



DOMESTIC VIOLENCE IN AUSTRALIA.

Peter Adamis 23 May 2014

Domestic violence in Australia is nothing new and we should not be surprised or abhorred news of domestic violence amongst New Australian communities.

To say that there is no domestic violence amongst new communities to this country is not like being an emu and sticking your head in a sand dune. Domestic violence appears to be rising and Australians from every background have a right to stamp out such practices and replace such acts with education and submitting such characters of violence to obligatory attendance at community and family awareness program designed to eradicate such behaviours.

Let us not kid ourselves in believing that domestic violence means violence against women alone. It also means violence against children, against the elderly, the disabled and the helpless who have no means of defending themselves. Domestic violence is everywhere and it is one of the rare times where I believe in 'dobbing' in those nefarious characters responsible for such acts. Domestic violence is a symptom of something greater and is always the outcome of a hidden fear of the unknown or lack of personal values and morals.

Over the past 40 years, I have read many a story about violence in the home, violence in the streets, violence at work, and violence in public places. In each case we as a society are astonished and surprised to hear of the brutal details and yet we move on and let the law enforcement agencies take the responsibility of cleaning up a mess that was not of their own making. We move on thinking that there are laws and community programmes to deal with such matters and yet these acts of violence occur on a daily basis in one form or another. When does it stop.

Community outrage at the father who flung his child over the West Gate bridge, or the father who drowned his children; community outrage over the death of Jill Meager and yet a few months later we find another perpetrator is staking and assaulting women in the same region. Sick bastards the lot of them, is what I call them and again, society is happy to just see them go behind bars hoping that spell in jail will rehabilitate them. I am sure that the jail system and culture hands out their own punishment when it comes to crimes against children, but is that the answer to what ails our Australian communities, I think not.

Re-education, professional support, community awareness programmes, relocation programmes, cultural awareness, rehabilitation and mentoring, access to non judgemental support agencies, media awareness, obligatory reporting by all professional bodies are all but minor actions that can be taken to reduce and finally eradicate domestic violence within the Australian society.

Domestic violence can occur at any moment at any place and for reasons which are sometimes unexplainable or even predicted. Therefore, as we are all stakeholders in this society, we have a duty of care and responsibility to one another to ensure that the health and well being of each individual is not marred by domestic violence. Reporting domestic violence does not make you a dobber in my eyes.

[The articles below are but the tip of the iceberg and it's a shame that we who live in the a democratic society are unable to come to grips with these sense acts of violence](#)



The Voice from the Pavement – Peter Adamis is a Journalist/Commentator and writer. He is a retired Australian military serviceman and an Industry organisational & Occupational (OHS) & Training Consultant whose interests are within the parameters of domestic and international political spectrum. He is an avid blogger and contributes to domestic and international community news media outlets as well as to local and Ethnic News. He holds a Bachelor of Adult Learning & Development (Monash), Grad Dip Occupational Health & Safety, (Monash), Dip. Training & Assessment, Dip Public Administration, and Dip Frontline Management. Contact via Email: abalinx@netspace.net.au or via Mobile: 0409965538

Dowry's dark shadow. May 23, 2014 Rachel Kleinman Melbourne journalist.

Indian women living in Australia suffer domestic violence stemming from a tradition that some say should be outlawed. Jessica* came to Australia in 2012 after an arranged marriage in India. Her Indian husband already had permanent residency here and she left her family and country behind to start a new life with him in Melbourne's western suburbs. Back home, Jessica had completed postgraduate studies, she had a career and came from a family with liberal values.

Now, just two years later, she is separated, recovering from the trauma of domestic violence and locked in a long legal battle to claim her dowry, which remains in India in the hands of her husband's parents. "This is just a kind of torture for me and my family," Jessica says. "I am all alone here. At least if I get back my dowry articles that would be fine ... It would give me back a bit of financial security."

To make matters worse, Jessica came here on a spousal visa. When the marriage broke down, her husband wrote to the Immigration Department saying he wanted to revoke his sponsorship of her. If she returned to India, Jessica would face the social stigma of being divorced. She is now applying for permanent residency, which her visa allows if she has suffered domestic violence.

