

# The Dynamics of Violence Within the South Asian Community in the United States

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# Agenda

- Who are South Asians?
- Culture and Cultural Competency
- South Asian Families
- Emerging Forms of Violence
- Barriers
- Intervention Strategies
- About Sahara
- About Manavi
- Reflections



# Learning Objectives

- Familiarize with South Asian Culture
- Learn the importance of cultural competency
- Better understanding about the violence against South Asian Women
- Cultural misinformation and avoiding assumptions
- Tools for intervention
- Services provided by Sahara and Manavi

# Who are South Asians?

South Asia includes:

- Bangladesh
- India
- Pakistan
- Nepal
- Sri Lanka
- Maldives, Bhutan, Myanmar



# Who are South Asians?

- South Asian subcontinent has great linguistic diversity
  - Within the **7** countries there are over **461** languages spoken.
  - Population density is very high, the whole area being inhabited by some 1.5 billion people
- More than 20% of the world's population Within the **7** countries there are over **461** languages spoken.

# South Asians in the United States

Over 3.4 million South Asians live in the United States.

The five states with the largest South Asian populations are **California, New York, New Jersey, Texas, and Illinois**

# South Asian Immigrants

- Naturalized Citizens
- Permanent Residency (Green Card)
- Wives on Conditional Green Card
- Temporary workers – H1 and H4 Visa holders
- Undocumented
- Second generation – born in the U.S.

# Culture as an Iceberg

20% Visible

Language and non-verbal communication

Rituals and symbols

80% Invisible

Communication styles

Listening styles

Beliefs about formality

Beliefs about hierarchy

Beliefs about silence

Values

Basic truths



# What Is “Culture?”

- Culture is a symbolic frame of reference that is complex and are shared experiences by group of people based on
  - Race, ethnicity and religion
  - Gender, age, sexuality
  - National origin and education
  - Immigration status
- Culture is
  - Social and Shared
  - Learnt and Dynamic
  - Continuous and Cumulative
  - Varies from society to society

# Why Should We Consider Culture?

- Culture impacts
  - An individual's experience of domestic violence
  - The batterer's response to intervention and acceptance of responsibility
  - Access to services that are crucial to the victim and children
  - How we develop prevention

# What do we mean by Cultural Competency?

Cultural competency refers to an ability to interact effectively with people of different cultures and socio-economic backgrounds to effectively and professionally work in situations.

Cultural competency comprises of understanding:

- A set of behaviors, policies, and attitudes which form a system or agency
- Includes human behaviors, languages, communications, actions, values, religious beliefs, social groups, and ethic perceptions.

# Cultural Competency Development

Cultural Competency Development is a journey – not a goal. It is a process in which one becomes aware of, appreciative of and sensitive to the values, beliefs, practices, and problem-solving strategies used by people of differing cultures

- It starts with your awareness.
- It grows with knowledge.
- It is enhanced with specific skills.
- It is polished with cross cultural encounters.
- Embracing diversity encompasses acceptance and respect.

# South Asian Families In The U.S.

- Families can be nuclear or joint
  - Joint family concept exists and is hierarchical by gender and age
- Values tend to be collective rather than individual
- Even when a branch of the family migrates, it is psychologically joint to others
- Practice variety of religions – Hinduism, Islam, Christianity, Sikhism, Buddhism etc.
- Food habits are diverse (eg. vegetarianism, beef, halal etc.)
- Marriage systems, religion, and values are somewhat resistant to change

# South Asian Families In The U.S.



Family structure is extended,  
and mostly patriarchal



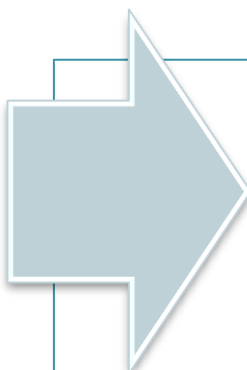
Identity is collective -  
encompassing family and  
community



Family relation is hierarchical  
by age and gender



Ideally, gender relations are  
interdependent



Maintaining family integrity  
and honor takes precedence  
over other individual  
interests

# Emerging Forms of Violence Against South Asian Women



Coerced Reproduction

Transnational  
Abandonment

Marital Rape

Dating Violence

# Marital Rape

- Cross-cultural
- Marital rape is often ethically permissible
- Cultural norms virtually guarantee husbands absolute sexual rights over wives
- Consent is a non-issue in marital relationships which makes it difficult to recognize marital sexual assault
- A woman's family and community might deny her support and dismiss her complaints
- This is an example of the intersection between domestic and sexual violence.



