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Real Heroines in Life: Acid Attack Survivor Turns Tragedy into Empowerment

By Hiruni Jayaratne¹

An acid attack is a form of violence in which acid or another corrosive substance is thrown at a person—usually a woman or a girl—with the intention of maiming, torturing, or killing them (*changing the world with women and girl-actionaid.org*). Women in countries around the world live with the threat of acid attacks. Globally, there are approximately 1,500 acid attacks a year, but it is a crime that often goes unreported for fear of reprisal (*changing the world with women and girl-actionaid.org*). Attacks are most prevalent in South Asian countries like Nepal, India, Pakistan, and Bangladesh since the acid remains inexpensive and freely available. Most of the victims and the survivors of acid attacks are women and girls. Refusal of marriage, the denial of sex, and domestic violence are the main reasons for acid attacks on girls and women. These acid attackers' primary objective is to harm and damage the girl's entire life by throwing acid onto her face so that she cannot marry. Many attacks have left victims with damage to their faces and vision. Disfigurement then becomes a public mark of shame, making it hard for women to get married or gain employment. But in reality, these women and girls are the real heroines since some of them still fight back to achieve their dreams. Reshma Qureshi and Laxmi Agrawal made their lives stronger, breaking the cycle of humiliation and perceptions about acid attack survivors. Acid attack survivors especially are real-life heroines and warriors since they build up their own life and empower themselves to stand against these violations against women and girls. Empowerment is a vital aspect of everyone's life.

Empowering others and empowering oneself are two different things in society. Converting the tragedy of acid attacks into empowerment is the best way to fight against this brutal way of violence and raise a voice against violators. Laxmi Agarwal (born 1 June 1990) is an Indian acid attack survivor, a campaigner for the rights of acid attack victims, and a TV host. Laxmi Agarwal was attacked in 2005 in New Delhi at the age of 15 after rebuffing the romantic advances of Naeem Khan. After this vicious incident, she raised her voice to protest the selling of acid and joined with NGOs to empower other acid attack victims to fight for their lives. In 2016, Reshma Qureshi, another acid attack survivor, became the first acid attack victim to walk the runway in the New York Fashion Week 2016. She also raised her voice against this violence, and she has proved that the most liberating thing about beauty is realizing that we are the beholder.

Most of the non-governmental organizations or charity services lend hand to them to fight back and follow their dreams by providing them with psychological resources and other ways of empowering themselves. Many acid attack survivors created their lives by starting a new family life or engaging with other charity services to raise voices against this brutality or opening restaurants or shops. Some stand as influencers to share their stories with other women or girls to build up awareness and empowerment. Women can be the wind, moon, or sun but I prefer they are a rock which has full strength and courage without any doubt. Women can go through any harsh moments with a wise mind. Therefore, all this can be gifted to one beautiful person called 'mother'.

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If someone asked ‘what is never-ending love and who is strongest? Then all can proudly say ‘none other than my mother’. The courage, efficiency, and passion of a woman cannot be replaced with any other things. We all have a wonder woman inside of us. We must show how strong we are. Women and girls are the real heroines, and their empowerment is vital.

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