STUDY OF RESILIENCE, HAPPINESS AND LIFE SATISFACTION AMONG ACID ATTACK SURVIVORS

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Abstract

Introduction: Acid attack is a heinous crime, where the victims face lifelong trauma, with disfigurement of face and other body parts. This study focused on studying the different ways through which acid attack survivors dealt with their circumstances by understanding their levels of resilience, life satisfaction and happiness.

Method: Homogenous purposive sampling was used for the study. 30 survivors answered for the quantitative analysis of the three components, followed by interview of 10 of them who agreed to be part of the semi-structured interview.

Results: In the quantitative analysis, it was found that there was a significant correlation between happiness and resilience. In the interview, four major themes emerged. The first theme was the ability to adapt, with sub-themes of personal belief system, adaptive memories of the past, belief in the just world and social support received from their family and friends. The second theme was life satisfaction which was derived by living in the moment and being hopeful. The third theme was that of happiness as an experience, which was subjective in nature and needed the reintegration of the past memories. The last was that of the experience of being a victim, which was driven by the memories of the attack.

Conclusion: Findings of this study indicate how the survivors have adapted to their circumstances at hand, but have past memories of the attack. These findings can further help to generate insights on the kind of interventions needed for the rehabilitation of the survivors.

Keywords: Acid attack survivors, happiness, life satisfaction, resilience.

INTRODUCTION

Women have been subjected to a lot of crimes in India since a long time now, but they are often under-reported. One of the less reported and talked about crime is acid attack. It is a crime carried out mostly by men in order to uphold their manhood, making it a gender-based violence (Khan & Hussain, 2008). The goals of these attacks are to disfigure, maim, torture or kill the victim (Patel, 2014). The attacker’s aim is mostly to degrade the beauty of the women, which in Indian perspective is considered to be an asset (Lodha et al, 2020). The victims undergo physical damage along with a lot of psychological trauma and torture. Most often, mental health issues like depression, insomnia, substance abuse and anxiety are seen in these victims, but they go unnoticed, as the primary focus is on physical recovery (Mannan et al, 2006).

In India, there are about 500 cases of acid attack every year, out of which 85% of the victims are females (Lodha et al, 2020). Around the globe, there are about 1500 cases annually (Peck, 2012). Most of the victims of acid attack are women. Some of these attacks happen due to rejection for sexual advances or proposal of relationships by women. This shows that women is considered to be an asset till the time her beauty is intact, which when damaged leads her to be considered her as useless (Mittal et al, 2020).

Available literature on acid attack often point towards the incidental description of the attack, which is mainly focused on understanding the survivor’s pain and causes of the attack. The subjective experiences of the survivors and their emotions, their
levels of happiness, gratification, their well-being and overall life satisfaction after the attack has rarely been studied. Moreover, very limited research can be found for the acid attack victims, with regard to how they dealt with their trauma.

For dealing with the pain that they undergo post their attack, the acid attack survivors need to be resilient. Resiliency is often defined as the human ability to adapt to the trauma, hardship, adversity and ongoing life stressors (Newman, 2005). Resilience has three aspects to it: (a) the individuals are at high-risk and yet show better outcomes for the trauma, (b) they have positive adaptation, despite the trauma and (c) they have better recovery from the trauma [8]. Some resources when available to the survivors of trauma, they can act as protective factors (like social support, education, unstable family environment and stable income), but when these are absent from their lives, they can act as risk factors that make them less resilient [9]. Rutter (1990) identified some important factors of resiliency: personality characteristics, family cohesion, social support, and self-esteem, levels of autonomy and good temperament. For any kind of traumatic events, resilient people have less damaged pattern of self-efficacy for difficult events (Caffo & Belaise, 2003). Adaptive psychological mindset often makes them resilient, whereas maladaptive mindset often leads them to feel hopeless, suicidal and unhappy (Mittal et al, 2020).

