

WASHINGTON DeSi: South Asians in the Nation's Capital

The South Asian Community Empowerment Project
With generous support from the District of Columbia Mayor's Office on Asian and Pacific Islander Affairs

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The development and implementation of the South Asian Community Empowerment Project (SACE) is the result of a group effort.

We would like to thank the following individuals for contributing to the SACE project: **Maha Khan**, who designed and implemented the surveys and focus groups, and drafted versions of this report; the **staff and interns** at APALRC and SAALT; the **SACE Advisory Committee** (Irfana Anwer of Ayuda Community Legal Interpreter Bank, Sabrina Balmgawalla of the University of D.C.'s Law School Center for Immigration Law and Practice, Kashyap Choksi of Equal Justice Works, Saba Ghori and Amrita Wassan of Asian/Pacific Islander Domestic Violence Resource Project (DVRP), Veeral Majmudar of the Savan Group, Nirva Parikh of Change to Win, and Daniel Singh of Khush D.C. and the Daniel Phoenix Singh Dance Company); **community-based partners**; and the volunteers who spent weekends and evenings surveying South Asians in metropolitan Washington, D.C.¹ The SACE project has been supported by the **District of Columbia's Office on Asian and Pacific Islander Affairs**.

About South Asian Americans Leading Together (SAALT)

SAALT is a national non-profit organization that fosters civic and political participation by South Asians in the United States through a social justice framework that incorporates the strategies of policy analysis and advocacy, community education, local capacity building, and leadership development. SAALT partners with community-based organizations in order to advance policy goals and community education initiatives. SAALT's programs in the D.C. area include community forums and townhalls, a Speaker's Bureau, participation in statewide coalitions, and policy advocacy. For more information about SAALT, please contact us at saalt@saalt.org or at www.saalt.org.

About Asian Pacific American Legal Resource Center (APALRC)

The APALRC was founded in response to the lack of linguistically and culturally appropriate legal services for the growing number of Asian Americans. The APALRC is the Capitol Region's nonprofit advocate advancing the legal and civil rights of Asian Americans and immigrants through direct services, education, and advocacy. Having established several direct service areas, including its domestic violence project, the housing and community justice project, the workers representation project, the language access project, the multilingual legal helpline, and the legal interpreter project, the main goals of the APALRC are to address the individual needs of the low-

income and limited English proficient Asian individuals and to advocate for broad-based systemic change on legal and civil rights issues impacting Asian individuals.

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ABOUT THE PROJECT

In order to understand the concerns and needs of Washington, D.C.'s South Asian community, South Asian Americans Leading Together (SAALT) and the Asian Pacific American Legal Resources Center (APALRC) embarked upon the South Asian Community Empowerment Project (SACE) in early 2009 with generous support from the District of Columbia's Office on Asian and Pacific Islander Affairs (OAPIA).

The project's goals are to: 1) **enhance collective understanding about the community of South Asians who live or work in Washington, D.C. with an emphasis on emerging trends;** 2) **set forth recommendations for policymakers, service providers and other stakeholders about how to effectively reach South Asians;** and 3) **provide appropriate legal services and education for the community.**

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The SACE project included the development and implementation of a translated needs assessment survey that was administered in person or in online format to 197 individuals; interviews with South Asian organizations and community members; and three in-person focus groups (with South Asian young professionals, domestic workers, and volunteers who administered the SACE surveys). In addition, the project connected with 20 community groups in the Washington D.C. metropolitan area.

While the SACE project findings are not intended to represent the experiences and needs of the entire South Asian community in Washington, D.C., they provide baseline information that can be used as starting points for community and public education, stakeholder and policy advocacy, and additional research.

The **survey** (*included in Appendix A*) covered questions related to demographic information; utilization of and access to public services; cases of unfair treatment; and civic engagement. The survey was available in English, Bangla, Hindi, Punjabi, Sinhalese, Tamil, and Urdu. To participate in the survey, a respondent had to either live or work in Washington, D.C. and identify as a South Asian or be of South Asian descent.

Trained volunteers administered confidential paper-based surveys in targeted neighborhoods, businesses, embassies, and places of worship in Washington, D.C. that are commonly known to or frequented by South Asians. In addition to administering the surveys in Washington, D.C., volunteers conducted the survey in Maryland and Virginia to capture South Asians who work in the District but who do not live in Washington, D.C.

The SACE survey was also conducted online via Survey Monkey, a survey software tool. An online platform was chosen to increase the number of respondents as well as to ensure the privacy, anonymity, and safety of respondents. The online survey was available only in English, and was conducted for eight weeks.

The SACE survey was supplemented by **focus groups** with young professionals, volunteers who administered the SACE surveys, and domestic workers. The aim of the focus groups was to provide deeper insights into the attitudes, perceptions, and opinions of particular sub-sections of the community.

We also conducted **one-on-one interviews with D.C. based community organizations and professional associations**. These organizations included the American Nepal Women's Association of Greater Washington, D.C. (ANWA), Asian/Pacific Islander Domestic Violence Resource Project (DVRP), Dhristipat's D.C. Chapter; Khush D.C., Metropolitan South Asian Deaf Association (MSADA), Sikh American Legal Defense and Education Fund (SALDEF), Sikhcess' D.C. Chapter; and the Washington Area Liquor Retailers Association (WALRA).

OUTREACH

SACE volunteers conducted outreach at the following locations: Bangladeshi, Indian, Nepali, Pakistan, and Sri Lankan Embassies; Buddhist Vihara; Florida Market; Indian Experience; Islamic Center of D.C.; Maine Avenue Fish Market; South Asian restaurants (various locations); National Gurdwara; Safeway (17th and Corcoran Streets, NW); Subway (various locations); Threads Salon; various taxi locations in D.C., Singh Saba Gurdwara Fairfax, VA; International Buddhist Center in Wheaton, MD; Murugan Temple in Lanham, MD, and the Bangladesh Islamic Center in Arlington, VA.

Additionally, we sought input from the following D.C.-area organizations: American Nepal Women's Association of Greater Washington, D.C. (ANWA); American Nepal Society; Capitol Area Muslim Bar Association of Washington D.C., Casa de Maryland; Dhristipat D.C. Chapter; Asian/Pacific Islander Domestic Violence Resource Project (DVRP); Federal Asian Pacific American Council

(FAPAC); Jubilee Housing; Khush D.C.; Metropolitan South Asian Deaf Association (MSADA); Muslim Women's Coalition; Network of South Asian Professionals (NETSAP); Pakistan American Leadership Center (PAL-C); Sikh American Legal Defense and Education Fund; Sikhcess D.C. Chapter, Sri Lankan Ranga Kala Kavaya (Cultural Center); South Asian student organizations at George Washington University (GW), Johns Hopkins School of Advanced International Studies (SAIS), and Georgetown University; and the South Asian Bar Association of Washington D.C. (SABA).

REPORT STRUCTURE

This report contains three sections. The first section provides background information and demographic analysis of the South Asian population living or working in Washington, D.C. The second part identifies the key issues facing the respondents who participated in our survey, and also presents some of their stories. The last section presents key recommendations to government agencies and community organizations, and suggestions for further analysis, outreach and research.



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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

From White Tiger Restaurant, situated on the Northeast section of Massachusetts Avenue and Threads Salon in the historic U Street district of the city, to the perfumeries in Florida Market and the numerous houses of South Asian worship, it is evident that the South Asian community has developed a significant presence in Washington, D.C. While South Asians in Washington, D.C. account for one of the largest Asian American groups in Washington, D.C., and are contributing to its culture and economy, little is known about the needs and experiences of the community members who have made this area their home.

