

Recap

IN THIS ISSUE

- Attacked with acid over refusal to sign divorce papers | 2
- Case Story - Rexona Akhter | 3
- Partnership Announcement | 4
- Employee of the month - Mukti Bala | 5
- Survivor of the month - Robiul Islam | 6-7
- Volunteer of the month - Iffat Mahjabin | 7
- Service Report at a glance | 8



ATTACKED WITH ACID OVER REFUSAL TO SIGN DIVORCE PAPERS

| SEPTEMBER 2021

On 27th September 2021, 32-year-old Rania*, a beautician, was attacked with acid by her husband Jaber* and his former wife, for refusing to sign divorce papers.

Jaber and Rania married in 2015 according to Islamic Sharia Law. It was their second marriage and Rania was aware Jaber was still with his first wife at the time. But upon registering their marriage in 2021, Rania discovered Jaber married another woman in 2015, the same year as her wedding.

Marital disharmony began following the discovery and in frustration, Jaber left home and cut off all forms of communication. Concerned, Rania visited her in-laws in search of her husband. When humiliated and threatened by them, she notified the Chairman of the village of her situation, with the help of the villagers. He spoke to them, in presence of both the wives. To Rania's dismay, Jaber's first wife announced that Jaber wished to stay with her. Following this, Rania returned to her father's place.

On 27th September, Jaber, along with his first wife and 2 others, arrived at Rania's father's house, to take her back. But on their way back, Jaber stopped the car in an isolated place and threatened Rania, forcing her to sign divorce papers. However terrified Rania was, she

refused to sign the papers despite the threats. Infuriated, Jaber with his henchmen pulled Rania by the hair and poured acid over her hands and fled the crime scene.

Rania sought help from a close-by house who washed her wounds with water for an hour. She was then hospitalized at Sundorganj Hospital and received treatment for a week.

On 28th September, Rania filed a case against the 4 accused: husband Jaber, his friend Karim*, his first wife, and her maternal uncle Rashid*. The following day, the police captured Karim and Rashid but the main perpetrators Jaber and his first wife remain fugitives. Later it was known that Jaber had already left his job.

The police and forensic team gathered the glass bottle from the crime scene and Rania's clothes (worn on the day of the incident) as evidence. Once the investigation was underway, the police collected the original marriage certificate from Rania. But they have yet to take her statement.

ASF became aware of the incident 6 days following the ordeal and immediately placed Rania into contact with ASF's Medical Unit and offered her legal advice.

***Names have been changed for confidentiality**

A photograph of a woman, Rexona Akhter, wearing a vibrant, patterned sari in shades of pink, purple, and yellow. She is looking out from a balcony with a metal railing, her expression one of hope or contemplation. The background shows lush green foliage.

CASE STORY - REXONA AKHTER

In 1992, after rejecting a marriage proposal, Rexona Akhter was acid attacked by 4 perpetrators. She was first treated at Dhaka Medical College Hospital for 9 months, undergoing 3 surgeries. She was then contacted by ASF, where Rexona continued to receive treatment and underwent 3 more surgeries. To this day, she suffers from difficulties in hearing and vision. While all 4 perpetrators were sentenced to life in prison, 2 of them were bailed out while the other 2 were released.

Rexona had a childhood dream: to study well, work hard and stand on her own feet. That dream, however, crumbled soon after the accident. Although she tried to return to her studies, going outside became mental torture. People would surround her the moment she left home, making offensive and demeaning comments, which proved detrimental to her mental health, forcing her to abandon her education. Left without a purpose, Rexona yearned for a family, wishing she had a

child. So, when her husband, who was already previously married, proposed to her, she accepted because she did not wish to be alone in this difficult life. She had two children, a son, and a daughter, both of them now married.

“Life in a household with a co-wife was like fighting an unending war. I did not expect anything good from this household, but I just hoped that my children would have a good future,” Rexona laments. Hoping to escape her daily mental torment, she got a job at ASF. But it was temporary and after 2 years, she was forced to return to her torturous battlefield. Her husband died shortly after, leaving her 1/3 of his pension, which is hardly enough for her to get by. Her son was studying LLB but left midway after his father’s death.

In September, ASF visited Rexona to know how she is doing in life. Rexona now resides in her own house in Kamrangichar Thana. Despite everything, she keeps up a positive attitude and when asked, always replies, she is doing well in life. She hopes her son can become established, and dreams of seeing her children live a better life than she ever did.

PARTNERSHIP ANNOUNCEMENT

In September 2021, ASF had partnered with the department of criminology of Dhaka University (DU). Under the partnership agreement each year, ASF will recruit at least two interns from the criminology department for assisting in developing them in critical skills development for solving social issues. ASF welcomed the two intern students'. The intern students will be closely working with Sarder Jahangir Hossain, ASF Executive Director (ED).



Left to Right: Sakib Ahamed (Intern), Sarder Jahangir Hossain (Executive Director), Nuren Durdana (Intern)

EMPLOYEE OF THE MONTH - MUKTI BALA

Nurse



“Over the years I have seen a lot of survivors come to the medical unit. Many of whom were in critical situations. No matter how unique or dire the circumstance, they remained resilient. Their determination to live past their traumas and reinvent themselves often made me ponder on the gift of life.

I have observed these heroes both up close and from afar. Today, after many such encounters, I can vouch for the fact that they truly are survivors. Phoenixes that have risen from their ashes. Many of whom would make incredible leaders and advocates for a safer, more gender-equal world.

