

DEMAND EQUALITY, NOT DOWRY

Preventing Dowry Abuse in Australia

WORKSHOP FACILITATION GUIDE



HARMONY ALLIANCE
MIGRANT & REFUGEE WOMEN FOR CHANGE



AustralAsian Centre
FOR HUMAN RIGHTS & HEALTH

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Introduction

Dowry abuse is a form of gender-based violence in Australia. It involves abusive behaviour - such as threats, assault and abandonment - in connection to demands for dowry. Dowry is practised by various communities living in Australia, including South Asian and African communities. While the practice of dowry giving may differ slightly between cultures, it generally involves the transfer of gifts, such as cash, jewellery, goods and livestock, from one family to another upon marriage. In South Asian cultures, the direction of dowry giving is usually from the bride's family to the groom's family, whereas in African cultures it is generally the opposite.

When given freely, without expectation or pressure, gifts are a normal wedding tradition in many cultures. Gifts can be a generous gesture to celebrate the marital couple's new life together and reflect the giver's relationship with the couple. However, negative aspects of gift giving in relation to marriage include attitudes of entitlement and abusive behaviours that are designed to demand dowry from families.

Harmony Alliance and the AustralAsian Centre for Human Rights and Health have been funded by the Australian Government to help prevent dowry abuse in Australia by working with communities to change attitudes and behaviours. This project, National Platform to Prevent Dowry Abuse in Australia, aims to work with communities most affected by dowry abuse in Australia - in particular South Asian communities - to end this form of gender-based violence.

We call dowry abuse 'gender-based violence' because it predominantly affects women. While men are undoubtedly affected by dowry abuse and can be victims, there is sufficient evidence

to indicate that most incidents of dowry abuse are perpetrated by men against women. As such, the Guide uses 'she/her' in reference to the victims and survivors of dowry abuse and 'he/him' in relation to perpetrators.

This Guide is designed with both community leaders and family violence service providers in mind, to increase its applicability in primary prevention efforts. It is hoped that the material in this Guide will help guide future content for training workshops in the community to end dowry abuse in Australia. The content in the Guide has been informed by the lived experiences of victim-survivors of dowry abuse and the professional expertise of Dr. Manjula O'Connor, psychiatrist and co-founder of ACHRH.

Due to the COVID-19 pandemic and ongoing public health measures, including border closures, the Demand Equality, Not Dowry workshop is designed for an online audience. Facilitators will be supported to use Zoom, a videoconferencing platform, to lead this workshop with potential for in-person sessions in the future.

What is dowry abuse?

Dowry abuse refers to controlling, isolating and violent behaviours linked to demands for dowry. These behaviours can include physical and verbal abuse, intimidation and humiliation. While dowry abuse is typically perpetrated by men against women within intimate relationships, family members including in-laws can also be involved in dowry abuse.

Examples of dowry abuse include:

- Pressuring her for large sums of money as part of her contribution to the marriage.
- Confiscating her wedding jewellery and refusing to return it.
- Verbally abusing her for not bringing enough dowry into the marriage.
- Threatening to withdraw sponsorship for her visa if she does not ask her parents for more money.

The following case study provides some insight into the dynamics of dowry abuse. The case study was supplied by Dr. Manjula O'Connor, psychiatrist and Executive Director of the AustralAsian Centre for Human Rights and Health, with permission from the victim-survivor. All names have been changed.

Case study: Priya's story

Priya entered into an arranged marriage with an Australian citizen of Indian origin in February 2016. The wedding took place in Delhi, India and during the wedding ceremonies, dowry (in the form of cash, gold and diamond jewellery, and clothing) was given by the bride's father to the groom and his extended family.

Before the couple relocated to Melbourne, Australia in April 2016, Priya had already experienced dowry abuse perpetrated by her husband and his family. Her mother-in-law harassed her for not bringing enough cash, furniture and gifts as dowry, in addition to confiscating Priya's personal jewellery.

While living in Melbourne with her husband, Priya was not permitted to open her own bank account and was forced to remain inside the house. Her husband demanded household goods and furniture from Priya's father, who shipped them from India. Priya's husband physically and emotionally abused her, refusing to pay for her medical treatment when she had a tooth infection.

In June 2017, Priya's husband and mother-in-law asked Priya to fly to India to attend her brother's wedding, with the understanding that Priya's husband would join her later in India. Instead, she was abandoned in India to live with her parents in Delhi and her husband stopped responding to her phone calls.

