Dowries in Diverse Communities
Mental Health Harm
A Public Health Approach

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Family violence (FV) is a universal problem with serious risks to health and life. It is a breach of human rights (WHO 2013)

1 in 3 women globally report facing FV comprising emotional, physical, sexual, and financial abuse (WHO 2005)

1 in 4 women in Australia reported current or past FV (ABS 2016)
Australian data

- In Australia, 1 in 4 women report FV comprising emotional, physical, sexual, and financial abuse (Australian Bureau of Statistics 2016)
- 1 in 9 (992,000) men were physically and/or sexually abused before the age of 15
- In spite of a significant increase in both focus and resources to address FV, little has changed in the 12 years since 2005 (Australian Bureau of Statistics 2016)
- Attitudes and unconscious bias is hard to shift (ANROWS 2018)
- Culturally responsive strategies more likely to work
Family violence has serious consequences for mental health. Yet ignored

Median prevalence of FV in mental illness

MDI – 45.8%;
PTSD- 61% ;
Anxiety Disorders- 27.6%

Meta-analysis (Teevillone et al 2012) shows FV is associated with 7 times greater risk of PTSD, 3 times greater risk of MDI, and 4 times greater risk of anxiety and panic disorders.

Australian population study suicidal Behaviours increased 3 times in victims and the likelihood of developing mental illness increased with increasing variety of abuse.

The burden of disease caused by FV - 7% of the global burden of disease for women

Greater than obesity and hypertension. In young women aged 22-45-

Mental illness accounts for the greatest portion


Causes of FV are complex, multiple and interactive

Feminist Theory of Violence

**Societal factors** - Male dominance in power making structures, weak legal sanctions for violence

**Cultural values and beliefs**
- Rigid gender roles, patriarchy, dowry abuse

**Family factors**
- Rigid gender roles
- Male control of decision making, control of wealth in the family

**Personal history**
- Witnessing IPV as a child
- Being abused as child

Early Intervention and Prevention of FV key priority of Australia

With the goal of supporting the Federal and State Government aims a series of community initiated, community owned and community led Action Research projects commenced in 2010.
FV Rates in Australia unchanged since 2005

- Australia is a highly multicultural country, migrants from over 200 countries are represented here.

- 1 in 4 were born overseas and another 1 in 4 have a parent who was born overseas.

- Culturally responsive strategies more likely to work.
Multicultural Australia and FDV

- Immigrants from Indian Subcontinent number 468,000, that is, almost 2 per cent of the Australian population (ABS, 2016)

- Victoria has a sizeable proportion of Indian community around 170,000 and if we add other South Asian communities it makes a sizable minority, around 2% of the population.

- Indian culture is highly complex, collectivist culture where the family and society is privileged over the individual.

- The Society is patriarchal and within a family the gender roles are clearly demarcated.
<table>
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<tr>
<th>Dowry</th>
<th>IPV</th>
<th>Prevalence of mental disorder</th>
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<tr>
<td>• IPV including</td>
<td>• Common mental disorders (mood, anxiety, PTSD)</td>
<td>• Higher in women exposed to IPV and other forms of GBV including rape and sexual assault</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Psychological, physical and sexual abuse</td>
<td>• Attempted suicide, impaired quality of life</td>
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Literature background

- Husband’s unsatisfactory reaction to dowry is said to be strongly associated with common mental disorders in Indian literature (Shidhaya and Patel 2010, Gururaj et al 2008).

- Dowry is a determinant of DV and related murders (White 2016, Ranjana Kumari 2006, Babu and Babu 2010).

- Harassment by in-laws on issues related to dowry is reported to be a major factor associated with suicidal behaviour in women (Vijaykumar 2016, Shidhaya and Patel 2010).

- Bride Price in Timore Leste is associated with depression, anxiety and explosive anger in the bride.
Abuse of dowry as significant contributor to FV and mental illness and suicidal behaviour in Australia
Coroner’s inquest found this statement to Police by Ms Godara - 6 years before her murder, she mentioned dowry related violence to the Police.

when I moved to Australia everything was fine until January 2008 when his relatives visited from India. His relatives 10 to 12 of them came out for two months and stayed at our place. One night in January 2008 Sunil’s uncle got drunk and verbally abused me and my family for not paying enough ‘dowry’ which is Indian currency after my marriage to Sunil. That night Sunil slapped me twice across the face because he was drunk and over the same issue about the “dowry”. I wasn’t injured from the slaps. In March 2008, the family left and Sunil has been bitter since they left about not enough dowry” being paid.9
A month after the alleged suicide of Melbourne resident Ramaya Krishna, her in-laws have been arrested by the Cyberabad police in India on Friday on charges of dowry harassment.
Dowry-related domestic violence and complex post-traumatic stress disorder: a case report