Many Indian women in Australia tell similar stories and there is a push to ban the dowry in Victorian state law. As the state's Indian population hits 190,000 there are claims the dowry increases a woman's powerlessness and causes tensions between families that can lead to relationships breaking down and, in some cases, contribute to domestic violence.

Dr Ravinder Thiara, a British academic from the University of Warwick who specialises in gender, race and violence, told Fairfax Media that the dowry "has huge links to domestic violence". Also, there are claims that Indian men with permanent residency in Australia are being "auctioned off" by their families to the highest bidder. The family of a potential bride that offers the highest dowry gets the prize of a son-in-law with Australian residency.

Melbourne psychiatrist Dr Manjula O'Connor, who was born in India, is leading the push to get the dowry banned in Victoria. Last month, former Victorian premier and serving Hawthorn MP Ted Baillieu tabled a petition in Parliament calling for 2008's Family Violence Act to be amended to outlaw the dowry. A UK politician has made similar calls in Britain.

This is a highly complex issue. The dowry has been banned in India since 1961 but it is a tradition that refuses to bow to the law. Thiara says that despite being illegal it is sometimes voluntarily given by the bride's family, but mostly because the groom's family expects it.

Thiara questions whether any dowry ban can be effective, given the evidence from India. "It is hard to see how a ban on dowry can be implemented so, rather than criminalisation, is prevention through education a better avenue to pursue?"

Even the definition of dowry is complicated. In India, it is a centuries-old tradition where the bride's parents present gifts of cash, clothes and jewellery to the groom's family. Also, women there are not entitled to any inheritance or property rights so, historically, the dowry's purpose was to provide the bride with financial security should anything happen to her husband.

However, in recent decades it has morphed into an economic transaction between the two sets of parents and often becomes a "price" for the groom. Dowry-related violence in India has a huge impact on women's lives. India's National Crimes Bureau reported one woman every hour died in India in 2012 because of dowry-related crimes. Previous figures showed that, in 2007, 8093 women were killed and 3148 took their own lives because of dowry disputes.

In 2012, Melbourne's Indian community was rocked by a spate of horrific murder-suicides within families. Twelve people, including five children, died in the space of a few months. In the first case, the bodies of a couple and their children, aged 5 and 3, were found in their Glen Waverley home.

Weeks later, a woman and three sons died in a Clayton South house fire. Soon after, the bodies of a couple, recently arrived from India, were discovered in their Blackburn home. Another Indian woman died months later when her estranged husband stalked her and set fire to her Kew house. He also died. These shocking events shone a light on family violence and mental health issues within the Indian population. Fairfax Media is not suggesting any of the 2012 deaths were dowry-related.

Most families live harmoniously, but Indian community leaders recognise that family violence is a substantial problem. The question of whether the dowry contributes is highly divisive. Dheen*, a professional man in his early 30s, came to Melbourne's southern suburbs from India eight years ago. He has an intervention order against him after his arranged marriage became violent. Dheen says no dowry was involved in their marriage. The problem of family violence comes from the male-dominated culture rather than dowry-related conflicts, he says.

"The man is the leader in the house, the authority. The woman has to follow that because he is the breadwinner, the wife and children will depend upon him, so they have to listen to him. The men use their power – that is the main reason for domestic violence in the Indian community."

Dheen is now getting help from Manjula O'Connor in how to manage his anger. "I couldn't deal with the problems and ended up solving the problem with violence and ended up getting into trouble." Dheen says that, historically, the dowry gave a bride confidence in her financial future. "Now it has become a social evil – people try to demand more money from the bride's family and it becomes a harassment for the girl's family."

O'Connor herself has been ostracised by sections of the Indian community for her outspoken approach to family violence and campaign against dowry. Vasanth Srinivasan, president of the Federation of Indian Associations of Victoria, does not believe dowry is a major issue. And he says the research funding that O'Connor secured to explore the issue of domestic violence could have been spent on community services.

"We were not impressed. Our services include crisis accommodation and food donations and legal support. We felt that money could have been better spent," Srinivasan says. "Problems with dowry are very rare. It has already been outlawed in India; I don't think we need to worry about that here," Srinivasan says. He also claims that O'Connor

inflates figures of "how many Indian men beat their wives" and he insists that "we do respect women in our community".

