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Acid Attacks: An Overview of Legal Measures and Motivation Trends in India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Colombia, and Cambodia

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Abstract

Vitriolage is a form of widespread violence around the world. This research analyzed legislative measures against the practice adopted by India, Bangladesh, Pakistan, Colombia, and Cambodia. The strengths and weaknesses of the different legal systems were examined. Motivational trends on why the violence was committed were reviewed in the literature in these countries. It was found that acid attacks are a form of gender-based violence. Countries where the measures were adopted to prevent attacks but failed to achieve the goal did not consider the attacks as a part of a broader problem. The only country that seems to have achieved the goal of reducing acid attacks is Bangladesh, where the law aggravated the penalties and implemented awareness raising about vitriolage. Bangladesh also promoted research and studies on the subject. The findings of the article could be helpful for governments in countries where acid attacks occur to create a policy to eradicate the problem.

Keywords

Vitriolage, acid attacks, motivation, victims, law, legal system, India, Bangladesh, Pakistan, Colombia

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ACID ATTACKS: AN OVERVIEW OF LEGAL MEASURES AND MOTIVATION TRENDS IN INDIA, PAKISTAN, BANGLADESH, COLOMBIA, AND CAMBODIA

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ABSTRACT

Acid attacks (vitriolage) are a form of violence that occurs in most countries of the world. Cases of acid attacks are no longer peculiar to developing countries; they also occur in western countries. This article analyses the legislative measures adopted by India, Bangladesh, Pakistan, Colombia, and Cambodia to combat acid attacks. It highlights the comparative strengths and weaknesses of these measures. It also examines the most important trends about the motivations of perpetrators reported in the literature in these countries, highlighting the sex-based nature of the phenomenon.

KEYWORDS

India, Bangladesh, Pakistan, Colombia, Cambodia, acid attacks, vitriolage, legislation, motivation, law, legal system

THE UNITED NATIONS REPORT “Good Practices in Legislation on Harmful Practices Against Women” (Women, U.N., 2009) defines acid attacks as any act of violence perpetrated by attacking the victim using an acid substance. The United Nations cites this crime in a report about violence against women; it is a sex-based crime in which men against women perpetrate the majority of cases. The report recommends using a broad legislative definition, considering the dynamics of the crime rather than the motivations for the crime, which are highly variable.

Acid on the human skin causes its dissolution and a wide range of physical reactions, from deep lesions and abrasions to the corrosion of bones and parts of the body. If acid comes into contact with the face, it can corrode the nose, ears, and mouth and blind the victim. Consequently, the attack has extreme psychological consequences due to the injuries’ severity and the social stigma related to deformation (Mannan et al., 2006).

ACID ATTACKS EPIDEMIOLOGY

In their analysis of the epidemiology of acid attacks, researchers (Kumar, 2021; Kanchan et al., 2015; Waldron et al., 2014; Mannan et al., 2004; Bhullar, 2013) found that countries on the Asian continent, in particular, the South East Asian Region (SEAR) (Kanchan et al., 2015) are most afflicted by this violence, followed by South America and Europe (Peck, 2011-a; Peck, 2011-b). Literature indicates that India,

Bangladesh, Pakistan, Cambodia, Vietnam, Laos, China, Kenya, South Africa, Uganda, and Ethiopia are among the countries where vitriolage most frequently occurs (Welsh, 2009; Young et al., 2002). Acid attacks are also perpetrated in Saudi Arabia (Pitkanen & Al Qattan, 2001), Nigeria (Olaitan & Bernard, 2008), Iran (Khoshnami et al., 2017; Farhad et al., 2011), and Jordan (Eisner & Ghuneim, 2013). In Cambodia, the first case of acid violence dates to 1960, and from there, the violence spread to other countries in South-East Asia (Licadho, 2003). According to data published by the Cambodian Acid Survivors Charity (2010), between 1985 and 2010, 271 victims requested treatment specifically for trauma caused by acid attacks. India has an estimated 1000 attacks annually (Doley, 2020; Dubey, 2015; Nguyen, 2015; Patel, 2014). The non-governmental organization Acid Survivors Foundation (ASF) reported more than 900 cases of vitriolage in Bangladesh between 2002 and 2003 and more than 250 cases in Pakistan between 2013 and 2014. Official data likely underestimate these violent acts (ASF, 2015). Acid violence, however, is a global problem and not unique to developing countries. The United Kingdom holds a record in this regard, with over 601 cases registered in 2016 (Sultana, 2018), and incidences have been reported in countries such as the USA, Germany, France, and Italy (Sullivan, 1998; Dubey, 2015).