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Abstract
Objectives: This paper draws attention to the mental health impact of coercive practice of dowry demands, associated with domestic violence (DV) in an immigrant woman.
Methods: This study was based on a case report and selective literature review.
Results: This case history illustrates the serious mental health impacts of repeated emotional and physical trauma inflicted by a husband who was dissatisfied with his wife’s dowry. Biopsycho-social and cultural aspects of mental health treatments needed to be augmented with attention to safety, advocacy, and access to support networks.
Conclusions: Cultural factors are important determinants of mental illness. Psychiatrists need to be aware of DV and dowry when treating immigrant women.

Keywords: domestic violence, immigrant woman, dowry, mental illness

Globally 1 in 3 women suffer domestic violence.1 Australia is no exception.2 Domestic violence (DV) is increasingly being recognized for its serious mental health consequences,3 and is found to be responsible for 8% of burden of health, predominantly mental health, for women aged 15–44 year, greater than smoking or hypertension.4 DV is a complex issue. The ecological model of Fleiss et al.4 illustrates the inter- actions between societal, cultural, family and individual factors that can give men the position of power, dominance and control over women and children. The social model of women’s mental health posits that women’s social positions make them more prone and vulnerable to poor mental health outcomes.5 South Asian culture, predominantly practice patriarchy, a practice that dis- advantages women at multiple levels: societal, familial and individual.6 Dowry is a south Asian cultural prac- tice where harassment by in-laws on issues related to dowry is reported to be a major factor associated with poor mental health and suicidality in women and is also a determinant of DV.7 Notably, the husband’s unsatisfac- tory reaction to dowry is said to be strongly associated with common mental disorders in Indian literature.8 Australia is a highly multicultural country.9 The inter- mingling of many different cultures and ethnicities results in hybrid identities and hybridization of cultural practices.10 In this rapidly changing trans-migratory world, studying the lives of individuals is crucial to the study of cultural factors, which are increasingly recog- nized as important determinants of mental health.11

This paper presents a case report of a South Asian migrant woman, victimized by the social practice of dowry in Australia, associated with DV and its serious impact on her mental health.

Case report
Ms A is a 25-year-old, recently separated woman referred by her general practitioner for the treatment of mental health impacts of DV. She was married in an arranged marriage in India to an Australian-Indian resident. A day after the marriage he stopped talking to her, he seemed annoyed and his mother repeatedly complained about dowry gifts being insufficient and of poor quality. Over the next week Ms A increasingly became anxious and sad. Over three ceremonies her parents had given extravagant gifts comprising gold and cash, expenses totalling over $570,000. Indian culture is virilocal (i.e. the son stays with the family and his bride moves in). Accordingly, Ms A moved in with her in-laws. Her per- sonal gold jewellery was taken by her mother-in-law ostensibly for “safe guarding” (but never returned). Ms A anxiously realized she was in a hostile environment from which escape was difficult. Divorce was not an
Development of a public health response to prevent FV in Australia

- The costs of violence to Australia is $22 Billion annually according to KPMG 2016
- Given the prevalent, serious and preventable nature of the problem, there is an urgent need for further development of a public health response.
- Significant health gains have been made through such an approach in addressing other major public health issues.
- For example, tobacco control and road safety, where major reductions in avoidable death, injury and illness have been achieved.
- Through a combination of legislative reform, law enforcement, communications and marketing, and services and programs to support individuals”.

Community Participatory Theatre suitability as a public health instrument to prevent FV

There are multiple versions of every story and multiple intersecting factors to complicate every story.

CPT offered a useful strategy to explore the existence and intersection of these contrasting versions.

Leading to the development of a *shared appreciation of the “truth” forces that drive FV*,

while simultaneously moving from facts to understanding the story and changing the story by exploring forms of restorative truths.
Theatre director freezes scene—audience asked to verbalise 2010-11
Community Based Participatory Research-CPT 2015-16
Exploring domestic violence and social distress in Australian-Indian migrants through community theater

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How marriage is arranged
“ARRANGED MARRIAGE”
Video
ARRNGED MARRGE.xspf
Letter from father of murdered victim for ACHRH petition

It is known fact that despite of stringent law against dowry, people receive the dowry, so do the Indian Australians. When they go to India for wedding, their parents choose the brides for them. Since the father being the head of the family has command, authority and influence on all the activities, all the rituals are performed in his patronage.