But Indian relationship counsellor Muktesh Chibber, who has a Melbourne-based private practice and also works for Relationships Australia, argues that dowry tears many families apart, hurting both men and women. "Problems with the dowry are very common," Chibber says. "This is a terrible issue – the Australian system, along with government in India, has to do something. It is not one way, I have seen men in terrible situations too. Sometimes the problem is with the in-laws."

Ted Baillieu is backing the dowry ban after he was contacted by O'Connor during his time as premier. A number of her Indian female patients came into his office and told their stories. "They were pretty horrific stories," Baillieu says. "Getting people to understand that domestic violence is a crime is the starting point. Even now you'll get people who hesitate about that. Dowry is clearly part of the issue ... there are cultural pressures that are historical."

Jacky Tucker is family violence manager at Women's Health West, which provides services across Melbourne's western suburbs. She knows of at least two Indian women who took their own lives because they felt their family situation was so desperate. The service supports many women who have arrived from India on spousal or student visas.

"Sometimes the woman is fleeing from the in-laws rather than the partner; the abuse is coming direct from them." Within Indian culture, once a woman marries, she traditionally "belongs" to her husband's family. She is expected to live under their roof and is often directed and controlled by her husband's parents. If they aren't satisfied with the dowry paid by her parents, this can be a trigger for abuse.

Tucker supports a change to Victorian law. "Dowry is a tension within the community ... it's reasonable to say there's certain circumstances ... where dowry is misused as a threatening tactic against women."

Women's Legal Service Victoria policy and projects manager Pasanna Mutha says Indian women are the service's second biggest client group. "[Dowry] is definitely a really important issue for our clients. It is very hard for them to get their dowry back [if their relationship breaks down]. It may be being held in India by the in-laws."

O'Connor, who sees many domestic violence victims in her private psychiatry practice, is also a senior fellow at Melbourne University's School of Population and Global Health. Last year she founded the Australasian Centre for Human Rights and Health along with Melbourne lawyer Molina Asthana, who originally practised in India.

O'Connor readily acknowledges that many people are unhappy with her approach. But she is determined to continue her crusade. "Young men need to understand [the dowry] will not be tolerated in Australia, just as it is not tolerated in India by law," she says.

O'Connor will meet state Attorney-General Robert Clark in June to discuss the next move. Baillieu says the issue may be referred to the Victorian Law Reform Commission.

O'Connor also met federal Social Services Minister Kevin Andrews earlier this year to discuss potential changes to spousal visa conditions. "I hope to make dowry acceptance – asking, taking or giving dowry – a breach of visa conditions. This will bring down domestic violence rates," she says.

Jessica is in limbo while she waits for permanent residency to be granted. Meanwhile, her parents have filed a complaint in India against her husband's parents to try to get her dowry back. Although the dowry was theoretically hers, the in-laws insisted on holding it for her. This is a common scenario. She says tensions between herself and her husband's family grew during the two-year marriage as they demanded control of her finances, her movements, what she wore and her contact with her own family. At one point, her husband started checking the car's kilometres to make sure she had not been out without his permission.

As she tells her story, Jessica appears composed, highly articulate and haunted by a sense of disbelief about what happened. Her husband first became violent after she told him she was fed up with his criticism. He punched a hole in the wall. "I was so worried by this, I did not know what was going on and I didn't tell anyone," she says.

From then, the violence escalated. On one occasion, after Jessica refused sex, he broke the TV remote control. Following another terrible argument, he hit her in the face. In the days afterwards, he apologised. But when he started pushing and abusing her again during a subsequent argument, Jessica called police and obtained an intervention order.

She is now sharing a house in Melbourne's south with another Indian woman and has casual teaching work. "He has made my life really hell. I just want my mental peace of mind. I am on antidepressants and having counselling," Jessica says.

"But I don't want to go back to India because there is such a stigma attached to being divorced and I don't want to be a burden on my family. So that is why I am trying to get my life back together here."

