



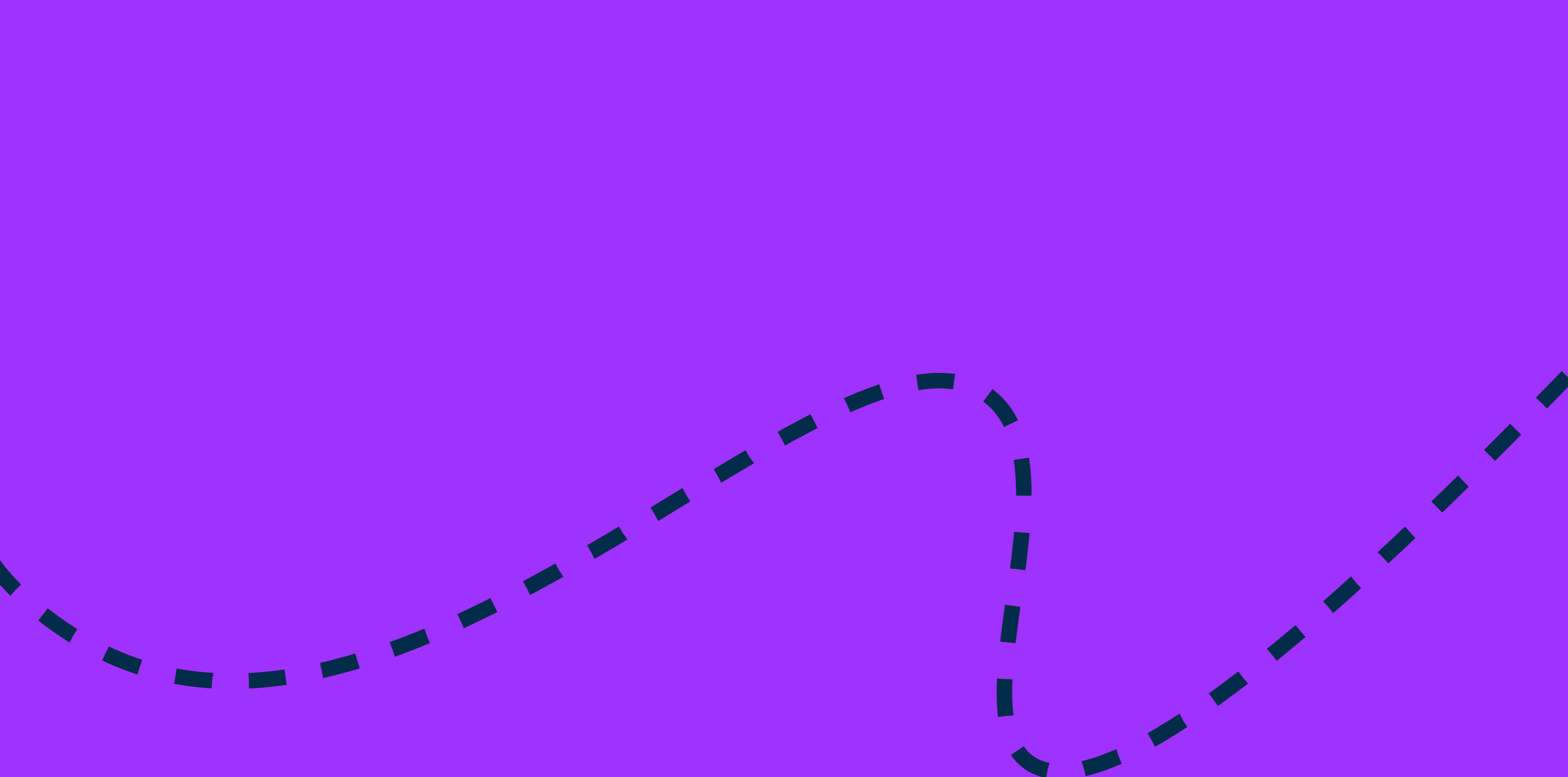
# Dowry Abuse and South Asian Populations in Australia

*A Narrative of Project Findings*



**PARRAMATTA**





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➔ Dowry Abuse and South Asian  
Populations in Australia: A Narrative of  
Project Findings

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Council and Western Sydney University

