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Cody Thompson

Augsburg University, thompsoc@augsborg.edu

Ankita Deka, PhD

Augsburg University, deka@augsborg.edu

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Exploring Community Supports for South Asian Women Experiencing Domestic Violence: Narratives from Survivors

Cody Thompson & Dr. Ankita Deka

Augsburg University

Abstract

The prevalence of domestic violence (DV) is higher among South Asian population living in the US as compared to the general population. For example, in the US, the lifetime prevalence of DV is around 20% (Devries et al., 2013), however, within the South Asian population domestic violence, accounting for physical and sexual abuse, is a staggering 40% (Mahapatra, 2012; Raj & Silverman, 2002). This research study explores the lived experiences, supports, barriers, and access to services among South Asian survivors of domestic violence. Using an in-depth interviewing method with eight women, this study explores the cultural, social, financial, immigration related barriers that South Asian women experience while navigating domestic violence. Research will also better inform policy makers of the prevalence of violence in South Asian communities.

Keywords: domestic violence, South Asian, abuse, lived experiences

1. Introduction

According to the World Health Organization (2017) the United Nations defines domestic violence as any act of gender-based violence that results in, or is likely to result in physical, sexual or mental harm or suffering to women, including threats of such acts, coercion or arbitrary

deprivation of liberty, whether occurring in public or private life. The prevalence of domestic violence is higher among the South Asian population living in the US as compared to the general population. For example, in the US, the lifetime prevalence of DV is around 20% (Devries et al., 2013), however, within the South Asian population domestic violence, accounting for physical and sexual abuse, is a staggering 40% (Mahapatra, 2012; Raj & Silverman, 2002). More significantly, about 50% of South Asian women in a study conducted in the United States reported emotional and psychological abuse (Mahapatra, 2012; Raj & Silverman, 2002). Domestic violence is largely underreported by South-Asian women; expectations placed on women by their spouse, family, and community regarding gender roles acts as a barrier to seeking help (Tonsing, 2015).

The South Asian population is one of the largest and most rapidly growing Asian immigrant communities in the United States. Many South Asians have immigrated to the U.S. from countries such as Afghanistan, Pakistan, India, Bangladesh, Nepal, Maldives, Bhutan, and Sri Lanka. In Minnesota, South Asians constitute the second largest Asian immigrant group (Council on Asian Pacific Minnesotans, 2012). Since the 2000 U.S. census, the South Asian immigrant population in Minnesota has more than doubled in size (U.S. Census, 2010).

This research study will explore the barriers to services South Asian women, with lived experiences of domestic violence, may encounter when seeking informal and formal support. According to Ralston (1991), “lived experience” refers to the practical experiences of the women’s daily lives such as: cooking, cleaning, caring, participation in paid work (full-time or part-time), attending to children and participating in various social, cultural activities as part of everyday life.

2. Literature Review

2.1 *Patriarchy and Gender in South Asia*

Some scholars link the high rates of domestic violence in South Asia to the postcolonial aftermath with a breakdown of local culture and the political system, suspension of economic progression, rise of structural hierarchies and the subjugation of women to household chores (Niaz, 2003). While traditional patriarchy existed in South Asian society, colonialism created impact on gender relations in these contexts.

In early South-Asian society (2500-500 BC), daughters received equal education in comparison to sons. They played an important role in their parents' house and participate freely in mixed social and public gatherings (Shankar, Das, & Atwal, 2013). By the time South Asian daughters had reached the ages of 16 and 17, they had enough education and maturity to manage the household with their husband. During this period, parental control over daughter(s) was much less. Practice of dowry and child marriages were not as prevalent (Shankar, Das, & Atwal, 2013). The relationship between husband and wife was expected to be based on equality, mutual respect, devotion, and loyalty. The husband was expected not to exert power and control over his wife. "One of the key factors that led to the steady decline and deterioration in women's status was the increasing barriers to education they began experiencing towards the end of the pre Christian era" (Shankar, Das, & Atwal, 2013).

