
AustralAsian Centre for Human Rights and Health Inc

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ACHRH

Empowering Communities

June 2025
Newsletter

**Finding Affection has been officially selected by the
Melbourne Documentary Film Festival**



Editorial

Manjula Datta O'Connor Hon. A/ Professor Psychiatry.

Author of Daughters of Durga Premier's Award Victorian Senior of the year 2024. Victorian Roll Inductee 2024. Multicultural Roll Inductee RANZCP Meritorious Ward 2023. Chair RANZCP Family Violence Psychiatry Network



Research shows each domestic homicide is like a tip of an iceberg. It reflects a large amount of abuse that is occurring in the community. Abuse occurs within the home, but it is encouraged and sustained by the systems that are run by the Governments- federal, state and local, the big financial businesses like the Banks. These are the systems that are designed to protect us but in fact do the opposite. When used and abused and gaslighted by the perpetrators they cause immense damage to the victims even more.

Allow me to share a story brought in by volunteers of our Community education project titled Sneh Community Participatory Theatre. We turned that story into a skit that is filmed in our documentary Finding Affection. The skit is titled Money, Money, Money. It speaks about the pressures on young migrant men to send money home, back to their parents. Sometimes it is for study loans that need to be repaid. But sometimes as in this case the parents are building a mansion and keep making demands for money. They live under an illusion that their son is extremely wealthy. Often the young people who are new migrants fall in the trap of showing off their “fake wealth”. In the skit the young man is under pressure to keep sending money, faster than he can earn. He is unable or unwilling to share the truth with his parents and tell them to stop asking. Neither can he share it with his wife that he is feeling extremely stressed. Instead, he by stealth starts to send her hard-earned money to his parents without her knowledge or consent.

The result is that they are overdrawn on their accounts and there is no money to pay for children’s school fees, and their electricity connection is cut off. This provokes an indignant response from his wife. His response is to shout and basher and leave her bruised.

We play the skit in front of the community, and in the participatory theatre mode, we ask the community audience what they will do to fix it. Their suggestion was simple. He should simply sit with his wife to share his burdens and then together they can reach a solution.

The bigger question is why he does not tell his parents or his wife. The answer lies in the need for absolute control and power over his wife and money. He is committing financial abuse. The Federal Government Committee on

Financial Services Regulatory Guidelines in May 2024. I was invited to give evidence.

I spoke about dowry abuse in immigrants from South Asia, and why we need the Federal Family Law Act to include dowry abuse in its definition of financial abuse.



I also gave details of how immigrant women are being duped into signing for mortgage debt without their name being on the title of their home, into signing up as guarantor for loans they know nothing about and sometimes forced to sign up papers to become Company Directors of companies that are debt ridden and going bankrupt. Often their signatures are forged by their perpetrators. Other people gave evidence - from the Finance Industry, Lawyers and Service providers, community groups.

A number of recommendations emerged to protect women from financial abuse. Please see the article below reported in Women's Agenda.



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.

FINDINGS OF THE FINANCIAL ABUSE SENATE ENQUIRY

Women's Agenda reported on 23/4/25.

Labor party is promising women proposed changes to address several critical legal and policy blind spots.

This is what's on the table for gender-based violence:

- Preventing perpetrators from accessing a victim's superannuation after death.
- Rewriting corporate law to stop abusers from fraudulently appointing victims as directors, then saddling them with company debt;
- Introducing "innocent spouse" provisions in the tax system to allow debts to be transferred back to the abuser who incurred them;
- Reforming the Director Penalty Notice scheme to factor in financial abuse;
- And exploring how social security debts racked up under coercion can be reversed or attributed back to the perpetrator.

While technical, these reforms can have real, tangible consequences for victim-survivors. They respond to repeated calls from the women's safety sector and align with Australia's national obligations under the National Plan to End Violence Against Women and Children 2022–2032, which commits governments to embed safety across systems and hold perpetrators accountable. These policies are the sort of system-level interventions that we need to commit to if the national plan is to succeed.

Economic abuse isn't a side effect of violence. It is violence. It isolates, controls, and forces women to stay.

Yet, for decades, our systems of tax, super, Centrelink, and corporate registries have been tacitly complicit in enabling these experiences.