Washington, D.C. is witnessing an unprecedented growth in its immigrant population. As Washington, D.C.'s total population decreased by 5.7% between 1990 and 2000, the overall immigrant population actually increased by 25%, with the Asian population demonstrating a 42% growth.³ In fact, 2007 census data reveals that the Asian American population in D.C. has increased by nearly 25% since the year 2000.⁴ Within the Asian community in Washington, D.C., the largest groups are the Chinese and Indian populations (at 4,767 and 4,277, respectively).⁵ The majority of South Asian residents in Washington, D.C. live in Wards 2 and 3.

In order to understand the concerns and needs of Washington, D.C.'s South Asian community, South Asian Americans Leading Together (SAALT) and the Asian Pacific American Legal Resources Center (APALRC) embarked upon the South Asian Community Empowerment Project (SACE) in early 2009 with generous support from the Washington D.C. Mayor's Office on Asian and Pacific Islander Affairs (OAPIA).

The project's goals are to 1) **enhance collective understanding about the community of South Asians who live or work in Washington, D.C. with an emphasis on emerging trends;** 2) **set forth recommendations to policymakers, service providers and other stakeholders about how to effectively reach South Asians;** and 3) **provide appropriate legal services and education for the community, based on the information collected about pressing needs and gaps.**

The SACE project included the development and implementation of a translated needs assessment survey which was administered in person or in online format to 197 individuals; interviews with South Asian organizations and community members; and three focus groups (with South Asian young professionals, domestic workers, and volunteers who administered the SACE surveys). In addition, we sought input from 20 community groups in the Washington D.C. metropolitan area.

While the SACE project findings provided below are not intended to represent the experiences and needs of the entire South Asian community in Washington, D.C., they provide starting points for community and public education, stakeholder and policy advocacy, and additional research.

Selected findings include the following:

- **Who Are We?** Of the respondents, the largest South Asian group living or working in Washington, D.C. is of Indian descent, followed by those of Pakistani, Bangladeshi, Nepali, and Sri Lankan descent.
- **Where Do We Live?** Almost all of the respondents work in Washington, D.C. The majority of respondents reside in Virginia, while more than one-third lives in D.C, predominantly in Wards 1 and 2. The remainder resides in Maryland.
- **Immigration and Citizenship:** More than half of the respondents are U.S. citizens by birth or naturalization. The remainder of the respondents comprises either legal permanent residents (15.2%) or employment/ student visa holders and their dependents.
- **Priority Needs:** Respondents identified access to health care, job trainings and legal services as three priority service needs. In terms of legal services, the top three areas of need are taxation and finance, immigration, and criminal defense.
- **Unfair Treatment:** In the last year, 28% of our respondents reported that they had experienced unfair treatment when dealing with law enforcement officials or government authorities. Of these respondents, 32% were Pakistanis, and 43% were Sikhs, communities that have experienced greater levels of discrimination and profiling since September 11, 2001. Additionally, almost a third of respondents expressed that they had experienced unfair treatment while working, or when frequenting stores, banks or restaurants.
- **Public Safety:** Small business owners identified safety and security concerns, and the need for the Metropolitan Police Department (MPD) to understand and communicate more effectively with South Asian business owners.
- **Civic Engagement:** While South Asians in our sample are engaged in civic activities such as voting or participating in cultural or religious organizations, nearly 78% do not engage with their elected leaders or government agencies.
- **Economic Empowerment:** While many South Asians are doing well financially, there is a growing population of low-income community members who work in service industries as waiters and domestic workers. In addition, taxi drivers and small business

owners who operate liquor or convenience stores in Washington, D.C. have specific and unique concerns related to government benefits.

- **Culturally and Linguistically Appropriate Services:** Currently, D.C. government agencies and non-profit organizations provide services, resources, and information that could be beneficial to South Asians. Yet, many community members, especially those with limited English ability or who are recent immigrants, are not receiving vital information related to health and legal needs; financial education and vocational training; and civil rights issues.
- **Community-Based Infrastructure:** Survey respondents continually referred to the importance of informal networks of family and friends which assisted in the process of adjusting to Washington, D.C. Cultural, civic, professional, and religious organizations provide many opportunities for South Asians in Washington, D.C. Recommendations include closer coordination and targeted efforts to reach marginalized segments of the community.

These findings, as well as those presented in the full report, demonstrate that government agencies, policymakers, community-based organizations and stakeholders have opportunities to develop partnerships, expand service provisions, and address concerns and needs of South Asian community members in Washington, D.C. and the metropolitan area. Based on our findings, we provide the **following recommendations** to the range of stakeholders connected to the South Asian community:

Government Agencies:

- Government entities, specifically the Office of Human Rights, Metropolitan Police Department and Alcohol Beverage Regulation Administration (ABRA), must conduct not only informational outreach to the South Asian community, but also outreach focused on addressing the concerns of community members.
- Collect and report disaggregated data about South Asian communities seeking services from government agencies. Conduct targeted assessments of low-income South Asians in Washington, D.C.
- Address language barriers in service provision by providing interpreters and translated materials in Bangla/Bengali, Hindi, Nepali, Sinhalese, Tamil, Urdu and other necessary languages that may emerge as knowledge of the community expands.
- Connect with similar agencies in neighboring counties in Maryland and Virginia to identify comprehensive efforts that can most effectively reach out to South Asian communities.

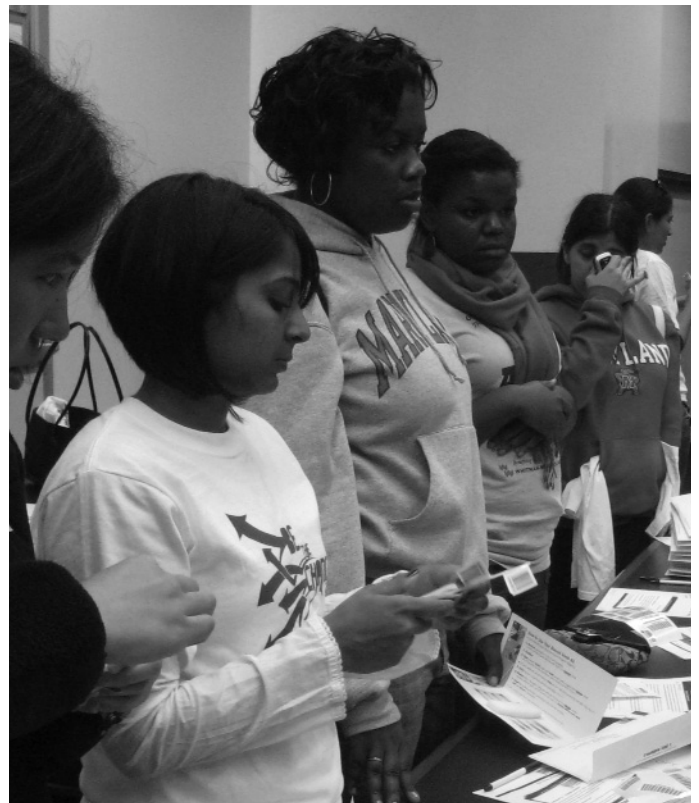
- Develop and conduct linguistically and culturally appropriate outreach to South Asians in the District, especially about government services and benefits.
- Conduct language access and cultural and religious competency trainings of front-line staff of government agencies with public contact.
- Build partnerships with South Asian and Asian community-based organizations, and ask for opportunities to present information at cultural and community events or to recruit for available job opportunities.
- Utilize OAPIA as a resource for information about South Asian organizations.
- Prevent, respond to, and prosecute instances of bias crimes, profiling and discrimination through various measures:
 - o Introduce and/or increase cultural and religious diversity trainings to the Metropolitan Police Department.
 - o Strengthen protection for victims of discrimination, and provide translated materials and information regarding resources for victims of discrimination.
 - o Utilize local and ethnic media to reach the South Asian community on issues related to discrimination and/or unfair treatment.
 - o Expand "The Bias-Related Crime Act of 1989" (D.C. Code §§ 22-4001 to 22-4004), by publishing disaggregated data on bias-related incidents against South Asians.
- Assess the language needs of individuals seeking services, as provided under the D.C. Language Access Act of 2004.
 - o Implement periodic front-line staff training of the Language Access Act, the usage of language line, and "I Speak" cards.
 - o Instruct all front-line staff to note the specific language spoken by all limited English proficient individuals seeking government services as mandated by the Act.

