

**Can Diversity Reputation Signals Reduce Discrimination Against Acid Attack
Survivors: Evidence from an Experimental Study**

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Summary: In this article, we delved into the challenges encountered by survivors of acid attacks when seeking customer-facing positions and proposed a strategy to alleviate them. Using a between-subjects experiment design, our research illuminated a main effect of job role; survivors consistently received lower evaluations for roles requiring direct engagement with customers compared to those not involving such interactions. Significantly, we discovered that this bias was remediated when organisations demonstrated their commitment towards diversity through diversity reputation signals.

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Can Diversity Reputation Signals Reduce Discrimination Against Acid Attack Survivors: Evidence from an Experimental Study

Abstract

Acid attacks have a profound impact on the lives of survivors. Survivors endure irreversible damage to their faces, physical injuries, psychological and emotional trauma, and social isolation. Additionally, many of them struggle to find employment due to their disfigurement, further dampening their prospects of social integration and financial independence. The current research examined the discrimination against survivors for customer-facing jobs and suggests a potential strategy to remediate this bias. Our research deployed a between-subjects experimental design. We collected data from working executives (N = 129) in India. The findings revealed that survivors received lower evaluations for customer-facing jobs compared to no-customer-facing ones. Further, we discovered that organisational diversity reputation signals can alleviate bias against survivors. This study contributes to both stigma theory and signaling theory. Moreover, our findings have practical implications for organisations.

Keywords: Stigma, Signaling Theory, Acid Attacks, India, Diversity and Inclusion

Introduction

“Acid attack on woman a month before her wedding in UP [Uttar Pradesh].”

-17 Nov’23, Times of India

“Madurai: Man sentenced to 10 years in jail for acid attack on college girls.”

-29 Dec’23, Hindustan Times

The recent news headlines above underscore the prevalence of acid attacks in India. India registered 202 cases of acid attacks and 71 instances of acid attack attempts in 2022 (National Crimes Record Bureau, n.d.). However, these figures underestimate the true incidence of such attacks, as many cases go unreported (Bhattacharya, 2023). The majority of the victims are women from the underprivileged backgrounds (Patel, 2014). Attackers primarily target the faces of their victims, causing irreversible damage (Finley, 2013). The permanent disfigurement, physical injuries and mental trauma make rehabilitation and social integration particularly challenging for acid attack survivors (Tripathi, 2023).

Facial perception, the process through which individuals interpret faces, is essential for various communicative purposes, including identifying and recognising others (Li and Jain, 2005). Thus, facial deformities can have a strong impact on social interaction (Stone and Patton, 2014). Individuals with facial disfigurements are prone to experience barriers in work organisations (Dipboye, 2005). Past research has highlighted the importance of facial appearance in work settings. Studies have consistently found that physical appearance is associated with success in organisations, especially during initial screening and job selection (Hosoda *et al.*, 2003; Langlois *et al.*, 2000). Facial appearance is particularly crucial when judgments have to be made about a person’s social competence (Eagly *et al.*, 1991).

The objective of this research is to examine the ways in which discrimination against acid attack survivors (henceforth “survivors”) occurs in employment settings and propose a strategy for its remediation. This study makes contributions to stigma theory (Goffman, 1963) and signaling theory (Spence, 1973). Firstly, we extend the extant stigma literature by demonstrating the pernicious effect of survivors' stigma on their employability. Secondly, we contribute to signaling theory by showing how diversity reputation signals can attenuate the

bias against survivors. Our findings suggest that employment opportunities for survivors are enhanced when organisations exemplify their commitment towards diversity through diversity reputation signals.

Acid Attack

Acid attacks are deliberate acts of violence that involve the throwing, spraying, or pouring of acid or other corrosive substances onto victims' faces or bodies (Kalantry and Kestenbaum, 2011). Acid attack causes permanent damage to the human skin (Hopkins *et al.*, 2021). The extent of the damage depends both on the concentration of the acid and the duration of the assault (Islam *et al.*, 2023). Those responsible for acid attacks frequently aim at disfiguring their victims, targeting their heads and faces rather than trying to kill them (Mannan *et al.*, 2007). While acid attacks are a global phenomenon, the reasons for the attack and the targets vary from one country to another (Hopkins *et al.*, 2023). The incidence of acid attacks is high in low and middle-income countries and has been linked to issues around gender inequality and violence against women (Chowdhury, 2011).