This plan responds to the Parliamentary Inquiry into Financial Abuse, which has heard devastating accounts of how abusers use economic tools — not fists — to destroy lives. Things like victims made directors without consent. Victims forced into debt. Tax bills, ABNs, unpaid loans weaponised with bureaucratic ease.

In many cases, the system has helped perpetrators more than it has helped those trying to leave.

This plan recognises financial abuse is a deliberate tactic, used to entrap, punish and disempower. And it thrives when our tax, legal, and welfare systems are not designed to detect or disrupt it. The planned legislative reform also intersects with broader priorities around economic equality. When victim-survivors are left with debts, damaged credit, or diminished retirement savings, their long-term financial security is compromised. That's not just a gendered economic issue — it's a national productivity issue, a safety issue, and a justice issue.

The work ahead will be complex. These reforms require cooperation across multiple portfolios — not just women's safety, but also Treasury, ATO, ASIC, Services Australia, and the Attorney-General's Department. It will require sustained consultation with victim-survivors and the sector to ensure efficacy and realise the

intent to support victim-survivors. The end goal must always be for a more accountable, fair, and survivor-focused system.

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

 **1800 737 732**



"Finding Affection" has been selected as the Award Winner in the "Best Short Documentary" category for the 27th monthly edition of Indian Independent Film Festival in February-March 2025.

Finding Affection on the World Stage

By Gauri Kapoor

We are delighted to share an exciting milestone in ACHRH's creative and advocacy journey. Our short documentary, *Finding Affection*, has begun to garner international attention, marking a new chapter for our work in storytelling, community engagement, and primary prevention.



Finding Affection is the culmination of years of community-led conversations, reflective storytelling, and lived experience-driven creativity. Drawing from the real-life narratives of migrant men, women and families in Australia's South Asian communities, the documentary explores the nuances of loneliness, love and finding connection. It invites viewers into a universally resonant exploration of how the undercurrents of family violence are experienced, expressed, and viewed in culturally diverse communities.

Festival Submissions and International Recognition

ACHRH prepared a detailed and comprehensive set of applications for the film's international festival campaign, thoughtfully presenting the film's themes, creative process, and social significance. We are pleased to report that *Finding Affection* has been officially submitted to prestigious film festivals across the globe.

Another notable platform we've entered is Film Bazaar, South Asia's largest film market, organised by the National Film Development Corporation of India (NFDC). As a key hub for filmmakers, producers, and distributors, Film Bazaar is a strategic entry point into the global South Asian diaspora film circuit. This submission opens the door to vital opportunities for co-distribution, networking, and further creative collaboration.

Awarded: Best Short Documentary - Indian Independent Film Festival

The Indian Independent Film Festival has officially awarded *Finding Affection* the title of Best Short Documentary! Competing against high-calibre entries from around the world, including impactful documentaries from the United States and Uzbekistan, *Finding Affection* stood out for the relevance and urgency of its themes.

Shortlisted: Women's International Film Festival

ACHRH is also proud to announce that *Finding Affection* has been shortlisted by the WRPN Women's International Film Festival in the United States. This festival is known for championing the voices of women filmmakers and for spotlighting stories that reflect women's lived realities.

The festival serves as a powerful platform that connects filmmakers to international distribution channels, creative funding bodies, and strategic partners. In fact, the festival's affiliate distributors, Worldwide Motion Pictures Corporation, Adler & Associates, Cardinal XD, and CCS Releasing—will review the "Best of Festival" winners for potential distribution.



Community Impact and Future Plans

The success of *Finding Affection* on the international stage reaffirms the value of community-rooted storytelling. This project emerged from ACHRH's broader work in promoting respectful relationships, social connection, and mental wellbeing in CALD communities. The film is not only a creative output but a continuation of our efforts to amplify lived experience, raise awareness of invisible challenges, and foster conversations around love, belonging, and care in migrant contexts.

We are now in the process of building a community engagement campaign around the film's release. This includes:

- Local and national screenings with facilitated discussions
- Educational toolkits for use in schools
- Collaborations with film distributors to make the documentary accessible to a wider audience
- Social media blitzes

We are proud of how *Finding Affection* is being received, and we remain committed to using art and storytelling as tools for advocacy, education, and social change.

