



# ACHRH

Empowering Communities  
through Knowledge & Research

## ACHRH Newsletter

February  
2015

### IN THIS ISSUE

## Hello to all our friends

We hope all our friends have had a happy and restful holiday period. The work hasn't stopped at the ACHRH, spurred on by the terrible news of recent murders.

In this newsletter, you can read about the Walk Against Dowry held in December, and a very special poetry evening, an interactive effort by the ACHRH and Sahitya Sandhya, held in January.

Coming up we have a community forum, planned for International Women's Day on March 8. It will be held at the Spirit of India in Preston,

at 12 pm. The forum is being held in conjunction with other community organizations.

The recent spate of murders and suicides related to domestic violence highlights the need for this forum – Dr O'Connor has written a thought provoking piece and you can read it here in this newsletter.

Venue and RSVP details also appear below. More information will be uploaded on the ACHRH website and Facebook as it becomes available.



**Manjula  
O'Connor**

### Saturday 31 January

Manjula has written a report on a poetry evening at Kew Library, an interactive effort by ACHRH and Sahitya Sandhya held to discuss the dowry tradition.



### Walk Against Dowry

On Sunday 14 December, Dr O'Connor and friends walked through the city of Melbourne to highlight the dowry issue.

# Walk Against Dowry

By Gauri Kapoor

On Sunday 14 December 2014, around 50 ACHRH supporters gathered at Federation Square to protest against the practice of dowry in Australia. Dowry abuse is a problem that is prevalent in many Asian, Middle Eastern and African communities. Special guests included Jennie Russell OAM, past president of the National Council of Women (Victoria) and Malvina Malinek. A journalist and photographer from the Age and freelance writer, Dorcas Utkovic, were also present to report on the protest. Indian community activist, Avinash Raina composed anti dowry slogans and Hindi songs for the event. He brought along drums and other instruments for the march and encouraged everyone to sing and shout their way through the Melbourne CBD! ACHRH volunteers helped to design and carry large anti dowry banners for the Walk that started in Federation Square and went all the way to the steps of Parliament.

At the steps of Parliament, survivors of domestic violence, Ashima Soni and Ritika shared their experiences with everyone. They reiterated how important it is to recognise dowry abuse as a breach of human rights. Nomeeta Lakhani, the organiser of the event, is a young Australian born woman. She spoke about how there are women in Australia who are treated like commodities at the time of marriage.

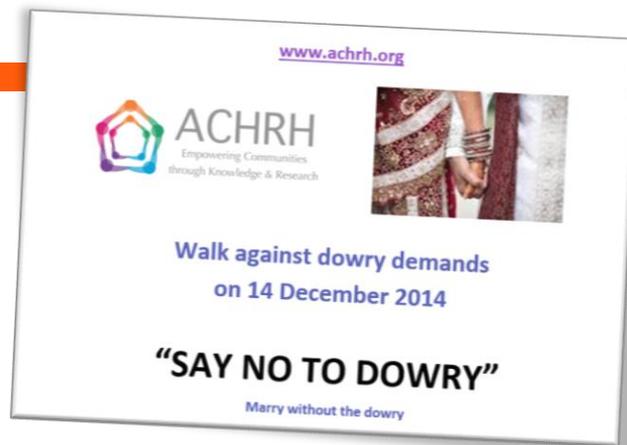
Marion Lau, Victorian Multicultural Commissioner, discussed how dowry abuse affects many Asian communities in the country. She stated it was important that weddings are celebrated rather than seen as financial burdens for prospective brides and their families. Marriages ought to be about respect not about dowry.

Nalin Sharda, professor at Victoria University, criticised the greed that fuels such dowry abuse. He says it is important that girls feel empowered to walk away from relationships where dowry is a huge factor. Mr Sharda thanked the young men and women who had turned up for the protest. He

was disappointed by the small turnout though and encouraged people to use social media to encourage more people to join the fight against the "corruption of good values".

Protesters were also joined by former Premier Ted Baillieu at the steps of Parliament. Mr Baillieu praised Dr Manjula O'Connor for her work in raising awareness of the growing problem of dowry abuse in Australia. He stated that coercive demands in marriages are a growing problem in the community and pointed out that silence encourages violence. He argued that even a small group of thoughtful people can change the world. Mr Baillieu reiterated his commitment to providing continued support for ACHRH's efforts in combating this problem.