Community Organizations:

- Conduct trainings and workshops around cultural and linguistic issues for government agencies and other stakeholders.
- Conduct outreach to working class South Asians and limited English proficient South Asians.
- Hold “know your rights” trainings and workshops for community members on multiple issues areas, including immigration, criminal assistance, and financial and taxation assistance, among other areas.
- Build relationships with non-South Asian organizations and service providers.
- Develop professional and job development trainings and resource materials for use by South Asians.
- Engage with South Asian youth to provide safe spaces and access to mentors.
- Conduct “Advocacy Days” for South Asians to meet with D.C. City Council members and heads of government agencies.

Community Stakeholders (Philanthropic and Resource Organizations):

- Liaise and build relationships with South Asians organizations.
- Partner with South Asians organizations when conducting outreach to new immigrant populations.
- Include South Asian populations in funding initiatives tailored to empower immigrant communities.
- Include South Asian culturally-specific trainings for Board Members and Staff.



BACKGROUND AND CONTEXT

A NATIONAL PERSPECTIVE

With a nationwide population of more than 2.7 million people, according to the American Community Survey conducted by the U.S. Census Bureau in 2006, South Asians comprised the fastest growing Asian American community in the United States between 1990 and 2000. The South Asian community in the United States comprises of individuals with ancestry from Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Nepal, Pakistan, Sri Lanka, and the Maldives. The community also includes members of the South Asian diaspora – past generations of South Asians who originally settled in many areas around the world, including the Caribbean (Guyana, Jamaica, Suriname, and Trinidad & Tobago), Africa (Nigeria, South Africa, Uganda), Canada, Europe, the Middle East, and other parts of Asia and the Pacific Islands (Fiji, Indonesia, Malaysia, and Singapore).

South Asians are diverse in terms of national origin, languages spoken, economic status, and religious affiliation. The most common languages other than English spoken by South Asians include Bengali, Gujarati, Hindi, Punjabi, and Urdu. South Asians practice a variety of faiths, the most common including Buddhism, Christianity, Hinduism, Islam, Jainism, Sikhism, and Zoroastrianism. The metropolitan areas with the largest South Asian populations include New York/New Jersey, San Francisco Bay Area, Chicago, Los Angeles, and the Washington D.C. metropolitan area (including suburban Maryland and Virginia). Populations of South Asians are also emerging in the Houston, Atlanta, and Seattle metropolitan areas.

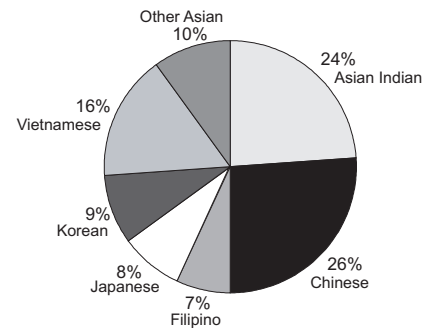
South Asians are also diverse in terms of immigration and socioeconomic status. According to Census 2000, the majority of South Asians who live in the United States are foreign-born, with over 75% of the population born outside of the United States. South Asians possess a range of immigration statuses, and include undocumented immigrants; student and worker visa holders and their dependents; legal permanent residents; and naturalized citizens. With respect to employment, many South Asians have careers in the technology and medical fields; many within the community are also employed in the retail, service and small business industries, or as cashiers, taxi drivers, and restaurant workers.

SOUTH ASIANS IN WASHINGTON, D.C.

Washington, D.C. South Asians comprise the second largest Asian population in the District.⁷ The Washington D.C. metropolitan area has the fifth largest South Asian population in the country.⁸

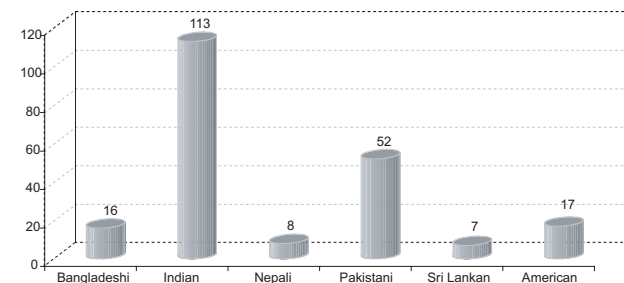
Within the Asian community in Washington, D.C., the largest groups are the Chinese and Indian populations (at 4,767 and 4,277, respectively), followed by the Vietnamese (2,926), Other Asian (1,718)⁹, Korean (1,615), Japanese (1,487), and Filipino (1,276) populations.¹⁰

Figure 1. Asian Ethnic Group Breakdown, Washington D.C.



Our survey of 197 South Asians that live or work in Washington D.C. similarly revealed that the largest South Asian group is Indian (57.45%), followed by Pakistani, Bangladeshi, Nepali, and Sri Lankan (see Figure 2).¹¹

Figure 2. National Origin of South Asian Survey Respondents (2009)



More than 96% of survey respondents work in Washington, D.C. A growing segment of respondents live in the suburbs of Virginia (45%) and Maryland (15%), while a little over one-third of our respondents lives in Washington, D.C.

According to Census 2000, the majority of South Asian residents who live in the District reside in Wards 2 and 3. The neighborhoods in **Ward 2** include Burleith, Downtown, Dupont Circle, Foggy Bottom, Georgetown, Sheridan Kalorama, Logan Circle, Mount Vernon Square, Shaw, and West End. Neighborhoods in **Ward 3** include American University Park, Berkley, Cathedral Heights, Chevy Chase,

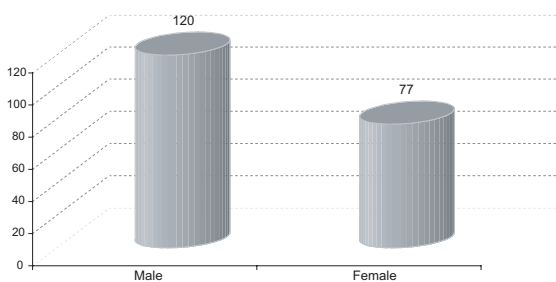
Cleveland Park, Colony Hill, Forest Hills, Foxhall, Friendship Heights, Glover Park, Kent, Massachusetts Heights, McLean Gardens, North Cleveland Park, Observatory Circle, the Palisades, Potomac Heights, Spring Valley, Tenleytown, Wakefield, Wesley Heights, Woodland-Normanstone Terrace, Woodley Park (Part of the neighborhood is also in Ward 1). South Asians are dispersed among the many diverse neighborhoods that comprise Wards 2 and 3. The Indian community seems to have more of a presence in Ward 2, while Bangladeshis seem to prefer residing in Ward 1, and Sri Lankans in Ward 3.

South Asians are carving out a space in other wards by opening commercial establishments, such as those found in Florida Market (Ward 5) and restaurants in Capitol Hill (Ward 6). While this is a positive trend, many of these business owners still prefer to live in the suburbs of Virginia and Maryland, claiming that the public services and affordable housing in those areas are more suitable to their family lifestyles.

