

Dynamics of Depression and Psychological Well-Being among Female Acid Attack Survivors of Pakistan (Depression and Psychological Well-being among Female Acid Attack Survivors)

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Abstract

The present study focused on determining the trends of depression and psychological well-being among female acid attack survivors. Data was collected from 48 female acid attack survivors who were victimized through acid attacks 2-5 years ago. Following hypotheses were formulated to meet the objective of the study; 1) acid attacks would determine trends of depression among female acid attack survivors. 2) Acid attacks would determine trends of psychological well-being among female acid attack survivors. The data population was reached through purposive sampling by contacting non-governmental organizations of Pakistan that were working for the rehabilitation of the acid attack survivors. The age range of the participants in the sample was 18-35 years. The minimum education level for the participants to be a part of study was matric. Data collection from the participants was done by using a consent form, a demographic information form, Siddiqui Shah Depression Scale (1992) and Ryff Psychological Well-Being Scale. For the ease of participants, all measures were used in Urdu language. Statistical analysis revealed that acid attacks significantly predicted depression and psychological well-being among female acid attack survivors. The significant implication of the present study draws attention to the acid attacks as the predicting factor of depression and psychological wellbeing among female acid attack survivors. The resourceful information derived from this research will help psychologists from multiple sources to develop a broader insight into the various factors contributing depression and psychological well-being among female acid attack survivors.

Keywords: Acid Attack, Female Acid Attack Survivors, Depression, Psychological Well-Being, Purpose in Life.

Introduction

Gender related crimes are an international phenomena. But unfortunately, Pakistan stands alongside Democratic Republic of Congo and Afghanistan to be listed as a country that has a highest rate of gender based violence (Welsh, 2009; Kiener, 2011). The basis for this ranking is the high gender gap in the

country. This gender gap is basically due to the meld of male egotism; familial and feudal segmentation; tribal sub divisions and strong religious beliefs that predominate Pakistani society and make it stand 133 out of 135 countries on the World Economic Forum's Gender Gap report (2011).

The researches on gender based violence and honor crimes (Haque & Ahsan, 2014; AVON Global Centre for Women and Justice & New York City Bar, 2011; Gauhar & Sultan, 2014; Bulletin of World Health Organization, 2011; Kiener, 2011) in the country reveal that acid attack stands as the most humiliating, horrific and destructive act targeted on women for various purposes mostly involving revenge factor tinted with the masculine dominant traits of society. These attacks occur mostly in countries like India, Bangladesh, Cambodia, Pakistan and Afghanistan. The incidence of these attacks from world over, reveals that 80 % of these victims are women and 40% among them are below the age of 18 years. In Pakistan and Bangladesh, the frequency of these attacks is higher than other countries where an acid attack occurs every three days. In Bangladesh, 70% of the acid attack victims were women with most of them belonging to the age group of 13-25 years (Babur, 2007; Zia, 2013; Iqbal, Afzal & Inayat, 2012, Haque & Ahsan, 2014).

According to an estimate 949 victims have been maimed by the heinous act of acid throwing in Pakistan. Out of these 60 % constitute of women and 15% of children. The geographical distribution of statistics reveal a major proportion being contributed by the feudal and tribal areas of Punjab. The annually reported crimes of acid attack reveal 65 reported cases in the years 2004-2006 followed by 71 in 2007-2008, 43 in 2009, 59 in 2010, 150 in 2001, 110 in 2012, 143 in 2013 and 160 in 2014. Legislation of acid attacks in 2011 has increased the number of reported cases by 300% in Pakistan (Dad, 2011; Public Radio International, 2014; VOA, 2014; Khan, 2013; Jalil, 2014; Khan, 2015; Abouzeid, 2010, Wasif, 2014, A Voice for the Voiceless, 2013).

However, valid research and accurate statistics on this patriarchal act lag behind the increasing rate of acid attacks in Pakistan. There are only two international organizations, Acid Survivors Trust International (2008) and its subsidiary Acid Survivors Foundation (1999), that are working in Pakistan with an aim to eradicate the increasing act of acid attack throughout the world by creating awareness through exploring and dispensing resourceful information. Besides these, Ansar Burney Trust International (1980), Aurat Foundation (1986), Progressive Women's Association (1985), Sarim Burney Trust International (1990) and Depilex Smile Again Foundation (2003) are some of the famous not for profit organizations that strive to support the acid attack victims by trying to help them in legal matters, medical matters and socio economic matters. Among these organizations Acid Survivors Foundation (1999) is the one that works on the biopsychosocial model towards the rehabilitation of the acid burn survivors. Depilex Smile Again Foundation (2003) has gained international fame in the recent years where acid attack survivors are given social, financial, medical support along with psychotherapies and occupational therapies with an aim of reintegrating them to society and helping them enjoy life as their counter parts.

In 2012, *Oscar Award* winning movie *Saving Face* by Daniel Junge and Sharmeen Chinoy, helped in creating an awareness about the hindrances faced by the survivors of acid attack in Pakistan. It helped raise awareness among general public about the frustration that exists in the life of a female acid attack survivor when she is trying to get back to the routine. The film endorsed the legislative steps taken by the law making agencies in order to help the acid attack survivors in Pakistan and also highlighted the work of various non-government organizations with a stress on the gaps that still need to be bridged. The film makers emphasized that when acid attack survivors get back to life, their mental and emotional health needs equal attention as does their physical health.

