

*Australasian Centre for Human Rights and Health Inc*



# ACHRH

Empowering Communities  
through Knowledge & Research

## United We Stand

March 2018  
Newsletter

### Welcome to the first ACHRH newsletter for 2018!

In the coming pages, you can read an overview of a recently released Parliamentary Report - A better family law system to support and protect those affected by family violence. Dr Keith Thomas, a key team member of ACHRH, has written a very modest piece introducing himself. You can also read the upcoming launch of the Nitak Vihar videotapes, and, a Youth Perspectives event on dowry related family violence. And last but certainly not least, there is a report on the launch of United We

Stand with some photos of both the launch and the preceding workshops.



**Manjula  
O'Connor**

The Board of ACHRH, pictured below, would like to take this opportunity to thank you for your continued support.



*Board of ACHRH*



## Introducing Dr. Keith Thomas

“United we stand”, as many readers will know, is a Victorian Government funded primary prevention project, that aims to achieve ACHRH vision of an equitable and harmonious society and promotion of family harmony through economic empowerment of men and women. At the time of writing, the project has successfully run two workshops that were filmed and a videotape to facilitate community discussion is now being developed, with the final product near.

Having been invited by Manjula early last year to participate in and help co-facilitate this project, I would like to take this opportunity to introduce myself, briefly, and share some thoughts on the process so far and some thoughts on how best to advance the project and ACHRH’s vision. I work as an academic at Victoria University’s Graduate School of Business, but I’ve been active in community-based projects for a long while. My involvement in ACHRH came about when I went seeking Manjula’s assistance in a youth and community leadership development project I was running for a local African community in Heidelberg. One thing led to another, and she subsequently invited me to participate in ACHRH. The capabilities I bring are modest, but I hope I am able to add value in terms of enabling change by supporting the many participants and community leaders to build on the evident strengths of the community and family unit, and grasp the nettle of a very invidious issue of family-based (domestic) violence. As I write this, I can imagine the general distaste towards the subject. There will be very few who might suggest that there is no issue, and no one would advocate for the status quo if they knew the

statistics. Definitive figures are a bit hard to offer, but the basic facts are chilling. This data is from the website for White Ribbon, an NFP in Australia that focuses on primary prevention of violence against women.

One in three women have experienced physical and/or sexual violence by someone known to them, one in five have experienced harassment in the workplace, and domestic violence is the principle cause for homelessness.

On the matter of what can/ should we/I do, the numbers indicate over 94 percent of employees agree employers should take a leadership role in educating their workforce about respectful relationships. We can add to this by taking the issue into our respective homes and communities, by understanding that what we model at home is what kids learn, and in particular, recognise the unintended consequences of many accepted social norms and expectations. Not talking about the issue is to condone and imagining there is no issue in my backyard, so there is no problem full-stop, is to bury our heads in the sand as it ignores the very powerful effect of the bystander, who can say no to a perpetrator, who can stand-by the potential victim in solidarity and who can role-model more effective ways to manage issues that inevitably come up in any family or relationship.

About UWS and ACHRH more generally, the first point that I came to recognise was the passion within the community for change. At the two UWS workshops that were filmed late in 2017, I was drawn to the knowledge, expertise and commitment of the many members of the South Asian and related communities. Young and old (er), parents and youth, working professionals and students,

there is great variety and capacity evident. No shortage in commitment too. The challenge, as I see it sustaining deep or second-order change. This change involves a new way of seeing things. It's easily said, but especially hard as it concerns deeply held, unconscious, beliefs. We don't give these beliefs up easily, because we mostly don't know they are shaping and influencing our behaviours. Worse still, if there are, and there are, many understood and also unspoken cultural and structural barriers to change. A simple example, consider this thought: what will our parents, family and community think? In many ways it is a positive. It encourages social cohesion and maintains valued social norms. In a difficult situation, such as DV, it can however risk isolation and victimhood for women and long-term harm to children caught in the crossfire.

I teach leadership and change, mostly to graduate students. It's a very relevant subject in the corporate world. Accepting it involves influencing people towards some desired goal, leadership seems a useful capability in this context of primary prevention. Moreover, rather than a centralised responsibility, it is a very democratic and distributed capability – that is, it's a job for all of us, regardless of age and level in the group or community. I'm

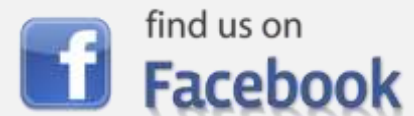
happy to talk more about this at some other time. Can I leave you for now with this provocative idea – based on what's called Ebbinghaus's Forgetting (Learning) Curve. The curve hypothesises a decline of memory retention and suggests people halve their memory of newly learned knowledge in a matter of days or weeks unless they consciously review the learned material. For DV, and any other important issue, it's clear we need to talk and do and review and repeat periodically... good intentions will only open the door to possible change.

