

Scars Beyond the Skin: An Introspection into Acid Attack Cases in Kerala (2016–2025)

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An acid attack is one of the most brutal and heinous crimes that violates human rights globally. The irreversible physical disfigurement is visible in the inflicted bodies, and the intensity of physical trauma and psychological marginalisation is unfathomable. This paper analyses the reported acid attack cases in Kerala from 2016 to 2025. FIRs pertaining to acid attack cases from 2016 to 2025, downloaded from THUNA (The Hand You Need for Assistance), the official citizen service portal and mobile app launched by Kerala Police for digital public safety services, were used as the primary source for this study. The findings reveal that 46 cases have been reported during this period. By using this data, this paper is trying to examine the district-wise distribution, the victims' gender, residence, age, number of victims, perpetrators' gender, victim-perpetrator relationships, the reasons, and the ways of these acid attack cases in Kerala. This study shows that acid attacks are widespread in Kerala, with a gender bias towards female victims. The observation leads to the fact that the victims of acid attacks did not get the justice they deserved when the perpetrators did not get the deserved punishment. This paper attempts to understand the reasons for the attacks and the methods used for disfigurement. The data shows most of the victims were

suffering from psychological trauma and the expenses of reconstructive surgery. Thus, the paper concludes by emphasizing the need for stricter control over acid sales, uniform legal implementation, and enhanced support systems for survivors and puts forward a few recommendations for ensuring the implementation of laws for justice and the rehabilitation of acid attack victims.

Keywords: Acid attack, female victims, perpetrators, legal implementation, rehabilitation

Introduction

An acid attack is a ‘silent’ violent crime. A perpetrator’s criminal mind is the only fuel for this heinous crime, and they need a fraction of a second to execute it. Its impact on the victim is horrible and irremediable. The perpetrator’s vengeance is the reason behind every shattered life of the acid attack survivors. One’s vengeance turns down another person’s life and dreams; that is the story of every acid attack survivor.

An acid attack involves the deliberate use of corrosive substances to harm another individual. Perpetrators often throw or pour acid onto a victim’s face or body, intending to cause severe injury, disfigurement, psychological trauma, or death (Rutledge et al., 2011). It’s a global issue, and the majority of victims are females. Even children are becoming victims of this. It seldom kills the victims, but it causes terrible physical, psychological and social scarring. Physically, acid can rapidly damage vital organs. It burns everywhere it touches, and the immediate threat for victims is breathing failure. Psychologically, victims suffer from anxiety, loneliness, depression, humiliation, insomnia, nightmares, headaches, fear of another attack, weakness and tiredness, and difficulty concentrating and remembering things. Socially and economically, victims face a lifetime of discrimination from society. Unmarried victims may find difficulty in getting married, and the survivors with disabilities often struggle to find jobs and earn a living, which leaves them dependent on others for basic needs. Acid attack has a particular gender dimension in India, and the majority of the reported cases have been committed on women (Law Commission of India, 2009). In India, the incidents of acid attack were being

recorded as an offence under IPC 326A and 326B. Under the newly enacted BNS 2023, these provisions have been retained and renumbered as Sections 124(1) and 124 (2), respectively.

According to the National Crime Records Bureau in India, 2499 acid cases were reported during the period 2015-2023 (National Crime Records Bureau, 2023). (Data for 2024 and 2025 have not yet been officially published)

Year-wise reported acid attack cases in India

Year	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023
Cases	268	283	309	287	316	242	249	273	272

Even though the Indian government tried to mend the laws on acid attacks, the number of cases persisted as much as before. Kerala has one of the highest literacy rates, advanced health infrastructure and relatively progressive gender indicators in India. However, Kerala is not far behind in heinous crimes like acid attacks. This study analyses the reported acid attack cases in Kerala from 2016 to 2025 FIRs pertaining to acid attack cases from 2016 to 2025, downloaded from THUNA (The Hand You Need for Assistance), the official citizen service portal and mobile app launched by Kerala Police for digital public safety services, were used as the primary source for this study. Within this period, a total of 46 cases were reported. By using this data, this paper is trying to analyse the district-wise discrimination, the victims’ gender, residence, age, number of victims, perpetrators’ gender, victim-perpetrator relationships, the reasons, and the ways of these acid attack cases in Kerala. This study shows that acid attacks are widespread over the socio-geographical region of Kerala, with a gender bias towards female victims. The observation leads to the conclusion that the victims of acid attacks did not get the justice they deserved, and the perpetrators did not get the deserved punishment. This paper puts forward a few recommendations for ensuring proper attention to the implementation of laws for justice and the rehabilitation of acid attack victims.