GENDER, IMMIGRATION STATUS, AND RELIGIOUS AFFILIATION

Of the survey respondents, 61 % are men and 39% are women (see Figure 3). Over half of these respondents are United States citizens, either born in the country (32%) or naturalized (40%). The remainder of our respondents includes legal permanent residents and employment/ student visa holders and their dependents (see Figure 4). In addition, South Asian respondents are diverse in terms of religious affiliation and practice Buddhism, Christianity, Islam, Hinduism, Jainism, and Sikhism (see Figure 5).

Figure 3. South Asians Living or Working in D.C., by Gender (2009)



WASHINGTON DESI VOICES:

“I came to Washington, D.C. as an arts performer from Pakistan. I am not literate, but had heard of the opportunities available in America. I did not want to return home, and while in D.C. for a performance, I spoke with a compatriot who advised me of a job opening at a restaurant. For over ten years, I have been a chef and am happy that my employer gave me this opportunity. Because of my employer, I was able to obtain permanent residency, and my children are U.S. citizens. They will be able to achieve what I have never been able to. I do this for them.”

Figure 4. Citizenship Status of South Asians Living or Working in D.C. (2009)

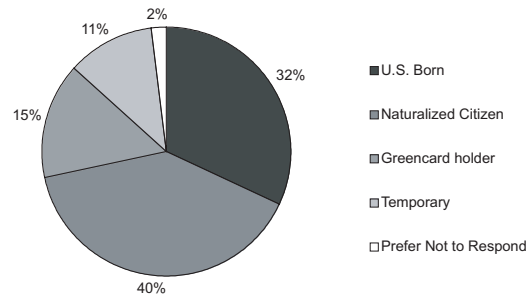
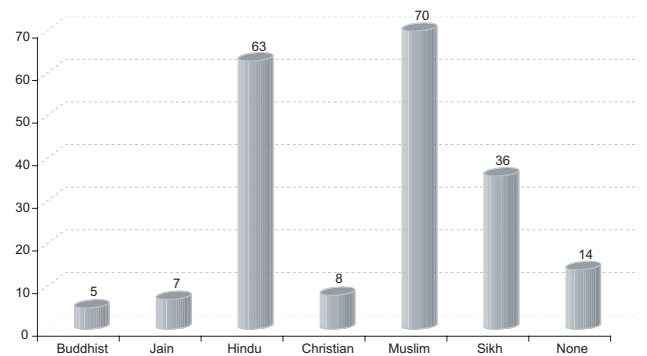


Figure 5. Religious Affiliation of Survey Respondents (2009)



INCOME AND EDUCATION

For the most part, South Asians living or working in D.C. are high-income earners. A large proportion of South Asians survey respondents earns a total household income of above \$100,000 (41%). About 11% earn less than \$29,000.

Interestingly, of those that earned less than \$29,000, 62% had completed a graduate or professional program. In discussions with South Asian taxi drivers, most of whom are naturalized citizens, many spoke proudly of their educational attainment in their home countries, and of their frustration during their job search in the United States, especially in fields commensurate with their levels of education. They explained that driving a taxi was supposed to be a means to an end—a temporary job until they found work more suitable for their skill set. But with the influx of immigrants just like them, the network of taxi drivers expanded, and the temporary aspect slowly evolved into permanency.

Survey respondents also represent a highly educated group, with more than half possessing a degree from a graduate program or professional school. In contrast, 2% had completed only secondary school, or had never attended school.

The findings also indicate a need for further research, especially with relation to working class community members. Many of the taxi drivers, vendors and small business owners that we approached did not want to reveal information about themselves, especially with regard to income data.



PRIORITY ISSUES CONFRONTING THE COMMUNITY

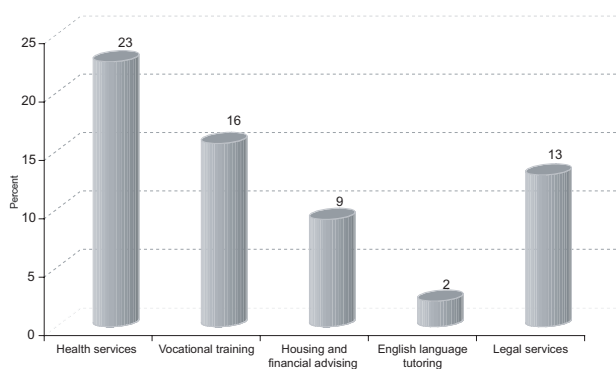
This section addresses three priority areas that South Asians respondents living or working in Washington, D.C. identified as important issues. These include access to social services, bias and discrimination, and civic engagement.

ACCESS TO SERVICES

Many new immigrants and mixed immigrant-citizen families rely on social services and benefits provided by government entities and non-profit providers. The social service safety net can include public assistance programs, welfare, Social Security, public housing, hunger and nutrition programs, and child support.

For South Asian survey respondents in Washington, D.C., the social services most identified as priority needs included **access to health care** (23%), **vocational training** (16%), and **legal services** (13%; see Figure 6). Survey respondents also identified other services such as learning English (14.4%), finding assistance for the elderly (13.3%), and housing and financial concerns (9.2%). Further, about 10% of South Asian survey respondents reported facing difficulty when seeking financial assistance for basic needs (clothing, food, and housing), and when dealing with teachers or counselors at children's schools.

Figure 6. Priority Social Service Needs of Survey Respondents (2009)



Many respondents felt that their financial status (38%) accounted for the difficulty in accessing social services in the U.S., followed by cultural differences (25%), their immigration status (21%), and their ability to speak or understand English (12.5%).

It is important to note that half of the respondents who claimed that they needed service provision did not know they could access certain services or did not *know* where to go for help. Survey volunteers were frequently requested to provide information on pro-bono legal services, low-cost English classes, and other such services.

HEALTH SERVICES

Survey respondents - from low-income members of the community to high-income earning small business owners - identified access to health information and services as a top unmet priority (23%). In fact, national studies show that immigrants, including the undocumented, tend to use fewer healthcare resources than native-born citizens. For many immigrants, the reasons for not using healthcare services can range from lack of information, affordability, or cultural and linguistic barriers.

WASHINGTON DESI VOICES:

"Just last year, I had a major surgery, and because I do not have health insurance, this was extremely expensive. I have experienced a lot of problems with healthcare. I cannot afford healthcare [on my own]. I also cannot read or write English, so I do not know where to turn to for help. My friends have tried helping me but there is only so much they can do. I don't know how I will take care of my children. I am really concerned. I do not know where to turn to for help."

In addition to being asked about access to health care, survey respondents were asked about health care needs. One-fourth of the respondents reported having challenges in addressing mental health issues, including 47% of our female respondents and 12% of our male respondents. Addressing the mental health needs of South Asians is an important yet often overlooked concern in the community, especially for newly arrived immigrants and survivors of domestic violence and trauma. Studies show that suicide rates in the community, particularly among young South Asian women, are found to be higher than in other populations.¹⁴ Yet, due to the social stigma and silence surrounding various issues, ranging from mental health to sexual and reproductive health within the South Asian community, it is difficult for many to obtain necessary health information that is linguistically and culturally sensitive. Organizations such as **Counselors Helping (South) Asian Indians, Inc. (CHAI)** in the D.C. metropolitan area have been assisting South Asians with mental health needs through referrals, support groups, and partnerships with schools and government agencies.

The D.C. government provides two main health service programs (in addition to Medicaid) for D.C. residents who do not have health insurance—the D.C. Healthcare Alliance (Alliance) and D.C. Healthy Families. The Alliance provides free health services such as clinic services, emergency care, immunizations, in-patient and out-patient

hospital care, physician services, and prescription drugs for individuals who do not have federally-financed Medicare and Medicaid and whose income falls at or below 200% of the Federal Poverty Level.¹⁵ The Alliance also provides multi-language assistance and interpreter services to applicants that require their services. In addition to the Alliance, the D.C. Healthy Families Program offers working families with children under 19 years of age and pregnant women free health insurance and free city-wide transportation services to and from prenatal/postpartum and well-baby care appointments.