In India, acid attack is considered gender-based violence, which primarily affects women (Sharma, 2013). The motives for these attacks include seeking retribution for a declined marriage proposal, family conflicts, property disputes, domestic violence, or doubts about infidelity (Arora, 2017). The disfigurement caused by the acid is irreversible, and numerous surgical procedures are unable to restore the aesthetics of a human face (Salmani *et al.*, 2023). Acid attacks may lead to other handicaps, including loss of vision, hearing, and organ damage (Kalantry and Kestenbaum, 2011). Survivors have to endure tremendous psychological and social impacts, leading to anxiety, depression, and suicide ideation (Qazi *et al.*, 2019). Oftentimes, survivors find themselves ostracised by society, shunned by family and friends, blamed for their condition, and questioned about their integrity (Sharma, 2019). Many avoid coming out in public to avoid the hostile stares of others (Querishi and Singh, 2018). Their socioeconomic condition and integration into society are further affected as many are unable to find employment (Pio and Singh, 2017).

Most academic work on acid attacks has examined the motive behind these attacks and the type and extent of injuries sustained by survivors (Hopkins *et al.*, 2023). Recently, there have been calls (e.g., Salmani *et al.*, 2023) for more research aimed at survivors, specifically in the Indian context. In this study, our objective was to investigate the employment accessibility of survivors, focusing on hiring outcomes. The next section outlines the theoretical underpinnings of this research, focusing on stigma theory and signaling theory. The research methodology, including data collection and analysis, is then described. Subsequently, findings are reported. This is followed by a discussion elucidating the theoretical and practical contributions of the findings. The article concludes with study limitations and future research agenda.

Theoretical Background and Hypotheses Development

Facial Stigma

Goffman (1963) initially defined stigma as an attribute that can discredit a person and reduce them from a whole person to tainted or discounted others. Later research has moved away from locating stigma wholly within the person by focusing on the person's social identity and the importance of specific contexts. For example, Crocker *et al.* (1998) refer to stigma as possessing (or believed to be possessing) a characteristic which conveys a devalued identity within a particular social context. The perception of being stigmatised can have negative consequences for those individuals who bear stigma (Stone *et al.*, 1992). The reactions towards stigmatised persons depend on the characteristics of perceived stigma (Jones *et al.*, 1984).

Zhang *et al.* (2021) identified five characteristics of stigma: concealability (degree of visibility), controllability (perceived responsibility), centrality (proximity to core identity), disruptiveness (degree of perceived threat to others), and malleability (how the stigma changes over time).

The conspicuous and novel nature of facial stigma can have a disruptive impact in social settings (Madera, 2016). Due to the primacy of face in human interactions, facial stigmas can be particularly disruptive (Vertegaal *et al.*, 2001). Facial disfigurements can significantly affect social interactions by inducing anxiety and avoidance reactions from others (Hebl *et al.*, 2000). The perception of an aesthetically unappealing face may trigger strong emotions like disgust, repulsion, and anger (Dovidio *et al.*, 2000; MacGregor *et al.*, 1953). Blascovich *et al.* (2001) reported increased stress and perceived threat from interacting with a facially disfigured individual.

Past research (e.g., Stevenage and McKay, 1999) has reported that individuals with facial disfigurement can face discrimination in hiring scenarios. Madera and Hebl (2012) observed that candidates with visible scars were rated lower in interviews than those without facial scars. Similarly, Madera (2016) discovered that interviewers displayed more negative affect and behaviours towards applicants with facial stigmas. Individuals with facial disfigurements may be considered a poor fit for jobs requiring interpersonal contact (Stone and Colella, 1996). Research has revealed that people with facial disfigurement are stereotyped as lacking social skills and confidence (Stone and Wright, 2012). Due to these stereotypes, they are discriminated against in jobs requiring high customer interaction compared to those with limited engagement with customers (Stone and Wright, 2013).

Due to their disfigurement, survivors are prone to experience adverse judgments from others, particularly in an employment context. They are more likely to experience discrimination when applying for customer-facing jobs where aesthetics and self-presentation skills are likely to play a significant role in evaluating candidates. Therefore, we hypothesise: -

Hypothesis 1: - A survivor candidate will be evaluated more positively for a no-customer-facing job than for a customer-facing job.

