



Mary F. Calvert/The Washington Times

HORROR: Varsha Hitkari was found hanging by a noose in July and remained in a coma for six weeks. Her parents blame her mother-in-law and husband, who had berated her for giving birth to two girls — including Pari, 18 months (right) — and demanded more dowry.

Brides bound by traditions

By Julia Duin
THE WASHINGTON TIMES

Second of four parts
"May you be the mother of a hundred sons" — a Sanskrit blessing

KANPUR, India — The best day of Varsha Hitkari's life was her wedding day when, dressed in a red sari with a gold veil and hennaed hands, she was presented to her new husband, Rakesh Kumar.

The ceremony eight years ago, accompanied by much festivity, featured a bride with a beautifully sculpted face who possessed degrees in sociology and law. The groom was a government official.

The bride's parents had to agree, as part of the dowry arrangement, to pay all the ex-

Indian women, families carry costly commitment of dowry

penses of their grandchildren's births. The husband also demanded 100,000 rupees — worth about \$2,200 — so he could buy an acre of land. Her parents refused to pay up, but they did provide a motorcycle.

As for the bride's in-laws, they wanted her to produce sons. In that, Mrs. Hitkari failed. Instead, she had two daughters: Himadri, now 5½, and Pari, 18 months. Her husband began berating her, demanding more dowry. When Mrs. Hitkari put Himadri into a school, her mother-in-law criticized her for educating a girl.



On July 23, Mrs. Hitkari's parents say, the mother-in-law and husband beat the woman senseless, then hanged her by a noose from a shower head. The bride's brother, Navneet Chandra, happened to drop by the

home and, glancing through an open door to the bathroom, was horrified to see his sister hanging there.

While the brother was trying to free his sister from the noose, Mr. Kumar was pulling on his wife's legs to try to tighten its grip. Only when Mr. Chandra's shouts roused the neighbors did the tug of war stop.

Mrs. Hitkari remained in a coma for six weeks, her story the stuff of local newspaper headlines. She came home to her family Sept. 18, able to sit up but not stand. Her movements were feeble; she could not speak and appeared to have suffered brain damage.

The 30-year-old woman now sits in a stark bedroom at her

CDC doctor opposes law for vaccine

Cancer-causing virus not contagious disease

By Gregory Lopes
THE WASHINGTON TIMES

The chairman of the federal panel that recommended the new cervical-cancer vaccine for pre-teen girls says lawmakers should not make the inoculation mandatory, as the District and more than 20 states, including Virginia, are considering.

Dr. Jon Abramson, chairman of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's advisory committee on immunization practices (ACIP), also said he and panel members told Merck & Co., the drug Gardasil's maker, not to lobby state lawmakers to require the vaccine for school attendance.



Abramson

"I told Merck my personal opinion that it shouldn't be mandated," Dr. Abramson told The Washington Times. "And they heard it from other committee members."

Dr. Abramson said he opposes mandating Gardasil, which prevents the cervical-cancer-causing human papillomavirus (HPV), because the sexually transmitted HPV is not a contagious disease like measles and he is not sure states can afford to inoculate all students.



One of an occasional series

"The vaccines out there now are for very communicable diseases. A child in school is not at an increased risk for HPV like he is measles," Dr. Abramson said.

In addition, Dr. Abramson said a discussion about making the vaccine mandatory should not be had until states show the money is available to vaccinate every child, adding, "I don't see that yet."

Taken in a series of three shots at \$120 each, Gardasil is the most expensive vaccine on the market. About 45 percent of children would be eligible for free vaccines from the federal Vaccinations for Children program, while the other 55 percent would depend on the state programs and insurance companies.

The ACIP, a 15-member panel charged with developing vaccine schedules and dosages, recommended Gardasil for 11- and 12-year-olds in July, spurring Merck's lobbying efforts and the legislative push to make the HPV vaccine mandatory. *see VACCINE, page A18*