

# Responding to Realities:

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

## Emerging Issues

With regard to the models of service delivery being employed by service providers around the country, we found organizations seem to be grappling with a common set of issues. These emerging issues revolve around a dialogue about improving services aimed at immigrant populations.

### Re-defining success.

In a conventional Domestic Violence framework, it is assumed that success is achieved when the survivor leaves the abusive situation. When working with immigrant populations, **this definition of success needs to change** because of a woman's dependence upon her abuser for legal immigration status and her fear of isolation from her community.

Almost all of the organizations felt that this conventional definition of success did not capture the progress made by survivors, and that to truly honor these women is to laud their ability to overcome barriers, both big and small.

For example, service providers talked of celebrating a successful navigation of the public transportation system, application for benefits, and knowing where to inquire for resources. This **strength-based approach** really turns the notion of success on its ear and **allows women to define what success looks like to them.**

### Working with families.

Many of the organizations talked about the need to not only work with individual women, but also the need to **create safe ways to work with the woman's family and/or support system** (e.g. relatives, friends). The idea of working with a family unit instead of an individual can be a comforting notion for many women who feel that seeking "help" is a selfish act and alleviate her feelings of social isolation.

### Moving toward a truly community-based approach.

Organizations felt they were viewed as being detached from their ethnic communities and, therefore, needed to allocate some effort into "integrating" survivors back into their respective communities.

These organizations spoke about their **efforts to become more rooted in the community** – creating collaborative relationships in ethnic communities; building a coalition around a mobilizing issue (e.g. immigrant rights). Consequently, women do not feel they are abandoning their community as they seek services to free their lives from violence.

A collaborative research initiative between Apna Ghar and Loyola University Chicago, Center for Urban Research and Learning, funded by the Sara Lee Foundation.

## Reshaping Domestic Violence Service Models for Immigrant Women

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While domestic violence is a problem that affects women from all backgrounds, issues regarding immigration status, linguistic and cultural isolation, and strong cultural or religious norms that differ from mainstream society complicate the domestic violence experience in immigrant families.

This research focuses on **documenting effective, culturally competent service models that address the needs of domestic violence survivors within the context of South Asian immigrant culture and circumstance.** Findings from this research should not be limited to South Asian immigrant women. They also provide a method of assessing the issues that impact other immigrant groups as they attempt to access social services.

Through this study, we have found that for practitioners, cultural competence allows them to have a **deeper understanding of the socio-cultural background of the women they serve.** In turn, this leads to the elimination of deeply entrenched disparities in the social services available to people of diverse racial, ethnic, and cultural backgrounds.

The current research is a multi-disciplinary effort to understand the service providers' perspective on the needs of immigrant women.<sup>1,2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> This report is based on the findings from a collaborative research project between Apna Ghar, a South Asian domestic violence agency, and Loyola University Chicago Center for Urban Research and Learning. This report focuses on strategies employed by domestic violence organizations who serve primarily South Asian or Asian women. It is primarily based on information gathered from interviews conducted with 30 organizations from around the United States and Canada. In addition, it is informed by the research conducted in other sections of the larger study: a case review of a random sample of 82 Apna Ghar clients; information gathered from 16 open-ended interviews with attorneys and legal advocates working with immigrant women who are victims of domestic violence, and a review of national and international literature on the incidence and prevalence of domestic violence among South Asians.

<sup>2</sup> The full report can be accessed at [www.luc.edu/curl/announcements/apnaghar/index.shtml](http://www.luc.edu/curl/announcements/apnaghar/index.shtml)

Women need someone who speaks their language, both literally, in terms of interpretation and translation of their native tongue, but also in terms of providing a safe space where women can feel that they can express themselves among fellow community members during their time of struggle and transition.

## What We Found

The organizations included in this study used a systematic approach, incorporating different types of innovative strategies for direct services. These included:

- General advocacy/peer counseling
- Legal advocacy
- Language interpretation and translation
- Supportive Services: English as a Second Language classes, job training, child care, transportation, medical, and life skills training
- Shelter or other housing assistance
- Mental health services/substance abuse services/professional counseling

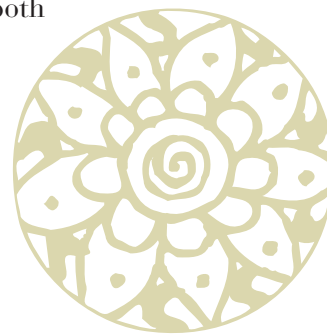
## Modes of Service Delivery.