A Documentary by AustralAsian Centre for Human Rights and Health

FINDING AFFECTION



SOME KIND OF SQUIRREL PRODUCTIONS IN ASSOCIATION WITH AUSTRALASIAN CENTRE FOR HUMAN RIGHTS AND HEALTH WITH KIND SUPPORT FROM THE VICTORIAN GOVERNMENT AND AUSTRALIAN INDIAN MEDICAL

GRADUATES ASSOCIATION (AIMGA) SYDNEY PRESENT FINDING AFFECTION

DIRECTOR EMMA MACEY STORCH CINEMATOGRAPHER RUDI SHRA EDITORS EMMA MACEY-STORCH RUIQI FU MUSIC PETRA SALSJO SOUND DESIGN DEAD ON SOUND

FEATURING AAKANKSHA GOYAL AMIT MULIYA CHRIS HOWSE DEEP DHANOA GURBIN KAUR JAGMOHAN SHARMA JAYATI KALIA PROF MANJULA DATTA O'CONNOR MAHINDER SALUJA MURLI CALPAKAM NAMRATA SHARMA NAYANA BHANDARI NITASHA MALIK POOJA CHANDNA PRIYANKA TAMHANE SARANBEER KAUR SHAMSIA SANCTIS VERSHA SHARMA VICTORIA HARRISON



AustralAsian Centre
FOR HUMAN RIGHTS & HEALTH



Seen and Heard Film Festival is a unique opportunity to watch 5 international award-winning Melbourne made short films (including ACHRHR's Finding Affection) that empower minds and strengthen multicultural communities. They tell stories about issues impacting our communities now like domestic violence and dementia with a message of transformation and hope.

The Seen and Heard Film Festival is a collaboration between ACHRHR and Creative Movies.

4 shows only - Showbiz Waverley Cinemas (Pinewood Shopping Centre - Mount Waverley)

Saturday 30th August, 3pm and 5pm

Sunday 31st August, 3pm and 5pm

Ticket Price - \$10

If interested in attending, please email ACHRHR -- org.achrh@gmail.com

30th & 31st August 2025

Seen and Heard

Empowering Minds
Strengthening Multicultural Communities

FINDING AFFECTION
A FILM BY MOULINATH GANGULY

Expectations
A FILM BY MOULINATH GANGULY

Tatts-it
NORMAN MACDONALD

Awards and Final Selections

Experience Short Film Brilliance at
Showbiz Waverley Cinemas
Pinewood Shopping Centre, 41 Centreway,
Mount Waverley VIC 3149

ACHRH **AustralAsian Centre**
FOR HUMAN RIGHTS & HEALTH

CREATIVE MOVIES



Indian Independent Film Festival

THIS CERTIFICATE IS PROUDLY
PRESENTED TO

Finding Affection

Emma Louise Macey-Storch

from
Australia

AWARD WINNER
Best Short Documentary



February-March 2025, 27th Edition

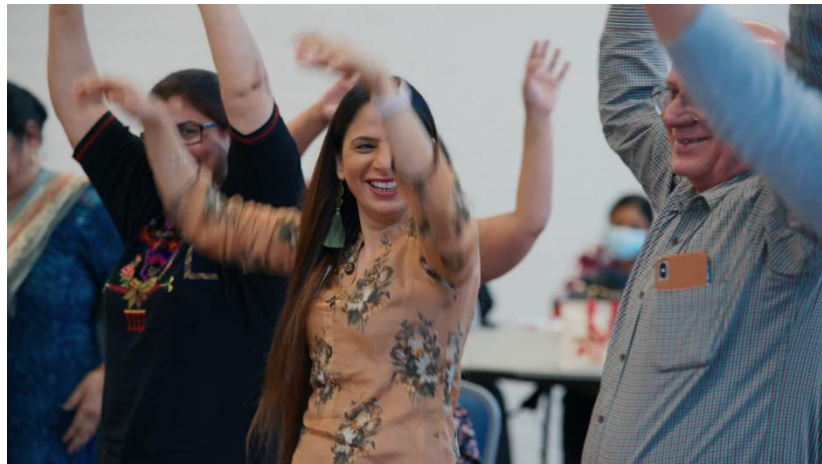
Feedback - Finding Affection Documentary

Medical Professional:

"An excellent documentary and kudos to you and the theatre grp for bringing forth a silent but deadly social epidemic".

Dr Katitza Marinkovic Chavez - Expert on Bereavement Due to Parental Intimate Partner Homicide (University of Melbourne):

"The documentary was moving, and it is such an important resource for people from South Asian communities and the general public, who need to learn about how domestic violence affects us all in different ways".



