

AustralAsian Centre for Human Rights and Health Inc

www.achrh.org



ACHRH

Empowering Communities

December 2023
Newsletter

16 Days of Activism

16 days of activism against violence against women is a global UN campaign that starts every year on 24 November and finishes on 12 December. At the AustralAsian Centre we take a global approach to stopping domestic violence. We collaborate with Indian institutions in Delhi National Institute of Family Welfare and Health, Lucknow with MBCP University, and Rishikesh All India Institute of Medical Sciences. We share our work, and resources to raise awareness around various forms of violence against women that are common to Australia and India.



Manjula
O'Connor

I will share some of the common forms of violence that are found in Australia.

Recently I was invited to deliver a keynote speech at the Lucknow MBCP Post Graduate College an international conference about the impact of Indian diaspora globally. I spoke about how the transnational nature of the crime called domestic violence, dowry abuse and abandoned brides was discovered in Victoria and how we at the AustralAsian Centre have created awareness and influenced policy and laws. It is all too common and needs to be kept front of mind to protect immigrant women and help them rehabilitate and reclaim their life and mental health. More on that in this issue from Dr Shweta Mishra from MBCP College.

The crimes against women travel to Australia from India, and we need a transnational approach.

On daily basis I hear about newly wedded women abandoned by their husbands, either in Australia or in India. It seems hard to imagine why someone would want to marry a person only to abandon them in the next months. Usually after perpetrating heinous violence and abuse, and dowry confiscation. Criminal behaviours towards the new bride are evidence of lack of compassion, and lack of ability to see beyond one's own self-centred needs and greed and a criminal intent.

Abandoned brides in India, by Australian Indian grooms is a painful story of many a woman. I recently received an email from Delhi by an abandoned bride. She wrote.

"I am Ms Y (name withheld), currently residing in India (Delhi). In Feb, 2023 my husband Mr X who is on student visa in Australia, abandoned me and left the country without any intimation/closure and now he is not responding to me neither is he appearing in the legal proceedings against him in India. I have shared multiple complaints to the embassy, local police, Victoria police and even to immigration.



The response received is utterly disappointing and saddening. It has been a year of mental trauma and emotional breakdown. All departments have neglected (the complaint, and not catching the) criminal who deserted his wife, threatened her, forcibly aborted her child and took away all her belongings and money. No one is even bothered to check his background in Victoria police received my complaint about four months back, but where is the necessary action taken? Absolutely nothing?"

The Australian High Commission told her they cannot help. He has Indian Passport, but he is here on international student visa, and told her to speak to the Police. The Police told her that the Indian government must make a complaint to them, before they can act. No request has been made. Each organization passes the buck.

The pain of the abandoned bride is limitless.

I wrote to the Australian Home Affairs on her behalf, and they have given her a link to write to the Border Watch Force. I await to hear the results.

Imagine the transnational nature of this crime and how it allows the criminals to get way. Indian weddings are very expensive affairs, usually paid by the bride's parents. Often multiple times their annual income. The parents often spend their savings in the hope of giving their daughter a happy future in Australia or a western country by marrying their daughters to ex-pat Indians or NRI (non-resident Indian). Many NRI weddings in Australia and abroad are happy and successful, their dreams fulfilled. But a significant minority end up with deceit, abuse and abandonment of the bride.

We at AustralAsian Centre plan to do more advocacy work in this area to influence the governments of India and Australia.

Another problem I want to mention today is sexual jealousy, something that is seen in all societies. Its roots lie in patriarchy and male sense of entitlement over females. Sexual jealousy is the most common cause of intimate partner murders.

Often, I have heard of obsessive sexual jealousy. Can you imagine a woman who is getting married to an Australia Indian resident being abused, called vulgar names within hours of the wedding. Why? He believed she was having an affair with a man, who was the groom's friend attending the wedding from Australia!! She just met him and had barely exchanged a hello. She was shell shocked. What is this man doing? Why out of the blue this man, my new husband abusing me? She said she had never been abused by her parents, or friends, or called such vulgar and awful names that cannot be repeated here. The pattern of suspecting her of having affairs with any man she spoke to, followed by beatings became his routine behaviour in Australia. Someone called the police on 000 to protect her. He was charged with criminal assault, and removed from his home.