# Coerced Reproduction

- Threats or acts of violence against one's partner to:
  - Force her to become pregnant
  - Force her to end her pregnancy
- Coercion can happen in three ways:
  - Pregnancy pressure
  - Contraceptive sabotage: "*Stealth*"
  - Pregnancy persuasion
- Happens frequently in:
  - Teenage relationships
  - Families with traditional expectations
  - Preference for offspring of certain gender

# Dating and Sexual Violence

## Dating is a foreign concept

- Often conflated with sexual activity
- Parents believe focus should be on Education

## Dating also signals claiming independence from parental control

- Particularly for daughters

## Teenage girls who are dating are often placed in a double bind

- They feel compelled to hide their dating relationships
- Therefore, if violence occurs in the relationship, they cannot reveal and seek support from family

# Barriers in Seeking Services

## Four common environments of experiencing violence

- Marriage
- Family
- Work/education place
- Dating scenario

## The barriers in disclosing and seeking services are

- Individual
- Family/community/cultural
- Institutional

# Barriers to Seeking Help

Several variables affect and prevent survivors from disclosing acts of domestic and sexual violence to authorities:

- Culture and religious background
  - Sex and sexualities are often taboo topics
  - Strong belief in fate
  - Strict loyalties to family and culture
  - Husband's family pressure
- Lack of information and resources
  - Fear and distrust of legal authorities
  - Lack of evidence to prove abuse
  - Fluency in English and lack of knowledge about rights
  - Legal residency status – immigration used as a tool of control

# Barriers to Seeking Help

- Social pressures
  - Insider/outsider distinction
  - Ideology of good wife and mother
  - Bias against divorce
  - Shame – self, family, and community
  - Guilt – failing marital and family responsibilities
- Fear of losing custody of children
- Financial difficulties
- Stigma of mental health
- Model Minority Myth

# Ensuring a Survivor's Safety

Take time to listen to their story

Understand their needs and barriers

Their barriers may be different but they are **NOT** bizarre

Restrain tendency to pathologize the unfamiliar

# Basic Intervention Strategies

- Speak clearly and slowly without raising your voice, avoiding slang, jargon, humor and idioms
- Be non-judgmental
- Determine language needs at the point of contact
- Be aware: family/untrained interpreters may misinterpret or filter
- Self control; observe non verbal behavior for pain
- Establish means of safe contact
- Avoid stereotyping – culture is diverse

# About SAHARA

## South Asian Helpline and Referral Agency

- SAHARA means “support”
- SAHARA was established in 1991 by 5 social workers and 2 physicians
- Mission: SAHARA serves survivors of all forms of abuse in the South Asian community by providing culturally-sensitive and linguistically-specific services



# Services of SAHARA

- Case Management
- Transitional Living Home
- Legal Advocacy
- Counseling
- Therapy
- Support groups
- Summer Youth Program
- Healthy ageing programs
- Public benefits assistance
- Citizenship Workshops and training
- Resources and referrals

# About Manavi

- Manavi means 'woman'
- Based in New Brunswick, NJ
- Mission is to end violence against women
- Established in 1985 by six South Asian women
- Inspired by the case of Amita Vadlamudi
- Founded to establish a voice for South Asian immigrants in the United States
- Strives to provide direct services to victims of violence and spread awareness of violence against women

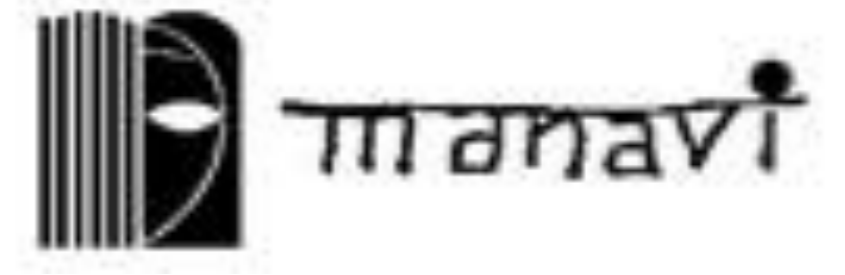
# Services of Manavi

- Crisis intervention
- Advocacy
- Culturally and linguistically specific counseling
- Sexual Assault Support Services
- Legal Advocacy Program
- Outreach and Education
- Transitional housing (Ashiana)
- Interpretation
- Economic Empowerment
- Cultural Competency Training

# Reflections

- What are assumptions regarding your culture that could become barriers to working with a client?
- Arranged Marriage vs. Forced Marriage

# Thank You!



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