

WHY ARE ACID ATTACKS ON THE RISE?

Recent statistics from the charity Acid Survivors Trust International (ASTI) reveal that acid attacks have soared by 61% in the UK. The chilling stats found that there were 1,690 offences involving corrosives recorded in 2025 – compared to 1,050 the previous year. Acid attacks also include corrosive alkalis such as bleach – many of which have been bought online or from shops due to lax sales restrictions around the substances. Out of the total offences, 23% were violent offences against the person, while the other 1,302 were threats of acid attacks against

the person and other acid related offences such as possession. The data also shows a 39% increase in violence against women and girls. ASTI Executive Director Jaf Shah says, 'As many cases do not reach court we do not know for certain what is behind the rise, but the pattern can be largely determined by the motivation of the perpetrator. For example, a gender-based attack, be a threat or a physical attack, will often be conducted by a known assailant. I think this reflects a broader pattern of violence against women and girls. Threatening someone with acid is a terrifying form of

violence, which can cause profound and lasting trauma even when no physical attack takes place.' The effect they have on victims too is devastating. Jaf adds, 'At a physical level there could be sight loss, hearing impairment as well as very severe pain that leads to permanent scarring as well as disabilities. It is a serious form of violence and the seriousness of the injuries will be determined by the amount and concentration of the acids thrown by the perpetrator.' Beyond the devastating impacts, these attacks also contribute a considerable economic cost to society. ASTI estimates a single attack costs £63,000 for the

medical and psychosocial support victims require, in addition to the costs to the police as well as judicial and penal systems. This means the economic cost of all physical attacks topped £24million. Jaf adds, 'With a new Government in place, there must be urgent action to tackle the root causes of acid attacks, including socio-economic deprivation, while also addressing the growing use of corrosive substances as a form of violence against women and girls. 'We know that prevention is key and education must form part of a comprehensive violence-reduction strategy, alongside stronger controls on access to corrosive



substances, consistent police recording and specialist support for survivors.' Closer speaks to one survivor who believes the Government need to do more to restrict the sales of dangerous corrosive substances, and to raise awareness of attacks and the impact they have...



Attacks have soared by 61%

Linneti wants to support other survivors



SURVIVOR:

'A liquid hit the side of my face and body – my clothes melted'

Linneti Kirungi, 35, who lives in Weston-super-Mare, suffered an acid attack in 2012 while living in her native Uganda. She says, 'When I hear that attacks are increasing, I don't think of statistics – I think of the faces, dreams, and futures behind those numbers and the families who are left to pick up the pieces. I know what it means to have your life changed in a few seconds. An acid attack may happen in an instant, but the journey of healing can last a lifetime.

'I was in my first year of university and decided to break up with my controlling boyfriend. We had been together for two and a half years, and he seemed fine after we split so I was pleased and ready to move on with my life.'

FOLLOWED

But one evening as she headed to the library, Linneti sensed someone was following her. She recalls, 'I saw a man dressed in black, carrying a blue bucket. Suddenly, a liquid hit the left side of my face and body. I thought it was urine – but then I saw my clothes had melted. A



Linneti in hospital after the attack

small piece of jacket on my right arm was the only thing left.'

As her attacker fled, the searing burning pain kicked in. She says, 'The left side of my face, head, chest, neck, back and shoulder felt like they were on fire. I heard a passer-by saying, "That is acid." The pain was unbearable.'

When Linneti finally received medical treatment, as nurses poured water on her, a doctor broke the news that she'd been the victim of an acid attack – and that some of it

had gotten into her eyes. She says, 'My friends were horrified when they saw what had happened to me. My best friend didn't even recognise me.'

'My wounds had to be dressed to prevent the acid from going deeper and to protect me from infections. I also had six reconstructive surgeries. The acid had dug deep holes in my body, so I needed skin grafts as my wounds could not heal on their own. My left ear couldn't be saved as the acid had destroyed it. I felt so low that I tried to take my own life. I underwent counselling

but it felt pointless – no one could understand what I was going through.'

Shockingly, due to Uganda's legal system, her ex and the assailant got away with their crimes. She says, 'Police advised me to ask for compensation instead, but I refused. A week later, my ex was released from jail and the case simply disappeared. He wasn't charged or sentenced. I'd been failed.'

BLINDED

It wasn't until she met another acid attack survivor, Hanifa Nakiryowa, that she realised there was light at the end of the tunnel. Linneti says, 'She had been blinded by an acid attack and meeting her was the wake-up call I needed. I thought if she could get through it, then I could carry on.'

Linneti says the support she received while recovering gave her inspiration to help others, and in 2019 she founded Hope Care Rescue Mission, an NGO that supports acid attack survivors and funds their medical care.

Over the years, Linneti and her group have offered survivors psychosocial support, legal representation and empowerment and advocacy programs, and eventually partnered with ASTI in 2021.

She says, 'I survived my attack, but I refuse to let my survival be the end of the story. I want every survivor to know that, despite what has been taken from us, our lives, our voices, dreams and our futures still belong to us.'

But while the work Linneti has done has touched and improved the lives of many, she says more needs to be done both nationally and internationally. Linneti adds, 'We need to meet with governments across the world to meet survivors and understand issues, so they can come up with policy based on prevention and restriction of corrosive substance sales. Survivors deserve more than sympathy. We deserve justice, dignity and the opportunity to rebuild our lives.'

● To find out more, visit hocram.org and asti.org.uk