


# Perspectives on acid attacks in the UK

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## Keywords

Acid, attack, corrosive, burn, assault

Through an open letter in this journal, Katie Piper – author, TV presenter and acid attack survivor, calls for action on corrosive substances.<sup>1</sup>

Anecdotally among my burns surgeon colleagues in the UK, there has been an increase in assaults with corrosive substances restricted to specific geographic pockets of the country. This is clearly a cause for concern, although it should be noted that of the estimated quarter of a million burn injuries per year in the UK, such injuries probably account for approximately 0.1% of all burns.

A previous article in *Scars, Burns & Healing* has provided the best snapshot of evidence we currently have in the UK of the pattern of such injuries.<sup>2</sup> This study highlighted our lack of understanding and challenged previously accepted stereotypes regarding such injuries. For instance, twice as many men were assaulted in this way as were women. Furthermore, the figures for the cultural and ethnic backgrounds of the victims were:

‘Victims came from various cultural backgrounds such as Caucasian (16), African (3), Oriental (1) and South Asian Subcontinent (1).’<sup>2</sup>

Hence, corrosive assaults in the UK appear to be a phenomenon that may be on the rise in certain geographic areas but not others, and appears to be something that is most commonly perpetrated by white men against white men but with a significant mix of other victims, both female and from a range of ethnic backgrounds.

As clinicians and scientists, we are problem-solvers using evidence as our main tool and collaboration as our catalyst. There is a clear need

for further evidence-based research related to acid attacks and corrosive substances so we can guide the wider community and policy-makers, as well as victims, in this important and serious area. While funding constraints remain a significant hurdle for those seeking to undertake primary research, raising awareness is an important first step. First-hand patient experiences are the most poignant reminders of our *raison d’être* and help highlight the importance of research to those that may be inclined to support it or undertake it.

‘Circumstantial evidence is a very tricky thing. It may seem to point very straight to one thing, but if you shift your own point of view a little, you may find it pointing in an equally uncompromising manner to something entirely different.’

—Arthur Conan Doyle, *The Adventures of Sherlock Holmes*

## References

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2. Tan A, Bharj AK, Nizamoglu M, et al. Assaults from corrosive substances and medico legal considerations in a large regional burn centre in the United Kingdom: Calls for increased vigilance and enforced legislation. *Scars, Burns & Healing* 2015. DOI: 10.1177/2059513115612945.

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