Signaling Theory

Signaling theory is concerned with reducing the information asymmetry between two parties (Spence, 2002). A signal refers to the action of the signaler (more informed party) that reduces the information gap for the receiver (less informed party) by providing information about the real characteristics of the signaler (Lee *et al.*, 2005). The first party perceives the observable actions of the second party as reflecting something unobservable about the second party. The term market signaling was initially framed to describe the job market, where employers decide about job applicants based on incomplete information (Spence, 1973). High-quality applicants engage in rigorous higher education in the labour market to distinguish themselves from low-quality prospects.

Signaling theory can be fruitfully used to investigate how firms signal their priorities to stakeholders. Signaling theory proposes that organisations' diversity practices and policies send signals to stakeholders regarding firms' priorities, values, and goals (Wayne and Casper, 2012). For example, diverse boards signal an organisation's commitment to societal values, meeting stakeholder expectations and market demands (Miller and del Carmen Triana, 2009). Women in top management roles signal organisational justice and support (Iseke and Pull, 2019). Gender equality initiatives signal the importance ascribed by an organisation to the contribution and professional development of women (Baker *et al.*, 2019). Similarly, ethnic diversity in

management positions signals an organisation's commitment to equal opportunity (Lindsay *et al.*, 2017).

When evaluating an organisation, stakeholders have to rely on signals as complete information is often unavailable or too costly to obtain (Simon, 1957). Barney (1991) suggested that corporate reputation, characterised by stakeholders' perceptions about an organisation's ability to create value relative to competitors, is an intangible resource of firms and a source of competitive advantage. An organisation's reputation for diversity is an important facet of corporate reputation. One way of assessing the diversity reputation of organisations is through the rankings or awards conferred to organisations by professional associations or business magazines on key diversity attributes (Avery and McKay, 2006). For example, *Fortune* magazine annually ranks the top 100 companies for diversity in the United States (Burdette, 2023). In India, professional organisations like the *Associated Chambers of Commerce and Industry* (ASSOCHAM) and business publications like *Business World* recognise organisations for their efforts on diversity and inclusion through awards (ASSOCHAM, n.d.; Bahl, 2022). Additionally, the Great Place to Work Institute releases annual rankings of the best workplaces in India on diversity and inclusion (Great Place to Work, 2024).

Diversity reputation signals the value organisations place on diversity and effective diversity management practices (Avery and McKay, 2006; Roberson and Park, 2007). A positive diversity reputation indicates that a firm actively hires a heterogeneous workforce and prioritises equal treatment of its employees, which conveys important information to various stakeholders, including current and potential employees (Roberson & Park, 2004). Research suggests that stakeholders positively interpret diversity reputation signals. Roberson and Park (2007) discovered a positive relationship between a firm's diversity reputation and its perceived value among investors. Cook and Glass (2014) found an increase in the stock price of firms subsequent to the declaration of diversity awards, implying that investors perceive signals of diversity reputation as positive indications of a firm's health.

Signaling theory suggests that signals' strength and effectiveness depend on the extent to which they are costly to the sender, visible and observable to the receiver (Bangertar *et al.*, 2012; Connelly *et al.*, 2011). Research suggests that being recognised as a diversity leader is strategically important for organisations. Hundreds of organisations vie for such recognition each year, dedicating considerable time and personnel resources (Daniels, 2004). Participating in these awards necessitates organisations to gather a wide variety of data and demonstrate their commitment to diversity (Cook and Glass, 2014). For instance, the methodology employed by *Fortune* magazine to recognise organisations on diversity includes parameters such as the company's values, overall workforce diversity, and anonymous feedback on the workplace experiences of marginalised groups (e.g., women, people of colour, persons with disabilities) regarding trust, pride, and camaraderie (Fortune, 2023). Diversity awards are highly credible as they are compiled independently by a third party and, therefore, beyond the direct control of organisations (Avery *et al.*, 2013). Receipt of diversity awards is also very public, as the award recipients are often lauded and featured in various publications and media outlets (Cook and Glass, 2014).

Organisational diversity practices act as cues for employee behaviours. Porcena *et al.* (2020) found that employees reciprocate with ethical conduct when organisations exemplify their dedication to diversity through fair and equitable practices. Building on the preceding discussion, we argue that survivors will be less prone to discrimination when organisations demonstrate their commitment towards diversity through diversity reputation signals. More specifically, we hypothesise: -

Hypothesis 2: - Diversity reputation signals will attenuate discrimination against survivors, such that in organisations that are recognised as diversity leaders, there will not be a significant difference in the evaluation of a survivor candidate for a customer-facing versus a no-customer-facing job.

