

***AustralAsian Centre for Human Rights and Health Inc***

[www.achrh.org](http://www.achrh.org)



**ACHRH**  
Empowering Communities

November 2025  
Newsletter

## Editorial

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

Founding and Executive Director ACHRH, Senior Victorian of the Year, Premiers Award



Manjula  
O'Connor

### **Sixteen Days of Activism – Healing Minds, Rebuilding Lives**

As we mark the global 16 Days of Activism Against Gender-Based Violence, it is vital to reflect not only on the visible scars of domestic and family violence (DFV) but also on the invisible wounds that alter the very architecture of the human brain. At the recent Pope Barton Public Mental Health Lecture in Adelaide, where I joined the panel to discuss Mental Health in the Shadows of Family Violence, I spoke about the profound neurobiological effects of prolonged trauma on women's brains — particularly the amygdala, hippocampus, and prefrontal cortex. Chronic exposure to coercive control and fear leads to structural shrinkage in these regions, impairing memory, emotional regulation, and the capacity to make decisions free from fear. These are not simply psychological injuries; they are physical alterations caused by sustained terror.

Understanding these changes underscores the urgency for trauma-informed and culturally safe mental health care. Healing must involve both mind and body, combining evidence-based therapies such as trauma-focused with compassionate community-based supports. By the time women come to see me in my private practice as a psychiatrist, most are suffering severe insomnia, weight loss, loss of appetite due to anxiety and depression. I prescribe medication to get relief from their symptoms. While therapy is essential, it takes longer to start working. However, for many immigrant and refugee women, help remains out of reach. Barriers include cultural stigma, fear of deportation or community ostracism, lack of financial independence, and mistrust of mainstream systems. Language barriers and limited awareness of available services compound the isolation.

At the AustralAsian Centre for Human Rights and Health (ACHRH), we continue to advocate for prevention through education, early intervention, and community empowerment. Recently we completed Sneh theatre

and finished documentary film ***Finding Affection***. It was screened at Indian Film Festival in Melbourne and in Kolkata and Seen and Heard Film Festival at Mount Waverly Cinema Hall.

We are grateful to Victoria Department of Family Fairness and Housing (DFFH) and Minister Natalie Hutchins for funding our ongoing educational program comprised of screening the film for the community, professionals and students, In the month of August Film Finding Affection was screened at the Community Lawyers Conference in Canberra.

**It is heartening to note that Federal Social Services Minister Tanya Plibersek has announced a parliamentary inquiry into suicide stemming from domestic, family and sexual violence in Australia.**

**We the ACHRH regularly use art and storytelling to bridge the gap between trauma and healing, fostering safe spaces where women's voices are heard and validated.** The strategy of using art will continue in the future as ACHRH in partnership with Indian Care, Creative Movies and Kheliya productions chart out our future as a creative hub for the betterment of community well being

To honour the 16 Days of Activism, we will screen ***Finding Affection*** in Parramatta, Sydney in partnership with University of New South Wales, Parramatta City Council and University of New South Wales, and let us reaffirm our collective responsibility: to believe women, to dismantle the structures that perpetuate silence, and to build systems that heal both the heart and the brain.

You can watch a trailer at this link: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZT-OhOLhr7I>



