of acid attacks and the demographics of acid attack survivors is a difficult task. Acid attacks are dynamic and relentless, and statistics therefore need constant updating. Most statistical information pertaining to acid attack violence is related to survivors rather than perpetrators. To design and

⁹ See: LICADHO, Living in the Shadows 18; Comeau and Thampi "The Physical and Psychosocial Needs of Acid Burn Survivors and the Opportunities for Support in Cambodia," Diss. 7; Bhuiyan and Lovely 18; Acid Survivors Trust International (ASTI) How Common Are Acid Attacks?; Anwar 308; Swanson 2; Natasha Wallace, "Murder by Acid: 18 Years for Accessory" Sydney Morning Herald, 18-19 February 2006; Asian Human Rights Commission (AHRC) "Sri Lankan Woman Brutally Assaulted and Treated Inhumanely Whilst a Housemaid in Saudi Arabia," Author, 2004; Sam Pazzano "20 years Sought in Acid Attack" Toronto Sun (2002); A Kuruluwansa "More Money from President's Fund for Acid Victim" The Daily News (2004).

implement successful acid attack prevention and other interventions, it could also be useful to identify and collate information on acid throwers.

2. South Asia

Bangladesh

Information gleaned from prior research, internet news reports, and human rights and medical reports, depict Bangladesh as having the world's highest incidence of acid attacks (Bhuiyan and Lovely 19; Rahman; Woolf). Bhuiyan and Lovely (19) claim that "Bangladesh has the highest world-wide incidence of acid violence and acid burns constitute 9% of total burn injuries in Bangladesh", and similarly, the Acid Survivors Foundation Bangladesh (ASF) state, "unfortunately Bangladesh has the world-wide highest rate of reported acid violence cases" (6th Annual Report 7).

The first reported incident of acid attack violence in Bangladesh occurred during the 1960s and certainly, since the early 1980s, acid attacks have been steadily increasing: during the 1990s acid attack violence escalated, with 200 cases reported (Chowdhury 163). The number of acid attacks peaked in 2002 when more than 487 women, men and children were attacked (ASF, 6th Annual Report 5). Motivations trends during this time were primarily rejection of sex and marriage, marital disputes and female infanticide. However, since the implementation of prevention strategies by the NGOs Naripokkho, United Nations Children's Fund (hereafter UNICEF) and ASF, and the implementation of the 2002 Acid Crimes Law and 2002 Acid Control Law, there has been a significant downward trend in attacks.

10 Statistics compiled by the ASF show that 192 women, men and children were attacked with acid from January to December 2007 (ASF, Acid Attack Statistics).¹¹ Motivational trends are also shifting in Bangladesh, with 53 women being attacked over land/property/money disputes. The category of land/property/money disputes includes “all kinds of clashes between neighbours regarding land and property ownership, conflicts about the use of common resources, conflicts over private loan repayments and litigation conflicts” (ASF, 6th Annual Report 10). The second most prevalent motivation is marital disputes with 18 women being attacked (ASF, Statistics of Acid Attack 2).

Pakistan

“A woman burnt by acid is like a living corpse. Those who commit such vengeful acts seek to sentence their victims to a plight worse than death”
Uzma Saeed, a lawyer working with a women's non-government organisation in Lahore, Pakistan.

Statistics on acid attacks in Pakistan are disparate and scattered at best. Recent data compiled by the Human Rights Commission of Pakistan (hereafter HRCP) found that in 2007, at least 33 women were burned in acid attacks which suggest a large decrease in attacks from previous years. In 2004, the HRCP documented 46 acid attacks in the southern Punjab alone (qtd. in Amnesty International). The newly established Acid Survivors Foundation Pakistan (hereafter ASFP) has contrasting figures to the HRCP, and has listed 137 survivors who have

10 However, although the ASF touts significant decreases in acid attacks, it must be noted that kerosene attacks have skyrocketed in Bangladesh in recent years. Which then leads one to speculate that root causes of GBV are not being addressed by this organisation.

11 Caution must be given to these statistics because it is cases only collated by the ASF and does not include survivors and victims who have found help at other clinics or hospitals.

utilised their services in the past year. However it is the staggering estimate by the Human Rights Watch (hereafter HRW) that cites “at least 280 women died and 750 suffered injuries in 2002 alone as a result of acid attacks” (HRW). Furthermore, the HRCP in their State of Human Rights 2004 report state that approximately 400 women are attacked by acid each year and that 15,000 cases of acid attack violence have been reported over the past ten years (HRCP State of Human Rights 2004 182). These staggering HCRP statistics must be viewed with caution, as they were collected from local newspapers, and not from a wide array of informant sources. In contrast, the statistics available for one year later in the State of Human Rights 2005 report do not necessarily correlate with the abovementioned figures, as “according to HRCP data, seven cases (of acid attacks) were reported between November 1st 2004 and August 31st 2005” (HRCP State of Human Rights 2005 188). Other figures collected by a local NGO, the Ansar Burney Trust, based in Karachi, estimate “as of a few years ago...[t]hat as many as four women were seriously burnt in such cases weekly in Pakistan” (Ansar Burney). The plight of acid attack survivors in Pakistan has recently been highlighted in the New York Times article ‘Terrorism That’s Personal’ by Nicholas Kristof. In this op-ed piece, he discusses the work of the Progressive Women’s Association who have “documented 7,800 cases of women who were deliberately burned, scalded or subjected to acid attacks, just in the Islamabad area. In only 2 percent of those cases was anyone convicted” (Kristof).

The motivations for acid attacks in Pakistan range from men attacking women over rejection of marriage proposals “to insure pain and suffering on the victim

because she dishonoured him by refusing his proposal” (Ansar Burney), to religious fundamentalists attacking unknown women “because they felt the women were too modern and westernised; even if all the women had done is wear jeans instead of the traditional Pakistani dress” (Ansar Burney).

Sri Lanka

Similar to Pakistan, there are no nationwide or coherent statistics available on acid attacks in Sri Lanka, however, there are at least three known cases of public figures being attacked or threatened by acid (Beach and Menon; Francis and Jayasiri). One case involved the attack of investigative journalist, another the National Democratic Party general secretary; threats were also made against the late President Ranasinghe Premadasa (Beach and Menon). In a separate case, the Asian Human Rights Commission (hereafter AHRC) has reported a brutal assault of a Sri Lankan domestic worker in Saudi Arabia who had an acid soaked cloth tied to her head, shoulders and chest in 2004 (AHRC). Indeed, with several cases of acid attacks reported in the media, there is no doubt many other cases are unreported in Sri Lanka; therefore this is another country within the region that needs to be flagged for further investigation on this issue.

India

In the case of India, nationwide figures and motivational trends on acid attacks are largely not known because of problematic reporting mechanisms, and the sheer population and geographical scale the country. Sources of information

have been predominantly gleaned from grey literature: newspapers, crime and police reports, Internet stories, and NGO publications. Several Internet stories and reports have been compiled by the CSAAAW, which outline specific cases only in Karnataka state with approximately 174 known cases taking place over the past five years (Swanson 4). And whilst one article published in the National Geographic alludes to the 'enforcement of the caste system through acid throwing' – it does not provide rigorous findings and conclusions (O'Neill). There are numerous newspaper stories written on acid attack violence in India, in particular, the Hindustan Times and The Statesman, have covered the issue from the early 1990s to the present day. Interestingly, international newspapers - The New York Times, The Guardian and The Independent - began covering acid attack violence in India earlier than the indigenous papers, where in 1982, the New York Times covered a story of Hindu / Muslim conflict which involved the throwing of acid. ¹² Media coverage on this issue during the 1980s suggested that motivations for throwing acid was caused by political unrest ¹³, however from 1995 onwards reported cases of acid attack violence tended to be motivated by spurned love affairs and personal disputes. However, despite increased media reporting on the issue, the accuracy of the number of acid attacks needs to be contested. As Haq notes, acid attack violence is

¹² However this must be viewed with caution as possibly the New York Times, The Guardian and The Independent were uploaded onto library catalogues earlier than then indigenous newspapers.

