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Acid Violence in Pakistan

47% of Pakistan's nearly 190 million population are women.¹ The country ratified CEDAW in 1996.² More than 15 years have passed since then but Pakistan still has a dismal women's rights record, ranking 134 out of 135 countries in the World Economic Forum's Gender Gap Report of 2012³. By far the most egregious of these are crimes of violence against women, which range from "honor" killings⁴ and rapes to domestic violence and acid crimes.

The Aurat Foundation, a local women's rights organization, reports 8539 cases of violence against women in 2011, an alarming increase of 6.49% from the previous year. Of these, sexual assault increased by 48.65%, acid throwing by 37.5%, "honor" killings by 26.57% and domestic violence by 25.51%. The organization noted 44 cases of acid violence in 2011 compared to 32 in 2010. An important point to remember here is that these are only the cases reported in the media.⁵ Indeed, it is widely acknowledged that most cases do not make it to the media as women tend not to come forth with the crimes for a number of reasons, such as fear, stigma, lack of rights awareness, economic dependence on the perpetrators, lack of family and societal support, and mistrust of the police and judiciary, to name a few. Collecting data from isolated rural areas is also difficult. Valerie Khan, Chair of Acid Trust Foundation Pakistan, estimates acid attacks in Pakistan number 150 each year while Shahnaz Bokhari, chief coordinator at the Progressive Women's Association, states that her organization has documented over 8800 cases of victims burnt by acid and fire since 1994.⁶ Bokhari adds the caveat that her figures are only from "Rawalpindi, Islamabad, and a 200-mile radius" and not the entire country. Both

1 Mansoor, *Pakistan's Women*.

2 Consideration of Reports submitted by State parties, *United Nations*.

3 Hausmann, Tyson and Zahidi, *The Global Gender Gap Report 2012*, 11.

4 I have put honor in quotations because I disagree with the purported reasons provided for such crimes, namely that the honor of a man is tainted if a woman engages in taboo sexual activity or any other perceived immoral activity. Juxtaposing the word "honor" next to "killing", in my view, also softens the image of the crime. I realize that the motivations behind the crime do make it necessary to differentiate it from other types of femicides so that its root causes can be focused on and tackled. Thus, in the absence of another term, particular one as widely recognized as "honor killings", the most one can do is make sure the "honor" part of the crime is questioned as, indeed, many writers are now doing. A UN report, *Good Practices in Legislation on "Harmful Practices" Against Women*, goes one step further and calls the practice "so-called 'honor' crime" to emphasize that it is "not honorable".

5 Incidences of Violence against Women, *Aurat Foundation*.

women believe that only 30% of acid violence cases are reported which ties in with the figures Aurat Foundation's has collected from media reports.⁷

This paper will examine the historical context and patriarchal patterns of belief that make violence against women in Pakistan not only possible but a crime which largely goes without punishment, often despite the existence of laws that advocate otherwise. It will focus on the recent debates regarding domestic violence in Pakistan and, specifically, on acid violence, which is a relatively recent type of violence against women. The paper will illustrate the devastating, life-long physical and psychological effects of an acid attack, especially in the absence of justice. It will examine the measures taken by various parties to curb the phenomenon and conclude with recommendations.

Why is violence so pervasive?

Immediate Social Context

Violence against women can only be viewed in a multi-causal framework. UNICEF lists “child marriage, gender-based power relations, women’s low economic status and traditional practices or social norms”⁸ as some of its causes. Violence against women in Pakistan reflects all of these factors and is “ignored, condoned, or justified by invoking religion, culture, or tradition”.⁹ For the scope of this paper, I will use culture, religion and tradition almost interchangeably for they are often intertwined notions of the right way of conducting affairs and living life in Pakistan.¹⁰ Indeed, it sometimes becomes very difficult to separate religion from culture. Religion, in the form that is used in Pakistan as a buffer against advancing women’s rights, is little more than “culture”, which is also, alongside religion, understood as static and pure. Of course, academics hold an opposite view of culture and consider it a “product of historical influences”, constantly contested and changing. These differing views of culture are important because there is a lot of variation in the approach of governments to women’s rights issues

6 Abouzeid, *Pakistan's Acid Attack Victims*; Ebrahim, *Pakistan: Women Intensify Push*

7 Abouzeid, *Pakistan's Acid Attack Victims*

8 *Progress for Children: A Report Card on Adolescents*, 32.

9 Bhatti, et al. *Domestic Violence*.

10 Shaheed and Hussain, *Interrogating the Norms*, 94.

depending on whether they view culture one-dimensionally as a static road block or as what it actually is: a malleable “set of practices and meanings shaped by institutional contexts”.¹¹ Pakistan tends to lean towards the first view.

Nationalist Construction

“The role and status of women are not isolated social phenomenon, and women’s struggles do not take place in a vacuum. Both are determined, enhanced or impeded, by the social, political and economic development of a people’s history.”¹² It is beyond the scope of this paper to go into an in-depth discussion of Pakistan’s history but it is pertinent to at least discuss the rationale behind Pakistan’s creation.

Pakistan’s creation was based on the ideology that Muslims were a distinct group in India with a “heritage, culture and tradition(s) different from those groups from which they wished to separate.”¹³ This necessitated the creation and support of a homogenous identity that could stand in opposition to colonialism and the Hindu majority in India. Islam was at the center of this male-dominated nationalist construction and has continued to be used by “those in power and those out of it...for consolidating support or legitimizing force.”¹⁴

The problem with this construction is that, as in much of history, the responsibility for maintaining culture and traditions fell to the domain of women. A narrative was thus constructed which stressed the seemingly insurmountable divide between religious/spiritual and secular/material forces, privileging the former as the means of resistance, an almost binary, artificial opposition which conveniently sought to ignore or discredit any contradictory ideas. Shahnaz Rouse’s position is that such a construction worked to control women by subsuming their interests under the broader nationalist group (as indeed, any nationalist construction is apt to do to oppressed groups in a community). It supported a problematic public/private divide between the roles of the sexes while giving overarching importance to one identity, that is, religious.¹⁵

11 Merry, *Human Rights*.

12 Mumtaz and Shaheed, *Women of Pakistan*.

13 Shahnaz Rouse in Jayawardena and de Alwis, *Embodied Violence*.

14 Mumtaz and Shaheed, *Women of Pakistan*.

15 Shahnaz Rouse in Jayawardena and de Alwis, *Embodied Violence*, 49.

Unfortunately, the narrative was not abandoned after independence because, much as before, it continued to differentiate Pakistan from India in the post-colonial period and served as a justification for the rule of the classes that took over from the British.¹⁶ A real federation where power would be shared by the constituent units was not created so that the “centralizing logic of the state was not mediated by the decentralizing imperative of a culturally differentiated nation.”¹⁷ The orthodox ulema entered the political arena immediately following independence making Islam central to all political debate in the country.¹⁸ Modernity was applied selectively leaving the private sphere more or less untouched.¹⁹ Thus, because Pakistan’s creation is tied, in some way, to religious identity and is often vigorously defended, it is hard to separate the separate religion from politics and this continues to have an adverse effect on women’s rights in the country.

Religion and Politics

Religion in the context of Pakistan’s history has frequently been used as a means of gaining or legitimizing access to power. Apart from citizenship of the state, a Muslim identity is the only shared identity of 97% of the population and is thus subject to manipulation by the elite to achieve their ends.²⁰ Jalal in her article “The Convenience of Subservience” describes this phenomenon thus:

So long as the British remained at the helm, political accommodation aimed at circumscribing state intervention in the domestic arena. With the departure of the colonial rulers, the state was the ultimate guarantor of the social order whose moral underpinnings were symbolized by women. The legitimacy of the state depended on its ability to play this role to the satisfaction of most, if not all, its citizens.²¹

16 Ibid.

17 Tambiah, *Women & Governance*.

18 Mumtaz and Shaheed, *Women of Pakistan*.

19 Tambiah, *Women & Governance*.

20 Khan, *Beyond Honour*, 144.

21 As cited in Khan, *Beyond Honour*, 143

Mumtaz and Shaheed are of the opinion that even though the founding fathers of Pakistan were modernists and disdainful of religious forces, they still made concessions to *maulvis* (“often, it seems that the term *maulvi* is used as an inclusive category encompassing the role of politico-religious parties as well as *maulvis* as individuals”²²) such as by changing Pakistan to an Islamic Republic under the 1956 constitution and giving religious scholars an advisory role in government. They attribute this to two reasons: a) the founding fathers did not foresee the importance religion would assume in the country in the future, built on the structure of earlier concessions, and b) religious forces had the potential to disrupt the law and order situation of the country (and did so). A third reason they consider is that the ruling elite might have seen some use in manipulating religion to gain leverage in internal power struggles.²³ Whatever the beginnings of Islam’s role in politics, once it gained the initial foothold, it proved unshakeable and gained more and more salience in the years to follow. It soon “became evident that it was not possible for any government to work outside the Islamic cultural framework”.²⁴ Islam, like the other two monotheistic religions, is “misogynistic, patriarchal and oppressive of women”.²⁵ These developments therefore meant that the state, in effect, was no longer neutral. The use of Islam in politics as a justification for gender discriminatory laws has proven hard to negotiate since few are willing to appear to stand against religion in the Muslim majority country.²⁶ The impact of religion on women’s rights and the law can be seen in the recent attempts by activists to introduce a Domestic Violence Bill in Pakistan which is discussed later in the paper. Before that, I want to outline just a few of the other tools used to define what it means to be a woman in Pakistan.