Closely related to resilience is Happiness, which is the state of emotional and mental being, where the person experiences some pleasant experiences. It is the subjective experience of how much one likes the life that one leads. It acts as a protective factor against the risk of PTSD in severe trauma victim (Bryan et al, 2020). Happy people are found to be more open, warm and empathetic and have more satisfaction in their relationship with friends and family. In trauma victims, happiness is questionable because of their victimization. They could be victims of home violence, sexual assault, community violence or stalking, happening in different stages of their lives, leading to being unhappy in their adult lives (Diette et al, 2016). Factors that contribute significantly to a person being happy are the intimate relationships shared with people around. According to Argyle (2001), happiness consists of three factors: (a) the average level of satisfaction over the period of time, (b) the frequency and degree of the positive affect and (c) the absence of any negative effects such as depression and anxiety. However, in acid attack survivors all of these remain a grey area, as their social interactions, skills and mental health are deeply impacted by their disabilities, post their attack. This often leads them to develop maladaptive thought patterns, leading them to have thoughts of suicide (Mittal et al, 2020).

In acid attack survivors, because of the trauma that they have undergone, their life satisfaction remains a big question mark, as satisfaction is based on one’s past and the future, desire to change the life one leads and satisfaction with the significant views that other holds of one’s own life (Diener et al, 1999). Telman and Unsal (2004) defined life satisfaction as the happiness that one attains from one’s own life. In acid attack survivors, one’s life is being controlled by the factors outside of their own self, where they undergo pain and suffering without their own fault. How one looks at life determines one’s life satisfaction.

Most of the survivors in India are subjected to discrimination based on their facial and bodily disfigurements. They are distressed due to the unfair treatment they are met with, from the society, due to the attack, which was not their fault. Often times, they are also blamed for ‘inviting or provoking’ the attacker, which leads them to be highly distressed. Some of the other social problems were lack of employment opportunity due to their facial deformity and social isolation. Research has found that the percentage of burn and educational levels determine the life satisfaction and coping mechanism used by the survivors. The more severe the burn from the attack, the poorer was the life satisfaction (Pishnamazi et al, 2012).

Rationale of the Study

Acid attack victims in India become the victims of the atrocities as acid became the source of revenge, to disfigure and settle scores. They were also carried out due to family and personal relationship problems. Some of the acid attacks also have the cause unclear as the transgressors are unidentified.

The physical consequences of the acid attack are quite broad range from burning of the skin leading to permanent scars, which may require multiple surgeries. They are left with life-long reminders of the scar, with extensive range of psychological, emotional and social problems. The psychological consequences range from the post-traumatic effects of acid attack to depression, hyper vigilance, anxiety, insomnia and even suicidal thoughts. Most often, they are discriminated and ostracized by the society to a greater extent which degrades their post-traumatic growth. There is loss of hope and their levels of life satisfaction are usually very low.

Studies that have been done so far have been found to study the reasons for the attack. But their level of psychological growth & adaptation after their trauma remains a question, even though they have healed physically from their pain.
This research is a part of an intervention done with these survivors for a period of 3 months with 30 survivors, where their levels of resilience, life satisfaction and happiness were aimed to be increased. To explore these, quantitative assessment of these components were used with the survivors, followed by interviews of 10 survivors, where all the aspects of their lives were explored.

Researcher’s Positionality

As a woman in the Indian society, the first author herself has been subjected to many such instances of patriarchal practices, where men are considered to be the powerful and faced discrimination. The physical appearance of women in the Indian society is so over valued that any damage to the face leaves behind a lot of psycho-social ramifications for the victim of acid attack. When the first author got a chance to work with the acid attack survivors as part of her project, she realized that women with these kinds of scars face greater discrimination. They struggle to make a position in the society and earn a decent living. They get legal and physical aid but never psychological rehabilitation and support. In the field of Psychology, very few studies have been done with the aim of providing mental health support and rehabilitation to these victims. Consequently, the authors realized that there is an urgent need for mental health professionals to understand the levels of resilience these survivors have, their views on life satisfaction and happiness among the difficult to reach population, who need interventions in order to get psychological rehabilitation. The authors were driven by the idea to understand the qualities that these survivors’ posed which helped them deal with the attack and give them a space to talk and share about their victimization experience.