DR TINASHE DUNE, JULIANA NKRUMAH, SHARMILA  
FALZON, KITTU RANDHAWA, HINA KHAN, TAMIMA  
RAHMAN & RITESH CHIMORIYA



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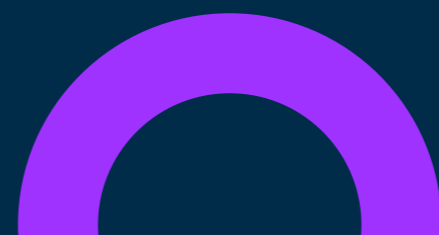
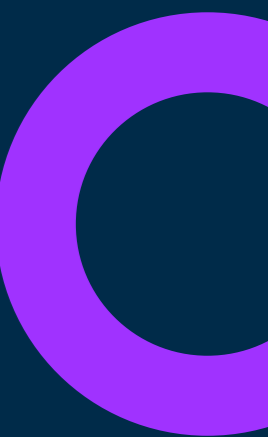
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## 1.0

# Contextual overview

### 1.1 What is dowry abuse?

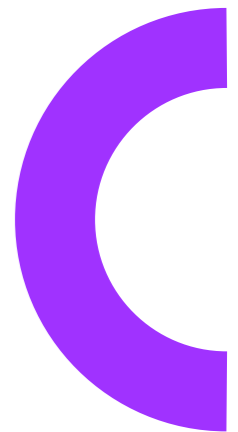
Dowry is a cultural practice where a person transfers money, property, goods, in the form of gifts to their partner's family before, upon or after marriage. Dowry abuse is an act of violence or abuse and threats, linked with giving or receiving dowry, any time before, during or after the marriage.

### 1.2 Dowry abuse among South Asian populations

The giving of dowry is a marriage custom prevalent in South Asian countries and becoming increasingly popular in Australia. The South Asian populations comprise of those originating from countries such as Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Maldives, Nepal, Pakistan, Myanmar, and Sri Lanka. Although dowry is illegal in key South Asian countries, it remains a common practice.

### 1.3 What this project aimed to do

This project was funded by City of Parramatta Council, Western Sydney University and Indian Crisis Support Agency, with subject matter expertise provided by Settlement Services International. It aims to understand how to define and identify dowry abuse and address this type of domestic and family violence within the South Asian community of Western Sydney.



## 2.0

# Interview findings

Interviews were conducted with South Asian women who are survivors of dowry abuse, and service providers who support the victims. Despite a consensus that dowry abuse is wrong, it continues to prevail among South Asian communities in Australia. All acknowledged dowry abuse to be a complex issue that overlaps with family and intimate partner violence.

### What the service providers and South Asian women had to say about dowry abuse

"...I think any marketing campaign is not going to stop dowry abuse because it is linked to so many other issues underneath it... and ...if I was going to make 100 grand by getting my son married to someone, I might be tempted too"

"We have discovered...what I called serial abuses- so they get one woman and squeeze her and her family for all the money or pecuniary interest and then they chuck her away, divorce her, whatever and send her back to home country and they will find another one..."

"When people become, in a sense, become greedy or beyond imagination and keep demanding of the woman and her family to keep paying more and using practises like coercion and physical abuse, emotional abuse, threats to put the woman in a place where the family and the woman lose all sense of joy in being in that relationship."

"I just I think because it is so much behind closed doors, it's the family presents nicely in the community and people think well of that. And I guess it's partly our fault as a society because we haven't made enough noise about dowry abuse to, to open people's eyes"



## 3.0

# Case file findings

We examined case files from domestic violence services within the Parramatta Local Government Area covering 2013 to 2020. We found 49 clear cases of dowry abuse; where the victims had South Asian descent, an average of at least six dowry abuse cases per year.

### Key findings

- |                                 |   |
|---------------------------------|---|
| <b>3.1 Gender and Heritage</b>  | Most victims of dowry abuse were female (84%), and born in India (80%).   |
| <b>3.2 Employment status</b>    | At the time when the victims sought help, many were unemployed (51%), and some did not have working rights in Australia (10%).  |
| <b>3.3 Immigration history</b>  | Majority of the victims were on a spousal visa (57%), much higher than those with Australian permanent residency (18%).   |
| <b>3.4 Language skills</b>      | Many victims had adequate to very good English language skills (90%). The two most common languages were Punjabi (43%) and Hindi (37%).   |
| <b>3.5 Dowry</b>                | The case files recorded cash as dowry ranging from AUD\$42,000 to AUD\$195,000. The cash commonly used to pay for the groom's student tuition fee in Australia, as well as the wife's visa processing charges and relocation charges. |
| <b>3.6 Other forms of dowry</b> | Other economic gains in the form of wedding gifts included gold, property, cars, and the women's salaries (as demanded by the groom's family).  |
| <b>3.7 Ongoing Abuse</b>        | The study revealed cases of continuous demand for gifts and instances of sexual extortion.  |



## 4.0

# Case study: Priyanka

Priyanka's story highlights how dowry abuse continues to exist and can be practiced in a subversive way, leaving victims with more complexity to escape dowry abuse.