22 Tambiah, *Women & Governance*, 250.

23 Mumtaz and Shaheed, *Women in Pakistan*, 10; General Zia-ul-Haq and his Islamization campaign is often used as the prime example of the case of a ruler using religion as a strategic tool to legitimize and consolidate his hold on power in Pakistan but all Pakistani governments have used this strategy to a certain degree. For instance, Shaheed and Warraich (in Shaheed et al., eds., *Shaping Women’s Lives*) note that General Ayub Khan (imposed martial law in Pakistan and assumed power in 1958) who was “known for his dismissive attitude towards ‘backward *maulvis*”, nevertheless rallied *maulvis* to pass a fatwa against women’s eligibility to rule a country when Fatima Bhutto (sister of Pakistan’s founder, Muhammad Ali Jinnah) was touted as the leader by his opposition, a religious party called Jamaat-e-Islami. Jamaat-e-Islami countered by passing an opposite fatwa in favor of women’s rule in exceptional circumstances despite their earlier opposition to women’s rule and general antipathy to women’s rights. Expediency is thus often the order of the day for those in power in deciding when to recognize women’s rights and when to ignore them.

24 Mumtaz and Shaheed, *Women of Pakistan*.

25 Khan, *Beyond Honour*.

26 Shaheed and Hussain, *Negotiating the Norms*, 38.

Culture and Social Conditioning through Public and Private Spheres

Pakistani society is deeply patriarchal with ingrained biases against girls and women. This can be ascertained from the skewed sex ratio of females to males in the country: “only nine hundred females for every one thousand men, resulting from infanticide or feticide”.²⁷ Nearly all societal institutions support and promote patriarchal values. One of these values emerges in the controlling mechanism of stringently gendered public and private spheres. Tahira S. Khan traces the history of these divisions back to two earlier periods: first, the colonization of India by Muslims at the start of the eight century, and secondly, by Britishers in the 1700s. According to her, the Muslim colonization changed the form of the family unit by coloring it with religious interpretations of the proper “status, rights and roles” of Muslim women and transforming it to suit the interests of male Muslim elites.²⁸ The British colonization worsened the status of women not only through legislations²⁹ but also by resulting in the actions of Muslims who rallied around the protection of the domestic sphere from outside influences while the public sphere underwent a “modernizing” transformation. Since the Muslims had been defeated in the public sphere, Khan argues that the private sphere was now the only one where they could wield power. They did this by confining women to the home, controlling their marriages and access to economic activities and resources, and defining a good woman as one that was voiceless and invisible.

Tambiah explains the common perception in the country, prevalent even today, that

A demure, chaste woman cannot, by definition, also be a public actor. Complying with expectations of chastity and modesty means confining oneself to the domestic environs, not associating with men outside the family circle, and especially not engaging in any behavior that may be interpreted as shameless, immodest, and therefore, immoral.³⁰

Even though these spheres interact with other factors such as class, caste, ethnicity, religion and rural/urban divisions, and have been contested by women all through its history, the

²⁷ Parrot and Cummings, *Forsaken Females*, 37.

²⁸ Khan, *Beyond Honour*, 140.

²⁹ For an example, see Lata Mani’s essay “Contentious Traditions: The Debate on Sati in Colonial India” in *Recasting Women*, which depicts how the British prioritized and regulated scripture over regional variations in customs creating blocks of religious identities and pitting them against each other. The British were instrumental in carving out the idea of a homogenous cultural identity (interchangeable with ‘religion’ and ‘tradition’) distinct from material life that “erased the agency of those [women] involved in such practices” while retaining the will of men.

³⁰ Tambiah, *Women & Governance*, 7.

divisions are still overwhelmingly pervasive. Often any gains women make in mobility are those that are “allowed” by male members of their family and are strictly regulated. Thus, women might get permission to work outside the home, as long as the benefit accrues to the home, or to attend religious functions which are deemed acceptable areas of female participation.³¹

Another factor that played an increasing role in the subjugation of women was “the rise of economy and the growth of landed property”. This essentially necessitated control of women’s sexuality and right to marry (granted by Islam) since by marrying the wrong man, the woman could reduce the economic assets of the patrilineal family. Marriages arranged by families rather than by a man and woman are still the norm in Pakistan. In fact, eloping with another man is, to this day, one of the major reasons behind “honor” killings.³²

The different treatment of the sexes “reflects the division between those who hold authority and those who do not.”³³ Differences in mobility and segregation of the sexes are a clear indication of an unequal distribution of power. Since it is a question of power, and women cannot gain power without men conceding it, quite often, the implications of violating these artificially created boundaries and norms can be severe as men may use force or violence to keep women from appearing in public or participating in activities which they consider to be immoral. However, violence is not the only means of control. Dissemination of a notion of the ideal woman as sexually/morally pure and obedient through patriarchal institutions such as the family, education system, law, media and religious institutions plays a major role in the subjugation of women. Violations of gendered norms provoke outrage, punishment and condemnation not only from within the family but from society as a whole. Men who are seen to be unable to control the women in their lives are looked down upon and sometimes may commit crimes against the women in their family solely out of societal pressure rather than of their own desire to punish them. There are virtually no support systems for a transgressing, rebellious woman. On the other hand, women who conform to gendered notions of correct behavior are rewarded with privileges.³⁴ Thus, women learn early on that their value in life comes from their subservient

31Tambiah, *Women & Governance*, 8-9 and 199-200; Ironically enough, distinguishing between what was acceptable or not vis-à-vis women’s public participation also has an impact on women’s groups. For instance, Shaheed and Warraich (as cited in Shaheed et al., eds., *Shaping Women’s Lives*) write that, “early on, the establishment started distinguishing between those undertaking activities seen as non-threatening cum nation-building and those considered too radical for the times.” The first category of women’s groups, “fully endorsed by the government”, flourished and survived while the latter, such as the Pakistan Women’s National Guard (PWNG) and the Pakistan’s Women’s Naval Reserve (PWNRR) had to shut down.

32 Khan, *Beyond Honour*, 142.

33 Fatima Mernissi, as cited in Khan, *Beyond Honor*.

34 Khan, *Beyond Honour*.

roles in the domestic sphere as daughters, sisters, wives and mothers and that any disobedience or assertion may bring about pain, suffering, and, even, death.³⁵ This socialization runs so deep that older women often side with men against younger women who overstep alleged bounds and may even take an active role in acting out violence against rebellious female family members.³⁶

Domestic Violence

“Ever since I was married nearly seven years ago, I have been slapped, kicked or burned virtually every day. Once or twice a week, my husband decides to stub me with lit cigarettes,” she told reporters in Multan. Saadia said her ‘misdemeanors’ included cooking food which was tasteless or speaking too loudly on the telephone.

“It is not something one complains about because it is the same story in every third house. It is a rare village woman, whose husband does not beat her,” Sadia said. “What I cannot stand is that my husband now beats my daughters because he says they must learn obedience,” she added.

Psychologist Asma Khan said that women seldom considered even searching for a way out. “Domestic abuse is so common in Pakistan that women from both the upper and lower classes consider it their duty to just take it. This is not the West, where women are encouraged to leave the men who beat them file charges against them. Here the girls’ own family will be the first to tell her to ‘face reality and do her duty,’” she added.³⁷

“Domestic violence is by far the most common form of gender based violence.” Stove burnings, acid crimes, “honor” killings, marital rapes and sexual assaults, physical abuse, verbal abuse, economic abuse, manipulation and control are all different forms of domestic violence. Collecting statistics on domestic violence is difficult because women are socialized to accept it as the right of their husbands, as a phenomenon that is normal, and are, therefore, unlikely to

³⁵ Jayawardena and Alwis, *Embodied Violence*.

³⁶ Khan, *Beyond Honour*.

³⁷ PPI, *Domestic Violence*

report it.³⁸ Women also fail to report domestic violence for fear of social stigma, retribution, dependence on husband for economic sustenance and mistrust (often rightly so) of the local criminal justice system.³⁹ “The matter is widely considered to be culturally sensitive and is therefore rarely and only reluctantly investigated . . . no nationally representative and only a very few small-sample clinical surveys have been conducted by individual scientists.”⁴⁰

Of the studies that exist, a report by United Nations found that 50% of women in Pakistan suffered from physical violence and 90% are psychologically abused by their husbands.⁴¹ A 2009 study by the US State Department confirmed these statistics reporting that 50% of urban women admit that their husbands have physically assaulted them.⁴² A survey by Thomson Reuters Foundation’s Trust Law conducted in June 2011 reveals that “Pakistan is the world’s third most dangerous country for women after Afghanistan and the Democratic Republic of Congo, with 90 percent of women suffering domestic violence.”⁴³ Human Rights Watch estimates the figure to be between 70-95%.⁴⁴ HRCP and a study by the Women’s Ministry also state that at least 80% of Pakistani women suffer from some form of domestic violence during

38 A recent report by UNICEF titled “Progress for Children: A Report Card on Adolescents” revealed that “nearly 50 per cent of girls and women aged 15–49 [in developing countries] believe that wife-beating is justified under certain circumstances; this percentage remains virtually the same whether those surveyed are older or younger – that is, girls aged 15–19 hold the same views as women aged 45–49”. An even higher number of boys think domestic violence can be justified under certain circumstances. The circumstances used as examples in the survey were “if his wife burns the food, argues with him, goes out without telling him, neglects the children or refuses sexual relations”.

39 Bhatti et al., *Domestic Violence*.

40 Zakat et al., *Spousal Violence*.

41 Niaz, as cited in Chumil et al., *Struggle for Rights*.

42 *50% Pakistani Urban Women*.

43 PPI, *Domestic Violence*.

44 Burney, *Crime or Custom?*, 102.

their life⁴⁵ with the government's Commission of Inquiry for Women describing it as the "most pervasive violation of human rights"⁴⁶ in the country.

