

Australasian Centre for Human Rights and Health Inc



ACHRH

Empowering Communities
through Knowledge & Research

Anti-Dowry Campaign goes national

September 2017
Newsletter

Reports of dowry related abuse from Victoria, Sydney, South Australia and Brisbane

In the past couple of years local and interstate telephone calls for assistance with dowry related matters have increased. The callers are mostly women, victims of dowry related domestic violence or frequently also financial abuse, emotional abuse and physical violence, but without dowry demands. Dowry demands means demands for cash, or humiliation of the bride for not providing enough gifts or good quality gifts, sometimes for not doing a glamorous enough wedding functions. It also means where the gold jewellery meant for the bride is taken over by the mother-in-law for "safekeeping" back in India but is never returned back to the bride. And when there is a marital break up the groom's family denies they have any of her gold jewellery at all.

ACHRH initiated the awareness raising campaign against dowry in Victoria and with consistent effort we were able to obtain the Royal Commission recommendation to expand the Family Violence Protection Laws of Victoria to include dowry extortion related domestic violence. We are confident this will be law in Victoria as Premier Daniel Andrews has given an undertaking to implement all 227 recommendations.

Our campaign in Victoria has alerted workers in other states and media reports are appearing from Adelaide and Brisbane and Sydney. Naomi's Selvaratnam's internationally screened documentary "[Australia's dowry deaths](#)" talks about the death of Parvinder Kaur in Sydney in 2014. She was burnt to death and her family assert it was a

case of dowry extortion leading to death. [Please watch](#) her moving documentary which has had 170,000 hits so far.



Manjula
O'Connor

I personally receive regular calls from victims of dowry extortion in Sydney and also from their parents back in India.

Now we have media reports of dowry related abuse from Adelaide and Brisbane. ACHRH has made a submission to the Senate Enquiry into 'Family Law and Family Violence' and recommended inclusion of dowry extortion related violence in the Federal Family Law Act.

On another exciting news ACHRH has won Victorian Government funded primary prevention grant titled "UNITED WE STAND". Please read more about it below.



ACHRH is active in community with “Mutual Cultural Respect”, a gender focused cultural sensitisation workshop at AMES Leadership training for culturally diverse young leaders, and at ISCKON’s Hare Krishna Temple.

I was honoured to be invited to speak at ‘National Commission of Women forum on “Troubled Youth” Forum’ and how to assist troubled Youth, held at the Victorian Parliament with high powered speakers and audience. [Please read their report.](#)

ACHRH invited to take part in OZAFRICA Television program on increasing awareness and rejection of dowry in Australian -African communities due to associated family conflict



Manjula speaks at the NCWV Troubled Youth Forum



OZAFRICA Television participants and audience



OZAFRICA Television participants and audience



Steering committee meeting to keep United We Stand on track

Steering Committee meetings keep 'United We Stand' on track. They are intellectually challenging and great fun. Highly intelligent members of community, doctors against domestic violence, lawyer, IT experts, prevention expert, academics and ACHRH Board

Please join us at the Launch of UNITED WE STAND. We will be launching the project at the Victorian Parliament on 20 September, between 1 to 2 pm.



Steering Committee members



+ UNITED WE STAND

An ACHRH Initiative for Primary Prevention of Family Domestic Violence



You are invited to join the launch

'United we stand' aims to achieve ACHRH vision of an equitable and harmonious society and promotion of family harmony through economic empowerment of men and women.

ACHRH held community participatory theatre action research project 'Natak Vihar' in 2015-16 around the nature and solutions to family and domestic violence. 'United We Stand' builds on the foundation of 'Natak Vihar' aiming towards prevention.

Individuals, Influencers, Leaders and Community Organisations
you are invited to join the launch of 'United We Stand'.

'United We Stand' Launch

Victorian Parliament – The Federation Room

Wednesday 20 September 2017 – 3 to 5 pm

TO PARTICIPATE:

Please RSVP by 10 September 2017 by contacting us below:

Research Team Co-ordinator Anu (akrishnan@kulturbrille.com.au)

Project Manager (manjula@achrh.org)



Funded by the Victorian Government Department of Premier and Cabinet
Sponsored by Overseas Medical Graduate Association

+ UNITED WE STAND

An ACHRHR Initiative for Primary Prevention of Family Domestic Violence



You are invited to make an Input

'United we stand' aims to achieve ACHRHR vision of an equitable and harmonious society and promotion of family harmony through economic empowerment of men and women.