A few months later, Priya decided to return to Melbourne in an attempt to repair their marriage. However, her husband refused to let her into the house and later sent her an email declaring his intentions to separate, remove her name from the lease and withdraw his sponsorship for her partner visa.

Why are we doing this work?

Dowry abuse is an under-recognised form of gender-based violence in Australia. Like most forms of domestic and family violence, we know it exists, we may know someone who has been affected by it and we know that it should not happen. Yet it continues.

In 2018-19, the Australian Government held a Senate inquiry into dowry abuse in Australia. One of their findings called for more evidence on the prevalence of dowry abuse.¹ In 2020, Harmony Alliance and ACHRH conducted an Australia-wide survey on dowry abuse, receiving over 180 responses. The survey, which was released in English, Hindi, Punjabi, Tamil, Telegu and Sinhala, was completed by community members and service providers, including doctors, mental health professionals, domestic violence service organisations and lawyers. 32 per cent of survey respondents reported that they had either experienced incidents of dowry abuse or interacted with a victim of dowry abuse in a personal or professional capacity. While the survey sample was not nationally representative, it indicates that dowry abuse is experienced by some communities living in Australia.

As a 'hidden' problem, raising awareness of dowry abuse in the community is critical, so victims, perpetrators and their families know that dowry abuse is not acceptable in Australia. Dowry abuse causes significant physical and mental harm to victims and their families. As a society, we have a responsibility to call out unacceptable and harmful behaviour. As individuals, we all have a role to play in making sure that our community does not

¹ The Senate. (2019). The practice of dowry and the incidence of dowry abuse in Australia. Legal and Constitutional Affairs References Committee. The Senate, Canberra.

tolerate any form of domestic and family violence, including dowry abuse.

Our laws also play a key role in sending a clear message against dowry abuse in Australia. However, it is important to be aware that dowry abuse is yet to be consistently recognised as a form of domestic and family violence in Australian law. As of May 2021, Victoria and Western Australia are the only states that have included dowry abuse in their respective legal definitions of family violence:

- Section 5 of Victoria's *Family Violence Protection Act 2008* states that 'using coercion, threats, physical abuse or emotional or psychological abuse to demand or receive dowry, either before or after a marriage' may constitute family violence.
- Section 5 of Western Australia's *Restraining Orders Act 1997* states that 'coercing, threatening, or causing physical abuse, emotional or psychological abuse or financial abuse, in connection with demanding or receiving dowry, whether before or after any marriage' may constitute family violence.

What is primary prevention?

The Demand Equality, Not Dowry workshop is part of a primary prevention approach to prevent dowry abuse in Australia. Primary prevention is designed to stop violence before it begins, targeting the whole population including those already perpetrating or experiencing violence.² It is increasingly recognised that successful interventions need to focus on primary prevention to end domestic and family violence.³ Furthermore, if efforts are not concentrated on preventing violence, the cycle will continue.⁴

Figure 1 below, which was developed by Our Watch, ANROWS and VicHealth in 2015, highlights the main purpose of primary prevention, compared to other approaches to end violence against women.⁵

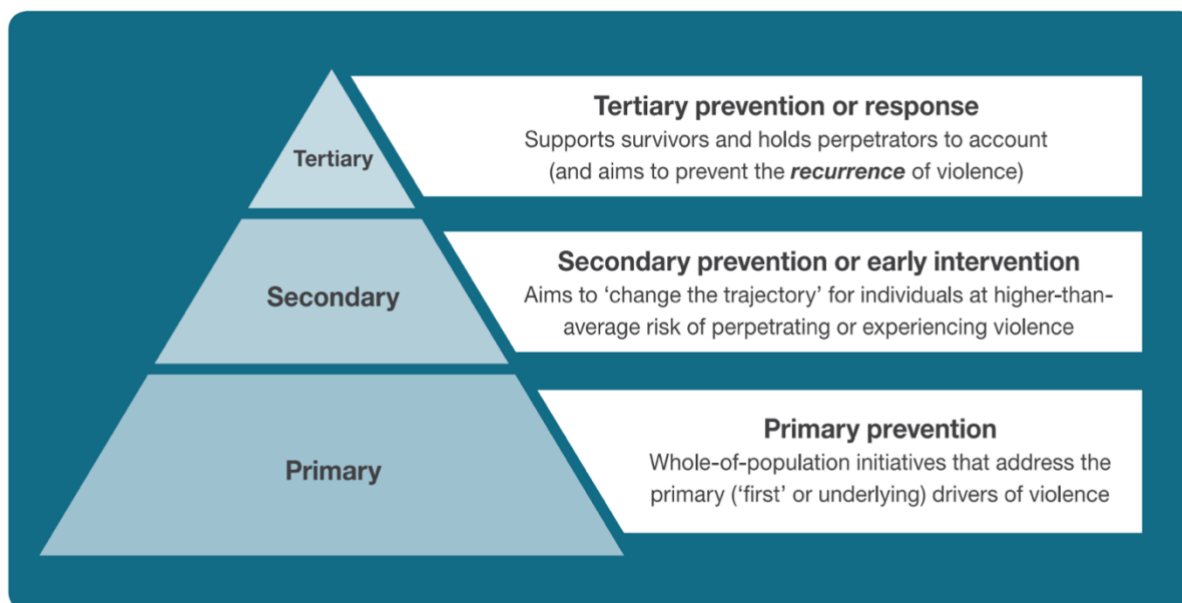
² Our Watch, Australia's National Research Organisation for Women's Safety (ANROWS) & VicHealth. (2015). Change the story: A shared framework for the primary prevention of violence against women and their children in Australia. Our Watch, Melbourne.

