



राष्ट्रीय महिला आयोग  
NATIONAL COMMISSION FOR WOMEN

# RECLAIMING LIFE

Rights, Laws and HOPE  
for Acid Attack Survivors





# Foreword

Acid attacks are among the most heinous forms of gender-based violence, leaving survivors with not only physical injuries but also profound psychological scars. This booklet, an initiative of the National Commission for Women, seeks to inform, empower, and support these brave women who have faced unimaginable cruelty.

The Government of India has enacted stringent legal measures, including the Bhartiya Nyaya Sanhita, 2023, and the Bharatiya Nagarik Suraksha Sanhita, 2023, to ensure justice for survivors and strict punishment for perpetrators. Complementing these are crucial government schemes for free medical treatment, financial compensation, and rehabilitation, reflecting a holistic approach to healing and justice.

As Chairperson of the National Commission for Women, I reaffirm our unwavering commitment to upholding the dignity and rights of every woman. Let this booklet serve as a beacon of hope and resilience, and a call to collective action to ensure that survivors of acid attacks receive the support and opportunities they deserve.

**Vijaya Rahatkar**

Chairperson,  
National Commission for Women

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*You are not defined by the attack. You are defined by your resilience, your courage, and your voice. With every step you take, you inspire others to stand stronger!”*

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# Introduction

Acid attacks are among the most brutal forms of violence—acts that not only cause deep physical harm but also leave lifelong emotional and psychological wounds. Survivors of such attacks face unimaginable challenges, from long-term medical care and legal battles to social ostracism and economic hardship.

This booklet is an effort by the National Commission for Women to empower survivors, inform the public, and support efforts for prevention, justice, and

rehabilitation. It aims to educate readers about the legal rights of survivors, immediate response actions, available resources, and real-life stories that highlight courage and resilience in the face of trauma.



**to empower**  
survivors



**inform**  
the public



**support efforts**  
for prevention, justice,  
and rehabilitation.

01

# Understanding Acid Attacks:

A Crime That Maims  
Beyond the Body





## 01 What is Acid Attack?

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An acid attack, medically and legally termed vitriolage, involves the deliberate use of corrosive substances to harm another individual. Perpetrators often throw or pour acid onto a victim's face or body, intending to cause severe injury, disfigurement, psychological trauma, or death.

The effects are catastrophic:

- **Physical injuries** include deep burns, loss of vision, and permanent disfigurement.
- **Psychological impact** includes trauma, depression, PTSD, and suicidal ideation.
- **Social consequences** include stigma, isolation, and barriers to education or employment.

Acid attacks are not impulsive acts—they are often premeditated and stem from a deep-rooted culture of gender-based violence and control.

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## 02 Why Do Acid Attacks Happen?

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Though the motives vary, many stem from:

- Rejection of romantic or marriage proposals
- Domestic violence and dowry demands
- Property or inheritance disputes
- Jealousy or professional rivalry
- A desire to control or punish

Women and girls are disproportionately targeted, making acid violence a tool of misogyny and control in a patriarchal society

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## 03 A Disturbing Pattern: Crime Statistics

According to the National Crime Records Bureau (NCRB):

- **2017:** 244 cases | **2018:** 228 cases | **2019:** 240 cases
- **2020:** 182 cases | **2021:** 176 cases

While there is a slight decline post-2019, the numbers remain alarmingly high.

These figures indicate that despite legal reforms and public awareness, acid attacks continue to be a serious and persistent form of gender-based violence in India.

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02

# Responding to an Acid Attack: What You Must Do





## 01 Immediate First Aid Steps (Do's)

- ✓ Flush the burn with clean, running water immediately for at least 30 minutes. Do not delay.
- ✓ Avoid splashing unaffected areas—focus water directly on the burn.
- ✓ Remove any contaminated clothing, jewelry, or accessories carefully to prevent further injury.
- ✓ Call emergency services – Dial 112 or 108.
- ✓ Cover the wound loosely with a clean, non-stick cloth or sterile gauze.
- ✓ Keep the victim calm. Reassure them and prevent panic.
- ✓ If possible, preserve the acid container or take note of the substance used.
- ✓ Discourage crowds and maintain the victim's privacy and dignity.
- ✓ Transport the victim to a hospital immediately, even if the burn appears minor.