According to researches lack of reporting of acid attacks is a major factor that keeps Pakistan on the hit list of acid attack among different countries. People are either not endowed enough to start legal action or they do not want to report because family members are involved (Zia, 2013). *"There isn't really anyone or anything that's fighting for these women on a systematic level, and that's really the root of the problem. These women feel that they just don't have the support within Pakistani society"* (BBC, 2014). Further the staff at hospitals is not trained enough to deal with acid attack cases and victims often coin up stories due to fear of retaliation. There is not any resourceful data that can be helpful and thus research on acid attacks as an act independent of gender based violence lags behind other countries (Gauhar & Sultan, 2014; Refugee Documentation Centre of Ireland, 2012; Violence against Women, 2012).

With such augmented rates of acid attacks the psychological effects of these attacks can never be ignored. The victims who survive these attacks are prone to many different emotional disturbances and insecurities. They might be unique from one survivor to another and range from a set back at the first sight of the new identity to depression and/or other psychological disorders (Acid Survivors Trust International, 2008; Acid Survivors Foundation, 1999; Cambodian Acid Survivors Charity, 2014).

Literature Review

A qualitative report on acid attacks by Malik and Khan (2013) reported that these survivors often get mentally disturbed due to their disfigured bodies after their reconstructive surgeries. They are unable to live normal lives and feel themselves as engaged birds. A report on acid attacks by BBC (2013) reveals that victims need dozens of reconstructive surgeries and after that they have to deal with psychological trauma that is mostly in the form of severe exclusion from the family structure. However, there has not yet been any quantitative study with an aim to identify the mental health of these survivors and the gaps in their psychological well-being.

Arshad and Malik (2014) reported symptoms of rejection sensitivity, depression and lower self-esteem among acid attack survivors in Pakistan. It also revealed rejection sensitivity among acid attack survivors to be a predictor of low self-esteem along with depression and age at the time of attack. Likewise, self-esteem was also a predictor of rejection sensitivity. Individuals with higher scores on rejection sensitivity had greater fear of being negatively evaluated by the people around them and hence they tried to live an isolated life with a minimum contact with people in society.

Objectives and Significance of the Study

Hence the present study aims to testify the predictive relationship of depression and psychological well-being among female acid attack survivors. The resourceful research knowledge would aid the mental health professionals and doctors to help female acid attack survivors by providing a better understanding of the life-long menace of acid attacks and would help comprehend the hindrances that act as a barrier in their reintegration to society.

Method

Participants

The sample selection involved non probability sampling technique of purposive sampling. A total of 48 acid attack survivors were gathered for final study. The following inclusion and exclusion criterion were utilized to select the sample Inclusion criterion of the research participants

- The sample consisted of 48 female acid attack survivors, who had survived acid attack 2-5 years back and had completed their course of first aid procedures and emergency treatments.
- Female acid attacks survivors within the age range of 18-35 years were selected for the present study.
- Participants with a minimum of Matriculation level were included in the research study.
- Female acid attack survivors from different non-government organizations were taken for the present study.

Exclusion criterion of the research participants,

- Hospitalized female acid attack survivors were not included in the sample.
- Those female acid attacks survivors, who had an educational level of less than matric, were not included in the sample.
- Female acid attack survivors who were undergoing their first aid treatments or going through emergency treatments in hospitals were not included in the sample.
- Female acid attack survivors of age above 35 years were not included in the sample.
- Female acid attack survivors who were admitted in the burn centers of hospitals and were in the initial stages of treatment were not included in the sample.

Measures

The consent form was designed in Urdu language so that it could be easily comprehended by the participants. It included all the details about the research that were necessary for the participants to make an informed decision of whether or not participating in the research study. It informed the participants about their right to confidentiality and brought to their knowledge, the nature of the study.

Siddiqui Shah Depression Scale is a 36- item questionnaire that assess the symptoms of depression adapted according to Pakistani culture. It was developed in 1992 with an aim of assessing the depression levels among Pakistani people. It tends to measure depression with its ethnic expression and explore its affiliated variables related to the reported symptoms in psychiatric wards of Pakistan. It was designed to meet the gap between the assessment of depressed people and their scores on the Western scales that were often misleading due to the cultural and ethnic difference.

The Urdu version of Ryff's Scale of Psychological Well-being 54-item, was used for the present study. It is a theoretically-grounded instrument that focuses on measuring six dimensions of psychological well-being: self-acceptance, personal growth, purpose in life, positive relations with others, environmental mastery, and autonomy (Ryff, 1989). Each dimensional scale contains 9 items equally split between positive and negative items. Items are scored on a 6-point scale ranging from strongly agree to strongly disagree.