*Manjula With Minister Natalie Hutchins at International Women's Day 2025*

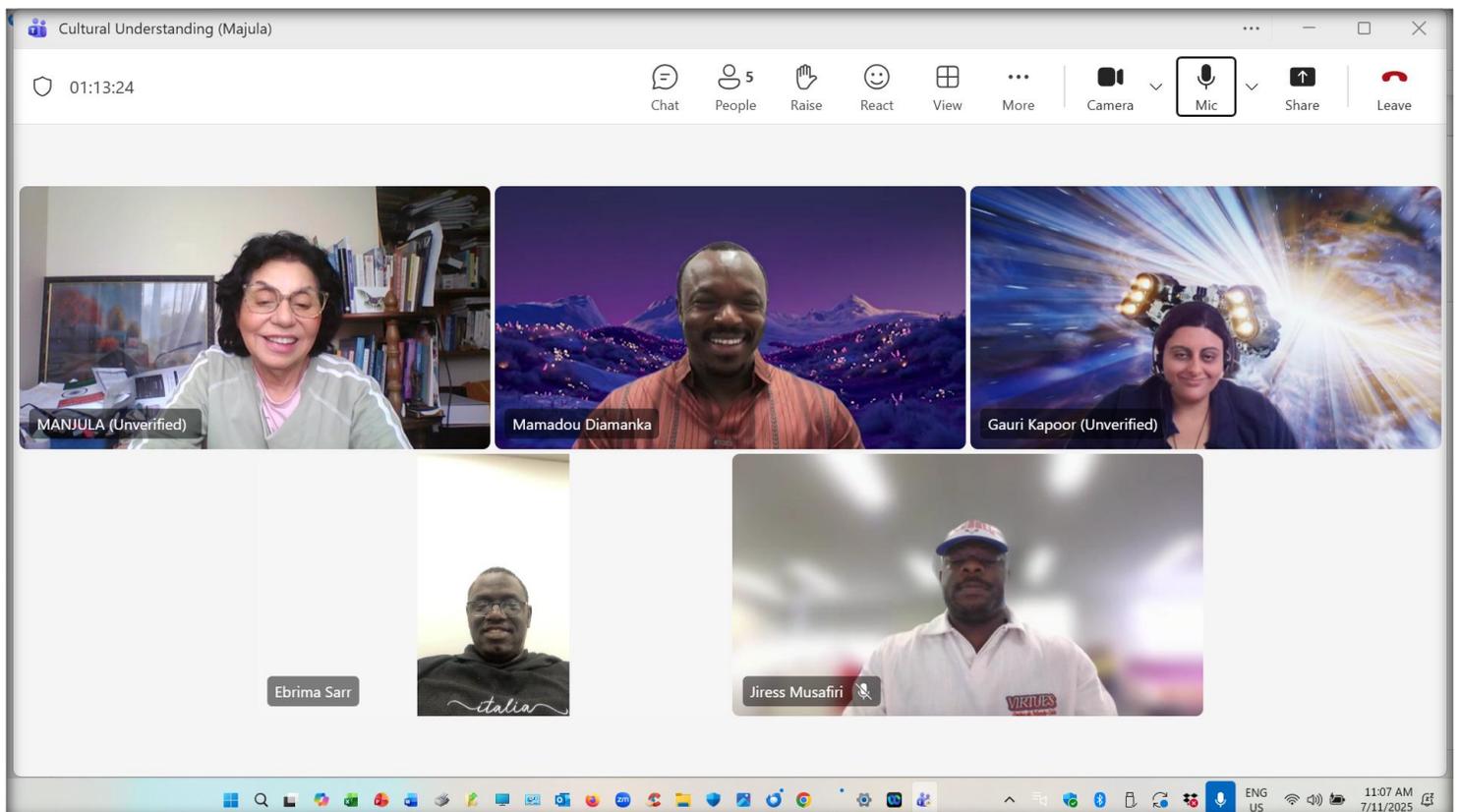


## AAFRO partnership

By Mamadou Diamanka

The Australian African Foundation for Retention and Opportunity (AAFRO) is proud to be partnering with Dr Manjula, the Founding Director Austral Asian Centre for Human Rights and Health (ACHRH) and her team. In the last several weeks, Dr Manjula and her team have provided incredible mental health and well-being support to AAFRO staff and student placements. These sessions have encouraged AAFRO staff who are on the frontline dealing with families and community members from the African Australian and others from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds who are at risk and vulnerable.

The partnership between AAFRO and ACHRH comes at a time when our team has been overwhelmed, dealing with the increasing number of young people and families reaching out due to the risk of homelessness, financial hardship, family and domestic violence. It was also timely as the community was grieving. We are looking forward to the incoming well-being and mental health support for community members and families. This partnership is a significant step forward for the AAFRO organisations and the community to have the opportunity to access the support that some of them require.