### 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):



# Launch of United We Stand

Gauri Kapoor - ACHRH Board Member

ACHRH'S "United We Stand" project was formally launched at the Parliament of Victoria on the 20th of September 2017. A diverse group of over 60 people including dignitaries, project sponsors, and project team members/volunteers gathered at the community event to celebrate the inauguration of another exciting and innovative prevention of family violence project designed by ACHRH Executive Director, Dr Manjula O'Connor.

The Chairman of ACHRH, Prof Ian Howie, officiated as Master of Ceremonies. He began by introducing Dr O'Connor to the audience and soon after called upon her to provide a general overview of the project and share her view on how it would bring people together to work on achieving positive, harmonious and respectful family relationships.

Dr O'Connor explained the way in which project had been designed to build on previous work done in Natak Vihar. Participants would be encouraged to open up about their experiences during a carefully crafted workshop. They would also be asked to analyse and discuss filmed scenes



from Natak Vihar. The workshop would encourage people to seriously question their stereotyped notions of masculinity and femininity and to think critically about challenging rigid gender roles in their lives.

Overall, United We Stand would be a project that adopts a holistic whole-of-life approach to addressing family violence in South Asian migrant communities. The aim being to work through ways in which happy and loving family ties can be developed and maintained.

The long term goal of the project is to make a valuable contribution to research on the wider impact of gender inequality and family violence. This includes undertaking further data collection and carrying out detailed analysis of the structural, cultural and societal contexts surrounding family violence and how to address them in primary prevention work.

Dr O'Connor's presentation was followed by a series of speeches made by members of parliament from across the political spectrum... Georgie Crozier MP, Jill Hennessy MP, Inga Peulich MLC, Gabrielle Williams MP. The

common emphasis in each person's address was the importance of developing culturally specific programs that address the ever increasing problem of family violence and the vital need to increase awareness of gender responsive laws and services in culturally and linguistically diverse communities.

Joseph Abeyasinghe's speech was by far the most emotive of all. He provided a moving and thought provoking

personal account which really pushed those present to think about how complex an issue family violence is.

After the conclusion of proceedings there was time for guests to network and sign themselves up to participate in a United We Stand workshop.



*Photos taken at the United We Stand workshops*

## Release of Parliamentary Report - *A better family law system to support and protect those affected by family violence*

Gauri Kapoor - ACHRH Board Member

In 2017, the Australian Parliament commissioned an inquiry into how Australia's federal family law system can better meet the needs of people affected by family violence. ACHRH submitted a detailed written submission outlining proposed solutions for the Parliamentary Committee's consideration.

The Inquiry recently released a report on its findings titled *A better family law system to support and protect those affected by family violence*. Section 7 of the report identifies dowry as a key area of concern in relation to family violence in culturally and linguistically diverse communities. There is a full subsection on dowry abuse which includes specific mention of ACHRH's recommendation "that the term 'dowry extortion' should be considered as an example of extortion in the Family Law Act" (Australasian Centre for Human Rights and Health, Submission 4, p. 2). The Committee also refers to the anticipated preparation of anti-dowry legislation by the Victorian Government and states it will closely follow progress of the bill in coming months.

The Board of ACHRH interprets the report's findings as a very positive development in the campaign to criminalise dowry at the federal level. It indicates an exciting new possibility that federal anti dowry laws may be introduced as part of larger efforts to reshape Australia's legal system so that it is far more culturally sensitive and attune to the

unique needs of the country's current wave of migrants.

Also important to note is the substantial increase in media coverage of dowry related violence across Australia. This will hopefully contribute to creating greater momentum and support in each state for change at the highest level.

ACHRH will continue to advocate strongly for reform of legal frameworks so that the pernicious effect of dowry and its potential to cause serious harm is recognised and acted upon not just in Victoria but also nationally.