However, despite the exceedingly high rates of domestic violence in Pakistan, Human Rights Watch discovered that "domestic violence cases were virtually never investigated or prosecuted"⁴⁷ even when they fell within the jurisdiction of criminal law such as in the case of assault or attempted murder because of biased attitudes, and lack of knowledge and training of doctors, police officers, lawyers and judges. Victims face harassment, intimidation and suspicion at every stage of the law enforcement process.⁴⁸ Moreover, passing legislation against domestic violence as a whole has proven to be difficult. Although Pakistan's National Assembly unanimously passed the Domestic Violence (Prevention and Protection) Bill on August 4, 2009, the Senate did not do so within the 3 months mandated by the constitution which allowed the bill to lapse.⁴⁹ The reason for this failure to pass the bill has been attributed to the Council of Islamic Ideology, a constitutional body which advises the government on Shariah law, which intervened to express concern over its passage. The CII deemed the bill threatening to the sanctity of the home and warned that it would encourage divorces in the country.⁵⁰ The bill was therefore sent to the Mediation Committee for further deliberation till the 18th Amendment, passed in April 2010, delegated all legislation related to women to the domain of provinces.⁵¹

The bill has been "under debate, revision and modification by Committees of both Houses of the present Parliament for over three years now, and around ten years in all."⁵² It was tabled before

45 Khan, *Country Report*; Burney, *Crime or Custom?*, 108.

46 As cited in Burney, *Crime or Custom?*, 102.

47 Burney, *Crime or Custom?*, 3.

48 Burney, *Crime or Custom?*

49 Buckwalter-Poza, *Troubled History*.

50 Gill, *Can Legal Reforms Protect Women in Pakistan?*

51 Imran, *Senate approves bill against domestic violence*

52 Imran, *MPs Urged*.

the joint session of Parliament for the Islamabad Capital Territory (ICT) on April 4, 2012, and was once again blocked. Two major political parties of Pakistan, the Jamiat Ulema-e-Pakistan (JUF-I) and the Pakistan Muslim League Nawaz (PML-N), opposed the bill. While PML-N requested additional time to review the bill, which Dr. Bari considers to be a delaying tactic, the JUI blocked it on the grounds that it was antithetical to Islam, would promote vulgarity, lead to the disintegration of the family unit and prevent a father from disciplining his children.⁵³ Indeed, the JUI-F stated that it would fight “tooth and nail” to oppose it, attributing it to “Western” culture as opposed to an Islamic one with one of the senators, Fazlur Rehman, using the parliament floor to raise his voice against the evils propagated by “immoral ‘westernized’ women” and foreign funded NGOs.⁵⁴ On television, a JUI-F senator Dr. Ismail Buledi went so far as to say “What would you do if your wife arrived home at four in the morning and you didn’t even know where she had been?”⁵⁵ implying that the proper response would be beat her.

When religious parties block legislation designed to protect women, the future of women’s rights in Pakistan seems bleak. Religious leaders and parties have tremendous influence in Pakistan and countering them can be difficult as it can be perceived as an attack on Islam itself rather than against the misinterpretation and gross misuse of Quranic verses and hadith. Just as religious leaders can be a force of good, such as in the case of Mukhtar Mai, who kept silent after her rape till the local imam persuaded her to file charges against her rapists, they can also promote inequality between the sexes. Zakar, Zakar and Kramer’s study in 2011 on the perspectives of religious leaders in urban Lahore on domestic violence shows that most of their interviewed religious leaders denied the problem existed, dismissed all statistics, and engaged in victim-blaming. Sexist attitudes coming from a position of influence can be exceedingly damaging in a society where men often tend to view violence against women as having been provoked and, thus, not the perpetrator’s fault which leads to a host of problems ranging from non-reporting to miscarriage of justice.

Not all bills addressing violence against women have been unsuccessful though. Legislation against acid violence was recently passed in Pakistan in December 2011. It is interesting to note that the study discussed above also showed that nearly all the religious leaders in the small urban sample condemned extreme acts of violence against women, even though their opinions on “mild violence” was more differentiated. Acid crimes fall under the category of serious acts of violence as they cause permanent damage to a women’s body which may explain why the Acid Control and Acid Crime Prevention Bill has faced lesser opposition than the Domestic Violence (Prevention and Protection) Bill.

53 Bari, *Politics of Domestic Violence Bill*; Ali, *Is Curbing Domestic Violence a Conspiracy?*

54 Talat, *Yes to Domestic Violence Bill*

55 Nasir, *Not in the name of God*

Acid Violence

Acid Attacks as Gender-Based Violence

Gender-based violence is that which is directed against a woman because of her sex or which affects women disproportionately. Acid attacks fall under the category of gender-based violence since most of its victims are women and it is often directed against them as punishment for transgressing gender based roles and limitations.⁵⁶ Valerie Khan, chief of Acid Survivors Trust in Pakistan, estimates that 70% of acid attack victims are women, 30% men and boys.⁵⁷ Children are often collateral damage in such attacks.⁵⁸ The victims are usually between 14 and 25 years of age.⁵⁹

Acid crimes, alongside “honor” killings, are the most violent forms of gender-based violence present in Pakistan today. A UN report defines acid violence as any act of assault which uses acid. It recommends defining the crime in legislation using the mode of assault rather than the motivations behind it.⁶⁰ Acid attacks may result in the death of its victims. At the very least, they result in “severe pain, permanent disfigurement, subsequent infections, and often blindness in one or both eyes”⁶¹ along with a great deal of psychological trauma and economic hardship.

Most of these attacks occur in the subcontinent, especially in Bangladesh and Pakistan, and in Cambodia. There have also been cases in Afghanistan and parts of Europe and Africa.⁶² The geographical reach of the crime seems to be on the rise which is an alarming development.

⁵⁶ *Combating Acid Violence*.

⁵⁷ Imran, *Society Fails*.

⁵⁸ Abouzeid, *Pakistan's Acid Attack Victims*.

⁵⁹ *Facts*.

⁶⁰ *Good Practices in Legislation*.

⁶¹ *Acid Attacks*.

⁶² *Ibid*.

Importance of Studying the Phenomenon of Acid Violence

One of the reasons I have undertaken this study, apart from the severity of the crime, is the lack of research available, particularly in Pakistan's context (much more research has been undertaken on acid crimes in Bangladesh, for instance). Reliable data is hard to locate, not just because of a dearth of data collection and the inherent difficulties in collecting data from war-torn areas of the country, but also because of underreporting and misreporting due to "fear of retribution and social stigma".⁶³ Newspaper reportage is by and large restricted to reporting the relationship between the victims and the alleged motivation behind the crime, rather than delving into the societal causes of acid violence and attempting to disseminate information about the life-long consequences of such acts of violence.⁶⁴ Recently there has been greater press coverage due to the passing of the Acid Control and Acid Crime Prevention Bill in December 2011 but more research needs to be conducted, especially on site in Pakistan, not only from an anthropological, legal and social science perspective, but also from a medical perspective to decipher the best method of treating and rehabilitating victims.

Impact

Despite his years of training, Jawad admits that he was shocked, "I had not seen anything like it before. I had seen bigger burns and on a younger patient, but never facial burns of this nature. Unless acid is neutralised it just keeps going deeper and deeper into your skin. All of the patients I had treated had been the victims of accidents – this was attempted murder."⁶⁵

Acid is a highly corrosive substance. It melts through skin and bone resulting in extreme physical and mental torture. The perpetrators usually deliberately target the face "in order to maim, disfigure and blind".⁶⁶ If acid is not washed away immediately, it continues penetrating and "may even cause skeletal damage and organ failure".⁶⁷ Superficial burns are caused by contact with acid in only 5 short seconds while full thickness burns take a mere 30 seconds. Superficial burns cause more agony than deeper burns because in deeper burns the acid

⁶³ Abouzeid, *Pakistan's Acid Attack Victims*.

⁶⁴ Welsh, *Burning in Hell*.

⁶⁵ Khaleeli, *Saving Faces*.

⁶⁶ *Acid Violence*.

destroys nerve cells. Immediately after the attack, victims are also at risk of breathing failure because of inhaled acid fumes or a swelling of the neck which can close off the airway. Those who survive the attack are severely scarred and, in the months to come, have to deal with the risk of infections, such as septicemia or gangrene. Infections prevent burns from healing and can spread to healthy parts of the body, increasing the chances of subsequent death.⁶⁸

After emergency treatment, those who survive require immediate surgery because if dead skin is not removed in time, new skin has the potential to cause further deformity. Dead skin must also be removed from around the neck and arm pits to aid movement after an attack. Burn wounds can take anywhere from 3-12 months to heal.⁶⁹ Staged surgeries and physical therapy is essential to “ensure that scarred tissue remains elastic and does not harm other parts of the body”.⁷⁰ Surgery may also be needed to remove scar tissue from covering the nostrils and ear canals. Physical therapy is required to reduce the “lack of movement from scarring”.⁷¹ In the meantime, survivors face daily “discomforts such as skin tightening and severe itching”,⁷² and may have difficulty eating and drinking. More surgeries are needed after the burns have healed to restore the appearance of the survivor. These surgeries may need to be carried out over 2-3 years.⁷³ Medical treatment can be very expensive, and is, often, unaffordable or unavailable.⁷⁴

The psychological effects of acid attacks can be traumatic and long-lasting; some victims may live with their psychological symptoms their entire life because they are reminded of their

67 *Combating Acid Violence*.

68 *Combating Acid Violence*; Bollineni, *Gender-based Violence*; *Saving Face Viewer's Guide*, Shah in *Brutality by Acid* estimates that “95% of acid burn victims die immediately”.