*Jessica and Dheen are assumed names

<http://www.canberratimes.com.au/world/dowrys-dark-shadow-20140522-38ris.html>

<http://www.smh.com.au/world/dowry-dark-shadow-20140522-38ris.html>

Move to ban dowry practice among Indians in Victoria

May 23, 2014 Rachel Kleinman Dr Manjula O'Connor. *Photo: Joe Armao.*

Women's rights advocates and former premier Ted Baillieu are pushing to have the Indian practice of dowry banned in Victoria amid claims it leads to domestic violence and the abuse of women. Mr Baillieu tabled a petition in State Parliament in April calling for amendments to family violence laws.

Economic abuse was made illegal under the Family Violence Act in 2008, but campaigners also want a specific ban on the dowry, which would bring state law into line with Indian law. The move has caused deep rifts within the state's 190,000-strong Indian community. Manjula O'Connor, an Indian-born psychiatrist and research fellow at Melbourne University, said the dowry must be outlawed. Dr O'Connor said through her private practice she saw many women who had suffered dowry-related domestic violence.

"Paying a dowry belittles the woman, it reinforces their role as inferior in the relationship and it makes the marriage an economic transaction," she said. Sometimes a man's family was unhappy with the amount paid and this could trigger violence and abuse against his wife or in-laws. Paying and accepting a dowry is a centuries-old tradition in India where the bride's parents give gifts of cash, clothes and jewellery to the groom's family. It has been illegal in India since 1961 but is still widely practised in arranged marriages.

Mr Baillieu was contacted by Dr O'Connor when he was premier. "Dowry is clearly part of the issue faced by these women," he said. Dr O'Connor will discuss the issue with state Attorney-General Robert Clark. Mr Baillieu said the matter may be referred to the Victorian Law Reform Commission. India's National Crimes Bureau reported that 8233 women died in 2012 due to dowry-related crimes. Many others took their own lives.

<http://www.theage.com.au/victoria/move-to-ban-dowry-practice-among-indians-in-victoria-20140522-38rra.html>

Domestic Violence Only Thrives in Silence, but You DO Have a Choice.

Malti Bhojwani 12 May 2014. *You have the power to end domestic violence simply by shining a spotlight on it. Image courtesy: © Thinkstock photos/ Getty images*

It saddens me to realise just how many women choose to stay in marriages where they are miserable, and it shocks me to see how many feel like it is normal to be physically and or emotionally abused by their partners. It further infuriates me to see how many parents expect their daughters to stay in these torture chambers for the sake of society and to avoid the stigma of divorce. But they stay because they don't believe they have a choice. Their upbringing and social values have burned into them that they have no options. Their silence is what keeps them there and unfortunately, the people they turn to are also afraid and keep silent as well.

Then there are those who are not being abused, but nevertheless are truly miserable, have no intimacy at all or understanding and can't even be friendly with each their partners. **Marriage can be one of the most fulfilling partnerships life has to offer, but when that is not the case, it is indeed sad to deem yourself undeserving of personal joy.**

Unfortunately, many marriages are not even humane; with suppression, control and fear present every single day. It isn't about the marriage then but rather about allowing an insecure and dysfunctional and possibly dangerous man to continue to behave in an insane and inhuman way and then making excuses to justify it. Or in the less dramatic scenarios, it's about resigning to a lifetime of negativity and sadness.

Please don't get me wrong, though divorced at a young age myself, I am not an advocate for it. Ideally marriage should be a lifelong commitment where two people support each other as companions despite their changing needs and goals. Perhaps the most important thing in a marriage is a commitment to relate lovingly and respectfully with each other every single day. In my case, we were both too young, to think responsibly, but I was lucky that we did maintain a fabulous and healthy working relationship as co-parents to our daughter.

When kids are involved. Choosing to get married was one decision you made, choosing to have kids is another. So if you do choose divorce, as a parent, it is your responsibility to be adult about it. Just because your marriage ends, it does not mean that your co-parenting should. Maintaining a working, peaceful relationship with your ex should be of topmost priority when co-parenting after divorce. Your circumstances may be different and unique, but know that you are not alone.