Eventbrite Registration Link: <https://achrh.eventbrite.com>



**AustralAsian Centre**  
FOR HUMAN RIGHTS & HEALTH

# ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING



Monday, December 1st, 2025



6:30 PM – 9:30 PM



Ross House, 251 Flinders Lane,  
Melbourne CBD



## GUEST SPEAKERS:

DR SARA SINGH (PhD RESEARCH  
SUPPORTED BY ACHRH)

MAMADOU DIAMANKA,  
CEO - AUSTRALIAN AFRICAN  
FOUNDATION FOR RETENTION AND  
OPPORTUNITY (AAFRO)

EVENTBRITE  
LINK:  
[https://achrh.  
eventbrite.com](https://achrh.eventbrite.com)

## Finding Affection Awards Update

We are delighted to share that our documentary, Finding Affection, has won the following award.

**Best Documentary Film (Foreign Film Category) - Durgapur International Film Festival (Kolkata, India).**

Finding Affection competed against entries from the Netherlands, the United Kingdom, the United States, the Islamic Republic of Iran, Greece, Turkey and Thailand.



*Award Winner*  
**Durgapur  
International Film  
Festival**  
2025




In addition, Finding Affection has received the '**Outstanding Excellence' Summer 2025 Award at the WRPN Women's International Film Festival** in the United States. Our documentary will now be entered into a 'Best of Festival' competition in 2026. Festival winners will potentially receive broadcast deals.



## Host a screening of ACHRH's documentary, Finding Affection

Finding Affection is a moving documentary that delves into the making of the SNEH Theatre Project, and the journey of the participants as they attempt to harness the power of participatory theatre to address deep-seated issues of domestic and family violence within their own communities.

By hosting a screening, your organisation can spark meaningful conversations about respect, safety and equality. ACHRH can tailor screening sessions to accommodate community groups, workplaces and educational settings.

### Interested in hosting a screening?

Contact:

Dr Manjula Datta O'Connor (ACHRH Executive Director)

Email: [info@achrh.org](mailto:info@achrh.org)

Mobile: 0419 354 482



## Suicide in sufferers of Family Domestic and Sexual Violence: The Hidden Toll on Migrant Women

*By Dr Manjula O'Connor*

It is heartening to note that Social Services Minister Tanya Plibersek has announced a parliamentary inquiry into suicide stemming from domestic, family and sexual violence in Australia.

<https://www.sbs.com.au/news/article/inquiry-suicide-domestic-family-sexual-violence-plibersek/h705mqg1k>

Suicide is one of the most devastating yet preventable outcomes of domestic and sexual violence. Among migrant women in Australia, it represents a tragic intersection of gendered abuse, cultural entrapment, and systemic neglect. As highlighted in my research, coercive control, dowry-related abuse, and sexual violence within marriage are significant risk factors for suicidal ideation and self-harm among women from South Asian and other culturally diverse communities.

For many migrant women, migration promises liberation and opportunity but can instead lead to isolation, loss of family support, and dependency on an abusive partner. When combined with patriarchal values imported from home countries, such dependency reinforces control through emotional, financial, and sexual abuse. Sexual coercion within marriage—often normalised or silenced by cultural taboos—has profound psychological consequences, including shame, depression, post-traumatic stress, and suicidal despair.

The Australasian evidence reveals that migrant women who experience family violence are more likely to express suicidality, especially when they face visa insecurity, lack of culturally safe mental health care, or disbelief from services. Suicide attempts are not merely acts of individual distress; they are signals of structural violence—failures of protection, justice, and compassion within systems meant to uphold women's rights.

Culturally tailored interventions are essential. Mental health professionals must recognise the role of coercive control, sexual abuse, and transnational power dynamics in shaping suicide risk. Screening for family and sexual violence in clinical settings should be routine, with clear referral pathways to trauma-informed, culturally safe support. Policy responses must also ensure that migration and family law frameworks protect victims, rather than perpetuate their entrapment.

Ultimately, the prevention of suicide among migrant women requires collective accountability—from clinicians, communities, and lawmakers alike. Only when women are believed, protected, and empowered can the cycle of violence and self-destruction be broken.

## Seen and Heard Film Festival

By Gauri Kapoor

After months of planning, on 30 August 2025 and 31 August 2025, the AustralAsian Centre for Human Rights and Health (ACHRH), in partnership with Creative Movies, presented the Seen and Heard Film Festival at Showbiz Cinemas Waverley in Mount Waverley. The two-day event showcased five internationally award-winning short films that traverse a range of topics such as mental health, family violence, the burden of self-image as well as the cultural and emotional aspects of human experiences. Tickets to all four screenings were completely sold out.