This article analyses acid attack violence in India, Bangladesh, Pakistan, Colombia, and Cambodia, as they have the highest incidence of acid attacks in the world and where this violence is sex-based. In the United Kingdom, acid attacks have increased exponentially since 2012, reaching 472 cases in 2017, just in the London Metropolitan Area (Twoon et al., 2016). This article will not consider acid violence in England, where gang members mostly perpetrate it (Evans, 2013; Grundlingh et al., 2017, Lewis et al., 2020; Mann et al., 2020)

AIMS AND METHODS

The article aims first to report on the prevalence of the problem worldwide, particularly in Asia and South America. Secondly, the aim is to point out the differences between the legislative measures adopted by the different countries and analyze and compare them, highlighting the strengths and weaknesses of each approach. Finally, the article will examine the trends of the perpetrators' motivations in the countries as reported in the literature, emphasizing the sex-based nature of this violence. The analysis and comparison will be helpful for legislative bodies in countries where this violence occurs to aid them in drafting the best legal measures to fight the problem.

The article is based on a broader research study about acid attacks (within a Ph.D. program in Criminology at the University of Milano-Bicocca- Law Faculty), in which 174 articles, reports, and papers were consulted. The information has been found using the keywords "acid attacks," "vitriolage," "acid violence," "acid burns," and "chemical attacks" in the JSTOR and Google Scholar "criminology collection" databases.

VITRIOLAGE AS A SEX-BASED FORM OF VIOLENCE

Although the literature documents the presence of both male and female victims, the crime has a specific sex characterization being perpetrated by men mostly against women as a punishment for transgressing the social rules and limitations imposed by gender (Zia, 2013). Analyzing the CEDAW (Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women) Committee (Committee on the Elimination All Forms of Discrimination Against Women, General Recommendation No. 19- Violence Against Women), "gender-based violence" is considered a form of violence that a) disproportionately affects women, b) is caused by discriminatory dynamics and c)

contributes to perpetuating inequalities and discrimination against women. Therefore, acid violence is a form of gender-based violence. Most victims are female, especially in Asian and South American countries (Kuriakose et al., 2017; Kaur, 2018). Even when women commit the attacks, as happens in Cambodia, they are directed against other women.

Moreover, acid violence has a highly gendered form of discrimination. Bangladesh, India, Cambodia, and Pakistan are among the countries that usually occupy the lowest places in the Global Gender Gap Index¹, which measures gender inequalities based on economic, political, educational, and health criteria. Finally, acid violence reflects gender inequality and helps perpetuate it (Kaur, 2018). Attacks, especially in Asia, are committed to destroy the social life of the woman victim: once disfigured, she can hardly build a family life and is considered impure and faithless. Vitriolage also acts as a deterrent to other women, who are discouraged from attempting to emancipate themselves from their subordination (Kalantry & Getgen Kestenbaum, 2011).

LEGISLATIVE DEVELOPMENTS ACROSS COUNTRIES

INDIA

India is the country that reports the highest number of annual acid attacks in the world. Out of a total of about 1500 cases estimated worldwide each year (Acid Survivors Trust International, ASTI), about 1000 are committed in India (Doley, 2020; Dubey, 2015; Nguyen, 2015; Patel, 2014). Despite the legislative reforms, such as the 2013 Criminal Law Amendment Act, and rulings of the Indian Supreme Court, the number of attacks is increasing. This growth in attacks can be attributed to the patriarchal system that still permeates Indian society, as the legislative measures adopted have not positively affected women's status in society. In addition, the inefficiency of the country's legal system does not provide adequate protection and assistance to victims of this crime (Kumar, 2021).