Being 'selfish' is an approach advocated by Ron Wilkinson, Ph.D., a psychotherapist in Dallas with over three decades of clinical experience working with families. Dr. Wilkinson has been co-parent to his two sons. He and his wife remain good friends.

I encourage parents to be goal-oriented and selfish," Wilkinson told me in one of our discussions. "In our culture, 'selfish' tends to be [interpreted as a negative] word. In a

more pure sense, however, a selfish person is someone who gets what he or she wants.” When parents see that there is something in it for them, to have a friendship with the ex-husband or to appear like the good guy to the kids, for example, it makes the whole task easier to do.

Family functioning has been the major emphasis of Wilkinson’s study and training at both the master’s and doctoral level. He has treated many families struggling with this issue, and has found time and again that nothing is more important to a child’s life after the divorce than the relationship between the parents. His 1992 doctoral dissertation confirmed this fact.

Kids are more resilient and intelligent than you think. If you want your children to think well of you, now and when they grow up; if you want your former spouse to be more cooperative; if you want to have a say in your child’s life, be selfish and go for what you want, Wilkinson tells his patients. When they grow up, children always value a parent who stayed in their lives; they are resentful and angry when a parent leaves them or continually causes difficulty.

A child is not concerned with who is right and who is wrong; he or she is concerned with having a relationship with both parents, regardless of the child’s age. Having said that, forcing a child to stay in a home where one parent is being abused and is petrified of the other is not healthy at all, and no matter how hard you try to hide it, they will know and often blame themselves for the abuse.

The factors that enable married parents to work harmoniously are the same as those that help divorced parents work together, says Rick Hanson Ph.D., a clinical psychologist and the first author of *Mother Nurture: A Mother’s Guide to Health in Body, Mind, and Intimate Relationships* (Penguin, 2002).

These factors include personal well-being, emotional openness, civility, empathy, goodwill, clarity about the values and principles that guide parenting practices and skill at negotiating practical arrangements. In the case of an abusive husband, this could be a little more challenging. Engage his hopefully sane and responsible parents in communicating how best to co-parent post divorce. Maintaining a working alliance with the child’s other parent, provided you are sure he won’t endanger their lives or ill-treat them, will give your child a sense of family and belonging. When parents make a decision to have a child, it is a lifetime commitment.

When there is abuse at home around children, realise that you are either subjecting your children to the similar fear and control from their father and possibly even being abused themselves. If your kids are “lucky” in that the abuser only lashes out and humiliates you in front of the kids, you are showing your sons that it is okay to do the same to women,

and your daughters that it is normal to accept being beaten and robbed of all human dignity. Divorce is hard on kids, but sometimes staying in a bad marriage may be even worse.

You do have a choice. I had the honour of being on Australian Radio late last year and it was a topic that truly saddens me — where women stay in abusive relationships. Uzma Beg the radio host asked me to offer my advice to the listeners who included women who stay in relationships with partners who cheat on them, beat them, attack them, insult and humiliate them *because of LOVE.* I disagree. Love is not like that at all. Love is when YOU love yourself first and SANITY is when you still have the mental capacity to protect yourself first. One attempt of harm on your SELF has to be the last one!

Women, especially Indian women are afraid of the lack of financial support, of the stigma and how society or other men will look at them and also about disappointing their parents. But when it comes to abuse, no one deserves to take it. Seek the support of one person you can trust and make the decision to live in dignity.

Let me tell you, you will not get a lot of support, you will be told to try harder to accept it, to change yourself and not aggravate your husband, you will be reminded of how hard it is to be a divorced woman in our society, but weigh out the consequences of sticking it out forever and then decide. You will have to be stable and extremely committed to your decision without second-guessing yourself. Don't doubt yourself and you will come out of it in some time happy and peaceful. Nothing worth doing is easy, but do you stay out of the fear of uncertainty clinging on to the devil you know? It is your choice.

Yes it is hard, having to work hard and support yourself or kids on a single income, having to seek out help from friends and family even, and having to tolerate the advances from sleazy men who see divorced women as “easy prey.” But you can recover your personal dignity and strength. You will be able to find your feet and be peaceful and happy again.

