

Australasian Centre for Human Rights and Health Inc



ACHRRH

Empowering Communities
through Knowledge & Research

Mutual Relational Respect (MRR)

November 2018
Newsletter

Welcome to another newsletter from the ACHRH!

In this newsletter you can read all about the Mutual Relational Respect project, from two participants who write of their positive experiences in attending. There are also some exciting upcoming events, including our annual AGM which members are most welcome to attend. Details appear in the following pages, so have your diaries nearby as you read. Dr O'Connor has also written a very interesting editorial on everything the ACHRH are doing in the campaign to have the voices of disempowered women heard. Thank you for your continuing support of this important work!



Manjula
O'Connor

AGM

Notice for ACHRH's Annual General Meeting (AGM).

Open to all ACHRH Members

5pm to 6pm on Friday December 7

Multicultural Hub, Drill Hall - 34 Therry St, Melbourne, Vic, 3004.



Happy Diwali to you and your families from ACHRH Team

Editorial

Dr Manjula O'Connor

In August 2018 Victoria Parliament unanimously passed the Family Violence Protection and Other Matters Bill 2018. It has received Royal ascent and is awaiting proclamation. The Bill seeks to expand the meaning of family violence by including the words "using coercion, threats, physical abuse or emotional or psychological abuse to demand or receive a dowry, either before or after a marriage." *The Family Violence Protection law will ONLY be triggered by abuse, coercive demands and violence associated with dowry. The practice of dowry itself is NOT a trigger for the law*

it is an honour and matter of pride for ACHRH that finally our campaign has been heard loud and clear by the Federal Government, we have campaigned hard so that the voices of voiceless and disempowered women are heard. **On 21 September 2018 I was honoured to be invited to give evidence at the Senate Hearing into "The practice of dowry and the incidence of dowry abuse in Australia" on behalf of ACHRH.** We thank the Chair Senator Louise Pratt and Senator Ian McDonald for sitting through the evidence presented. And we thank Julian Hill MP for giving dowry abuse a high profile by triggering this enquiry.

I spoke about the current rate of dowry abuse in cases of family violence according to my practice was around 40%. It is interesting that the rate of dowry abuse in my figures has shifted downwards from 75%



Dr O'Connor and others at the SACMAC Meeting

I reported in 2015 to current 40%. In other words in the past 3 years the rates of dowry abuse are down. We believe the deterrent effect of our highly public campaign and the forthcoming dowry-abuse laws of Victoria is already visible.

I am in contact with a significant number of abandoned brides living in India and in Australia - many never received invitation by their NRI husband to join them and many were forced to return back to India because the husband was not satisfied with the amount of dowry received, kept demanding more dowry until violence led to separation. The lack of transnational laws that can support ABANDONED wives is abuse of the women's human rights: Australia is party to harbouring perpetrators of such crimes. The victims are being punished but perpetrators get away without accountability and punishment. In Australia a first world, wealthy country we cannot allow that to continue.

"The young women and their parents have been hoodwinked by society into continuing the practice of dowry believing that it is their duty to give and the grooms have been groomed to believe that they are entitled to receive the bride's family wealth "

Submission by ACHRH to the Senate Enquiry into dowry abuse

In the Middle Eastern and African context it is the groom that gives dowry to the parents of the bride. While the practice of bride-price is valued by African communities, and by and large is less harmful than the groom-price it is also open to abuse. Parents can promise their daughters hand to the grooms of their choice, based on dowry offering and that has its own negative consequences.

A number of submission to the Senate Hearing into dowry abuse have mentioned that women falsely accuse men or "fake dowry claims" will lead to abuse of anti-dowry laws in Australia. In A radio interview a journalist asked me –have you ever heard or seen fake dowry claim cases. I said I have not seen or heard of fake dowry case. The reason is that there is confusion about what is dowry. According to the Indian custom the definition of dowry includes the expense of the wedding that is born by the bride 's family, gifts given at the wedding, and at *shagun* and after marriage. I do not know any Indian wedding where the large majority of gifts are not given by the bride. After the breakup of marriage it is only fair the groom should return all the gifts given to him and his family and pay for half the expense of wedding that is

usually exorbitant, and return all her jewellery, clothes and property she brought as dowry. There is nothing fake in that.

A final report to the Senate is due on 6 December 2018

It is important to note that financial abuse and dowry abuse, financial coercion, emotional abuse and physical violence in marriages occurs in every community, every society, and the whole of Australia and the whole world. It certainly doesn't just occur in South Asian, migrant or minority communities. We all have to fight it together.

[Australian police deal with an incidence of domestic violence every two minutes](#) in Australia and we have had more than one murder every week as a result of domestic violence.

