



**ACHRH**  
Empowering Communities  
through Knowledge & Research

**ACHRH**  
Newsletter

**July 2015**

IN THIS ISSUE

## Hello to all our friends

It seems each and every time we pick up a newspaper or browse news and social media online, we are confronted with family violence stories. By following the ACHRH on Facebook, you can be kept informed and up to date by a reliable source on this important issue.

In this newsletter, you can read a beautiful piece of poetry written by Nayana Sahajpal, and some reports on ACHRH activity by Dr O'Connor and Gauri Kapoor.

Perhaps the most moving report is the one written by Dr O'Connor on

the candlelit vigil in honour of Nikita Chawla. She would have been 24 had she not been taken from her family in one of many cases of domestic violence. The organizer of the vigil, and Nikita's brother, Tarang Chawla, spoke on the night. Some video of the vigil is available by [clicking this link](#).



**Manjula  
O'Connor**

### IN THIS ISSUE...

#### Reports on the vigil for Nikita

Manula and Tarang have written about the very moving Light In Our Lives candlelight vigil held on what would have been Nikita Chawla's 24th birthday.

#### Royal Commission in Family Violence

Manjula has written a very positive report on dowry being recognized as an issue with regards to domestic violence here in Australia.

#### Acid Attack Victims

Gauri Kapoor has written about the recent meeting hosted by the ACHRH, to discuss domestic violence in Pakistan.

#### Did You Know...

It's up to us to bring about change.

# Light in Our Lives Candlelight Vigil

By Tarang Chawla

A crowd of hundreds braved the cold on Sunday 21 June at Queensbridge Square in Melbourne for the *Light In Our Lives* candlelight vigil held on what would have been Nikita Chawla's 24th birthday.

Ms Chawla was killed on 9 January 2015. 49 women have been killed across Australia so far this year.

The vigil, organised by Tarang Chawla, Nikita's brother, was used to raise awareness of men's violence against women in culturally diverse communities and to look at the human loss of men's violence.

"Men's violence is often framed in dollar terms. We'll read that it costs Australians \$13.6 billion. This shocks us, but the problem runs deeper than that. Men's violence robs women of their dignity, their humanity, and in the most abhorrent cases, their life," Mr Chawla said.

The vigil featured prominent speakers from several anti-violence organisations including White Ribbon, Our Watch and Safe Steps. Families of other victims were also in attendance.

The Australasian Centre for Human Rights and Health were a feature of this vigil. Dr. Manjula O'Connor said, "The extended Indian Family system provides intense closeness and strong support to its family members but there is a cost and that is separation anxiety at any threat or actual loss of a relationship. This causes its own problems including fear, anger and rage which can even become murderous

"There is tremendous solidarity here. We are part of a growing movement of people who say "no more" to this terrible violence that is



*Tarang Chawla speaking at the vigil*

taking away our mothers, daughters, sisters, and friends," Mr Chawla said.

The vigil highlighted that men's violence has nothing to do with the actions of women, but is instead to do with misogyny and is the product of a society that is still entrenched with patriarchal belief systems.

"Men commit violence to exert dominance over others. If we change their behaviour, we can stop these statistics from rising. In our case, it's too late because Nikita is gone, but it is our responsibility to educate

boys and men in the Indian community about respectful attitudes towards women," Mr Chawla said.

The man accused of killing Nikita Chawla is awaiting trial in the Supreme Court, after pleading not guilty to her murder. People wishing to support Nikita and to stamp out violence in our community should follow the [Facebook.com/JusticeForNikita](https://www.facebook.com/JusticeForNikita) page.



## Loving relationship becomes murderous

By Dr Manjula O'Connor

It was Nikita 24th birthday on 21 June 2015; instead we held a candle lit vigil for her at the Queensbridge Square in the city.

Nikita like many of us Indians came from an extremely close knit family system. Indian families are well known for their ability to provide enormous emotional and financial support and anything else required by its members. The result is there for all to see -- children attain high levels of education and achievement, no matter where they live in the world.

But it is not so easy to get those privileges, there are certain rules the members must follow to enjoy the privileges of this tight yet supportive system.

This system is hierarchical.