The most bitter pill to swallow from my books and workshops has been when I share with people that we DO have choices. Sure the prices or consequences may be high, but to me, short of “death – by firing-squad,” we have choices! We choose where we are and who we stay with. When one woman finds the courage and dignity to choose “her” then it gives other women the courage and inspiration to do the same.

Leslie Morgan Steiner is a writer and outspoken advocate for survivors of domestic violence — which includes herself. Watch her TED Talk for more on why women tolerate such abuse. She is empathetic and understanding. It is a truly inspirational talk. **“Abuse thrives only in silence. You have the power to end domestic violence simply by shining a spotlight on it.”**

“A person who loves herself would protect her life and safety first. A dependency on an abusive man is an unhealthy obsession. Nothing is worse than taking and then justifying and most of all blaming yourself for the abuse. Please don't get me wrong again, I am not advocating divorce. If there is no abuse, then become extremely clear of what you want your life to be about and see if you can enroll your husband into sharing that vision with you, whether it is about parenting your kids or advancing your personal and professional growth in a direction where you support each other. If however, you know in your gut that alignment with him is impossible, then be selfish and think of your life. You deserve to be happy and peaceful and most of all to be free of fear especially in your own home and bed.”

<http://idiva.com/opinion-relationships/domestic-violence-only-thrives-in-silence-but-you-do-have-a-choice/29792>

Malti Bhojwani. Malti Bhojwani is a best selling author and an experienced, fully-trained professional life coach, certified by the ICF. She's lived in Singapore, Indonesia and Australia and has helped scores of corporates, educational institutes, and individuals better themselves using her unique coaching techniques and live workshops. Life coaching is a future-focused practice with the aim of helping clients determine and achieve their personal goals. Malti's unique and successful methods do not give you answers to your problems but help you find the answers yourself.

Violence Against Women. Wire23 May 2014.

Violence against women is a significant human rights issue in Victoria. All women have a right to safety in homes, schools, at work and on the streets.

Whether in the home or elsewhere, physical or psychological violence against women is something that can happen to any woman, regardless of her age, ethnicity or wealth. Violence against women is a serious, widespread problem in our society and we frequently assist women who have experienced violence.

Women who contact us commonly talk about domestic violence, sexual assault and/or child abuse. Our information sheets below provide contact details of available outreach services, women's refuges and other safe accommodation, and other resources dealing with violence against women.

Domestic/ Family violence. Domestic violence and abuse is a growing and recognised problem for women. Nobody has the right to abuse or control you. If you are experiencing or know someone experiencing domestic violence, this brochure provides information on getting legal advice, protecting yourself and your children, and the help and support services available.

Money problems with your partner? *Dealing with financial abuse*. Many people think of family violence as physical injury or emotional abuse. However, withholding money, controlling all the household spending or refusing to include you in financial decisions is often part of family violence and is called economic or financial abuse.

Women from all socio-economic and ethnic backgrounds with or without children can experience financial abuse. Controlling the money is a common aspect of family violence, and can happen to any woman regardless of her financial ability or knowledge.

Sexual assault. One in three women will be sexually assaulted at some time in their life, and it can happen to women and children from all walks of life. Some forms of sexual assault are criminal offenses and the impacts of experiencing or witnessing an assault are varied. Besides dispelling destructive myths surrounding sexual assault, this sheet gives information on assistance for victims and their steps to recovery, and advises family and friends how they can support victims.

Stalking. Stalking is when a person, usually someone you know, tries to keep in contact or spies on you. It is a criminal offence and there is a high probability of violence when stalking persists for more than two weeks. After this point, it is recommended that you take a proactive approach such as contacting the police, documenting the stalking, informing your friends or considering an intervention order. (Kindly funded by the Lord Mayor's Charitable Foundation)

Young people who use violence in the home. A child who is violent or engages in abusive behaviour is not simply suffering from teenage angst. Handling the situation can be difficult, especially when many risk factors can aggravate their behaviour. This information booklet gives some tips on identifying abusive behaviour, how to deal with them and where to get further support for both you and your children.

<http://www.wire.org.au/information-resources/violence/?gclid=CKbYg4aEwb4CFUcDvAodZiUAQw>