ACHRRH held community participatory theatre action research project 'Natak Vihar' in 2015-16 around the nature and solutions to family and domestic violence. 'United We Stand' builds on the foundation of 'Natak Vihar' aiming towards prevention.

Individuals, Influencers, Leaders and Community Organisations

you are invited to join one of our 'United We Stand' workshops.

'United We Stand' Workshops

Melbourne Polytechnic NMIT Studios (77 St Georges Rd, Preston VIC)

2 – 5 pm followed by drinks and dinner

JOIN US FOR ANY OF THE SCHEDULED WORKSHOPS

TO PARTICIPATE:

Please RSVP by 10 September 2017 by contacting us below:

Research Team Co-ordinator Anu (akrishnan@kulturbille.com.au)

Project Manager (manjula@achrh.org)

WORKSHOPS

**Sunday 1 October 2017
or
Sunday 8 October 2017**

Workshops will be video recorded and a final DVD will be produced along with a YouTube film for community's use.



Funded by the Victorian Government Department of Premier and Cabinet
Sponsored by Overseas Medical Graduate Association

"UNITED WE STAND"

UPCOMING NEW ACHRH PRIMARY PREVENTION PROJECT

FUNDED BY VICTORIAN GOVERNMENT



"United we stand" aims to achieve ACHRH vision of an equitable and harmonious society and promotion of family harmony through economic empowerment of men and women.

We are proud to receive Victorian Government's funding of this project. It is a win for all South Asian migrants and we welcome other migrants in as well.

In 2015-16 a community participatory theatre action research project "Natak Vihar" performed community theatre workshops and 3 live performances with the aim to find solutions to family violence in South Asian communities. All key findings were recorded and the current project builds on the foundation of Natak Vihar.

The new project United We Stand builds uses film recordings of the Natak Vihar videos to facilitate further debate. We have strengthened and formed collaborations between seven South Asian community organizations. We invite individuals and community organizations to send in 3-4 of their leadership/influencers to participate in any one of the two workshop scheduled to start after Navratra fasting –Sunday 1 October 2017 And Sunday 15 October.

We have been fortunate to secure services of academic, clinical, media, and social experts to help conduct this project at highly discounted rates or free of charge. ACHRH is making a significant in-kind donation of office space for planning and on-going meetings over 12-month period, and providing expert coordination of the project. Overseas Medical Graduate Association has kindly offered to sponsor lunch.

The workshops will be video recorded and a final DVD will be produced along with a YouTube film for community's use.

We invite you to participate in the project and add your support to strengthen the family unit and enhance mutual respect.

Please Contact Anu if you wish to participate

akrishnan@researchconsulting.services or manjula@achrh.org

ACHRH Conducts MUTUAL CULTURAL RESPECT workshops with

- Hare Krishna temple devotees
- AMES culturally diverse Trainee Leadership program





MEDIA RELEASE

THE GOOD AND DIFFICULT REALITY OF BEING A MIGRANT IN AUSTRALIA

The issue of loss and grief among migrants will be explored at a GriefLine seminar on 13 September.

Indian migrant Dr Manjula O'Connor is one of the speakers who knows full well of the struggles that come with for many migrants.

"Australia is a successful multi-cultural country. Migrants are welcomed and they integrate with broader society adding to the richness of multiple cultural traditions and identity.

Nonetheless migrants are a growing but poorly understood group, and this is not helped by the widespread negative views reflected in the current public debate around immigrants and their children," Dr O'Connor said.

She suggests that more migrants working within government and in policy would make a longer-term difference because policies and programs would be shaped by people who understood the reality of straddling two worlds.

Dr O'Connor believes that the discrimination and isolation that many migrants face is liable to put them at risk of loneliness, and mental health issues such as depression and anxiety, especially among older people who can take longer to adapt to Australian culture and face barriers to seeking help. Domestic violence is also an issue that deserves a culturally sensitive approach.

Breakdown of traditional family relationships is also commonplace with migrant children living in a very different world to their parents and grandparents.