Molina Asthana, a board director at ACHRH, encouraged everyone to sign the online petition against dowry. Special thanks to musician, Bobby BeeBob who performed a wonderful song at the conclusion of the event.





# Sahitya Sandhya

By Dr O'Connor



**A special poetry evening to discuss the dowry tradition:**  
poetic voice on dowry, domestic violence: an interactive effort by ACHRH and Sahitya Sandhya )

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Sahitya Sandhya was convened and chaired by Dr Subhash Sharma and in collaboration with Australasian Centre for Human Rights and Health

It is with much pride ACHRH collaborated with Sahitya SANDHYA to host an evening against the harmful tradition of dowry. It was sung in Poetry by the talented poets of Melbourne. Poems were recited in Hindi and English. Poems were sung about the dollar value of doctors, engineers, and where dowry has become a marital business transaction. The greedy in-laws are never satisfied and this greed has caused about 12,000 dowry deaths in India alone according to last Indian census. Dowry has been proclaimed a Human Rights Abuse by the United Nations. While dowries or similar payments are prevalent worldwide, dowry murder occurs predominantly in South Asia.

Nayana Bhandari a poet presented three poems on domestic violence she writes: "If we want to save families, we have to speak about family violence in interactive, acknowledging, creative, educating and intellectual ways".

This issue needs consideration from holistic point of view. Therefore to bring in awareness, Sahitya Sandhya is an on-going meeting of Poets, they meet at Kew Library once a quarter. This time they invited a collaboration with ACHRH where dowry and domestic violence was demonstrated in poetry. In a gathering of around 60 people, men and women from all walk of life shared the heaviness of this issue with the creativity of poetry.

Few poets shared mythological references and condemned the practice of dowry by stating the value of female was equivalent to that of a goddess. One more poet states dowry as a prime reason behind female foeticide thus leading to gender equality.

Program MC Dr Subash Sharma recited poem of Nari Shakti or "women empowerment", urging females to stand for her rights. Dr Nalin Sharda recited his own poem on women's empowerment necessary to root out this evil tradition of dowry.

Nayana from NGO, Oorja foundation, described the plight of female in interior of India up to the most developed country as painful. She narrated her journey from her home town to Australia in 3 languages focusing on global plight of women suffering from dowry to domestic violence.

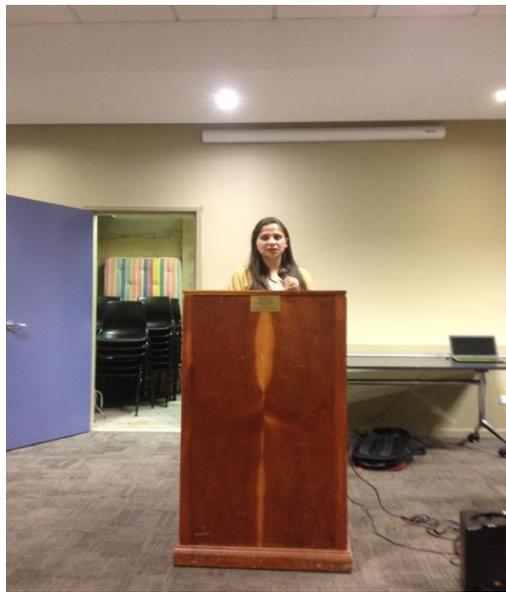
Dr Manjula, director of ACHRH, shared real life experiences from other ethnic communities like Sri Lanka and Pakistan and Africa about this situation and requested everyone to come up and stand together against domestic violence. She urged the need for change in laws to ban the practice of dowry in Australia.

Almost 10 -15 poetry pieces were shared by different mind sets presenting empathetic, tragic and heart rendering situation of domestic violence.

This event was a great initiative which brought together 60 creative people to share their views on this social evil. ACHRH is grateful to SAHITYA SANDHYA for sharing their Poetry evening with sensitivity for an effort towards social injustice.



*Dr O'Connor and friends of ACHRH at the poetry evening.*



*Nayana recites her heart felt poetry against domestic violence*



*Dr Subhash Sharma evokes Women power Nari Shakti in his composition*



*Dr Nalin Sharda speaks of women and rays of sunshine*

### Support Us

ACHRH is an NGO and as such relies heavily and extensively on the mission partners and the wider community for support. If you would like to support us and get involved in any way then please do contact us, either via the website:

<http://www.achrh.org/>

Or Facebook:



find us on  
**Facebook**

# We need a Community Forum

By Dr O'Connor

## 17 cases of domestic violence related murders and suicides in Victorian Indian community in two years

We need a Community Forum to explore the issues of Domestic violence at the International Women's Day.