Reforms which can tighten up legal definitions and enhance social education, provide frameworks and tools to members of communities to prevent family violence, and protect victims is needed. **We do not need victim blaming.**

We feel proud that ACHRH, we are a small NGO yet we have been able to mobilise the community to rise up, and have influenced policy makers and governments against the abuse of the practice of dowry that has caused much harm to migrant women in Australia.

On another note we are grateful to receive a new grant. Just last week the Minister from Multicultural Affairs Minister Robin Scott announced that ACHRH has won a grant to continue the community-based

education around the new forthcoming anti dowry-abuse laws, based on our previous project the "United We Stand" videotapes. We will launch the videotapes on 7 December 2018. Please do join us and celebrate the community's ownership of the fight against family violence in our South Asian communities.

NOT ANYMORE. WE SAY 'NO'

By: SHWETA MISHRA "shawryaa"

The unpleasantness grew frighteningly massive

Air was no more a breathing source

With body beaten black

The house matured to a Nazi camp

And the dark walls painted stain damp

'Wife' a soulless word

Scribbled on sheet

Hung round her neck

Dust accumulated

And ink faded

While you aspired for the sky

You didn't allow her earth enough to stand

She resolved to step out

To create her own queendom

Her space sans your worldly wisdom

No one will ever push and pull her here

She will not be the trash of your box now

She'll be her moon, she'll be her sun

No mother would ever want

Her daughter fallen into the fatal haunt

She, in her womb,

Was breathing peacefully

With same peace, with same security

She'll live out of the wedded flood

She'll live and celebrate her menstrual blood

Where there's no pain

Where her nights are fearless

Where there is no shame, no guilt, and no fire

Where her face is not scarred

Where air reaches her unbarred

(Shweta Mishra "shawryaa" is an Indian poet and writer. She completed her doctorate in 2006 and is presently working as an Assistant Professor in English at Government Post Graduate College, Lucknow, India.)



Mutual Relational Respect (MRR)

Marshie Perera Rajakumar

As a member of the community, and now also a mother to a son, I feel even more driven to push for progress on gender equality and mental health as way to end family violence.

So I was delighted to be invited to be a part of ACHRH's current project - MRR.

Mutual Relational Respect (MRR) is a Victorian Government funded primary prevention project which aims to achieve ACHRH's vision of an equitable and harmonious society.

The family is the basic unit of harmony and strength in every society.

MRR explores why family based (domestic) violence, FV, exists in every country and changes we can make in our own families and communities to help reduce it. It takes a strength based approach by encouraging participants to look for positive aspects of relationships to promote family harmony.



FV is a complex issue and an uncomfortable topic to discuss. It is the result of interactions at multiple levels: the individual, the family, the community and the structures of society. To unpack causes and implement solutions, we need to explore our own unconscious bias and deeply held belief systems that create barriers for us as well as others (regardless of gender).

The MRR method to generate healthy discussion within communities is to run workshops for community groups where we, as facilitators, invite the participants to explore the pros and cons of certain behaviours within family systems.



The passion within the South East Asian (SEA) groups to find ways to improve relationships and create loving families is clearly evident as the workshops have been very well attended.



The aim of MRR is to empower individuals in these communities and families to be champions of change and to question gender norms; what does masculinity and femininity really mean? MRR implores participants to think about how they can challenge rigid gender roles in their lives for the benefit of current and future generations.

Misunderstanding these workshops help clarify is the definition of violence itself. Some hold the belief that violence has to manifest as physical harm in order to be defined as violence. The workshops created opportunities to explore financial and emotional abuse as forms of violence.

The reasons for the need for change are clear – the statistics and research detailing the magnitude and pervasiveness of FV are inescapable and the regular horror stories in the local and international media are



becoming too familiar; 12 women died in Australia just in the month of October!

Overall, the workshops have helped me realise that although we have a long way to go, there are many people using whatever platforms they have available to them, to bring about social change to create a better global culture. It's been a wonderful way to connect with individuals about the hopes and dreams they had as they were growing up as well as what they envision for a better future.



Mutual Relational Respect (MRR) participant report

Dr. Tarini Fernando - Consultant Anatomical Pathologist and current title-holder for Mrs South Asia Australia

On the 15th of September I had the pleasure of attending a seminar run by the ACHRH on the prevention of family violence. This was an excellent opportunity provided to all the men and women taking part in the Miss/Mrs/Mr Southasia Australia pageant run by Dilkie Perera. The 2-hour evening seminar was overseen by Dr. Manjula O'Connor together with other team members from ACHRH. In the world of pageants and all that it entails, this was an interesting and informative side-step providing us with a whole-rounded experience.