69 *Combating Acid Violence*; Bollineni, *Gender-based Violence*.

70 *Combating Acid Violence*.

71 Bollineni, *Gender-based Violence*.

72 *Acid Violence*.

73 Bollineni, *Gender-based Violence*.

74 *Combating Acid Violence*.

trauma by their scars and disabilities. The psychological effects, it can be seen, are caused not only by the attack on the victims, but also as a result of living with the consequences of that attack.⁷⁵

Additionally, in many cases, permanent blindness, damage to hearing and loss of use of hands makes day to day routine difficult, if not impossible. Survivors face discrimination in finding employment. Physical deformities and disabilities also result in social ostracization and loss of independence. Survivors are often unable to continue their education. Some survivors find it hard to appear in public with their deformities and need to be rehabilitated. Many end up staying with their attackers out of economic dependence (often greatly enhanced due to disabilities) or fear of losing their children as in the following case:⁷⁶

“I have to stay with him because of the children. If I leave, he will take them”, said Shaminara, a mother of three whose abusive husband threw acid at her during a fight nearly 3 years ago. “He says I should be grateful that he is keeping me, when I’m so scarred and disfigured”, the 34-year old said. . . .

Every afternoon . . . she returns to her husband, who still beats her regularly and who was never punished for his crime. “Before I was burnt, I used to fight back, now I don’t fight back at all”, she said.⁷⁷

Women who were single at the time of the attack are unable to marry. In a society where many women depend on their husbands for their economic needs, this can mean a cycle of poverty and deprivation. Moreover, survivors who decide to register cases against their attackers often find the justice system inadequate with the police reluctant to register cases, high legal expenses and a time-consuming path to conviction.

The effects of acid attacks are not confined to the survivors alone. A journalist narrates the following story which shows how the threat of an acid attack can be used to keep women in check:

The most haunting part of my visit with Ms. Azar, aside from seeing her face, was a remark by her 12-year-old son, Ahsan Shah, who lovingly leads her around everywhere. He told me that in one house where they stayed for a time after the attack, a man upstairs used to beat his wife every day and taunt her, saying: “You

⁷⁵ Bollineni, *Gender-based Violence*.

⁷⁶ Chinoy and Junge, *Saving Face*.

⁷⁷ Solberg, *Pakistan moves to tackle Acid Violence*.

see the woman downstairs who was burned by her husband? I'll burn you just the same way."⁷⁸

Even if there is no verbalized threat, hearing about acid attacks occurring with impunity in the community means that a fear of acid attacks develops amongst the women in society in general which may prevent them from being active agents in their own lives and keep them from transgressing atrocious gender norms.

Causes

Manzoor's attack followed a row over doing the dishes.

"It was seven o'clock in the morning, and I had just finished making breakfast," she says.

"My daughter was crying so I picked her up, but her grandmother said: 'Leave her and wash the dishes.' I told her that I would wash them, and that we had the whole day ahead of us. After this, they started beating me. I was unconscious for four or five days. I woke up in hospital in Lahore."

While she lay unconscious, Manzoor was drenched in acid. It devoured her lower lip, neck and shoulders and left her chin fused to her chest.⁷⁹

"My husband and I often had arguments in the house," she said, in her hospital bed. "On that day before going to sleep he said 'you take too much pride in your beauty'. Then in the middle of the night he threw acid on me, and ran away."⁸⁰

Acid violence operates in a multi-causal framework. Najan u Din, from the Human Rights Commission of Pakistan, believes that acid violence needs to be considered against the background of violence against women in Pakistan as a whole.⁸¹ "Acid attacks occur where there is significant gender discrimination." This is why it was important to examine the patriarchy

⁷⁸ Kristof, *Terrorism that's Personal*.

⁷⁹ Orla, *Pakistan Acid Victims*.

⁸⁰ *Pakistani Women's Lives*.

⁸¹ Solberg, *Pakistan moves to tackle Acid Violence*.

and gender biases that are inherent in Pakistani society at the beginning of this paper. Such norms form the basis of gender-based violence of all kinds, including acid violence. Gender-based violence often works in a circle - it “not only reflects gender discrimination and inequality but also perpetuates it”.⁸² The preamble to the United Nations Declaration on the Elimination of Violence against Women, (DEVAW) 1993 recognizes that

. . . violence against women is a manifestation of historically unequal power relations between men and women, which have led to domination over and discrimination against women by men and to the prevention of the full advancement of women, and that violence against women is one of the crucial social mechanisms by which women are forced into a subordinate position compared with men . . .⁸³

In some cases, gender bias may even be the personal motivating factor behind an attack rather than just a part of the cultural background such as in the case of Najaf Sultana whose father burnt her when she was 5 because he did not want another daughter.⁸⁴

Working alongside “socio-cultural imperatives” such as discriminatory attitudes towards women are “personal imperatives” or motives for acid attacks.⁸⁵ A frequently cited motivation for these attacks is the refusal of marriage proposals or sexual advances. This can be linked to the patriarchal attitude of viewing women as property, “particularly after attackers have decided to marry or to become romantically involved with them”.⁸⁶ A second link can be made to notions of honor in society wherein a woman’s refusal to submit to a man’s demands can be viewed as “damaging to the man’s honor and reputation”⁸⁷, a state of being that can only be remedied through an act of violence.⁸⁸ The woman’s face is usually targeted in these attacks because a woman’s worth is linked to her appearance and, through it, to her marriageability and social

82 *Combating Acid Violence*.

83 *Developing Legislation*.

84 *Acid Attacks a Serious Concern in Pakistan*.

85 Welsh, *Burning in Hell*.

86 *Combating Acid Violence*; Also see *Criminalization of “Honour” Crimes*.

87 *Combating Acid Violence*.

status. Anwary explains these kinds of attacks in the following words regarding similar attacks in Bangladesh:

The tremendous emphasis on women's appearance is also responsible for acid attacks . . . By destroying women's appearance, attackers try to bolster the political power they feel was threatened when the women rejected their proposals. The men use women's appearance and sexuality to mark the boundaries between themselves and the women. Therefore, appearance seems to be a map of power for men and women.⁸⁹

Other reasons are domestic, dowry or family disputes in which case the attacker is usually the husband or in-laws.⁹⁰ This falls under the ambit of domestic violence. Although the exact motivations may vary, the underlying reason is usually a patriarchal attitude of control over women and an aversion to displays of assertiveness or autonomy from the women in one's family.⁹¹ Thus, acid attacks can be motivated by something as simple as a woman seeking divorce or being unable to balance work at home and work outside to the satisfaction of her husband.⁹² Anwary proposes that globalization may be contributing to an increase in acid attacks in Bangladesh because new forms of labor demands are contesting traditional division of labor between men and women. He asserts that globalization is making women more independent provoking a "reactionary backlash" from men due to the "erosion of patriarchal privilege".⁹³ Janet Welsh also states that "changing gender roles"⁹⁴ are one of the causes for acid attacks in India, Bangladesh and Cambodia. Pakistan is also facing pressures from

88 Welsh, *Burning in Hell*.

89 Anwary, *Acid Violence and Medical Care*.

90 Solberg, *Pakistan moves to tackle Acid Violence*.

91 *Combating Acid Violence*.

92 Kristof, *Terrorism that's Personal*; Anwary, *Acid Violence and Medical Care*.

93 Anwary, *Acid Violence and Medical Care*; Chowdhury, *Feminist Negotiations*.

94 Welsh, *Burning in Hell*.

globalization and undergoing similar transformations in society which could be contributing to the increase in violence against women.⁹⁵

Land, business or other feuds between families may also be a motivation behind acid attacks.⁹⁶ Often men attack the women related to their male enemies rather than their enemies themselves because it is perceived to be the greater “humiliation”.⁹⁷ Memuna Khan is one such acid attack victim. She was attacked as revenge for a dispute between another family and her own.⁹⁸ Such attacks can be very effective as the economic burden of medical treatments also has the potential to ruin entire families.

There is also a direct causal link to acid attacks as a choice of method of violence. One of the reasons acid attacks are increasing in number is the ease of obtaining acid for little expense. For instance, in Pakistan, “a bottle of acid can be purchased for a mere twenty rupees – less than half a United States dollar.”⁹⁹The acids used in attacks i.e. hydrochloric, sulfuric and nitric are also commonly used in local industries¹⁰⁰ (for instance, acid attacks are “particularly prevalent in the cotton-rich province of Punjab, where industrial strength sulphuric acid is inexpensive and used for cotton processing”¹⁰¹) and sulphuric acid can be extracted from car

⁹⁵ The change is gradual and severely contested but very palpable. See *Perspectives on Gender Roles*; Tambiah, *Women & Governance*, 205. Khan, *Beyond Honour*, 276 – 280.

⁹⁶ Shah, *Brutality by Acid*; *Good Practices in Legislation*; Solberg, *Pakistan moves to tackle Acid Violence*; *Combating Acid Violence*; Bangladesh and Pakistan have a shared history and similar cultures. In the case of Bangladesh, a study cited in *Combating Acid Violence in Bangladesh, India and Cambodia* found that “nearly 65% of perpetrators . . . were rejected suitors . . . and nearly 15% were husbands.” Acid Survivors Foundation also reveals that 39% of acid attacks in Bangladesh from 1999 – 2009 were a result of land or business disputes with the victim’s family (Ibid.). My analysis of news reports on acid attacks in Pakistan reveals a similar trend. For some examples of acid violence in Pakistan, see *Acid attacks a serious concern in Pakistan* by the Asian Human Rights Commission.

⁹⁷ Anwary, *Acid Violence and Medical Care*; Sexual assaults and rapes are also used to similarly settle scores between feuding families. The Mukhtara Mai case is one of the more famous examples of this phenomenon.