Legislative Measures in India

Acid violence was officially codified in 2013 with the Criminal Law Amendment Act, which introduced sections 326A and 326B in the penal code. In particular, Section 326A introduces the specific offense of attack with acid, and Section 326B criminalizes an attempt to commit the crime. In addition, the amendment to Section 100 of the Criminal Procedure Code introduces a specific right of self-defense, which includes the murder of the perpetrator in cases of acid attacks, completed or attempted. The law also amended the Criminal Procedure Code, introducing in Section 357A, a provision of a Victim Compensation Fund for the victims of acid attacks, rape, and human trafficking, and added a Central Victim Compensation Fund (CVCF) supplementary to the State one (Goswami & Handa, 2020). Finally, in Section 357B, victims are insured with state compensation and the penalties paid by the perpetrators. Section 357C requires all public and private hospitals to provide first aid and free medical treatment to acid attack victims and to report the incidents to the police immediately. The 2013 revision also regulates the sale of acids, identified previously as one of the

¹ The World Economic Forum introduced in 2006 the "Global Gender Gap Report," drawn up annually to provide a framework that shows the breadth and extent of the gender gap worldwide. www.weforum.org.

most problematic aspects of the existing Indian legislation (Kalantry & Getgen Kestenbaum, 2019; Kanchan et al., 2015; Bhullar, 2013; Ahmad, 2011; Ahmad, 2012) and one of the causes of the persistence of the violence in the country. Alongside the Poison Act of 1919, which regulated the sale of poisons, the Model Poisons (Possession and Sale) Rules of 2013 (Kaur, 2018) established restrictions on the sale and purchase of acids, including banning the purchase by children under 18 years of age (Bhullar, 2013; Goswami & Handa, 2020).

India: Failure to Reduce Attacks Compared to Bangladesh

Despite the efforts and measures put in place by the government, the Indian legal system still seems to be inadequate in fighting vitriolage. Despite these legal changes, acids are still readily available in the country's markets without special restrictions (Venkataraman, 2016). As the literature points out (Kalantry & Getgen Kestenbaum, 2019), the Parliament has not enacted laws explicitly dealing with the acid distribution chains or the responsibility of the manufacturing companies. Kalantry & Getgen Kestenbaum (2019) compare the impact of the Indian legislative changes to the system changes introduced by Bangladesh in 2002 (The Acid Crime Control Act (ACCA) and The Acid Control Act (ACA)). They highlight how the implementation of the serious control of the sale and purchase of acid substances has led to a significant decrease in acid attacks in Bangladesh. Finally, in 2016, the government granted further rights to acid attacks survivors: the Rights of Persons with Disabilities Act (RPDW) which placed victims in the category of persons with disabilities (Vishwakarma, 2017), recognizing benefits in public recruitment, education, and land allocation (Kalantry & Getgen Kestenbaum, 2019). The literature (Kumar, 2021) identifies the main inefficiencies as the lack of an efficient method for regulating the sale of acid substances, the slowness of the legal system in carrying out investigations and processes in cases of acid attacks (Gupta, 2020), and the lack of investment in education and information programs about issues such as gender violence, gender equality, women's rights and the social stigma felt by the victims.

BANGLADESH

For a long time, Bangladesh has been the country with the second-highest number of vitriolage cases (after India). The first case reported was in 1967; since then, the number has grown steadily, reaching 47 cases reported in 1996, 130 in 1997, and 200 in 1998 (Kaur, 2018). Since the 1990s, the problem has become pressing in the country. Numerous studies (Mannan et al., 2004; Haque & Ahsan, 2014; Rahman et al., 2014) indicate that, in those years, Bangladesh was one of the countries with the highest incidence of acid attacks in the world, reaching ten times higher than that of India (Hayward, 2000). Between 2000 and 2001, reported episodes of acid attacks came to more than 300 cases per year.