Domestic violence is supported by patriarchal norms regarding a man's right to beat his wife under certain circumstances (Ellsberg, Heise, Pena, Agurto, & Winkvist, 2001; Garcia-Moreno et al., 2005; Koenig et al., 2003; Koenig, Stephenson, Ahmed, Jejeebhoy & Campbell, 2006; Schuler, Hashemi, & Badal, 1998). In their study in Uttar Pradesh and Tamil Nadu, two large states in India, Jejeebhoy and Cook (1997) found that the most cited reason for beating a

wife, which was also justified by the wife, was “disobedience to a husband’s orders or failing to meet a husband’s expectations.” These forms of disobedience vary from failing to serve a hot meal, fighting with the mother-in-law, refusing sex, and behaving improperly with men who live outside of the household (Garcia-Moreno et al., 2005; Jejeebhoy & Cook, 1997).

Gender and patriarchy are a complex web of paradoxes in South Asia. The notion of classic patriarchy and its intermingling with colonialism and capitalism have had perverse impacts on women (Hapke, 2013). In South Asian culture, discipline of women either by their husband or husband’s family is permissible and culturally sanctioned. This could account for the prevalence of physical violence committed by both the abusive partners and family involved (Jordan & Bhandari, 2016). Mehta & Gopalakrishnan (2007) found that one in every two females face violence at home in South Asian countries. Women in the South Asian community obtain respect and recognition in society not through independence but by fulfilling the roles of an ideal wife and mother of a son or sons (Goel, 2005).

Ahmad et al. (2004) studied the relationship between South Asian immigrant women’s patriarchal beliefs and their perception of abuse using a vignette. More than half the women in the sample (52.6%) endorsed patriarchal beliefs and did not believe the woman in the vignette was a domestic violence victim, even though the vignette clearly indicated it (Mahapatra, 2012). Ahmad et al. found that women who adhered to South Asian patriarchal social norms were less likely to view spousal abuse as abuse (Mahapatra & Dinitto, 2013). Patriarchal beliefs these immigrant women may hold are being challenged as they are exposed to an environment that is more egalitarian and provides them with resources and laws that could protect them from their abusive partner (Adam & Schewe, 2007).

Prevalence of DV in Pakistani rural areas suggests that violence is normalized in women's marital life as a routine matter and is not considered a form of violence (UN WOMEN 2014). Psychological violence is institutionalized through family structures, cultural and religious traditions, and is considered a widely accepted method for controlling women and maintaining men's supremacy over women (UN WOMEN 2014). Males in rural areas have a childhood history of physical abuse and neglect (Khodarahimi 2014) and they use this violence in adulthood to resolve their conflicts, especially against their wives (Zakar, Zakar, & Abbas, 2015).

2.2 Immigration Limitations

Most South Asian immigrant women in North America arrive to the U.S. legally dependent on men, such as their partner or spouse, who are the primary applicants (Merchant, 2000). In a study conducted by Tonsing (2015), women shared they are more vulnerable to domestic violence if they are on a spouse-dependent visa. Many South Asian women immigrate to the United States via marriage. Arranged marriage is a common practice in the South Asian community (Abraham, 2000).

An immigration status is often contingent on her husband's sponsorship because she usually enters the United States as his wife. Her dependence on him for legal status adds to her vulnerability, and that is a threat that her husband often does not hesitate to use to his advantage (p. 36) (Bhattacharjee, 1992; Preisser, 1999). The abuser may manipulate the immigration system, for instance, not allowing the woman to access her own immigration papers, or not informing her of immigration policies (Crandall, Senturia, Sullivan, & ShuiThornton, 2005). The fear of deportation hinders many women from reporting abuse or seeking help.

In a study conducted by Choudhry (2001), many women who migrate to the United States, having left behind their family support networks, often have no trusted family members they can turn to for support and may be terrified of consequences such as separation from children and financial distress, if they talk about intimate partner violence or are seen accessing help. Immigrant women often experience more acute forms of isolation and powerlessness because of the complexities and stresses associated with adapting to a new country (Macleod & Shin, 1990).