The seniors have more power than the younger members. In this tight and extended family system men have more power than women; boys have more privileges than girls. It is an unequal system

But when it works well it works extremely well. The grandmothers and mother in laws who are not into abusing their power are the most emotionally nurturing parents I have seen. They can be great mother substitutes for daughters in law who traditionally leave their own mothers behind after marriage and move into their husband's family home.

In this family system what is the role men play? Men see it as their role to be the most important bread winner, and the most important person in the household. In our society the man must be seen to be the head of the household not only by the wife but also the world outside, otherwise he loses self-respect and self-confidence. This puts them at risk of becoming depressed and suicidal.

The problem is that life is not straightforward anymore. In the 21st century the women are getting educated. They are smart and are using education to become Pilots, Astronauts, physicists, doctors, engineers, and teachers. In this way the women are at the same level of power as the men. They earn as much as the men do. So imagine a home where a woman can earn as much as her husband, is as educated and is as intelligent but the societal rules are she is subservient to him, remains quiet, pleases him, pleases his mother and father at all times whether or not they love and respect her. He on the hand is the one who makes

all important decisions that affect her and the family. The family harmony

and the quality of home life is maintained by the wife or the woman, especially a young new bride. Her behaviour is judged against the ideal of a "good Indian woman" – pretty, educated, intelligent, docile, silent, and most importantly she must maintain the social bonds of the family. She is responsible for his happiness and the quality of the marriage.

These are the societal rules we live by. The rules were written in the book Manu Samhiti thousand years ago but we still follow them today. It is time for change!

When there is inequality in the home, the one who is powerless will resent the one with power. The problem for the woman is how to overcome her resentment, use her will power and intelligence to solve the conflict in her own head that while she remains unequal to him she must somehow maintain intimacy with him. The result is that she will look for friends outside the marriage who she can talk to and share her burden. And if that friend happens to be a man then there is a danger for things to go very badly wrong here.

In a culture where the divorce rate is low and marriage is seen for ever then any threat of losing the loved one can cause intense separation anxiety. Anxiety causes fear and that can be turned into Anger. Anger and fear of losing a loved one gives rise to rage. This is the first alarm signal

Why this rage becomes murderous in some men but not in others is an Important question. The answers are not clear. Perhaps a sense of control and possessiveness over wife, "if I can't have her no one can have her".

This type of thinking dehumanises the other and should serve as a warning signal.



Act before it is too late, before irreversible damage like a murder comes about. Help is available. Just speak to your GP and ask for a referral to “Men’s Behaviour Change program” and asked to be checked for depression and anxiety. Stop using alcohol.

We cannot solve these problems by remaining silent about them.

We have to include men’s voices to give us answers - how to enhance the woman’s power and agency within the society, within the home, and allow her to have equal voice and equal say in decisions that affect her and the family unit. At the same time raising awareness among women that the society is listening to them and they are valuable. ACHRH is about to commence a community based project to find answers to the above questions

The candlelit vigil in honour of Nikita Chawla is an example of an open honest soul searching that is going on in the Indian community. We thank Nikita’s grieving family for doing their part in breaking the silence in the fight against domestic violence and we must pledge to keep this fight going until there is not one case.



*Nikita’s dance students perform a dance taught by her, in honour of her memory*

# Acid Attack Victims in South Asia

By Gauri Kapoor

By courtesy of the Honorary Investment Counsel of Pakistan in Melbourne, Ayesha Bux, ACHRH recently hosted a meeting to discuss the issue of domestic violence in Pakistan. Special guests included Sabra, a survivor of an acid attack, Pakistani actress Faryal Gauhar, and founder of the Depilex Smile Again Foundation, Massarat Misbah. The three women came to Australia earlier this month to raise money for victims of acid attacks. Also in attendance was Mrs. Sheila Byard - President, National Council of Women Victoria.

The Hon Counsel began the meeting by pointing out that domestic violence is a significant problem affecting both Pakistanis and Indians. Ms Bux has worked closely with Dr Manjula O'Connor and Molina Asthana to help victims of domestic violence in the Indian, Pakistani and Bangladeshi communities in Melbourne. Dubious Justifications for violence in these communities include dowry entitlement, forced marriage and family honour. Ms Bux stressed the urgent need to challenge the acceptance of domestic violence in South Asian communities all around the world.