Legislative Measures in Bangladesh

Protests from non-governmental organizations about the continued increase in acid attacks and pressure from the media led the government to approve in 2002 two specific laws on the subject: the Acid Control Act and the Acid Crime Prevention Act. The Acid Crime Control Act introduced specific provisions on murder committed with acid, acid-related injuries, and acid attack attempts. The law established the Acid Tribunal Court, which has jurisdiction over all acid-related violence cases. To solve the problem of delays in vitriolage case decisions, the Acid Crime Control Act requires a maximum duration of 60 days for investigations and 90 days for the Acid Tribunal Court to issue a receipt of the investigation findings. The court also has the power to

judge the actions of police forces in collecting complaints and conducting investigations in cases of acid attacks, which is a valuable tool for achieving the objectives of police enforcement (Shah, 2009). Previously delays were one of the most problematic aspects of this crime, so this change is important. The Acid Control Act regulates the import, export, and use of acid substances and established the National Acid Control Council and the District Acid Control Committees. The tasks of the National Council are:

- to formulate rules to control the production, transport, use, and sale of acids,
- to develop policies to prevent the harmful effects of acid use and to support the victims of attacks in terms of medical care, legal aid, and rehabilitation pathways,
- to implement awareness of vitriolage and promote research and studies on the subject.

The law established the National Acid Control Fund to raise funds for the victims' medical, legal, and rehabilitative expenses. District Councils operate under the aegis of the National Council and perform the same tasks at the local level. A licensing requirement was introduced for the import, production, and trade of acidic substances. Those who are found in possession of substances or machinery that can be used for the production of acids and those who, even though they are in possession of the above license, do not respect the terms of the license are sanctioned.

Strengthens and Weaknesses of the New System in Bangladesh

Despite the efforts in drafting the law, there are still many difficulties in controlling and reducing the production and sale of acids. In cases of attacks, it is rarely possible to trace the seller of the substance and prosecute him (Law Commission of India, Report No. 226). Since the entry into force of these laws, the phenomenon has seen a slow but constant decrease in acid attacks. In 2003, the number of attacks decreased by 15% compared to the previous year, from 494 cases to 417, until reaching numbers below 100 from 2011 onwards. For this reason, Bangladesh is cited by the literature (Kaur, 2018; Kalantry & Getgen Kestenbaum, 2019; Shah, 2009) and by institutions of other countries (Law Commission of India, Report No. 226) as the only country to have put in place effective measures to combat the phenomenon.

PAKISTAN

In Pakistan, as in the countries previously examined, there are no official statistics on the incidence of vitriolage. The available statistics are those from non-governmental organizations active in the territory; among these, one of the most important is the Acid Survivors Foundation Pakistan (ASF Pakistan). The data collected by ASF Pakistan are not complete and underestimate the phenomenon. The informal number of these crimes is exceptionally high (Acid Survivors Foundation Pakistan, 2015). The data collected indicate a substantial increase between 2012 and 2014; from 2015 onwards, however, the number began to decrease. By 2016, they had decreased by 52%. The most affected territory is Punjab, where about 85% of the country's attacks have occurred in the last ten years (ASTI, 2018). The high incidence of vitriolage in this area is because Punjab is one of the country's poorest areas, where women have little awareness of their rights (Zakar et al., 2016), and textile companies that use acidic substances for the working processes are concentrated.

Legislative Measures in Pakistan

In December 2011, the Pakistani Senate unanimously approved the Acid Control and Acid Crime Prevention Act to criminalize acid attacks, recognizing them as

specific crimes, thus amending the Pakistani Criminal Code and Criminal Procedure Code. In particular, the Penal Code now includes Sections 336A and 336B, which introduce the crime of injuries caused by corrosive substances; the law also criminalizes the conduct of those who market acidic substances without authorization.

In Punjab, there is the famous case of Naila Farat. In 2013, a 13-year-old girl was scarred on her face for refusing to marry the offender. The attack received much media attention because it was the first time an acid attack survivor appealed to the Supreme Court. In this case, Naila appealed against the decision of the High Court of Multan, which stated that the payment of a financial penalty by the perpetrator would extinguish the prison sentence provided for the crime. The case paved the way for the approval of the so-called “Act of 2011” (Kaur & Kumar, 2020).

Reasons for the Failure of Laws in Pakistan

Despite the efforts made by the government, the number of acid attacks has decreased only partially following the adoption of the law. The literature (Werlhof, 2014), in particular, laments the choice of an *ad hoc* law to combat violent attacks. The Pakistani government has not intervened on the broader problem of violence against women in the country or social and cultural causes that lead to violence, such as vitriolage. In addition, in parallel with the creation of new criminal cases, the law has not set up an adequate system to implement the level of awareness of acid attacks in the country and to encourage women to report attacks. Moreover, it has not invested in training specialized police-enforcement personnel to deal with these cases nor in studies or research on the subject. In addition, it has not addressed the problem in rural areas in the country, where the attacks are most widespread and where tribal laws often replace the laws of the state (Butt et al., 2019).

