



image source: [@desisrisingup](https://twitter.com/desisrisingup)

*intimate partner violence in south
asian american communities: a
public health issue*

SUMMARY & OVERVIEW

this **digital toolkit** is a starter kit for public health professionals, students of public health/adjacent fields, and community members looking to learn about how intimate partner violence impacts the health and well-being of South Asian American communities

During the COVID-19 pandemic, there were alarming domestic violence (DV) trends in the United States and across the world; the UN calling it the “shadow pandemic”. With the South Asian community already being at high risk for intimate partner violence (IPV), SA community based organizations mobilized to meet the critical needs of SAA survivors and operate beyond their capacities. Domestic violence, or intimate partner violence (IPV) is “a systematic pattern of behaviors that include physical battering, coercive control, economic abuse, emotional abuse, and/or sexual violence” (API-GBV).

In the Unites States:

- **1 in 4 women** experienced IPV at some point in their lives (Futures without Violence)
- The prevalence rate of IPV in South Asian American communities is **40%** * (Devries et al., 2013)
- According to a more recent study, physical violence (**48%**) was the most prevalent type of abuse (Rai & Choi, 2021)

Intimate partner violence is a public health issue and has significant health implications. Recognizing this allows the conversation to shift from a criminal justice approach to a **public health approach to IPV**, that puts emphasis on:

1. prevention and and designing prevention programs that center the needs of survivors, communities, and break cycles of abuse generationally
2. equitable access to **culturally tailored** support services
3. understanding the risk factors and protective factors associated with IPV, at the intersections of **race, gender, culture, caste, and socio-economic status**



Art by: shehzil malik
Instagram: @shehzilm

Although research studies and resources highlighted in this toolkit may refer to survivors as “women”, we recognize that intimate partner violence (IPV) and gender based violence (GBV) impacts South Asian survivors of all gender identities and sexualities

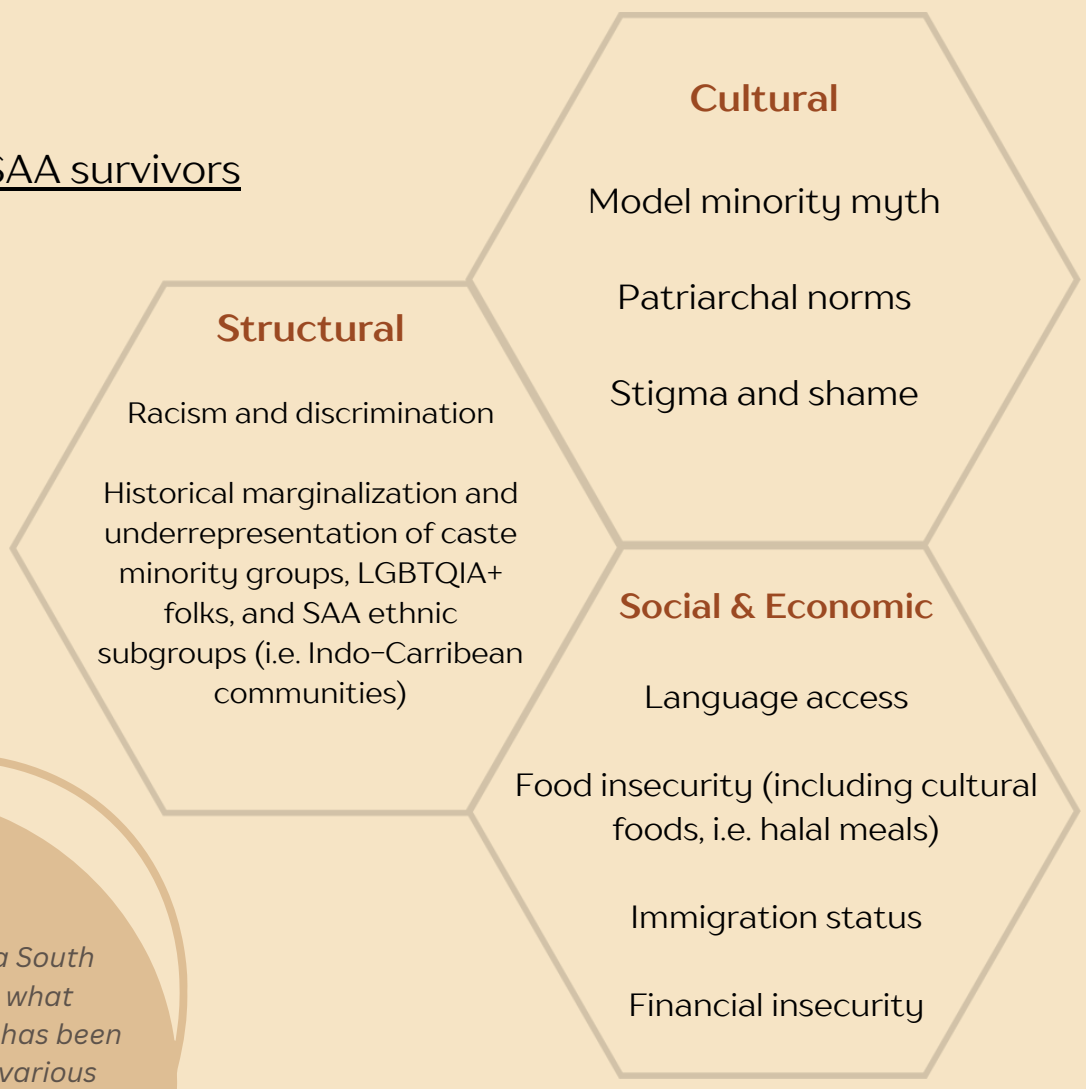
*likely lower than the true prevalence due to underreporting as a result of stigma, shame, and other structural inequities.

