



**SHAKTI**

COMMUNITY COUNCIL INC.

**CULTURE IS NO EXCUSE FOR ABUSE!**

**Presentation to  
New Zealand Sexual Health Society  
Rotorua, 2013  
by Shila Nair**

# Shakti Community Council Inc



**SHAKTI**  
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- **Set up in 1995 as a women's organisation**
- **Established by Asian, African and Middle Eastern immigrant women to service Ethnic migrant and refugee women.**
- **Gaps in culturally specific and culturally competent response prompted Shakti to set up services in domestic/family violence intervention and prevention.**
- **Domestic Violence survivors as role models and as catalysts for social change**
- **Women's Rights and Human Rights based**

# Shakti Community Council Inc.



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- **Approved and accredited with CYF as an umbrella organisation that can deliver specialist, culturally competent domestic violence intervention services nationally.**
- **Shakti New Zealand holds several government funding contracts and is supported by private trusts and community donors.**
- **Largest and only government approved national immigrant organisation in New Zealand offering such specialist services to Asian, African and Middle Eastern.**



## ***Our Mission***

We endeavour to facilitate and ensure safety and overall well-being of all women, young women and children through strategic intervention measures aimed at eliminating all forms of oppression and gender-based violence.

## ***Our Vision***

To have a world where women and children are empowered to live a life of dignity free from fear and violence and are able to exercise their rights, choices and responsibilities



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# Our Core Services

**The projects / programmes delivered to over 40 different ethnic communities include:**

- **24 / 7, multi-lingual, multi-cultural domestic violence crisis attendance and pick up services, nationally, through 0800SHAKTI**
- **4 specialist Refuges – 2 in Auckland and 1 each in Christchurch and Tauranga.**
- **8 Drop-In centres nationally for Women & Children, and 1 drop in centre for Families in Auckland**
- **Services for Youth – by youth for youth**
- **Advocacy – Human Rights, Legal, Housing, Police, Immigration**



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# Shakti Member Organisations

## **Shakti Community Council Inc.; organisations in New Zealand:**

- Shakti Asian Women's Centre Inc. - Auckland
- Shakti Asian Women's Safe house Inc. (2 Refuges) - Auckland
- Shakti Legal Advocacy & Family Social Services Inc.- Auckland
- Shakti Education Training & Advisory Company (SETAC) \*NZQA-Registered training & education provider (Auckland and nationwide)
- Shakti Ethnic Women's Support Group Central Region Inc. (1 Refuge)
- Shakti Ethnic Women's Support Group Christchurch Inc. (1 Refuge)
- Shakti Ethnic Women's Support Group Wellington Inc. (Refuge proposed)

## **Shakti Overseas:**

- Shakti Migrant & Refugee Women's Support Group Melbourne Inc.
- Shakti Migrant & Refugee Women's Support Group NSW Inc.
- Shakti Australia Inc.

# Shakti Australia











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## Journey into Asia & the Middle East