¹³ From 1982 through to 1995, all of the reported stories on acid attack violence in India were motivated by political unrest between rival political groups or the sparring Hindu / Muslim factions. See: The New York Times (USA publication), October 6, 1982, 'Religious Riots in India Appear to Wane'; The New York Times (USA Publication), December 28, 1989, 'Final India Reports 1,000 Deaths in Hindu-Muslim Fighting'; Courier Mail (Australian Publication), December 12, 1990, 'Troops Act to Contain Indian Riots'; The Scotsman (Scottish Publication), September 13, 1995, 'Burning issue of the mutilated women'. The first story published in an Indian newspaper was in The Statesman, July 20, 1998, 'Chandrakha'.

shrouded by a 'culture of silence', and many acid attack survivors remain silent as either they or their family are: ashamed of their disfigurement; blamed for their own attack as they provoked their own assault; fear further reprisals from the perpetrator/s; or are unaware of medical, legal or social services available (qtd. in Chowdhury 172). Furthermore, many acid attack survivors live in rural communities and as the processes for collecting information on acid attacks are inadequate or unreliable, this also exacerbates silence on the issue of acid attack violence. Adding to the complications of accurate and rigorous data collection of acid attacks are that there are unreliable classifications of injuries as being due to either accidental workplace acid burns or to pre-meditated acid attacks at some medical facilities, and because not all cases of acid attacks or threats of acid attacks are reported to authorities, medical agencies or the media. ¹⁴ Of the many Indian acid attack news stories that appear on the Internet, many attacks seem to occur in Kashmir and other northern states (The Statesman), and characterised as attacks against women by their "husbands, neighbours, colleagues, former employers, (and) men they saw on the streets everyday" (CSAAAW). In 2004, a documentary was produced on acid attack violence entitled 'Burnt Not Destroyed', and in 1999 Namita Gokhale wrote The Book of Shadows, a fictional story of an acid attack survivor. Despite the lack of nationwide figures on the issue in India, the presence of such data on news and Internet, in film and in novel suggests that acid attack violence has been a problem

¹⁴ However, although data collection in India (and elsewhere) can be problematic, one non-government organization in Southern India – CSAAAW – collates and maintains data that appears to be authentic and less contaminated. Members of the CSAAAW are lawyers, doctors, activists and involved and respected in community, thus, survivors and their families are more likely to confide with staff and report cases as acid attack violence.

in India at least since the 1980s and possibly for longer, however without conducting in-depth field research on the topic in India, it is difficult to confirm whether acid attacks occurred in this country prior to this time.¹⁵ One could speculate that most likely they did, however locating evidence of a colonial link to this type of violence could prove challenging, as according to Indian historian Sumathi Ramaswamy, the likelihood of a British expatriate throwing acid or committing a public crime was not tolerated or publicised by the ruling elite (pers. comm). Although, during the colonial reign it is possible that acid was available in India and was used during the production of gold and woven fabrics, and the polishing of jewellery.

However, insofar as the recent influences for the increase in acid attacks and the ongoing public interest in this issue, Scott Carney notes that,

“a number of politicians, including the wife of the former prime minister of India, have had acid thrown at them. It is also commonplace in mob violence. Popular televised serials and films reinforce the idea by repeatedly portraying acid attacks” (Carney).

The case of Chennamma Deve Gowda, wife of former Indian Prime Minister H.D Deve Gowda has created sustained and widespread interest in the issue. On 21 February 2001, H.D Lokesh, nephew of the former Prime Minister, brutally attacked his aunt with acid in a temple over a family feud. The perpetrator “carried the acid in a bucket covered with flowers and other pooja articles, which they poured over her head as soon as she came out” (The Times of India Judicial probe ordered into attack on Gowda's wife). The survivor – Chennamma – sustained 40 per cent burns on her neck, chest, back and one side of her face (The Hindu; Maramkal).

¹⁵ Archival searches of newspapers – both Indian and international – only revealed the earliest printed story in The New York Times in 1982 (acid thrown during a religious riot).

Speculative newspaper stories insinuated that the victim, Chennamma, had contributed to her own attack by daring to interfere in 'men's business': family sources state that she had attempted to block financial assistance from her affluent, powerful husband to his under-privileged siblings:

"It is an act of vengeance between the two families. One reached the top-most position in the country, the other is facing grinding poverty with six children, including two physically challenged ones", a village elder said (The Hindu Gowda sees no need for investigation).

Her husband absolved himself of involvement in or reprisals for this violent crime:

"My view on the matter is simple. There was no need for an inquiry as the incident took place in the abode of God and he (God) himself was the witness. That being the case, what could humans say on such a thing? He did not like the idea of punishing anyone in that regard...[H]ence, I will leave everything to the will of the almighty" (The Hindu Gowda sees no need for investigation).

Similarly, the survivor did not want any legal action taken "because their arrest and conviction is not going to change or help anything" (The Hindu Gowda sees no need for investigation). However, the case was taken to court, and was the first case in the State of Karnataka to result in a conviction – 6 years of imprisonment for H.D Lokesh.

Statistics collated for The Crimes in India Report by NCRB indicate a high incidence of various forms of VAW in India. For example, there was a "total of 1,85,312 incidents of crimes against women reported in the country during 2007 as compared to 1,64,765 during 2006, recording 12.5% increase during 2007" (NCRB Crime in India 2007 242). Statistics are categorised into six broad classifications: rape, kidnapping and abduction, homicide for Dowry, torture (both mental and physical), molestation, sexual harassment/'Eve-Teasing', and importation of girls (NCRB Crime in India 2007 241). The classifications of crimes against women do

not distinguish amongst the various types of torture inflicted on women and girls, including acid attack violence. However, if acid attacks are classified in this category, indicators suggest that this form of violence is more prevalent than previously thought, with a 20.3% increase in cases of torture against women and girls, with 75, 930 cases in 2007 in comparison to 63, 128 cases reported in 2006. The statistics on reported cases of Dowry Crimes are also worth highlighting as acid is also frequently used in this form of violence.

As mentioned above, statistics on the incidence rate of both VAW and acid attacks can be problematic as not all cases of acid attacks or threats of acid attacks are reported to authorities, medical agencies or the media. Additionally, many survivors may present their burns as 'stove burst' accidents. This means that the incidence of acid attacks in India need to be treated cautiously, given that the data are based solely on cases reported in the media or to NGOs, rather than on surveys conducted in rural villages or with police, legal, medical and other social services.

3. South East Asia, East Asia and Australia

In a case mirroring the assault on the Sri Lankan domestic worker, a female domestic worker from Indonesia was assaulted by acid in Saudi Arabia (Maedzoeki). Additionally, in early 2006 an Indonesian acid attack survivor underwent a groundbreaking operation to reconstruct her face with skin from her back (Nugroho). Although the article reporting this did not explain why the patient was attacked with acid, or whether there were other recorded acid attack survivors in Indonesia, the events raises questions that there may be other Indonesian cases that have

remained unreported (Nugroho). Certainly, Monira Rahman from the ASF cites Indonesia as one location where attacks have been reported (qtd. in Salahuddin). However, lack of details, statistics and information generally relating to acid attacks in Indonesia, make it difficult to ascertain the scope of the problem.

Cambodia

Similar to data on acid attack violence in other locations, Cambodia's recent statistics on this topic are also incoherent and challenging. In one newspaper story, it notes that: "The Cambodian Acid Survivors Charity (hereafter CASC) and its partner, the Children's Surgical Centre (hereafter CSC), had provided treatment and surgery to 114 acid burn survivors in Cambodia" (Heng). However, on the CASC website they state that they have "provided acute burn treatment and surgery to a total of 190 acid burn survivors. Of these, 56% were women, and 17% were children. More than 8% were blinded and 6 acid victims died" (CASC). Older data collated by LICADHO Notification team from local newspapers state that 11 cases of acid attacks were reported from January to August 2005, with 19 people being injured those cases (LICADHO, Categories of Motives).

Over the past few years, the predominant motivation identified for acid attacks in Cambodia are women attacking other women over 'triangle of loving/relationship affairs'/'crimes of passion'. Wives often throw acid "against their husbands' mistresses (*Sangsar*) or next wife (*Proh Pun Kroay*): to take revenge and destroy the appearance of the victims so the husbands will not stay with them" (LICADHO, Living in the Shadows 2). Newspaper reports collected by LICADHO suggest the

motivational trend of 'crimes of passion' is slowly shifting, with nearly half of all acid attacks now perpetrated by men (LICADHO, Statistical Acid Report). However, client reporting to CASC depict 'accidents' as the leading cause of acid attacks. ¹⁶

Looking further East, recently forty-six people in Hong Kong suffered burns when an unidentified perpetrator threw two plastic bottles filled with an unspecified acid from a building into a crowded shopping district onto the street below. To date, motivations for this attack remain unclear (The China Post).

With regard to mainland China, whilst there are several internet news reports of acid attacks in that country, mystery surrounds their reporting and under-reporting. Indeed, one case, where more than 20 school children were burned in an act of retribution by a fellow student, suggests "the Chinese authorities, anxious to present the country with an image of safety, sometimes hide stories and release them days, or even weeks, later, or sometimes do not reveal them at all" (Byelo). One report that did address motivation, dealt with a 'crime of passion' where a first wife attacked a mistress and her child (Mc Carthy).

Australia

Australia is not immune to acid attack violence. In a highly publicised case during 1907, Martha Rendell was found guilty of killing her defacto's three children by "by applying solutions of hydrochloric acid to their throats" (Haebich 75), and was the last woman hanged in Western Australia on 6 October 1909 (Haebich 66). In February 2006 the Sydney Morning Herald reported: "a 36-year old man, who can

¹⁶ Client reporting needs to be viewed with caution as many client will not admit to the real reason they were attacked due to shame and dishonour and fear for further reprisals.

only be known as AB, was jailed in the NSW Supreme Court for 18 years” (Wallace) for killing Dominic Li by pouring acid down his throat (Wallace). Additionally, two acid attacks during 1988 in Sydney and Melbourne have been reported. In one of the most horrific of these cases, 12 year-old Vikki Tsiounis was brutally attacked in a Sydney cinema: “when Mrs Martha Tsiounis got up to take her son to the lavatory, the man, about 21, poured a container of acid on Vikki’s legs” (“Prisoners (sic) Bid to Aid Acid Girl” 8). Another case three months earlier reports a woman in Melbourne was attacked with a bucket of hydrochloric acid for breaking off a long-standing marriage arrangement (“Victim Ended Marriage Pact” 35). In a more recent account, Australian environmentalists aboard the Sea Shepard’s Anti Whaling vessel ‘*the Steve Irwin*’ threw “containers filled with a mild form of acid made from rotten butter” along with what the protesters call “slippery chemicals” at a Japanese whaling ship (BBC).

