

# Domestic Violence in the South Asian Diaspora\* in the United States

Fall 2025

## Community Snapshot

- More than 6 million people of South Asians descent resided in the United States, according to 2023 US Census Data.<sup>1</sup>
- The states with the largest South Asian populations are California (1,166,230), Texas (803,524), New York (677,887), New Jersey (511,918), and Illinois (340,889)<sup>1</sup>
- Indians make up the largest South Asian ethnic group, with a population of 4.8 million.<sup>1</sup>
- According to [U.S. Census Bureau's American Community Survey](#), of the 875,100 Hindi speakers in the US, 18% (156,200) speak English “less than very well.” Of the Urdu 499,800 speakers in the US, 28% (139,800) speak English “less than very well,” and of the 435,700 Gujarati speakers in the US, 32% (141,600) speak English “less than very well,” according to data from 2017 to 2021.<sup>2</sup>
- According to data from the 2022 American Community Survey, about 70% of South Asians (4.5 million) are foreign born. Indians also make up the largest foreign-born population at 2.8 million<sup>3</sup>

## Recent Statistics on Domestic Violence

### Prevalence and Forms of DV

- In a 2022 study that included 468 South Asian immigrant men and women across the 50 U.S. states, the most prevalent lifetime type of domestic violence victimization was physical violence (48%), emotional (38%), economic (35%), verbal (27%), immigration-related (26%), in-laws related (19%), and sexual abuse (11%).<sup>4</sup>

\* The South Asian diaspora refers to people with ancestral roots in countries of South Asia, including but not limited to India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Nepal, Bhutan, Sri Lanka, and the Maldives. It encompasses both foreign-born immigrants as well as U.S.-born second- and third-generation individuals who identify with these communities.

- In that same study, women reported higher rates of the following types of abuse:
  - Physical abuse was reported by 57% of female and 41% of male participants.<sup>4</sup>
  - Emotional abuse was reported by 43% of female and 35% of male and participants.<sup>4</sup>
  - Economic abuse was reported by 42% of female and 29% of male and participants.<sup>4</sup>
  - Verbal abuse was reported by 34% of female and 22% of male and participants.<sup>4</sup>
  - Immigration-related abuse was reported by 29% of female and 25% of male and participants. For example, more women (29%) reported they were not allowed by spouse/partner to keep their own passport and green card compared to 25% of men in the study.<sup>4</sup>
  - In-laws abuse was reported by 21% of female and 19% of male and participants.<sup>4</sup>
  - Sexual abuse was reported by 12% of female and 10% of male and participants<sup>4</sup>
- According to a study from 2015, first- and second-generation immigrant<sup>†</sup> Indian American women were more likely to perceive physically and sexually violent acts as abuse, compared to emotionally and verbally violent acts. Negative consequences of emotional and verbal abuse include chronic fatigue, depression, and low self-esteem.<sup>5</sup>
- According to a study that included study included 116 South Asian immigrant women in Chicago, 23.3% reported physical abuse and 28.4% reported nonphysical abuse.<sup>6</sup>
- In a 2018 study that included a convenience sample of 535 women of Indian, Pakistani, Bangladeshi, Nepalese, Sri Lankans, Bhutanese and Maldives descent; over 20% reported childhood sexual abuse; 6.9% childhood physical abuse; 16.3% childhood verbal abuse; 13.5% reported having a battered mother; and 30.5% reported intimate partner violence in adulthood.<sup>7</sup>

## Risk and Protective Factors

- A 2022 study found a variety of significant correlates of DV victimization among South Asian immigrant men and women, including having higher education levels (e.g., vocational school, high school, undergraduate degrees), belonging to the 1.5+ immigrant generation, living in joint families, and being employed.<sup>4</sup>
- According to a study that included 127 South Asian women in Chicago, risk factors for both physical and nonphysical abuse included being divorced or separated and having a dowry. Those who reported not feeling safe calling or visiting their family of origin were significantly more likely to report experiencing non-physical abuse.<sup>6</sup>

<sup>†</sup> First-generation immigrant is defined as foreign-born, and second-generation includes children of foreign-born parents.

- In a 2019 study that included 535 adult women of South Asian descent, participants reporting adult DV were significantly more likely to report childhood verbal abuse, childhood sexual abuse, and twice as likely to have reported having a battered mother compared to those who had not reported experiencing DV. Adult domestic abuse or intimate partner violence was measured by asking participants if they were currently or had been experiencing physical and/or sexual abuse since the age of 18.<sup>8</sup>

## Mental and Physical Health Impacts

- From a 2016 family violence study of 368 adults of South Asian descent in the U.S., participants who reported any relationship violence were significantly more likely to have experienced suicide attempt. Participants who reported suicide attempt were significantly likely to have also reported childhood sexual assault.<sup>9</sup>
- According to a 2019 study that included 535 women of South Asian descent, participants who reported sexual abuse in childhood were twice as likely to ever have thoughts of suicide and were four times more likely to ever have attempted suicide. Also, participants who reported having a battered mother were twice as likely to ever have thoughts of suicide and have attempted suicide compared to their peers who did not report having a battered mother.<sup>8</sup>