Procedure

Data collection from the sample participants was done on individual basis. Participants were reached with the help of non-government organizations. The chairpersons of the respective organizations were contacted through an approval letter to seek their help in order to reach the female acid attack survivors. Participants were contacted with the help of the organizations and the process of data collection was started. Those participants who met the inclusion criteria were called to the respective organizations for a meeting with the researcher. This helped in establishing a rapport between the participant and the researcher. Participants were briefed about the purpose of the research and the research process. Those female acid attack survivors who were willing to participate in the study were then asked to sign a consent

form. They were informed that their participation in the research is voluntary and they have a right to withdraw from participation at any time during the data collection process. They were also assured that their provided information would be kept highly confidential. The participants who agreed to participate in the research were then interviewed individually by the researcher. It is worth mentioning here that many female acid attack survivors denied to be a part of the study. They refused from participating by stating that when people talked to them, they talked in a sarcastic way and often made fun of them. The semi structured interview that was done during the individual meeting with the participants involved questions that were a part of the demographic form. Then they were presented with the two questionnaires. For the ease of comprehension, both questionnaires that were selected for the research study were in Urdu language. Participants were individually given instructions about each questionnaire. The Siddiqui Shah Depression Scale (1992) was presented first and was followed by Urdu translated version of Ryff Scale of Psychological Well-Being (1987). The average time taken by the participants in the completion of first questionnaire was 10-15 minutes whereas for the completion of second questionnaire the average administration time taken by participants was 20-30 minutes. The results obtained from the scored questionnaires were analyzed using Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS, 22.0).

Results

The empirical findings from the results are compiled with the help of pragmatic research in the area of acid attacks entailing its effect on the psychological health of the female acid attack survivors. Outcomes from the statistical analysis of the collected data reveals a significant predictive association of acid attacks with depression and psychological well-being among female acid attack survivors.

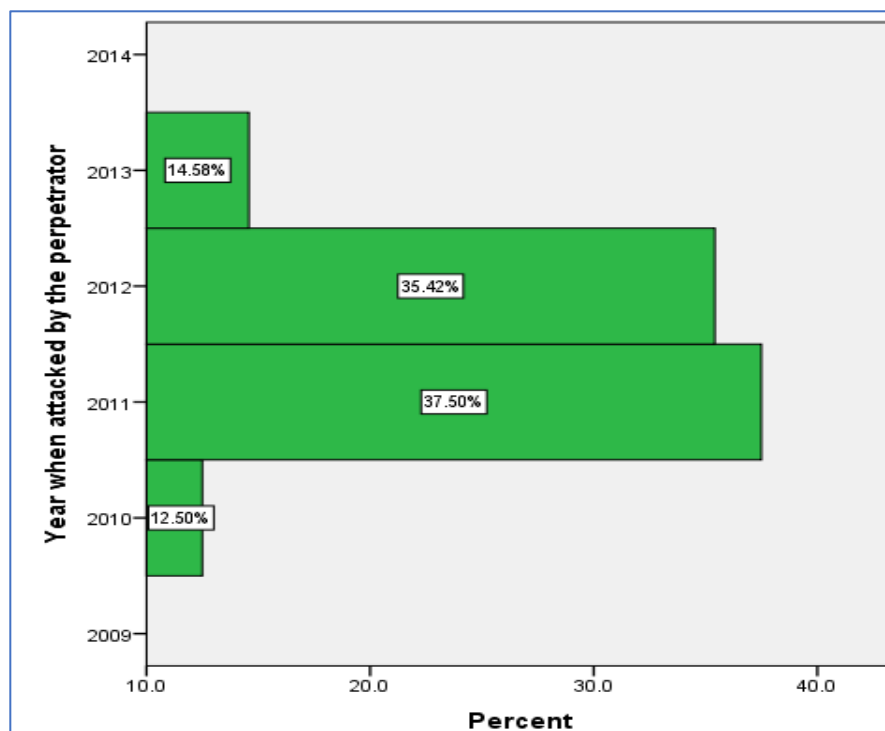


Figure 1: Bar Graph Representing the Distribution of Year of Attack in the Sample (N=48)

