Rigoberta Menchú TUM "We have learned that change cannot come through war..."

Hillary CLINTON "I am particularly horrified by the use of propaganda..."
A Bangladeshi woman acid survivor receives surgery in an attempt to improve physical damage to her face from exposure to acid. Today advocates ask what is the best approach in helping survivors cope? Image: ASF

(WNN) Dhaka, BANGLADESH: “My nose, eyebrows, eyelids, lips all peeled off in to my hands. I held on to the skin and flesh thinking the doctors would be able to reattach it,” Bina Akhter told author and United Nations consultant Elora Halim Chowdhury, describing how a group of men attacked Akhter with acid when she was fourteen years old.

Akhter added: at least 50 neighbors watched the attackers beat her and her uncle who had tried to protect her. The crowd watched but did nothing. While they are not unique to Bangladesh, a study conducted by Bangladeshi human rights group Odhikar recorded 581 reported cases of acid attacks against women in Bangladesh between 2003-2006.

Other reports by Bangladesh legal aid organization ASK – Ain O Salish Kendra indicates that since Bangladesh began monetizing its ‘development initiatives’ to increase women’s role in the Bangladesh economy and the public sphere, the government has begun to neglect incorporating public education on human rights into their overall strategy.

Bangladesh has been seeing an escalation in all forms of violence against women.
The typical image of acid attack victims in Bangladesh is the common description of a woman victim who is someone who has denied a man by rejecting his advances. But in reality acid attacks affect both genders. It also affects many children. Many victims and survivors like Akhter also have had no previous conflict with their attackers.

Akhter’s attack was intended to terrorize her family into obedience when a gang of men, with local political connections, broke into her house to abduct her cousin. “The acid was dripping into my mouth. I could taste it,” outlined Akhter about the effect the acid had once it hit her face.

Chowdhury researched and gathered interviews for over a decade before she completed her latest book, “Transnationalism Reversed: Women Organizing against Gendered Violence in Bangladesh.”

“This book allowed me to talk from different vantage points: the donors, the victims, the feminists, the state…,” said Chowdhury in a recent interview with WNN – Women News Network.

To get her story, Chowdhury talked with survivors of severe acid violence. She also interviewed United Nations officials and human rights advocates, as well as journalists and social activists, located both inside and outside of Bangladesh.

As an independent researcher and scholar, Chowdhury combined her interviews with extensive research to form a theoretical formula, both political and philosophical, that asks: Where are the failures in the mechanism of advocacy?

The goal is obviously to improve advocacy on all levels.

Despite being multilingual and connected with ‘the movement’ toward human rights, Chowdhury says the relationship between the researcher and its subject is “inevitably unequal and even exploitative.” Outlining that globalization and ‘NGO(Non-Government Organization)-ization’ of social movements has had unintended consequences for local women’s movements and the women involved.

Chowdhury speaks specifically on the evolution, successes, de-radicalization and finally, the unraveling of Naripokkho, a Dhaka-based advocacy organization which she began working with in the mid-1990s. In “Transnationalism Reversed,” she names names; something that activists have warned her against doing in Bangladesh. Through her research, she explores the unequal relationship between all organizations and the people who work within them.

“When the Acid Survivor Foundation (ASF) in Bangladesh researched the causes of acid violence, their study indicated that only 17% of the acid attacks in Bangladesh over the time period of 1999 – 2002, was caused by rejection of love, marriage or sex proposals,” emphasized Chowdhury in her recent interview. “Yet this is the common profile of acid victims that seems to make it into media and policy reports with persistent regularity,” continued Chowdhury.

“Acid violence is prevalent because of three related factors: gender inequality and discrimination, availability of acid and impunity for perpetrators,” says the ASF.

In her book Chowdhury points to UNICEF – United Nations Children’s Fund (Bangladesh) as the manager for what she describes have been ‘costly and risky’ treatments for survivors of acid violence. These treatments were not thoughtfully researched and were unavailable to a wide swath of the Bangladeshi population, outlines Chowdhury.

In order to receive treatments for acid violence numerous women, many who at the time were teenagers, were removed from home to live in an unfamiliar city. Several treated survivors, including Bina Akhter, admitted to feeling isolated, having “reoccurring nightmares and depression” for weeks following their treatments.