Acid attacks have also been reported in other Asian countries including: Malaysia, Hong Kong, Vietnam, Laos, Myanmar, Thailand, and Taipei (LICADHO, Living in the Shadows 18; Comeau and Thampi 7; Forster 6; ASTI, How Common Are Acid Attacks?). Whilst cases have been reported in these countries, the intimate particulars of cases or statistical trends are difficult to surmise. Time and resource limitations on this research and the scope of this thesis, it has been difficult to prove an imperial pattern. However, two factors suggesting such a pattern are that all of these countries were colonised by either the British or French from the 17th century onwards, and that during the 19th century in these two empires vitriol attacks were

common. This possibility of an imperial pattern warrants investigation beyond this current study.

4. Europe, North America and Jamaica

Recently there have been reports of several acid attacks in France and the United Kingdom.¹⁷ However, it is in Bulgaria and Greece that a spate of high profile, public acid attacks has occurred. In three separate incidences, the deputy director of Bulgaria's National Construction Supervision Directorate, an investigative journalist and the advertising manager of a fashion agency have all been attacked with acid (Terzieff; Sofia Echo; Dimitrova). On 22 December 2008 in Greece, the acid attack upon a Kostadinka Kuneva, a Bulgarian cleaning lady and a outspoken union official, led to a 3000 strong riot to demand justice and immigrant solidarity (Squires).

Regarding the United States and Canada, Comeau and Thampi report that acid attacks occur in "North America, including Baltimore and Dallas. The Government of New Brunswick has identified acid burns as a common form of assault against women" (7). Chowdhury also asserts that along with England, acid attacks were common in the USA during the 19th century; however as mentioned above, they decreased with the development of the police and judicial systems (Chowdhury 163). Nevertheless, in a very recent attack on 28 July 2008 in Chicago, two people threw acid on a woman in public whilst she was on her way to work.

¹⁷ See: Forster 25; BBC; West Australian, "Hunt On for Acid Sprayer", Author, 18 Dec. 1989 12; Bodnar et al, 1991. In a recent acid attack in London, a man has been found guilty of ordering an acid attack on a TV presenter he contacted on Facebook and then dated. The 24-year-old survivor has had over a dozen operations (BBC Obsessed fan ordered acid attack).

Details on the motivation for the attack are scarce, however the victim had been harassed prior to the attack and “received threats and had her tires slashed” (Fox News). In July 2007, a man in Cleveland threw sulphuric acid in the face of an unknown woman as she was stepping off a bus. Again the motivation for this attack is unclear, however one insight into the case was that the perpetrator “was diagnosed with mild mental retardation” (Atassi).

Another attack occurred on 16 April 2006, when a woman in New York crashed a ‘Sudanese wedding party...[a]nd splashed people with a glass bottle full of acid, injuring six people” (Associated Press). In 2002, an acid attack was reported in Toronto, where a 28-year-old woman was doused with almost a litre of sulphuric acid by her ex-boyfriend, an attack leaving her face, chin, neck, arms, chest and upper legs horribly scarred (Pazzano).

Recent statistics for acid attacks in Jamaica are unknown, however, Foster states, “from 1981 – 1990, 562 acute chemical burn injuries were admitted to hospitals in Jamaica...[4]2% of these were as a result of an assault” (25). Motivations for attacks range from domestic violence, criminal assaults to ‘crimes of passion’ (Forster 25). Similar to Indochina, the imperial pattern of acid attack violence should also be explored in the context of Commonwealth countries and those colonised by the British or French.

5. the Middle East and Africa

Along with Pakistan, Bangladesh and Kashmir, Iraq is becoming a hot spot for acid attacks. There are many internet news reports of acid attacks on ‘immodest’

women who have had their face or legs burnt because they were not wearing traditional veil or 'abaya' covering. Some children are even being recruited to conduct acid attacks, and dozens of women have been assaulted recently (IRIN [IRAQ: Acid attacks on "Immodest" Women on the Rise](#)).

However it is a recent attack on 14 November 2008 in Afghanistan that has highlighted the issue globally. Police reports state that 'Attackers in Afghanistan have sprayed acid in the faces of at least 15 girls near a school in Kandahar' (BBC [Acid attack on Afghan schoolgirls](#)). Luckily several of the school girls were wearing Islamic burkas or veils which provided them with some protection.



Image: BBC [Arrests after Afghan acid attack](#)

Although the Taliban denied any involvement in the attack, (former) Lady Bush condemned the attack by stating: "The Taliban's continued terror attacks threaten the progress that has been made in Afghanistan...[T]hese cowardly and shameful acts are condemned by honorable people in the United States and around the world" (Wafa). The attack appears to be motivated by those with an anti-education for girls grievance.

In a highly publicised case in Iran, recently the Sharia *code of quis* or equivalence justice has been meted out on acid thrower. In addition to paying a fine, as part of his punishment, the perpetrator will be blinded with acid in both eyes. In 2004, Majid Movahedi blinded Ameneh Bahrami with battery acid after she spurned his unwanted advances (BBC [Court orders Iranian man blinded](#)).

The Acid Survivors Foundation Uganda (hereafter ASFU) has recorded more than 232 acid attacks in Uganda, with 32 attacks reported in 2007 alone (Machrine). The motivations for attacks range from domestic arguments, relationship quarrels, land and business disputes, robbery, and mistaken identity. Similar to the motivations in Jamaica, Hong Kong and Cambodia, acid is also used by female love rivals to disfigure their competition (Forster 6).

Forster (25) also states that acid attacks first came to light in Nigeria during the early 1990s, and estimates that approximately 50 acid attacks have occurred in Nigeria. Although more rigorous and recent statistics on acid throwing in Nigeria is not available, a story titled 'Violence against women: What's the punishment?' by Akor Ojoma notes that indeed acid attack violence is an unaddressed problem in that country:

“the persistent cases of acid bath, currently the most monstrous act of violence against women, in the Nigerian society is a depressing pointer to the fact that gender-based violence in the society is not abating, and there doesn't seem to be any serious punishment against it”.

Other African countries that have reported cases of acid attacks include: Egypt, the Republic of Yemen, Gabon, Ethiopia, and Saudi Arabia (Forster 6). Although activists and scholars note that acid attack violence is generally unheard of Ethiopia, in a recent 2007 case in this country, 21-year-old student, Kamilat Mehdi, was brutally attacked by a spurned lover (Henshaw).

Saudi Arabia is another country that has reported cases of acid attack violence. There are two known cases (mentioned above) of foreign domestic workers being attacked in Saudi Arabia by their employers (a Sri Lankan woman and an Indonesia woman), and an Internet, database and journal search retrieved only

one medical report on the issue. This 2001 report does not indicate whether people were intentionally attacked by acid, but it does state that 59 people were admitted to two hospitals for acid burns, and that 15 of these patients were women (Pitkanen and Al Qattan 376-378). This is another cultural context to be flagged for further exploration and attention.

Government Organisations (GOs) and Non-government Organisations (NGOs) responses to acid attack violence

This section elucidates *to whom* and *where* acid attack survivors and their families turn to after their attack. A complex milieu of inter-related interests, agendas, and issues underpin the design and implementation of interventions for acid attack survivors in Cambodia, Bangladesh, India and elsewhere. The most significant of these are from NGOs and governments. NGOs provide the mechanisms for responding to the issue of acid attack violence, as the political environment in these three countries makes it necessary for NGOs to fill “a much needed role in developing intervention programs where the government has limited resources” (Comeau and Thampi 24). There are now six NGOs – ASTI, ASF, ASFP, CASC, ASFU, CSAAAW – involved in the direction service provision to acid attack survivors in Asia and Africa. However, there are numerous others who provide intervention and services to acid attack survivors. In all three countries, the government operates the largest burns units where most acid attack survivors go for immediate burns treatments. However, that being said, in most cases patients are

required to pay for medical services at government operated burns units, and not all are in a position to do so. Additionally, as one NGO in Asia observes, the quality of medical services that acid attack survivors receive hinge on how much money they have and doctors "advise victims' families, if they have money, to buy better medicines outside of the hospitals" (Living in the Shadows 12).

As mentioned above, NGOs provide the mechanisms to respond to the issue of acid attack violence in Cambodia, Bangladesh and India, and this is also the case in most other countries where acid attack violence is recognised as a problem. Thus, this study also aims to assess their responses to the issue. Whilst many NGOs have advocated for social, medical and legal reforms that have assisted in improving health, education and training, human rights, laws and psychosocial services for acid attack survivors; to date, none of them have developed a rigorous and dedicated programme that authentically acknowledges or addresses root causes of acid attack violence.