Collectivist societies and traditional societies place the honour of the family on women's shoulders, not the men. Her sexual chastity is all important and upholds the honour of her husband/male partner, and his family. On the other hand, alcohol, gambling, domestic violence - the commonly seen toxic behaviours of men do not attract the same level of stigma, censure, or punishment. To maintain feminine honour women, need a reputation for sexual purity, via behaviours such as wearing modest clothes and maintaining virginity before marriage. No such rules apply for the male gender.

We live in a world where women have achieved as much and, in some cases, more than men, they are educated and innovative. In the modern world gender equality is considered essential for the good health of societies. We demand that the same morals and ethics be applied to everyone equally. Men have affairs outside the marriage too, often women put up with this behaviour. Why? Mainly because in the patriarchal arrangement of our society, being a divorced woman is stigmatized, and women are shunned, and blamed. Read my book *Daughters of Durga* for more information on Honour Killings.

Finally, I can say that our work against dowry abuse is working and having impacts. A very heart-warming email arrived in my inbox last week. A young woman in Melbourne was about to get married to a man living in Melbourne. Days before the wedding he started demanding a large dowry. The young woman was so incensed she cancelled the wedding a week before the due date.



PICTURE BY UN WOMEN

Women are changing the world. Many men are joining us. We want more men to become activists with us to make this a better and fairer world for all.

VIGIL TO HONOUR THE VICTIMS AND SURVIVORS

AustralAsian Centre held a vigil to mark the 16 Days of activism. The week before, 6 women were killed in South Australia alone, and 53 women killed in Australia in 2023. The vigil honoured the women who were murdered, and the women who are survivors of domestic violence.

Date 7 December 2023 8 15 pm.

Venue- Scott's Church City. Corner Russell Street and Collins Street



Review- SNEH theatre project performance at Melbourne CBD

By: Sumimol Sebastian

This event was held at Dosa hut, Melbourne CBD with viewers from a wide range of backgrounds including international students from metro and regional campuses. The artists presented themes around family violence in an immigrant family through participatory theatre approach.

The performance is an eyeopener for many viewers including me, who are conditioned to normalise gender-based violence and inequality. For example, although dowry is prohibited by law in India in 1961, it is continued in the name of tradition in most families regardless of their education or where they live. This performance creates a platform for open discussion around the practice of dowry as a tradition, as a means of abuse. This also provide an understanding and awareness around the support systems available in Australia.

The active participation of the audience made this standout from any other theatre projects. The organisers ensured a psychologically safe space for all the viewers to express their perspective. Most importantly, Dr Manjula and her team encouraged viewers to share their perspective and what they see or understand from the performance and how they can relate to their daily life. It was interesting to listen to the perspective of young people from other cultures where dowry system is not prevalent

or when the groom pay dowry to the girl's family.

Some scenes from the performance are definitely going to stay with the viewers for a very long time. One scene that particularly stuck with me is, when mum and daughter did not accept the father – perpetrator upon his release from the prison. It's very different to the storyline I am used to in South Asian stereotype movies, where being a wife and daughter you forgive and accept the perpetrator back in the family.

This performance also pointed out the financial abuse in many immigrant families where the extended family in overseas is the hidden perpetrator to initiate the violence. Many professionally successful immigrant women are not financially independent because their partner controls the income. This is a unique challenge for the victims as well as the policy makers. I wish, Sneh theatre would continue to work on creating awareness on the subtle and yet detrimental financial and emotional abuse.

To portray a performance around gender-based violence and dowry related domestic violence to a multicultural audience in Melbourne is not an easy task. The passion and hard work from the volunteers are highly appreciated. In addition to creating awareness, these performances also strengthen many

individuals who feel stuck and are confused to choose the right decision when they experience family violence.