### Murders- suicides in 2012



*Sharmas- family of four murdered by husband May 2012*



*Sargun Ragi burnt by husband and he died too September 2012*

Anita George killed herself and her two children in house fire in Clayton – April 2012. A note was discovered by the Police but the Police refused to call it suicide. Husband was due to return back from India the same day. My guess - she was unhappy in her married life.

Asim and Nidhi Sharma – died October 2012. Her in-laws returned back to India that night after a stay with them. She stabbed him while he slept and then stabbed herself. My guess - she was unhappy in her married life and with her in-laws.

### Murders-Suicides In 2013

An Indian woman nearly beheaded by her husband and then tried to kill himself – January 2013. Both survived the attack. The story goes that he was angry because she was unable to conceive a child.

### Murders-Suicides In 2014



*Deepshikha- Physiotherapist killed by husband he committed suicide*

## Murders In 2015

In the Victorian Indian community 15 people have been killed in murder suicide cases and two nearly died from seven families over two years between August 2012 and January 2015. This list is not exhaustive.

Homicides and murders due to domestic violence are described in research as 'the tip of the domestic violence iceberg'. They reflect a deep and widespread problem within our community.

The latest murders of Nikita and Deepskikha say to us enough is enough. We must not waste the death of our young girls as senseless murders which will continue. This demands a deep soul searching by the Indian community of Australia.

Domestic violence is behaviour problem the brunt of which is borne by young women below 40 years of age generally speaking. Sadly the older women, usually of the husband's family become allies of male perpetrators.

Research shows that women who tend to kill or commit suicides and murders of husband and children as mentioned above usually occur in the context of violent marital situations.

United Nation Population Fund conducted a study on male attitudes and domestic violence in India in 2014. The findings show some of what we are experiencing in Victoria.

The study explores what is the average Indian man's image of himself and what types of social and domestic behaviour society expects of him as a man – the study calls 'masculine behaviours'.

The results show that most Indian men believe that to be a real man he must have the most power and control in the house, dominate decision making, be the provider, control finances etc. This has a double edged impact – on the one hand this would no doubt put him under an enormous pressure to perform, to look in control, dictate to woman what she can wear, where to go, who her friends can be. Any deviation will be seen as weakness. On the other hand this very show of strength will put the man under great stress to perform. If they fail to perform then they lose face and that will make him feel shame and embarrassment

Then depending on how he handles this type of stress, he can become depressed or angry or frustrated and seek unhealthy options to relieve stress like drinking, drugs, or violence against his wife.

In other words there is no benefit to the man for being dominant and controlling of his wife, the women and children. Because it can have a bad effect on them as well. His wife and his children can become demoralised, depressed and start to dislike his character.

The same study found the Indian woman on the other hand is expected by society to be demure, and always display her femininity with qualities of "tolerance and acceptance". This means she cannot enjoy freedom or independence like her Australian peers.

UN Population Fund 2014 study states there can be a negative reaction from the community against men and women who buck the above social traditions.

The study also showed that peer pressure from other men, fear of being ridiculed, and humiliated stops men from behaving tenderly, with compassion, and empathy towards women – for example changing diapers, or washing dishes, cleaning the house even if the wife holds a job like the husband – such activities are not regarded as masculine jobs.

We conducted a research project with 165 women of Indian community of Victoria in 2011 using theatre. Our study has been published in two learned journals and it confirms the above stated research by UN Population Fund 2014. Victorian Indian women confirmed gender inequality as it is practiced in Indian homes

Vichealth 2009 research says that gender inequality is the first step towards violence and violence leads to murders and suicides

Not surprisingly the above attitudes lead to a very high rate of domestic violence in Punjab, Haryana, Uttar Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan, Maharashtra and Odisha. 40% men said "women should neither be seen nor heard".

60 % admitted to using violence to assert their dominance over their partner if she wanted to step out of her traditional roles or was unable to meet the expectation of bearing a son.

52 % women surveyed talked about experiencing some form of violence during their lifetime. 38% suffered physical violence, including being kicked, beaten, slapped, choked and burned, and 35 per cent were subjected to emotional violence, including insults, intimidation and threats.

The atrocities committed against women are cruel; rob the society of dignity and women of human rights. We must tackle those parts of our culture.