After a presentation by Dr. O'Conner on the sobering statistics of family violence, as a group we discussed two separate but chronologically linked scenarios, highlighting the need for addressing gender inequality from a young age in order to break the cycle of family violence. In a short amount of time a lot of ground was covered which challenged preconceived notions about family violence leading to robust discussions and the sharing of personal experiences. All the participants left with a new perspective on how to tackle this pertinent issue together with information on how to access support services.

Family violence is a pervasive problem both here in Australia and across the globe. It affects us all regardless of your culture, class or level of education. Hopefully through the consistent education of subsequent generations together with relevant and effective legislation, this will eventually become an issue of the past.



Dowry abuse should be recognised as domestic violence under Australian law, advocates say

Hayley Gleeson (First posted 21 Sep 2018 - <https://www.abc.net.au/news/2018-09-21/dowry-abuse-in-australia-senate-inquiry-begins/10292714>. Reproduced here with permission.)

The disturbing number of Indian and South Asian women experiencing domestic violence and even being killed by their partners as a result of dowry-related abuse is an "alarming" problem that requires an urgent national response, the first hearing of the Senate inquiry into dowry abuse in Australia heard on Friday.

Liberal senator Ian Macdonald, deputy chair of the Legal and Constitutional Affairs References Committee, told the hearing in Melbourne the concept of dowry had previously been "completely foreign" to him and that, when the inquiry was first proposed, he thought it was "ridiculous" because he believed it was not an issue in Australia.

But he was "glad" the inquiry had been instigated, he said, because it had exposed him to the seriousness of it.

Survivors of dowry-related abuse and a range of experts working to address it gave evidence as part of the focused probe into the "alarming growth" of dowry abuse in migrant communities, which an ABC News investigation revealed has resulted in a spate of horrific murders and suicides in recent years.

As part of the cultural practice, which has been illegal in India since 1961, a bride's family typically pays the

groom and his family a dowry of cash, gold, gifts and property at the time of marriage.

However, it is common for grooms and their families to escalate demands for additional sums, which has resulted in violence, abandonment and even death when brides do not comply.

Indian and South Asian women who have migrated to Australia as part of arranged marriages and who have temporary migration status may also be threatened with deportation by their husbands, who have the ability to withdraw sponsorship of their wives' visas if they do not deliver on demands for more dowry.

In their joint submission to the inquiry, Good Shepherd Australia New Zealand and inTouch Multicultural Centre against Family Violence said the practice of dowry abuse remained "largely unidentified within legal and policy frameworks" and that naming it in the definition of family violence — as the Victorian Government had recently done — would improve victims' access to support services.

"There needs to be an explicit reference to dowry abuse in the definition of domestic and family violence nationwide to increase protections for individuals at risk," chief executive of Good Shepherd

Australia New Zealand Stella Avramopoulos told the committee.

The Attorney-General's department had argued in its submission that the existing family violence legal framework was broad enough to include dowry-related abuse, Ms Avramopoulos said. "However, it is our experience that victims of dowry-related abuse often miss out on the support they need as a result of this broad-strokes approach."

Melbourne-based international anti-dowry campaigner Manjula O'Connor told the committee it was also vital the Australian Government consider how women on temporary migrant visas could be better protected from — and receive support for — dowry-related abuse and threats of deportation given their ineligibility for Centrelink, Medicare and long-term housing.

"This [dowry abuse] is a trans-national crime — it's a new kind of crime that has [emerged] because of migration," said Dr O'Connor, who in her clinical practice sees up to four new women from the Indian sub-continent experiencing family violence every week, nearly half of whom she says are also victims of dowry abuse.

"We ask the Senate committee today to look at laws that will support the victims of this crime and not harbour the perpetrators just because they have Australian citizenship."

Dr O'Connor said she had been disappointed by what she called a "backlash" to the campaign to end dowry abuse in Indian communities, particularly from many

men who have claimed in submissions to the inquiry that it is not a major problem in Australia.

Family violence and murder in Australian Hindu and Sikh communities



There are growing concerns about a recent, significant increase in domestic violence in Hindu and Sikh communities, a crisis which has become public in a spate of horrific deaths.

Others have argued that anti-dowry laws in India — in particular section 498A of the Penal Code, which in 1983 established specific forms of dowry-related cruelty to a wife — are misused by women to harass and extort their husbands, behaviour they say is resulting in the social ostracism and suicide of men.

"The law has been used as a weapon to intimidate husbands to comply with the demands of paying exorbitant money as "settlement" or impose financial and family decisions using threats of false complaint," stated one anonymous submission, which also claimed dowry "is not a common cultural practice in India".