# Project Women Against Violence

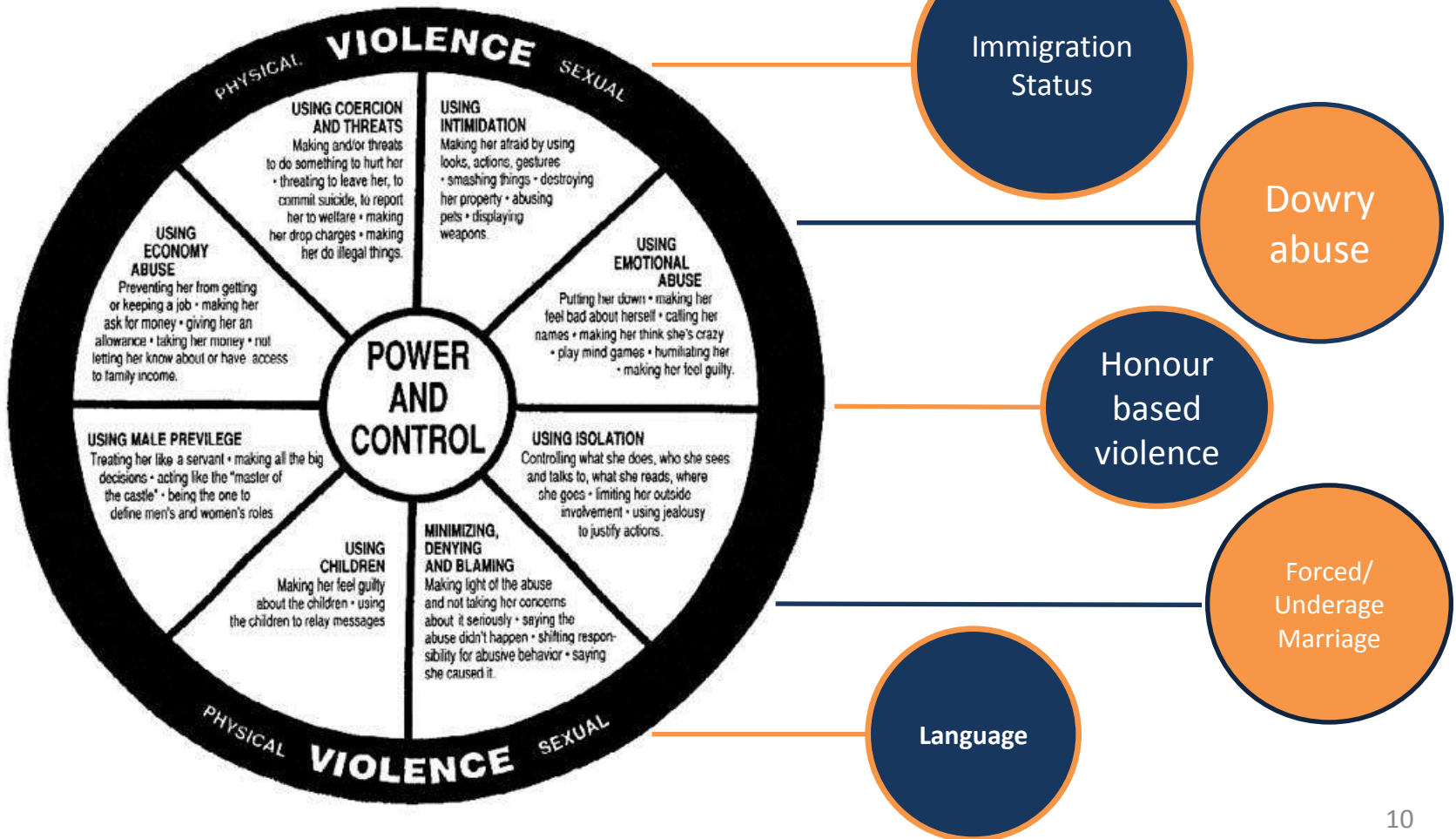
- Project was launched in 2008, building transnational relationships with NGOs; scoping done in Japan, Korea, Singapore, Malaysia, Nepal, Bangladesh and India as well as prominent Western countries of migration such as the USA
- Main activities involve capacity-building in partnership with local NGOs towards empowerment, advocating for suitable legislation for women and enabling establishment of refuge services



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# Additional Elements Specific to Migrants and Refugees





# How Abuse is seen in Ethnic Communities in New Zealand

- ❑ Abuse is culturally sanctioned in almost all ethnic communities. Abuse is part of life for many and as a result women are unable to identify 'Abuse' as such
- ❑ Physical assault with hands or objects are considered normal and often takes place in front of other family members who do not intervene



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- Marital rape is not considered as 'violence'. Most often the woman does not have a choice to retain/terminate her pregnancy.
  
- Language barriers, poor access to information and intra-community pressure keep women vulnerable and in the constant fear of being abandoned by their husbands
  
- Women who break away from abuse and get justice are stigmatised and isolated by their respective communities and struggle to rebuild their lives



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- ❑ Ethnic communities are by and large close-knit and religious: Cross over between religion and culture
- ❑ Disregard of issues related to abuse and violence against women and children within cultural set-ups and safety is compromised
- ❑ Reinforcement of traditional patriarchal systems and gender roles.
- ❑ Most religious leaders come from overseas -- Little exposure to New Zealand society and laws.



# Forced / Underage Marriage



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## What is under-age marriage?

- Underage marriage involves the marrying of children (often girls) under the legal age.
- Difficult to pin-point where the practice originated
- Happens in the Middle East, Asia, Oceania and Africa.
- Some countries have no age restrictions on marriage; in Yemen, age restriction to marriage was abolished in 1999.
  - Consummation of marriage is set at onset of puberty, which is interpreted by some to be as early as 9.
  - Likewise, no age restriction for Saudi Arabia

With little restriction being placed on marriage age paedophilia becomes culturally and legally sanctioned

## Disadvantages

- Greater control over the young brides by groom and family
- Increase likelihood of sexual abuse and domestic violence, also health implications on being young mothers
- Drastic decrease in chances of schooling
- Limited capacity to enter paid labour force



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## What is forced-marriage?