## Help-Seeking and Barriers to Support

- According to a 2015 study that include 152 first- and second-generation immigrant<sup>‡</sup> Indian American women, most were more likely to seek informal support through friends or family rather than formal sources of support such as mental health services, regardless of DV experiences.<sup>5</sup>
- According to a 2020 scoping review, immigration policy, especially related to H1B visas, were considered barriers to seeking services for DV. With an H1B visa, an immigrant man could sponsor his wife, but the wife cannot work, obtain a social security number, or obtain a driver's license or bank account without permission of the H1B visa holder.<sup>10</sup>
- Acculturation, or lack of social support, isolation and/or fear, shame, and cultural stigma, less education, lower socioeconomic class, and limited English proficiency were also key socio-cultural factors that prevented help-seeking.<sup>10</sup>
- Additional social barriers include traditional gender roles, taboo against seeking social and mental health services. Systemic barriers include a lack of awareness about available resources, lack of affordable health services that are culturally congruent, and a mistrust of legal authorities and police.<sup>5</sup>

<sup>‡</sup> First-generation immigrant is defined as foreign-born, and second-generation includes children of foreign-born parents.

- Barriers to support for South Asian immigrant South Asian women include limited English proficiency, lack of in-language DV programs and interventions, and threats of deportation and control over finances by abusive partners, and a lack of awareness about VAWA and other potential legal protections for survivors, according to a 2023 scoping review.<sup>11</sup>

## Promising Practices and Recommendations

- South Asian survivors benefit from DV services in their preferred language. Finding providers who share religious or ethnic backgrounds may lessen some of the barriers and stigmas against seeking formal support.<sup>12</sup>
- In a study from 2023 conducted in Twin Cities metropolitan area of Minnesota, participants recommended DV training for faith leaders to better support survivors with faith-based education on healthy relationships and provide survivors with confidential support, spiritual guidance, and healing. Religious organizations may offer a culturally trusted setting to reach survivors, raise awareness about DV, and implement prevention programs.<sup>13</sup>
- Psycho-educational workshops may be avenues to share information such as definitions, signs, and symptoms of emotional and verbal abuse with community members of South Asian communities in order to increase awareness about forms of domestic abuse that are not physical.<sup>5</sup>
- According to a 2023 scoping review, community-based projects such as the Shanti Project for the Indian-Gujrati community is a promising culturally specific program. The concept of Shanti, or harmony and peace, was integrated into a bystander intervention program developed for and by the Gujrati community. The intervention aimed to denounce DV and interrupt violent attitudes and behaviors.<sup>11</sup>

## Selected Translated Materials

- Lifetime Spiral of Gender Violence ([English](#) | [Gujarati](#) | [Hindi](#) | [Punjabi](#) | [Tamil](#) | [Telugu](#) | [Nepali](#) | [Urdu](#)) | [API-GBV](#)
- Creating a Safety Plan ([English](#) | [Urdu](#) | [Punjabi](#)) | [Peel Committee Against Woman Abuse](#)
- Materials on domestic violence in over 115 languages: [Bengali](#) | [Gujarati](#) | [Hindi](#) | [Punjabi](#) | [Tamil](#) | [Urdu](#) | [Hot Peach Pages](#)

# Resources

## Crisis Services

- ***National Domestic Violence Hotline***

Provides 24/7 free and confidential support, including crisis intervention, DV education, safety planning, and referrals to local service providers. Assistance is available in English, Spanish, and 200+ other languages through interpreter services.

*Live Chat:* [www.thehotline.org](http://www.thehotline.org) | *Call:* 1-800-799-SAFE (7233) | *Text:* START to 88788.

- ***Love is Respect***

Offers 24/7 free and confidential support for teens, young adults, and their loved ones seeking help or information about healthy relationships and dating abuse.

*Live Chat:* [www.loveisrespect.org](http://www.loveisrespect.org) | *Call:* 1-866-331-9474 | *Text:* LOVEIS to 22522

- ***National Sexual Assault Hotline***

Provides victims of sexual assault with 24/7 access to free, confidential services.

*Live Chat:* <http://online.rainn.org> | *Call:* 1-800-656-HOPE (4673)

## Directories

- [Directory of Domestic Violence Programs Serving Asians, Native Hawaiians, and Pacific Islanders](#) | API-GBV
- [International List of Sexual & Domestic Violence Agencies](#) | Hot Peach Pages
- [List of South Asian Domestic & Gender-Based Violence Organizations](#) | South Asian SOAR

## Asian Pacific Institute on Gender-Based Violence

For questions, information, publications, training requests, and technical assistance related to domestic violence, sexual assault, dating violence, and/or stalking in Asian American, Native Hawaiian, and Pacific Islander (AANHPI) and Middle Eastern and North African (MENA) communities, visit [www.api-gbv.org](http://www.api-gbv.org) or email [info@api-gbv.org](mailto:info@api-gbv.org)

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