Seen and Heard Festival Trailer

WATCH HERE: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3GZ44b16xl0>

The five films shown were

1. **Finding Affection** - 'Community Theatre as a means of breaking silence'
2. **Ekti Cup (A Cup)** - 'Domestic Violence, when you least suspect it'
3. **Expectations** - 'General Gap between first and second generations'
4. **Tatts IT** - 'Depiction of Grief, how does the mind cope with the loss of a spouse?'
5. **Smriti Satatai (Memories are Forever)** - 'Coping with Dementia'





Guest speakers at the film festival included Julian Hill MP (Assistant Minister), Matt Fregon MLA, Colin Brooks MP, Swami Sunishtanandaji Maharaj (Vedanta Centre Melbourne), Steven McGhie MP, Viv Nguyen (VMC Chair) and Rama Manchkanti (IndianCare). The audience was comprised of community members from diverse backgrounds including artists, students, mental health professionals and individuals with lived experience voices.

**Julian Hill MP (Assistant Minister for Citizenship, Customs and Multicultural Affairs) interview with Aradhana Ganguly (Creative Movies) - WATCH HERE:**

<https://www.facebook.com/share/v/16LEUUKAbv/?mibextid=wwXlfr>

After each screening block, there was commentary from guest speakers and an audience Q & A. This facilitated a rich space for conversations to reflect on themes raised by each of the films.

All five films succeeded in sparking audience dialogue about culture, the complexities of human nature and the importance of looking after one's well-being when faced with uncertainty and the adversities of life. The common thread tying each of the films and the festival itself centered on how being 'seen and heard' is such a fundamental human need.

Audience members also showed much interest in discussing how storytelling can be used to highlight the intersections of cultural identity, resilience and mental health in today's world.

Matt Fregon MP aptly commented on how we all too often focus mainly on creative content produced by Bollywood or Hollywood. We neglect to pay as much attention however to small, local made films that are engaging with diverse facets of social issues, and which so deserve to be 'seen and heard'.

In her speech, ACHRH Executive Director Dr Manjula Datta O'Connor emphasised ACHRH's broader commitment to developing message driven, socially relevant films. She announced ACHRH, Khelaiya Productions Inc, IndianCare and Lotus Productions have signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) to co-establish a film making entity named Arunya Productions. This collaborative filmmaking project will focus on promoting mental health and well-being as well as raising further awareness about family violence.

Furthermore, in 2026, ACHRH and Creative Movies plan to host further screenings of the five films showcased at Seen and Heard. The northern suburbs of Melbourne and the western suburbs of Melbourne will be prioritised.



## Screening of Finding Affection for Australian Indian Medical Graduates Association (AIMGA) in Sydney

On September 20th, 2025, ACHRH Executive Director Dr Manjula Datta O'Connor presented the Finding Affection documentary to 45 doctors from the Australian Indian Medical Graduates Association (AIMGA) in Strathfield, Sydney.

After the screening, there was an engaging discussion on how doctors can better recognise and respond to family violence.

ACHRH thanks AIMGA for their generous support in helping fund the creation of our documentary, Finding Affection.



## Cofined. I am nobody.

By: Shweta Mishra 'shawryaa'

Flipped and folded  
 weak-yellow hard bound  
 cofined sheets;  
 cofined in the shelf  
 stacked in rows.  
 The wood is dry and peeling;  
 As the sun dances with dust  
 spreading everywhere through  
 tiny holes.  
 My tired eyes  
 pain  
 as they read Socrates and Aurobindo.

Lungs are delighted  
 and, hunger satiated,  
 as I breathe the dust  
 and see it all dying...  
 as vast as the sky  
 as small as the firefly –  
 All lit yet dark, all dark yet  
 lit  
 This knowledge of  
 difference...  
 I am nobody.  
 Nothing stays, but difference.



### 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.

### Donations to ACHRH are 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 effecting 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](mailto: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.

Donations can also be made into our bank account:

BSB: 083004

Account: 706210026

## 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*