"For immigrant children, it can be difficult to live with the expectations and demands of one culture in the home and another at school, especially for female teenage children for example there may be greater expectations to adjust behaviour according to "family honour," Dr O'Connor said.

She believes that elder abuse is also a very real issue where older people remain silent due to loss of face and fear of being abandoned are important issues that need to be watched.

Dr O'Connor is speaking at GriefLine's Migrant Seminar: Born in One Country Dying in Another - The Power of Story. The seminar will provide an opportunity for the Chinese & Indian communities to explore common migrant themes and issues which are often unacknowledged.

Dr. Manjula O'Connor, is a consultant psychiatrist, Hon Senior Fellow, at The University of Melbourne, Department of Psychiatry; and Chair "Family Violence Working Group" at the Royal Australasian and NZ College of Psychiatrists.

You can read more about the upcoming GriefLine seminar below.

GriefLine's Migrant Seminar Upcoming Event details

Born in One Country Dying in Another - The Power of Story

Date: Wednesday 13 September

Time: 5:15pm – 8:30pm

Venue: Level 1, 479 Warrigal Road, Moorabbin

The recent Census results highlight a changing Australia, with one quarter of Australians born overseas and an increasing number in Asia and not Europe.

The statistic tells many stories but what it does not show is the reality of being a migrant in Australia, and what that means when it comes to living and dying in the country.

Cost: \$25 for general public, free for GriefLine volunteers

Other: Light refreshments provided

Registration: 9935 7444 or email susanm@griefline.org.au

Media inquiries: John Myers on (03) 9818 8540, 0409 215 120, mediawise@mediawise.net.au

Dowry in Australia: 'A form of abuse'

International Documentary produced by Naomi Selvaratnam

First published on Al Jazeera, July 3, 2017 <http://www.aljazeera.com/indepth/features/2017/06/dowry-australia-form-abuse-170629102856430.html>

On the night of December 13, 2014, Deepshikha Godara was stabbed, beaten and strangled to death by her estranged husband, Sunil Beniwal. Sunil then fled their home in Melbourne, Australia, and deliberately drove his car into the path of an oncoming truck. He died instantly.

A coroner ruled that Deepshikha's sudden and violent death came after years of prolonged physical and emotional abuse at the hands of her husband.

There are fears that such violence is growing in Australia, triggered by the Indian tradition of dowry - where a bride and her family provide gifts and money to the groom and his family.

For Deepshikha's husband, her family's payments were never enough.

"The higher the social status of the groom, the more dowry he can demand. I have heard that so many times from the younger women. The mother-in-law and the father-in-law say that 'My son lives in Australia, don't you think that he deserves more? He lives in Australia, he has to be honoured.'"

It is not illegal to give or take dowry in Australia, but late last year, a royal commission into family violence recommended that dowry be legally recognised as a form of abuse.

"We want the dowry to be recognised as an act of domestic violence," Dr O'Connor says. "It will help bring the laws in line with what is happening in India."

Dead at the hands of her husband

Deepshikha was a 25-year-old physiotherapist living in the Indian capital, New Delhi, when her family arranged her marriage to Sunil, an Australian citizen.

"He was a beautiful guy, a smart guy," Deepshikha's father, Ashok Kumar Godara, told Al Jazeera in an interview at his home in New Delhi. "Well-educated and well-behaved. Outwardly, he looked like a very social person and I was very satisfied with him. I agreed to the marriage."

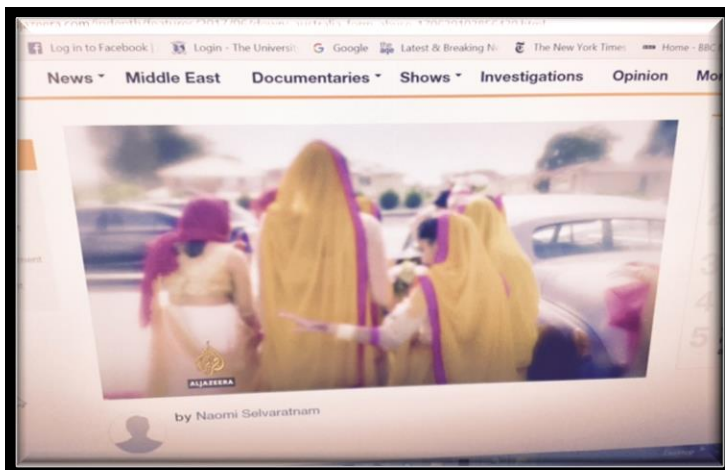
Deepshikha's family then organised a dowry, which included gold, diamond necklaces and money.