METHODOLOGY

Sampling

The sample of the study consisted of 30 acid attack victims, working in Sheroes Hangout Café, Agra, India. They were from different parts of the country, but working together in the café run by the Foundation. They were in the age range of 18-35 years, and have suffered burn injuries due to the acid attack.
Aim

To aim of this research is to study the relationship between Resilience, Life Satisfaction and Happiness among the acid attack victims. This was explored using both quantitative questionnaires and qualitative semi-structured interviews, conducted with the acid attack survivors.

Tools used

The Resilience Scale (Wagnild & Young, 1993).

This scale consisted of 25-items with responses ranging from strongly agree (1) to strongly disagree (7). This scale measured resiliency through five components: equanimity, perseverance, self-reliance, meaningfulness and existential aloneness. Cronbach’s alpha coefficient was found to be moderately high (0.73 to 0.91). For the validity of the scale, it was found to be significantly associated with morale, life satisfaction, self-esteem, depression and perceived stress. For scoring the scale, the interpretation was done in the following way: 101-115 (low resilience), 116-130 (moderately low resilience), 131-145 (moderately high resilience), 145-160 (high resilience) and 161-175 (very high resilience).

Subjective Happiness Scale (Lyubomirsky & Lepper, 1999).

The Subjective Happiness Scale (SHS) is a 4-item scale developed to measure global happiness levels. Greater score indicate greater subjective happiness. In 14 studies, the scale has been validated with a total sample of 2732 participants. For reliability, there is high internal consistency across communities of US, California and Russia. Good test-retest reliability was found and convergent and discriminant validity had confirmed the use of the construct of subjective happiness.

Satisfaction with Life Scale (Diener et al, 1985).

The Satisfaction with Life Scale is a 5-item scale which is designed to measure the global cognitive judgment about one’s own life satisfaction. It is a 7-point likert scale, with scores ranging from 7 (strongly agree) to 1 (strongly disagree). The scoring is kept continuous and the scores range from 5 to 35. The cut-off scores for the scale is: 31-35 (extremely satisfied), 26-30 (satisfied), 21-25 (slightly satisfied), 20 (neutral), 15-19 (slightly dissatisfied), 10-14 (dissatisfied) and 5-9 (extremely dissatisfied). The SWLS is shown to be a valid and reliable scale suited for use with wide range of age groups and applications (Pavot et al, 1991).

Semi-Structured Interview.

Out of the 30 survivors, 10 of the participants agreed for in-depth interview, talking about their experiences of the attack and their life, in general.

Ethical Consideration

For reaching out to the victims, approval was sorted from the Founder & Director of Sheroes Hangout Café, Agra. Participants were explained about the study variables and written consent from each of the participant was taken in advance. For interviews, the participants who were willing to interact, their interviews were done. All the interviews were done in separate sessions, individually. All the participants were assured that their verbatim would only be used for research purpose and their privacy would be maintained.

Procedure

For this study, homogenous sampling was done, where participants were part of Sheroes Hangout Café at Agra, under the Chhanv Foundation, an NGO working for rehabilitation of the acid attack survivors of the country. Informed consent was obtained from all the 30 participants and was informed about complete confidentiality of their identity. In order to ensure this, codes were assigned to each of the participant. The questionnaires were given by the first author, followed by interviewing 10 participants who agreed to be interviewed. During the first three visits, participants were given the questionnaire to be filled and rapport formation was done with them. From the fourth visit onwards, narratives were collected from the 10 participants, who shared their different life experiences post their attack. However, there were moments where few participants felt uneasy,
for which the interview was stopped. They were continued when the participants were ready to talk again. Some of the probing questions that were asked to them were: “What is your family’s view towards your life at the moment?”, “Who are your biggest strengths in this journey of recovery?” and “What is your view of the future and your life, in general?”