“Due to the nature of the attack, its consequences and the fact that the majority of perpetrators are not brought...
to justice, there are huge and long term psychological impacts on the survivor and immediate family which can last their entire lives,” continued the ASF.

Today neither the Naripokkho staff nor the survivors themselves understand what all the real ‘healing effects’ for treatment are. Nor did UNICEF follow up in a way that would provide sustainability to check to see if the women’s treatments were considered complete and effective.

“While staff are able to provide a supportive environment, they do not have adequate counselling skills to support survivors,” said UNICEF in an outlined program assessment in July 2003.

At the end of the day these survivors returned with limited resources and prolonged lack of opportunities for education and employment as they attempted to return back to communities that stigmatized and objectified them. Tragically many of the attackers remain free, living near a woman, or child victim, who continues to be tormented by severe injuries.

Chowdhury’s important research shows that on all levels localized Bangladeshi institutions, including even the doctors examining acid violence victims as well as the police recording their testimony, have been biased against these women. Some agents from local Bangladeshi institutions also frequently continue to blame the women for the attacks.

“In reality, land and business disputes are the leading causes for acid violence,” outlined Chowdhury. “…and older women are frequently targeted as a means to desecrate families involved in these disputes.” she said. “Nevertheless, young or older, it is disproportionately women family members who are made to pay the price for these disputes,” she continued.

The degree of blame against women victims of acid violence in Bangladesh has happened to the point where some agents have deliberately recorded misinformation, delayed law enforcement, or at its worst never attempted to report an acid attack. Some women have also been verbally abused and deliberately humiliated after they were attacked.

As women ‘fall-through-the-cracks’ even improvements in Bangladesh’s national policy, a favored focus of the United Nations, has created insufficient solutions. Non-urban often uneducated women still need assistance. These are women with scant knowledge of their own human rights or their ability to have legal access to report violence through the legal system.

In its earlier years Naripokkho focused on creating a communal environment to empower acid attack survivors by helping them connect with each other. Naripokkho established workshops early on where survivors could tell their own stories from their own perspective using their own voice. They were also encouraged to map their own future and sharpen their vision of what local social justice should look like. Then the plan for how to acquire adequate services for victims of violence could begin to go forward.

“Together these women were starting to chart the direction of a campaign that emphasized the importance of empowering those who had endured acid attacks to be the leaders of the campaign,” said Chowdhurry in her interview with WNN.

In one Naripokkho workshop, a group composed primarily of young women realized one of their biggest common struggles – struggling through social isolation.

This was in part because of handicaps, such as blindness and disfigurement, that identifies acid survivors as victims in society. The majority of these women fear being verbally abused within the community, especially in public places.

To see more of this story with video and special reports link to page 2 below > > >

http://womennewsnetwork.net/2012/07/11/bangladesh-advocacy-acid-crime/
BANGLADESH: Is stop violence advocacy working? Author tracks acid crime | WNN – Women News Network

9/15/2014

Related Posts

Acid Crime Survival Zambia

International women in film & arts gather at UN to stop violence against women

In Italy she faced change, not defeat, under acid violence

1 2

Short URL: http://womennewsnetwork.net/?p=16988

Posted by Women News Network on Jul 11 2012. Filed under Asia, Features. Comments Feed. Both comments and pings are currently closed.

Recent Entries

- After Changing Mindsets, Haryana Village Wants to Change Name
- Colombian women’s group wins UN refugee prize
- The dogs who worked for rescue at 9/11’s Ground Zero
- Meet the Kurdish Women Fighting ISIS in Syria
- Finn aims to be first female president of Somalia
- Under violence Nigeria’s girl abductees become child soldiers
- [US] History’s Female Programmers Will No Longer Be Forgotten
- China’s extreme smog predicts a slow down in coal consumption
- SAMOA: Pacific women, youth to benefit from partnerships – UN
- [Europe] The Countertraffickers

Featured Links

- WNN Breaking
- WNN MDG Stories

http://womennewsnetwork.net/2012/07/11/bangladesh-advocacy-acid-crime/
BANGLADESH: Is stop violence advocacy working? Author tracks acid crime | WNN – Women News Network

http://womennewsnetwork.net/2012/07/11/bangladesh-advocacy-acid-crime/