I. The District-wise Distribution of Acid Attack Cases in Kerala during 2016- 2025 (Up to May)

According to THUNA (The Hand You Need for Assistance), 46 acid attack cases were reported in Kerala during the period 2016-2025 (up to May).

District	Number of Cases	Percentage
Thiruvananthapuram	3	6.52
Kollam	6	13.04
Pathanamthitta	4	8.70
Alappuzha	4	8.70
Kottayam	2	4.35
Idukki	4	8.70
Ernakulam	6	13.04
Thrissur	1	2.17
Palakkad	5	10.87
Malappuram	2	4.35
Kozhikode	3	6.52
Wayanad	1	2.17
Kannur	4	8.70
Kasaragod	1	2.17
Total	46	100

Percentage = Number of cases ÷ Total cases (46) x 100

The highest number of acid attacks was reported at Kollam and Ernakulam, with 13.04% (6 cases) each. 10.87% (5 cases) were reported at Palakkad. Pathanamthitta, Alappuzha, Idukki, and Kannur each contributed 8.70% (4 cases). 6.52% (3 cases) each were reported in Kozhikode and Thiruvananthapuram. 4.35% (2 cases) were reported in Malappuram and Kottayam. Thrissur, Wayanad, and Kasaragod recorded the fewest cases at 2.17% each (1 case).

The analysis of the district-wise distribution of acid attack cases in Kerala shows that acid attacks are not concentrated in a single deprived district. It spreads widely across Kerala's social geography. The districts with a high rate of acid attack recurrence include Kollam and Ernakulam. The majority of the places in these districts, where the acid attack cases were filed, are characterized by

rubber plantations. So, formic acid is easily available and becomes a major local factor in acid attacks in Kerala. Perpetrators also obtain sulphuric, hydrochloric, and nitric acids from chemical or lab supply stores, household cleaners and hardware stores. The Hon'ble Supreme Court issued a series of directions in Writ Petition 129 of 2006: Laxmi Minor Vs Union of India, to take proactive measures to regulate the sale of acids (*Laxmi Vs. Union of India (UOI) and Ors.*, 2013). The easy availability of acid proved that the government was not very concerned about implementing these Supreme Court guidelines.

According to the data, the highest number of cases (8) was reported in 2022. The fewest cases were reported in 2016, with one case. There is no gradual increase or decrease in the year-wise analysis of the reported cases. However, this trend must be a serious concern for us. If it continues, the number of cases could exceed previous years.

II. Reasons for Acid Attack

Reasons	Number of cases	Percentage
Suspicion of wife's chastity	12	26.09
Family issues between husband and wife	12	26.09
Previous enmity	7	15.22
Love failure	4	8.70
Land boundary dispute	3	6.52
Due to the enmity of questioning the drunken behaviour	2	4.35
Dowry menace	1	2.17
Family issue between siblings	1	2.17
Questioned the harassment	1	2.17
Student's revenge	1	2.17
The victim had not conceded to the carnal demands of the accused	1	2.17
Unknown	1	2.17
Total	46	100

$$\text{Percentage} = \text{Number of cases} \div \text{Total cases (46)} \times 100$$

The above table shows the reasons behind the acid attacks in Kerala. Marital and relationship-based conflicts are the major motives for acid attacks in this data. Suspicion of a wife’s chastity and general family issues between husband and wife were the major reasons, each accounting for 26.09% (12 cases). That means more than half of the attacks arise in the family domain. The next major category, previous enmity, accounts for 15.22% (7 cases). Love failure was directed at the attack in 8.70% (4 cases). 6.52% (3 cases) were reported under the category of land boundary disputes. In 4.35% (2 cases), enmity over questioning the drunken behaviour of the accused was the reason. Dowry menace, sibling family issues, questioning harassment, a student’s revenge, refusal of carnal demands, and unknown causes each contribute just 2.17% (1 case).

This indicates that an acid attack is an extreme form of patriarchal control and domestic power conflict within a familial relationship. From the analysis, the investigator observed that, in Kerala, acid attacks are primarily a gender based crime. The low cost and easy availability might be the reason for using acid as a weapon for vengeance. These cases indicate the role of wounded male ego, possessiveness and rejection-based hatred in the cases of acid attack.

This data indicates that interpersonal problems are the primary causes of acid attacks rather than social struggles. Many studies have shown that Kerala’s familial bonds are strong. At the same time, this analysis shows that most of the acid attack cases were reported within the family sphere; especially, marital conflict is the major trigger for acid attack.