I am deeply humbled by their experiences and inspired by their strength and look forward to serving many such strong men and women in the future.

To our reader, I implore you to donate to our cause empowering these souls to lead the way to a more just and equal society.”

Mukti Bala started her journey with ASF in 2002 as a nurse. Currently, in charge of all ward attendants, her daily task includes handling indoor patients, providing various requisitions among many other responsibilities.

A busy bee, you can seldom find her stationed at one place. On rare occasions, you can find Queen bee by the balcony during tea breaks sipping at chai. Every conversation with her is an invitation to a sea of wisdom and knowledge owing to her vast experiences.

A maternal figure, we, at ASF, look up to you and are very lucky to have you on the team. We are forever indebted to your service Mukti Bala and we wish you continue to inspire us to lead with grace and conviction.



SURVIVOR OF THE MONTH - ROBIUL ISLAM

Robiul Islam was only 2 years old when he and his mother were attacked with acid by his uncle, who was involved in a land dispute with Robiul's father.

On 1st March 1988, at around 3 am, Uncle, Mohammed Sirajul Islam, drenched Robiul and his mother with acid, as reported by the neighbors, critically wounding Robiul's head, eyes, face, and nose. He ended up at Dhaka Suhrawardy Hospital after being shifted across multiple hospitals. His wounds soon became infected and infested due to delays in receiving treatment. After an extended period of treatment, while Robiul looked fine upfront, his wounds were left in their horrible state. Meanwhile, his expectant mother passed away six months after the incident due to her critical acid wounds.

Losing his mother at such an early age traumatized little Robiul. Making matters worse, his father became aggressive with him after her death. His once-caring father would often beat Robiul whenever he cried and forced him to work day and night on the fields, without a care for his son's wellbeing.

Robiul's situation improved slightly when his stepmother came into their household. She tried her best to love Robiul, and prevented his father from beating him. In this way, amidst poverty and a lack of affection from family members, Robiul grew up.

"Although my life felt cursed, I spent happier days in school, where my teachers and friends always encouraged me and gave me mental support", says Robiul.

After graduating high school, Robiul began looking for a job. His father refused to help him in his search for work. But education is necessary to become capable and Robiul barely had the finances for his education. Failing to find a job, Robiul returned to his studies and enrolled in a Bachelor of Arts degree. This is when he came to know of ASF.

ASF opened up a new world for him. He finally found a shelter and kinder spirits with whom he could share his deepest concerns. ASF financially supported Robiul's education, provided him with treatment and trained him in digital skills.

“ASF pulled me out of darkness and showed me the path to light! Through ASF, I got the opportunity to work as Sathkhira District’s Ambassador,” says Robiul.

When Robiul found work as a project manager, he was faced with workplace discrimination, and was never praised for his hard work. Disappointed, Robiul decided he would not work for others anymore. He started his own coaching center, where he taught students along with others.

Things were looking up for a while. But then, with the onset of the pandemic, and the government’s decision to close all coaching centers, Robiul suffered a huge loss. Throughout the pandemic, he worked part-time temporary jobs at several organizations, gaining a lot of experience in the process.

In his short life of 33 years, Robiul has faced social ostracism, workplace and employment discrimination, and an utter lack of tolerance and sensitivity from people. In this competitive world, he feels like he always falls behind others because he is an acid survivor.

“Will people ever accept me for who I am? Will our society ever change?” Robiul expresses dejectedly.

Robiul’s perpetrator still walks freely today. His father never demanded justice since the perpetrator was his own brother. Robiul believes God will give him justice one day, even if the law cannot. He only hopes that people will stop their cunning ways and eradicate acid violence forever.



VOLUNTEER OF THE MONTH

Iffat Mahjabin

Asian University for Women

Bsc Public Health & Environmental Science

“I will cherish my experience volunteering for ASF for the rest of my life. Writing and listening to the survivors’ stories made me feel that they are someone I have known for a very long time even though I have never met them in person. I have come to know some incredibly strong women whose story would be a source of inspiration for me. They taught me to never give up even when the world is being constantly cruel, or to love your own self even more when you don’t meet the social standard of beauty. Seeing the survivors at ASF who could grow a root with the help and support from the incredible donors gives me hope that there is much more space for kindness than cruelty in this world.”

Iffat assisted ASF in collecting case stories by interviewing survivors. We thank you for your time, Iffat, and wish you the best of luck in your future endeavors.

SERVICE REPORT

AT A GLANCE



65

SURVIVORS

MEDICAL

Medical Advice (Physical & Hotline)
Physio Advice
Psychotherapy Counselling
Referral

- 65 offered medical advice regarding recurring complications associated with acid burn wounds
- 02 patients given pressure garments
- 09 referred to other hospitals

19

SURVIVORS

LEGAL

Legal Assistance
Legal Counseling
Hotline service

- 04 given legal advice
- 15 offered hotline service

**“NO ONE HEARS THE CRY OF A
WOMAN FROM HER HOME.**

**ALL FORMS OF VIOLENCE
AGAINST WOMEN MUST STOP!”**

FATIMA (survivor)

DONATE



acidsurvivors.org
asf@acidsurvivors.org

House #39, Road #12, Block #Kha
Pisciculture Housing Society
Adabor, Dhaka - 1207, Bangladesh