

## About Saheli



Saheli, Support and Friendship for South Asian Women and Families is a Massachusetts based domestic violence response and prevention agency. If you or someone you know is experiencing abuse and violence reach out to Saheli for free, compassionate and confidential help. The advocates at Saheli speak seven South Asian languages. You can get help anonymously, or come into our office for support and friendship.

## Data Overview

**One hundred and fifty-five people responded to the survey.**

- Average age of respondents was 40
- Range of ages was 19-80 years old
- One hundred and thirty-four women, seventeen men, and four (did not share) responded.

**In this study, we asked one group to respond to survey questions without prompts. Another group was asked to read educational materials about domestic violence prior to responding. Roughly half the surveys were done online, the other half were filled out at face to face meetings and events. We found that there were no significant differences in responses between the two group**

- Largest group of participants were Indian Americans
- Second largest were Pakistani Americans by large margin
- No respondents from Bangladesh, Nepal or other South Asian country

## Participant Profile

**The majority of participants were:**

- Married women with higher education, including some college and further
- Living with families i.e. spouse, children
- Immigrants

## Intimate Partner Violence in the South Asian Community

Project Director: Uma Chandrika-Millner, Ph. D.  
Center for Psychological Rehabilitation, Boston University

Project Coordinator: Ms. Mani Dixit, Saheli

## Quick Look

- 31% of sample reported personally experiencing intimate partner violence
- 54% reported knowing a South Asian person who experienced intimate partner violence
- 88% reported emotional abuse, control, and/or intimidation
  - 50% experienced physical violence
  - >50% reported being threatened and intimidated
- 25% reported that they did not receive any help for the abuse and violence committed against them
- 43% sought services and supports primarily for “emotional support” and “advice and guidance”
- Majority said they enlisted the help of family and friends and informal channels of help-seeking are more common than going to police and anti-violence agencies
- 33% of women and men accessed mental health services which were the highest among all services received
  - 25% reported having no services
- One individual shared her experience of having miscarried multiple time due to the experience of violence
  - 1/3 reported financial control and/or withholding of financial support
  - >50% reported experiencing high stress levels and reported loneliness or isolation following the abuse
  - 27% reported keeping the experience of abuse a secret

## Data Overview

Types of experiences	Number of Participants	Percentage
Physical violence or aggression	20	46.7
Emotional abuse, control, or manipulation	42	87.5
Threats or intimidation	26	54.2
Social isolation	15	31.25
Injury that required medical attention	3	6.3
Financial control/withholding of financial support	16	33.3
Sexual abuse	10	20.8
Loss of pregnancy due to physical/emotional abuse	1	2.1
Verbal abuse/insults	1	2.1

Intimate partner violence and domestic violence take a very heavy emotional and psychological toll on families, trauma that last for decades if not an entire lifetime. Young children witnessing abuse are deeply impacted. Our participants indicated the following mental health conditions when they lived in abusive households.

Mental Health challenges	Number of Participants	Percentage
High stress	27	56.25
Frequent crying spells	14	29.2
Recurring memories of the experience	14	29.2
Numbness	8	16.7
Sleeplessness	18	37.5
Frequent use of alcohol or drugs	4	8.3
Helplessness or hopelessness	15	31.3
Low appetite	13	8.4
Excessive worrying	23	48
Bouts of uncontrollable anger	14	29.2
Headaches or body aches	11	23
Panic	15	31.3
Loneliness	21	43.8
Suicidal thoughts	7	14.6
Constant health issues or concerns	8	16.7

## Barriers to Access

Reasons why South Asians find it difficult to get help	Number of Participants	Percentage
Language barriers	56	36.1
Cultural values and beliefs	105	67.7
Concerns about safety	61	39.4
Lack of access to services	61	39.4
Lack of knowledge about what to do	105	67.7
Fear of law enforcement	39	25.2
Being out of status legally	26	16.8
Fear of losing children to DCF	39	25.2
Other	23	14.8

## Background

In 2016 Saheli, Support and Friendship for South Asian Women and Families, conducted a study for the need for intimate partner violence (IPV) services among South Asian families living in Massachusetts. IPV is often the most significant component in domestic violence and other forms of violence against women. Funded by Community Health Networks Area 15, an affiliate of Lahey Hospital and Medical Center and the Mass. Dept. of Public Health, the study attempted to measure what the level of need was for services among South Asians and what specific services families were seeking.