The following is a snapshot of some of the NGOs and agencies that either work exclusively with acid attack survivors on medical, financial, legal, and social support, or who work with women, girls and men who are victims of violence or torture (thus acid attack survivors are also included in their programmes and interventions).

Acid Survivors Trust International (ASTI)

ASTI is a registered non-government organisation based in the United Kingdom (UK). Originally established in 1999 as the Bangladesh Acid Survivors Trust (BAST)

to support acid attack survivors in Bangladesh, it was re-launched in 2004 with a broader international scope (Morrison 1). Its Mission Statement asserts that “ASTI supports organisations working to eliminate acid violence wherever it occurs” (Morrison 1), and the organisation aims to:

To act as an international network for national groups which provide support to survivors and are working to outlaw and eventually eliminate this grave abuse of human rights; to create an international network of medical professionals offering assistance to national groups by strengthening indigenous capacity for treating acid burns (1).

ASTI has assisted in establishing Acid Survivors Foundations in Bangladesh, Uganda, Pakistan and Cambodia. In the future they hope to open organisations in Nepal and India.

Cambodian League for the Promotion and Defense of Human Rights (LICADHO)

LICADHO, a LINGO established in 1993, operates in 12 provinces with more than 100 staff (Lim 3). LICADHO's PAT program provides: financial support to acid attack survivors, counselling and medical support services to individual acid attack survivors, and legal and advocacy assistance to acid attack survivors and other survivors of torture (fieldnotes). Since 1999, PAT has conducted case study interviews with many acid attack survivors and collected more than 100 reports of acid attack violence from Cambodian newspapers (LICADHO, Living in the Shadows 5). In 2003, PAT formulated this data into the publication of the Living in the Shadows (2003) report – a report that also enabled acid attack survivors to share their experiences and stories (LICADHO, Living in the Shadows 5).

Children’s Surgical Centre (CSC) and Cambodian Acid Survivors Charity (CASC)

Despite its name, the CSC is a surgical international NGO registered in the USA, and is also involved in the medical side of adult acid attack survivor burn treatment, providing medical services such as skin grafting and rehabilitation surgery in Phnom Penh, Cambodia (Comeau and Thampi 8). In many cases, CSC will offer complimentary treatments to acid attack survivors in dire financial circumstances. With an average cost of US\$130 for each treatment, this free service is often life saving, especially for those survivors who need between 20 and 40 treatments (Comeau and Thampi 22).

In early 2006 CSC, with support from ASTI, established the Cambodian Acid Survivors Charity (CASC). The remit of CASC is to provide “residential and medical care for victims of this crime” (CASC). CASC services include:

- Surgical, medical, and psychological treatment
- Vocational training and social reintegration projects
- Legal assistance and advocacy for legal reform
- Awareness raising, research, education and advocacy to eliminate acid violence altogether (CASC).

Association of the Blind in Cambodia (ABC)

Established in 2000, the ABC is an association of blind and visually impaired Cambodians established to promote and foster equal opportunities and full participation in Cambodian society (Biggs 2). The Executive Director of the ABC is

an acid attack survivor, as is the President of the ABC's Cambodian Blind and Visually Impaired Women's Friendship Group (CBVWFG). The CBVWFG holds weekly meetings, and activities include: guest speakers, social outings, Braille and English training, Indonesian massage training, income-generating projects, and financial support for members requiring medical treatment. The meetings enable members to share their feelings and experiences within a safe and supportive environment (fieldnotes).

Campaign and Struggle Against Acid Attacks on Women (CSAAAW)

The CSAAAW is an Indian registered trust and coalition comprising: NGOs (Mahila Jagruti, Hengasira Hakkina Sangha, and People's Union for Civil Liberties), academics, lawyers, journalists, women's rights activists, students and other concerned individuals from across Karnataka (South Asia Citizens Wire (hereafter SACW)). Based in Bangalore, CSAAAW assists survivors with gaining access to legal, medical and social services, and works to prevent further attacks (SACW).

Acid Survivors Foundation (ASF)

The ASF, established in 1999 in Dhaka, Bangladesh aims “to aid recovery of survivors of acid violence to a condition as near as possible of their pre-attack situation and eventually eliminate acid attack in Bangladesh” (ASF, 6th Annual Report 2). The ASF assists approximately 200 acid attack survivors each year, and conducts their interventions and services through five Program Units: Legal Unit,

Social Reintegration Unit, Notification and Referral Unit, Prevention, Advocacy and Research Unit, and Medical Unit (ASF, 6th Annual Report 13). The ASF employs approximately 20 acid attack survivors in administration and other positions within the organisation, who encourage survivors to become activists and ‘role models’ (fieldnotes). This assists acid attack survivors to live a dignified and self-reliant life and also to educate police, judges, public prosecutors, policy makers and community members as to the consequences of acid attack violence (fieldnotes).

Naripokkho

Established in 1983, Naripokkho is “a Dhaka-based feminist advocacy organization” (Chowdhury 164) that works to advance the situation of women, to struggle against violence and inequity and raise consciousness about women’s rights in Bangladesh (Chowdhury 171). During the mid-1990s, Naripokkho initiated the campaign of acid attack violence in Bangladesh and brought media attention to this issue.

Highlighting this issue to state and international agencies “led to critical negotiations in the sphere of women's development, gender violence, and state and international donor interventions” (Chowdhury 170).

Acid Survivors Foundation Pakistan (ASFP)

ASFP is a registered charitable organisation, providing comprehensive services to meet the medical, surgical, psychological, legal, and rehabilitation needs of the acid attacked people in all regions of Pakistan. They offer a four pronged approach of: A

Nursing and Support Unit; Rehabilitation Program; An Art Therapy Program; and Awareness and Prevention Campaign (ASFP Projects).

Human Rights Commission of Pakistan (HRCP)

Established in 1986, HRCP is a non-partisan non-government organisation that aims to further the cause of human rights in Pakistan. It also aims to expose human rights violations by creating awareness and redressing wrongs (HRCP Aims and Objectives). As part of its advocacy and awareness work, the HRCP collects statistics from newspaper reports pertaining to acid attacks in Pakistan, and produces these findings in their Rights of the Disadvantaged and State of Human Rights reports (HRCP).

Human Rights Watch (HRW)

The HRW is the world's largest non-government human rights organisation, whose primary aim is to investigate and report on human rights violations on a global scale (HRW *About Human Rights Watch*). Produced in 2002, the 'Stop Violence against women' report outlined various statistics on acid attacks in Pakistan (HRW).

Progressive Women's Association (PWA)

Recently featured in Nicholaus Kristoff's article on acid attack violence in Pakistan, the PWA, "is a voluntary non-government, apolitical organization formed in 1986"

(PWA). Aims of the organisation include:

- To advocate for women's rights
- To fight discriminatory laws against women
- To provide and encourage political empowerment for women
- To expose hidden domestic violence against women
- To evolve strategies for the empowerment of women (PWA).

Ansar Burney Trust

Established in 1980 and based in Karachi, Pakistan, the Ansar Burney Trust is a non-political NGO that aims to "fight against all forms of injustices, cruel inhuman and degrading treatment, child abuse, cruelty to women and other more subtle forms of human and civil rights violations" (Ansar Burney). The Ansar Burney Trust has provided acid attack survivors with free medical treatment and legal support (Ansar Burney).

Acid Survivors Foundation Uganda (ASFU)

The ASFU's mission "is to support acid attack survivors to enable them to lead productive independent lives, and to remove the scourge of acid violence from society" (ASFU). Established in Kampala in 2003, the ASFU: funds medical care,

provides training and education to community, police and other agencies; and supports acid attack survivors with counselling and advocacy (ASFU).

Chapter summary

The literature and the research reviewed in this chapter related to the principal issues surrounding and underpinning acid attack violence. The foregoing discussion has placed acid attack violence within its historical, societal and cultural framework of violence, motivations and trends, and has briefly outlined NGO responses to the issue. The following chapter outlines the theoretical concepts and explanations underpinning this study.

CHAPTER THREE

THREE CASES

These three cases below highlight a predominant motivation for throwing acid: loss of face, shame or loss of honour. In cases where acid is thrown as a love oriented punishment, victims are primarily young girls or women.

Cambodia: the case of Tat Marina

It is the case of 16-year old Karaoke star Tat Marina that has created the greatest impact upon the increase in acid attack violence in Cambodia. On 5 December 1999, the wife of a high-ranking government official viciously attacked Tat Marina in public with more than a litre of nitric acid. This case of acid attack violence



points out nuanced aspects of traditional Cambodian culture, myths, attitudes and beliefs. Tat Marina was attacked because of her lower status and wealth, and the fact that she dared to dishonour a person higher in the social hierarchy, an act that provoked sadistic retribution. Image Source: Smith and Kimsong

At the time there was immense media coverage of the attack, with some less flattering stories in the local press that portrayed Tat Marina as a opportunist *Srey*

Ta-Ta (a woman who lives with a much older, married man who economically supports her), who contributed to her own downfall. Eleven years later, the perpetrator has never been brought to justice. This sent a very clear message out to Cambodian society...mistresses or broken/bad women (*Srey Khoich*) deserve to be destroyed by acid, and there is no punishment for the crime. Reports from the NGO community and media have suggested the incidences of acid attacks in Cambodia have increased since Tat Marina's attack. 18 According to newspaper clippings collected by a local NGO: LICADHO, eight attacks occurred during the weeks after Tat Marina's attack. Similarly, Smith and Kimsong also suggest that according to officials at one Phnom Penh hospital, there were eight acid attack victims during mid-December 1999, as opposed to one or two every few months.