- The organizations included in this study represent a mix of volunteer-run organizations and organizations with paid staff ranging from one part-time staff to over 80 full-time staff. These organizations offer unique blends of services, including legal services, counseling, shelter, and language interpretation and translation, **however, the model in which services are delivered varies.**
- In-house services – Some organizations have staff that provides comprehensive domestic violence services that are located on-site. These organizations tend to have ‘departments’ that are responsible for providing a set of services (e.g. legal, housing, counseling departments).
- Collaborative model – In areas with sizable Asian populations, several Pan-Asian organizations pool their resources and collaborate to deliver an array of domestic violence and support services to their clients, so that one organization provides legal services and partners with another organization that primarily provides emergency and transitional housing.
- Referral based – Some organizations deliver services by referring clients to mainstream organizations or to individuals (e.g. mental health counselors, lawyers) who specialize in serving the South Asian community. This model is especially common in areas that have small Asian/ South Asian populations.

## Innovative Direct Services.

### Utilizing peer relations.

- One core aspect of a successful service model is to involve peers in freeing a woman from a life of violence. Peer support is viewed as a culturally competent strategy because it **utilizes the women’s relationships instead of solely focusing on the individual within the violent situation.**
- The peer model rests on the ability of organizations to provide services in a multitude of languages. Women need someone who speaks their language, both literally, in terms of interpretation and translation of their native tongue, but also in terms of providing a safe space where women can feel that they can express themselves among fellow community members during their time of struggle and transition.



## Flexibility in delivery of legal assistance.

The legal services provided by the organizations interviewed varied.

- Some organizations pool their legal resources with nearby organizations to create a “Legal Resource Center” while other organizations enlist volunteer or pro-bono lawyers.
- One organization employs the strategy of using a significant portion of its funds to recruit “top lawyers” in the area because the complexity of the legal systems requires a lawyer who is fully vested in the case.
- Another organization provides regular free legal clinics where women meet simultaneously with family and immigration lawyers in an effort to streamline and coordinate any necessary legal actions.
- All of this points to the need to be flexible and creative in the face of available legal resources.

## Community building as a bridge.

In addition to providing services, a significant portion of the efforts of these organizations are being directed to community building, which includes everything from organizing a community around institutional changes to networking with relevant stakeholders.

These organizations are most concerned about:

- Building relationships within the domestic violence service community;
- Conducting education and prevention efforts in the South Asian/Asian community;
- Creating an awareness of services provided by these organizations (outreach); and
- Building relationships and coalitions for public policy advocacy.

## “Internal” collaborations

- **Re-framing domestic violence.** Staff from these organizations work with leaders in the South Asian community so that these leaders are able to articulate issues related to immigration, women, families, violence, health and wellbeing. Many organizations connected with their “internal” networks by framing violence as a community issue.
- **Domestic violence organizations as a bridge.** By building these internal and external networks, institutions and members of the South Asian community begin to recognize South Asian domestic violence organizations for the resources they bring to the community, such as relationships with mainstream institutions and funding for social services in the community. As domestic violence organizations are often be viewed as ‘homewreckers’ in the community, this asset-based perspective represents a dramatic shift in the community’s attitudes towards those who provide services to victims.

## “External” collaborations

- **Technical assistance to mainstream organizations.** Some ethnic organizations provide training and consultation to mainstream domestic violence organizations on how to provide culturally competent services. This represents a way of building mainstream organizational capacity for direct services, while also allowing ethnic organizations access to additional resources through their relationships with mainstream service providers.
- **Coalition for public policy advocacy.** Since their work transcends many fronts – women’s issues, immigration, advocacy for the Asian communities – the domestic violence organizations in this study utilized many of their ‘external networks’ to further their work in coalitions dedicated to securing more rights for battered immigrant women at the institutional level.

The organizations interviewed provided instances of internal and external networks they created for their community building efforts. “INTERNAL” networks include faith-based groups, businesses, and associations in the South Asian community. “EXTERNAL” organizations include mainstream domestic violence organizations, immigration organizations, police, and hospitals.