Intimate Partner Violence in South Asian American communities

Public Health Implications

- IPV can result in injury and even death. Survivors face negative health outcomes, such as depression, post traumatic stress disorder, and conditions adversely affecting the heart, reproductive, digestive and nervous systems (CDC)
- According to a 2006 study examining associations between IPV and health outcomes of South Asian women in Greater Boston, SAA Survivors of IPV were **significantly more likely** than those with no history of IPV in their current relationship to **report poor physical health**, stemming **directly from injury and indirectly from stress** (Hurwitz et al, 2006)
- In the same study, **15% of the participants were depressed** and **five percent reported suicidal ideations**. The research highlighted that IPV victimization was also linked to **anxiety (23%)** and **sleep disruption (30%)** (Hurwitz et al, 2006)

Factors impacting SAA survivors



II Reflection PAUSE: As a South Asian American or ally, what identities do I carry? What has been my relationship with the various factors listed on this page? What power and control dynamics have I personally witnessed or experienced?

Risk Factors and Protective Factors of IPV

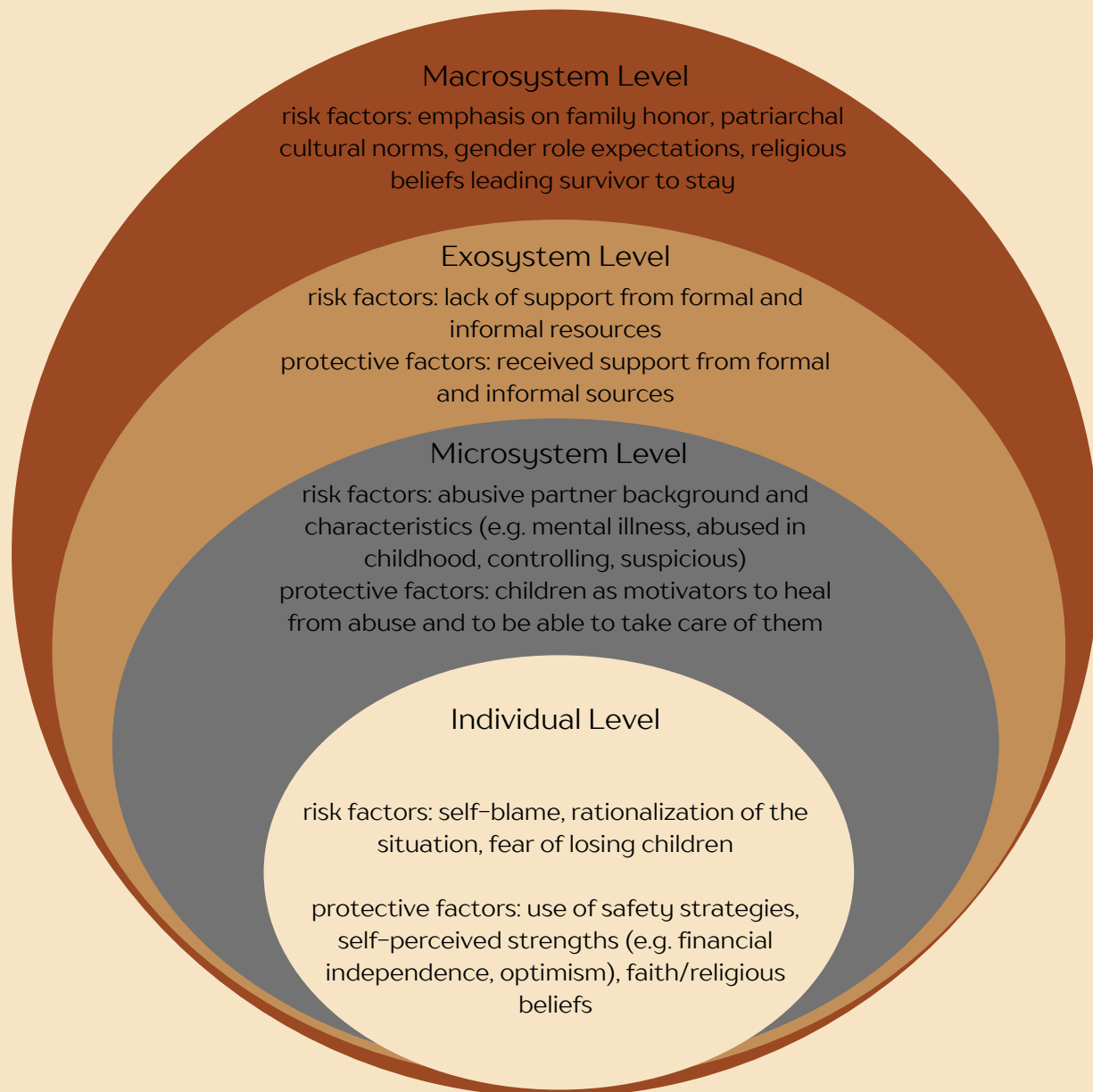


Figure: A ecological framework for domestic violence among South Asian immigrant women

“

It's a very private thing. People do not even see it as an abuse. The South Asian community call it a family affair, so it should be dealt with in the family”

-survivor and study participant,
age 35

*“It wouldn't make sense for me to go to an American psychologist or a therapist or a counselor and talk to them about my marriage, because our dynamics are very different. If, for example, my husband's sister has been one of the main issues of our marriage not working and if I go to an American counselor or psychologist or a therapist, they will just tell me not to talk to her or to avoid her, and that's not something I can do. Someone that doesn't know about our **culture or traditions cannot really help us.**”*