### Priyanka's story

*Priyanka<sup>1</sup>, a 35-year-old woman of South Asian descent and a single mother, had a typical case of dowry abuse.*

*Priyanka, born in India, had recently completed her bachelor's degree when her family arranged her marriage with Vikram<sup>2</sup>, who was undertaking postgraduate studies in Australia.*

*Priyanka's family was ecstatic for her to start a new life in Australia and considered the requests for wedding gifts made by the groom's family to be customary. Her family spent around AUD\$60,000 in wedding costs. Priyanka's wedding*

*"gifts" included gold and cash, which was also used to cover her visa charges and relocation costs as well as the groom's tuition fees.*

*Priyanka was not prepared for the continuous demand for gifts which involved threats, controlling behaviour, coercion, and sexual extortion that she experienced upon her arrival in Australia.*

*Priyanka gave birth to a baby boy, and she presumed that the physical and emotional abuse would stop. However, Priyanka's family was asked to pay even more money considering the new addition to the family.*

*Priyanka was constantly threatened that she will have her visa revoked, which was tied to her spouse's student visa.*

*The dowry abuse continued for four years; Priyanka became isolated in a foreign country with little to no support for a person with her visa status.*

*Priyanka then began to fear Vikram may inflict physical abuse on her child, so she reached out to her cousin living in Australia. She and her son moved out and then sought help from domestic violence support services.*

**There is the need for greater understanding and awareness of the existence of dowry abuse in Australia. There needs to be support for service providers to identify dowry abuse in victims that present to them. We need changes to the Immigration system so that victims do not suffer from systemic injustice as well as abuse due to their visa status.**

**Only then can people like Priyanka get the chance to break free from the cycle of dowry abuse.**

<sup>1</sup> Not real name

<sup>2</sup> Not real name

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**Address:** 126 Church St, Parramatta  
PO Box 32, Parramatta NSW, 2124

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**Phone:** 1300 617 058

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**Email:** [council@cityofparramatta.nsw.gov.au](mailto:council@cityofparramatta.nsw.gov.au)

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**Web:** [cityofparramatta.nsw.gov.au](http://cityofparramatta.nsw.gov.au)

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**📞 For non-English speakers, phone interpretation services are available via TIS National on 131 450.**

#### KOREAN

본 소식지와 관련해 통역 지원이 필요하신 경우, TIS (131 450)에 전화하여 Parramatta Customer Service (9806 5050)를 연결해 달라고 요청하시면 됩니다. 업무시간은 월요일에서 금요일, 오전 8시 30분부터 오후 5시까지입니다.

#### CHINESE

如果你需要翻译协助阅读这份新闻简报, 请联系 TIS, 电话131 450, 要求他们代表你接通巴拉玛打市议会顾客服务处, 电话 9806 5050。顾客服务处的工作时间是每星期一至星期五, 上午8:30至下午5:00。

#### ARABIC

إذا كنت بحاجة للمساعدة في ترجمة هذه النشرة, اتصل بـ TIS على الرقم 131 450 واطلب منهم الاتصال نيابة عنك بخدمة زبائن باراماتا على الرقم 9806 5050 من الإثنين إلى الجمعة بين الساعة 8:30 صباحاً و 5:00 مساءً.

#### HINDI

यदि आपको यह सूचना-पत्र समझने में सहायता चाहिए तो कृपया TIS को 131 450 पर फ़ोन करें और उनसे कहें कि आपकी तरफ़ से पैरामाटा कस्टमर सर्विस को 9806 5050 पर फ़ोन करें। यह सेवा सोमवार से शुक्रवार, सुबह 8.30 बजे से शाम 5.00 तक उपलब्ध है।

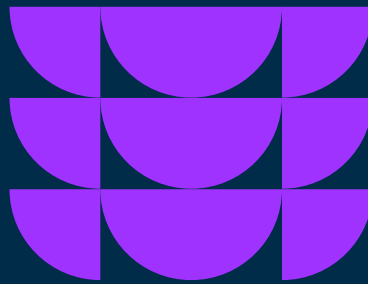
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➔ Document Design by Studio Storm Australia

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*Developed in partnership with:*