*Nikita Chawla- classical dancer killed by husband, January 2015*

## We call upon all Indian Men and Seniors to join the open Community Consultation Forum on INTERNATIONAL WOMEN'S DAY and help to find solutions

### OPEN INVITATION

#### THEME ---“HE FOR SHE “

Every murder, every suicide within a violent home is only the tip of the domestic violence iceberg in the community.

What type of attitudes do we need to change and what types of attitudes we must save and preserve in order to strengthen the community and stop domestic violence in the Victorian Indian community?

To achieve this we need the community to come together and voice their views- men, women, seniors, community leaders, guided by academic in particular Prof Bob Pease and professionals.

A number of community organisations will participate. Mr Sudhir Juneja has created a FB page [Community - Together against Family Violence](#). Please see the Facebook page and leave a comment.



#### Aims of the community forum

Domestic violence is a very complex problem. Society, family relationships, cultural factors and individual factors all play a role in making an environment where violence and abuse is allowed to occur.

We aim to find solutions that are acceptable to the community but ones that are based on the accepted world research.

We wish to bring out the voices of men to express the strengths that reside within our culture and then figure out how best to use the strengths to overcome the toxic aspects of our culture, change those aspects that give permission, condone or commit domestic violence.

The community discussions held will be held on International Women's Day. All are welcome to add constructive opinions - men and women, seniors and the youth.

#### Outcomes

- To formulate recommendations that will help to plug gaps in services for people of South Asian community who are suffering domestic violence.
- To start serious research based discussion process among community members. The aim is to discuss factors that will help prevent domestic violence and lower domestic violence rates by changing the mindset that accepts domestic violence as an acceptable outlet for problems.
- To issue the above as a document to VMC, [Minister Fiona Richardson](#), Minister for Prevention of Family violence ; and the [Department of the Premier and Cabinet](#)
- To prepare a document for the [Royal Commission into Family Violence](#)
- To disseminate widely the outcomes of discussions
- To issue a press release

Venue: '[Spirit of India](#)'. 1 Oakover St .Preston Tel 9484 8372

Date: 8 March 2015

Time: 12:00 pm to 4:00 pm.

Refreshments: light lunch and masala chai will be provided

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Other contacts - Deepak Vinayak, Faruk Husain, Jasvinder Sidhu, [Oorja Foundation](#) (Nayana: [nayanasahajpal@yahoo.com](mailto:nayanasahajpal@yahoo.com))

Media Partners – Santa Banta, The Indian Sun

*For more details, check the [ACHRH website](#) and [Facebook page](#), and the Santa Banta and [The Indian Sun](#) newspapers closer to time*

## WHERE TO GO FOR HELP

- **POLICE IN EMERGENCY -- 000**
- **YOUR GP -- they are helpful, easy to reach, they will refer you to the right place.**
- **NATIONAL SEXUAL ASSAULT, DOMESTIC AND FAMILY VIOLENCE COUNSELLING SERVICE -- 1800 RESPECT**
- **INTOUCH MULTICULTURAL CENTER AGAINST FAMILY VIOLENCE**  
–  
**1800 755 988**
- **WOMENS DOMESTIC VIOLENCE CRISIS SERVICE (WDVCS)**  
**24 Hour state wide line 1800 015 188**
- **MEN'S 24 HOUR REFERRAL SERVICE**  
**1800 065 973 (FREE CALL VICTORIA ONLY)**
- **VICTORIA IMMIGRANT AND REFUGEE WOMEN'S COALITION**  
**03 9654 1243**  
virwc@virwc.org.au, www.virwc.org.au
- **WOMEN'S INFORMATION & REFERRAL AGENCY (WIRE)**  
**03 9348 9416**  
inforequests@wire.org.au
- **DR MANJULA O'CONNOR, FOUNDING DIRECTOR ACHRH**  
**03 9654 5271**  
manjula@achrh.org



# ACHRH

Australasian Centre for  
Human Rights & Health

### WHY GET HELP?

- ❖ Domestic Violence damages our culture
- ❖ Domestic violence breaks our homes
- ❖ Domestic Violence causes:
  - Anxiety,
  - Depression,
  - Suicide,
  - Homicide in women, men and children

### WHAT CAN YOU DO?

- ❖ Support those who may be victims
- ❖ Encourage victims to seek help and become survivors
- ❖ Encourage perpetrators to seek help
- ❖ **DO NOT BE SILENT ON DOMESTIC VIOLENCE**

*Say No to Domestic Violence*