Read the full Parliamentary Report here:

[https://www.aph.gov.au/Parliamentary\\_Business/Committees/House/Social\\_Policy\\_and\\_Legal\\_Affairs/FVlawreform/Report](https://www.aph.gov.au/Parliamentary_Business/Committees/House/Social_Policy_and_Legal_Affairs/FVlawreform/Report)

## Dowry Related Family Violence: Youth Perspectives Event - December 10 2017

Gauri Kapoor - ACHRH Board Member

To mark the occasion of Human Rights Day as part of the 16 Days of Activism against Gender Based Violence, ACHRH hosted a screening of the Al Jazeera documentary "Australia's Dowry Deaths". This was followed by a panel discussion on the topic with prominent young male and female leaders in South Asian communities - Ritu Kukreja, Susan Ahmadi, Vinu Gunetilleke, Hammad Sherazi and Vaibhav Sharma. ACHRH Board Director, Molina Asthana, moderated the discussion and formally welcomed former Victorian Premier, the Hon Ted Baillieu who was guest of honour at this special event.

The panel discussion covered much ground. It began with the panellists discussing and debating the concept of dowry and more importantly perceptions of the concept of dowry. The second part of the conversation moved to dissecting 'dowry culture' and how it has evolved over time. Initially dowry was intended to be a small good will gesture between two families bound together by marriage. It was viewed as a harmless practice that would ensure respect for the provider of dowry (more often than not the bride). Nowadays it has become more like a large business transaction that often leads to exploitative and abusive behaviour in families. Even worse, it has led to slavery like situations of violence and sadly death in many cases.

Several panellists expressed their amazement at the fact that dowry still even exists as a custom and family tradition despite its medieval roots and seemingly out of



place characteristics in our modern world. On the contrary the practice has become even more pervasive with the passage of time and has had serious social, cultural and economic repercussions. It is clear that many people have not questioned the ethics of the dowry system and its role in perpetuating traditional patriarchy.

While issues relating to dowry have been extensively examined in South Asian countries, panellists noted that until now there has been little focus on the impact of the practice on South Asian migrants living in Australia. ACHRH is proudly at the forefront of advocacy and ethnographic research on this issue. It is clear that there needs to be a continued effort to promote greater awareness of the ways in which dowry/and or migration status are often used as a weapon or pressure point in the context of family violence here in Australia. Panellists agreed that there are gaps in protection and support for victims of dowry related abuse which need to be addressed and that young people need to be at the centre of efforts to drive social change on this critical issue.

Following the conclusion of the panel discussion, Mr Baillieu spoke about his support for ACHRH's awareness

campaign against dowry. He congratulated Dr O'Connor for her perseverance in exposing dowry related abuse in Australia despite considerable community hostility and reiterated his unwavering support for her and for ACHRH going forward.





## Upcoming Launch of Natak Vihar Videotapes

Gauri Kapoor - ACHRH Board Member

On Friday April 27th, ACHRH will host a function at the Lyceum Club to launch the Natak Vihar Videotapes and to celebrate International Women's Day. I recently had the pleasure of viewing the tapes. Watching them brought back fond memories of the time when ACHRH volunteers came together to create a really special project with many special moments. It was evident from watching the videos how well the community engaged with the devised performances and the messages they conveyed about the consequences of family violence. The forum theatre approach encouraged the audience and actors to interactively address complex cultural issues surrounding family violence and to talk about how to develop positive changes in attitude and behaviour. There were people of different ages and from all kinds of backgrounds present at all three performances who enthusiastically shared their interesting and perceptive comments on what they had seen. They also had the chance to reflect on and share with others the challenges they had faced as migrants living in Australia. Overall, this creative medium proved to be a highly effective way of generating discussion and reducing the stigma around talking openly about family violence in Indian/South Asian homes.



*ACHRH WORKSHOP Easter 2016 explores father-son relationship*



*Natak Vihar audience and actors at Craigieburn interactive theatre performance held on 16 April 2016*

# CELEBRATE INTERNATIONAL WOMEN'S DAY

## LAUNCHING NATAK VIHAR VIDEOTAPES

Interactive community theater

Changing the story: Exploring solutions  
Community owned theater and research

### JOIN US

**DATE** Friday 27 April at 6 pm

**PLACE** The Lyceum Club  
Ridgway Place (Off 3 Little Collins Street)  
(Parking Wilson's Car Park - 34 Little Collins Street)

**RSVP** Please respond by 20 April    **EMAIL** [info@achrh.org](mailto:info@achrh.org)





*Images from the 2018 Premier's Gala Ball*

## 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**
- **INTOUCH MULTICULTURAL CENTER AGAINST FAMILY VIOLENCE -- 1800 755 988**
- **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)**
- **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

### 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*