But soon after Deepshikha moved to Australia, they say her husband and his family began demanding more.

One year into her marriage, the demands for more dowry got so bad Deepshikha went to the police.

I lost my confidence and I can see myself falling down into hell. I never expected that

Dr O'Connor says the local police didn't understand how dangerous issues around dowry could be.



India outlawed the dowry practice nearly 60 years ago, but even today, one woman dies there every hour in a dowry-related incident, according to the country's National Crime Records Bureau.

As more Indians move to Australia, more cases are showing that this deadly menace has made its way overseas.

Every year, psychiatrist Dr Manjula O'Connor sees hundreds of women at her medical practice seeking help after being harassed to provide a dowry.

"In Australia, we do have documented files of murder and suicide due to dowry," she says.

'Once a girl is married, there is no going back'

Ruby Jones

First published on the ABC, July 29, 2017: <http://www.abc.net.au/news/2017-07-29/dowry-abuse-domestic-violence-kasish-story/8745118>

It's a type of domestic violence you probably haven't heard of: dowry abuse. Some Indian-Australian men are using their desirable status as residents to extort thousands of dollars from the women they're marrying, with threats and violence if their escalating demands aren't met.

The trouble started when Kasish's new husband wanted her to take the blame for his driving offence, to save his demerit points. When she refused, he hit her for the first time.

"He hit me, he scold me, he pull my hair," she said.

"He said: 'Why are you not giving to me? I am your husband, you have to give to me. All [the] people are doing it'."

When the driving offence took place, Kasish wasn't even in Australia. She was a newlywed in India's capital, Delhi, planning to move to Melbourne to be with her husband.

They met on a matrimonial website, where potential husbands and wives can be searched for with filters including annual income, caste, and whether or not they have been married before. No-one wants a partner who is divorced, Kasish says.

"A divorce is not acceptable in India, not acceptable in my family. And I never [thought it would] happen to me in my life," she said.

It's not just husbands

In India marriage and money go hand in hand because of the payment of dowry — an ancient and illegal financial custom.

When she got married, Kasish's family paid her new husband and his family a \$50,000 dowry, in cash, jewellery, gold and white goods — including a washing machine, TV and air conditioner — for her new in-laws.

That's a standard dowry commanded by Australian-Indian men, according to a domestic violence caseworker who says she has seen hundreds of cases of dowry-related abuse in South Australia.

Avni doesn't want to use her real name, to protect her clients' identities. She works with migrant women in Adelaide, where legal and social workers say dowry-related abuse is increasing.

Typically, a woman's family pays between \$25,000 and \$50,000, including bearing the cost of a lavish ceremony, she says.

But demands often keep coming after the wedding, and if the bride's family refuses them, the husband might use physical violence to extort more money, or exact revenge.

"More than half of [my] clients have this problem. Most of the time... the husband keeps asking for dowry, and it finally ends up in physical violence," Avni said.

It's not just the husband, sometimes it's his entire family, says Brisbane-based social worker and director of JK Diversity Consultants Jatinder Kaur.

She has seen cases where a mother-in-law is abusive, or instructs her son to be violent to his new wife. "Typically the in-laws, usually the mother-in-law, is not satisfied with what she got, after the wedding," Ms Kaur said.

"They will try to extort or emotionally blackmail the bride's family. [The mother-in-law will say] 'we will make your daughter's life hell if you don't give us what we want'."

"Unfortunately I think it's a growing trend, and not just with the newly-arrived."



In one case in South Australia, a bride-to-be's family bought new shoes for the entire wedding party as part of the dowry. (ABC News: Pip Kruger)

Migrant men abusing wives to extort more dowry money from families, Legal Services Commission says

Tory Shepherd, Political Editor

First published on The Advertiser (Adelaide), June 04, 2017: <http://www.adelaidenow.com.au/news/south-australia/migrant-men-abusing-wives-to-extort-more-dowry-money-from-families-legal-services-commission-says/news-story/af9a9986091e5d406282e56fedbcf658>

A dowry can be property or money the bride's family gives to the husband upon marriage.

