

Gender-based violence

NUMBER 68

Toll: The number of women between the ages of 15-48 that have experienced some form domestic violence. UGANDA

AFTER AN ATTACK. The experts advise that immediately the acid is poured on you, pour water on yourself. If you can be able to do so or you can ask those around you to help you, do that as it is the immediate first aid. Water helps dilute the acid concentration so that its effect is mild. After that, you can be rushed to the nearest hospital although not every hospital can attend to such attacks.

Acid attack almost killed her

Burnt for love: Gender based violence takes on many forms, physical, psychological and economical; some victims have suffered acid attacks. As the world commemorates the 16 days of activism against gender-based violence, one such woman shares her story with Sarah Aanyu.

The yellow cap worn over a weave, makes it easy for one to single out Jamidah Namuyomba from the group of six women sitting around a table. Her smile draws one to her almost immediately. You can tell hers must have been an even brighter smile before the misfortune of an acid attack befell her.

"It happened when I was only 19 years old," she says in Luganda, the language in which she prefers to hold the interview. Like

many victims of acid attack, Namuyomba's case was a lover affair turned sour.

"I am a Muslim and he is a Christian. My family members and relatives never liked our union since for a Muslim to marry a Christian, one has to convert to Islam. A thing that my boyfriend was willing to do, but he still doubted my commitment," she says.

Mistrust begets ill feelings

Nonetheless, the couple started living together and had a child. Namuyomba also has two children from a previous relationship. She believes that the mistrust he had and the pressure her relatives exerted on her mounted pressure on their relationship.

To keep sane, she decided to concentrate on her restaurant business. Unfortunately, her business did not progress as expected, so she had to sell some of her property to keep the business running, an act that made her partner suspicious.

"He thought I wanted to leave and take our son with me. I tried to explain to him why I was selling the things but he never understood. Instead he started paying guards to keep watch over me at home, just to make sure I never left him for another man," she says.

Her lover went to the extent of paying someone to kill her twice, but she escaped when she heard him plotting this on phone.

"One of the men hired later confessed that he had been paid to kill me, but fortunately, he knew my father and could not kill me," says Namuyomba.

Fateful attack

After the failed plans to take her life, this only rattled her partner more. One day her boyfriend was restless and kept passing by her restaurant all day, but she never took this seriously.

In the evening at around 8pm when she was in the kitchen, she received a customer whom she thought needed food.

"He walked into the kitchen and tapped me. When I turned, he instead poured a strange substance on my face and left immediately," she says.

In excruciating pain, Namuyomba run out of the kitchen to the restaurant sitting area screaming uncontrollably. Her confused customers thought cooking oil had poured on her face.

"The sensation was hot and I felt an intense burning. My eyes and mouth shut instantly but I could hear all that was being said. I knew the person who had poured acid on me, but I could not speak. Next I woke up in Masaka Hospital and the doctors were asking me to mention who had done it or else I could die with the truth," says Namuyomba.

Her face was completely burnt. She revealed that the attacker was a man called Lwakissetta, but she was frustrated because the doctors then ignored her and acted like her case too severe that she could not survive the ordeal.

The short hand of justice

"Lwakissetta was arrested the next day and he confessed that my boyfriend had paid him Shs20, 000 to pour acid on me, but he managed to escape and has never been arrested," she says sorrowfully.

Luckily, she managed to live longer than expected, something that gave her hope. She had to rely on comfort from her friends as her relatives gradually abandoned her claim.