RESULTS & DATA ANALYSIS

For the research, quantitative assessment was done using the SPSS Version 20, through which variables of resiliency, life satisfaction and happiness were analyzed.

Table 1: Demographics of the participants of the study

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>Count (n=30)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Education</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Less than High School</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Graduation</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rural</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Background</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rural</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Urban</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18-25 years</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>26-35 years</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Legal Status of the Attacker</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Convicted</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Trial Ongoing</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No identification of attacker</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Years from Attack</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1-3 years</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3-6 years</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6 years &amp; above</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 1 shows the demographic details of the acid attack survivors who were part of the study.

Table 2: Correlation between Resilience, Life Satisfaction and Happiness among the acid attack victims.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variables</th>
<th>Resilience</th>
<th>Life Satisfaction</th>
<th>Happiness</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Resilience</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Life Satisfaction</td>
<td>.284</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Happiness</td>
<td>.391*</td>
<td>.096</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Correlation is significant at 0.05 level (2-tailed).

Table 2 represents the correlation between resilience, life satisfaction and happiness. It was seen that there is a significant relationship between happiness and resilience.

Table 3: Themes from the Interviews

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Themes</th>
<th>Sub-themes</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ability to Adapt</td>
<td>Personal Belief System</td>
<td>refers to the belief system of an individual to believe that they can do better, which leads them to adapt to the difficult situations.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
From the interview with the survivors, there were 4 major themes that were drawn out from the interview, through thematic analysis.

Themes in the Interview:

Ability to Adapt

It is the ability of an individual to adapt to the circumstances, rapidly learn new skills and change one’s behavior as per the instances.

Personal Beliefs: Personal beliefs refer to the stories we tell ourselves to define our personal sense of reality (Uso-Domenech & Nescolarde-Selva, 2016). This makes them believe in their ability to control the circumstances and reactions, which helps them to adapt through the difficult times.

“He might have attacked me to change my life, but he does not have control to change my life. I have control on it. Nobody else can change it, only I can change it. I have become strong and better version of myself after the attack.”

Adaptive Memories of the Past: It is the process of changing one’s own memories of the past to ways that it helps in survival and moving on from the memories of the painful past.

“I have understood that there is nothing good going down the same memory lane of the pain. I have started looking at it as what would have happened if there would have been no attack on me, I wouldn’t have the current group of friends I have at the moment. Right now, I just know that the attack added meaningful things to my life. My daughter and my mother have been the biggest strengths for me. They stood for me when the attack happened and still now. The attack added positive things in my life too”
Belief in the just world: It is the belief of the victims that the offenders will be punished by any means and they will get justice in some or the other way. Sometimes this might become pathological as well.

“Right after my attack, I didn’t recognize the attacker. Police officials kept asking me if I remember any details of that person. But I couldn’t remember anything. For a long time I kept thinking about it. But now, I have left it. Since I didn’t have a name or face to that person, I didn’t file a case. And now I have realized that it is no point thinking about it. God is there, he will be punished as and how he deserves.”

Social Support received: Their ability to adapt to their pain and past traumas is enhanced by the social support that they have received from the people around them.

“My family and my friends have stood for me in the journey of recovery. They have been my biggest support. My friends at Sheroes also helped me overcome post the attack. Looking at them I find strength and belief in my own self that I can definitely deal with all the pain, because I am not the only one having pain.”

“There have been many moments in my life post the attack that people have tried to sexually abuse me because of my vulnerability post the attack. It is my family and my closest friends who have saved me from this kind of situations.”

Life Satisfaction

It is the individual’s view of one’s own life and his perception towards the life, including the views of his past and the present.

Living in the moment: In this, life satisfaction of an individual is dependent on the individual’s ability to focus at the present moment, rather than the past and the future.

