



NALSA (LEGAL SERVICES TO VICTIMS OF ACID ATTACKS) SCHEME, 2016

BACKGROUND

According to the National Crime Records Bureau, 222 cases of acid attacks were reported in 2015. **The number of acid attacks have been on the rise.**

The Justice Verma Committee constituted by the Central Government in 2013 in the aftermath of the Nirbhaya case to suggest reforms in the criminal justice system dealt with the issue of acid attacks and observed:

“We understand that a most heinous form of attack on women, which is commonplace in several Asian and African countries is the throwing of acid on women for a multitude of reasons, including alleged adultery, turning down advances from men, and also as a form of domestic violence. Acids and other corrosive substances are thrown on women or administered to them, thereby causing death or physical and psychological damage with unfathomable consequences.

CONSTITUTIONAL GUARANTEES

The Constitution of India guarantees the right to life and liberty of every individual under Article 21. This has been interpreted to

include the right to live with dignity and would encompass the right to live with dignity of all including victims of acid attacks.

LEGISLATIVE FRAMEWORK

- In the absence of any specific provisions to deal with incidents of acid attacks, such cases were generally dealt with under Section 326 of the IPC and other provisions.
- By virtue of Criminal law (Amendment Act), 2013, Sections 326A and 326B were inserted in the Indian Penal Code providing for punishment to anyone who causes permanent or partial damage or deformity to, or burns or maims or disfigures or disables, any part or parts of the body of a person or causes grievous hurt by throwing acid on or by administering acid to that person, or by using any other means with the intention of causing or with the knowledge that he is likely to cause such injury or hurt or who throws or attempts to throw acid on any person or attempts to administer acid to any person.

- “Acid” was defined to include any substance which has acidic or corrosive character or burning nature that is capable of causing bodily injury leading to scars or disfigurement or temporary or permanent disability.
- In *Laxmi v. Union of India, W.P. (Cr.) No.129/2006*, the Hon’ble Supreme Court of India directed that over the counter sale of acid would be completely prohibited unless the seller maintained a log/ register recording the sale of acid which would contain the details of the person(s) to whom acid(s) is/ are sold and the quantity sold.
- Regarding proper treatment, after care and rehabilitation of the victims of acid attack, a direction was issued by the order dated 10.4.2015 to the State Governments/ Union Territories to take up the matter with all the private hospitals to the effect that private hospitals should not refuse treatment to victims of acid attack and that full treatment should be provided to such victims including medicines, food, bedding and reconstructive surgeries. It was also observed that action may be taken against hospital/ clinic for refusal to treat victims of acid attacks and other crimes in contravention of the provisions of Section 357C of the Code of Criminal Procedure, 1973.
- Section 357A Cr.P.C. provides for a

Scheme being drawn up by the State Government in coordination with the Central Government for providing funds for the purpose of compensation to the victim and such Schemes .

Role of Legal Services Institutions

The Preamble of the Legal Services Authorities Act, 1987 emphasises that the legal services authorities are concerned with the weaker sections of the society and imposes a duty on them to ensure that opportunities for securing justice are not denied to any citizen by reason or economic or other disabilities.

OBJECTIVES OF THE SCHEME

- To strengthen legal aid and representation at the national, state, district and taluka levels for victims of acid attacks
- To enable the victims of acid attacks to get access to medical facilities and rehabilitative services;
- The ultimate objective of the Scheme is to ensure that the victims of acid attacks are appropriately rehabilitated in the society and live a life of dignity.

PLAN OF ACTION

- Legal Representation
 - a) All victims of acid attacks and where the acid attack results in death, the heirs of victims of acid attacks shall be provided legal

- aid on a priority basis in order to enable them to get the benefit of the Victim Compensation Scheme.
- b) SLSAs and DLSAs shall ensure that the victims of acid attacks do not have to face any kind of delay in procedural wrangles and the interim compensation is awarded at the earliest.
 - c) Support persons and legal representation shall be provided to victims of acid attacks during the recording of their statement under section 164 Cr.P.C., giving evidence etc.
 - d) Every District Legal Services Authority and Taluka Legal Services Committee shall designate at least one panel lawyer as Legal Services Officer for the purpose of this Scheme.
- b) The PLVs shall also assist the victims of acid attack in obtaining from the hospital where the victim was first treated a certificate that the individual is a victim of an acid attack which may be utilized by the victim for treatment and reconstructive surgeries or any other scheme that the victim may be entitled to with the State Government or the Union Territory, as directed by the Supreme Court in the order dated 10.4.2015.
 - c) The Legal Services Clinics shall ensure that action is taken against hospitals which deny treatment to victims of acid attacks on superficial grounds.

Co-ordination with the Government Departments

Legal Services Clinics

- a) SLSAs shall set up Legal Services Clinics at hospitals having specialized facilities for treatment of burns where victims of acid attacks may be referred for treatment. The PLVs and panel lawyers shall be deputed to such Legal Services Clinics shall be in regular touch with the victims of acid attacks and their relatives and ensure all possible help to them in securing appropriate medical help and treatment.
- b) The SLSAs shall take up the matter with the concerned States and Union Territories for taking appropriate steps with regard to inclusion of the names of the victims of acid attacks under the disability list and thereafter to ensure that they get the benefit of all the schemes which are available for persons with disability.

DATABASE

- a) All SLSAs shall have database of the existing Central or State Schemes, policies, regulations, policy directives concerning victims of acid attacks and the same may also be published in the form of pamphlets or booklets to be used in dissemination of information and creating awareness.
- b) All SLSAs shall have database of the hospital where specialized facilities for treatment of burn victims are available.

Awareness

- a) SLSAs along with DLSAs shall conduct awareness programmes to generate awareness about the Victim Compensation Scheme and the entitlements under the same and various laws and government schemes.
- b) SLSAs, DLSAs and Taluka Legal Services Committees shall organize awareness drives to highlight that over the counter sale of acids stands prohibited. The PLVs may inform the concerned

department or DLSAs if they come across any incidents of sale of acids so that appropriate action can be taken immediately.

Training and Orientation Programmes

- a) SLSAs shall conduct training and orientation programmes for panel lawyers and PLVs to sensitize them on how to deal with cases of victims of acid attacks.
- b) SLSAs shall, in coordination with the State Judicial Academies, plan and conduct training/ sensitization programmes for Judicial Officers with a view to ensuring quick and adequate award of compensation, including interim compensation, and a fair and dignified treatment of the victims of acid attacks during trial of cases.



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