



MWIA CASE STUDIES

VIOLENCE CAUSING PERMANENT INJURY OR DISFIGUREMENT

Case 4: Acid attack in Nigeria

Objectives

- To show the level of impunity regarding acid attacks on women in Nigeria

Narrative Case

** At the end of the case study you can find "Learning points" related to information presented in the narrative case, denoted by numbers in square brackets.*

I was a 26-year-old patent medicine vendor based in a town in Ebonyi State. I joined an Esusu (thrift contribution) [1] with some local business men and women. We contributed N10,000 (ten thousand Naira) every month. After some months, it was my turn to receive the sum of N150,000 (in August 2006). I kept N135,000 in my house planning to use it to replenish my stock the following day.

Later that day, a customer called me from the bedroom to come and give treatment to his sick mother. I left my bedroom and crossed over to the shop to attend to the customer. When I returned home I found that my N135,000 had been stolen. On enquiry, one woman told me that she saw a young man named N. N. coming out from the back door of my room. When I confronted him about the missing money, he denied any knowledge.

N. N. is an electrician from the same State. He was my neighbour at work. When I arrived in town to start the business, he asked me to be his girlfriend. I him turned down, but we remained cordial.

Not knowing what else to do, I travelled to my village and informed my parents about the stolen money. They came back with me and asked N. N. to swear an oath before a well-known shrine in the village to prove his innocence, which he refused to do. When he found out that my parents were determined to take him to the shrine, he admitted stealing my N135,000. As is customary in the area, N. N.'s hands and feet were tied and he was disgraced publicly as a thief. His relatives were invited and we made a spoken agreement with them to repay the entire sum of money in instalments. With no better option, I accepted this agreement.

A few days later, at about 3-4a.m, I heard a knock on my door. It was N. N.'s voice claiming he was saying that he had come to return some of the money. I was reluctant to open the door at that time of the night, but my youngest sister who was visiting, urged me to open the door and receive the money instead of allowing him to go back with it.

My other sister, with whom I live in Akwunakwuna [2], had then woken up and joined us at the door. As I opened the door, I felt very hot liquid and burning sensation on my face and I cried out to neighbours for help, shouting that hot water had been poured on me. At the same time my two siblings were shouting as the same liquid was also poured on them.

My two sisters and I, were rushed (unconscious) to the Teaching Hospital where we spent the first 7 months on intensive treatment. Only part of our hospital bills (N450,000) were paid for by my parents through the sale of my father's parcels of land. The hospital management detained us in the hospital for months because our bills were not paid. In all, we spent a total of 20 months in the hospital.

Throughout our stay in the hospital, no relation of N. N. came to see us or our parents to offer sympathy. N. N. has not returned the stolen money either. We later heard that N. N. was arrested, detained and released later by the police. Presently, I hear that N. N. is going round our village boasting that since I was the cause of his disgrace, he would kill me and kill himself if he ever set eyes on me [3].

Since the incident, I have not gone to the village to see my mother. I am told that my mother is so broken hearted that she cannot bear to see me this way and that she now behaves abnormally [4].



Postscript:

Blessing lost her left ear and requires another operation on her left eye if she is to retain vision. There are no hairs on the part of her left scalp, which was burnt. [5]

Learning Points

- [1] The story shows clearly efforts at self-empowerment by B. U. through the local thrift system used as a savings scheme called Isusu.¹
- [2] The system of distributive wealth is shown through the fact that B.U was supporting her younger sister, who lived with her
- [3] The aspect of the level of impunity is evident through the fact that the perpetrator is still walking around free in the community.
- [4] The impact of violence on close family members is often ignored. In this case not only were B.U.'s two sisters were injured, but the incident still affects her mother psychologically.

Background information on acid attacks ^{2,3}

Acid throwing, also called an acid attack, a vit attack or vitriolage, is a form of violent assault defined as the act of throwing acid or a similarly corrosive substance onto the body of another with the intention to disfigure, maim, torture, or kill. Perpetrators of these attacks throw acid at their victims, usually at their faces, burning them, and damaging skin tissue, often exposing and sometimes dissolving the bones. The most common types of acid used in these attacks are sulfuric and nitric acid. The long-term consequences of these attacks may include blindness, as well as permanent scarring of the face and body, along with far-reaching social, psychological, and economic difficulties

References

1. Iheduru, N. G. (2002). *Women Entrepreneurship and Development: The Gendering of Microfinance in Nigeria*. 8th International Interdisciplinary Congress on Women [Presentation]. Retrieved from: <http://www.gdrc.org/icm/country/nigeria-women.html>
2. Acid throwing (n.d.) In *Wikipedia*. Retrieved 22 November 2014 from: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Acid_throwing
3. AllAfrica (6 October 2011). Nigeria: Curbing Incessant Acid Attacks. Retrieved from: <https://allafrica.com/stories/201110060699.html>