Another part of the literature (Zia, 2013) points out that the reform does not deal with the issue of corporate responsibility, which is decisive if we think that in Pakistan the majority of acid attacks occur in the province of Punjab, the location of cotton and clothing companies that use acids in their production processes. Therefore the solution would be to impose due diligence on companies, requiring them to implement procedures to prevent the theft of acidic substances, to provide acid containers with information on the legal consequences of improper use of it, and to check if the companies with which they have commercial relations respect the procedures for possession, sale, and trade of substances (Kalantry & Getgen Kestenbaum, 2011). Moreover, in 2017 the National Assembly approved the Acid Burn Crime Bill to remedy the law's shortcomings. It contains provisions to speed up proceedings in vitriolage cases, provide free medical care and treatment to victims, and establish the Acid and Burn Crime Monitoring Board to implement the objectives described in the law (Kaur & Kumar, 2020).

COLOMBIA

In the decade between 2004 and 2014, it is estimated that about 1000 acid attacks have been committed in Colombia, which gains the dismal record of the South American continent country with a greater spread of the phenomenon (Weiss, 2014). Contrary to the other countries analyzed, in Colombia, there are official statistics for this type of crime; in particular, according to the Instituto Nacional de Medicina Legal y Ciencias Forenses (www.medicinalegal.gov.co), since 2008, there has been an increase in the number of attacks recorded in the country. Between 2004 and 2007, the number did not exceed fifty cases; from 2008, the number of complaints tripled, up to 162 cases in 2012. Between 2004 and 2014, out of 932 victims, 475 were female, and

457 were male. Perpetrators are usually men, but there is substantial correspondence between the victims of the two sexes, although even in this case, female victims are greater (Fucsia, 2011).

Legislative Measures in Colombia

In response to the social alarm caused by the continuing increase in cases of acid attacks (Castañeda Harruba & Vargas Hernández, 2017), in 2013, the Colombian government added law 1639 and amended article 113 (“Deformidad”) of Código Penal, which increased the penalties for the crime. Subsequently, in 2016, the Ley Natalia Ponce de León (L. 1773/2016) introduced article 116A in the Colombian Penal Code, which created an autonomous crime figure for acid attacks: “lesiones con agentes Químicos, ácido y/o sustancias similares” which further increased the sentence for acid violence. The law contains provisions regulating the possession, production, and trade of acidic substances. It added medical, legal, and psychological assistance to victims and invited the Government and the Ministry of Health to implement the means for these services (articles 5 and 7). Finally, it seems helpful to mention the Ley Rosa Elvira Cely (L.1761/2015), in feminicide, which recognized this crime as autonomous. The law has amended Article 119 of the Colombian Penal Code, doubling the penalty if the conduct described in the previous articles is committed against women or minors.

Inadequacy of the Reforms in Colombia

Despite the efforts made by the government, analyses published in the literature (Gónima Díaz Granados, 2014; Beltrán-Ramírez & Cuenca-Tovar, 2016; Montaña Patiño, 2018; Orozco Padilla, 2018) consider that the steps taken so far are insufficient to tackle the phenomenon due to the lack of a significant decrease in the number of attacks and for the continuing difficulties in tracing and prosecuting the perpetrators of these crimes. The government and public institutions require a coordinated and organized effort.

