

Week 1:
Problem and Idea link

Case Study: Sheroes Hangout

Acid attacks in India are a form of *gender* based violence and aimed at silencing and controlling women. India along with other South East Asian countries *acid violence* is gender related. Although there is a very limited access to statistics in relation to *acid* attacks, a review of Indian newspapers found that 153 reported *acid violence* cases happened from January 2002 to October 2010 and approximately 75% of the attacks were perpetrated against women. Additionally, and based on a research conducted by the Chhanv Foundation in 2015, there were more than 400 cases reported between 2010 and 2014. Yet, there is not a clear picture and open-source data in regards how many people have been attacked by acid in India. *Acid violence* has been off the radar for a long period of time; there was no specific law against acid violence till the period of 2008-2013, when a segment was added under the 326 section of the Indian Penal Code (IPC). Nonetheless, there are some aspects that are not considered and must be revised in the long term plan, such as the section that gives discretion to the courts as far as punishment is concerned and there are no clear provisions for awarding compensation to the victim. In short, stricter laws are needed to decrease the number of crimes; that is to say the regulation to acid sales is fairly poor. In India and based on different studies, *acid violence* relies on disputes over land, inheritances, dowries, jealousy, marriage refusal and sexual decline. But it seems that jilted lovers and marriage refusal are the most common motivating factors for perpetrators.

Sheroes Hangout is a social enterprise company that was created by both the *Stop Acid Attacks* (SAA) campaign and *Chhanv Foundation*. The SAA campaign started on 8th of March 2013 which is also known as International Women's day. SAA's primary aim was to create awareness, compile data, provide information, and to connect and mobilise people against *acid violence*.

Campaigns in relation to gender violence, abuse and women rapes were all over the media in contrast with *acid-attacks*. Hence, the ASS portal was developed to provide specific information and a virtual space to connect acid-attack survivors and give them voice to denounce the attacks. Soon after the SAA launch, the founders realised the need to open a centre to shelter acid-attack survivors from all over India and provide different services as in India acid-attack patients are offered a very limited service; although medical treatment is free, psychological and socio-economic support is needed. Hence, the *Chhanv Foundation* was registered as a not-for-profit organisation dedicated to the *entire* rehabilitation of *acid-attack* survivors. It is essentially a centre that not only provides shelter but also different activities to the survivors that include trainings, workshops, counselling and many other activities such as dancing and singing to offer the survivors another alternative of live. In practice, *Chhanv Foundation* is concerned with the aftermath of the survivors' experiences, especially because the foundation acknowledges that the recovery process is painful and difficult but survivors need alternative tools to re-start their lives. *Sheroes Hangout* venture was opened to empower survivors and give them opportunities.

Sheroes Hangout is a café near the Taj Mahal, Agra, one of the most touristic and visited places in India. As with any other venture, *Sheroes Hangout* café seeks financial sustainability, but the fundamental difference is that as a social enterprise its financial target is to maintain its social value. The café's business model is actually quite interesting, as it does not only offer food and beverage, but also works as a handicraft, exhibition and work space that tourists and locals can spend their day at. The café's revenue also comes from the trading of cloths, souvenirs and paintings made by some of the survivors. For visitors and/or locals that may be interested to learn more about *acid violence*, there is an opportunity to meet, share experiences, learn from and chat with the survivors that are operating and managing the café on a daily basis. Notably, the café also operates as a training centre; since a large number of survivors are uneducated, the workshops include reading, writing and training for computer and mobile skills to the acid-attack groups. Currently, the café is managed and operated by five survivors: Rupa, Neetu, Dolly, Ritu and Geeta.

They all have been acid-attacked and, although their stories are different, they all agree that there is always a chance to move forward. *Neetu* (See video link below), who is one of the survivors, claimed: “*My life has become good since I joined the campaign. Early I felt like dying, but now I wish to live with these people... I feel normal*”. In the *Chhanv Foundation*’s long-term plan, the aim is to open more ventures and provide more opportunities for the survivors.

Website: <http://www.sheroeshangout.com>

Video link here: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=STwSQBnmSgM>