Sabra, a brave survivor of an acid attack, became emotional as she shared her story. She was married at the age of 15 to a husband much older than her. Soon after the marriage, Sabra as well as her mother began to face physical and emotional abuse on a daily basis. Sabra's husband and his family were not satisfied with the dowry that had been provided at the time of marriage. The abuse even resulted in Sabra having a miscarriage. Months of torture culminated in an acid attack on

Sabra.

After the attack, Sabra underwent reconstructive plastic surgery. She has had over 35 surgeries so far. Her face was badly burnt. For anyone, the face is an important part of one's identity and its disfigurement can lead to a great decline in self-confidence. Over the course of her treatment, Sabra realised that there are many acid attack victims in Pakistan. Sabra is keen to help other girls who have suffered from

severe domestic violence like her. She understandably empathises deeply with them and has now become a strong role model for girls who are beginning their path to recovery. Young women feel extremely let down by the weak legal system in Pakistan. According to Sabra, out of hundreds of acid attack cases only 5 perpetrators were convicted and jailed.

There are hundreds of girls who are waiting for surgeries in Pakistan. Families simply don't have the means of paying for all the treatments they require. People are reluctant to accept help from NGOs as there is a lot suspicion surrounding such organisations. Moreover there is much shame surrounding the break-up of marriages and discussing domestic violence openly. These girls struggle to find jobs in order to support themselves after the break-up of their marriages. Fortunately, the Depilex Foundation has begun giving girls scholarships for higher education as well as workplace training. There are several burns victims who have worked hard and become nurses and lawyers who now help victims of domestic violence in Pakistan.

Faryal Gauhar is a prominent actress and a leading women's rights activist in her country. During the meeting, Faryal talked of the violence she endured during her two marriages. Her work in raising awareness of domestic violence in Pakistan led to her appointment as a Goodwill Ambassador for the United Nations Population Fund in 1999. In her role as Ambassador, Faryal frequently visited Bangladesh which has the highest rate of acid attacks in the world.

On June 4, Faryal starred in a play titled "Empty Room" at the University of Melbourne. Money raised from the play went towards surgeries in Pakistan. During the meeting, Faryal spoke at length about the power of art therapy and the role television and film can play in



**Manjula gives a gift to Faryal as a token of thanks from ACHRH**



**Faryal Gauhar (click the photo to read more about her life)**

changing societal attitudes. ACHRH, led by Dr Manjula Connor, will soon launch a theatre project exploring domestic violence with men and women in the Indian community.

The Hon Counsel has since announced that 100 pledges for surgeries have been received as a result of the Pakistani delegation's visit to

Australia. ACHRH is one of the many donors who have supported this great cause.



# One Step Closer in the Fight Against Domestic Violence - Making Dowry Demands ILLEGAL

By Dr Manjula O'Connor

VICTORY! Dowry recognised as a contributor to the problem of domestic violence in multicultural Australia by the Victorian Government in its submission to the Royal Commission in Family Violence! The next step is to make it illegal.

Many told us this is not a problem in Victoria or Australia but constant reports of dowry related domestic violence in clinical and research settings, in the media, protest marches in the street, signed petitions have all had an impact.

And it's one giant step closer to change in laws sought by our petition, now signed by 700 members of ethnic and mainstream community of Victoria.

**For 2 years ACHRH members have led public mobilisation for this goal, including:**

- Gave voice to the dowry issue, a dirty secret in a great number of our ethnic communities.
- Brought attention to the coercive dowry demands that are far in excess of the annual income of the families as a cause of violence directed against women.
- Started a petition that demands change in laws to include dowry demands **an example of economical abuse under the Family Violence Protection act 2008 and thus making it a criminal act**
- Helped compile media reports of two dowry related deaths in Victoria (Herald Sun 23/4/15), the result of insatiable greed for dowry.

Once the laws are enacted we have requested changes be brought at the immigration levels. Prior to the visa being granted the migrants to be given information that giving and taking of dowry is against the laws of Australia and to sign an affidavit stating dowry was neither given nor taken in marriages arranged between Australian and non-Australian citizens.