CAMBODIA

A 2010 report published by the Cambodian NGO Acid Survivors Charity states that between 1985 and 2009, 216 cases of acid attacks were reported in Cambodia (Cambodian Acid Survivors Charity, 2010). The number was limited until 1999; in 14 years, there were only 37 cases. In 2000 there was a significant increase in the number of cases reported (40 in that year alone). Analyses published in the literature (Kaur, 2018; HRW, 2019) found the link between this exponential growth with the attack suffered by singer and model Tat Marina² on December 5, 1999, in which the perpetrator and his accomplices were not officially identified and, therefore, not prosecuted. For this reason and because of the popularity of those involved, the case had great resonance in the country. It was widely reported in the Cambodian media and newspapers, and it is thought that the publicity of the attack and the impunity of the perpetrators to identification and prosecution convinced the population of the

² Tat Marina’s case is perhaps the most famous vitriolage episode in the country. The girl was 16 years old when she was attacked by two men, beaten until she passed out and scarred with acid. The instigator of the attack was Khoun Sophal, wife of the then MP to Under-Secretary of State Svay Sitha, with whom Marina was having an affair. No one was prosecuted for the crime, although this occurred during the day in a crowded market and several people testified to having recognized the assailants; the victim received no compensation whatsoever.

difficulty of prosecuting this type of crime, triggering a series of acts of emulation. However, as with other countries, Cambodia has no official reports documenting this type of crime. Statistics reported by non-governmental organizations in the territory (CASC,2010; Licadho, 2003) are based on cases reported by newspapers and media, which underestimate the crimes (Licadho, 2003; Brady, 2013).

For this reason, it is possible that the number of cases reported by the media has grown since 1999 due to the greater attention paid to the phenomenon by journalists and activists (Licadho, 2003). Between 2009 and 2012, there was an increase in cases of acid attacks, which were widely publicized by the media. In these three years, 35 attacks and 59 victims were recorded (Freeman & Kunthear, 2012) compared to 36 victims in 2010 (CASC, 2010).

Legislative Measures in Cambodia

Following these repeated incidents, in 2012, the Cambodian government issued a Law on Regulating Concentrated Acid (Acid Law) and Sub-Decree No 48 on the Formalities and Conditions for Strong Acid Control. The law criminalizes acid attacks and supports the hypothesis of voluntary and involuntary murder, torture, and unintentional injuries committed by using acidic substances. Chapter 2 of the Act establishes the need to obtain authorization for the production, import, export, sale, and activities in general related to acidic substances. It identifies the competent authorities to regulate them. The Sub-Decree also requires all distributors to record all information regarding the purchase or sale in a register which must be made available to the police in case of inspection. All buyers must be at least 18 years of age and submit a specific identification document or license for purchase, specifying the intended use of the substance. The Acid Law also provides medical, legal, and rehabilitative services for victims, providing that state hospitals and care centers offer free care and assistance to survivors. However, it omits the amount of funds available for this service (Human Rights Watch, 2019a).

Role of Non-Governmental and Victim Support Organizations in Cambodia

Article 13 then seems to transfer specific responsibilities to private and non-governmental organizations, establishing that “the State encourages the participation of national and international, public and private non-governmental associations and organizations in support of victims.” In practice, members of these organizations describe a system based solely on their support and assistance for the victims due to the lack of state initiatives. Also, Cambodian Acid Survivors Charity was the only body that recorded incidents of acid attacks, provided legal support and medical and psychological services to victims, provided financial support to their families, and organized meetings with support groups and experts in the field (Human Rights Watch, 2019a). Since 2012, due to the perceived reduction in the number of attacks in the country, there has been a gradual reduction of funds donated to the organization until it closed in 2014. In general, all associations and non-governmental organizations assisting victims of acid violence saw a drastic reduction in economic aid from the government. This situation meant that, in practice, Chapter 3 of the 2012 Acid Law had been rarely applied (Human Rights Watch, 2019a). Human Rights Watch also points out that none of the survivors interviewed by them has received free treatment in public hospitals; on the contrary, victims have to bear the costs of medical treatments on their own, and they are refused care if they are unable to prove their financial resources to cover the expenses (Human Rights Watch, 2019b).

Both victims and health professionals are unaware of the existence of the law; in 2017, even the head of the burn victim's unit at Preah Kossamak Hospital (the largest hospital in Cambodia and the only one with a specific unit for burns) stated that he was not aware of the legislative provision that assures free medical treatment to vitriolage victims. Following the law's passage, there was a decrease in the number of vitriolage cases and a reduction in the availability of acidic substances in the country. On the other hand, Human Rights Watch (2019a) highlighted that the compensation system still has some shortcomings. According to the NGO Licadho (2003), vitriolage is an expression of the deep-rooted problems of Cambodian society, which after decades of wars and genocide, has normalized the use of violence to solve conflicts and familiar disputes.