Research Methodology

Our research methodology consisted of a laboratory experiment employing a between-subjects design, which allowed us to control for confounding variables and demand effects (Charness *et al.*, 2012). We used an in-basket exercise to embed the experimental materials, which included manipulation of job roles and the diversity reputation signals. The in-basket technique is a tool generally used to assess how well candidates perform job-related tasks within a stipulated time (Moses and Bynham, 1977). Research has revealed that behaviours in an in-basket exercise mirror the performance anticipated in actual job roles (Brief *et al.*, 2000). Moreover, an in-basket simulation provides more realism and thus is suitable for measuring ethical behaviours in a laboratory experiment (Trevino, 1992). Past research has used in-basket exercises to study discrimination in the workplace (e.g., Rosen and Jerdee, 1974; Umphress, 2003).

Sample

The sample comprised 129 working executives who were participating in a management development program at a business school in India. 81 (62.79%) were male, and 48 (37.21%) of the participants were female. The average age was 31.76 years ($SD = 8.15$), and the average work experience was 13.31 years ($SD = 9.66$). Since our study aimed to examine the impact on hiring choices, a sample of managers was deemed appropriate.

Procedure

An in-basket exercise was administered to the participants. In the in-basket, participants were instructed to take on the role of a Human Resource Director at StayOtel (an Indian Hotel company). The in-basket contained information about the organisation, the roles and responsibilities of the Human Resource Director and an organisation chart. In the main section of the in-basket, participants were tasked with completing five memoranda within forty minutes, each involving typical professional tasks. One memorandum contained the experimental manipulation, requiring the participants to make a hiring decision for a job opening at the hotel. Specifically, they were required to evaluate a fictitious survivor candidate's (Ms Kavita) resume for the position. We ensured that the resume fulfilled the minimum requirements for the job in terms of qualification and experience. We chose to disclose the information pertaining to the acid attack on the resume of the candidate. Specifically, the personal details section of the resume read as follows : -

“In 2022, I experienced an acid attack, which led to a twenty-month break following my graduation. The incident resulted in extensive burns across my body and has significantly altered my facial features. Despite these challenges, I lead a purposeful life. With the appropriate opportunity, I possess the capability to excel in any role that aligns with my skills.”

Three versions of the in-basket (no-customer-facing job, customer-facing job, and customer-facing job with diversity reputation signals) were randomly assigned to the participants. The participants were given the relevant job descriptions. We made sure that both jobs were placed at the same level in the organisational hierarchy, which was clearly illustrated and evident in the organisation chart.

In the first condition, participants evaluated the candidate for a laundry associate position (no-customer-facing job). The job responsibilities of a laundry associate comprised of (i) operating laundry equipment, including washers, dryers, and ironing machines, in accordance with safety guidelines and manufacturer instructions, (ii) sorting, washing, drying, folding, and pressing linens, towels, uniforms, and other laundry items promptly and efficiently, (iii) maintaining cleanliness and organisation of the laundry area, including the storage of clean and dirty linens and supplies. In the second condition, the participants evaluated the same resume for a guest service associate position (customer-facing job). Responsibilities of a guest service associate consisted of - (i) greeting guests upon arrival with warmth and professionalism, assisting with check-in procedures and providing necessary information about hotel amenities, services, and local attractions, (ii) handling guest inquiries, requests, and concerns promptly and courteously, striving to exceed their expectations and resolve any issues efficiently, and (iii) maintaining a professional appearance and demeanour, adhering to grooming and uniform standards set by the hotel.

The third condition included the manipulation of diversity reputation signals, which was operationalised through the receipt of a diversity award by StayOtel. Specifically, it consisted of an additional memorandum with a communication from the firm's CHRO about StayOtel receiving the Best Company Award in the Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion category at the India Inclusion Summit 2023 (a platform that brings together organisations, leaders, and activists to build awareness and in the space of diversity and inclusion). The memo included details about the award criteria (culture and leadership, accessibility of buildings, employment practices, community engagement and supplier diversity), the number of participating organisations, the industry experts on the jury panel, and a certificate of recognition.

Following the completion of the in-basket exercise, participants responded to several manipulation check items and a demographic questionnaire. Subsequently, they were debriefed.