Tat Marina now lives abroad, she has received over 20 operations, and it is doubtful that she will ever return to Cambodia. She has had numerous threats to her life. Several of her family members were forced to leave Cambodia and now live in exile. The attacker/s have never been arrested and it is believed that they still live in Phnom Penh, Cambodia. In the summer of 2009, a documentary film titled 'Finding Face' will be released which highlights Tat Marina's story.

Bangladesh: the case of Babli Akter

Who Threw the Acid? by Babli, a 5 year old survivor (qtd. in ASF 6th Annual Report)

*Who threw it? Who threw the acid?
My father did.
My father had the acid and flung it.
Who did he throw it on?
Who was his target?
His daughter.*

18 J Smith and K Kimsong, "Acid-Laced Vengeance", The Cambodia Daily February 5-6 2000.

*He threw acid on his daughter because
She was not born a son.*

Babli Aktar was aged only seven months old when her father poured acid into her mouth and on different parts of her body every day for five days. In a clear case of attempted female infanticide, Babli's father was so ashamed of her sex that he intentionally tried to kill her in one of the most heinous and cruel ways. Although, Babli's mother lodged a complaint against the perpetrator, to date her father has not been arrested for the crime (AFP). Babli, now aged nine, has had over ten operations and continues to have difficulty eating and talking. She attends primary school in the capital city Dhaka.

India: the case of Haseena Hussain

In another highly publicised and influential case, 19-year-old Haseena Hussain was brutally attacked by her employer, Joseph Rodrigues, over spurned love advances. Described as “an attractive, upwardly mobile woman in Bangalore, India” (Carney), Haseena was threatened prior to her attack that there were going to be “dire consequences when she declined his overtures and started working elsewhere. Rodrigues sought to settle matters by throwing sulphuric acid on her” (Carney). Thus, Haseena was attacked because she had agency and dared to dishonour (or was perceived to dishonour) a man, which led to provoking retribution.



Image Source: Carney

Haseena Hossain continues to live in Bangalore India, she is blinded in both eyes despite three attempted corneal implants and has received 18 operations. The attacker, Joseph Rodrigues, has recently been freed from prison after spending five years and three months there. Haseena Hussain now works as a role model and activist with the Campaign and Struggle Against Acid Attacks on Women (CSAAAW) to fight the surge of acid violence against women.

Chapter Summary

Three cases of acid attack violence in Cambodia, Bangladesh and India. The commonalities between all three are similar motivations and causes for throwing acid. The next chapter draws on these cases and literature, and presents an overview of the motivations and causes for acid attack violence.

CHAPTER FOUR

SPECULATIONS AND EXPLANATIONS OF THE AETIOLOGY OF ACID ATTACK VIOLENCE

We love and suffer according to cultural imperatives
(Luhman qtd. in Shapiro 137).

In order to understand the complex interrelated factors involved in *why* acid attack violence occurs in Cambodia, Bangladesh and India, this chapter examines the underlying personal, situational, societal and cultural forces behind them. The rationale for this focus is that some policy decision makers, judges and lawyers, NGO workers, community and religious leaders, journalists, community members and others, cite acid attack survivors as the cause of acid attack violence, which contributes to further marginalisation of acid attack survivors. Although Lind van Wijngaarden uses this analogy in his discussion of socio-cultural context of sex work and gender in Cambodia; it is also salient to the discussion of acid attack violence in other cultural contexts:

“We will not be able to stop a speeding car because we have surveyed and described its color (sic), the number of wheels and the length of its antenna. Without any in-depth knowledge of the car's engine and the buttons and pedals to operate it, only coincidence may help someone to stop the car - or a fatal accident. In order to put brakes on a raging HIV epidemic, one needs to study *what drives it*, in addition to *what it looks like*” (18).

Cambodia

“The time to act against acid attacks is now. Acid attacks are very destructive for Cambodian society and culture, and set a bad example for young Khmers. If acid throwing becomes more common in Cambodia, more and more people will think that it is an acceptable way to resolve their problems. Khmer lives will continue to be destroyed by acid” (LICADHO, Living in the Shadows 19).

There are significant factors in the Cambodian way of life, including: marriage, sexuality, gender relations, religious beliefs, protecting and loss of face, and hierarchy – all of which underpin and contribute to such horrific violence. ¹⁹ An adapted socio-ecological violence model by Heise and colleagues is useful in understanding this interplay of cultural, societal, situational and personal imperatives that combine to proliferate acid attack violence in Cambodia. As previously mentioned, this approach argues that no one process is the sole causative or underpinning factor and it is an intricate network of processes together in combination, rather than in segregation, that are the indicators responsible. For example, in this model, cultural imperatives such as rigid gender roles, along with other processes, combine with personal level imperatives such as a perpetrator’s level of self-esteem, to determine the motivations and causes of acid attack violence (see Appendix One). ²⁰

Based on this model, marriage is one institution that influences the cultural tapestry of Cambodia. Cambodia is a male-dominated society in which females are

¹⁹ M O’Leary and M Nee, *Learning for Transformation: A study of the relationship between culture, values, experience and development practice in Cambodia*, CCC, Phnom Penh, 2001, p. 47.

²⁰ L Heise, 'Violence Against Women: An Integrated, Ecological Framework', *Violence Against Women*, 4.3 June 1998, p. 262.

expected to conform to cultural norms, traditions and socially assigned gender roles by being 'a good woman' (*Srey La-Or*), marrying 'a suitable man' (*Bdei La-Or*), providing children, and being a loving and loyal homemaker (*Srey Grap Lakkhana/May P'Teah La-Or*) (Mony). The *Chhap Srey* is a traditional moral code of conduct for Cambodian women that outlines these expected and acceptable moral, religious and social behaviours, and also 'one's position in society' (Bit 100). Mony explains that marriage is a very important tradition for Cambodians, and that arranged marriage - which has been the practice in Cambodia for centuries - remains the conventional norm. One consequence of arranged marriages in Cambodia is that people who may not be intellectually, sexually or physically compatible with each other can be paired. The culturally prescribed role for men in Cambodia is not as rigid as it is for women, and it is socially acceptable for men to engage in pre-marital and extra-marital sex, although the modern constitution forbids polygyny and polygamy (Mony). From 1970 through to 1998, significantly more men were killed or disappeared, and the only available options for many women were either to be a next wife (*Proh Pun Kroay*) or to remain unmarried (*Srey Ot Toan Gaa Te*). Surtees states that, given the dominance of the family institution and "women's role within it in the Cambodian social order, some researchers argue that many women prefer to be second and third wives, rather than to remain unmarried" (32). These factors, along with the increase in disposable incomes for some sectors of Cambodian society, have contributed to a dramatic increase in the buying and selling of sex in Cambodia.

Despite a plethora of information in Cambodia pertaining to the sex industry, very few reports focus on the cultural aspect of sexual behaviour and sexual practices in Khmer society. The silence shrouding this issue could be attributed to the private nature of sexuality in Cambodia, the cultural practice of protecting 'face', and the logistical difficulties in collating statistics on the frequency and habits of pre-marital and extra-marital sex. For example, in some cases a husband will seek a mistress (*Sangsar/Srey Ta-Ta*) for a love affair.

As mentioned above there are also more women than men in Cambodia, a factor which, in addition to cultural acceptance of polygamy, has contributed to the availability and increased supply and demand of women for pre-marital or extra-marital affairs. A 'good woman', or loyal wife does not deviate from traditional norms, and will adhere to the *Chhap Srey* 'serve and respect their husbands at all times' and rarely leave her husband and home. Zimmerman states that "shame is one of the most influential emotion in the lives of Cambodian women" (qtd. in Vugin 9), and the fear of losing status as a divorcee, or being abandoned and learning to live independently is a risk many women are afraid of. Therefore, a woman will instead take drastic steps to ensure she is not dishonoured by abandonment or placed in greater economic vulnerability by a young and attractive rival and will blame other women, rather than the men who are involved. An angry wife is also far more likely to throw acid at her husband's mistress (*Sangsar / Srey Ta-Ta*) than at her unfaithful husband (LICADHO *Living in the Shadows* 2). That is, wives often throw acid "against their husbands' mistresses (*Sangsar*): to take revenge and destroy the appearance of the victims so the husbands will not stay with them", and

as Mydans poignantly states "...these are battles among the oppressed, the harsh intersection of mutual tragedies – woman against woman."