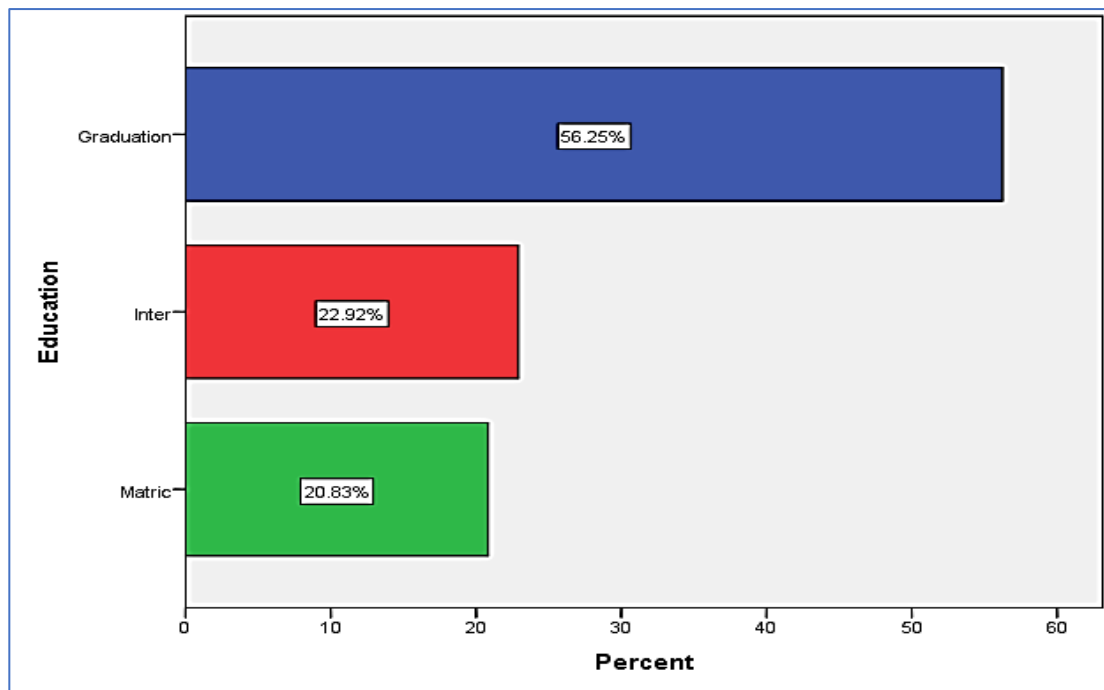


Figure 2: Bar Graph Representing Distribution of Education Levels of Participants in the Sample (N=48)

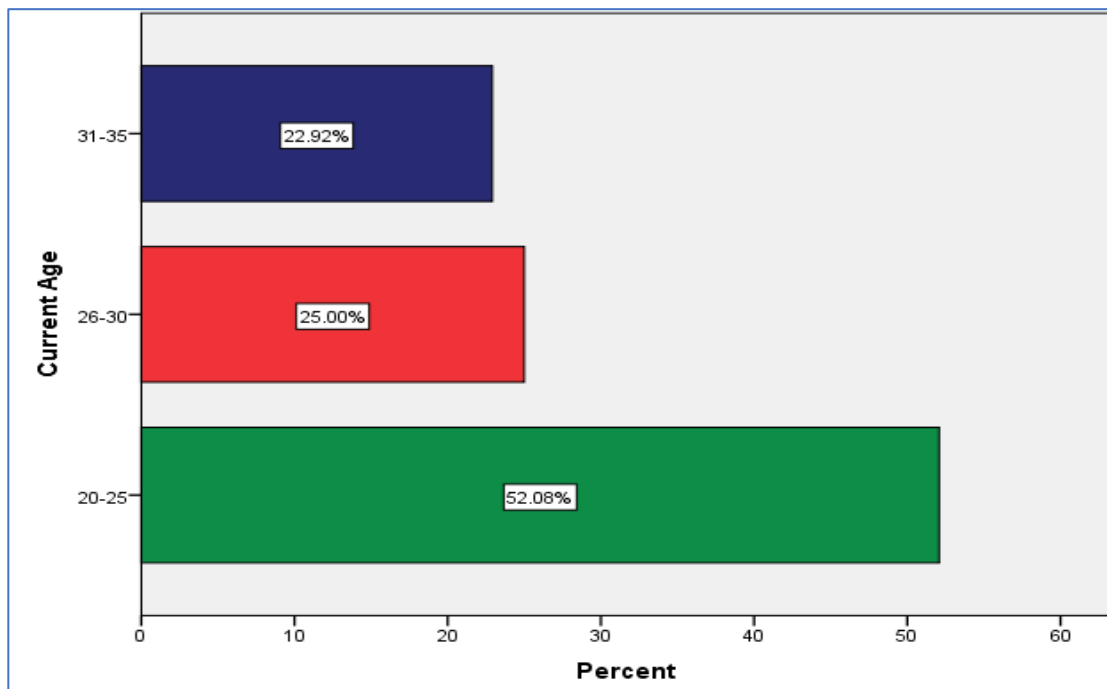


Figure 3: Bar Graph Showing the Age Distribution of the Participants in the Sample (N=48)

