

# Christchurch mosque attack victim faces life without walking again

Cecile Meier06:55, Jun 19 2019



SUPPLIED

Sazada Akhter remained unconscious in hospital for two weeks after she was shot on March 15.

***Sazada Akhter will not walk again. At night, her stomach burns so much she cries and screams for hours before she falls asleep on her hospital bed. She is begging authorities to let her sister and brothers stay to support her long-term. Cecile Meier reports.***

Before March 15, Sazada Akhter had a "very happy life". The 25-year-old had moved to Christchurch from Bangladesh at the end of 2017 to join her husband, Mohammed Mashud, who had been in the country for several years.

She was about to start working as a rest home caregiver. The couple wanted to have a baby.

Then [a gunman killed 51 worshippers](#) at two Christchurch mosques and injured dozens more. He shot Akhter in the chest and abdomen as she fled the Al Noor Masjid. ***(Christchurch Truth editor: The "live-stream" of the "attack" shows no such shooting.)*** She is one of the most seriously injured victims from the [terror attack](#).

After multiple operations, she is the only injured mosque victim still in hospital.



AMY WRIGHT/STUFF

Sazada Akhter, right, who was shot in the chest and stomach outside the Al Noor mosque, is desperate for her sister Nahida Akhter to stay in New Zealand long term.

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Akhter [remained unconscious for two weeks after the attack](#). When she woke, her husband broke the news: she would not walk again.

When *Stuff* visited, Akhter looked as though she was being swallowed by the cushions on her hospital bed. Paralyzed from the chest down, she could only move her head and arms and struggled to find a comfortable position to talk.

"I don't understand my body anymore. If you cut my leg, I don't feel it. I don't know how to go on about my life."

The bullets damaged her kidneys, liver and lungs. She could not keep food down for weeks after she regained consciousness. Her eating has become better, but her stomach and backside burn so much at night that she cannot sleep until about 4am.

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POOL

Prince William visits terror attack survivors and staff at Christchurch Hospital on April 26, 2019.

"Every night I cry and shout. The nurses come and hold my hand and they cry too."

Mashud has been at her bedside trying to soothe her distress and bringing her home-cooked meals every day. Because of this, and the anxiety he suffers post-attack, he has been unable to return to his taxi driving and welding jobs.

Akhter does not qualify for ACC wage cover as she had not started her job at the time of the attack.

When she is discharged from hospital in three to four months, she will need a wheelchair-accessible home with extra space to store rehabilitation equipment. A Ministry of Social Development case worker [will help](#) with that, but she is worried about having to move homes repeatedly, and wonders how they will pay the rent long term. A friend has created a [Givealittle page](#) for the couple.

She and Mashud have received [money from Victim Support](#), are on the [benefit](#), and ACC is covering treatment costs, but they worry about making ends meet in the months and years to come.



ALDEN WILLIAMS/STUFF

Mohammed Mashud. His wife, Sazada Akhter, will never walk again.

Akhter's sister, Nahida Akhter, brother Shamim Mia, and Mashud's brother, Rubel Mia, came from Bangladesh to support them. Their visitor visas will expire in October, but the couple is desperate for them to stay long-term.

Nahida cooks meals for the whole family in the morning and sits by Akhter's side at hospital the rest of the day. Shamim and Rubel Mia are providing emotional support and looking for a job so they can financially support the couple and their family in Bangladesh.

Akhter's mother is recovering from a heart attack [she suffered after she learned](#) of the shooting and Mashud's father, who has diabetes, needs surgery.

The siblings do not qualify for the [special category visa](#) the Government created to allow mosque victims and their immediate family members to become permanent residents because they were not in New Zealand on March 15. It is unclear whether they qualify for any other visa.



AMY WRIGHT/STUFF

Nahida Akhter, left, supports her injured sister, Sazada Akhter, at Burwood Hospital.

When Prince William [visited her and other injured survivors](#) in April, he held her hand and five times promised he would give her "every help possible", she said. Despite the pain and anxiety, she smiled that day. The prince gave her hope, which added to the Government's pledge to support mosque victims. But a month on from the prince's visit, she says the hope has faded.

Immigration New Zealand assistant general manager Peter Elms said people who did not live in New Zealand at the time who do not qualify for the special category visa could apply under any of the usual immigration visa categories.

Prince William's media staff did not respond to a request for comment. Instead, New Zealand's Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet contacted *Stuff* on his behalf. Communications director Catherine Delore said

the Duke of Cambridge's visit was to pay tribute to those affected and to show support to the local and national community.

"Support for the victims is appropriately a matter for government agencies here, who are addressing their needs and concerns."

**Stuff**