Measures

Dependent Measure

Participants rated whether they would invite the applicant for an interview ("I would invite Kavita for an interview") on a scale of 1 ("Strongly Disagree") to 7 ("Strongly Agree").

Manipulation Checks

The manipulation check items questioned participants about their assigned role in the in-basket exercise and the specific position for which they evaluated the resume of Ms Kavita. Additionally, participants were inquired if Kavita had taken a break in her career, with those who responded affirmatively were asked a follow-up question about the reason for this break. Moreover, participants who were randomly assigned to the third experimental condition were asked whether the organisation had received a Best Company award for Diversity and Inclusion.

Findings

Manipulation Checks

All participants answered correctly about their role in the in-basket exercise. Except for one, all respondents correctly recalled the job role for which they evaluated Kavita's resume $\chi^2(1, N = 129) = 125.03, p \leq .001$. 99.22% of participants correctly answered the reason for Kavita's career break; one participant did not respond to this question. 97.50% of participants in the

third condition correctly recollected that the company had received a Best Company award in Diversity and Inclusion $\chi^2 (1, N = 40) = 36.10, p < .001$. As the nature of our results did not change, irrespective of whether those who incorrectly recalled the manipulation were excluded, we present the findings for all 129 participants.

Main Findings

Table I shows the descriptives and correlations of the study variables. We tested our hypotheses with hierarchical regression analysis. The three experimental conditions (no-customer-facing, customer-facing, and customer-facing with diversity reputation signals) were represented by two dummy variables (Cohen and Cohen, 1983). As we expected the mean of our dependent variable to be the highest for the no-customer-facing condition, we chose it to be our reference group. The first dummy variable (No-customer facing = 0, Customer-facing = 1, Customer-facing with diversity reputation signals = 0) contrasted the customer-facing condition with the no-customer facing condition. The second dummy variable (No-customer facing = 0, Customer-facing = 0, Customer-facing with diversity reputation signals = 1) contrasted the customer-facing with diversity reputation signals condition with the no-customer facing condition.

The unstandardised regression coefficient of the dummy variable represents the difference between the means of the group coded 1 and the reference group (Cohen and Cohen, 1983). For this study, each regression coefficient and its significance level would be a comparison of the mean of the customer-facing (first dummy variable) or customer-facing with diversity reputation signals (second dummy variable) with the mean of the no-customer-facing condition (reference group) for the dependent variable, invite for interview.

Insert Table I about here

Table II provides details of the hierarchical regression analysis. In Step 1, two control variables – age and gender of the participants were regressed on the dependent variable, invite for interview. This produced an R^2 change of 0.001, which was nonsignificant. In Step 2, the two dummy variables were entered, with the effects of gender and age controlled. As expected, this resulted in a significant R^2 change of 0.05, $p \leq 0.05$, which indicated a main effect of the condition. A t-test showed that survivors received lower ratings for the customer-facing job than the no-customer-facing job, $M = 5.35$ ($SD = 1.40$) versus $M = 6.02$ ($SD = 1.07$), $t(87) = -2.52, p \leq 0.05$. Consistent with Hypothesis 1, the regression coefficient of the first dummy variable that was created to contrast the customer-facing condition with the no-customer-facing condition was significant, $B = -0.68, p \leq 0.05$. This finding supported our expectation regarding the main effect of the job role on the survivors' evaluation.

A t-test revealed no significant difference between the evaluations of participants in the customer-facing with diversity reputation signals condition and no-customer-facing condition, $M = 5.70$ ($SD = 1.30$) versus $M = 6.02$ ($SD = 1.07$), $t(82) = -1.24, ns$. In alignment with Hypothesis 2, the regression coefficient of the second dummy variable that contrasted the customer-facing with diversity reputation signals condition with no-customer-facing condition was insignificant, $B = -0.31, ns$. This result suggests that participants evaluated the resume similarly in both conditions.

Insert Table II about here

Discussion

The purpose of this research was to comprehend the discrimination against survivors for customer-facing jobs and the effectiveness of a potential strategy to remediate this bias. We found that survivors were less positively evaluated for customer-facing jobs than no-customer-facing ones. Importantly, our findings suggest that when organisations exemplify their commitment towards diversity through diversity reputation signals, there is a reduction in bias against survivors such that they are evaluated similarly for both customer-facing and no-customer-facing jobs.