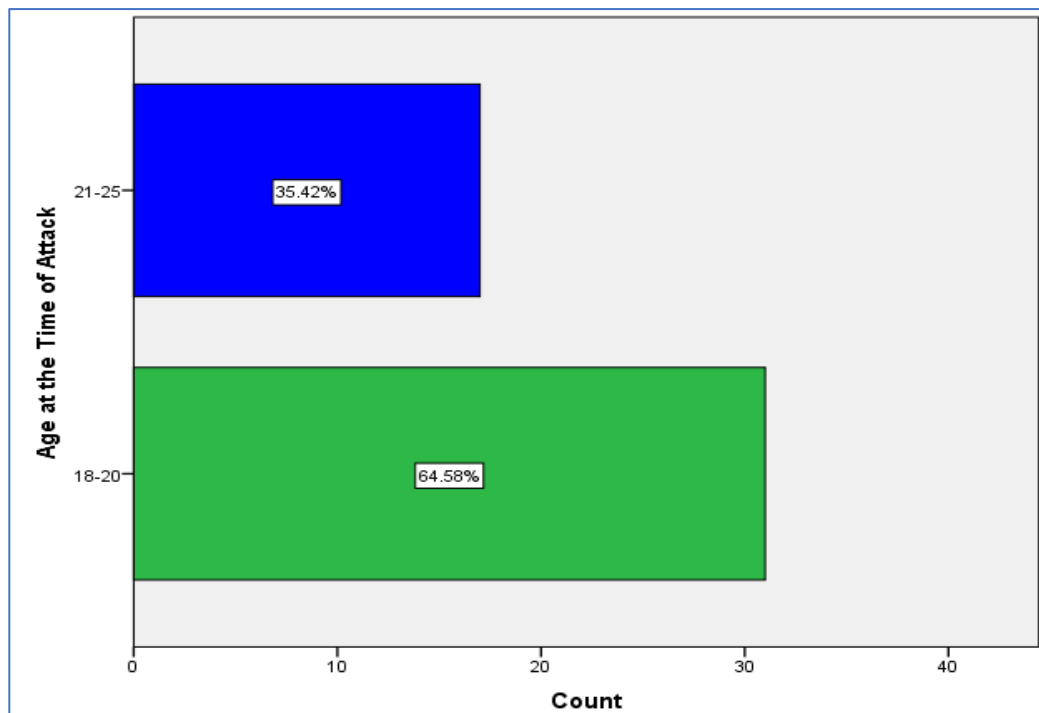


Figure 4: Bar Graph Representation of the Age Distribution of the participants at the Time of Attack in the sample (N=48)

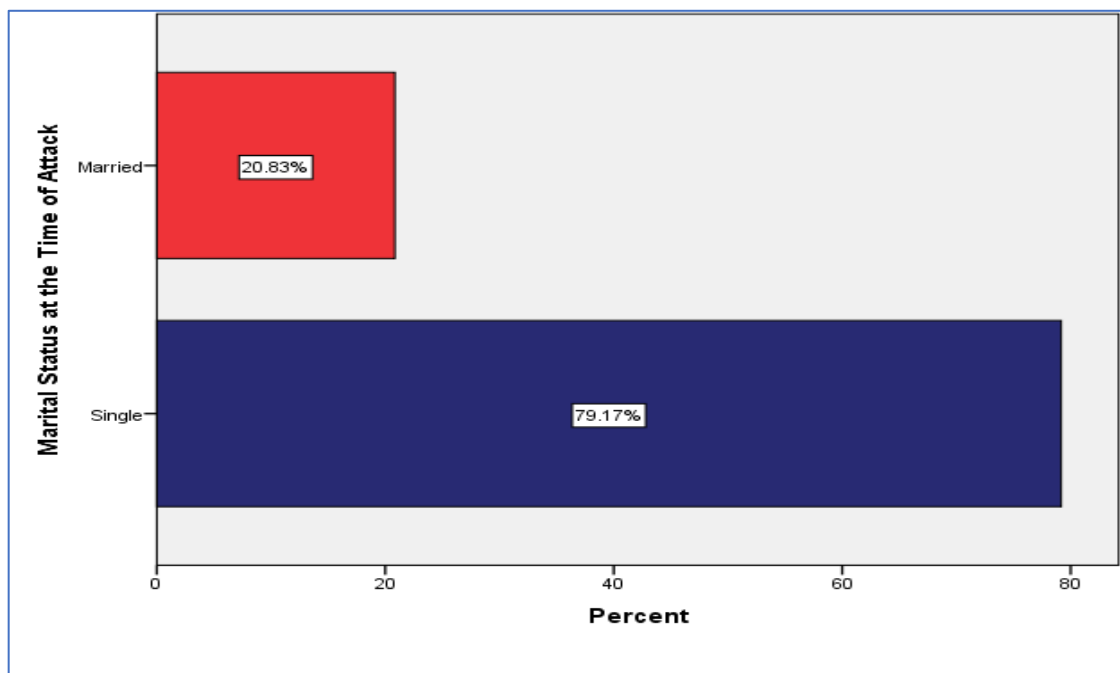


Figure 5: Bar Graph Representation of the Marital Status of the Participants at the Time of Acid Attack in the Sample (N=48)

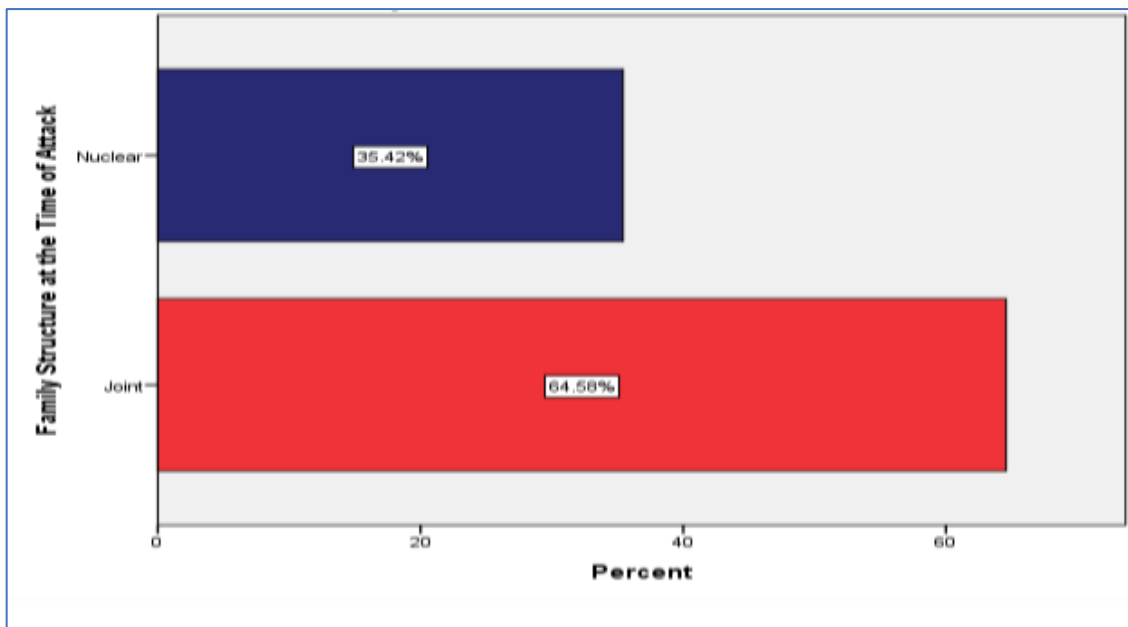


Figure 6: Bar Graph Depicting the Family Structure of the Participants at the Time of Acid Attack in the Sample (N=48)