⁹⁸ *Acid Attacks a Serious Concern in Pakistan*.

⁹⁹ Shah, *Brutality by Acid*, 1-2.

¹⁰⁰ *Combating Acid Violence*.

¹⁰¹ Orenstein, *Acid Attack Victim*.

batteries or bought at auto shops.¹⁰² Acid attacks are also relatively simple to carry out. Acid can be thrown from a distance using a bottle, which does not resemble a weapon and can be easily carried in public. The entire attack is over in a matter of seconds and there is no sound.¹⁰³ For these reasons, acid violence is considered to be “an increasingly ‘effective’ way to perpetrate violence and control women and girls”.¹⁰⁴ Prosecutions for acid violence are abysmally low which also contributes to its increasing use as a form of violence.

Barriers to Justice

Zohra Yusuf, chair of Human Rights Commission of Pakistan, says that “only about 10% of cases are getting to court.”¹⁰⁵ From 1994 to 2008, perpetrators were convicted in only 2% out of 7800 cases of acid attacks.¹⁰⁶ According to Human Rights Watch, Pakistani women seeking redress for violence committed against them encounter a severe and persistent gender bias in the criminal justice system. There is a tendency to either deny that violence against women exists in society at all or to treat it as a minor offence, not worth of attention from officials. Many officials also dismiss victim narratives as lies. The statements provided by police, medical and legal officials documented by Human Rights Watch activists concerning assaults against women are shocking with rape victims treated with hostility and suspicion and domestic violence victims’ cases dismissed as self-inflicted wounds.¹⁰⁷

I don't believe in rape cases. Women's consent is always there . . . Our society does not allow rape. – Prosecutor, Lahore District Attorney's Office

102 Blick, *Disturbing Popularity of Acid Attacks*.

103 *Combating Acid Violence*.

104 Parrot and Cummings, *Forsaken Females*, 157.

105 *Pakistani Women's Lives*.

106 Kristof, *Terrorism That's Personal*.

107 Burney, *Crime or Custom?*, 46-51.

A woman who is well developed cannot be raped unless there are four or five men [involved]. One man cannot rape a woman . . . One-on-one cannot be rape unless a gun or other arms are used . . . Women bluff, women make up stories, women lie. – Head Medico-legal Officer, Karachi

The social set-up [in Pakistan] does not allow that women should be abused. – Director of Police Training Center, Lahore

Generally speaking, there can be no sex without the woman's consent – I am telling you this as a man. – Judge Javed Qaisar (he added that she could be raped if she was drugged or a child)

It is wrong of courts to believe women so that the poor man ends up in jail. – SHO, Factory Road police station, Lahore

Twenty-five percent of such women come with self-inflicted wounds. – Captain Memom on domestic violence victims¹⁰⁸

Domestic violence cases are also considered to be a private, family matter that should not be interfered in. Outright dismissal of complaints by police officials, especially in domestic violence cases which are usually not even considered a crime unless the injuries are substantial, is a norm. Acid attacks get the same treatment – “Most of the time, victims can't get a case registered by the police.”¹⁰⁹ Furthermore, judges are known to harass and threaten female victims in court. Human Rights Watch documented at least one case in which a judge threw out a domestic violence complaint based on a verse from the Quran which he interpreted as allowing a husband to beat his wife.¹¹⁰

Other reasons for a lack of justice are rampant corruption, unprofessionalism, ignorance and lack of trainings and gender sensitivity. Since the abuse of victims and her family by police officials is common, many victims prefer to suffer in silence rather than register a formal complaint at the police office. Even NGO activists bypass the police and prefer to go directly to magistrate to request an order for the police to register a complaint. In cases where a complaint or FIR (first information report) is registered, the investigation is usually botched, either due to

108 Burney, *Crime or Custom?*, 46-51.

109 *Pakistani Women's Lives*.

110 Burney, *Crime or Custom?*, 50-53, 57.

incompetence or because the police obtains bribes from the suspect, which hinders the legal process.¹¹¹

The Pakistani legal system also has its fair share of drawbacks. First of all, there is plurality of legal systems. It has been observed that “whenever the coexistence of multiple legal systems provides an option on the same issue, all too frequently the one least favorable to women is the one that is implemented.”¹¹² Pakistan has at least three separate legal systems:

1. High Courts in each of the four provinces. They “possess original supervisory jurisdiction – the authority to establish guidelines for the provinces’ lower civil and criminal courts.”¹¹³
2. Shariah Courts were established in 1978 as part of the High Courts to make sure no law or judgment ran contrary to Islamic principles. The Shariah Courts cause huge problems as the same case may fall under the jurisdiction of both High Courts and Shariah Courts, which operate under different legal standards and might therefore pass different judgments. Additionally, the Islamic knowledge of those serving on the Shariah Courts is often questionable. Their decision, therefore, has the potential to be based on a “particular judge’s social and gender bias, rather than a truly meaningful assessment of Islamic law.”¹¹⁴

Since 1991, Shariah Courts have also been granted constitutional power to remove “unIslamic laws”.¹¹⁵ Many women’s rights advocate in Pakistan believe that a woman can only get justice if religious interpretation of laws is left out of the criminal procedure since only men are allowed to interpret Islamic principles and the process is biased given the strong patriarchal and gender discriminatory social context.¹¹⁶

111 Burney, *Crime or Custom?*, 53-63.

112 Shaheed, *Controlled or Autonomous*.

113 Shah, *Brutality by Acid*, 3.

114 Ibid., 3.

115 Palo, *Charade of Change*.

116 Shah, *Brutality by Acid*, 3-4.

3. Tribal Courts or jirgas operate in the Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA). The Supreme and High Courts of the country have no jurisdiction in these areas. Decisions handed down by the Tribal Courts do not follow any law of the land and are arbitrary. The members of Tribal Courts do not require any formal legal training and are not elected; rather they derive their power from their status as the landholding elite class. It is almost impossible for a woman to get justice from these courts as a woman's status in these areas is very low and, once again, only men are allowed to make the decisions. There is no appeals mechanism so all decisions are final and binding. Acid attack cases do not seem to be prosecuted in FATA at all.¹¹⁷

Women's Human Rights Movement

Although Pakistani women have been politically and socially active in one form or another since before Pakistan's independence, they united as one in the under the formation of the Women's Action Forum after General Zia-ul-Haq imposed martial law on Pakistan in 1978, courted the support of Islamic parties for legitimacy and began his Islamization campaign (ironically in a Muslim majority country). "Women bore the brunt of this campaign because it appeared to be giving the license to pass judgment on the 'morality' on people in public spaces, the prime indicator of which seemed to be women's apparel and clothes."¹¹⁸ The Shariah Courts were established and several laws were passed during his regime which eroded women's rights in Pakistan to an alarming degree and continue to have a detrimental impact to this day. Violence against women became rampant as the state itself became complicit in subjugating and torturing women under the Hudood Ordinances which equated rape with adultery and mandated brutal punishments such as death by stoning and whipping. Under the new Law of Evidence, a woman's testimony was reduced to half of a man's and the Law of Qisas (vengeance) and Diyat (compensation or "blood money") was promulgated for physical violence and murders. Under the latter law, a victim or her family could demand retribution or compensation or choose to forgive the crime's perpetrator altogether. Murderers could now conceivably buy their way out of a sentence and many did. Moreover, this law prevented the maximum sentence in cases where the victim was related to the perpetrator.¹¹⁹ "honor" killings, thus, essentially became crimes

¹¹⁷ Ibid., 5.

¹¹⁸ Mumtaz and Shaheed, *Women in Pakistan*, 72.

¹¹⁹ Shaheed and Hussain, *Interrogating the Norms*, 3, 17, 24; Palo, *Charade of Change*.

without punishment as the murderers were frequently family members who were forgiven by other family members.

Killings are private offences, against the individual, not the state, so who will bring and pursue the charges of murder? If the father or brother kills a woman, the family of the girl will not pursue the case, as in their eyes no wrong has been done . . . The prosecution case collapses in almost all the scenarios of an honour killing: In *karo-kari* cases there is no aggrieved party to pursue the case, society as whole approves of the killing . . . If a brother kills his sister on the grounds of honour, her guardian, her father[,] can forgive his son.¹²⁰

All forms of violence against women rose as a direct result of these laws. Gender discriminatory state laws and actions signal that a woman is worth much less than a man and can be treated as such. The women's human rights movement that started in response to Zia-ul-Haq's regime took up the issue of violence against women (WAF called them "crimes against women") for the first time. Their agenda was not the result of outside or foreign influences. It began very much at home in response to atrocities committed in the country against women by the state. International human rights discourse was not used by WAF in making its demands. "The only exception to this were repeated calls for Pakistan to ratify CEDAW, starting with a March 8th Resolution in 1983." There were independent, parallel developments across the globe with regards to women's experiences with violence which resembled each other. This similarity was not consciously considered in Pakistan till the 1990s. Fareeda and Hussain argue that the areas where the Pakistani women's rights movement and the international women's rights movement converged were broad to begin with. While the core issue of violence concerned women everywhere, the ground realities in Pakistan and elsewhere were completely different and required different tactics. While internationally patriarchy was being criticized and an understanding of women's rights being developed, Pakistani women were targeting specific gender discriminatory laws. WAF did not have the time or the resources to engage in international debate while there were pressing issues at hand. It did not attend the Nairobi World Conference on Women in 1985. However, as a result of similar concerns and histories, WAF did develop regional linkages such as with Indian and Sri Lankan activists.¹²¹

Despite this, Pakistani women were not isolated from international rights developments. A Women's Right Committee was established in 1975 due to United Nations International Year of the Woman. Its first report lacked teeth but by the time it issued its second report in 1985, due to the rampant violation of women's rights in society, it was far more critical of Pakistani society's treatment of women. International rights discourse also impacted WAF terminology with the term "violence against women" replacing the locally coined "crimes against women" as early as 1989.