Previous studies on facial stigmas have focused on disfigurements arising from port-wine stains, birthmarks, or facial scars (e.g., Buijsrogge *et al.*, 2021; Madera and Hebl, 2019). Our research extends the current literature by focusing on the stigma arising from acid attacks. Results also indicate that the influence of this stigma varies depending on the nature of the job involved. The findings of this study resonate with the previous studies on the debilitating impact of facial stigmas in employment contexts (e.g., Madera and Hebl, 2012). More specifically, our research aligns with the previous findings that have shown a negative bias towards those with facial disfigurement for customer-facing jobs (e.g., Stone and Wright, 2013).

Our research demonstrates that survivors may face barriers to workplace access due to their appearance, particularly in service industries like hospitality. Past research has demonstrated that hospitality employers favour hiring individuals with physical attractiveness due to concerns about how employee aesthetics might impact the organisation's image (Groschl, 2007). Nickson *et al.* (2005) discovered that customer-facing employees' appearances, physical looks, and aesthetic and self-presentation skills are more important to employers in the hospitality industry than hard or technical skills. Similarly, Tews *et al.* (2009) found that managers in the hospitality industry placed more emphasis on the attractiveness of applicants for customer-facing than non-customer-facing jobs. Our study revealed similar findings wherein survivors received more negative evaluations for customer-facing jobs. These findings have practical relevance for organisations. Past research has shown that organisations' focus on ideal characteristics of job applicants rather than necessary ones can disqualify persons with disabilities for certain positions (Reilly *et al.*, 2006). Therefore, for survivors to have a level playing field, organisations need to ensure that job matches are based on candidates' knowledge, abilities, and relevant experience, thereby emphasising the required abilities of the position (Brecher *et al.*, 2006).

Becker (1957) posited that inferior labour market outcomes associated with minority groups can be driven by the negative attitudes of customers. Scholars have pointed to the influential role of consumers in inducing and upholding stereotypes (e.g., Ozanne *et al.*, 2018). Research has found that organisations consider their customers' perceived preferences during recruitment and selection (Kuppuswamy and Younkin, 2020). Therefore, organisations may avoid hiring survivors to avoid unfavourable feedback from customers.

This research extends signaling theory by showing how diversity reputation signals can mitigate discrimination against stigmatised groups. Past research has shown that diversity reputation signals are positively perceived by investors (Roberson and Park, 2007) and are linked to an increase in share price (Cook and Glass, 2014). Our results demonstrate that diversity reputation signals such as diversity awards provide information about otherwise unobservable characteristics of an organisation, such as its espoused values, commitment to diversity and fair treatment of all employees. These signals can then act as cues for employees

to engage in non-discriminatory behaviours, thereby improving the survivors' employment prospects.

Limitations and Future Research Agenda

Our research investigated how acid attacks affected job evaluations of survivors using a hypothetical profile in a laboratory experiment. Scholars have employed field experiments to examine employment discrimination against those from stigmatised groups (e.g., Ameri *et al.*, 2018). Therefore, it might be advantageous to conduct field-based research to evaluate the impact of acid attacks. Additionally, we manipulated the acid attack on the resume of the candidate. However, past research has used other stimuli, such as photographs (Madera and Hebl, 2012) or videos (Buijsrogge *et al.*, 2021). Likewise, researchers could utilise audio-visual stimuli in the context of acid attacks. Moreover, our experiment involved assessing a female survivor candidate. Prior research (e.g., Stone and Colella, 1996) indicates that gender can affect the treatment of stigmatised individuals in organisations. Thus, for a more comprehensive understanding, future scholars can include the gender of applicants in experimental designs to understand if there is a difference in the evaluations of male and female survivor candidates.

While our study focused on discrimination against survivors for customer-facing jobs in the hospitality industry, future research should generalise these findings to other contexts. For example, research has found aesthetics to play an important role in employee selection for interactive service jobs in the retail industry (Williams and Connell, 2010). Studies in retail or other contexts (e.g. fashion, media) where physical attractiveness can be an important consideration for employee selection can provide additional perspectives on the employability of survivors.

This study examined the role of one diversity reputation signal, diversity awards, in reducing discrimination against survivors. Past research has shown how organisational-level signals (e.g., workforce diversity, family-friendly policies) and individual-level signals (e.g., academic degree, participation in leadership programs) can ameliorate discrimination against women in organisations (Kim *et al.*, 2017). Similarly, future research may explore organisational and individual-level signals that can mitigate bias against survivors.

