

South Asian domestic violence victims face barriers during pandemic

By **Fatima Baig**

Many South Asian women who are victims of domestic violence face hurdles such as language and social barriers. Since the pandemic started, places like Indus Community Services are having to adapt the way they provide services for South Asian Women.

South Asian women face barriers when it comes to domestic violence and, as a result, many have a hard time coming forward and gaining access to services and resources available to them.

According to Rupri Muintanti, Family Court Support Worker of Indus Community Service, South Asian women face language barriers, systemic barriers, family pressure, financial support challenges, a lack of knowledge about services and resources available to them, immigration status, shortage of shelters and housing wait times, ineligibility for Legal Aid Ontario, Ontario Works, child care subsidy and transportation when it comes to domestic violence.

Indus Community Services had to change the way they are providing services during the pandemic.

One of these changes involves doing virtual or telephone meetings instead of face-to-face sessions, and, as a result, they are having a hard time building a rapport with clients.

?The barriers workers are facing when providing services to South Asian women during a pandemic is that sometimes workers find it difficult to build a rapport with women as face-to-face meetings do not take place anymore.? said Muintanti

According to Mutani, ever since they switched to telephone meetings Indus Community Services have a hard time reaching clients and providing support to individuals as many are not tech-savvy, as well as women who have children since they often have a hard time focusing on the conversation.

Due to the telephone meetings, there is a greater chance of miscommunication as well.

?South Asian women during a pandemic cannot be able to connect with the client since the main way we are doing this is by telephone and at times they are not able to pick up or call us back. If this happens, it makes it difficult for the service provider and the client as well, since it creates the barrier of miscommunication.? said Multani.

According to Multani, since the pandemic has hit many women are hesitant and worried about going into a shelter or a congregated space and fear they will get exposed to COVID-19. As a result, many women are choosing to stay where they are.

Financial insecurity is also a big reason why women don't want to leave their families.

Many immigrant women are stay at home mothers or newcomers to Canada and don't have experience in the job market.

?During the pandemic, employment is challenging and they do not want to separate from their family and financially struggle. They fear the uncertainty during the pandemic and this can create a strain on their mental health as well,? said Multani.

The services and programs offered by Indus Community Services include Family Court Support Services Crisis intervention, counselling and risk assessment safety planning and transitional support women's groups to support health and wellness educational workshops, advocacy and referrals to community resources mental Health Counselling Support Child, youth and parenting support.

To access these services, please contact Indus Community Services Head Office at 905 275 2369