Survey respondents who could not avail themselves of health insurance options provided by their employers indicated that they turned unsuccessfully to state agencies. However, many were rejected, leaving them helpless and frustrated. Even for those that could afford health care, finding competent bilingual health service providers was cited as a barrier to adequate care.

More research is needed to understand whether South Asians in need of health information and care have an understanding of D.C. government resources or access them regularly. In addition, the D.C. Department of Health Care Finance and the Department of Health must liaise with and conduct more targeted outreach to the South Asian community.

During a focus group conducted as part of this project, small business owners of South Asian descent complained about the extremely high cost of private health insurance they had to allocate monthly (up to \$1700/month), which they said was simply untenable, particularly in difficult economic times.

WASHINGTON DESI VOICES:

I recently moved from New Jersey to Washington, D.C. to work at a restaurant. I live in Virginia and requested my health insurance to be transferred from New Jersey. My wife is a U.S. citizen and I am a green card holder. My wife just had a child and so is not earning anymore and as a result we have less income.

I cannot afford healthcare without insurance. I recently received a letter stating that I got rejected for my [request to transfer insurance]. There is no indication for why I got rejected. I am not sure what to do and I desperately need this.

LEGAL SERVICES

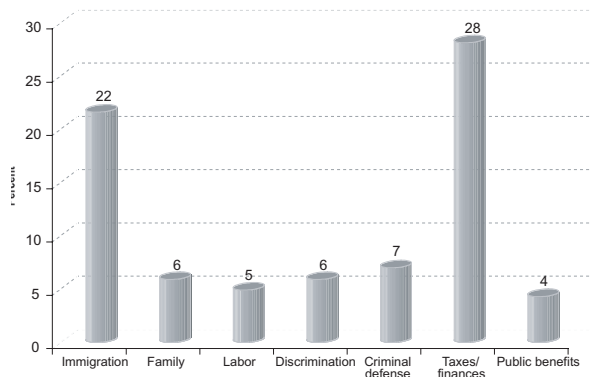
Our survey demonstrated that South Asians would benefit from the provision of linguistically and culturally appropriate legal services in the D.C. area. Twenty-eight percent of survey respondents reported needing legal assistance and information over the past year, especially with respect to taxation and financial issues (see Figure 7). Other pressing legal concerns include immigration services (22%) and criminal defense, (7%), followed by discrimination (on the basis of racial, ethnic, gender, religious—5.9%), family issues (separation/divorce, custody and support, domestic violence issues, elder care issues etc. at 5.9%), labor/employment (4.9%), and public benefits (such as housing, social security, and food stamps).

The APALRC routinely works with many South Asians requiring legal services. Many of those individuals requiring immigration assistance sought assistance with student visas, family sponsorship, domestic violence issues, employment sponsorship, and particularly H-1B visa issues. Additionally, community members have sought assistance with

employment problems (back wages, harassment), care of the elderly, and many cases related to family law ranging from protective orders to full divorce and division of assets.

Respondents expressed concern that linguistic barriers, obstacles in accessing public transportation, high legal costs, and the work-day hours of legal offices are obstacles that stand in the way of seeking legal assistance.

Figure 7. Needed Legal Services of South Asian Survey Respondents (2009)



VOCATIONAL TRAINING

In addition to healthcare, there is a high demand for vocational trainings and workforce development (16%). This finding is not surprising, given the country's current economic crisis and its impact on minorities and immigrants. Around the country, South Asian communities are facing the effects of the financial crisis, ranging from foreclosures to job losses. Similarly, in Washington D.C., South Asian respondents noted that workforce development is a critical gap. Interestingly, Nepali respondents identified vocational training as their primary need above others (38%), potentially due to newer migration patterns and settlement in the D.C. area. To support their needs, the **American Nepali Women's Association of Greater Washington, D.C.** (ANWA), a non-profit organization assisting Nepalis, has been providing professional skills training to Nepali women immigrants.

OTHER SERVICES

South Asian survey respondents also identified services such as learning English, finding assistance for the elderly, and housing and financial concerns. 14.4% of survey respondents reported encountering problems with finding assistance to learn English. Many respondents commented that they did not know where to enroll for English as a Second Language classes. Additionally, 13.3% of our respondents encountered problems seeking services for the elderly. In fact, the APALRC is witnessing a rise in the number of inquiries from South Asians about culturally appropriate funeral services and nursing homes. Additionally, a survey respondent stressed the importance of providing tailored elderly services:

MY LIFE AS A SOUTH ASIAN IN D.C. WOULD BE EASIER IF I WAS ABLE TO BRING MY OLDER, UNHEALTHY PARENTS TO THE D.C. AREA SO THEY COULD LIVE IN AN AFFORDABLE FACILITY—ASSISTED LIVING OR OTHERWISE—WHERE THEY FELT COMFORTABLE (E.G., A PLACE WITH INDIAN FOOD, RESPECT FOR THE IDIOSYNCRASIES OF SOUTH ASIAN CULTURES AND FAMILIES).

In addition, an often silent but important concern is gender-based violence within the South Asian community. Many South Asians, particularly women, continually encounter gender-based violence in the United States. D.C. area domestic violence prevention and support organizations, such as **Asian/Pacific Islanders Domestic Violence Resource Project (DVRP)** and **Asian Women's Self Help**

Association (ASHA), point to an increase in South Asian women seeking their services. DVRP and ASHA are not only raising awareness in the Asian Pacific Islander community about the problems of domestic violence in metropolitan Washington, D.C., but are also providing access to culturally and linguistically responsive resources.

Despite their services and outreach efforts, there are still many South Asian domestic violence survivors—from all economic backgrounds and immigration statuses—who are unable to access the legal and social services needed for their safety, mainly due to lack of awareness, immigration concerns and linguistic and cultural barriers. Government agencies and mainstream social service providers and shelters must work with Asian and South Asian organizations to expand the options available for victims and survivors of domestic violence.

BIAS AND DISCRIMINATION

In the United States, people of color and immigrant communities have long experienced bias and discrimination. South Asians, in particular, have experienced unfair treatment in a variety of contexts, particularly with racial and religious profiling by law enforcement officials, xenophobic and anti-immigrant sentiment, unfavorable immigration policies, and discrimination at the workplace and in public, all of which have been exacerbated by the post-September 11th backlash. In addition, for South Asians who are lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, intersex and questioning (LGBTIQ) or for those who have certain disabilities, discriminatory actions and policies can have even a greater impact.

An important trend in the survey points to the unfair treatment experienced by South Asians when dealing with police or government officials, at work or when applying for jobs, and in their neighborhood with other community members.

WASHINGTON DESI VOICES:

I came to this country from India 15 years ago to make a life for myself. I am proud that I own a small store in Washington D.C. But life is still difficult for me.

My biggest concern as a business owner is the lack of security in my store's location in D.C. I feel that the MPD [Metropolitan Police Department] do not do their job thoroughly, and I think it is because they are afraid to be involved in gang warfare, or maybe it is because I am from India. My store has been broken into twice in the last year and both times the Police have not responded appropriately. My life would be easier if I knew the Police were protecting our community.