The practice is common in countries including India and Pakistan, but also in the Middle East.

The commission says in South Australia there are an increasing number of young migrant women reporting dowry-related abuse.

In one example, an Indian woman's mother gave a \$60,000 dowry, before the woman went to join her husband in Australia.

She needed to pay fees to update her qualifications before starting a job, but the husband said she would have to get more money from her mother, started abusing her, and eventually threw her out of the home.

"Typically, the abuse takes the form of further financial demands on the bride's family from the groom, the refusal to allow the woman access to the dowry funds, and physical violence," the commission states in a submission to a parliamentary inquiry.

"The commission has encountered an increasing number of young migrant women with dowry-related abuse through our advice service.

"These women were overwhelmed by their circumstances, compounded by the fact that they were new migrants to the country. As new migrants, they faced various issues including a language barrier and lack of knowledge of the local laws and the Australian mainstream culture and social norms."

The commission's submission was to an inquiry into a better family law system to support and protect those affected by family violence.

They have found domestic or family violence is prevalent in the culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) community, comprising more than 40 per cent of the women seeking legal advice and about 35 per cent of the men.

The commission wants to see the Family Law Act recognise "dowry, bride price, female genital mutilation, forced and early marriages and other harmful cultural and traditional practices" as family violence. It wants more education, support and protection for victims, who often fear being deported.

The commission is also calling for SA's Women's Safety Services model to be considered nationally, that a dowry be included in property settlement even if it happens overseas.

The inquiry has been tasked with working out how to better protect and support people affected by family violence. Submissions have now closed but the inquiry is still accepting community statements and will have an online questionnaire available until August 31. The committee will report to the Federal Government after that.

Other submissions have noted there are specific issues with CALD communities, where people are less likely to understand or accept Australian laws and cultural expectations.

Need help? Call 1800 RESPECT National Sexual Assault, Domestic and Family Violence Counselling Service: 1800 737 732

Support Us

ACHRH is an NGO and as such relies heavily and extensively on the mission partners and the wider community for support. If you would like to support us and get involved in any way then please do contact us, either via the website:

<http://www.achrh.org/>

Or Facebook (click the image to follow the link):



find us on
Facebook

WHERE TO GO FOR HELP

-
- **POLICE IN EMERGENCY -- 000**
-
- **YOUR GP -- they are helpful, easy to reach, they will refer you to the right place.**
-
- **NATIONAL SEXUAL ASSAULT, DOMESTIC AND FAMILY VIOLENCE COUNSELLING SERVICE -- 1800 RESPECT**
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- **INTOUCH MULTICULTURAL CENTER AGAINST FAMILY VIOLENCE -- 1800 755 988**
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- **WOMENS DOMESTIC VIOLENCE CRISIS SERVICE (WDVCS) 24 Hour state wide line 1800 015 188**
-
- **MEN'S 24 HOUR REFERRAL SERVICE 1800 065 973 (FREE CALL VICTORIA ONLY)**
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- **VICTORIA IMMIGRANT AND REFUGEE WOMEN'S COALITION 03 9654 1243**
virwc@virwc.org.au, www.virwc.org.au
-
- **WOMEN'S INFORMATION & REFERRAL AGENCY (WIRE) 03 9348 9416**
inforequests@wire.org.au
-
- **DR MANJULA O'CONNOR, FOUNDING DIRECTOR ACHRH 03 9654 5271**
manjula@achrh.org
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WHY GET HELP?

- ❖ Domestic Violence damages our culture
- ❖ Domestic violence breaks our homes
- ❖ Domestic Violence causes:
 - Anxiety,
 - Depression,
 - Suicide,
 - Homicide in women, men and children

WHAT CAN YOU DO?

- ❖ Support those who may be victims
- ❖ Encourage victims to seek help and become survivors
- ❖ Encourage perpetrators to seek help
- ❖ DO NOT BE SILENT ON DOMESTIC VIOLENCE

Say No to Domestic Violence