120 Hina Jilana, human rights activist, as cited in Palo, *Charade of Change*.

121 Shaheed and Hussain, *Interrogating the Norms*, 41-60, 87.

During the same time, WAF's demand that women-only police stations be established was inspired by Brazil's example. It eventually resulted in women's police stations being set-up years later in 1999. The group also used international press coverage and pressure to its advantage, for instance, publicizing the case of a young, blind rape victim about to be condemned for adultery locally and internationally led to the case's dismissal from the courts.¹²²

"Honor" crimes first came to light during the 1980s and continued into the 1990s. "Unlike rape that was recognized as a crime despite the silence and taboos", "honor" crimes, acid attacks, burning of women, etc., were not acknowledged as crimes or condemned by society. On the contrary, there was an underlying sense of acceptance of these acts of violence and murders. WAF was instrumental in collecting data and bringing these atrocities to public attention. After Zia-ul-Haq's regime ended, so did the WAF-led movement's unity but many new organizations were created, some by former WAF activists. Now that women no longer felt as threatened by state actions, they could finally devote more attention to international human rights discourse.¹²³

The Asian Women's Rights Council was established in 1988 to address the concerns of third world women. Later, in 1993, Pakistani women, including WAF activists, attended the NGO Forum and were part of the Women's Caucus in the UN World Conference on Human Rights in Vienna.¹²⁴ Gender-based violence was the central issue in the conference after a "worldwide petition campaign gathered over 300,000 signatures from 123 countries."¹²⁵ While Pakistani feminists recognized the worth of human rights language and the positive change that could be brought about through dialogue, exchange of information, and pressure from foreign governments, they were also cognizant that it could open the gate for "superpower intervention in national politics", a concern they expressed in their contribution to a position paper on the UDHR. In the subsequent two years, several regional networks were set-up. Pakistanis also prepared a Pakistan National Report for the 1995 UN Conference on Women in Beijing. This report was significant because, for the first time, Pakistani feminists, activists and scholars were asked by the new Secretary of the Women's ministry for their input in writing the report and the final report largely composed of their views. Amid other issues related to the position of Pakistani women in society, the report tackled the issue of violence against women demanding that the law enforcement agencies treat it as a crime and properly register and investigate all complaints, that doctors report all cases of burns and suspected domestic violence injuries to the police for them to take action against the attackers, and that medical centers be established

122 Ibid., 52, 75-89.

123 Ibid., 81, 93

124 Ibid., 95- 97.

125 Merry, *Human Rights*, 22.

for the treatment and support of victims of violence. As during the Vienna conference, there was a demand that Pakistan ratify CEDAW without reservation. Pakistan did end up ratifying CEDAW on 12 April 1996 but with major reservations. The Women's Ministry under the government of Benazir Bhutto decided to take steps to implement the Beijing Plan of Action but as the government changed in 1997, these plans were abandoned. In the meanwhile, women's organizations in Pakistan continued advocating for women's human rights.¹²⁶

There are several advantages of conducting international meetings on women's rights such as the generation of awareness, sharing of critical experiences which could be modified and implemented locally, and the use of the platform to challenge state positions and demand positive action. In Pakistan's context, a significant drawback of the meetings was that the amount of collaboration between activists and the government in preparing reports and the responsiveness of the government to activist concerns depended upon which political party was in charge at that moment in time. The next government could not be relied on to continue the plans that the former government had set into motion. Indeed, in Pakistan, there is a trend for a succeeding government to sometimes go as far as to undo the work of the previous government simply to differentiate themselves from their rival's strategies.

People and Organizations acting against Acid Violence

Several NGOs, both local and foreign, are currently working either exclusively with acid attack survivors or against violence against women as part of their broader human rights agenda. Some of the local NGOs are as follows:

Acid Survivors Foundation Pakistan

ASFP was established in 2006 with the aid of Acid Survivors Trust International which is a registered charity in England and Wales. ASFP provides legal, medical and psychological support for acid survivors while lobbying for an end to domestic and acid violence in Pakistan. It participated in the meetings that led to the passage of the Domestic Violence Bill in the National Assembly in 2009. Another of its services is capacity building through the training of medical staff in its own organization as well as others. ASFP also engages in data collection.¹²⁷

Aurat Foundation

¹²⁶ Shaheed and Hussain, *Interrogating the Norms*, 100 – 108.

¹²⁷ ASFP *About Us*; When I contacted Valerie Khan, Chair, of ASFP, she informed me that the organization was in the process of updating its records.

Aurat Foundation was set up in 1986 with the objective of women's empowerment. It engages in data collection, listing statistics of acid attacks alongside kidnappings, murders, domestic violence, "honor" killings, rapes, sexual assaults, and burnings in its press briefings and annual reports on violence against women. Alongside dissemination of information, it also counts capacity building and advocacy amongst its operational parameters.¹²⁸

Depilex smileagain Foundation

DSF is a support organization for acid attack survivors. Like ASFP, it provides legal, medical and psychological assistance, spreads awareness of the crime and advocates for an end to the violence. At the same time, it also helps survivors find jobs.¹²⁹

Human Rights Commission of Pakistan

HRCP was established in 1987 as an NGO working for the promotion of human rights in Pakistan. Its annual report addresses the problem of acid attacks and violence against women in general. Its aims are to work for the ratification and implementation of international human rights agreements by Pakistan, to increase awareness and support for human rights, to collaborate with international human rights bodies and to provide support to victims of human rights violations and to other NGOs working towards the same goals.¹³⁰

Progressive Women's Association

PWA has been in existence since 1985. It has been advocating for women's rights, fighting to eradicate discriminatory laws such as the Hudood Ordinances, and working towards an end to domestic violence. It runs a shelter for battered women by the name of AASRA and provides victims with medical and legal support. Initially set-up for the support of victims of rape, incest, domestic violence and "honor" killings, PWA added acid and burn victims to its agenda in 1994. PWA's work has received substantial press coverage through The National Geographic Channel's program *Honor Killings* by Michael Davie and the Op-Ed feature on acid attacks by Nicholas Kristof of The New York Times.¹³¹

128 *About AF.*

129 *DSF About Us.*

130 *HRCP About Us.*

131 Bennett, *Seven who Stretch their Reach*; Kristof, *Terrorism that's Personal*; Shahnaz Bukhari *Civil Courage Prize Address.*

Ansar Burney Trust

Established in 1980, the organization works for the promotion of human rights. It provides medical and legal support to acid attack survivors.¹³²

Abdul Sattar Edhi Foundation

The most respected NGO in Pakistan, Abdul Sattar Edhi Foundation was established in 1947 as a social welfare organization. Alongside running the largest ambulance service in the world, the organization also provides a host of other services such as an animal shelter; a missing person service; free dispensaries, kitchens, clinics, laboratories, and maternity homes; nursing training centers; rehabilitation centers; child adoption centers and Edhi homes for disabled people, orphans and domestic violence victims.¹³³

Saving Face

Apart from local and foreign NGOs, several people have been working for acid attack survivors in their individual capacities. For instance, Sharmeen Obaid Chinoy's Oscar-award winning documentary, *Saving Face*, highlights the roles of Sarkas Abbas, Advocate High court, in working to convict an acid attack perpetrator; Dr. Muhammad Jawad, in travelling from UK to Pakistan to operate on acid attack survivors for free and Marvi Memon, politician, in bringing a bill against acid violence to parliament. The documentary itself has contributed tremendously towards the dissemination of information regarding the plight of acid attack survivors and the people involved in remedial efforts. Its mission is to "leverage the film as a tool to gain support and momentum for the global campaign to end acid violence, in Pakistan and beyond."¹³⁴ The documentary's website has a viewer's guide to help people learn about acid violence and it links to a list of organizations combatting acid violence.

Journalists

132 Welsh, *Burning in Hell*, 50.

133 *Edhi Services*.

134 *Saving Face Mission*; See also Khan, *The Real Miracle Workers*

Journalists are an important agent of change for any campaign. WAF's women's rights movement had had an ally in the print media during Zia-ul-Haq's regime, for instance.¹³⁵ Activists, recognizing the power of the news medium, have called for media participation in its efforts to bring pressure on the government to control acid violence.¹³⁶ Right now, in the wake of the success of *Saving Face* and the tragic suicide of Fakhra Younus, a high-profile acid attack victim, in March 2012, not a day goes by without a newspaper printing an article on acid violence. However, most of the articles tend to be repetitive in nature and bring forth no new information or strategies to tackle the phenomenon. Nevertheless, they are advantageous because they make sure the issue stays in public eye and forces the government to take notice. It remains to be seen how long the strong publicity will continue.

It is pertinent to mention here that not all journalism has a positive impact. Journalists are as much a part of the patriarchal structures in society as any other person. Pakistani media is well-known for its sensationalizing of violence against women and its hounding of victims.¹³⁷ Recently, an anchor and columnist, Javed Chaudhry, after first writing a graphic account of the injuries of an acid attack victim, hinted in his April 1st op-ed, *Chala Goli* (Shoot!)¹³⁸, in the Urdu newspaper *Daily Express* that perhaps women should take responsibility for having acid thrown on them as well because they provoke men to take such horrific measures. While narrating only the perpetrator's side of the story, the author even went so far as to suggest that perhaps an "honor" killing would have been more suitable, even compassionate, telling the attacker "*Intiqaam lena tha to seedha sadha qatal kar detay*"¹³⁹ (If you wanted revenge, you could have just killed her). Ayesha Haroon states that it is tragic that "we are still trying to prove that throwing acid on a human being is a heinous crime and there can be no justification for it".¹⁴⁰ Abira Ashfaq writes about the article:

. . . In this bizarre piece of writing, Chaudhry seems to be unabashedly generating

135 Shaheed and Hussain, *Interrogating the Norms*, 91.

136 Khan, *Pressure to get Amendment Passed*.

137 Shaheed and Hussain, *Interrogating the Norms*, 85-86;

138 Choudhry, *Chala Goli*.

139 Ashfaq, *Misogynistic Excuse*.

140 Haroon, *Media Misogyny*.

support for him [the attacker] and his crime, building consensus for violence against women and the male right to exert physical power over women who “stray”.