Research & Further Readings

Research

- DASGUPTA, S. D. (2007). *Body Evidence: Intimate Violence against South Asian Women in America*. Rutgers University Press. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctt5hj900>
- Hurwitz EJ, Gupta J, Liu R, Silverman JG, Raj A. Intimate partner violence associated with poor health outcomes in U.S. South Asian women. *J Immigr Minor Health*. 2006 Jul;8(3):251–61. doi: 10.1007/s10903-006-9330-1. PMID: 16791535
- Misra, S., Tankasala, N., Yusuf, Y. et al. Health Implications of Racialized State Violence Against South Asians in the USA. *J. Racial and Ethnic Health Disparities* (2022). <https://doi.org/10.1007/s40615-021-01219-w>
- Raj A, Silverman JG. Immigrant South Asian women at greater risk for injury from intimate partner violence. *Am J Public Health*. 2003 Mar;93(3):435–7. doi: 10.2105/ajph.93.3.435. PMID: 12604489; PMCID: PMC1447758.
- Rai, A., & Choi, Y. J. (2021). Domestic Violence Victimization among South Asian Immigrant Men and Women in the United States. *Journal of Interpersonal Violence*. <https://doi.org/10.1177/08862605211015262>
- Sabri B, Simonet M, Campbell JC. Risk and protective factors of intimate partner violence among South Asian immigrant women and perceived need for services. *Cultur Divers Ethnic Minor Psychol*. 2018 Jul;24(3):442–452. doi: 10.1037/cdp0000189. Epub 2018 May 24. PMID: 29792481; PMCID: PMC6023771.
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- SOAR Together We Rise Report: <https://www.togetherwerise.report/>
- Tripathi, S., & Azhar, S. (2022). A Systematic Review of Intimate Partner Violence Interventions Impacting South Asian Women in the United States. *Trauma, Violence, & Abuse*, 23(2), 523–540. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1524838020957987>
- Yoshihama M, Bybee D, Dabby C, Blazeovski J. Lifecourse experiences of intimate partner violence and helpseeking among Filipina, Indian, and Pakistani women: Implications for justice system responses. Washington, DC: National Institute of Justice; 2010.

Research & Further Readings

📖 Books

- *Coolie Woman: The Odyssey of Indenture* by Gaiutra Bahadur
- *Speaking the Unspeakable* by Margaret Abraham
- *They Called Us Exceptional: And Other Lies That Raised Us* by Prachi Gupta
- *Coming Out as Dalit: A Memoir of Surviving India's Caste System* by Yashica Dutt
- *Health of South Asians in the United States: An Evidence-Based Guide for Policy and Program Development* by Memoona Hasnain, Punam Parikh, and Nitasha Chaudhary Nagaraj
- *Sexuality, Gender Roles, and Domestic Violence in South Asia* by M E Khan
- *We Too Sing America: South Asian, Arab, Muslim, and Sikh Immigrants Shape Our Multiracial Future* by Deepa Iyer
- *Social Change Now: A Guide for Reflection and Connection* by Deepa Iyer

🎧 Podcasts

- Between Friends: Conversations with Maitri

Language & Definitions

Survivor: often refers to an individual who is going or has gone through the recovery process. We intentionally use this word in place of “victims” to honor the on-going strength and resilience of survivors. ([National Domestic Violence Hotline](#))

Person Causing Harm: A person whose behavior, including emotional or physical violence, has caused harm to someone else. The term has been popularized in restorative justice practice. ([New York State Office for the Prevention of Domestic Violence](#))

Survivor-Centered: A survivor-centered approach recognizes survivors’ rights to make decisions about their safety and future. It’s strengths-based and recognizes that survivors with different backgrounds have different needs and experiences. ([New York State Office for the Prevention of Domestic Violence](#))

Caste: Caste is a social reality experienced by South Asians and the South Asian diaspora. While caste systems are often strongly associated primarily with South Asia, similar systems exist in regions including, but not limited to South America, Asia, and Africa ([Equality Labs](#)). **Caste discrimination** involves massive violations of civil, political, economic, social and cultural rights. Caste-affected communities are denied a life in dignity and equality. (International Dalit Solidarity Network (IDSN))

Transformative justice: an approach to and processes for addressing harm that seeks to not only address the specific situation of harm in question, but to transform the conditions and social forces that made such harm possible. Sometimes used interchangeably with community accountability. To learn more, check out the toolkit, *Creative Interventions: A Practical Guide to Stop Interpersonal Violence* : <https://www.creative-interventions.org/toolkit/>

Policy Advocacy | Key Areas

Advocating for policies at the local, state, national and international level that are rooted in **anti-violence, anti-oppression**, and support survivors' right to **safety, dignity** and **self-sufficiency**