Among national employment rates, immigrant women have higher unemployment rates. Also, for those who are educated, many do not find jobs in their areas of expertise because they do not have the relevant work experience required. Many who do seek employment accept relatively low-paying jobs (George & Ramkissoon, 1998).

In a study conducted by Rubeena Zakar, Muhammad Z. Zakar, and Safdar Abbas (2015) on domestic violence against rural women in Pakistan, multivariate logistic regression analysis showed that women's low education, low income, and marriage at an early age were significantly associated with domestic violence (Zakar, Zakar, & Abbas, 2015). Out of 480 respondents, about 76% experienced current psychological violence, 88% experienced lifetime psychological violence at least once, 30% experienced violence in their lifetime, 16% were currently experiencing physical violence and 44% reported experiencing lifetime sexual violence.

Women's unemployment increased the likelihood of physical violence, whereas employment status did not appear to be a strong predictor of psychological and sexual violence (Zakar, Zakar, & Abbas 2015). In conclusion, Zakar, Zakar, and Abbas (2015) show that rural women living in poverty, without formal education, and who are married at a young age are

more vulnerable to domestic violence. This situation in rural areas suggests that DV is deeply embedded in the patriarchal structure of society, which keeps women at a subordinate position in power relations. There is a need for comprehensive strategies to empower women through enhancing their education and capabilities so that they can improve their socioeconomic status (Zakar, Zakar, & Abbas 2015).

Raj and Silverman's (2003) study of South-Asian immigrant women indicates that immigration-related factors predicted several levels of partner violence. Women with no family in the United States are three times more likely to have been physically injured than those with family in the country.

In a study conducted by Kelkar (2011), she describes how U.S. immigration policy affects South Asian women. Historically, U.S. immigration policy has been built to allow primary entry for men followed by secondary entry for women, who are generally wives or fiancés of the men. The principle of coverture embedded in immigration law forces women into dependency and places complete control of their lives in the hands of their spouses (Kelkar, 2011).

After the Immigration and Nationality Act of 1965 was passed, the H1B visa was created. This allowed men to sponsor their spouse on an H4 visa. The H4 visa places major restrictions on its holder, usually a woman). The H4 visa does not permit the holder to work and it does not assign the individual a social security number (Kelkar, 2011). This restricts the holder from earning money and ultimately leading a normal life. Individuals who hold an H4 visa are unable to open a bank account and cannot obtain a driver's license unless their partner holding the H1B visa submits additional paperwork allowing them to proceed with the process. An H4 visa has profound yet negative impacts on an immigrant woman's life (Kelkar, 2011).

2.3 Social Stigma

In a study conducted by Tonsing (2015), most South Asian women who participated felt pressured not to disclose their abuse outside of their family. The fear of potential shame to their family, fear of being ostracized from their communities and the notion of “saving face” barred women from reporting (Tonsing, 2015).

Many South Asians are socialized from childhood to believe that women are the protectors of *izzat*, a Hindi-Urdu term meaning “honor,” and may therefore refrain from talking about the abuse to protect this honor (Choudhry, 2001). These cultural norms make it harder for women to speak about their abuse and to challenge the hierarchy of gender, age, and status in their communities (Tonsing, 2015). For meaningful and effective change to occur, Tonsing believes that a strong effort is needed at both the family and community levels. Most South Asian people view domestic violence as a private matter to be endured. Tonsing shares in her research that ensuring women’s experiences of abuse are documented and named as “violence” is important. “Violence” must be defined as unacceptable and recognized as a social problem within the community.

People who have worked with South Asian women understand why domestic violence is highly underreported and that is because many women never get as far as the formal institutions to report their experiences of domestic violence. Often, South Asian women who do end up in court drop domestic violence charges, which become secondary to the divorce, immigration, and housing problems they must struggle with (Preisser, 1999).

Divorce is discouraged, and women who leave their husbands, even in the context of abuse, are frequently socially ostracized, and the shame they feel can extend to a “loss of face” for their entire family (Kallivayalil, 2010). Many women have shouldered the burden of

maintaining an unblemished view of the family to the outside community, despite frequently severe abuse (Kallivayalil, 2010).