This will have an impact internationally. Dowry is a human rights abuse that is prevalent in many Asian, Middle Eastern and western countries.

We want the entire world to unite behind the same goal of removing dowry, by making the giving and taking of dowry illegal in every country. Research evidence shows dowry demands are associated with verbal abuse, physical violence, torture and death. Not the least of it is the pressures on the families to beg, borrow or steal to pay for dowries just to conform to social pressure. WHO states that Gender equality is the best preventive measure to stop domestic violence. The tradition of dowry negates the principle of equality in the marriage -whether dowry is given or taken.

Our work is far from done, but it's a day to celebrate -- **congratulations to everyone.**

Just last year change in community attitudes to dowry seemed nearly impossible. It was going to remain a blind spot in multicultural Australia and domestic violence debate. **But with hope, and good strategy**, and the support of many Political leaders like Ted Baillieu, Minister Fiona Richardson; organisations like National Council of Women Victoria, Royal Australian NZ College of Psychiatrists; media such as the ABC, The Age, The Herald Sun; ethnic newspapers like Santa Banta, The Indian Sun; as well as our own community research conducted with groups from The Melbourne University, **most of us now believe the tide is turning**, and momentum is building to get a legal and immigration change that will set the international stage on course to a solution to this dowry related millennia old social problem.

It will be a long fight, we cannot afford to drop our guard, as there is no commitment to change the laws as yet but today, we celebrate a battle won!!!

With warmest thanks from the ACHRH Team



14 December 2014 - ACHRH protest March on the steps of Parliament House, Melbourne. Click on the photo to read about the March in *The Age* newspaper.

## 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 (click the image to follow the link):



To whom it may  
refer.....

I was planned to  
remove as soon as Dr  
has diagnosed me as a  
"Girl"

My mother cried,  
shouted, pleaded and I  
was allowed to be born  
"but"

I was kept unequal,  
treated indifferent,  
tamed, grown up with  
symptoms of  
malnutrition and mental  
illness "due to"

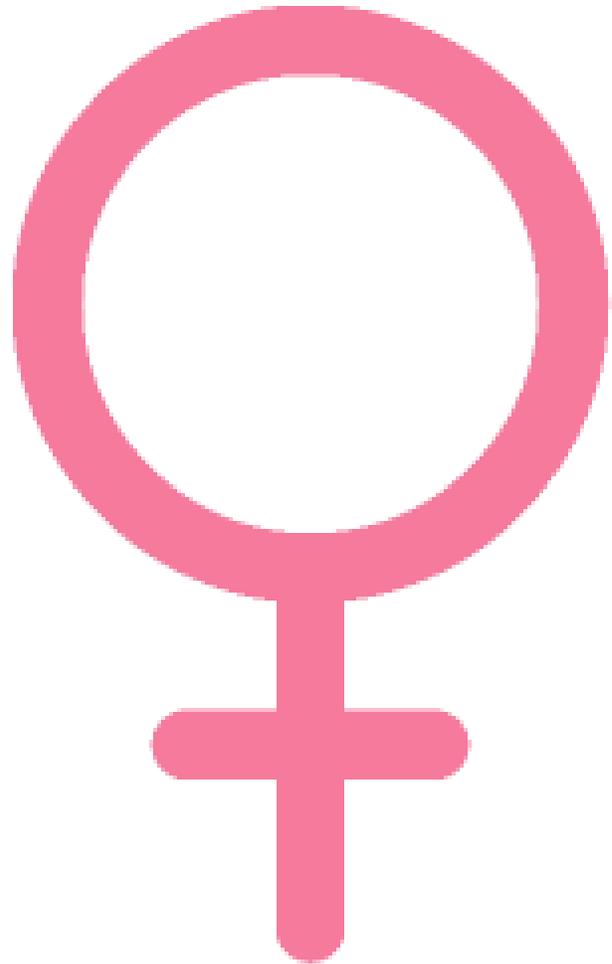
My soft voice, curvy body, no beard /moustaches and may be  
because of long hair, fragile frame "then"

I have been teased, raped, molested, harassed, suppressed  
and left as a victim in every walk of life "as"

I carry an identity of "being a woman"

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Nayana Sahajpal



## 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



### 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*