III. Victims’ Age

Victim Age	Number of Cases	Percentage
Less than 18	1	2.17
18-28	6	13.04
29-39	15	32.61
40-50	14	30.43
51-60	5	10.87
Not mentioned	5	10.87
Total	46	100

Percentage = Number of cases ÷ Total cases (46) x 100

Victims are devastatingly concentrated in the 29–50 age range. 29–39 group forming the single largest share at 32.61% (15 cases) and the 40–50 group close behind at 30.43% (14 cases). They together account for nearly two-thirds of all cases. This advocates that women in their prime working and family-raising years are the most vulnerable to acid attacks. The 18–28 and 51–60 groups are comparatively smaller, at 13.04% (6 cases) and 10.87% (5 cases) respectively. Cases involving minors (under 18) are rare, accounting for just 2.17% (1 case). Age was not recorded for 10.87% (5 cases). This pattern indicates that adult women in their late twenties through fifties bear the crushing brunt of acid attacks.

IV. Victims' Gender

Gender	Number of Cases	Percentage
Male	3	4.52
Female	43	93.48
Total	46	100

Percentage = Number of cases ÷ Total cases (46) x 100

The gender distribution of victims is skewed toward women. The majority of the victims of acid attacks were female, 93.48% (43 cases), and 6.52% (3 cases) were male. This difference underscores that acid attacks in this dataset are predominantly a form of gender-based violence, with women constituting the near-total portion of targets. The small number of male victims suggests that men were also targeted occasionally.

V. Perpetrators' Gender

Gender	Number of Cases	Percentage
Male	40	86.96
Female	3	6.52
Both	2	4.35
Not Mentioned	1	2.17
Total	46	100

Percentage = Number of cases ÷ Total cases (46) x 100

The data shows that most of the perpetrators of acid attacks were male, accounting for 86.96% (40 cases) of all recorded incidents. It mirrors the broader pattern of women being the major victims and points to a strong gendered dimension. Female perpetrators are involved in a small minority of cases at 6.52% (3 cases). In 4.35% (2 cases), both male and female perpetrators were involved. In 2.17% (1 case), the perpetrator's gender is not mentioned. The near-total dominance of male perpetrators, combined with the earlier finding that most victims are female, reinforces that acid attacks in this dataset largely reflect a pattern of male-perpetrated violence against women, rooted in motives such as marital suspicion, relationship conflict, and enmity.

VI. Victim Perpetrator Relationship

Relationship	Number of Cases	Percentage
Known	40	86.96
Not Mentioned	6	13.04
Total	46	100

Percentage = Number of cases ÷ Total cases (46) x 100

The data reveal that in 86.96% (40 cases), perpetrators were known to the victims. These were husband, sister, neighbour, lover, classmate, or family friend. In 13.04% (6 cases), perpetrators were not mentioned. This strongly reinforces that acid attacks are largely rooted in personal relationships and domestic or social conflicts, such as marital suspicion, family disputes, love failure, and enmity, rather than random or stranger-perpetrated violence. The relatively small share of unknown-perpetrator cases suggests that acid attacks in this context are less an act of arbitrary crime and more a targeted act arising from familiarity, trust, and proximity between victim and offender.

VII. Number of Victims in each Case

In 60.87% (28 cases), one victim was affected in each case; in 23.91% (11 cases), two victims, rest of the other cases three in 8.70% (4 cases), four and more (seven) in 6.52% (3 cases) victims were found affected by acid attack.

VIII. Number of Victims in each Case

In the majority of cases (91.30%), a single perpetrator was guilty of the crime. In 4.35% cases, two perpetrators were involved in splashing the acid on the victim, in 2.17% cases, three or four perpetrators were involved each.

IX. Main Physical/Psychological Harm by Acid Attack

Harm by Attack	Number of cases	Percentage
Disfigured Face	24	52.17
Eye Injury/Vision Lost	5	10.87
Hearing Loss	1	2.17
Injuries to the neck, chest, shoulder and hand	10	21.74
Effect on the private parts of the body	1	2.17
Injury to the head	4	8.70
Victim's death	1	2.17
Total	46	100

Percentage = Number of cases ÷ Total cases (46) x 100

According to this data, facial disfigurement was the most common outcome of acid attacks, affecting 52.17% (24 cases) of victims. It reflects the characteristic nature of acid violence as an attack aimed at permanently destroying the victim's appearance and identity. Injuries to the neck, chest, shoulder, and hand form the second most common category at 21.74% (10 cases). Eye injury or loss of vision at 10.87% (5 cases), highlighting severe sensory or functional impairment. Injury to the head accounts for 8.70% (4 cases). Hearing loss, effects on private parts of the body, and victim death each represent a smaller but significant share at 2.17% (1 case). This

indicates that acid attacks predominantly cause severe, visible, and often permanent facial and bodily disfigurement, with a smaller proportion resulting in sensory loss, internal or intimate injury, or death, reflecting the compounded physical and psychological trauma inflicted on survivors.