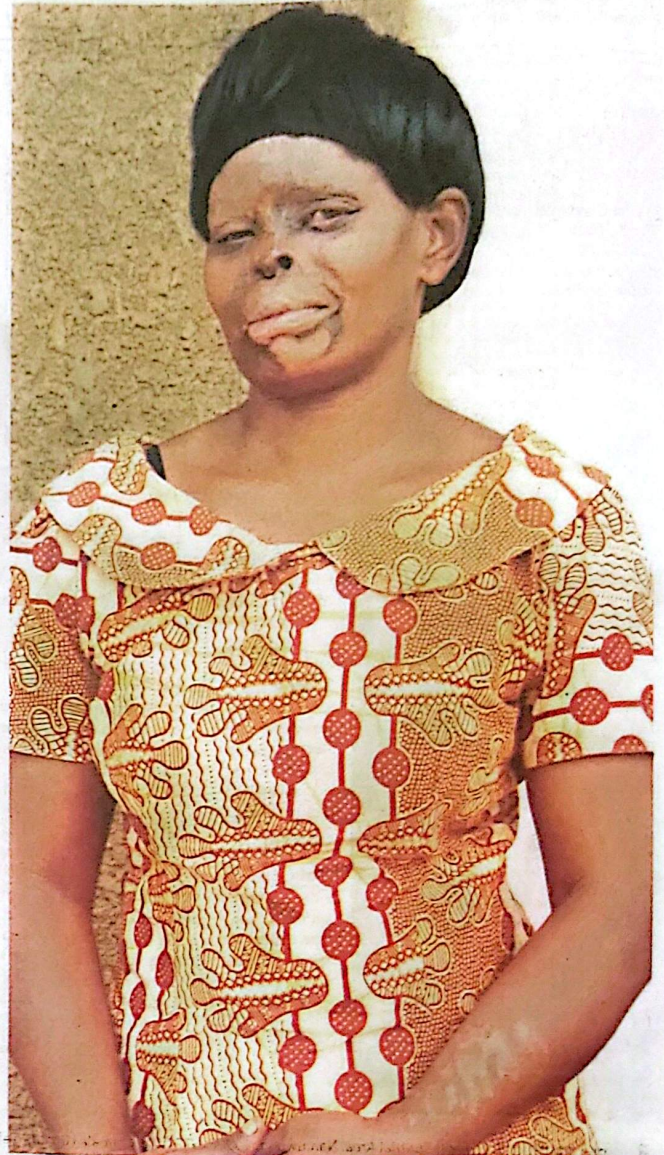
she says.

However her relatives still segregated her, some even shunned anything she touched which left her traumatized. She was given a room to live in with her children at her late half-brother's house but even then, she was frustrated by her father, step mother and other half-brother until she moved to Kampala to live with other survivors in Bugerere.

Life was not easy because it was a new environment, she had a family, and people around were afraid of speaking to her but she soon learnt how to weave and now earns a living from the skill.

Her children got a scholarship to study free at a nearby school.

"It is now 10 years ever since that happened and despite the disfigured face, I have learnt to live in my own skin with helping people get to live comfortably around me," she proudly says.



EXPERTS' VIEWPOINT

Causes. Reenah Ntorewe, an administrator at End Acid Violence Uganda, says there are many acid attacks because of lack of awareness, serious and specific laws against the act and also the stereo type people have attached to the act which leaves some victims shy to come out and comfortably talk about their ordeal. The government regulates the sale of toxic substances through the Chemical Prohibition and Control Act which was signed towards the end of 2015 and was advocated for by acid survivors and well-wishers in Uganda with the help of RISE, a United States based organisation.

Anyone can be a victim

Ernest Kayanja, founder of End Acid Violence Uganda, says you can never tell when acid is going to be poured on you because if people did, then there would be no cases since people would take precaution.

"Anyone can be a victim because it does not only happen to people who have grudge with others but can also happen because of mistaken identity. So what people need to do when they are walking is be cautious of the people in their surroundings especially those who are acting suspicious."

He advises that immediately the acid is thrown on you, pour water on yourself if you can be able to do so or you can ask those around you to help you do that as it is the immediate first aid. Water helps dilute the acid concentration so that its effect is mild.

"After that you can be rushed to the nearest hospital although the best hospital one can go to is a public hospital because they are the ones that have most of the medication required for the acid victims. If possible you can find your way to Kiruddu Hospital, Mulago where the best acid attack facilities in the country are found," he says.