Marriage rates are fixed and decided by the fathers for their sons. Traditionally, these are fixed according to their status and position/post of their sons. Money incurred Rs. 20 lacs to 50 lacs to bestow upon groom and his parents according to their status.

It’s varying from the position like doctor, lawyer, engineer, professors, managers or teachers and executives. In wedding ceremonies, all luxury cars, A.C., T.V., fridge, utensils, costly watches, branded clothes, gold jewelery and diamond rings are given. Grooms and their parents enjoy with these dowry items and return to Australia.

When they, in-laws commit domestic violence against brides/wives for dowry, there is no law to punish them for bullying. They escape from stringent anti-dowry law since they have not committed crime in India and vice-versa grooms/boys commit offense in Australia and
South Asian Version-Culturally constructed trauma therapy

**Society**
- Factor 4 – Sons birth is celebrated, and enhances value of male gender, entrenches patriarchy, devaluation of female gender.
- Immigration- partner visa enhances sponsor power, inequality in marriage linked to dowry amount.

**Community** –
- Women’s primary role to get married, have children, keep family together.
- Dowry given by the bride to the groom further enhances the value of male gender.
- Equality in home and sharing housework seen as threat to masculinity.

**Relationship/Family** -
- A daughter-in-law is a threat to Mo-Son bond, enhances DIL vulnerability.
- Dowry amount given by the bride to the groom measures her worth.

**Individual** –
- Factor 4 highly prized son is liable to be pampered receiving unearned rewards, expecting the same from wife in marriage. Sense of entitlement.

Cultures and attitudes are contextually determined and do change

CPT helped to break down old boundaries, opened up channels of communication and empowered communities through engagement. Our campaign spoke to the hearts and minds of women and people

We did this also by building evidence, showing the governments the cost benefit analysis that dowry was costing the communities, causing mental health harm and adding to FV burden of $22 B to Australia.
Australasian Centre for Human Rights and Health PETITION commenced 2013

Urged by victims of dowry abuse

To the Legislative Assembly of Victoria

The undersigned concerned members of public of Victoria draw to the attention of the House:

Our serious concern that dowry demands, demands for money and gifts in the context of a new marriage (up to seven years) is a significant contributor to family and domestic violence within certain cultural communities of Victoria. We are concerned that this pattern is similar to the one reported in India, with documented extensive evidence of serious domestic violence in the context of demands for dowry and gifts by the groom and his family.

The petitioners therefore request that the Legislative Assembly of Victoria Amends Family Violence Protection Act 2008 - SECT 6 titled “Meaning of Economic Abuse, Examples” as soon as possible to add the words, Dowry or coercive demands for gifts or cash in the context of a new marriage (up to first seven years).
Indian community protest against dowries

*The Age - December 14, 2014*
Mr Baillieu (Hawthorn): I note the petition seeking to include coercive demands for dowry in the economic abuse provisions of family violence legislation. It was compiled by Dr Manjula O'Connor of Melbourne University. She is a champion for the rights of abused women, particularly Indian migrants. This is not an Indian community issue alone, but the issue of coercive demands for dowry is real. I have met many women she has supported. They have been pressured for dowry and have suffered domestic violence, depression, family breakdown and worse.
Premier of Victoria Announced Royal Commission Into Family Violence
December 2014
Royal commission Report March 2016
Recommendation # 156

- The Victorian Government amend section 6 of the Family Violence Protection Act 2008 (Vic) to expand the statutory examples of family violence to include forced marriage and dowry-related abuse [within 12 months].

- Accepted the need for education and research in its explanatory statement
Extensive media coverage

Ted Baillieu, former Victorian premier, calls for ban on marriage dowries. abc.net.au/news/
23 May 2014, 1:36pm

Dowry's dark shadow May 23, 2014, Rachel Kleinman. smh.com.au
Indian women living in Australia suffer domestic violence stemming from a tradition that some say should be outlawed.