## 02 What NOT to Do (Don'ts)



- ✗ Do not apply any creams, oils, butter, or ointments.



- ✗ Do not rub or touch the burn.



- ✗ Do not delay medical attention.



- ✗ Do not try to neutralize the acid with other chemicals.



- ✗ Do not use ice or very cold water—it can worsen the injury.



- ✗ Do not feed the victim if they are unconscious



- ✗ Do not pull off clothing stuck to the skin.

03

# Legal Protections and Rights







Acid attacks are not only heinous acts of violence—they are serious criminal offenses under Indian law. Survivors are entitled to robust legal protections, free medical care, and legal aid. The laws ensure that perpetrators are held accountable and survivors receive support to rebuild their lives with dignity.

## **Relevant Law:** **Bhartiya Nyaya Sanhita (BNS), 2023**

The Bhartiya Nyaya Sanhita (BNS), 2023, replaces the Indian Penal Code and strengthens legal provisions for acid attack cases. Acid attack is now one of the severe offences where stringent punishment is prescribed for this category of crimes.

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### **01 Section 124 – Grievous Hurt by Use of Acid:**

- As per Section 124 of BNS, if any person voluntarily causes injury by throwing or administering acid or any other corrosive/ burning substance, they can be punished under this law.

- The harm may include permanent or partial damage, deformity, maims, disfigurement, disability, burn injuries, or even rendering someone into a permanent vegetative state.
- This is one of the serious offences as per Section 43 of BNSS as well where such offenders are arrested and kept handcuffed.

**Punishment:**

- This is one of the severe offences which is in the category of cognizable and non-bailable offence i.e. FIR will be registered and after the arrest the person can not get bail without order of Session Judge.
- Imprisonment for a minimum of 10 years, extendable up to life imprisonment, and
- A fine that is mandatory and must be just and reasonable, directly payable to the survivor to cover medical expenses and related costs for the treatment of the victim.

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## 02 Attempt to Commit an Acid Attack

Even the attempt of acid attack is a serious criminal offense.

**Punishment:**

- This is also one of the severe offences which is in the category of cognizable and non-bailable offence i.e. FIR will be registered and after the arrest the person can not get bail without order of Session Judge.
- Imprisonment for a minimum term of 5 years and upto 7 years, and
- A fine, the amount of which is determined by the gravity of the attempt and its consequences.

## 03 Definition of “Acid” Under Law

The BNS broadens the definition of acid to include:

“Any substance which has acidic or corrosive character or burning nature, that is capable of causing bodily injury leading to scars or disfigurement or temporary or permanent disability”

This ensures that all forms of harmful corrosive substances—beyond just sulfuric, hydrochloric, or nitric acid—are covered under the law.

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## 04 Action against the Public Servant, if fails to register FIR for acid attack

As per Section 199 of BNS, if a public servant fails to record any information related to acid attack shall be liable for a rigorous imprisonment for a term which shall not be less than six months but which may extend to two years, and shall also be liable to fine.

This is a cognizable and non-compoundable offence i.e. the FIR may be filed against such officer and it cannot be compromised.

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## Medical Treatment as a Legal Right

**Under the Bhartiya Nagarik Suraksha Sanhita (BNSS), 2023**, acid attack survivors have the right to seek immediate and free medical care, without any procedural delays or financial burden.

### Section 397 of BNSS– Emergency Medical Treatment

- All public and private hospitals are legally bound to provide free and immediate treatment to acid attack victims.
- Hospitals must not refuse treatment or delay assistance, regardless of the victim's financial status.
- Victims covered under Section 124 of BNS (acid attack survivors) fall directly under this protective provision.
- Hospitals are also required to inform the police immediately upon treating such victims

### Section 200 of BNS – Punishment for Non-treatment of victim

If In-charge of a hospital or any other person fails to comply with their duty to provide free emergency treatment to victims:

#### **Punishment:**

- One may face imprisonment of up to 1 year, or
- Fine, or
- Both, depending on the severity of the violation.