“I am going with the flow & I am happy with my current life. My life has been a roller coaster ride mostly but being in this age now I have realized that it is important to focus on the present rather than the past and the future, because if we focus too much on them, it will only be painful.”

Hopefulness: It is the ability of an individual to have hope despite the hardships that one faces.

“I am hopeful that something good is written for me despite my struggles & pains. I am hopeful that good things will happen in my life. It needs lot courage to be hopeful after all I have been through but I know that being hopeful gives me strength to do better.”

Happiness as an experience

Happiness is the positive emotional state of joy, contentment and satisfaction that one experiences.

A subjective experience: Happiness differs in each of the individuals. It is dependent on each of the individuals’ real life experiences, which in turn actually defines the subjective well-being of the individuals.

“Happiness for me is seeing something good happening despite the struggle that I have been through.”

“For me, happiness is small little things. There was a time when I was not able to cook food for her because of the pain of my attack. Now it matters a lot that I am able to do the basic things for her.”

“I am happy because I have a job, a family and some good friends. Happiness can be different for everyone, right? I feel my happiness is dependent on myself and the people around me.”

Reintegration of the past memories: Every individual has different perspectives of the memories of the acid attack.
“Initially I used to have a lot of nightmares and felt difficulty in sleeping. Now I have become used to all the pain; it doesn’t affect me much now. I am happy now.”

Experience of being a Victim

The perception of an individual towards their acid attack defines the way they see their life as.

Memories of the attack: The survivors get flashbacks or have memories relating to their attack.

“I feel like I am a victim for things I don’t deserve to be victim for. I still have memories of my attack fresh in my mind, like it runs as a movie in front of my eyes. I am undergoing so much of pain till now because of that day.”

These results indicate that the acid attack victims still undergo pain and despair. They have memories related to their past which haunt them.

DISCUSSION

Acid attack for a long time has not been read and researched upon. Most of the literature that is available, focused on the attack, issues and the struggles of the victims, rather than how and what these victims did to bounce out of the phase of struggle and difficulty.

The participants of this study were 30 female acid attack survivors, from which 10 survivors agreed for a detailed interview with the researcher. All the participants were in the age range of 18-35 years, out of which 21 did not finish high school and 9 finished graduation. As per the legal status of the attacker, 7 of their attacker were convicted, 18 have trial ongoing and 5 had no identification of the attacker, which in turn affected their mental status (Table 1).

This study attempted to understand their levels of resilience, life satisfaction and happiness post a vicious incident with them like acid attack, through quantitative and qualitative methods. This study is a part of rehabilitation and intervention program being done by the first author with these survivors, which continued for a period of 3 months. In this study, quantitative assessment was done using 3 questionnaires to check their levels of resilience, happiness and life satisfaction.

Results on Table 2 show the correlation between the three components measured from the questionnaires. It was found that there is a significant relationship between happiness and resilience, significant at 0.05 level. For the other components, no significant relationship was found. In a similar study done by Dewan & Sharma (2019), they also found a similar correlation among the acid attack survivors. It implies that when a survivor has good resilience to bounce back from their desperate pain, they are likely to be happy. However, there is no specific correlation between resilience and life satisfaction. Life satisfaction is determined by genetic factors and social cognitive mechanisms like environmental supports and self-efficacy and not just resilience (Lent et al, 2009). Even though a person might be resilient in face of any adverse situations, but he/she may not have high life satisfaction as life satisfaction is dependent on individual’s subjective experience of seeing their own well-being. Similarly, people who are happy may not always be having high life satisfaction & vice versa. This is because happiness is dependent on others and doing things for others, which may deplete our own happiness, but may lead to have high life satisfaction because doing things for others may make them feel worthy. Thus, happiness and life satisfaction diverge from each other significantly due to the existence of altruism, which may drive one to be satisfied in life but not necessarily happy (Kwang, 2022).