Our experimental investigation did not include individual characteristics which can be useful predictors of attitudes towards survivors. We propose three individual attributes for future research: social dominance orientation, openness to new experiences, and previous contact with survivors. Social dominance orientation (SDO) is "the degree to which individuals desire to support group-based hierarchy and the domination of inferior groups by superior groups" (Sidanius and Pratto, 1999, p. 48). Past research has found that SDO is associated with discriminatory behaviours towards minority groups (Pratto *et al.*, 2006). Given that individuals with high SDO prioritise the preservation of existing social hierarchies, it is plausible that they may exhibit greater discriminatory behaviours towards survivors belonging to a lower-status group. Openness to experience reflects an individual's willingness to entertain new ideas, values, and experiences (Costa and McCrae, 1997). We anticipate that those open to new experiences will exhibit lower levels of discrimination against survivors. Research indicates that previous contact with individuals from stigmatised groups can enhance acceptance by altering others' expectations or disconfirming stereotypical assumptions about the individual (Stone and Colella, 1996). Likewise, we expect those who had previous contact with survivors to display positive behaviours towards them in the workplace.

Historically, survivors have been reluctant to public contact for fear of approval and acceptance (Basu, 2020). Thus, direct contact may not always be feasible; thus, alternate forms of indirect contact should be explored. Research on parasocial contact (Schiappa *et al.*, 2005) suggests that communication via media can have similar effects as direct forms of contact in reducing anxiety and increasing outgroup trust. Recently, Stone and Fisher (2020) found a positive effect of video-based intervention in improving attitudes towards those with facial disfigurements. Researchers should explore the effect of similar interventions in the context of survivors.

Our study was conducted in India, but acid attacks occur in many countries (ASTI, 2022). Dissanaïke and Rahimi (2009) noted a substantial variability between countries on various aspects of acid attacks, including the motivation behind the attacks, the injuries caused and the demographics of the survivors and attackers. While the incidence of acid attacks has been commonly associated with South Asian countries such as India, Bangladesh, and Pakistan (Kalantry & Kestenbaum, 2011), recent research has revealed an increase in acid attack violence in other geographies. For example, Hopkins *et al.* (2021) identified a surge in acid attacks in the United Kingdom, primarily connected with street violence, with a majority of the victims being men. It is important for future researchers to explore the employability of survivors in different national and cross-national contexts.

Conclusion

This study aimed not only to understand the discrimination faced by survivors during their employment search but also to provide evidence of a possible remedy for such bias. The findings demonstrate the discrimination survivors may face in customer-facing roles. Importantly, our research suggests that the employment prospects of survivors can be improved when organisations exemplify their commitment towards diversity through diversity reputation signals. We hope that this research will inspire further inquiry aimed at gaining a nuanced comprehension of the obstacles faced by survivors in contemporary work environments.

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Table I

Descriptive Statistics and Correlations Between Study Variables							
	Mean	SD	1	2	3	4	5
<i>Dependent Variables</i>							
1 Invite For Interview	5.69	1.28	1				
<i>Control Variables</i>							
2 Age	31.77	8.15	-0.02	1			
3 Gender ^a	0.63	0.48	-0.02	0.10	1		
<i>Independent Variables</i>							
4 Dummy 1: No-customer-facing/customer-facing ^b	0.35	0.48	-0.19*	-0.12	0.16	1	
5 Dummy 2: No-customer-facing/customer-facing with diversity reputation signals ^c	0.31	0.46	0.005	0.18*	-0.39	-0.49**	1

N=129; ** p≤0.01,*p≤0.05; ^a 0 = Female, 1 = Male ; ^b Customer-facing = 1, Customer-facing with diversity award = 0, No-Customer-facing = 0; ^c Customer-facing with diversity reputation signals = 1, Customer-facing = 0, No-Customer-facing = 0

Table II

Hierarchical Regression Analysis

Step	Variables	B	ΔR ²
1			0.01
	Age	-0.003	
	Gender	-0.057	
2			0.05*
	Age	-0.005	
	Gender	0.042	
	Dummy 1: No-customer-facing/customer-facing	-0.68	
	Dummy 2: No-customer-facing/customer-facing with diversity reputation signals	-0.31	

N = 129; B = Unstandardized regression coefficients, *p≤ 0.05