³ Hyman, I., Guruge, S., Stewart, D.E. & Ahmad, F. (2000). Primary prevention of violence against women. *Women's Health Issues*, 10(6), 288-293.

⁴ Gundersen, L. (2002). Intimate-Partner Violence: The Need for Primary Prevention in the Community. *Annals of Internal Medicine*, 136(8), 637-640.

⁵ Our Watch, Australia's National Research Organisation for Women's Safety (ANROWS) & VicHealth. (2015). Change the story: A shared framework for the primary prevention of violence against women and their children in Australia. Our Watch, Melbourne.

Figure 1 | Prevention approaches to end violence against women



As such, the Demand Equality, Not Dowry workshop is designed for all communities living in Australia who practise dowry. As a facilitator, you should be aware that some participants may have experienced or perpetrated dowry abuse but the content of the workshop is targeted to address attitudes and behaviours of the community as a whole, rather than the actions of specific individuals.

In supporting a primary prevention approach to ending dowry abuse, it is important to keep in mind that the key drivers of dowry abuse include gender inequality, men's control of financial decisions, greed and pressure from family. These drivers were identified by respondents in Harmony Alliance and ACHRH's survey, *Exploring the link between dowry demands and abusive behaviours*.

Demand Equality, Not Dowry workshop structure

Total length = 2.5 hours (including 10-minute break)

ACTIVITY	RESOURCES	TIMING
Welcome to the Demand Equality, Not Dowry workshop - Facilitator waits for most participants to join the Zoom meeting room before starting Up to 5 minutes - Facilitator begins with an Acknowledgement of Country <i>I would like to begin by acknowledging the Traditional Owners of the lands on which we are all meeting today. I would also like to pay my respects to Elders past, present and emerging.</i> - Facilitator welcomes participants and provides an overview of the workshop, using the key points below 2-3 minutes - Thank participants for coming to the workshop.	N/A	10 minutes

○ Mention that the workshop has been funded by the Australia Government, through a project delivered by Harmony Alliance (the national migrant and refugee women's coalition) and the AustralAsian Centre for Human Rights and Health. ○ Explain that the purpose of today's workshop is to explore attitudes and behaviours that contribute to dowry abuse in Australia, and actions needed to prevent it. ○ Provide a brief overview of the workshop's structure, including a presentation of survey findings on dowry abuse in Australia, followed by scenarios and group discussion. ○ Mention that there will be a comfort break about halfway through the workshop, if needed. • Facilitator explains Zoom etiquette 1 minute <i>Please keep yourself on mute unless you are speaking. You can raise your hand or use the hand button at the bottom of the screen</i>		
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<i>if you would like to speak. If you want to say something while someone else is talking, you can also use the chat box where everyone will be able to read your message.</i>		
Participant Introductions • Participants take turns introducing themselves (names and occupations only, no locations).	N/A	10 minutes
Dowry Abuse Survey Results • Facilitator explains survey results to participants, highlighting the key points below: ◦ Harmony Alliance and the AustralAsian Centre for Human Rights and Health were funded by the Australian Government to hold a national survey on dowry abuse in Australia. ◦ The survey received over 180 responses and was mainly targeted at South Asian communities living in Australia. ◦ Responses were received in all states and territories, except for the Northern Territory, with most respondents located in	Slide with survey results	10 minutes

