

# **Family Violence and Medico-Legal Issues in Australian Migrant Communities**

**will be presented by Professor Manjula Datta O'Connor**



**The Annual General Meeting of the Society will be held on Saturday, 22 November  
2025 Melbourne Club, 36 Collins Street, Melbourne**

**Drinks served 6.30pm, Presentation 7.00pm, followed by Dinner**

**Dress: Black Tie**

Family violence remains a pervasive public health and human rights issue in Australia, with migrant communities facing unique and often compounding vulnerabilities. This presentation explores the complex medico-legal dimensions of family violence in culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) populations, highlighting the intersection of health, legal, and migration systems.

Domestic abuse is expressed, endured, and silenced differently across different cultures, notwithstanding the fact that some contributory elements such as gender inequality and mental health issues are shared. These communities are not on the margins of the national story. 30.7 per cent of Australians are born overseas and the top ten migrant source countries include India, China, Nepal, Pakistan and Sri Lanka. We cannot overlook their story. Our understanding of gendered violence has lagged in such communities. My clinical, research and community-based activism reveals that feminist analysis of inequality is necessary, but not sufficient to understand and eventually stop family violence. I will speak about how I discovered a particular form of financial abuse termed 'dowry abuse' in Australia and recognised the influence of tradition, family hierarchy, migration stressors, and the imbalance of power between genders.

Clinicians are frequently the initial point of contact for reports of domestic abuse from their patients. It is a difficult task to respond sensitively and effectively to disclosures of abuse, while safeguarding the trust and wellbeing of the patient. Legally, we are bound to protect—but ethically, we must also advocate. That was how I became involved in activism and advocacy.

The law is meant to protect, but for migrant survivors, fear of visa cancellation, deportation, or community ostracism can silence cries for help. These aren't just legal challenges—they are deeply human ones. Migration law, family law, and health law intersect in complex ways, and too often, systems work in silos.

I found that progress requires collaboration between medical, legal, and social services. To achieve reforms that prioritise migrant voices and experiences, collaboration with media, public servants, and politicians is essential.

By deepening our understanding of the medico-legal landscape and embracing a holistic, human-centred response, we can move closer to ensuring safety, justice, and healing for all families—regardless of their origin.

---

**Professor Manjula Datta O'Connor MBBS FRANZCP DPM MMED**

Professor Manjula Datta O'Connor is a psychiatrist in private practice with clinical and research interest in migrant women's mental health, family violence, complex trauma and trauma therapy.

She is Hon Clinical A/ Professor at the Department of Psychiatry University of Melbourne, and Adjunct Professor UNSW Department of Social Sciences. Manjula is the immediate past Chair Bi-National Family Violence Psychiatry Network. of the Royal Australian New Zealand College of Psychiatrists. She is an invited examiner and mentors her peers.

She is the author of the book \*Daughters of Durga\* and was invited to give readings at the Brisbane Writers Festival 2023.

Manjula is an invited expert on government committees regarding migrant women's safety. Manjula frequently appears on media as a guest.

Manjula co-founded the NGO, the AustralAsian Centre for human rights and health (ACHRH) in 2012. As the Executive Director of ACHRH she successfully led the dowry abuse campaign in Australia culminating in law change in Victoria in 2019; inclusion of dowry abuse in the Attorney General's National Principles to Address Coercive Control in Family and Domestic Violence 2023 and successfully advocated to change Federal Family Law Act 2025 to include dowry abuse as an example of financial abuse. ACHRH under Manjula's directorship won the Innovative Award for migrant community education around Australian culture. In its short existence (12 years) ACHRH has won around \$1million in grants.

### **Recognition and awards**

Manjula received the Premiers Award Victorian Senior of the year 2024, was inducted into the Victorian Honour Roll 2024, the Multicultural Honour Roll 2024, and received the Meritorious Award from the Royal NZ College of Psychiatrists Victorian Branch 2023. She was recognized with the Victorian Government Multicultural Award for Excellence in Service Delivery in Women's Health 2012, the Changemaker Award at Women's Agenda 2020, and the Australia India Business and Community Excellence Award. She was also listed among the top 100 Indians in Australia 2022.

Manjula's name has been mentioned multiple times in the Federal and Victorian Parliament.

More information can be found on [www.manjulaconnor.com](http://www.manjulaconnor.com)

---

**Members may bring guests who need not be legal or medical practitioners.**

**Acceptances close Friday, 13 November 2025 and no acceptances or refunds will be available after this date.**

**Members and their guests are reminded of the dress requirements. Mobile telephones may not be used inside the Melbourne Club. Urgent calls may be made to the Club on (9650 4941) and a message will be conveyed by Club staff.**

**The Committee reminds Members that the premises are to be vacated by 11.00 pm.**

**Host Member: Mr William Edwards**

**Mr Ian Rose, Hon. Legal Secretary**  
**Tel: (03) 9645 1597 or 0419 551 362**

**Dr Craig Barnett, Hon. Medical Secretary**  
**Tel: (03) 9429 2724 or 0407 532 447**