Sumimol Sebastian has a Masters in Public Health from the University of Melbourne and has been working with children and families for over 15 years.



ACHRH Advocacy: Dowry Abuse Recognised as a Form of Financial Coercive Control

By: Gauri Kapoor

The National Principles to Address Coercive Control in Family and Domestic Violence

There has been much debate over the past few years regarding whether state governments in Australia should follow the path of certain other Western countries in criminalising coercive control.

Following an extensive community consultation process, the Australian Government's Attorney General's Department recently released its National Principles to Address Coercive Control in Family and Domestic Violence document. Coercive control is framed throughout the document as very much a gendered problem.

The paper articulates seven Principles that provide a comprehensive overview of factors to be considered in an Australian context and map out ideas for how to move towards a multilayered National Plan of Action. They are informed by intersectional lived experience and trauma.

ACHRH in its role as Chair of the National Dowry Abuse Working Group (DAWG) has facilitated numerous stakeholder meetings and communications to advocate for inclusion of dowry abuse in measures to deal with coercive

control. In 2022 ACHRH was invited to participate in the Attorney General's Department Roundtable to help provide advice on drafting of the National Principles.

ACHRH has campaigned to highlight dowry abuse as a form of coercive control in discussions with government representatives in the Australian Capital Territory, South Australia, and Queensland. The same concern was emphasised-at a meeting held with the Director of the Family Safety Branch at the Federal Attorney General's Department.

The National Principle 3 speaks about taking an intersectional approach to understanding features and impacts

- Recognising diverse experiences and identities including but not limited to cultural background, sexuality, disability, socio-economic circumstances and structural forms of inequality.

We are excited to share that the ACHRH's consistent advocacy over several years has resulted in dowry abuse being recognised on Page 13 of the National Principles to Address Coercive Control in Family and Domestic Violence document. The document refers to dowry abuse as follows.

“Dowry abuse, such as violence or other harmful behaviours related to the giving of gifts by one family to another before, during or after a marriage can also be a form of financial abuse”.

The Seven National Principles – A Snapshot

National Principle 1 Shared understanding of the common features of coercive control

Analysing the different ways perpetrators exert power and dominance.

National Principle 2 Understanding the traumatic and pervasive impacts of coercive control

Exploring physical, emotional, psychological, spiritual, cultural, social and financial dimensions of abuse.

National Principle 3 Taking an intersectional approach to understanding features and impacts

Recognising diverse experiences and identities including but not limited to cultural background, sexuality, disability, socio-economic circumstances and structural forms of inequality.

National Principle 4 Improving societal understanding of coercive control

Developing a shared understanding of coercive control that ensures it is adequately identified and addressed with a focus on changing social norms, attitudes and behaviours that lead to toxic behaviours.

National Principle 5 Embedding lived experience

Embracing the views of victim-survivors in policy development, service design and delivery in a process of rigorous consultation and evaluation.

National Principle 6 Coordinating and designing approaches across prevention, early intervention, response, and recovery and healing

Defining roles and responsibilities in each part of the service system with all sectors and jurisdictions working together on a coordinated approach.

National Principle 7 Embedding the National Principles in legal responses to coercive control

Considering all highlighted issues in developing effective legislative reforms. This includes improvements to existing legal mechanisms (including civil actions) outside of the possible introduction of a specific coercive control offence.

LINK: [National Principles to Address Coercive Control in Family and Domestic Violence \(ag.gov.au\)](https://www.ag.gov.au/national-principles-to-address-coercive-control-in-family-and-domestic-violence)

A Brief Note On The Inaugural Ceremony Of The International Conference: "Global Connections: Unveiling The Indian Diaspora's Transnational Impact"