2.4 Lack of Responsive Services

Research identifies four distinct variables determining access to services: acculturation, social support, patriarchy, and social isolation (Mahapatra & Dinitto, 2013). When South Asian women seek assistance from mainstream advocates or service providers, they are faced with communication problems. These problems arise in part from a failure of the service providers to understand the cultural context and issues of the client (Preisser, 1999). Lack of awareness and access to culturally relevant services acts as a major deterrent (Dutton et al; 2000)

In a seminal study by Mahapatra & Dinitto (2013), South Asian survivors indicated that they found social workers least helpful. Generally, mainstream service providers have very little knowledge about the South Asian client's background and often are not cognizant of the client's expectations (Preisser, 1999). Helping professionals remarked that existing social service agencies for ethnic minorities are program-based and are not geared for providing services for domestic violence cases (Tonsing, 2015). Intervention strategies work when cultural, historical, and ethnic contexts are taken into consideration (Preisser, 1999).

For the advocate and service provider, the implications are clear: providing competent services to a diverse South Asian population requires an integrated approach, which must include training in the specifics of gender violence and a sensitivity toward and respect for the client's cultural and ethnic background. Services providers must seek resources within the South Asian professional community and organizations that are involved in directly helping women in crisis (Preisser, 1999).

In George and Ramkissoon's study (1998), a woman said "I don't quite understand when White people talk. I understand English, but it is hard for me to follow what they say, especially when they use slang. Some of them get quite annoyed with me." In addition to the language barrier, when a woman cannot speak the local language, and if her literacy level is low, then she is already at a disadvantaged position for gathering information (Tonsing, 2015). Prevention approaches to address partner abuse and delayed help-seeking among South Asian immigrant women should include tailored community education, social services to reduce vulnerability, and cultural competency of professionals. Further research and program evaluation are needed to advance the field (Ahmad, Driver, McNally, & Stewart, 2009).

In today's era of global migration, a socio-historical understanding of the issues faced by a vulnerable subgroup of immigrant South Asian women is salient to address their needs in a timely manner (Ahmad, Driver, McNally, & Stewart, 2009). There is limited knowledge that addresses why abused South Asian women delay help-seeking (Ahmad, Driver, McNally, & Stewart, 2009).

Women within the United States who called ASHA for Women, an organization serving women and children affected by domestic violence in the Washington D.C. area, expressed fear of going to the authorities based on the perception that they would lack an understanding of their culture, ethnic, linguistic, and immigrant issues (Preisser, 1999). Help-seeking is highly concentrated to family and social networks. There is evidence to suggest that most women experiencing violence choose to seek community support instead of professional help (Raj & Silverman, 2007).

3. Method

This study uses a qualitative methodology using an in-depth interviewing method. In-

depth interviewing is a qualitative research technique that involves conducting intensive individual interviews with a small number of respondents to explore their perspectives on an idea, program, or situation. In-depth interviews are useful when you want in-depth information regarding a person's experience or want to explore new issues in depth (Boyce & Neele, 2006). We chose this methodology as it is the most efficient way to navigate our study when seeking to understand South Asian women's lived experiences of domestic violence.

Between May and July of 2018, we conducted eight in-depth qualitative interviews while working in partnership with SEWA-Asian Indian Family Wellness (SEWA-AIFW). SEWA-AIFW is an organization located in Minneapolis, MN serving people of South Asian origin living in the Twin Cities and greater Minnesota area. This study was reviewed and approved by an Institutional Review Board.

3.1 Participants

Through working in partnership with SEWA-AIFW, we were able to recruit eight study participants to participate in our research study. SEWA-AIFW made initial contact with potential study participants by reaching out to them with an overview of our study. Potential study participants who expressed interest in our study were provided a consent form to read through and sign, consenting they were willing to participate in our study. Once study participants provided informed consent, we sought to find a date and time at the convenience of the study participant to conduct the interview. All interviews took place at SEWA-AIFW's main office located in Minneapolis, MN. Also, all study participants received services at SEWA-AIFW at some point in time.