This provision holds both government and private healthcare institutions accountable, and reinforces that medical care is not just a moral obligation but a legal right of the survivor.

## Free Legal Aid – A Lifeline for Survivors

Navigating the legal system can be overwhelming, especially for those recovering from trauma. To ensure that no survivor is denied justice due to financial hardship:

### Legal Services Authorities Act, 1987

- All women, regardless of their income or social status, are entitled to free legal aid services through District Legal Services Authorities (DLSAs), State Legal Services Authorities (SLSAs), and the National Legal Services Authority (NALSA).
- Acid attack survivors can access:
  - Legal advice
  - Representation in court
  - Assistance with compensation claims
  - Guidance during investigation and trial

Free legal aid plays a critical role in ensuring survivors can assert their rights, seek compensation, and bring perpetrators to justice –without facing legal or financial barriers.

# Compensation to victims of Acid attack

## Section 396 of BNSS- Victim Compensation Scheme

As per MHA advisory dated 20.04.2015, **A minimum compensation of 3 lakh** is to be paid to victims of acid attack through DLSA/ NALSA.

## Prime Minister's National Relief Fund (PMNRF)

Since, 08.10.2016, a financial assistance of **Rs. 1 lakh** is provided to the female acid attack victims from Prime Minister's National Relief Fund (PMNRF). In case of male victims, financial assistance upto Rs. 1 lakh is granted, depending upon scale of injuries and other criterion.

- All the compensation under Section 396 or PMNRF shall be in addition to the fine or compensation paid by the accused to the victim as per the directions of the court.
- Acid attack has been kept under the list of disabilities therefore the **benefits all the schemes related to disabled persons** are applicable in case of acid attack victims.

## Compensation Schemes for victims

Acid attack survivors in India are entitled to financial compensation from the government to help them recover and rebuild their lives. This compensation is provided through schemes such as the Victim Compensation Scheme (VCS), governed by Section 357A of the Code of Criminal Procedure (CrPC) and 395 of the Bhartiya Nagarik Suraksha Sanhita, 2023.

The amount of compensation depends upon the severity of the injuries. The financial support is meant to cover medical treatment, surgeries, psychological counselling, rehabilitation, and basic living expenses if the survivor is unable to work.

## Process to be Followed

To apply, the survivor or their representative needs to approach the District Legal Services Authority (DLSA) and submit necessary documents like the FIR (First Information Report), medical reports, and a written application. The DLSA evaluates the case and recommends a suitable compensation amount. Survivors can also receive free legal aid to help with the application process. This compensation plays a vital role in helping survivors regain stability and live with dignity after such a traumatic experience.

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**Approach District Legal Services Authority (DLSA)**

2

Submit necessary documents like the FIR (First Information Report), medical reports, and a written application.

3

DLSA evaluates the case and recommends a suitable compensation amount.

4

**Survivors can also receive free legal aid to help with the application process.**

## Judicial Intervention

### **Laxmi vs. Union of India**

- The Supreme Court of India, in the landmark case of Laxmi v. Union of India [W.P. (Criminal) 129 of 2006] laid down guidelines to regulate the sale of acid in India. Laxmi, a 15 year old girl was attacked as a form of revenge in 2005. Laxmi petitioned the Supreme Court to address the rising incidents of acid violence.
- The Supreme Court issued comprehensive directions to regulate sale of acid including maintaining a sale register, verification of buyers identity etc., ensure free and immediate medical treatment to victims, and provide adequate compensation and rehabilitation. It emphasized the importance of social reintegration and legal support for survivors.
- The Court strongly condemned acid attacks as grave violations of human rights and dignity, stressing the need for a rehabilitative, rather than purely punitive approach to justice. This judgment laid the groundwork for stronger legal and administrative frameworks to prevent acid violence and assist survivors in rebuilding their lives.