By: Dr Shweta Mishra

On 09th November 2023, an International Conference on "Global Connections: Unveiling the Indian Diaspora's Transnational Impact", was organised at Maharaja Bijli Pasi Government P.G. College, Ashiana, Lucknow (Uttar Pradesh), India. This conference was organised in the hybrid mode and several speakers from different states of India connected with their online videos to speak on the theme of the conference, as well as offline delegates who travelled to physically present their research papers in the technical sessions allotted to them. We also had the privilege of listening to some of the most well-established personalities in their respective fields who connected with us from beyond India, and it was not only apt and suited the subject under scrutiny, but also provided us with firsthand information about diaspora. The conference began with the invocation of the blessings of Goddess Saraswati, the lighting of the lamp and garlanding of the idol of Goddess Saraswati. After the welcome address of the Principal, Prof. Suman Gupta, and the reading of the concept note by the convenor of the conference, Dr Shweta Mishra, the address of the online keynote speaker, Prof. Manjula O'Connor's video was played. The same was viewed by the august gathering of academicians. We also had the honour of having Prof. R.P. Singh, Department of

English and Modern European Languages, University of Lucknow, who joined us as the offline keynote speaker. He is renowned as a learned scholar with an enormous command over his subject. Mrs. Penny Doure was the Special Guest in the inaugural ceremony. She works in Australia for special children. We also had



overseas dignitaries joining us online as Guests of Honour to present their views on the Indian Diaspora. Their deliberations on the theme of the conference definitely proved exceedingly useful for our purpose.

Professor Manjula Datta O'Connor was introduced as a psychiatrist, an author, clinician in private practice with clinical and research interest in migrant women's mental health, family violence and complex trauma and trauma therapy, as the Guest of Honour in the Inaugural Ceremony. There were other renowned speakers as well like Prof. Primnath Goptar, Chairman of the NCIC Heritage Center and an executive member of the NCIC, is a writer, biographer, social worker, cultural promoter, Hindi film scholar, lecturer in Indian Cinema, UWI, former school principal and School Supervisor. He is also a member of the Editorial Board of the Publications Committee of the Global Gimit Institute (Fiji). We also had Ms Soma Vyas, an Educator from New Jersey and Ms. Anisha Tomar, IFS officer, currently posted at Iceland to share their relevant views on the subject. There were resource persons to enlighten the delegates with their skill and expertise in the subject knowledge, and in all technical sessions the delegates, who had volunteered and expressed their willingness to join the seminar from across the country, presented their research papers at the venue.

Prof. Manjula O'Connor's speech was one of the highlights of the Inaugural Ceremony. Her exhaustive lecture focussed on the trauma experienced by Indian brides abandoned by their male counterparts in Australia. She talked about the sensitive issue of family violence and abuse to which young women are subject in Australia and how migration has led to this blistering problem of dowry, physical/verbal abuse, and abandonment. Dr O'Connor also mentioned about the efforts taken by her as she co-founded the non-profit welfare organisation ACHRH and how she and her team have been successful in not only providing support to these unfortunate women but have also been able to empower them legally and economically. Professor O'Connor's address was emphatic and related to a grave problem of Indians based in Australia. The purpose of the conference, to have scholarly discussions and exchange of ideas on the theme to further contribute to global progress and mutual understanding, was well achieved.

BIO NOTE

SHWETA MISHRA “shawryaa”

Dr Shweta Mishra “shawryaa” (M.A. Ph.D.) is an Assistant Professor in English and presently teaches at MBP Government Post-Graduate College, Lucknow (Uttar Pradesh) India. Her poems have been published in Kavya Bharati and Muse India. She has also presented her poems in the U.S. based online platform “Bauchhaar”. Shweta Mishra “shawryaa” is also on podcast. (anchor.fm/shweta-mishrag)



Donations to ACHRH are now tax deductible!

Thank you for considering a gift to ACHRH, which will support our work to create happy and healthier communities; did you know that donations to ACHRH over \$2 can now be claimed as a tax deduction?

Since 2012, ACHRH has delivered a range of programs which tackle issues affecting migrant communities in Australia. If you would like to be a part of making tangible impacts for at risk communities, please contact Kate Grimme on 0400 032 821 or email info@achrh.org We will be pleased to provide you with more information on how you can make a financial contribution and to share details on the programs and projects we run.