DISCRIMINATION AND PUBLIC SAFETY CONCERNS

South Asian respondents living or working in the District reported that over the past year, they have most frequently experienced unfair treatment when dealing with police or government officials (e.g. court personnel, immigration officials, airport security).¹⁸ An overwhelming majority (71%) felt that this treatment was due to their race or skin color (71.6%). This was followed by national origin (41.9%), religious affiliation (39.2%), and/or difficulty communicating in English (21.6%).¹⁹

This trend was confirmed in various one-on-one discussions with survey respondents and in focus groups. Many South Asians reported that government officials, especially law enforcement, did not treat them fairly. Small business owners echoed this concern. Many felt that they are specifically targeted for robberies. They also expressed grievances about the manner in which the Metropolitan Police Department (MPD) responded to their security concerns, citing examples of the MPD not investigating crimes thoroughly, or not providing enough security/patrol in their area of business.²⁰ This was especially true in sparsely populated and more at-risk locations, such as Florida Market. As one business owner commented:

IT WOULD BE HELPFUL IF PUBLIC SAFETY AND SECURITY CONCERNS WERE BETTER ADDRESSED BY CONCERNED AGENCIES.

In other instances, South Asians felt they had experienced unfair treatment in their neighborhood from other community members (7.6%), or at school/university (4.3%). Additionally, one-fourth of respondents faced difficulty in managing racial tensions with other members of their community. As D.C.'s neighborhoods become more diverse, the importance of community relations cannot be over-emphasized. Community organizations, such as City at Peace, that promote cross-cultural understanding and non-violent conflict resolution, and organizations that address public safety problems, such as the Citizens Advisory Council and the Neighborhood Stabilization Program are positive models employed by the D.C. government. These programs need to explore and expand their outreach to include new immigrant communities.

Given the number of times that the MPD was mentioned during focus groups and interviews related to this project, it is clear that the MPD's role is critical in ensuring community safety. The MPD is the

primary law enforcement agency for the District of Columbia. The MPD has also created specialized units to assist both the general public and other law enforcement agencies.

The Asian Liaison Unit (ALU) is one such specialized unit that was officially established in March 1996. The ALU acts as a conduit between the MPD and the Asian community in Washington, D.C. The unit is staffed by a Sergeant, one community outreach specialist and five sworn officers who speak Korean, Vietnamese, Chinese Cantonese, and Thai. The primary responsibility of the ALU is to provide general police operations in the Chinatown area and to conduct investigations involving Asian complainants or perpetrators crime. Additionally, the ALU conducts outreach to the Asian community and provides interpretation and translation assistance to MPD officers. It is imperative to include information and training about South Asian needs and languages as part of the training received by all MPD officers and personnel, especially those staffing the ALU. A deeper understanding of South Asian concerns will also greatly facilitate constructive dialogue between the ALU and South Asian vendors, taxi drivers, and small business owners.



POST 9-11 DISCRIMINATION

South Asians have long endured bias-motivated rhetoric and violence ranging from harassment to physical assaults targeted on the basis of religious affiliation and/or national origin. Since September 11th, the number of these incidents has risen significantly.²² In fact, the Civil Rights Division of the Department of Justice (DOJ), the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI), and the U.S. Attorney's Office have investigated over 750 incidents involving violence, threats, vandalism, and arson against Arabs, Muslims, Sikhs, and South Asians in the United States between September 11th and March 2007. Members of other religious faiths, including Hindus, have also been targets of harassment since September 11th.

The most striking observation among South Asian respondents who felt that they had been treated unfairly by government officials are the large proportion of Pakistanis and Sikh respondents (32.7 and 42.9%, respectively).²³ Pakistani and Bangladeshi Muslims—both low and high-income earners—told us that their experiences in the United States are tainted with memories of harassment at D.C.-area airports and in public (with community members, in a bank, store or restaurant). One respondent claimed that her life as a South Asian would be easier if “I didn't have to justify everything I do as a Muslim American.”²⁴

In addition, many Sikh respondents provided anecdotal evidence of being victims of religious and racial profiling, as well as hate crimes and employment discrimination, which again reflects national trends.²⁵ In fact, places of worship in D.C. have also experienced

unfair treatment, such as the National Gurdwara located in the Northwest quadrant of the District. While the Sikh community was trying to raise funds to construct the Gurdwara, they faced many challenges before finally opening their doors in 2006. These challenges included graffiti and egg yolks on a trailer at the site after September 11, 2001.²⁶

WASHINGTON DESI VOICES:

After completing a Bachelor's degree in her home country of Bangladesh, “Sadaf” came to Washington, DC to pursue higher education more than 10 years ago. Though she was highly qualified, she experienced limitations due to her immigration status. Luckily, she found a job that would sponsor a work visa, but sensed that her employers took advantage of her immigration status. In the end, she felt constrained and isolated.

Since September 11th, Sadaf believes that the government is growing more and more suspicious of her community. When traveling, she feels as though she is ‘treated like a criminal,’ and she has been the victim of bias-motivated rhetoric. Tired and frustrated, this talented young woman recently moved to Canada where, she says, there are not as many barriers in obtaining immigrant status, and the government does not look at her suspiciously.

SOUTH ASIAN LESBIAN, GAY, BISEXUAL, TRANSGENDER, INTERSEX, AND QUESTIONING (LGBTIQ) COMMUNITY

WASHINGTON, D.C. HAS ALWAYS BEEN A WELCOME ENVIRONMENT FOR THOSE WHO IDENTIFY THEMSELVES AS LGBTIQ. SOUTH ASIAN LGBTIQ COMMUNITY MEMBERS HAVE A VISIBLE PRESENCE IN D.C., BUT THEY FACE MULTIPLE LEVELS OF DISCRIMINATION AND UNFAIR TREATMENT IN VARIOUS CONTEXTS—WITHIN AND OUTSIDE THE SOUTH ASIAN COMMUNITY. IN ADDITION, FEDERAL POLICIES RELATING TO HATE CRIMES ENFORCEMENT, IMMIGRATION, MARRIAGE BETWEEN SAME-SEX PARTNERS, AND WORKPLACE DISCRIMINATION HAVE A SIGNIFICANT IMPACT ON THE COMMUNITY.

EVEN WHEN THEY DO FIND SUPPORT IN THE D.C. LGBTIQ NETWORK, SOUTH ASIANS FACE AN ADDITIONAL BARRIER—A LACK OF CULTURAL SENSITIVITY AND UNDERSTANDING TOWARDS SOUTH ASIAN LGBTIQ ISSUES. ORGANIZATIONS SUCH AS KHUSH-DC ([HTTP://WWW.KHUSHDC.ORG/](http://www.khushdc.org/)) CAN BE A RESOURCE FOR MANY LGBTIQ SOUTH ASIANS.

ACCESS TO MENTAL HEALTH SERVICES IS PARTICULARLY CHALLENGING FOR LGBTIQ INDIVIDUALS. FOR THOSE IN D.C. WHO DO SEEK IT, THERE ARE NOT ENOUGH LINGUISTICALLY AND CULTURALLY COMPETENT MENTAL HEALTH SERVICE PROVIDERS. MAINSTREAM ASIAN AND SOUTH ASIAN ORGANIZATIONS NEED TO FOCUS ON PROVIDING SUPPORT SERVICES AND OUTREACH TO LGBTIQ INDIVIDUALS IN AN INTEGRATED MANNER.

EMERGING ISSUES AT THE WORKPLACE

South Asian survey respondents of all incomes expressed various concerns about workplace issues. Almost a third of survey respondents living or working in D.C. expressed that they had experienced unfair treatment at work or when applying for a job. Further, about one-fourth of survey respondents encountered difficulty in obtaining or negotiating their salary. Many respondents working on temporary visas in D.C. felt bound to and restricted by their employers. And some respondents felt they had been either denied jobs or were treated poorly at work because of their perceived national origin or religious affiliation.

Through focus groups and conversations with a mix of individuals with diverse socioeconomic statuses and occupations - young professionals, small business owners, domestic workers, and low-income workers - we gleaned specific trends about workplace-related issues.