We live in a patriarchal society where incidents of domestic violence are commonplace. However, to indirectly suggest that victims somehow deserve to have their faces destroyed, in a most painful and brutalizing way, is outright irresponsible, criminal, and derogatory to the decades of struggle by the women in Pakistan.

Government Officials

The support of government officials, such as parliamentarians, judges, police chiefs, is critical for the success of any campaign that aims to introduce legislative change and requires the support of the government for its success. Support from people in positions of influence is an important element of top-down strategies. Fortunately, there are several government officials who are sufficiently concerned about acid attacks to raise their voices against the phenomenon. Some of these officials are mentioned in the next section.

The government has also been providing free care to acid attack survivors through a burns center in Islamabad which was opened in 2007.¹⁴¹

Criminalizing Acid Attacks

Naila Farhat, a 13 year old girl, was burnt by acid by a rejected suitor, Irshad Hussein, and, his accomplice, her science teacher Mazhar Hussein, on her way home from school in 2003. The science teacher was released after he allegedly bribed police officials but Irshad Hussein was sentenced to 12 years imprisonment and a fine of 1.2 million rupees. “He appealed and convinced a High Court to reduce his sentence to four years and 1.1 million rupees, with the proviso that if he agreed to pay the fine, his jail term would be voided and he would be released.”¹⁴²

Not accepting the new judgment, Naila took the case to the Supreme Court which upheld the earlier verdict in November 2009. It was the first acid attack victory in the Supreme Court and in his ruling, Chief Justice Iftikhar Muhammad Chaudhry, asked the government to pass new legislation restricting the sale of acid and imposing tougher sentences for acid violence perpetrators. As a result of the verdict and years of lobbying by NGOs and women’s human rights activists, three women parliamentarians, Marvi Memon, Shahnaz Sheikh and Anusha Rehman Khan, filed an Acid Control and Acid Crime Prevention Act in Parliament in 2010.¹⁴³ The Act was “supported, researched, and financed by several women’s rights organizations, including ASF, the United Nations Development Fund for Women, and Pakistan’s Ministry of

141 Khan, *The Real Miracle Workers*.

142 Abouzeid, *Pakistan’s Acid-Attack Victims*.

Women Development.”¹⁴⁴ It was unanimously passed by the National Assembly in May 2011 and by the senate in December 2011.¹⁴⁵ The bill states, “Whoever causes hurt by corrosive substance shall be punished with imprisonment for life or imprisonment of either description which shall not be less than fourteen years with a minimum fine of Rs.1 million.”¹⁴⁶ The bill also added a sentence of up to 1 year or a fine of 100,000 rupees or both for those convicted of selling acid to unlicensed buyers. Previously the fine for the offence was a mere 500 rupees or about 6 dollars.¹⁴⁷

It is too soon to tell whether the new legislation will have any impact on reducing acid crimes. However, early reports indicate the legislation is not having the desired effect. Marvi Memon, the primary author of the bill, believes that most attackers are still not convicted because they can bribe police officials.¹⁴⁸ Other parliamentarians believe that the legislation is not tough enough and the death penalty should be the maximum recommended punishment instead of a life sentence, as is the case in Bangladesh.¹⁴⁹

What more can be done?

The main reason the campaign for the eradication of acid attacks is not bearing fruit is that the root cause, the patriarchal social order, is not being tackled. Endeavoring to change the mindset of people is a huge undertaking but the only one which will have any long-term effect. As a signatory to CEDAW, it is the obligation of the Pakistani government to ensure that women are protected and “to improve the de facto position of women through concrete and effective

¹⁴³ Ebrahim, *Law against Acid Attacks*; Khan, *Women-specific Bills Passed*; Abouzeid, *Pakistan’s Acid-Attack Victims*.

¹⁴⁴ Orenstein, *Acid Attack Victim*.

¹⁴⁵ Imran, *Acid Control & Acid Crime*; Khan, *Women-specific Bills Passed*.

¹⁴⁶ Khan, *Women-specific Bills Passed*.

¹⁴⁷ Orenstein, *Acid Attack Victim*.

¹⁴⁸ *Pakistani Women’s Lives Destroyed*.

¹⁴⁹ Gishkori, *Lawmakers Agree*; Anwary, *Acid Violence and Medical Care*.

policies and programmes, and to address prevailing gender inequality and persistent gender stereotypes that are perpetuated in law, societal structures, institutions, and by individual actors”.¹⁵⁰ Alongside broader societal measures, several steps can be taken concurrently to make sure that the new acid violence legislation is more effective and survivors are better taken care of.

Bangladesh introduced the Acid Control Act (ACA) and the Acid Crime Control Act (ACCA) in 2002. Under ACA, the “unlicensed production, import, transport, storage, sale, and use of acid can result in a prison term of 3-10 years”. The ACCA introduced tougher penalties for acid violence and a dedicated judicial procedure for acid violence cases.¹⁵¹ Despite a low rate of conviction and inadequate medical facilities, the government’s commitment and the work of NGOs and activists has seen acid attacks decline from about five hundred in 2002 to a hundred in 2010.¹⁵² The Bangladeshi model is not perfect but Pakistan can still learn from it. The following are certain recommendations based on Bangladesh’s experience, academic papers and NGO strategies:

Legislation

Pakistan may consider treating acid attacks as attempted murder, as Indian legislators have been debating, since they are pre-meditated crimes which result in either death or permanent injury. The maximum sentence may also be increased to the death penalty, such as is the case in Bangladesh, to deter the crime. Bangladesh has forty acid violence criminals on death row.¹⁵³ However, death penalty is in itself a brutal punishment and 88% of U.S. criminologists do not believe it is a greater deterrent to murders than long imprisonment so this move needs to be carefully considered.¹⁵⁴ In the Indian state of Karnataka, life imprisonment seems to be deterring people from committing acid violence so that may be sufficient as a maximum sentence.¹⁵⁵

150 *Domestic Violence Legislation.*

151 *Saving Face Viewer’s Guide.*

152 *Campaigns against Acid Violence.*

153 Shah, *Brutality by Acid.*

154 *Do Executions Lower Homicide Rates?*

155 *Combating Acid Violence.*

However, the sentence for the unlawful sale of acids should be increased. For instance, it can be raised to a minimum of three years and a fine of 300,000 to a maximum of 10 years and a fine of one million rupees.

Moreover, the Domestic Violence Bill should be passed as soon as possible to show a zero tolerance policy of the government for women's human rights violations. To deal with religious objections to the bill, the government could obtain the support of progressive Islamic clerics or Islamic universities and consider the domestic violence legislation in other Muslim countries, such as Malaysia and Indonesia.¹⁵⁶

Implementation

The Acid Control and Acid Crime Prevention Act has been criticized for not defining the "role of the law enforcement agencies or mechanisms for regulating and monitoring acid trade".¹⁵⁷ This should be corrected to facilitate the working of the law. A regulatory body should be set-up to gather information from all stakeholders, introduce policies for acid management, devise strategies for the achievement of legislative objectives and oversee implementation.¹⁵⁸ Bangladesh has established a National Acid Control Council (NACC) for the implementation of its acid attack laws with district committees operating at the local level. The NACC includes government officials, women's rights activists, media personnel, medical professionals, and lawyers. India is also looking into setting up a National Acid Attack Victim's Assistance Board.¹⁵⁹

Monitoring

A separate body should be established for the purpose of monitoring and evaluation. It can be created to monitor the implementation of all legislation relating to violence against women including the Protection against Harassment of Women at Workplace Act 2010 and the Domestic Violence Bill (when it is passed).

The Police and Protective Measures

156 *Making Domestic Violence a Crime.*

157 Sana Masood, lawyer at ASFP, as cited in Ebrahim, *Pakistan: Women Intensify Push*

158 *Developing Legislation.*

159 *Combating Acid Violence*; Bollineni, *Gender-based Violence.*

Laws will never be taken seriously unless they are implemented. This, first of all, requires “political will”¹⁶⁰ and an overhaul of the police system. Currently, the police system is corrupt and inefficient. Some suggestions are a more stringent recruitment policy requiring a certain level of education to qualify as an officer; trainings that range from gender-sensitivity to policy implementation; better pay scales to eliminate corruption; eradication of “the influence of politicians in the recruitment and promotion of police personnel”¹⁶¹ to ensure that the system is based on merit and powerful perpetrators do not get away with crimes; adequate resources to conduct proper investigations; the recruitment of more female officers to reduce the abuse of women at police stations and the opening of more women police stations so that women find it easier to approach the police for assistance.¹⁶² Bangladesh has partially taken steps to address the patriarchal attitude of the police by setting up a female-staffed Victim Support Centre through the Police Reform Program in 2009 in order to “remove social and cultural barriers and enhance accessibility to report crimes against women and children.”¹⁶³ Police should also be “encouraged to file criminal cases suo motu”.¹⁶⁴

According to a study in Bangladesh, “perpetrators threatened 91% of the victims prior to the attack, and over 50% of victims filed a complaint with the police” and some even threatened them after the attack if they attempted to file criminal charges. Pakistan should consider implementing a proper “victim and witness protection program”¹⁶⁵ or introducing the concept of protection orders for the safety of women threatened with violence. It should also consider following the example of Bangladesh in making police officers responsible for the injuries that result due to their failure to protect victims. Bangladesh’s Acid Crime Control Tribunal “can investigate police officers whom they feel have failed to either prevent an acid attack from occurring or did not investigate a crime correctly. If the police officer is found to be in violation of the Act, that police officer may himself be subjected to legal action.”¹⁶⁶

160 *Pakistani Women’s Lives*.

