

Male Vitriolage: An Emerging Trend

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ABSTRACT

Acid attack or vitriolage is an abominable crime. It reveals the pure evil psyche of the perpetrator. Though the common victim of this wicked crime are females, but it would be wrong to completely exclude the males from its grip. The tormented life that the survivor is forced to live after the incident is inevitable. The disabilities, the sufferings and the scars it brings along itself are enough to remind the survivor of this horrific incident every day. The survivor may suffer from post-traumatic stress syndrome which can eventually lead to severe depression and suicidal tendencies. Laws need to be stricter; punishments need to be harsher and no biasness should be involved based on the gender of the survivor. Being a male survivor does not lessen the severity of the crime.

Keywords: Vitriolage, Criminal Amendment Act 2013, Male Survivors

INTRODUCTION

Vitriolage is defined as deliberate throwing of a corrosive substance onto a person in a conscious attempt to disfigure maim, torture, kill or harm that person. The targeted area of body is generally face. Vitriolage truly means throwing of oil of vitriol (sulphuric acid) on body of a person, but this term incorporates throwing of any corrosive chemical or plant juices like Calotropis juice by one person on the other person [1]. It is one of the commonest barbarous crime. Maximum damage to the tissues is caused by acids as it is most commonly used but alkalis produce liquefaction necrosis permitting deeper invasion of tissues. The main culprits behind vitriolage are rivalry, sexual jealousy and hatred often of extreme level. A heinous crime like vitriolage not only compels the survivor to live a life of agony everyday but it also reminds the survivors of how not only his face and body, but life too is scared forever.

THE CURRENT SCENARIO

Whenever we hear of offence vitriolage the mental image formed in our minds is of a female survivor. Particularly in India it has to be a woman. WHY? Because it is a male dominated society. Male are the stronger section, the protector, the self-sufficient and the emblem of strength. Such strong section of society can only be perpetrator of crime and not the victim of it. Violence too is only their domain.

The irony is that the patriarchal society handovers great power and control to males and hence finds it difficult to associate sympathy with them. Crime against men do not get as much attention, nor do they get their share of required support from the society. As these crimes fail to evoke any disgust in society, they also fail to pave way to criminal justice system. Society tends to forget that intensity of violence is same irrespective of gender. We are all bone and flesh. Violence is violence irrespective of the gender involved.

STATISTICS

According to NCRB men make up to 40% of vitriolage survivors in India [2]. Vitriolage is also a form of hate crime which by layman understanding typically involves females, but crime is not gender bias like laws, which do not apply on

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male vitriolage survivors.

LAWS

Vitriolage is addressed in certain IPC sections, Section 320 IPC (clause 6), Section 325 and Section 326 of IPC. According to Criminal Law Amendment Act 2013, two separate sections were incorporated in the IPCs to define vitriolage i.e., 326A and 326B where punishment ranges from 5-10 years and fine to meet the medical expenses [3].

In July 2013, the Supreme Court ruled that vitriolage victims shall be paid a compensation of at least Rs3 lakh by the state government/Union territory towards after care and rehabilitation. Any survivor compensation schemes in existence then or brought into effect post the ruling would have to comply with the said order. This was to be in addition to any fines to be paid under Section 326A (a section added to the Indian Penal Code in 2013, along with Section 326B to recognize, define and penalize vitriolages and attempts to attack with acid). None of these are gender specific. But within the government and judicial apparatus, these are presumed to apply only to female survivors [4].

There should be separate legal provision to not only address but also provide legal redresser to male survivors as and when this heinous crime occurs to any male victim.

CONCLUSION

What vitriolage does to a survivor is real definition of devastation. It takes away the identity of a person, disables the person, and creates pain, agony, mental trauma and depression. Vitriolages involving face may make the person blind. It becomes difficult for the survivor to carry out day to day tasks. The social prospective towards the survivor changes, survivor is no longer considered a normal element of society. Beauty still holds its paramount position in society. For a bachelor almost no marriage prospective is left. Survivors can clearly see their lives being derailed in front of them. The extensive medical treatment that follows further drains the man and his family financially. The crushing mental, physical and financial burden further adds to the agony of a survivor.

With no co-operation from the law and no NGOs highlighting their case men find it extremely difficult to bear all the trauma and bring back their lives to normal. Vitriolage is a grievous issue but the insensitivity of the society can be estimated by the fact that no accurate statistics on incidents and number of vitriolage survivors is maintained. It would not be wrong to say that Indian law system fails to acknowledge these vitriolage survivors. Not only the legal system but we as a society too fail them and they do not get their fair share of help and support. The mind-set of the society needs to change too. There should be no biasness in perceiving the suffering and anguish of a victim based on gender.

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CONFLICT OF INTERESTS

No conflict of interest associated with this work.

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