SMALL BUSINESS OWNERS: WASHINGTON AREA LIQUOR STORE ASSOCIATION (WALRA)

Metropolitan Washington, D.C. is home to a growing number of South Asian-owned businesses ranging from restaurants such as Nirvana and Indique; wholesale food stores such as the Caribbean Crescent; and liquor stores such as S&S Liquor and Universal Liquors. Opening up a small business can be a challenging process, in terms of understanding and navigating the bureaucracy associated with small business ownership. D.C. government services have put into place promising practices to assist small business owners, such as providing step-by-step information on their website, and providing interpreters upon request.

For many small business owners, organizing themselves into a united voice can prove to be beneficial for their interests. For example, the **Washington Area Liquor Store Association (WALRA)** is a group of organized South Asian business owners collectively seeking to protect their rights and interests. WALRA represents 40 Indian-owned liquor stores in the District.

However, small business owners often encounter challenges in running their stores and confronting safety and security issues. For example, liquor store-owners have commented that the "color of their skin" can play a role in this business, which is frustrating. For example, suppliers may sometimes prefer not to deal with immigrants. In addition, WALRA members are concerned with the lack of security around their stores, and claim that they have been forced to write severe reports of theft and burglary in order for the MPD to respond.

WALRA seeks to be more proactive to changes in industry practices and policies, especially with the current economic crisis. WALRA is also building relations with other business associations like the Korean-American Grocers Organization (KARGO) to build a more unified, powerful voice.

DOMESTIC WORKERS

Domestic workers are individuals who perform a variety of household services, ranging from childcare to household errands to cooking and cleaning. The number of domestic workers in the United States is on the rise. Most of the individuals who are brought to the U.S. on A-3 and G-5 visas work for foreign diplomats in Washington, D.C., Maryland, New York, or Virginia.²⁷ In Washington, D.C., many South Asian domestic workers are part of the households of diplomats, South Asian families, and those working for international organizations. While there are no available estimates for the numbers of domestic workers in the Washington D.C. area, it is clear from our own conversations with domestic workers, and from our partner, CASA of Maryland (which organizes and advocates on behalf of domestic workers) that there is a growing South Asian domestic worker community in the area.

South Asian domestic workers can face a range of concerns related to exploitation in terms of wages, limitations due to immigration status, and a lack of knowledge and understanding of their rights. According to a survey conducted by Domestic Workers United and the Data Center of more than 500 domestic workers in the United States, 99% of those surveyed were foreign-born, 76% were non-U.S. citizens and 93% were female.

Numerous cases have revealed that South Asian domestic workers endure harsh conditions amounting to force, fraud, and coercion, including being confined in the home where they work, being physically assaulted by their employer, and receiving no pay for work. Many are hesitant to seek recourse because their ability to stay legally in the United States hinges upon their relationship with their employer. Some fear reprisal from their employers including isolating them from the outside world and threatening them with deportation. This is often exacerbated for those employed by senior diplomats who are protected by diplomatic immunity.

The State Department requires foreign diplomats or staff of international organizations to sign employment contracts with domestic workers, which ensure their basic rights. However, our conversations with domestic workers illustrate that often, their contracts are violated, and that the enforcement and monitoring of

contractual obligations are almost non-existent. As one domestic worker we spoke with recounted:

INSTEAD OF WORKING EIGHT HOURS A DAY AND RECEIVING OVERTIME WAGES, I WORK AT LEAST 12-HOUR DAYS WITH NO OVERTIME. I DO NOT GET AS MANY HOLIDAYS AS I SHOULD. IN THE BEGINNING, MANY OF US WERE NOT ALLOWED TO LEAVE OUR HOMES EXCEPT FOR RELIGIOUS HOLIDAYS. MY EMPLOYERS ALSO ASK ME TO PERFORM DUTIES THAT ARE NOT INCLUDED IN MY CONTRACT—LIKE GARDENING AND WALKING HALF AN HOUR EACH WAY TO DROP OFF THEIR CHILDREN AT SCHOOL. I ALSO DO NOT HAVE MUCH PRIVACY, AND AM NOT SURE WHERE TO TURN TO FOR HELP.

Many of the women who spoke with us noted that they had chance encounters with other domestic workers during the few hours they were permitted to leave their homes—most often at places of worship. Some women ran away from their employers, while over time, other women learned to assert their rights.

For domestic workers in Washington, D.C., there are few places to turn. Employment service centers, linguistically and culturally appropriate as well as gender-sensitive safe spaces, English language classes, and immigration/employment legal services would greatly assist South Asian domestic workers in Washington, D.C.

TAXI DRIVERS AND RESTAURANT WORKERS

There is a growing number of South Asians employed in the restaurant and taxi/limousine industry. Many of the taxi drivers and restaurant workers we approached were hesitant to express their grievances to us.

Taxi drivers that spoke to us referred to their jobs as steady ones, though always adding that it was not originally ‘meant to be’ their profession. Many South Asians have found success in this industry and operate their own small-scale taxi or limousine services such as the Columbia Cab Association and Freedom Cab. However, though they have found success, driving a taxi at all hours of the night can be a dangerous job. Even the hesitant taxi drivers shared anecdotes of being harassed and not receiving sufficient protection from the MPD.

Restaurant workers, in contrast, are still trying to adjust to life in Washington, D.C. The few that were open with us spoke of the difficulties they faced in supporting their families on their low incomes, and not having access to culturally and linguistically appropriate government services such as health care and community centers. Some provided anecdotes of their friends subjected to unfair working conditions in restaurants; not receiving wages on time; and hesitancy in lodging complaints against their employers.

YOUNG PROFESSIONALS

While young South Asian professionals are growing in number and employed in different sectors—such as the health and legal sector—there is still a gap in the government and non-for-profit sectors.

The dearth of South Asians in government jobs, until very recently, seems to stem from two reasons. The first are institutional barriers—perceived and real—that have made it difficult for South Asians to pursue jobs in this sector. Anecdotal stories were shared with us about how some government recruitment programs lack focus on outreaching to South Asians. The lack of attention seems related to the perceptions of ‘foreignness,’ and lack of leadership skills within the community. Secondly, cultural and economic pressures often force many young South Asians to pursue jobs in corporate sectors.

“TEN YEARS FROM NOW, I WOULD LIKE TO SEE MORE YOUNG PEOPLE WORKING IN NON-STEREOTYPICAL FIELDS, AND ESPECIALLY IN THE PUBLIC SECTOR, DUE TO PEOPLE IN THOSE POSITIONS NOW OFFERING ENCOURAGEMENT AND HELPING OTHERS GET THEIR START.”

D.C. government agencies could more effectively recruit to South Asians through partnerships with South Asian organizations, and advertising and outreach in media most frequently consumed by South Asians. Moreover, South Asian community members in non-profit and governmental sectors could network with and mentor young South Asians to assist them with professional opportunities.

Our conversations indicate a need for further research that is targeted to South Asian working class community members, as well as outreach by government agencies in the District of Columbia that address bias and discrimination. For example, the **D.C. Office of Human Rights (OHR)** is the District’s government entity charged with eradicating discrimination and protecting the human rights of those living, working, and visiting the District. Among its many

functions, OHR investigates complaints dealing with unlawful discrimination, housing violations, denials of language services and many other areas. Additionally, OHR makes recommendations to the Mayor and City Council on how to address systemic patterns of discrimination.

While survey respondents have indicated unfair treatment, the number of complaints filed by South Asians with OHR remains low. Again, this hesitance in reporting disparate treatment reveals the need for OHR to inform South Asian community members of the complaint procedure and the possible remedies.