161 Tambiah, *Women & Governance*, 248.

162 Tambiah, *Women & Governance*, 247-248.

163 *Combating Acid Violence*.

164 Bollineni, *Gender-based Violence*.

165 *Combating Acid Violence*.

Bangladeshi police also has a 30 day deadline, with the possibility of a 60-day extension, to conduct investigations. If the investigation is not completed in the stipulated time period, courts can request that another investigating officer be assigned to the case and may take action against the original investigating officer.¹⁶⁷ Pakistan should only implement timelines with penalty of legal action in case of delays if it can guarantee that its police force will not be understaffed. In Bangladesh, due to police officer's high workloads, they are only able to deliver poor results working under the deadline and the fear of legal action.¹⁶⁸

Stalking

UNIFEM considers stalking an act of violence and recommends defining it in legislation as “a pattern of harassing or threatening behaviors”.¹⁶⁹ Stalking should be understood as “a serious offence by family members, the police and the judiciary, and stalkers should be brought to book at an early stage”¹⁷⁰ since it often precedes violent, even fatal, attacks.

The Judiciary and Expedited Trials

The Pakistani judicial system is flawed. It is plagued with allegations of corruption and political influence. Thus, for acid violence to decline, lawyers, judges and policy makers must be sensitized on gender violence, be committed to their duties and have an in-depth understanding of the related laws.

Moreover, cases need to be resolved quickly to ensure timely justice. Bangladesh has established dedicated tribunals and requires the completion of court proceedings within 90

166 Shah, *Brutality by Acid*.

167 *Combating Acid Violence*.

168 Chowdhury, *Negotiating State*.

169 *Developing Legislation*

170 Bollineni, *Gender-based Violence*.

days.¹⁷¹ Its current turnaround time for cases is under a year.¹⁷² In contrast, Naila Farhat's case took 6 years to reach a final verdict. It is hoped that the new legislation will help expedite the judicial procedure.

Control of Acid & Corporate Responsibility

While the Acid Control and Acid Crime Prevention Act was passed unanimously by Parliament, the unlicensed sale of acid has not been regulated. Interior Minister Rehman Malik recently asked Parliament to issue strict orders for the regulation of acid sales and purchases in accordance with the new laws.¹⁷³

"Evidence suggests a correlation between legitimate business uses of acid and the incidence of acid attacks." In Pakistan, 77% of all attacks occur in parts of the Punjab province "where the cotton and garment industries are concentrated and acid is used in production." John Ruggie, the Special Representative of the Secretary-General on the issue of human rights and transnational corporation, has stressed that companies have a responsibility to act with due diligence in preventing human rights violations.¹⁷⁴ Towards this end, the report, *Combating Acid Violence in Bangladesh, India, and Cambodia*, lists the following steps that companies should take to control acid availability and misuse:

1. Develop and implement procedures that prevent acid theft.
2. Label acid containers to inform end-users of the legal consequences of misusing the acid.
3. "Companies that import products manufactured using acid from countries with high rates of acid attacks" should ensure that the companies they are buying from follow all due diligence procedures for the safe handling, labeling, storage, sale and disposal of acid.
4. Likewise, companies which supply acid to industries in countries with high rates of acid attacks should ensure that the companies they are selling to are following correct procedures in line with local laws.

171 *Combating Acid Violence*.

172 *Campaigns against Acid Violence*; Shah, *Brutality by Acid*.

173 Gishkori, *Lawmakers Agree*.

174 *Combating Acid Violence*.

First Aid and Health Campaigns

The wellbeing of acid violence survivors is paramount. “Public campaigns have been successful in educating residents throughout Bangladesh about what to do in case of an attack, as well as conveying the importance of finding competent medical care within three days.”¹⁷⁵ First responder medical kits can be created and donated to hospitals in areas with the highest rates of attacks.¹⁷⁶ Doctors and paramedics, who may be first responders to the attacks, need to be trained to recognize acid burns and provide relevant treatment as proper first aid can check further damage.

Reintegrating survivors into their community is important therefore NGOs and the media should inform people about the importance of treating survivors with respect instead of treating them as pariahs.¹⁷⁷ All this information can easily be incorporated into general awareness campaigns already run by NGOs in Pakistan.

Free Medical Treatments

The government needs to establish more dedicated acid burn units with plastic surgeons for the short and long-term care and rehabilitation of acid violence survivors. NGOs can reach out to plastic surgeons, both locally and internationally, who are willing to volunteer hours at their clinics.¹⁷⁸ Survivors should be provided full compensation for healthcare costs and legal assistance. A swift system needs to be developed for this so that there is no delay in treatment due to shortage of funds.

Survivors’ families should also be “offered psychological support . . . and be included in campaigns and focus groups.”¹⁷⁹

175 Swanson, *Acid Attacks*.

176 *Saving Face Viewer’s Guide*.

177 Swanson, *Acid Attacks*; Shah, *Brutality by Acid*.

178 Swanson, *Acid Attacks*.

179 Welsh, *Burning in Hell*.

Vocational Training and Economic Reintegration

Providing training and jobs to survivors, which are “sensitive to their physical and psychological needs”¹⁸⁰, will enhance their sense of empowerment and independence and boost their self-confidence.¹⁸¹

Support Groups

Support groups should be set-up to help survivors network and share experiences.

Public Awareness Raising and Education

In order to prevent attacks from occurring in the first place, the Bangladeshi government is targeting men in an awareness raising campaign and using local and international media to generate publicity and support while Bangladesh Acid Survivors Foundation (BASf) is developing linkages with grassroots NGOs (tackling other issues in society) for a community outreach program.¹⁸²

Pakistan can follow similar strategies to challenge gender-discriminatory belief systems and create zero-tolerance for violence in society. There are already plans underway to release the documentary, *Saving Face*, all over Pakistan with translations in regional languages. Sharmeen Obaid Chinoy said that the “priority is to share it with the rural population”.¹⁸³ The team behind the documentary in collaboration with local NGOs also plans to implement a project whereby religious leaders condemn acid violence in mosques, as is already being done with the support of Islamic Health in the UK.¹⁸⁴ Thus, partnerships can be formed with community and religious leaders to promote a culture of non-violence.

180 Ibid.

181 *Saving Face Viewer's Guide*.

182 *Campaigns against Acid Violence*.

183 Imran, *Society Fails*.

184 Imran, *Society Fails*.

Education is another important avenue of change. Human rights and gender issues should be a compulsory part of school and university curricula.¹⁸⁵

Media Training

Media personnel should receive gender-sensitivity training and be made aware of the need to condemn acid attacks so they do not sensationalize, glorify or justify violence; do not promote gender stereotypes, or harass victims. At the same time, media should be considered an important partner in the fight against human rights violations since it has the power to “influence and change social norms and behavior.”¹⁸⁶

Data Collection and Analysis

Currently, there are very few academic studies on the phenomenon of acid violence (even less so on Pakistan) and no nationwide data collection and monitoring system. Filling this gap would enable a deeper understanding of the causes leading to an increase in acid violence and how best to address the problem. The research and monitoring should also tackle other forms of violence against women as they are interconnected and based on similar structures in society. Criminal profiling of attackers is another avenue that can be looked into.¹⁸⁷

Synergies

The government, judiciary, NGOs, acid survivors, media, activists and grassroots communities should create partnerships and work together to achieve the best results in medical treatments, legal outcomes, social reintegration, public awareness and prevention. At the same time, they should also create linkages with regional and international groups and NGOs to share experiences and expertise.¹⁸⁸ Bangladeshi NGOs, Naipokkho and ASF, are good case-studies for this.¹⁸⁹

185 *Domestic Violence against Women*; Chowdhury, *Negotiating State*.

186 *Domestic Violence against Women*.

187 Welsh, *Burning in Hell; Saving Face Viewer's Guide*.

188 Welsh, *Burning in Hell*.

Coalition Building and Advocacy Campaigns

NGOs should continue to advocate for legislation and policies outlawing all forms of discrimination and violence against women. Enacting such laws will signal a strong commitment to women's equal rights and status on the part of the government.

Conclusion

Acid violence is a form of gender-based violence prohibited by both international and local laws. Despite this, it has been continuing almost unabated because of deep-rooted patriarchal structures, a weak law and order situation and the cheap availability of acid in markets. However, there have still been some positive developments. The first of these was the passage of the Acid Control and Acid Crime Prevention Act by the Pakistani government in December 2011 after years of lobbying and hard work by committed NGOs, activists, lawyers and health care providers. The efforts of NGOs and feminists are continuing to spread awareness of gender discrimination and inequalities in society, and assist survivors. The media is an active participant in information campaigns. A Pakistani documentary on acid violence won an Oscar and is poised to be released all over the country. The government also seems to be on board in the fight against acid violence – parliament unanimously adopted a resolution on March 27, 2012 seeking “comprehensive and dedicated laws”¹⁹⁰ against acid attack perpetrators. It remains to be seen whether all these actions will make a dent in Pakistan's acid attack cases or a much more concerted effort will be required.

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189 Chowdhury, *Feminist Negotiations*.

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