Promoting immigration justice and supporting South Asian immigrant survivors

- [Working for Immigrant Safe and Empowerment \(WISE\) Act](#)
- You can check out [Alliance for Immigrant Survivors](https://www.immigrantsurvivors.org/policy-updates) for policy updates and action items:
<https://www.immigrantsurvivors.org/policy-updates>
- The [HEAL \(Health Equity and Access under the Law\) for Immigrant Families Act](https://napawf.org/heal/); Read more:
<https://napawf.org/heal/>

Reproductive health

- [Women's Health Protection Act \(WHPA\)](https://reproductiverights.org/the-womens-health-protection-act-federal-legislation-to-protect-the-right-to-access-abortion-care/): <https://reproductiverights.org/the-womens-health-protection-act-federal-legislation-to-protect-the-right-to-access-abortion-care/>

Advocate for data disaggregation

- Read [AAPI Data's Report: Six Steps to Improve Federal Government Performance on Data Disaggregation](#)
- Implementation and enforcement of [OMB SPD-15 Guidelines](#) across agencies

Gun violence prevention

- Advocating for comprehensive, evidence-based, community-driven policy solutions to *prevent* gun violence and *support* those who are healing in its wake
- Check out APHA's Gun Violence is a Public Health Crisis [factsheet](#)

Supporting anti-caste based discrimination legislature and caste abolition work

- [Equality Lab](http://www.equalitylabs.org/what-is-caste/caste-and-the-law/): www.equalitylabs.org/what-is-caste/caste-and-the-law/
- SB-403 (California) : <https://www.equalitylabs.org/campaigns/sb-403/>
- Anti-caste based discrimination ordinance in Seattle, WA – passed February 2023

Language Access

- [API-GBV](https://www.api-gbv.org/culturally-specific-advocacy/language-access/): <https://www.api-gbv.org/culturally-specific-advocacy/language-access/>

Mental Health

- [Stop Mental Health Stigma in Our Communities Act](#)
- [Mental Health Workforce and Language Access Act](#)
- Check out the [National Council of Asian Pacific American's 2024 Policy Platform](https://www.ncapaonline.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/05/Health.pdf):
<https://www.ncapaonline.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/05/Health.pdf>
- Increased funding and resources towards policing alternatives and community mental health services, and expansion of said services



Resources



Maitri, a South Asian DV organization based in the San Francisco Bay Area has compiled a list of South Asian DV agencies by state, [here](#)

Hotlines

📞 National Domestic Violence Hotline:
1-800-621-SAFE (7233)

National Organizations

♥ API-GBV

♥ Futures Without Violence

♥ South Asian SOAR

Alternate First Responders

♥ CAHOOTS (Crisis Assistance Helping Out on the Streets), (Eugene/OR, Springfield, OR)

♥ PAD (Policing Alternatives and Diversion), Atlanta, GA

♥ B-HEARD (Behavioral Health Emergency Assistance Response Division) New York, NY

Health care- for survivors

♥ HRSA Find a Health Center [here](#)

♥ South Asian SOAR Abortion Care Guide: www.southasiansforabortion.org

Language Access

♥ In-Language Resources: www.api-gbv.org/aapi-in-language-resources/

Health Care - resources for providers

♥ CUES: an evidence based intervention: <https://ipvhealth.org/health-professionals/educate-providers/>

♥ IPV Health Partners Toolkit <https://ipvhealthpartners.org/>

♥ Toolkit for advocate programs to support survivor health needs: <https://ipvhealth.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/07/FWV-Advocate-Toolkit-7.24.pdf>

Mental Health

♥ Bengali Mental Health Movement (National)

♥ CHAI Counselors (Maryland) (now part of Pro Bono Counseling)

♥ Gaya Therapy (New York)

♥ Division on South Asian Americans (DoSAA)

♥ MannMukti

♥ Muslim Mental Health

♥ South Asian Mental Health Initiative & Network (SAMHIN) (New Jersey)

♥ South Asian Sexual and Mental Health Alliance (SASMHA)