Victoria, Queensland and New South Wales. ○ It was released in six different languages (English, Hindi, Punjabi, Tamil, Telegu and Sinhala). ○ The survey asked respondents to consider a list of abusive behaviours linked to dowry demands. Respondents identified verbal abuse, humiliation, financial abuse and controlling behaviours as the most common abuse associated with dowry demands. ○ The survey also asked respondents to identify drivers of dowry abuse, which are factors that contribute to dowry abuse occurring in Australia. Survey respondents identified gender inequality, men's control of financial decisions, greed and pressure from family as key drivers. ○ Most survey respondents were extremely familiar with dowry abuse and approximately a third of respondents had either personally experienced dowry		
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abuse, or knew someone who had experienced dowry abuse.		
Scenario 1: Group Discussion • Facilitator shares slide with Scenario 1 and nominates a participant to read it aloud for the group 2 minutes • Facilitator leads group discussion based on Sita's situation, using the questions below 28 minutes ○ What are your first impressions? ○ What is Sita's role in the family as a modern-day woman? ○ What are her parents' considerations for a potential groom? What are their expectations of Ram, as a non-resident Indian (NRI)? ○ Why do you think Sita changes her mind about getting married, once she sees the list of dowry? ○ What do you think she is feeling in this moment? ○ Why do you think her parents refuse to support her decision to call off the wedding?	Slide with Scenario 1	30 minutes

Scenario 2: Group Discussion • Facilitator shares slide with Scenario 2 and nominates a participant to read it aloud for the group 2 minutes • Facilitator leads group discussion based on Ram's situation, using the questions below 23 minutes ○ What is your initial impression of Ram? ○ How does Ram's family influence his expectations of marriage? ○ How might his attitude and upbringing influence his relationship with his future wife? ○ What do you think happens when Ram doesn't get his way? ○ Where do you think his sense of entitlement originates from? ○ What do you think is a sense of entitlement?	Slide with Scenario 2	25 minutes
Comfort Break (Optional) • Facilitator asks the group whether they would like to take a ten-minute break, or continue the discussion.	N/A	10 minutes

• If the group would like to take a break, participants should stay in the Zoom meeting room but turn off their camera or audio if they wish. • Facilitator sets a timer for ten minutes and reminds participants to return at the nominated time. • If the group would like to continue without a break, proceed to Scenario 3.		
Scenario 3: Group Discussion • Facilitator shares slide with Scenario 3 and nominates a participant to read it aloud for the group 2 minutes • Facilitator leads group discussion based on Ram and Sita's situation, using the questions below 23 minutes ○ How would you describe Ram and Sita's relationship? ○ Do you think Ram considers Sita to be his equal? ○ Now that she's married, what do you think Sita's relationship with her parents is like?	Slide with Scenario 3	25 minutes

○ What might happen if Sita's parents give Ram the \$30,000? What if they don't? ○ Is Ram's approach to managing household finances normal in Australia? What about in India/Pakistan/Sri Lanka etc.? ○ What might happen if Sita refuses to let Ram manage her money?		
Scenario 4: Group Discussion • Facilitator shares slide with Scenario 4 and nominates a participant to read it aloud for the group 2 minutes • Facilitator leads group discussion based on the situation, using the questions below 23 minutes ○ What is the groom's mother trying to convey when she says 'We live for our children and want to make life as comfortable and happy as we can for them'? ○ Why does she bring up her niece and her wedding? ○ Why do you think the groom's mother is talking about this now, two months before the wedding?	Slide with Scenario 4	25 minutes

○ How should you respond to the groom's mother, knowing that your daughter is listening? ○ What would you advise your daughter do, if she expresses her reluctance to get married after this conversation? ○ What would you say to your daughter, if she decides to proceed with the wedding?		
Conclusion • Facilitator summarises key points from the group discussion and thanks participants for their valuable contributions. • Facilitator mentions that online gift cards will be emailed to participants afterwards. • Facilitator tells participants that they may also be contacted via email to complete a survey on their experience of the workshop to help improve future workshop sessions.	N/A	5 minutes

Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs)

How should I respond if a participant says that dowry abuse is not a problem in Australia?

There is adequate evidence to show that dowry abuse is experienced by women living in Australia. You can mention that an Australian Government inquiry into dowry abuse was held in 2018 to 2019 and received over 80 submissions. Encourage participants to read through some of the submissions in their own time.

There are also a number of studies that have been published on dowry abuse in Australia. You can refer participants to an article written by Dr. Manjula O'Connor and Erminia Colucci, 'Exploring domestic violence and social distress in Australian-Indian migrants through community theater', which was published in the Transcultural Psychiatry journal in 2016.

What should I do if no one is willing to start the discussion?

