



Combatting Mental Health Misinformation in the South Asian Community

Key Overview: *Empower South Asian communities in the U.S. with accurate, culturally sensitive mental health information, destigmatizing mental illness, debunking myths, and sharing accessible local resources.*

This toolkit is designed for South Asian community members to discuss mental health and health misinformation that may spread and affect our communities. Mental health awareness can help support family members, friends, and loved ones in pursuing mental well-being and addressing any mental health concerns that may otherwise be overlooked due to stigma and systemic barriers. This toolkit aims to equip community members of all ages, in spotting misinformation and evaluating sources to cultivate mental well-being.

Use this toolkit to:

- *Identify and counter mental health misinformation*
- *Cultivate meaningful conversations across generations*
- *Destigmatize mental health in South Asian communities*
- *Encourage seeking support and connecting to care*



Mental Health in the South Asian Community

Mental well-being means having the strength to manage stress, learn effectively, work well, and reach our full potential. Yet, when mental health struggles, it can show up as physical symptoms like headaches, fatigue, stomach pain, or trouble sleeping and major life can heighten emotional challenges.

Mental health services may not reflect our cultural values, language barriers make effective communication difficult, and many South Asian individuals harbor mistrust toward healthcare systems.

Mental health is rarely talked about, we often lack the language to express what we feel or know where to seek help, and even when we do, reaching out can feel embarrassing or shameful.

*Recognizing these personal, cultural, and systemic challenges is a crucial first step in creating supportive paths to healing, discussion, and community care. **How we understand mental health depends greatly on our information sources, whether from family, friends, social media, or the news.***

***Emotional &
Physical
Well-being***

***Systemic
Barriers***

***Stigma &
Silence***

***Information
Sources***

False Information on Mental Health & Consequences of Misinformation

“Misinformation” is a broad term referring to false or misleading content, while “disinformation” is intentionally misleading or false content, and both can delay treatment, lead to the use of harmful remedies or advice, increase stigma and isolation, and disempower individuals seeking help.

| | Health Misinformation Checklist |
|--------------------------|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> | Did you check with the CDC or local public health department to see whether there is any information about the claim being made? |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | Did you ask a credible health care professional such as your doctor or nurse if they have any additional information? |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | Did you type the claim into a search engine to see if it has been verified by a credible source? |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | Did you look at the “About Us” page on the website to see if you can trust the source? |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | If you’re not sure, don’t share! |

“How can I spot misinformation?”

S = Stop before forwarding or reacting

I = Investigate the source

F = Find better coverage

T = Trace claims back to the original context



Any examples of harmful misinformation you’ve seen:

POP QUIZ!

Q1

What is Health Misinformation?

1. It is spread on purpose, for malicious intent.
2. It is spread for political gain.
3. It is false, inaccurate, or misleading according to the best available evidence at the time.
4. It is completely false and doesn't have any bit of truth.

Q2

What are common types of Health Misinformation?

(select all that apply)

1. Memes that are shared with friends and family.
2. Videos on youtube.
3. Graphs or diagrams on websites.
4. Statistics and data shared on whatsapp.

Answer Key:

Q1. 3. Health misinformation is information that is false, inaccurate, or misleading according to the best available evidence at the time.

Q2. All the above.

Common Myths & Facts about Mental Health in South Asian Communities

| <i>Myths</i> | <i>Facts</i> |
|--|--|
| Religious/cultural failure causes mental health issues e.g., "You are depressed because you don't listen to your parents, go pray or we can perform a ritual instead of seeing some therapist or doctor who will just give you pills." | Mental health conditions like depression and psychosis are medical issues requiring proper treatment, therapy and/or medication. Spiritual practices or faith can help support treatment but do not replace treatment. |
| Therapy is only for "crazy" people or a Western thing e.g., "Going to therapy is bringing our problems to someone outside the family. We don't do that." | Therapy is a HIPPA compliant tool for self-understanding, growth, and healing, relevant to all of us. Seeking professional help is responsible and courageous, not shameful. |
| WhatsApp and family advice are enough e.g., "Home remedies can cure anxiety, why see a doctor? Once she gets married she'll be fine." | Advice shared in close networks often lacks scientific support. Some "natural" remedies may delay effective treatment, evidence-based approaches are essential. |
| Talking about mental health burdens others e.g., "If I share my depression, I'll burden my loved ones and they will be disappointed." | Opening up creates connection, reduces isolation, and promotes empathy, understanding, and earlier help, benefiting both you and those who care about you. |

How can I take care of my mental health?

- Movement
 - Dancing, exercise, walking
 - Meditation & Breathing
 - Guided meditation apps
 - Seeking professional support
 - Finding a therapist that fits our wants and needs
 - Seeking additional resources
-

Mental Health Tools and Resources:

Asian Mental Health Project



MannMukti – South Asian Mental Health



Asian Mental Health Collective:
Lotus Therapy Fund



CHAI (Counselors Helping [South] Asians and Indians)



South Asian Mental Health Initiative & Network



Full SAPHA Mental Health Resources List



Additional Resource: Helplines

If you or a loved one is in need of immediate help or support, here are additional resources you can explore. These helplines offer confidential 24/7 support:

National Suicide Prevention Lifeline: 988

Crisis Text Line: Text EMPOWER to 741741 to connect with a crisis counselor

Resources on Misinformation:

**Toolkit for Addressing
Health Misinformation
from the Office of U.S.
Surgeon General – 2021**



**Hindi and Bengali Fact
Checks (Desi Facts)**



**How to Protect Yourself
From Misinformation
(Security.org)**



**AA/PI Misinformation
and Disinformation
Resource List**



**The Impact of Social
Media Misinformation on
Mental Health**



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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:**



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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