Study participants were women of South Asian origin currently living in Minnesota. Age of study participants ranged from 24 to 70 years. Immigration status of study participants varied

from being on a visa to having US citizenship. All participants in the study had shared having at least a master's degree.

3.2 Data Collection

We conducted eight semi-structured interviews lasting over an hour. Semi-structured interviews are conversations in which you know what you want to find out about, and they are guided by a set of questions (Miles and Gilbert, 2005). Using a semi-structured interview format was an effective method in better understanding a South Asian woman's lived experience of domestic violence. Semi-structured interviews allow for better engagement in conversation and makes the experience more fluid in nature. We opened each interview with one main global question by asking participants to tell us their story. The study sought to explore the following: experiences with intimate partner relationship, experiences of violence, social support, barriers to seeking services, coping mechanisms, and views on availability of culturally relevant domestic violence services.

The follow up questions were: (i) 'What are some of your experiences as a South Asian immigrant woman who have experienced domestic violence?' (ii) 'What are some barriers you have faced when seeking services and support in Minnesota?' (iii) 'What are some social supports that helped you navigate the crisis?' and (iv) 'What type of support and services do you believe should be available for South Asian women in general experiencing violence?' Additional probing questions were asked to better explore the experiences of our study participants. All interviews were audio recorded and transcribed.

3.3 Data Analysis

Each research investigator individually read through each one of the eight interview transcriptions. Each transcription was read several times to better understand the data. Next, each

research investigator sought to identify patterns and themes in each transcription. After patterns and themes were identified in each individual transcription, existing patterns and themes were compared across all transcriptions. Finally, the coding themes were compared between the two researchers and differences were discussed. This process helped to explore the validity of the data.

4. Results

4.1 Social Isolation

Women in our research study experienced social isolation manifested in different forms. In many cases, a woman's spouse may force her into isolation, disconnecting her from friends, family, and her community at large (Midlarsky et al., 2006). Women in our study who experienced social isolation were concerned with being able to connect with their social supports such as family members. One woman stated: *"Once he {husband} got like upset or something in a year he like disconnect my phone 10 to 15 times. How can I communicate outside the world specially in with my parents?"*

Multiple women in this study experienced isolation from electronic devices such as phone and laptop inhibiting their ability to connect with family and friends. Another experience of a woman in this study illustrates isolation from electronic devices: *"He would just take my phone in my laptop and not getting to talk to people {friends and family}."* Gill (2004) stresses that isolation is an effective method of abuse which lowers a woman's self-esteem and prevents them from escaping the abuse.

4.2 Emotional and Physical Abuse

Emotional and physical abuse was a very pervasive theme in our research study. These types of abuse manifested in forms such as control, name calling, threatening, hitting, etc.

Women felt the need to endure the abuse they were experiencing and stay with their husbands for their children's sake. Women, who were concerned about their ability to care for children on their own in a country where they have no independent income and cannot obtain employment either due to visa or educational restrictions, felt obligated to remain in abusive situations for the sake of their children (Jordan & Bhandari, 2016).

Staying in an abusive relationship for the sake of a woman's children was very common in our study. Some women waited if college for their children to grow up before they chose to leave their abusive situation. There were multiple women in our study who experienced abuse while they were pregnant. One study participant shared: *"And one night when he was drunk. And you know, he was he passed out, so I tried to wake him up. And then you know, he was mad that I woke him up. And then I called his brother, he had a brother who was in India. Right then it was like midnight, and then he got so mad, he started hitting me and he started putting me on the ground, he started kicking me, I was scared because I thought I could lose the baby"*.

An important risk factor perpetuating violence in the South Asian community is what scholars have identified as gender ideology (Abraham, 2000; Mehrotra, 1999). A woman in our study experienced abusive language daily from her spouse even when her husband thought she didn't cook food properly: *"A lot of abusive language. From morning to night, it did not matter what time of day. A lot of verbal abuses every single day especially when it would be past eight o'clock that I might get home. 'No damn food... da da da da da... then when I cooked the food {he} just throw away whatever I cooked anyway."* Also, the role extended, marital families play in the lives of married South Asian couples is culturally distinct and is an important factor in South Asian women experiencing domestic violence (Jordan & Bhandari, 2016).