The concept of Karma and past, present and future life incarnations are inherent in the myths, attitudes, behaviours and responses towards acid attack survivors in Cambodia. That is, survivors are often blamed for what has happened to them as their misfortunes are attributed to misdeeds in past lives that have come back to haunt them in this present incarnation (Bit 19). As Cambodia's most identifiable attack survivor, Tat Marina has publicly lamented that "I don't know what I did in a past life [to deserve this]...[b]ut I believe I might have done some bad things..." (Smith and Kimsong). To illustrate this, Bit contends the concept that "life in the present incarnation cannot be changed" (23) stifles the desire for community members or religious leaders to confront and condemn acid attacks. This can also lead to absolute or unquestioning acceptance by survivors of what has happened to them, and some survivors are then reluctant to seek justice (Bit 23).

The concept of 'face' is of vital importance in Cambodian society, and refers to "social and professional position, reputation and self-image" (Irwin 67). Face – gaining, protecting or losing – is a significant factor in understanding the complex personal, corporate, ethnic and national processes that lead to acid attack violence in Cambodia. Ponchaud as cited in Bit posits that:

"The Khmer will save his 'face' or conceal his private thoughts behind an enigmatic smile, a smile that does not necessarily reflect inner joy, but is the bulwark behind which he can take refuge, can hide his feelings or inner emptiness. It is at once a means of self-defence and an expression of respect for others.

The cautiousness with which Cambodians approach new social experiences has much to do with protecting his 'face' so that he may not unduly risk his honour or suffer and irreparable insult" (101).

Irwin postulates that the consequences of losing face through ego deflation, dishonour or irreparable insults can often be devastating (Irwin 67). This particularly applies where the preferred weapon of choice is acid. In most cases where a woman is the intended victim of an acid attack (and particularly where she has rejected a marriage proposal), the perpetrator will target her face. In many Asian societies tremendous emphasis is placed on a woman's appearance, particularly her face. Along with virginity, this is her sole other resource in the marriage market (Chowdhury 164). Therefore, "by destroying women's appearance, male attackers try to bolster the political power that they feel was threatened when the women rejected their proposals" (Anwary 308), and additionally, by marking a woman as 'spoiled goods', the prospect of her finding a suitable and financially attractive marriage is greatly diminished (Chowdhury 163). Again, as Chowdhury aptly comments, "because women are considered bearers of tradition and honour, it is on their bodies that contestations over gender, ownership, and power are played out" (164).

Another facet of Cambodian culture that is also significant in the discussion of acid attack violence is the hierarchical structure of Cambodian society. O'Leary and Nee note that "in Cambodian society social stratification and differences in status are extremely important" (48). The social structure in Cambodia is based upon factors such as: gender; colour; class, race; wealth; reputation of the family; occupation; political position; poverty; the character of the individual; religious piety; or ancestry; and an individual's social position is determined based on these variables (Ovesen qtd. in O'Leary and Nee 48; Ebihara qtd. in Surtees 65). Hence, the inequality

embedded in this hierarchical structure inevitably leads to violence and discriminatory practices (Kleinman qtd. in Surtees 170). In many cases of acid attack violence, the victims did not adhere to the proverb '*Kom bos san touch rom long phnom*': don't throw the fishing line over the mountain: you cannot do anything that is not following the 'proper' way, according to hierarchical structures (O'Leary and Nee 51). That is, the victims did not know or keep their place in society and attempted to transcend the boundaries within the hierarchical structure, and were forcefully put back into their place.

An exploration into various theories of violence uncovered a dearth of appropriate explanations for the particular situation in Cambodia. Catherine McKinnon's conjecture on women perpetrators as abused victims themselves is not salient in this context. Theories posed by Burfoot and Lord in 'Killing Women: The Visual Culture of Gender and Violence ' are also not useful in fully explaining this violence. The concepts of sadist/masochist - voyeur/victim, as developed by Belinda Morrissey, also do not directly translate into the context of female vitrioleuses in modern day Cambodia. Another explanation for females perpetrating acid attack violence can be found in the work of Shapiro in Breaking the Codes - Female Criminality in the Fin de Siecle Paris. In this we are able to locate a discourse akin to that of contemporary Cambodia. She discusses the private, domestic struggles played out in public spaces, whereby the vitrioleuses 'suffered' and were not punished for their crimes. They too were often more powerful and in a position of higher status than the victim. It is through this historical explanation of Crimes of Passion / Heat of Passion crimes that we are able to possibly create an adapted

version which is close to assisting in developing an authentic or rigorous understanding of this issue. Crimes of Passion / Heat of Passion crimes indicate that the perpetrator (usually a mate) incited violence in an ad hoc, defensive, spontaneous manner, however, acid attack violence is not an impromptu form of violence, rather, it is calculated revenge where the perpetrator is required to be organised and sophisticated. That is, the perpetrator needs to devise a plan that involves: purchasing the acid (in some locations this can be very difficult), then carry the acid so as not to burn oneself, then stalk victim, then throw acid, then develop a plausible alibi or have sufficient funds to bribe police and victim's family, or hide from police or be willing to re-locate to a different village or town to avoid persecution. Thus, a Crimes *over* Passion and not Crimes *of* Passions theory could be useful. Although both concepts are based on punishment over broken hearts and rejection, the former, indicates a level of premeditation of the crime.

Bangladesh

Again drawing on the adapted framework by Heise and colleagues, the motivation and causes for acid attack violence in Bangladesh can be understood through individual, situational, societal and cultural imperatives. Developing an understanding of one significant factor in the Bangladeshi culture – shame – elucidates reasons for committing acid attack violence in this country. Shame can be defined as a loss of social-esteem: “the evaluation of self by others” (White and Mullen 157). And according to criminologist James Gillian, “shame is the primary or ultimate cause of all violence...(however) several preconditions have to met before

shame can lead to full pathogenesis of violent behavior” (Gilligan 111). The author goes on to state that the preconditions for violence to be enacted over shame are:

- The presence of overwhelming shame;
- Having no other means or alternatives of warding off or diminishing feelings of shame or low-self esteem; and
- A lack of emotional capacity and the absence of feelings of either love or guilt.

Furthermore, according to anthropologist Julian Pitt-Rivers “concluded that in all known cultures “the withdrawal of respect dishonours...and this inspires the sentiment of shame” (qtd. in Gilligan 110).

With regards to the case of Babli Akter, it is possible that the perpetrator enacted acid attack violence “in an attempt to replace shame with pride” (Gilligan 111). Although outlawed, son preference is an embedded traditional practice in many South Asian countries. As IRIN notes:

“existing in various forms and across many cultures, son preference includes a broad spectrum of customs and rituals, the foundations of which are favouritism towards male children with concomitant disregard for daughters” (11).

The WHO further contends that Bangladesh is one country in which son preference and discriminatory practices against females are prevalent (qtd. in IRIN 11). Causes for son preference include: the low value of women and girls, gender bias, patriarchal stratified societies, and burden of Dowry (IRIN 16). Son preference can take many forms including the intentional neglect or underfeeding, however, one of the more sadistic forms of son preference is female infanticide. Traditional methods for killing baby girls include milk laced with poison or shredded paddy husk (IRIN

12), and perhaps based on the former technique, Babli's father attempted to utilise a similar methods but substituted poison for acid.

Another possible explanation for acid attacks in cases of female infanticide is sadism. Although sadism is linked to sexual gratification and pleasure produced by cruelty (Krafft-Ebing qtd. in White and Mullen 237), an adapted version could be useful in explaining the longitudinal use of a corrosive agent on a child. However, without intense psychological profiling of the perpetrator, it is challenging to assess whether the perpetrator experienced excitement by controlling, subduing and inflicting pain (White and Mullen 237).

Lastly, the aetiology of acid attack violence in Bangladesh could also be explained in *The Currents of Lethal Violence*, where Unnithan and colleagues note several concepts pertinent to acid attack violence. One of these is frustration. Dollard notes that frustration is "that condition which exists when a goal response suffers interference" (qtd. in White and Mullen 40). This concept could be linked to female infanticide: frustration that the male's Y chromosomes chose the sex of the girl child and frustration that a girl child was born, and instead of the male parent taking responsibility, he chose to blame and punish the child rather than self.

India

A general understanding of the underlying precipitating factors for acid attack violence in India remains limited as previous research has been characterised by a predominant focus on the burns suffered by the survivors or the legal interventions sought²¹. However, with reference to the adapted socio-ecological model (see Appendix One), two fundamental explanations for acid attack violence in India are loss of honour and jealousy.

The concept of 'honour' is of vital importance in Indian society, and refers to dignity, nobility, respect, and social prestige and is the substrate for judging women. Loss of Honour is a significant factor in understanding the complex personal, corporate, ethnic and national processes that lead to acid attack violence in India. As cited in Welchman and Hossain, the UN Special Rapporteur on VAW explains that:

"Honour is defined in terms of women's assigned sexual and familial roles as dictated by traditional family ideology. Thus, adultery, premarital relationships (which may or may not include sexual relations), rape, and falling in love with an 'inappropriate' person may constitute violations of family honour" (5).