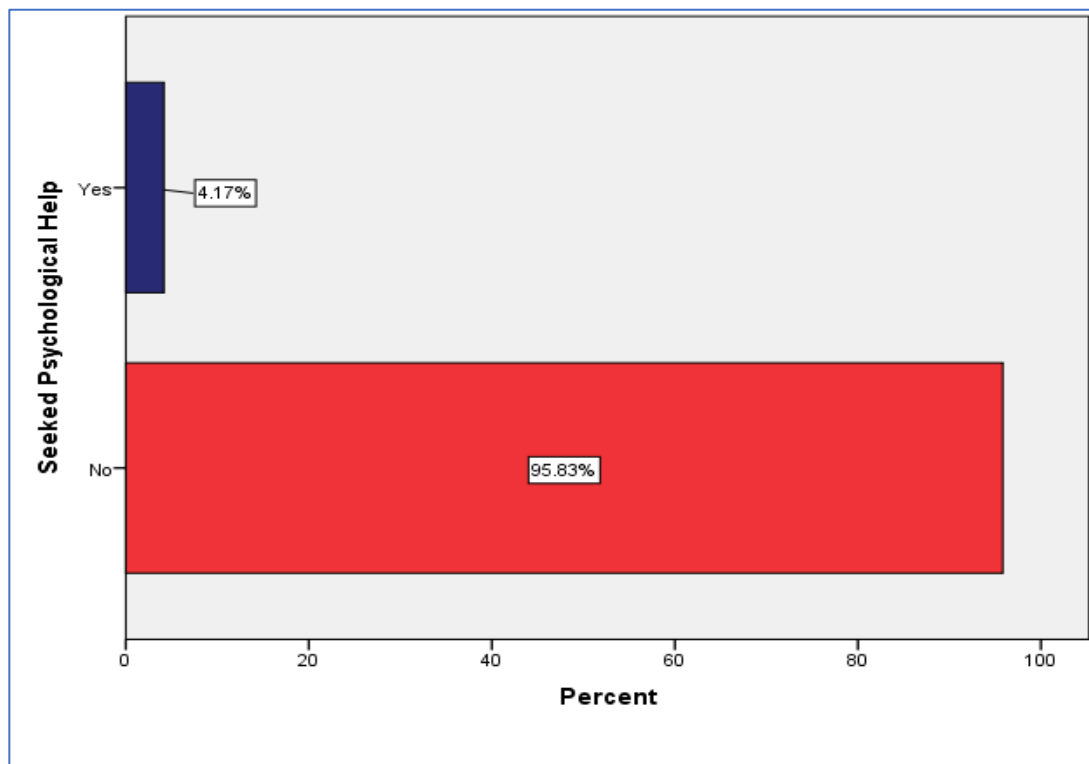


Figure 7: Bar Graph Representing the Distribution of Seeking Psychological Help of the Participants in the Sample (N=48)

Table 1: Mean and SD of Depression and Psychological Well-Being

	N	M	SD
Depression	48	1.10	.309
Psychological Well-being	48	.10	.309

Table 1 presents the descriptive statistics that includes mean and standard deviation of depression and psychological well-being among female acid attack survivors (N=48) that were included in the sample frame.

Table 2: Correlation between Depression and Psychological Well-Being from Data gathered from the Participants (N=48)

Measures	Depression	Psychological well-being
Depression	-	-.501*
Psychological well-being	-.501*	-

*p<0.01

Table 2 represents the correlational analysis of depression and psychological well-being among female acid attack survivors. It depicts a moderate negative correlation ($r = -.501$, $p < .01$) between depression and psychological well-being among female acid attack survivors. This suggests an inverse relationship between depression and psychological well-being and shows that as depression among female acid attack survivors increases, their psychological well-being decreases.

Table 3: Coefficients for Linear Regression with Depression Levels as Predictor of Psychological Well-Being among Female Acid Attack Survivors (N=48)

	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	p
	B		B		
(Constant)	47.878			9.309	.000***
Depression	-.260		-.501	-3.928	.000***

***p<0.01

Dependent Variable: Psychological well-being

Table 3 indicates regression coefficient of depression ($B = -.260$, $t = -3.928$; $p < 0.01$). In the light of the result it can be concluded that depression can significantly decrease psychological well-being to a moderate level. The coefficient indicates that for every additional unit of depression, psychological well-being is expected to decrease by an average of .260 units.

Table 4: Summary of Linear Regression Analysis of Depression as Predictor of Psychological Well-Being among Female Acid Attack Survivors.