Dowry extortion is a long standing problem in India and Pakistan, but now it appears to be on the rise in Australia.
http://www.radioaustralia.net.au/international/2014
Media support for state law change

- A petition calling for the practice of "dowry" to be labelled as family violence has been tabled in Victoria's Parliament. 30 November 2015. By Luke Waters

- SBS World News Radio: There has been a renewed push for dowry demands to be legally defined as a form of economic abuse in Australia. By Sacha Payne. 14 December 2016

- Australia is set to become the first country outside India to have laws targeting dowry abuse. The Victorian Government is preparing legislation that will target unscrupulous husbands extorting dowry money from the families of their wives. The move coincides with a new report revealing the extent of domestic abuse suffered by migrant women. Gareth Boreham, October 18, 2017

Dowry in Australia: 'A form of abuse' | Australia | Al Jazeera

Jul 3, 2017 - Dowry, death and despair in Australia's Indian community

Dowry is 'ruining' lives in Australia | SBS Your Language

Family violence, dowry and 'fake cases' in Australia's Indian ... - SBS
https://www.sbs.com.au/.../family-violence-dowry-and-fake-cases-australias-indian-co...

Jul 27, 2018 - As the Senate inquiry into dowry abuse in Australia is currently ... abuses and even suicide and murder, some members of the Indian Australian ...
AUSTRALIA | FOR LOVE OR MONEY


Dowry ban debate gains momentum in Australia


SHOCKING DOMESTIC VIOLENCE STATISTICS REVEALED

The Indian Link , July 2014
First National Anti-dowry summit sparks call for Australian law against ancient tradition 14 December 2016

- Medical professionals and academics are calling for a national law against dowry, as part of Australia's first summit looking at the impacts of the practice. [http://www.abc.net.au/news/2016-12-14/calls-for-national-anti-dowry-law/8121182](http://www.abc.net.au/news/2016-12-14/calls-for-national-anti-dowry-law/8121182)

- MULTI ETHNIC ISSUE – BRIDE PRICE women tend to be victims at the hands of callous husbands who mistreat their wives because they say they have paid for her.
Amendment to Victorian Laws Bill passed both houses of parliament in Victoria 7 December 2018

- Proclamation of laws in June 2019
Labor MP Julian Hill calls for Senate Inquiry February 2018
Senate enquiry into dowry and dowry abuse has found that Dowry abuse in Australia is far more extensive and complex.

Family Law Act to acknowledge dowry abuse as an example of financial abuse in the Australian Family Law Act.

Immigration law changes to protect women of temporary visas is recommended.
Migration related issues

- Immigrant brides /newly married women at greater risk.
- temporary visas
- Partners abuse their power by inducing fear and threats of deportation.
- Risk, fear and threats of separation from their children
- Many young women, new brides have been deported back to India in highly distressed states.
- Abandoned brides in India and Australia after dowry confiscation
Why immigration support?
Intersectionality of disadvantage additive
Everyone has power—some more than others
Dowry-related abuse a transnational problem bigger than one country

- Societal and community level gendered socio-cultural milieus give rise to the problem
- But the macro-level formal-legal structures and global power asymmetries contribute to the dowry abuse

*Gender-blind transnational formal-legal frameworks and gendered and transnational structural inequalities come together to construct transnational brides as ‘disposable women’ who can be abused, exploited and cast aside with impunity (Anitha Sunderi 2018)*
In the words of Justice Pascoe

“There is a clear need for a superior court in family law to deal with matters such as complicated financial cases that involve complex trust and corporate structures; .... international cases that involve conflicts of laws.... and  on the cutting edge of developments in .... medicine and psychology,”. “These require the attention and precedent-setting decisions of a superior court.”

Milestones achieved

- Royal Commission into Family Violence Report March 2016, Volume 5, recommendation # 156 states “dowry to be included as an example of family violence in the Family Violence Protection Act 2008 of Victoria (within 12 months)

- Dowry is cited as a complex form of violence in a booklet released by the Federal Attorney General’s office 2016 “Path to Justice - Migrant and Refugee women experience of courts”

- Dowry is cited as a complex form of violence in Federal Department of Social Services document 2015, “Hearing her Voice”

- Federal Department of Social Services document 2016 “Platform for action” it is cited as a complex form of domestic violence. This document is a preparatory document for 2017 National Action Plan to reduce violence against women and girls.

- Victorian parliament passes the amendment to include the inclusion of dowry abuse as example of family violence – Aug 2018

- Federal enquiry into nature and prevalence of dowry abuse – June 2018- 19 Feb 2019

- Second National dowry abuse summit in Sydney with UNSW and INDIA - 22/2/19
THANK YOU FOR LISTENING