



Committee Secretary
Senate Legal and Constitutional Affairs Committee
PO Box 6100
Parliament House
Canberra ACT 2600

August 16, 2018

Dear Committee Secretary,

RE: The practice of dowry and the incidence of dowry abuse in Australia

Domestic Violence Victoria (DV Vic) is an autonomous, non-government peak body organisation whose membership consists of over 80 state-wide and regional specialist family violence agencies across Victoria, providing a variety of specialist services to women and children who have experienced family violence. Our members also include community and women's health agencies, some local governments and other community service agencies. As the recognised representative of the specialist family violence sector in Victoria, DV Vic is the key stakeholder organising, advocating for, and acting on behalf of the specialist family violence sector. In this role, DV Vic holds a central position in the Victorian coordinated family violence system and its governance structures. DV Vic provides policy advice and advocacy to the Victorian Government about family violence response and systems reform and drives best practice in family violence through our role in the development and support of the statewide specialist programs, including the development of the Code of Practice for Specialist Family Violence Services.

Domestic Violence Victoria (DV Vic) congratulates the Senate Standing Committee on Constitutional and Legal Affairs on their inquiry into the practice of dowry and dowry abuse in Australia. Importantly for DV Vic, this timely enquiry provides an opportunity for the practice of dowry to be properly understood, and to explore the intersection between dowry-related abuse and domestic and family violence in order to articulate options for addressing this issue.

DV Vic fully supports and endorses the joint submission to the inquiry made by Good Shepherd Australia and New Zealand and InTouch Multicultural Centre Against Family Violence, as well as the individual submissions from Harmony Alliance, Australian Women Against Violence Alliance, and Anti-Slavery Australia.

In particular, DV Vic draws the Commission's attention to the following issues raised in each submission:

Domestic Violence Victoria

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- Dowry abuse occurs within a continuum of family violence, and as part of a pattern of coercive and threatening tactics that may include various other forms of family violence including physical violence and abuse. It is underpinned by and reinforces gender inequality, male privilege and discrimination against women. It must be analysed and responded to from a feminist intersectional perspective and mainstreamed into the prevention and intervention responses to violence against women and family violence across Australia.
- Recognising this, the Royal Commission into Family Violence in Victoria recommended that the definition of family violence be expanded to include examples of dowry-related abuse. DV Vic supports the position of our partners in their submissions that this should be expanded to the national level (and all states), including in the family law jurisdiction.
- Further, criminal justice responses must be recognised as just one option within a coordinated family violence response to dowry abuse, and one which will not be appropriate for many survivors of family violence experiencing dowry abuse. Therefore, resources for responses to family violence must be sufficient to ensure specialist family violence services and other first responders have the capacity, knowledge and skills to assist survivors of dowry abuse.
- Survivors of dowry abuse and related offences such as forced marriage must have access to trauma-based psychosocial support irrespective of whether they engage with Federal legal interventions.
- Improve data collection related to dowry abuse throughout the family violence system.
- Family violence provisions under the *Migration Act 1958* must urgently be reviewed. The review must ensure that:
 - Dowry abuse is recognised within the definition of family violence, as is the diversity of perpetrators of dowry abuse beyond an intimate partner.
 - The process for assessing eligibility for the family violence provision must reflect the nature and tactics of dowry abuse, noting that the evidence currently required to demonstrate a genuine relationship is most often antithetical to the experience of family violence, including dowry abuse.
 - Expand the visa classes that the family violence provisions apply to in recognition that visa insecurity is leveraged as a tactic for the further perpetration of family violence, including dowry abuse.
 - Survivors of family violence subject to the family violence provisions within the *Migration Act 1958* have access to financial support, including those affected by dowry abuse.

Please contact DV Vic for further clarification on the points raised above and/or if you have any further questions.

Kind regards,

Fiona McCormack
CEO