Resources

Legal Resources

♥ South Asian Legal Defense Fund (SALDF)
<https://www.southasianldf.org/>

♥ Tahirih Justice Center, www.tahirih.org

♥ Immigrant Legal Resource Center
www.ilrc.org

♥ Asian Americans Advancing Justice OC
(AAAJ OC) www.ajsocal.org

Faith-based DV Resources

♥ American Muslim Health Professionals

♥ Sikh Family Center

Resources for SA LGBTQIA+ survivors

♥ Desi Rainbow Parents and Allies

♥ DeQH – Desi LGBTQ Helpline

♥ List of Regional Resources:
www.sapha.org/resources/lgbtqia-resources/

|| **PAUSE:** In the context of community, what are some ways that I **receive** care or instances where I have **felt** cared for? Think about 2-3 folks in your immediate community. Do you know what makes them feel seen, cared for, and safe?

“Creating a survivor justice movement requires more than just a name—it requires building a distinct ecosystem where survivors are not subsumed under the larger gender justice umbrella. Survivors need focused funders, media attention and policy support that prioritize their **healing** and **liberation**.”

- Kavita Mehra, ED of Sakhi NYC
full article here: <https://msmagazine.com/author/kmehra/>



Art by: shehzil malik

Worksheet- What can I do?

We hope this toolkit invites you to examine how intimate partner violence in South Asian American communities intersects with your lane in public health, and equips you with resources so you can join advocacy efforts and create awareness surrounding this issue.

Questions to consider

1. What is my lane in public health?

Example: Mental Health

Example: Climate Change and Health

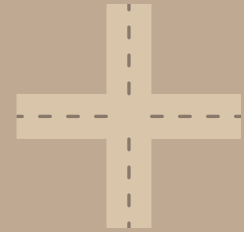


II PAUSE, Reflection: As a South Asian American or ally, what emotions do I feel arising in my body when thinking about violence the South Asian American community faces? What does intergenerational trauma mean to me? As we engage in this work, how can we hold space for these emotions in our bodies and center healing for ourselves as well?

2. How does my work intersect with intimate partner violence?

Example: As outlined previously in this toolkit, intimate partner violence negatively impacts the mental health and wellbeing of South Asian survivors. Survivors of IPV have reported experiencing anxiety, depression, suicidal ideation, and PTSD.

Example: As the climate crisis continues to worsen, it exacerbates rates of gender based violence. Survivors are disproportionately affected. These impacts compound and are further exacerbated for South Asian survivors already experiencing environmental injustices, immigration injustice, lack of access to adequate health care, and/or caste based discrimination, etc.



3. How can I advocate for and with South Asian survivors?

Example: I can advocate for policies that would promote culturally competent mental health care and expansion of mental health resources to all South Asians regardless of immigration status, economic barriers, etc.

If I have capacity, I can reach out to my local IPV or SA IPV org and see how I can partner with them to support survivors' healing and access to mental health care.



Example: An intersectional approach to climate justice



The South Asian Public Health Association (SAPHA) is a non-profit organization dedicated to advancing the health and well-being of South Asian communities in the United States through advocacy, collaboration, and communication. We strive to address the unique health challenges faced by individuals of South Asian descent through education, advocacy, research, and community engagement. Established in 1999, SAPHA gained formal recognition in 2001 as a 501(c)3 non-profit organization and has marked many milestones in promoting the health and well-being of South Asians throughout the years, including the groundbreaking report, "A Brown Paper: The Health of South Asians in the US," in 2002, the publication of "The Health of South Asians in the US – An Evidence-based Guide for Policy and Program Development" in 2017, many successful webinars, publications and invitations to conferences and events, along with White House recognition. SAPHA operates with a dedicated team of volunteer Board members representing diverse expertise in public health, health disparities, mental health, clinical care, health policy, and disease control and prevention.

**Visit our website for more information on how to stay involved
and reach out for partnership opportunities:**

 www.sapha.org

 admin@sapha.org

 [@saphainfo](https://www.instagram.com/saphainfo)

We would love to hear your thoughts on the toolkit as well as feedback on how to improve the content. Please share any new resources, suggestions and comments by emailing: advocacy@sapha.org