This narrative is particularly relevant to discussions of acid attack violence motivated by spurned love advances or domestic disputes. That is, if women become 'spoiled goods' from acid, they have been publicly marked, and which makes it clear that this is due to their apparent or suspected deviation into extra-marital relationships, by 'falling in love with an inappropriate person' or by daring to say 'no' to a man. In

²¹ Although in recent years, the ASF in Bangladesh together with other NGOs have spearheaded campaigns on legal recourse, to date the primary and predominant focus by NGOs have focused on medical care.

extreme cases, in order to preserve the honour of the other family members and to punish the way-ward daughter, some families will completely ostracise her post-attack (Imam and Akhtar 73).

Although *Crimes of Honour* are primarily associated with the Middle Eastern and Islamic cultures, an adaptation of this family violence (usually committed by a male family member) could be useful in developing an understanding why acid attacks occur for reasons of family related disputes and domestic disputes and rejection of love / sex / marriage. According to Siddiqui (qtd. in Welchman and Hossain 263) “an ‘honour crime’ is one of a range of violent or abusive acts committed in the name of ‘honour”. Acid throwing - as an intimate act of terrorism - can be viewed as a punitive measure that reclaims honour: “Honour can be restituted through either the modifications of the transgressor’s behaviour or erasure of the carrier of the dishonour” (Welchman and Hossain 47). Further, IRIN notes that “contemporary honour crimes are based on archaic codes of social conduct that severely circumscribe female behaviour while at the same time legitimising male violence against women” (135). Thus, if the motivation for acid throwing has been established as ‘rejection of love / sex / marriage’, women and girls are then held liable for infractions against that reputation. However, as in the case of Haseena Hussain, if the motivation for throwing acid is rejection of sex or marriage, it indicates that a woman or girl has agency: she has at least the ability to refuse him in the first place.

A substrate of the concept of honour is jealousy, and by developing a deeper understanding of this emotion, it could highlight motivations and causes for acid attack violence. According to White and Mullen, one definition of jealousy is:

“a complex of thoughts, emotions, and actions that follows loss or threat to self-esteem and/or the existence or quality of the romantic relationship. The perceived loss or threat is generated by the perception of a real or potential romantic attraction between one’s partner and a (perhaps imaginary) rival” (9).

These scholars have developed a ‘Model of Romantic Jealousy’ (9) that incorporates several pertinent elements such as Pathological Jealousy and Erotomantic Attachments, which provide insight into explanations for acid attacks motivated by land and business disputes, marital disputes, and rejection of sex or marriage.

Firstly, sufferers of Pathological Jealousy, also known in psychological circles as ‘the Othello Syndrome’, ‘the erotic jealousy syndrome’ or ‘conjugal paranoia’ (White and Mullen 173), may experience delusions and believe their partner (or perceived partner) is cheating and that feelings of humiliation and betrayal need to be avenged (White and Mullen 178).

Developing an understanding of ‘erotomantic’ relationships could also prove useful in profiling acid attackers and understanding motives and causes for attacks. According to White and Mullen, this type of relationship “exists only in the mind of one would-be partner” (185). They provide one case of an acid attack, where the perpetrator had delusional thoughts that he was betrayed and deserted by the victim for another man, however, the female victim did not even know the attacker (White and Mullen 186).

Despite vast societal changes in contemporary India, traditional relations between women and men have remained the same due to fundamental hierarchical structuring of gender relations. And there is a dearth of evidence on whether women are being specifically attacked for merging into traditional male work environments or whether women are being attacked for performing well in traditional male environments. This type of economic or work-place jealousy is a topic that needs to be flagged for further attention.

Discussion and Summary

This section re-visits the problem of acid attack violence, particularly in relation as to how the socio-ecological model can generate new understandings of this vicious, premeditated crime. Firstly, to recap, acid attack violence is a complex and variant form of violence with many motivations and causes. Table One below highlights these:

Table One: Reasons, Causes, Perpetrator / Survivors

Reason	Cause/s	Perpetrators & Victims / Survivors
Domestic Disputes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Suspected infidelity - Jealousy & envy - Divorce settlements - Perceived dishonour - Domestic violence - Rigid gender roles - Inequality - Hierarchy & power 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Husband against wife - Wife against husband - Wife against (suspected) mistress - Husband against former wife - Divorced man against the new husband of his former wife - Father against daughter - Child against parent (elder abuse)
Dowry Disputes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Devaluation & commodification of women & girls - Greed - Hierarchy & power 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Husband against wife - Fiancé against fiancé - Parents-in-law against daughter-in-laws - Other in-laws against daughter-in-law

Rejection of love / sex / marriage	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Jealousy & envy - Shame - Loss of face - Loss of honour - Notions of masculinity 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Co-workers against co-workers - Unknown people attacking perceived lovers / acquaintances - Former or current lovers
Land / property / money disputes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Poverty - Competition - Shame - Loss of face - Loss of honour Grievances 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Neighbours against neighbours - Unknown attackers - In-laws - Business partners or employers or employees (Can be women or men)

For four years I lived in Cambodia and Bangladesh and worked with NGOs that provide services to acid attack survivors. At that time I was not overly critical of the approaches undertaken by my employers. However, since the commencement of this research thesis, I have reflected upon and critically analysed the operations and responses (or lack thereof) by various actors. Through this investigation, I have ascertained that the predominant interventions and responses to this issue are generated by a Western constructed medicalised approach. That is, “healing”, “reconstructing” and “re-claiming” lost beauty are the programmatic emphases of NGOs (namely the Acid Survivors Foundations franchises). And although since the inception of these purpose built NGOs and also the passing of laws – aimed at prosecuting perpetrators and curbing the sale of acid – technologies, demographics and locales of GBV is morphing and escalating because underlying origins are not being rigorously or authentically addressed. Thus, this study aims to highlight this paucity, and as noted in the Introduction, the hypotheses for this research study are:

1. That socio-cultural, situational and individual determinants contribute to acid attack violence.

2. That motivations and causes for acid attack violence vary from location to location.
3. That shame, loss of face or loss of honour are imperatives that perpetuate attacks and marginalise acid survivors.

As shown, the first hypothesis can be highlighted through Heise and colleagues socio-cultural model (see Appendix One). The flexibility and adaptiveness of this framework enables its application to acid attacks with various motivations, in various cultural settings. The second hypothesis also can be elucidated through the model, and also as described in the literature review, acid attacks are not only confined to specific religious societies, and nor are they confined to particular cultural settings. However, in countries where there are higher prevalence rates of acid attack violence, there is a correlation to a higher frequency of acid throwing in contexts where there is a high rate of GBV. Lastly, with reference to the third hypothesis, the three case studies: Tat Marina in Cambodia, Babli Akter in Bangladesh and Haseena Hussain in India, shame, loss of face and loss of honour are underpinning imperatives that are contributing factors to acid attack violence.

Chapter Summary

In conclusion, this section has outlined motivations and causes for acid attack violence. The following section outlines recommendations for action.

CHAPTER FIVE

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR ACTION AND IMPLICATIONS FOR FURTHER RESEARCH

This chapter provides recommendations for potential interventions and future investigation. Acid attack violence is a multi-dimensional problem that demands a multi-faceted response, and with the ASTI anticipating the development of a new ASF in northern India, there are opportunities for the development of innovative and appropriate interventions and laws. Specifically, interventions and laws that seriously tackle the root causes of acid violence (such as a culture of violence, marital conflict, rigid gender roles, and face / shame / honour), and address the needs of acid attack survivors and their families, leading to tangible decreases in GBV.

Recommendations

- **Address this issue using an adapted, integrative Public Health response**

Government officials, policy makers, NGOs, community members and others need to re-frame the way in which this issue is thought of and addressed. Working from a socio-ecological framework or a bio-psycho-social model will assist actors in

developing and implementing interventions that rigorously address GBV and root causes.

- **Work with criminologists, psychologists and perpetrators do develop a deeper understanding of motivations**

There is a paucity of literature, theories and understandings of violence from a non-Western context and non-legal context. Additionally, to date there is a dearth of information and understandings on *why* do people commit violence. Working with scholars and anti-violence activists could prove useful in developing action oriented interventions.

- **Education and sensitisation of national institutions**

Government officials, policy-makers, community and religious leaders, judges, police and court officials, medical doctors, NGO leaders, and others need to be challenged about their individual prejudices, and educated about the consequences of acid attack violence and about the need to implement laws and punish perpetrators. Training sessions on ‘changing attitudes and behaviour’ and ‘acid attack violence awareness’ could be useful avenues for disseminating information and challenging discriminatory attitudes and beliefs.

- **Zero tolerance policy from national institutions**

In addition to the current support from NGOs, in order to eliminate acid attack violence governments needs to spearhead a zero-tolerance policy. This should receive the dedicated support of all national institutions, including government

officials, police officers, community and religious leaders, policy-makers, judges and court officials, and others.

- **Regulate the sale of acid**

Although there are countries which have passed laws to control the sale of acid (namely Bangladesh), findings do not suggest that this has dramatically affected the decrease in acid attack violence. However, in combination with other interventions such as working with potential throwers, controlling this corrosive substance and punishing sellers could assist in decreasing acid attack violence.