During their interview, one of the common themes that emerged was their ability to adapt, which enables them to make decisions and gain control over the adverse situations and behaviors by actually increasing their sense of self awareness and avoiding situations that increase their stress (Mittal et al, 2020). Components supporting their ability to adapt are their personal belief systems, adaptive memories of the past, belief in the just world and social support received by them.

Their personal belief system made the victims of acid attack believe that they can do better and adapt out of their difficulties. This can also be explained by them giving meaning to their experiences (Eiroa et al, 2011). Respondents started believing that if they believe in themselves that they can recover, they will grow out of their pain and suffering. Some of them believed that
before their attack, they were dependent on their husbands. However, post the attack they started believing that they can become independent by their own selves and were able to find something positive despite their struggle and suffering.

Adaptive memories of the acid attack survivors is helpful in emotional regulation, as selectively forgetting negative memories are helpful, however only mildly negative memories can be forgotten. They increase the subjective well-being and reduce the unpleasant affect (Norby, 2015). Some of the participants in this research mentioned that they do not want to recall all the painful memories, but they have memories that are related to their post-recovery phase. One of them mentioned that she met her husband during her stay in the hospital. He had helped her in the process of recovery. She said that her memories of the attack are pleasant now as it led to her ‘finding her soul mate’.

The belief in the just world makes the victims believe that the offender will meet the desired punishment that they deserve. High believers in just world believed all the events happening as just and were able to cope better from their anger and believed that they would be able to achieve their personal goals (Otto & Caludia, 2005). In some of the interviews, it was found that the victim didn’t know any details of the attacker and hence could not bring them to justice. For this, they start believing that the world is a just place and the offender would suffer by themselves. Some of the victims also reported that the judicial system would give them justice that they deserve. It brings people a sense of comfort (Haynes &olson, 2006) and is believed to be beneficial for one’s wellbeing (Correia & Vala, 2003).

The social support received by the survivors makes them adapt to the circumstances at hand. Similar findings have been found where high social support increases confidence and foster more coping strategies (Holahan et al, 1995). Miller & colleagues (2009) also found that threatening social connections like isolation and loneliness makes an individual more vulnerable to treat, while having them enhances their ability to adapt. All these components have been found to increase the adaptability of the individual affected by acid attack. The acid attack survivors, who were interviewed, reported that their social surrounding and support from their friends, family and their organization (Sheroes Hangout) where they worked, helped them in their physical and mental recovery from the after effects of the attack. In a research done on acid attack survivors, they found that family members provided support such as financial, emotional, physical and medico-legal support (Batool et al, 2020). The social support received by the survivors act as protection against the meta crimes against the victims. These women often become easy target of such crimes because they are considered ‘powerless’ (Sivabalan et al, 2022).

Participants reported life satisfaction as a combination of two most important factors: living in the moment and hopefulness. Life satisfaction is experienced by the people when there is a fit between the desired goals and their outcomes. One of the sub-themes found to enhance the life satisfaction in survivors is living in the moment. This is similar to the concept of mindfulness, which broadens attention and awareness, can recognize and appreciate pleasant moments for regulating positive emotions (Bryant, 1989). This also promotes positive experiences via cognitive reappraisal, increasing the effects of living at the moment on life satisfaction (Cheung & Ng, 2020). Some of the acid attack survivors did report not thinking much about the ‘future & going with the flow’. Being victims of acid attack, there can be multiple instances where these women are subjected to a lot of discrimination. They have seen violence and abuse, for which their faith in the future remains bleak, for which most of them reported that they prefer to go with the flow and take life as it comes.

Life satisfaction and hope are important parts of any process of dealing with trauma that is intense. In spinal cord injury patients, it was seen that being hopeful led to complete recovery, for a cure and for high life satisfaction (Pat, 2010). The acid attack survivors reported having hopes of getting a job, having a status in the society that is respectful and being treated as ‘normal’. Many of the survivors reported that it is the hope for a better future and for the sake of their family; they bounce back despite all the problems. One of the survivors mentioned that she is the sole bread-earner in her family as her parents are old and her kids are young, and her husband had left her after the attack. She mentioned that without hope for a better future and her striving quality, she wouldn’t have survived the toughest phase of her life.