Most women's abuse started out as verbal and emotional then escalating to physical abuse. One of our participants experienced consistent verbal and emotional abuse from her partner, which then escalated to physical abuse quickly over time: *"The abuse started first it was verbal, you know, first thing I wake up in the morning and he'd be like, you know why why do you look like that in the morning or, you know. He would say, why do you think like that? That is not how you think! Don't do your PhD, you're not worth it."*

4.3 High Social Stigma

Domestic violence is highly stigmatized in the South Asian community. Due to high social stigma, women in our study expressed a lack of support from family and friends. Women are expected to not speak about their abuse to anyone. If they speak up, they are putting themselves in a position to be socially ostracized as well as becoming more vulnerable to experience further abuse. Women in our study were fearful of people finding out about their abuse especially community members such as family and friends. It was not uncommon for women to attempt to seek help within their community finding they would only be turned away. An experience from one of our participants seeking help from her neighbor who happened to be of Asian-Indian origin elaborates on the theme: *"I seek the help from my neighbor, even he is Indian. He said, you know this is a family matter, we can't help you."*

South Asian women were taught growing up to deal with it, anything, as that is the "way it is". A participant in this study had no plan to leave an abusive relationship even though she had a laundry list of reasons to do so. Here's why: *"I did not have a plan before that. Why? Well, I do not know. Because I was taught that is the way it is, just deal with it."* When social service agencies fail to understand the cultural context in which South Asian women's experiences are rooted, it inhibits them to seek support from their community rather than more formal support.

Women in abusive relationships disclosed that fear of stigmatization and being ostracized from their community, fear of intensification of abuse, and limited availability of services were some reasons for not seeking help from those outside their personal networks (Mahapatra & Dinitto, 2013).

4.4 Legal and Immigration Related Barriers

All participants in our study lacked knowledge to understand the legal system in the United States. Several women in our study were currently going through divorces as well as fighting for custody of their children. Women were fearful of losing their immigration status especially if they were going through a divorce. Women who are going through a divorce while being legally dependent on their spouse are at a higher risk for being deported back to their country of origin since their spouse is in control of their visa status. The power to keep a spouse in permanent risk of deportation provides abusers, who are citizens and legal permanent residents, with a tool to keep abused immigrant women in violent relationships (Gill, 2004).

One participant in our study experienced abuse from her spouse for 16 years. Her spouse used his power and influence to falsely implicate her of violence against their children. She was eventually arrested and put in county jail. She narrates the following experience and her encounter with the legal system in the US: “. . . *she {police officer} started again. Just accept your mistakes. I said no I cannot accept something which have never happened and then she kicked me in my hip.*” This participant ended up in a workhouse. Her spouse told her family in India that she was in the hospital receiving treatment for mental illness when really, she was in jail under false charges the entire time.

4.5 Lack of access to culturally relevant counseling services

To put things into more perspective at the local level, there is only one organization

(SEWA-AIFW) serving South Asians living in the Twin Cities and greater Minnesota.

Participants in our study expressed deep concern for lack of culturally relevant services. One participant in our study stated she had limited access and information regarding support services:

“A lot of helpless because you don't know where to contact the correct person and you don't know the laws, immigration rules and whom do you approach. So, lack of education basically, and support obviously”.

Participants were also fearful of cultural misunderstandings by social service providers. Also, a participant's fear of being judged and misunderstood inhibited her from seeking services. Here is an experience of a participant who sought counseling services and realized that she couldn't find the cultural support she sought because most women of other races and ethnic identities in her support group had different socialization toward gender and violence. *“I'm the only Asian girl or the only Indian. Yeah, the only Asian girl in this whole group. And that's where I'm beginning to see the difference between my mindset and their mindset.”*

4.6 Lack of financial resources

Most women come to the United States on dependent visas, a visa legally bound to her spouse's legal status (Kelkar, 2011). However, as stated before, our study participants' visa status varied. Even though women in our study had earned at least a master's degree, they were unable to work due to restrictions imposed by their visa status. Women who were unable to work due to visa restrictions became completely financially dependent on their spouse. A spouse had complete control over financial resources and could cut them off whenever he wished to.