X. Laws and Advisories

FIRs pertaining to acid attack cases from 2016 to 2025, downloaded from THUNA, indicate that the FIRs were filed under IPC Sections 326(A) and 326(B), and BNS Sections 124(1) and 124(2). Out of forty-six cases, thirty-one were under IPC 326(A), eight under IPC 326(B) and seven under BNS 124. IPC 326 (A) deals with an actual acid attack leading to injury, while 326(B) deals with an attempt to commit an acid attack, even if injury does not happen. According to IPC 326A, the maximum punishment is ten years' imprisonment, and the minimum is five years. Under IPC 326B, the minimum punishment is five years imprisonment and the maximum is seven years. According to both sections, the compensation should be paid to the victim and be just and reasonable to cover the victim's medical expenses (The Indian Penal Code, 1860, 1860). IPC 326(A) and 326(B) are equivalent to BNS 124(1) and 124(2) respectively. There is no great difference between IPC 326 (A),(B) and BNS 124 (1),(2) in accordance with punishment and compensation. The significant tweak in the BNS is the clear and specific insertion of the "Permanent vegetative state" as an outcome of an acid attack. Even though it is a short statement, in today's medical context, this amendment has had a significant impact on our legal framework (Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita 2023, 2023). In IPC 326 (A)&(B), the death and severe injury were considered, but this specific insertion represents a significant shift in acknowledging the loss of quality of life. The Hon'ble Supreme Court issued a series of directions under Writ Petition (Criminal) 129 of 2006: Laxmi minor Vs Union of India to take proactive measures on: regulation of sale of acids, providing free treatment to the acid attack victim, disbursing compensation to the acid attack survivor. According to this order, "the

acid attack victims shall be paid compensation of at least three lakhs by the concerned State Government as the after care and rehabilitation cost” (*Laxmi Vs. Union of India (UOI) and Ors.*, 2013).

In accordance with the above direction, the Ministry of Home Affairs has issued several Advisories to State Governments’ administrations. The ‘Advisory on expediting cases of acid attack on women’ states that “The issue of apprehending the culprits and fast tracking of justice also needs to be seriously considered. It is requested that the States must take proactive measures to expedite investigation and trial of the acid attack cases and bring them under a definite time frame”(Ministry of Home Affairs Government of India, 2015). According to this advisory, “the primary response of the administration should be focused on providing timely, full, and free treatment to the victims of acid attack. While treatment of the victim should be the primary consideration, the disbursal of the compensation should also be expedited within the time frame as stipulated by the Hon’ble Supreme Court of India”(Ministry of Home Affairs Government of India, 2015). This advisory also reminds us of the provisions for punishment for denying registration in cases of crimes against women. Even though these laws are in books, in reality, they are not as effective as they claim to be.

Recommendations and Conclusion

This study emphasizes on the gap between law in books and law in action. The written law is advanced and strict, but in reality, it is inconsistent and weakly enforced. The pattern seen in FIRs pertaining to acid attack cases from 2016 to 2025, downloaded from THUNA (The Hand You Need for Assistance), the official citizen service portal and mobile app launched by Kerala Police for digital public safety services, indicates several practical issues like easy availability of acid, delay in justice, inadequate compensation, medical and rehabilitation gaps, which prevented the enforcement of laws. Strict law enforcement, monitoring, responsible purchasing, active reporting and public awareness are the key ways to control acid attacks. By establishing fast-track courts and ensuring swift justice and prompt

punishment, we can foster fear of the law in perpetrators, build confidence among survivors, and enhance public trust in the legal system. Adequate compensation, including free treatment and rehabilitation, helps victims ensure timely medical assistance, psychological recovery, economic security, and the regaining of dignity. Employers, companies, and institutions should welcome acid attack survivors by offering meaningful employment based on their abilities and health conditions, rather than excluding them due to disfigurement. Such inclusive opportunities empower survivors to regain confidence and actively reintegrate into society. That is the best rehabilitation they can get and the best empowerment they can gain for their future. Let Kerala be a model for the world in eradicating this heinous crime and extending fraternal support to the survivors. Teach our future generations to respect other individuals' right to live a quality life rather than attacking them to end their life for one's wrath.

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