- **Development of formalised partnerships**

Acid attack survivors, communities, government and non-government agencies, police and courts, and the media should collaborate and co-ordinate their efforts. Together, this pro-active collective should execute a five-pronged approach of medical, legal, social reintegration, prevention and advocacy and notification and referral activities, based on the lucrative ASF model in Bangladesh.

- **Address underlying root causes of acid attack violence**

Develop comprehensive strategies and policies with key stakeholders, communities and NGOs to challenge and address oppressive social problems such as poverty, cultures of shame and honour, history and culture of violence, marital conflict and rigid gender roles. These strategies and policies could include early intervention in

marital conflict, gender sensitivity training with boys and young men, and increased opportunities for education and training for both women and men.

- **Services for women with disabilities who experience violence**

Women with disabilities who experience subsequent violence require specialised and adapted services and activities: they should also be involved in the design, training and execution of interventions. It is crucial for staff at shelters and at other intervention points to gain awareness and training relating to the specific physical and psychological needs many acid attack survivors have. Information relating to violence against women with disabilities needs to be disseminated to wide-ranging audiences; NGOs and government agencies need to develop affirmative policies; and a mechanism to collate statistical information could be developed.

- **Monitor different forms of gender-based violence**

Whilst the implementation of laws and interventions has resulted in significant decreases in acid attack violence in Bangladesh, it is not known whether violence against women has manifested into alternative means. No doubt there will be a decrease of acid attacks with the impending implementation of laws and interventions in Cambodia. However, if laws and interventions are developed in isolation of underlying socio-cultural factors, it is possible that a shift in the use of different technologies of violence against women could occur.

- **Support traditional and cultural methods of healing and treatment**

Whilst I advocate challenging oppressive socio-cultural myths, beliefs, practices and institutions, there is immense merit in valuing and adapting indigenous knowledge and practices in interventions for acid attack survivors. For example, many acid attack survivors suffer from depression and self-esteem issues, and are isolated within their family and community. In addition to counselling and cognitive behaviour therapy, NGOs and communities could facilitate and fund traditional ceremonies such as *Srock Tik* (a cleansing ceremony to “avert danger...[c]ure illness; and to increase family harmony” (Derks qtd. in Surtees 184) to assist acid attack survivors with the healing and re-integration processes. Some traditional beliefs cite evil spirits as the cause of sickness and violence and it is believed that village healers, monks, Shamans, herbalists and folk healers can expel these spirits through traditional healing methods. In Cambodia, traditional healing practices such as: intradermal rubbing with herbs, cupping (*Choob Khyol*) which involves heated jars placed on the skin to draw out evil humors in the patient, coining (*Kos Khyol*) where coins and tiger balm are rubbed on the skin until a red welt is raised, pinching (*Chab Khyol*) improves circulation and restores balance, faith healing, or Chinese herbal medicine, could also be used alongside modern, Western styles of medical treatment for acid attack survivors (Ministry of Health Cambodia; Graham and Chitnarong).

- **Vocational training activities**

Acid attack survivors need training and employment opportunities. Together with acid attack survivors and communities, NGOs need to develop and implement training, education and income-generating programs that are grounded in 'local cultural perspectives' (Surtees 182) and are sensitive to their physical and psychological needs.

- **Improve and diversify data collection mechanisms**

A nation-wide, linked database system on incidences of acid attack violence could be developed, updated and maintained by medical facilities, the police, the media, women's shelters and NGOs.

- **Monitor and provide support to the families of acid attack victims**

Acid attacks cause many deaths in India. Families and partners of victims should be offered psychological support, therapy, and legal advice, and be included in campaigns and focus groups.

- **International and regional working groups**

Acid attack violence occurs in many Asian and African countries, and the formation of working groups could be advantageous in sharing information, raising awareness, improving interventions and preventing acid attack violence.

Recommendations for my future PhD research

In addition to arriving at these recommendations for cultural and impairment-sensitive interventions, a supplementary objective for this study was to identify and provide an impetus for areas of future investigation.

As identified in the Literature Review, whilst many medical studies have been undertaken into acid burns (particularly in Cambodia, West Africa, Uganda and Bangladesh), there is overall a paucity of information on acid attack violence from a socio-cultural perspective. Additional research will: assist in the development of appropriate and sensitive treatments for survivors of acid attack violence; provide understanding which will assist in challenging and changing discriminatory socio-cultural attitudes, beliefs and practices; prevent future acid attack violence.

I suggest that future research should address the following areas:

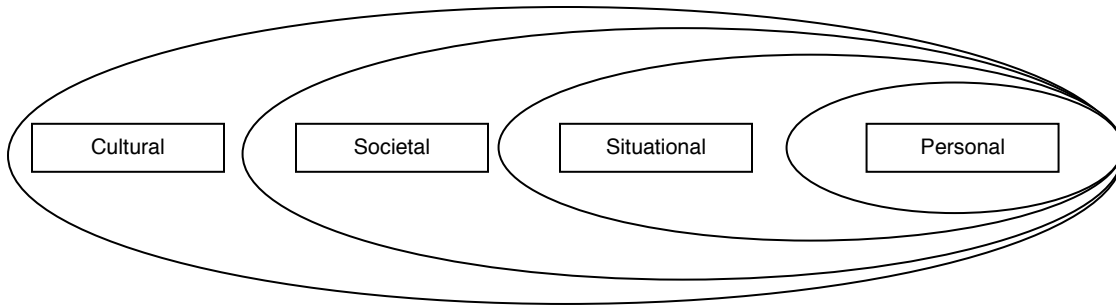
- The history of acid attack violence in post-colonial settings;
- Reasons behind a significant demise of reported acid attacks in the UK, Europe and USA during the 19th century and early 20th century;
- The impacts of ‘threats’ of acid attack violence and the extent to which perpetrators then progress to actually throwing acid;
- Individual, country-specific, nationwide research, including the demographics and motivations of acid attack violence in Sri Lanka, Indonesia, China, Malaysia, Hong Kong, Vietnam, Laos, Myanmar, Thailand, Taipei, Afghanistan and Saudi Arabia;

- Whether the passing of laws on the control of acid, rigorously promotes a decrease in acid attack violence;
- Comparative research amongst various geographical regions and historical, imperial patterns where acid attack violence is/was evident. This could show patterns and trends of acid attacks and could be a forecaster to future locations;
- The underlying reasons as to why acid attack violence is increasing in Iraq, Pakistan, and India;
- In-depth demographic research on acid attack survivors living in rural India;
- Ethnographic and demographic research from a variety of different sources on acid attack violence;
- Exploration of traditional knowledge and practices used by NGOs and other agencies in interventions for survivors of violence;
- Quantitative research on the incidences of neglect and violence against acid attack survivors when they return home;
- Criminal 'profiling' of acid throwers. Most statistical information relating to acid attack violence is focused on survivors, hence, it could be useful to identify and collate information on acid throwers and potential acid throwers;
- Whether families/partners of acid attack victims are further threatened, harassed, or attacked by perpetrators after the death of their partner/sibling/child.

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APPENDIX ONE: SOCIO-ECOLOGICAL MODEL

Ecological model of personal, situational, societal and cultural factors that contribute to acid attack violence. *Sources:* Vogin (10-13); Comeau and Thampi (6); adapted from Heise (262-290); also see Bandyopadhyay and Rahman Khan (65-66).



Cultural	Societal	Situational	Personal
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Institutionalised Gender inequalities ▪ Economic inequalities ▪ Class/caste/status /Hierarchy ▪ Devaluation of women ▪ Rigid gender roles ▪ Traditional norms & worldview ▪ Morality ▪ Face/honour/shame ▪ Hierarchy/Power ▪ Beauty/disfigurement ▪ Culture of revenge, retribution & violence ▪ “Raging misogyny” ▪ Taming wild, errant, non-docile, non-conformist women 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Justice, the law & legal system & impunity towards perpetrators ▪ Social permissiveness ▪ Capacity & corruption of government ▪ History of burning and fire to punish women to solve problems ▪ Empathy for VAW from community ▪ Patriarchal privilege ▪ Media: influenced by traditions ▪ Male domination of resources ▪ Men’s right to discipline women ▪ Economically motivated violence ▪ Influence of Western capitalism ▪ Women entering traditionally male work roles 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Ongoing family or relationship conflict ▪ Community Economic Index ▪ Community gender norms ▪ Low family/partner education ▪ Emotional state and personality traits ▪ Geographic location/isolation ▪ Peer association ▪ Access to acid ▪ Low cost of acid ▪ District level murder rate 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Male shame ▪ Feelings of powerlessness ▪ Male proprietariness ▪ Entitlement ▪ Age of perpetrator ▪ Age of survivor/victim ▪ Ideas on infidelity / possession ▪ Poor anger management skills ▪ Attachment disorders ▪ Intergenerational transmission of violent behavioural strategies ▪ Low academic achievements ▪ Low personal income ▪ Childhood neglect, abuse and violence ▪ Depression/low self-esteem/insecure ▪ Anti-social behaviours ▪ Violence is innate human behaviour ▪ Violence as a tool for constructing masculinity ▪ Psychopathology ▪ Coping skills deficits ▪ Controlling behaviour

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