Anti-dowry laws were "unnecessary and unconstitutional in Australia", the submission concluded, because existing domestic violence laws were adequate and applicable "to the Indian diaspora living in Australia".

But Dr O'Connor said such claims were a distraction, and an attempt to "shut up advocates" and survivors speaking out about the issue.

Labor MP Julian Hill, who announced the inquiry into dowry abuse in June, said most Australians would be "horrified" if they knew the extent of the problem, which he described as a "pernicious cultural practice dating back centuries" that was now a cause of "great worry in our community".

"When I first spoke publicly [about dowry abuse] in Parliament," Mr Hill said, "I was stunned that within two days I had people ringing my office ... telling me this was not a problem, it was all made up."

But Mr Hill said that was "just nonsense" and was contradicted by the "evidence".

"It's been recognised by the royal commission into family violence, it's been recognised by Victorian coroners' investigations [as part of] a pattern of murders and abuse.

"Clearly we don't want law that criminalises or stigmatises men who are marrying for love and good reasons, but there is a problem [with dowry abuse], and we need to

be honest enough to look at what legal responses are needed, but also community education."

Dr O'Connor agreed, adding it was "extremely important" that seven survivors of horrific dowry abuse in Australia — all women — were able to give evidence to the committee in a private hearing.

"They were ... distressed, but also relieved that ... the Government is listening, and will do something about it," Dr O'Connor said.

"These women are absolutely caught between a rock and a hard place, and we really need to support them, and today ... it was really good for them to be heard."

A final report to the Senate is due on December 6.

[A decade of domestic violence deaths in Hindu and Sikh communities](#)



[For many Hindu and Sikh women who've experienced domestic violence in the last decade, their suffering has ended only with death. These are their stories.](#)

Upcoming Launch of the United We Stand Tapes

Vijaya Tangirala - ACHRH Volunteer

On Friday December 7, ACHRH will host a function at the Multicultural Hub to launch the United We Stand Tapes.

I met Dr Manjula fortuitously in 2016 and learned about her passionate contribution to the community through women empowerment. This aligned closely with my community work as a founder & coordinator of Telugu Ladies Club of Melbourne. As a trained Healthy Relationships Ambassador for the Telugu community I have been working with victims of family violence for the past five years as a first point of contact. I took part in the United We Stand (UWS) launch, workshops and video which discussed a family unit from different cultural and personal backgrounds. In 2017 my role as a member of the

steering committee for United We Stand was very satisfying. In 2018 during the Mutual Relational and Respect (MRR) program, I was one of the key facilitators to provide educational workshops to the South Asian communities. For me personally the UWS workshops and MRR provided an opportunity to discuss the main cause of family violence directly to the community members and gauge their perception to further improve educational activities. It was a pleasure to work with such a highly committed team at ACHRH and share my knowledge and experience with a like minded cohort! I am looking forward to the launch of the United We Stand DVD and am hoping it will reach the many needed women to break their silence on this growing epidemic.



Vijaya Tangirala and other United We Stand participants with Dr O'Connor

United We Stand

Proudly Inviting You To Attend

*the
Launch of the United We Stand Tapes*

*Prevention in Practice:
Strengthening Family Harmony in South Asian Communities*

DATE - Friday December 7 at 6pm

*PLACE - Multicultural Hub, Drill Hall
34 Therry St, Melbourne, VIC, 3004
Parking at 23-29 Therry Street. Ibis Hotel*

RSVP by NOVEMBER 17

Dr Manjula O'Connor - info@achrh.org - 0419 354 482
Gauri Kapoor - gaurikapoor@optusnet.com.au - 0434 858 155



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+ UNITED WE STAND

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

Media Engagement

The ACHRH has been making waves in the media – the following is a list of mentions of the ACHRH:

- ABC radio – World News, RN, ABC News
- ABC digital news- by Hayley Gleeson
- ABC television news- by Naomi Selvaratnam
- SBS digital news by Mosiqi Acharaya
- The Age – Article by Jewel Topsfield
- The Sydney Morning herald - Article by Jewel Topsfield
- Daily Telegraph– Article by Clarissa Bye
- The Australian –Article by Sue Smethurst, published in Enquirer
- The BuzzFeed.News –digital news

The ACHRH has also received the following mentions:

Victorian Parliament (and recorded in Hansard) -- Role of ACHRH and Dr Manjula in attaining the difficult goal of inclusion of words dowry abuse in Family Violence Protection Act by MP Heidi Victoria, MP Gabrielle Williams, and MP Danielle Green.

Federal Parliament -- MP Julian Hill.

**# SAY NO
TO DOWRY**