Model	R	R ²	Adj. R ²	S.E	Change Statistics				
					R ² Change	F Change	df1	df2	Sig. F Change
1	.501 ^a	.251	.235	8.42	.251	15.429	1	46	0.000

a. Predictors: (Constant), Depression

b. Dependent Variable: Psychological Well-being

Table 4 reveals $R^2=.251$ indicating that predictor variable of depression explains 25% of the variance in the dependent variable that is, psychological well-being.

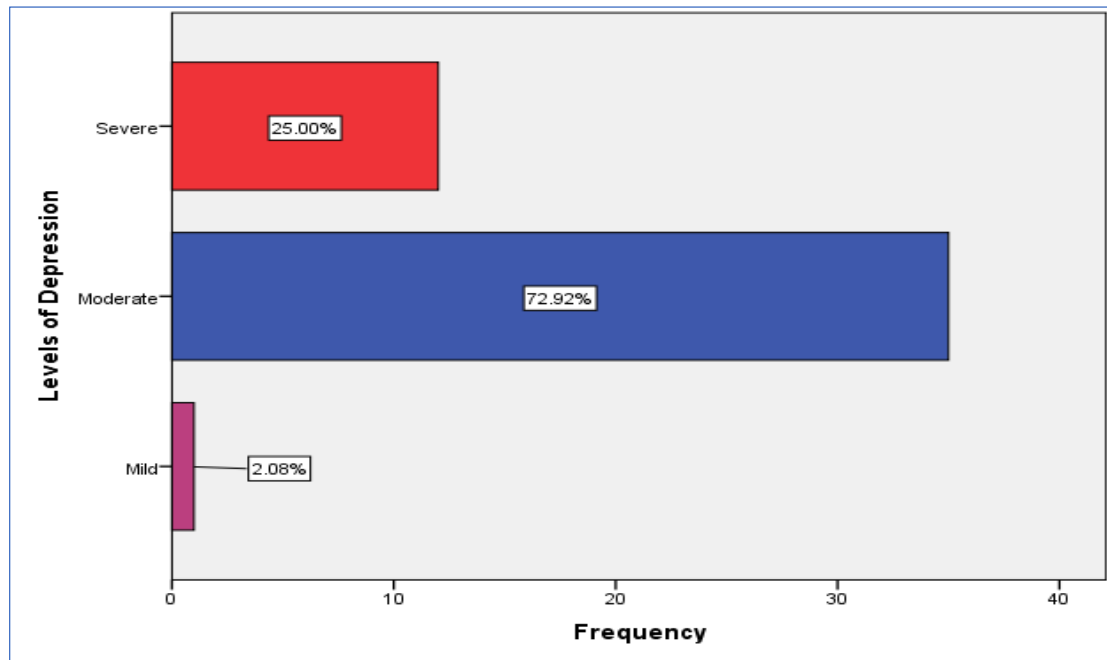


Figure 8: Bar Graph Representing Levels of Depression among Participants (N=48)

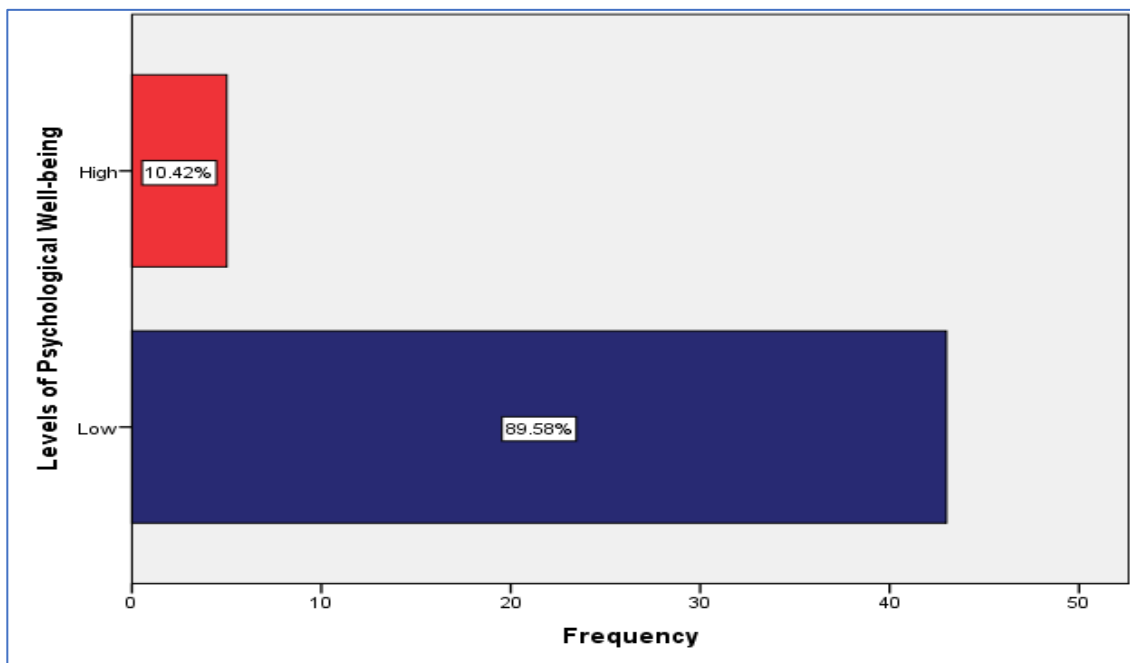


Figure 9: Bar Graph Representing the Levels of Psychological Well-being among Participants

Discussion

The present study sought to examine the predictive association between depression and psychological well-being among female acid attack survivors. The research findings endorse that acid attacks predict depression and psychological well-being among female acid attack survivors. The present study was formulated based on the available research evidence with the subsequent hypotheses to be tested:

H₁: Acid attacks would determine trends of depression among female acid attack survivors.