In acid attack survivors, happiness is a subjective experience, where everybody differs on what brings happiness to them. Victims reported that they remain happy despite the pain in their physical body because they feel that choosing happiness is their own personal choice. In a study done by Migliorini and Tonge (2009), they found that in spinal cord injury victims, they were satisfied with their lives as a whole. It is possible that one may have low material assets and chronic illness, yet be happy with one’s life. Some of the victims also mentioned that their happiness is being driven by the closest family members and their friends. Their continuous support has helped them bounce back from their difficult phase of life and be happy at this moment.

Reintegration of the past memories is important as trauma shatters some of the most basic assumptions of the world (Manda, 2015). Few of the acid attack survivors mentioned that they do get flashbacks and sudden tremors thinking of their attack, but
have started accepting as part of their lives and these triggers have stopped affecting them much now. In any trauma, there are maladaptive, generalized and catastrophizing thoughts and beliefs, that become part of self, which make them believe that they are fragile, incompetent and the world is a scary place. For this, it is important that individuals integrate the traumatic memories into a coherent life narrative, where trauma related thoughts and emotions become better linked to specific circumstances and context, correcting the over-general appraisals of ever-present threat (Schauer et al, 2011). Victims of such severe intensity, through reintegration have benefits from these experiences, such as self-knowledge, rearranging their personal priorities and their personal relationships (Taylor, 1983). This also indicates the need of psychological rehabilitation for these survivors, which will help them in dealing with the painful memories of the attack.

An acid attack survivor has scars of the attack physically present in their body. It makes them believe that these scars are part of their lives now. Along with this, there are intense memories that are significantly part of their lives. These memories of the attack maybe enhanced traumatic memories (like remembering the smell of the acid, the place of the attack and so on). This is typical of how anyone remembers any intense traumatizing experience. They are often caused by the stress and defense circuits of our brain. However, they may not have any memory of other irrelevant details of the event (Schwabe, 2016). Some of the survivors reported that they remember the place of the attack, the smell of the hospital they were admitted and the voice of their favorite nurse, but cannot remember any other information such as their travel from the place of attack to the hospital, the times of suffering in their home and so on.

Therefore, these finding in this research indicate that victims of acid attack survived through a lot of pain and they did not get much of psychological rehabilitation. A lot of these victims have got resilient over time by their own selves. This study was a part of the greater intervention carried out by the first author, where she was continually engaged with their survivors in order to give them rehabilitation and support, through the support of the NGO. Participants who continued therapy and group session showed drastic improvements in their adaptability. These different themes are also indicative of the fact that the survivors have memories of their attack, even though they have successfully adapted to the circumstances at hand.

CONCLUSION

Acid attack is a heinous crime that has life-long consequences for the victim. Along with physical deformity, there is also a lot of suffering mentally and emotionally for the survivor. This study made an effort to understand the pain and suffering of these survivors and how they dealt with them. It also aimed to measure their current levels of resilience, life satisfaction and happiness. Their ability to adapt despite their circumstances, their perspectives towards life satisfaction and happiness and their experience of being a victim were explored in the study. This study was a part of another intervention being done by the first author along with the NGO, where psychological rehabilitation program was being implemented.

The insights from this study would act as the base for developing some of the most important interventions for the acid attack survivors, for psychologists and social workers who are interested in working for this population. These results can also be correlated to other forms of abuse suffered by women. However, this needs more investigation to conclude strongly on it.

The results of this study can used for further investigation and planning of interventions for women who are suffering from mental health issues or have been part of intense violence and attack scenes. This would draw out more mental health consequences and comprehensive outlay of intervention designs for such population. This study is expected to draw more visibility of active interventions into the lives of acid attack victims.

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