Congratulations Dr Sara Singh!

ACHRH extends its congratulations to Dr Sara Singh, a valued member of ACHRH's Sneh Project Team, on recently being awarded her PhD!

Sara's research explored the critical issue of dowry-related abuse in Australia, contributing important insights into this topic.



We are proud to celebrate this achievement and wish Sara all the best for her work in the future.

(Pictured: Dr Sara Singh)

A Thank You to ACHRH

By Sara Singh

In late 2021, as part of my PhD program, I commenced a research project on perceptions and experiences of dowry and dowry abuse in Indian communities in Australia. The project was conceived in response to the overall limited research examining dowry abuse within the Australian context, and sought to develop insights that have the potential to inform Australian advocacy and responses to the issue.

Several years on, this project is now complete. The final thesis draws on the rich and in-depth narratives and accounts of 26 participants, comprising four victim-survivors of dowry abuse, eight service providers from relevant fields, and 14 members of Indian communities more generally. Their narratives provide important insights on how the practice of dowry is perceived and understood, particularly in the modern context, and how dowry abuse is perpetrated. Participants also identified issues in existing responses to dowry abuse, and offered solutions.

The project's findings emphasise the importance of intersectional responses to dowry abuse, and in particular, culturally responsive support for victim-survivors, and increased support for temporary migrants who are affected. It also highlights the need for Australian responses to better address the transnational dimensions of dowry abuse. Additionally, the project's findings underscore the value of community education in tackling dowry abuse. The full PhD thesis is available [here](#).

This project would not have been possible without the wonderful help and support of ACHRH, and especially Professor Manjula O'Connor, who was one of my PhD supervisors. It was through Professor O'Connor's tireless work and advocacy that I learned about the issue of dowry abuse in Australia, and she has been pivotal in helping me build my knowledge on this topic and undertake this research.

Over the last few years, I have also further developed my understanding of dowry abuse, and of domestic and family violence (DFV) more broadly through my involvement with the work of ACHRH. The Sneh Theatre Project, in particular, allowed me to witness first-hand the power of community-led capacity building and solutions to DFV. Throughout my engagement in that project, I was constantly blown away by the passion and hard work of all the individuals in the Sneh Theatre team. Their commitment to raising awareness of and addressing DFV is truly inspiring.

I look forward to continuing my engagement with and seeing the wonderful work of Professor O'Connor and ACHRH.

On Friday December 13th, 2024, ACHRH held its Annual General Meeting (AGM) at Ross House in Melbourne's CBD.

Keynote speaker was Ms. Farah Farouque (CEO - Ethnic Communities Council of Victoria).

The following organisations were represented at ACHRH's AGM.

- IndianCare
- National Council of Women (Victoria)
- Ethnic Communities Council of Victoria
- Overseas Medical Graduates Association
- Ladies Doctors Club
- Marg Foundation
- Arabic Welfare Association



Family Law Reform - A Message from the Attorney-General's Department

The department has published information outlining changes to the *Family Law Act 1975* made by the *Family Law Amendment Act 2024*. Most of the changes commence on 10 June 2025.

It is available here: [Family law changes from June 2025: Information for family law professionals | Attorney-General's Department \(ag.gov.au\)](#).

We have also published an Easy Read version and Translations into eleven languages of the 'Family law (property) changes from 10 June 2025: fact sheet for separating couples': [Family law \(property\) changes from 10 June 2025: Fact sheet for separating couples | Attorney-General's Department \(ag.gov.au\)](#).

Information on sources of support and assistance for those experiencing family separation can be found here: [Family Law Services and Support Fact Sheet | Attorney-General's Department \(ag.gov.au\)](#).

Dowry Abuse to be Recognised in Australia's Federal Family Law

By Gauri Kapoor

Dowry abuse will soon be recognised as a form of family violence under the Family Law Act 1975. This change comes after years of relentless advocacy spearheaded by ACHRH under Dr Manjula O'Connor's leadership. At the heart of the movement for change were the voices of migrant women who courageously spoke out about their experiences of financial exploitation, emotional abuse, and coercion.

Dowry giving can have devastating consequences especially when expectations turn into relentless demands, blackmail, or threats of abandonment or violence. For many women from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds, dowry abuse is not just about money.

