We used a tiered methodology.

To gain a comprehensive understanding of domestic violence among South Asian immigrant women, the research team conducted:


Legal/Policy Research: Review of literature; interviews with 11 Chicago-based attorneys and legal advocates, and 5 interviews with national attorneys and advocates.

Innovative Service Models: Phone interviews with 30 organizations in the United States and Canada.

Of the 30 organizations interviewed:
- 7 were located in Northeastern U.S. region
- 3 were located in the Mid-Atlantic region
- 5 located in the Southern region
- 6 located in the Midwestern region
- 7 located in the Western region
- 2 located in Canada

Domestic violence is a problem that affects women from all backgrounds. Nearly 25% of women indicated in the 2000 National Violence Against Women Survey that they were raped and/or physically assaulted by a current or former spouse, cohabiting partner, or date at some time in their lifetime. Immigrant women are no exception. The issues regarding immigration status, linguistic and cultural isolation, and strong cultural or religious norms that differ from the mainstream society complicate the experience of domestic violence among immigrant families.

According to the 2000 Census, there are over 1.3 million documented South Asians living in the United States. South Asians come from a cluster of countries that includes India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka, Nepal, Bhutan, and Afghanistan. This growth in the South Asian population in the United States is mainly due to immigration and not increased fertility. Furthermore, the Census figures represent only those South Asians who responded to the Census survey and do not reflect undocumented immigrants and refugees, thus making these figures even higher.

Given this growth of the South Asian immigrant population in the United States, service providers must react to the particular needs of Asians, who often fall under the stereotype of the “model minority” and are not perceived as needing social services. Furthermore, those services that are available are resisted by the clients' limited facility with English and immigration status, they are less likely to be employed. Immigrant women are more likely to report being abused by both their husbands and other family members.

Legal/Policy Research
Immigrant women who are victims of domestic violence residing in the United States are in a “perfect storm” – a convergence of detrimental factors. Those who are not married to citizens or resident aliens have little ability to find relief due to their lack of citizen – or citizen-like – rights. Those who do have rights are often blocked from exercising them because of a lack of knowledge, manipulation by the perpetrator, and fear of isolation from her community. In a conventional Domestic Violence framework, it is assumed that success is achieved when the victim 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 fear of isolation from her community.

Case File Review
In a review of Apna Ghar client files comparing immigrant and non-immigrant domestic violence victims, we found:

- Immigrant clients were more likely to report abuse and receive legal services, and have limited English language skills.
- Due to the clients’ limited facility with English and immigration status, they were more likely to be employed.
- Immigrant clients were more likely to report being abused by both their husbands and other family members.

In particular, our review of the immigration and social welfare system concludes that:

- Many of the aspects of US ‘family-based’ immigration provisions create and/or exacerbate an unequal power relationship between the abuser (the sponsor) and the victim.
- The US social welfare system limits the options available for victims of domestic violence to successfully receive support. In particular the lack of universal entitlement to family, employment and housing benefits, combined with the cutbacks in entitlement to other social welfare programs for women and non-citizens, have severely limited assistance available to abused immigrant women.
- A domestic violence service system based on “citizen rights” as opposed to human rights, such as that in the US, has some profound limitations in fully serving immigrant women.

Emerging Issues for Service Providers
With regard to the models of service delivery being employed by service providers around the country, there were issues with which organizations seemed to be grappling. These emerging issues revolve around a dialogue about improving services aimed at immigrant populations.

Conventional measures of success fail to recognize progress when it is made abroad.

Re-defining success
In a conventional Domestic Violence framework, it is assumed that success is achieved when the victim 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 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 their clients, and that for those women to be able to achieve success, they must be able to achieve both legal and social support, both legal and social advocacy, and a safe way to work with the women’s family and/or support system (e.g. relatives, friends). The idea of working with a family unit instead of an individual can be comforting to many clients who feel that seeking “help” is a selfish act.

Immigrant women are victims of violence residing in the United States. In a “perfect storm” – a convergence of detrimental factors. Those who are not married to citizens or resident aliens have little ability to find relief due to their lack of citizen – or citizen-like – rights. Those who do have rights are often blocked from exercising them because of a lack of knowledge, manipulation by the perpetrator, and fear of isolation from her community. In a conventional Domestic Violence framework, it is assumed that success is achieved when the victim 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 fear of isolation from her community.

Moving toward a truly community-based approach:

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

In examining the issues that arise from both the political/legal and social service analysis, it is clear that these emerging issues are very much related; that speaking of individual survivor issues is absolutely related to the institutional issues around the immigrant system and human rights. Decision-makers and policy makers in both the political/legal and social service analysis, it is clear that these emerging issues are very much related; that speaking of individual survivor issues is absolutely related to the institutional issues around the immigrant system and human rights.

Conclusion: Individual “success” is determined by the ability to navigate multiple, complex systems.

Making these individual-to-institutional connections and tying innovative strategies to them, organizations and advocates can create a space for these women to honor themselves and eventually free themselves from a life of violence.