- Marriage without free consent
- Practiced across **history, culture and social levels**
- Communal links and “**family honour**” highly valued. Used as power and control tool
- Speaking out **risks** isolation, persecution, even honour killing
- To **control** women’s sexuality; honour of the family tied to their status
  - In many cases, triggered when women are seeking to exercise freedom to choose a spouse, or objecting to family’s choice
- Strengthen **family alliances**
- **Preserve cultural and traditional rights** within respective ethnicities



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# Dowry Abuse

- Dowry (monetary or otherwise) are given to the family of the groom to **increase the “value” of the girls**, and thus their marriageability.
- Brides=increase of family members = burden (brides may or may not contribute to family income)
  - **Dowry is therefore compensation, and it is never enough**
- Directly contributes to the high rates of female **infanticide/foeticide** especially for families who are unable to cope with the financial burden
- India outlawed dowry in 1961, but the practice still continues

Marriage is not just between two people, but could potentially involve the whole family and half the community!

### **This relates us to honour-based violence...**

The girls are under constant surveillance, and if it is suspected that the girl has transgressed the “honour code” and thus brought the family to disrepute, it could evoke a range of responses, such as...

- **Forced abortion; hymen repair**
- **Abduction and imprisonment**
- **Forced marriage**
- **Forced suicide**
- **Killing -- may be punishment for girls who refuse to enter into the forced marriage.**

### **Why?**

Besides dowry payments, forced marriage happen partially due to a **desire for cultural-preservation and often for residency** of the groom in Western countries

To ensure that the girls marry what is **deemed the “right” men** by the family, whether this is in terms of race, economic status or caste.



# Human trafficking



Forced marriage = human trafficking?

- Facilitation of marriage for Immigration purposes (sponsorship of family/relatives)
- Dowry = exchange for residency status
- Young girls (under 18 years) sponsored on spousal visas to resident men
- Refugee women: war creates increased vulnerability for women to be trafficked



**WOMEN'S UN REPORT NETWORK -  
WUNRN**

**AFGHANISTAN - FORCED MARRIAGE - GIRL CHILD**

WUNRN

<http://www.wunrn.com>

*The New York Times*



**WOMEN'S UN REPORT NETWORK -  
WUNRN**

# Marriage Without Consent: Girls' & Women's Human Rights



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According to the WOMEN'S UN REPORT NETWORK the following types of marriages continue to be practiced. Such marriages promote culturally sanctioned abuse

- Child Marriage
- Forced Marriage
- Compensation Marriage: the practice of forcing a girl into arranged marriages as compensation for a murder perpetration by a family member, to repay debts, food and property or settle other disputes
- Incestual Marriage – Father marrying the daughter
- Kidnapping Marriage – Cultural practice in some countries / Gender disparity in eligible girls/women
- Trafficking Marriage
- Muta'a, or "pleasure marriage," entitles a man to take on many wives for one day to several years

**SEXUAL VIOLENCE IS AN INTEGRAL PART OF SUCH CULTURALLY SANCTIONED ABUSE**

# Effects on Women & Young Women



- Emotional
- Physical
- Reproductive
- Financial
- Unable to lead what we call `normal' lives
- Stigma and Ostracisation



# Loss of young women's lives



**Banaz Mahmood**

UK  
Complaint to the police  
with fear of family  
killing her for walking  
out of an arranged and  
abusive marriage

Ignored, later tortured,  
raped and killed



**Heshu Yones**

UK  
Father tried to force  
her to marry her  
cousin in Kurdistan  
when found out she  
had a boyfriend

Father later slit her  
throat in the family  
home



**Shafilea Ahmed**

UK  
Refused the  
marriage her  
parents arranged  
for her

Attempted suicide

Jointly murdered  
by parents by  
asphyxiation with a  
plastic bag



# Shakti Intervention & Advocacy

- **Clear message in our intervention, awareness and advocacy:  
Culture is no excuse for abuse**
- **Since 2009, more younger and younger women accessing our services across NZ – Youth Unit established / Youth Refuge**
- **50% of overall cases have forced marriage component**
- **Under-aged marriage still occurring, many at 14 years, boys at aged 11 – awareness programmes in schools**
- **Submission to Justice Select Committee 2010**
- **CEDAW Lobbying 2012 – Recommendations to Government**
- **Letter of Agreement between Police, MSD and Govt agencies  
--acknowledgement of forced marriage in New Zealand**



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**THANK YOU FOR LISTENING**

**ANY QUESTIONS?**