It is about power, control and fear. Victims of dowry abuse are often pressured to meet unaffordable financial demands, are isolated from their support networks, and suffer threats to their immigration status. Sometimes dowry abuse escalates into physical violence, abandonment overseas and even death.

Uptil now, dowry abuse has not been included within Australia's federal legal framework.

While Victoria and Western Australia took progressive steps to include dowry abuse in their definitions of family violence (notably in Victoria's 2018 amendments to the Family Violence Protection Act), there has never been a national legal standard. This legal gap has meant that many women suffering from dowry abuse have been unable to access protections under federal family law. Courts lacked guidelines to address dowry-related coercion in custody disputes, property settlements, and intervention orders. There

has been no formal recognition that dowry related demands could constitute economic and emotional abuse.

The new Family Law Amendment Bill makes critical changes by listing dowry abuse as an example of family violence within the federal Family Law Act. This change will allow courts and service providers to:

1. Recognise coercive demands for dowry as a form of economic and emotional abuse and intervene more effectively.
2. Issue family violence orders that account for dowry-related abuse
3. Consider dowry abuse during divorce proceedings, particularly in decisions around property division and child custody
4. Provide a more robust legal basis for victims to seek protection and justice
5. Encourage greater community awareness and education about the harms of dowry abuse.

While the proposed reform is a major achievement, its success will depend on effective implementation. This includes:

- Training for legal professionals, judicial officers, and police to understand the nuances of dowry abuse
- Enabling and funding frontline service providers to better identify and support affected women.
- Culturally responsive communication to help newly arrived migrant women understand that they are protected under Australian law.
- Community education campaigns
- Partnerships with faith and cultural leaders

Volunteer Spotlight – Aakanksha Goyal

Earlier this week, we asked one of the ACHRH's volunteers to answer a few questions about herself. Read on for a window into one of our wonderful volunteers!



What's one thing you're surprisingly good at that most people wouldn't guess?

I used to be a good singer and sing in college festivals back in the day.

What's a small, everyday action that individuals can take to support the ACHRH?

Be alert to your surroundings and reach out to women around you who are facing domestic violence issues and need support and guidance, point them to the right resources for help

What's a small daily ritual that brings you joy or helps you stay focused?

Talking to my parents back at home

What sparked your initial passion for the mission of the ACHRH?

Listening to the dreadful cases of women who suffered due to DV made me want to be a part of the noble cause and amazing work Dr Manjula and ACHRH is doing

What's your favourite word in any language? Why?

c'est la vie which means "that's life" in french. This word is my motto in life and inspires me to accept what I cant change and live in the present

What are you enjoying doing at the moment?

Going for drives and spending time taking in the beauty of autumn colors, this is my fav season and the weather has been perfect lately

What is the best thing that happened to you this week?

Spending time with my fur baby and seeing him enjoying his walks post his surgery

What's the latest thing you've listened to, read and watched?

I am reading this book by Mel robbins currently - " the let them theory", and enjoying the read. I recommend it.

Kohl

By: Shweta Mishra 'shawryaa'

She stood for hours, at the window sill, and
watched the winged beauties,

As they hopped on slumped wires... time silently
stood...

For long, her eyes tirelessly gazed, in some hope,
and, at some abstraction...

The eyes were dark with kohl, the eyes were black
as soot;

The eyes were dense and calm, the eyes were all
set for the storm;

For long they didn't blink,

For long they didn't demand,

For long they were not around;

Far at some distant hill, there was light and mist

Shades of grey and blue in sky, blended with those
eyes

There the eyes were fixed and took the colors in...

There they reveled in mysterious joy.

Then the storm hit and flew the birds away

Save one

That couldn't fly too high; this one could only turn:

Half a turn of body, half a turn of eyes;

Half of devastated desires, half of burning fires;

There lay the dust that climbed

A thousand step to reach the temple garbha

The idol, a jeweled stone bust

Of dust, and, vermilion-colored by the world.

She marveled was there a soul in there, and life

Of Her choice or did She want to fly?

She was moved by the stillness in those eyes and
lifelessness,

The garlands too heavy;

Kohl, washed intermittently by salty water,

And Hers, in kumkum red copper tumblers, by
waters of faith.

BIO NOTE

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. A gold medalist in M.A. English, Lucknow University, she has authored several research papers that have

been published in various reputed journals. Creative writing is what she passionately loves to do.



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*