Here is an experience of a participant who spent some of her money from her savings account and her husband exerted his control when he found out.: *“I had some \$600 in my account in the savings account and for some reason I had to take out \$60 so he took away all the*

money from my savings account.” Even though women were married and living in the same household as their spouse, in some cases, women were expected to provide for themselves and their children.

A woman in our study was expected to provide for her children and this is her experience: *“Um in my case, I had to financially provide for my children, mostly on my own. And this went on through all their life. The most help I got was he took care of the mortgage, but food clothes, electric bill, on the most part, any household item, any household appliance, any household machine, I had to figure out how to get the money and put em in and make sure everything's working at all times, which that was the long and short of it. So, for my 30 years of marriage. That is how things were done. We had a business together, I had to beg to get a paycheck. So I basically in that interim of 30 years dependent on my credit cards to get me through because there was no outside income other than the business which like I said I had to beg for a paycheck.”*

5. Discussion

The results of this study demonstrate support for existing literature. Patriarchy and gender in South Asia have distinct impacts on the everyday lives of South Asian women experiencing domestic violence. Women in the South Asian community obtain respect and recognition in society by fulfilling the roles of an ideal wife and mother of a son or sons (Goel, 2005). Women deserve to have autonomy in their relationships and should be granted the privilege to make choices on their own. Despite this common understanding, in reality, most South Asian women continue to face everyday discriminations and abuse in their personal relationships based on age old traditions and values.

Immigration related barriers further accentuate the experience of violence and abuse as

women remain trapped in their abusive relationship. In our study, women were constantly in fear that they would be deported to their country of origin if their spouse separated from them. They were also fearful of losing custody of their children. Most of these fears were based on what their spouse had conveyed to them and because of the lack of understanding about the legal system in the US. Many women expressed they had obtained advanced degrees that were not recognized in the United States. This disparity in recognition of their education caused women to have to rely entirely on the abusive partner's income, as they were no longer credentialed to do the jobs they had been trained to do (Jordan & Bhandari, 2016). Throughout our study, women expressed how important access to financial resources were in navigating their abusive relationships. A woman in this study had to go on food stamps during their period of legal separation because her spouse would not provide any financial resources: *"He would limit all my money and everything so I didn't have any money. I had to go on food stamps"*.

6. Limitations

The main limitations of the study are as follows: 1) There was significant challenge in recruiting participants for the study. Because of the high stigma associated with discussing domestic violence, survivors were reluctant to participate. There were several interview cancellations, and withdrawals which resulted in a small sample for the final study. 2) The second limitation of the study was that this research was entirely confined to Minnesota, so geographically the sample was not very diverse. The strengths and challenges of geographical mobility, such as urban versus rural, which in turn are associated with access to services or lack thereof could not be captured in this study. 3) Finally, South Asian women have different countries of origin. In this sample however all the diversity of cultural impacts depending on

country of origin, values, and norms of socialization toward gender could not be captured.

Despite the challenges and limitations of the study, this research is the first of its kind in the state of Minnesota that has tried to capture the lived experiences of domestic violence among South-Asian women living in the state.

7. Conclusion

There is very limited research available nationally on prevalence and outcome of domestic violence in the South Asian community living in the US. Similarly, very little is known about the incidence, outcome, and access to services among survivors of domestic violence in Minnesota. This study is the first of its kind in the state that has explored the lived experiences of South Asian domestic violence survivors. The study can provide perspective to service providers, as well as policy makers regarding developing culturally relevant services, facilitating access, and more importantly advocating for resources to support organizations that work with South Asian communities. More population level research is also needed to understand the context of domestic violence in South Asian community living in the US. Community level education and outreach is also important to create awareness and understanding of the issue.

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