H₂: Acid attacks would determine trends of psychological well-being among female acid attack survivors.

The empirical validation of the first hypothesis (H₁) was confirmed through the aforementioned statistical analysis that revealed a major portion of the research sample was found to be moderately depressed after the attack with prominent depressive symptoms of guilt, complains regarding body appearance, interpersonal conflicts with family and friends, hopelessness, feelings of worthlessness and suicidal ideation. Examination of the variable of marital status reveals that most of the participants of the present study were single at the time of attack. Since the participants belonged to various non-government organizations that provided them with rehabilitation services and helped them reintegrating into the society. The marital status of many of the participants was changed to married during their course of rehabilitation. Thus, a social support network in the form of family existed for them. Previous studies also report that depressive trends are not as common among married women as they are prevalent among separated or divorced women (Bulloch, Williams, Lavorato & Patten, 2009; Nyer et al., 2010).

Empirically valid results were found for the second hypothesis (H₂). Most of the female acid attack survivors had a low sense of psychological well-being that further augmented negative mental health and psychological symptoms among them. Their maimed bodies and life full of physical and emotional scars lead them towards a lower sense of self-acceptance. The stigmatization from people around them makes it impossible for them to form healthy relationships with others. This was empirically proven by the statistical analysis of the data that revealed a low ability of forming warm and close relationships with others among the participants of the present study. This in turn seems to lower their ability to enjoy their lives, they live as birds in cage with no avenue for personal growth and a least interest for purpose in life. Their right to autonomy, right to live as independent beings is replaced by constant negative remarks from society that makes it difficult for them to reintegrate in to their society. This can be well associated to the findings of the present research that revealed most of the participants had difficulty mastering the environment.

A previous study (Yusufzai, 2013) also reported similar findings for female acid attack survivors. Findings revealed that an acid attack doesn't only disfigure a face or a body, rather it brings eternal psychological trauma for those who undergo it. In most cases, the end result of acid attacks is nothing but mass destruction of one's life. Apart from the physical trauma and reconstructive surgeries, many survivors are maimed for life.

Death wish or suicidal ideation is another mostly reported feeling among female acid attack survivors. The present research findings reported that suicidal ideation was prominent among the participants (M=4.50). Moreover, during the interview session, most of the participants reported that they attempted to end their lives as a result of taunts from the society that made their lives miserable. This in turn is a probable reason for a reportedly low of purpose in life (M=.08) among the participants which in turn causes to be a threat to their ability to move out in life and hence is an intimidation to their independence. They are unable to enjoy their autonomy since their adaptive functioning is greatly hampered due to the physical

disabilities, societal labels and mental discomfort. Thus, a lower sense of autonomy ($M=0.04$) is inculcated in the survivors that was also evident among the participants of the present study.

Thus, along with depressive feelings and low moods, survivors face a psychological trauma that hinders their sense of self, their autonomy, and their ability to move in society and thus they are left dependent over others with social isolation and ostracism from community as their true fate (Krausz, 2014).

The present research also focused on interpersonal conflicts as a prominent determinant of depression and positive interpersonal relationships as a determinant of psychological well-being among the participants. The findings indicated that participants mostly had high scores on interpersonal conflicts ($M=7.06$) with friends and family and a relatively low score on positive interpersonal relationships ($M=.10$). This depicts that the interpersonal conflicts with the social support network that result due to frustrations from being a disfigured acid attack survivor makes it difficult to establish warm and healthy positive relations with other people. Thus, the female acid attack survivors are left in a state that gives a set back to their interpersonal relationships and thus hampers their capabilities of mastering the environment and moving on in life (Pakistani Women's Human Rights Organization, 2011).

Findings from the current study also supported the fact that there is a relatively low sense of environmental mastery ($M=0.04$) among female acid attack survivors. Their capability to accept their new self is not well supported by their sense of inner guilt, worthlessness, complains regarding body appearance and hopelessness related to future. They are unable to accept their new identity that is full of scars left behind by acid and are thus unable to reintegrate into the society. The negative emotional health in the form of depressive symptoms among female acid attack survivors are enduring. They leave long lasting negative impacts on their psychological well-being and the survivors are thus left to live their entire life with the trauma. They are reminded of their worthlessness by the scars on their body and their physical disabilities. Living with the consequences of the acid attack further lowers their psychological health (International Center for Transitional Justice, 2010).

Thus the present study relates the predictive nature of acid attack as determinant of high levels of depression and low level of psychological well-being among female acid attack survivors.

Implications

The study makes prominent contribution by determining the quantitative relationship between levels of depression and levels of psychological well-being among female acid attack survivors that has not been studied earlier with context to the female acid attack survivors of Pakistan. Hence the present study is a contribution towards the maiden establishment of local research data on depression and psychological well-being among female acid attack survivors.

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