Update - Mutual Relational Respect (MRR)

On November 16th, 2023, Dr Manjula O'Connor hosted an interactive Mutual Relational Respect (MRR) workshop for twelve female doctors. The Netflix film called 'Darlings' provided an interesting reference point in their discussions about family violence in today's world.

A MRR workshop was also organised for a group of Egyptian priests on November 15th, 2023. Overwhelmingly positive feedback was received. Participants found the MRR workshop to be informative and insightful.



The Hon Mark Dreyfus KC MP

Media Release 19 October 2023

<https://ministers.ag.gov.au/media-centre/passage-landmark-family-law-reforms-19-10-2023>

Family Law Amendment Bill

The Family Law Amendment Bill 2023 will ensure the best interests of children are at the centre of all parenting decisions made inside or outside the courtroom and will make the system easier to navigate.

Significantly, the amendments passed today repeal the presumption of 'equal shared parental responsibility' provisions in the Family Law Act 1975. In 2017, a bipartisan parliamentary committee found that these provisions were confusing, that they failed to prioritise the safety of children and that they were being improperly applied in a way that put children at risk. These findings are consistent with the overwhelming consensus of family law experts.

Under the new laws, parenting decisions will have to be based solely on what is in the best interests of the child.

The new laws also include:

- requiring Independent Children's Lawyers to meet directly with children;
- greater powers to protect parties and children from harmful effects of protracted and adversarial litigation;
- a definition of 'member of the family' in the Family Law Act that is inclusive of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander concepts of family and kinship;
- simplified compliance and enforcement provisions for child-related orders;
- powers to enable government to regulate family report writers;
- ensuring that children's voices are heard more easily in matters under the Hague Convention on the Civil Aspects of International Child Abduction.

These reforms are long overdue and will improve the lives of Australian families. In the nine years the former government was in office there were more than two dozen reviews into

the family law system, with hundreds of recommendations that were simply ignored.

The Albanese Government is ensuring separating families are safer by acting where the former government failed to deliver for so many years.

Family Law Amendment (Information Sharing) Bill 2023

The Family Law Amendment (Information Sharing) Bill 2023 will ensure courts have access to the full picture of family safety risk in order to prioritise the safety of children and families, particularly in circumstances where there is risk of child abuse, neglect or family violence.

This important change progresses the Government's commitment to ending gender-based violence in a generation.

The Bill:

- establishes two new information sharing orders to allow courts to directly and quickly seek information from police, child protection and firearms agencies about family violence,

child abuse and neglect that could place children at risk;

- allows a court to make these orders at any point during proceedings so information is accurate and up-to-date; and
- will ensure sensitive information is only disclosed in a safe and appropriate manner.

This Bill is informed by the Australian Law Reform Commission's 2019 report Family Law for the Future – An inquiry into the Family Law System and reflects the Government Response to the Joint Select Committee on Australia's Family Law System.

The Government's legislation will see more family law matters resolved quickly, safely and inexpensively without compromising the safety of family members.

The Government recognises the advocacy of those with lived experiences of family and domestic violence. Their stories have been central to the development and passage of these important reforms and I thank them for their contributions.

**What to do if you suffer
dowry abuse?
Help is available and
you are not alone.**

 **1800 737 732**



WHERE TO GO FOR HELP

- **POLICE IN EMERGENCY -- 000**
- **YOUR GP -- they will refer you to the right place.**
- **NATIONAL DOMESTIC AND FAMILY VIOLENCE COUNSELLING SERVICE
1800 RESPECT**
- **INTOUCH MULTICULTURAL CENTER AGAINST FAMILY VIOLENCE –
1800 755 988**
- **Safe Steps Family Violence Response Centre, phone
24 Hour statewide line 1800 015 188**
- **MEN'S 24-HOUR REFERRAL SERVICE
1800 065 973 (FREE CALL VICTORIA ONLY)**
- **WOMEN'S INFORMATION & REFERRAL AGENCY (WIRE)
03 9348 9416
inforequests@wire.org.au**

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 Family Domestic
Violence*