TRENDS IN ACID ATTACK MOTIVATION

Amorous and Sexual Rejection

An analysis of the literature shows that the perpetrators' motivations behind acid attacks vary in different countries (Dissanaike & Rahimi, 2009). As Sabzi Khoshnami and collaborators (2017) highlighted, vitriolage is most prevalent in developing countries, particularly in Asia and Africa. In these countries, the phenomenon assumes a strong gender dynamic; usually, men perpetrate crimes against women for reasons of honor, revenge, family disputes, and rejection of marriage proposals. In particular, romantic or sexual rejection is one of the most common motivations underlying attacks on women in many Asian countries, including Taiwan (Yeon et al., 1997), Bangladesh (Begum, 2004; Faga et al., 2000; Mannan et al., 2004), Hong Kong (Young et al., 2002) and Sri Lanka (Karunadasa et al., 2010).

Revenge

Studies on male survivors (Srishti et al., 2019) indicated that revenge and jealousy are the most common reasons, highlighting that the motivations are similar for both sexes. Even the revenge committed against non-intimate people (not included in the group of family members or partners) seems relevant for a significant number of attacks in Asian countries (Karunadasa et al., 2010; Yeon et al., 1997).

Family and Partner Disputes

Attacks frequently involve women attacking other women for disputes concerning the partner (Branday et al., 1996). At the same time, in Colombia, the violence seems to be linked to family and partner disputes; frequently, when the victims are young girls who have a low level of education and belong to a modest socioeconomic class, thus they are dependent on their partner (Guerrero, 2012). Furthermore, in Jamaica, vitriolage victims usually come from urban areas with a high population density and belong to middle-to-low social strata.

Attacks During Robberies

Acid attacks can also be the illegal means through which other crimes are committed, frequently theft or robbery. Asaria et al. (2004) have found that in Uganda, the majority of attacks are carried out in the course of robberies.

Intention to Disfigure

Acid attacks rarely lead to the victim's death; the perpetrator intends to humiliate and brand the survivor for life (CASC, 2010); therefore, the attack is typically aimed at the face (Tan et al., 2015). The intention of disfiguring a person's appearance is to erase her identity (De Sousa, 2010). This factor takes on different connotations according to the social context. In Asian and South American countries where the physical aspect is relevant to the search for a partner (often the only means for women to become independent from their original family), it represents an instrument of control over the victim's life (Kalantry & Getgen Kestenbaum, 2011). On the other hand, in the United Kingdom, it expresses the will of the perpetrator to leave the mark of their revenge for the injustices suffered (Alleyne & Wood, 2010). Therefore, the propensity to commission acid attacks is also influenced by cultural factors (Mann et al., 2020). Literature has found that men are more prone to revenge than women (Baron & Richardson, 1994; Maccoby & Jacklin, 1980) and that young people are more prone to revenge than adults (Costa-Mckinley et al., 2001). These statements are consistent with the research of Tan et al. (2015), who identify young men as the group that most frequently commits these crimes.

Correspondence and Non-Correspondence between Male and Female Victims

In Colombia, Waldron et al. (2014) showed a substantial correspondence between the victims of the two sexes. On the contrary, Kalantry & Getgen Kestenbaum (2011) show that India, Bangladesh, and Cambodia have the highest prevalence of acid attacks, which have a strong gender bias, with most of the victims being female. The authors suggest three main factors linked with the violence: gender inequality, the extreme accessibility of acids (particularly in India, due to the widespread textile processing industries), and the impunity of the perpetrators to prosecution.

COMPARING THE LEGAL MEASURES BY COUNTRIES

The analysis of the legal landscape of the countries in question allows us to make some comparative observations on the legal measures introduced to combat the phenomenon of vitriolage.

Victim Compensation System

Regarding the provision of compensation for victims, all of the examined countries have introduced specific provisions for survivors of acid attacks. In addition to the legislative provisions adopted is whether or not there is effective enforcement of the laws. As noted above, although the Cambodian government expressly provides free medical and legal assistance for the victims in the Acid Law, it has not established an adequate system of funding and awareness. In practice, the non-governmental organizations in the territory are in charge of these tasks. Since 2012, there has been a dramatic reduction in economic aid by the government.