### **Parivartan Kendra and Anr vs. Union of India and Ors. [2013]**

In this case, the Supreme Court directed that stringent action should be taken against persons supplying acid without proper authorization and that the concerned authorities also to be made responsible for failure to keep a check on the distribution of acid.



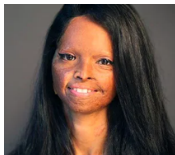
04

# Prominent voices of Survivors



# Laxmi Agarwal

Laxmi Agarwal's story is one of extraordinary courage and transformation. At just 15, she survived a brutal acid attack after rejecting a marriage proposal—a moment that could have silenced her. Instead, Laxmi chose to fight back, becoming one of India's most prominent voices for acid attack survivors.



**Laxmi Agarwal**  
Acid attack survivor

Her relentless advocacy led to stricter regulations on the sale of acid and improved support systems for victims nationwide. Laxmi's journey of resilience and activism inspired the acclaimed film *Chhapaak*, which helped bring the issue into the national spotlight. Today, she stands as a powerful symbol of strength, hope, and the unbreakable spirit of survival.



## Sonali Mukherjee

In 2003, Sonali Mukherjee survived a life-altering acid attack that left her with severe injuries and emotional scars. Yet, in the face of immense pain and countless surgeries, she refused to be broken. Sonali turned her personal tragedy into a mission

for justice, emerging as a fierce advocate for the rights of acid attack survivors. Her strength and determination gained national attention when she shared her story on the popular television show *Kaun Banega Crorepati*, inspiring millions across the country. Today, as a motivational speaker and activist, Sonali continues to fight for dignity, justice, and empowerment—showing the world that true courage lies in never giving up.



**Sonali Mukherjee**

Acid attack survivor



## Reshma Qureshi

Reshma Qureshi faced a brutal acid attack that disfigured her face, but not her spirit. Instead of hiding away, Reshma chose to challenge conventional beauty standards and walked

the ramp at New York Fashion Week, making headlines around the world. She became the face of campaigns against acid violence, using her voice to demand justice and awareness. Through her activism and public presence, Reshma has redefined what it means to be beautiful and brave.



**Reshma Qureshi**

Acid attack survivor



## Pragya Prasun

Pragya Prasun's journey is a testament to the indomitable human spirit. In 2006, just 12 days after her marriage, she was attacked with acid by a rejected suitor while traveling by train. Despite suffering 47% burns and enduring multiple surgeries, Pragya transformed her personal tragedy into a mission to support others.



**Pragya Prasun**

Acid attack survivor

She founded the Atijeevan Foundation in 2013, which has since assisted over 250 acid attack survivors by facilitating free surgeries, offering counseling, and providing vocational training. Her unwavering commitment to empowering survivors earned her the prestigious Nari Shakti Puraskar in 2019. Pragya's story inspires countless individuals to rise above adversity and make a positive impact on society.

These stories serve as powerful reminders that while acid may cause lasting physical scars, it can never erase the determination, dreams, and dignity of the human spirit.

## Helplines

NCW 24X7 Helpline

**7827170170**

Cyber Helpline

**1930**

Police Helpline

**112**

Domestic Violence,  
Harassment and Abuse  
Helpline

**1091**

Child Helpline

**1098**

Women Helpline

**181**





# Safety, Dignity, and Empowerment

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 NCWIndia

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An acid attack is a cowardly and inhumane assault on a person's dignity and humanity, causing physical and psychological trauma. The scars of acid attacks may heal, but emotional and psychological trauma can last a lifetime.

An acid attack can take away a person's physical beauty, it cannot take away their inner strength and resilience.

**Vijaya Rahatkar**

Chairperson,

NATIONAL COMMISSION FOR WOMEN



**राष्ट्रीय महिला आयोग**

NATIONAL COMMISSION FOR WOMEN

Government of India