The workshop is designed to be highly interactive, with open-ended questions to start group discussions. It is very unlikely that participants will be reluctant to start discussing the scenarios, as they will be informed beforehand that active discussion is a key part of the workshop. As a facilitator, it is important that you allow participants adequate time to consider the questions, before jumping in to fill the silence. Sometimes silence can be a good way to prompt less active participants to engage in the discussion.

How should I manage conflicts in opinion between participants?

Difference in opinions among workshop participants is normal and should be expected. Dowry abuse, and domestic violence more broadly, is a sensitive topic and some people may have strong reactions to the workshop content or comments by other participants. Acknowledge the arguments raised by participants, even if they may differ from yours, and invite others to share their thoughts. Where relevant, refer to the evidence on dowry abuse in Australia (see above).

What should I do if the workshop is running behind schedule?

It is important that you manage your time well so that each activity can be completed. Set a timer for each activity and try to adhere to the allocated time, without cutting people off mid-discussion. If needed, you can skip the ten-minute break and proceed directly to the next activity. Alternatively, you can ask participants if they are comfortable with the workshop running five to ten minutes late, so there is enough time to finish all the activities.

What should I do if a participant is distressed by the workshop content?

If a participant seems distressed by the content (for example, they are tearing up or appear overly emotional), you can send them a private message via Zoom and ask if they would like to leave the workshop or take a break.

What should I do if I experience difficulties with Zoom?

If you are experiencing issues with Zoom (for example, the video keeps freezing or audio is delayed) check that your Internet connection is stable and move closer to the Internet modem or router, if possible. If that does not improve the situation, try turning off your video and remaining on audio only until the connection improves. See the section on instructions for using Zoom (p. 25) for more information.

Commonly used terms and definitions

The list below contains definitions of common terms that may be used during the Demand Equality, Not Dowry workshops.

Please note that this is intended to be a guide only and use your own judgement when clarifying terms and concepts with participants.

Domestic servitude	Forcing a person to do housework and not allowing them to leave the house.
Dowry	Substantial gifts transferred from the bride's family to the groom's family upon marriage. Dowry can include things like cash, white goods, cars and jewellery.
Dowry abuse	Controlling, isolating and violent behaviours associated with demands for dowry.
Emotional abuse	Maintaining power and control over a person by limiting their freedom, isolating them and making them feel scared or threatened. Also known as psychological abuse. ⁶
Entitlement	Having the right to do or receive something.

⁶ healthdirect. (2021). Emotional abuse. healthdirect. Retrieved March 11, 2021.

< <https://www.healthdirect.gov.au/emotional-abuse> >

Extortion

Using actions or words to demand money or objects of value from a person.

Financial abuse

Taking control over a person's finances, withholding money from them or refusing to include them in spending decisions.

Gender-based violence

Violence against women that results in physical, psychological, sexual or economic harm.⁷ Gender-based violence includes domestic and family violence, which disproportionately affects women.

Humiliation

Using actions or words to embarrass or shame a person.

Intimidation

Using actions or words to make a person feel scared or threatened.

Isolation

Using actions or words to prevent a person from maintaining contact with their family, friends, culture or community. This includes stopping them from seeing friends, restricting access to forms of transport and not allowing them to participate in social or community activities.

⁷ European Commission. (n.d.). What is gender-based violence? European Commission. Retrieved March 11, 2021.

Patriarchy/patriarchal A system of social structures and practices through which men dominate, oppress and exploit women.⁸

Verbal abuse Using negative words to frighten, criticise or insult a person.

⁸ Walby, S. (1989). Theorising Patriarchy. *Sociology*, 23(2), 213-234.

Instructions for using Zoom

Zoom is a videoconferencing platform that is relatively simple to use. To use Zoom, you will need a stable Internet connection and a computer. While Zoom is available on mobile, we recommend that you use a computer for the workshops. Please note that Zoom requires you to allow permission for the platform to access your camera and microphone while using the platform so that participants can see and hear you.

Harmony Alliance will provide you with access to a Zoom account to facilitate online workshops and cover all associated costs. However, it is expected that you will use your own computer and Internet connection.

Before the workshop, you should familiarise yourself with the basic functions of Zoom if you haven't already. Please note that within a Zoom meeting, there is a chat box where participants can message each other. The messages can be sent privately (so only the person directly messaged can read it) or to the entire group for all participants to read. If there is someone already speaking, the chat function is a good way for other participants to comment without interrupting the speaker. You should keep an eye on the chat box during the workshop to acknowledge any points raised by participants. See [Figure 2](#) below:

Figure 2 | Zoom toolbar