Furthermore, survivors and hospital staff are unaware of the outcome of these predictions. On the contrary, a virtuous example is the Cambodian one. Before the enactment of Law no. 1773 of 2016 (which, in addition to providing medical and legal assistance to victims, is concerned with delivering forms of psychological support), in 2014, provided a detailed emergency service protocol that guaranteed first aid to the victims at the place where the attack took place, free hospital care and assistance and

the intervention of a medical team with interdisciplinary skills with the intervention of specialists in the field of mental health and rehabilitation paths for victims.

Penalties Measures

The penalties for vitriolage usually include a custodial sentence and a monetary sanction, and the laws provide a framework for judges and courts to determine the liability. There are no precise predictions concerning the factors to increase or decrease punishment in India. For example, the Sentencing Manual of the Crown Prosecution Service of the United Kingdom identifies a series of “specific gravity factors” based on the relevance of the attack, such as the effects on the victim and the acts of gratuitous violence committed against her, and the “mitigations factors,” such as the admission of guilt by the offender and the lack of permanent injury. Given the high number of cases occurring in Indian territory, the literature (ASTI, 2015) suggests that adopting such a manual with clear and specific forecasts could help develop an aligned and coherent jurisprudence.

General Versus Ad Hoc Provisions

Regarding adopting specific or general laws to criminalize acid attacks, India, Pakistan, and Colombia have introduced changes and amendments in the penal and procedural codes in force. In contrast, Bangladesh and Cambodia have opted to introduce *ad hoc* provisions. In contrast, the British government has, so far, considered sufficient the provisions contained in the OAPA and the Criminal Attempts Act. Part of the literature (ASTI, 2015) considers introducing specific provisions not only to facilitate judges and courts in the imposition of the sentence but also to emphasize the gravity and relevance of the crime, also for the population.

Legislative Measures Related to Cultural Causes are Preferable

However, literature (Werlhof, 2013; Kumar, 2021) that highlights the importance of considering the harm within a broader context recommends laws that consider the causes and consequences of the act instead of focusing on the formal aspects of the regulatory provisions. For example, in Pakistan, the government, in creating new criminal cases, has not intervened in the broader problem of gender violence in the country that leads to the occurrence of the attacks. The government has not set up an adequate system to encourage women to report attacks and raise awareness of vitriolage. It has not invested in training specialized personnel to address these cases to achieve the aims of police-force enforcement or in studies on the subject.

Corporate Responsibility

Similarly, the theme of corporate responsibility seems to be decisive (Zia, 2013) if we think that, especially in Asian countries, there is a high concentration of companies that use acidic substances in their production processes.

Bangladesh as the Virtuous Example

The only country that appears to have worked satisfactorily to achieve these objectives is Bangladesh, which has seen a slow but constant decrease in acid violence cases since the year following the enactment of the Acid Crime Control Act and the Acid Crime Act and is considered a virtuous example by the literature (Kaur, 2018; Kalantry & Getgen Kestenbaum, 2019; Shah, 2009) and the institutions of other countries (Law Commission of India, Report No. 226; Women, U.N., 2009). For the other realities considered, the research (Sinha, 2020; Kumar, 2021; Gaviria-Castellanos et

al., 2015) highlights the need to implement and develop the existing body of legislation.

CONCLUSIONS

Vitriolage is a form of widespread violence around the world. This research analyzed legislative measures against the practice adopted by India, Bangladesh, Pakistan, Colombia, and Cambodia. The strengths and weaknesses of the different legal systems were examined. Motivational trends on why the violence was committed were reviewed in the literature in these countries. It was found that acid attacks are a form of gender-based violence. Countries where the measures were adopted to prevent attacks but failed to achieve the goal did not consider the attacks as a part of a broader problem. The only country that seems to have achieved the goal of reducing acid attacks is Bangladesh, where the law aggravated the penalties and implemented awareness raising about vitriolage. Bangladesh also promoted research and studies on the subject. The findings of the article could be helpful for governments in countries where acid attacks occur to create a policy to eradicate the problem.

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