CIVIC ENGAGEMENT

South Asian respondents in Washington, D.C. are actively involved in the civic sector in different ways. More than three-fourths of respondents voted in the last election, and more than half are members of either a religious or cultural organization. Additionally, a little less than half either volunteer or are members of civic organizations (such as charitable organizations). These statistics demonstrate the commitment of South Asians to their communities in Washington, D.C. In fact, about half of our respondents stated that they would like to be actively involved in solving problems that affect their local community.

In contrast, the level and nature of political engagement by South Asians in D.C. is low. Only 16% of respondents have ever met with a D.C. government official or public decisionmaker to voice concerns about specific issues. In fact, 59% of South Asians living or working in Washington, D.C. either feel that they cannot express their concerns to a local ward representative, or remain neutral about whether they can actually effect change in their neighborhoods. Many respondents also stated that they did not have issues to voice.

WASHINGTON DESI VOICES:

"I did not have major problems in D.C. because I came here a long time ago... and the key was that I had a network to turn to. Everyone has to have a network otherwise they will not come to D.C. or any other city in the US. We help and guide each other a lot. I got lucky with my job because at first I could not get one and was told to resort to driving a taxi, but luckily I met someone who introduced me to someone, and that's how it worked in the end..."

"I was lucky because when I moved from Sri Lanka my father was here [when I arrived] and so I had a network. Without that network I would not have been able to access anything. Even if you speak English your accent is different, and people cannot understand you. Driving is different! So you need someone to tell you what your rights are in this country, and where you can and access services."

This general apathy may stem from the fact that South Asian immigrants tend to come from political environments where active dialogue with government agencies is not particularly encouraged. This could also be coupled with the current policies in the United States that have created a climate of fear for many immigrants which, in turn, makes it more difficult for some to express their concerns publicly. There is a need then for civic and political engagement efforts that can move South Asians, especially those who are low-income, working class, or have limited English ability, to becoming more politically empowered.

South Asians are actively involved in professional, civic, cultural and religious organizations, which add tremendous value and support within the community. However, these organizations often lack the resources to address all the needs of the community. Many are not fully or partially staffed.

Some of these organizations include:

American Nepal Society, American Nepal Women's Association of Greater Washington, D.C. (ANWA), Asian's Women's Self Help Association (ASHA), Asian/Pacific Islander Domestic Violence Resources Project (DVRP), Bangladesh Association of America Inc. (BAAI), Capitol Area Muslim Bar Association, Counselors Helping South Asians/Indians Inc (CHAI), Drishtipat DC Chapter, Indian American Leadership Council, Khush DC, Metropolitan South Asian Deaf Association, Network of South Asian Professionals (NETSAP), Pakistan American Leadership Center (PAL-C), Pakistan Association of Washington D.C., Sikh American Legal and Education Fund, Sikhness DC Chapter, Sri Lankan Ranga Kala Kavaya, and the South Asian Bar Association (SABA).

In addition to these organizations, many South Asians turn to places of worship for support, both for social networks and for assistance. Some of these include the National Gurdwara on Embassy Row, the Islamic Center of Washington D.C. on the Northwest section of Massachusetts Avenue, and the Buddhist Vihara on 16th Street in the Northwest of D.C.

POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS AND LOOKING FORWARD

The findings and experiences gleaned from the SACE project demonstrate that government agencies, policymakers, community-based organizations and stakeholders have opportunities to develop partnerships, expand service provisions, and address concerns and needs of South Asian community members in Washington, D.C. and the metropolitan area. Based on our findings, we provide the **following recommendations** to the range of stakeholders connected to the South Asian community:

Government Agencies

- Government entities, specifically the Office of Human Rights, Metropolitan Police Department and Alcohol Beverage Regulation Administration (ABRA), must conduct not only informational outreach to the South Asian community, but also outreach focused on addressing the concerns of community members.
- Collect and report disaggregated data about South Asian communities seeking services from government agencies. Conduct targeted assessments of low-income South Asians in Washington, D.C.
- Address language barriers in service provision by providing interpreters and translated materials in Bangla/Bengali, Hindi, Nepali, Sinhalese, Tamil, Urdu and other necessary languages that may emerge as knowledge of the community expands.
- Connect with similar agencies in neighboring counties in Maryland and Virginia to identify comprehensive efforts that can most effectively reach out to South Asian communities.
- Develop and conduct linguistically and culturally appropriate outreach to South Asians in the District, especially about government services and benefits.
- Conduct language access and cultural and religious competency trainings of front-line staff of government agencies with public contact.
- Build partnerships with South Asian and Asian community-based organizations, and ask for opportunities to present information at cultural and community events or to recruit for available job opportunities.
- Utilize OAPIA as a resource for information about South Asian organizations.

- Prevent, respond to, and prosecute instances of bias crimes, profiling and discrimination through various measures:
 - Introduce and/or increase cultural and religious diversity trainings to the Metropolitan Police Department.
 - Strengthen protection for victims of discrimination, and provide translated materials and information regarding resources for victims of discrimination.
 - Utilize local and ethnic media to reach the South Asian community on issues related to discrimination and/or unfair treatment.
 - Expand "The Bias-Related Crime Act of 1989" (D.C. Code §§ 22-4001 to 22-4004), by publishing disaggregated data on bias-related incidents against South Asians.
- Assess the language needs of individuals seeking services, as provided under the D.C. Language Access Act of 2004.
 - Implement periodic front-line staff training of the Language Access Act, the usage of language line, and "I Speak" cards.
 - Instruct all front-line staff to note the specific language spoken by all limited English proficient individuals seeking government services as mandated by the Act.

Community Organizations

As demonstrated in this report, South Asians have relied on informal intra-community networks to foster economic and social growth. Yet, unlike other Asian community members such as the Chinese or Vietnamese in Washington D.C., who can turn to community-based organizations that provide services, advocacy or an organizing focus, similar efforts do not exist as of yet for South Asians in the area. Community-based organizations that coordinate with religious and cultural groups, and engage in social service provision, advocacy and organizing could be of tremendous benefit to South Asians in D.C.

- Conduct trainings and workshops around cultural and linguistic issues for government agencies and other stakeholders. A positive example is the **D.C. South Asian Speaker's Bureau**, a project coordinated by SAALT with community partners. Through the Speaker's Bureau, community members have been trained to provide presentations about South Asians in the D.C. area, and presentations have been provided to various DC, MD and VA government agencies and community stakeholders.

- Conduct outreach to working class South Asians and limited English proficient South Asians.
- Hold “know your rights” trainings and workshops for community members on multiple issues areas, including immigration, criminal assistance, and financial and taxation assistance, among other areas.
- Build relationships with non-South Asian organizations and service providers.
- Develop professional and job development trainings and resource materials for use by South Asians.
- Engage with South Asian youth to provide safe spaces and access to mentors.
- Conduct “Advocacy Days” for South Asians to meet with D.C. City Council members and heads of government agencies.

Community Stakeholders (Philanthropic and Resource Organizations)

- Liaise and build relationships with South Asians organizations.
- Partner with South Asians organizations when conducting outreach to new immigrant populations.
- Include South Asian populations in funding initiatives tailored to empower immigrant communities.
- Include South Asian culturally-specific trainings for Board Members and Staff.

Our efforts in understanding the concerns and challenges that South Asian community living or working in Washington, D.C. face are merely the first step in what needs to be a long-term and multi-faceted effort. The range of stakeholders in Washington, D.C. –government agencies, city council representatives, community-based organizations, religious and cultural groups, professional associations, philanthropic institutions, immigrant rights and worker rights organizations, and providers of social services – can all play meaningful roles in ensuring the full and active participation of South Asians in their neighborhoods, schools, workplaces, and communities. Greater research into South Asian community members who are working class, poor, and recent immigrants is absolutely critical, as is the expansion of existing government services and benefits, as well as non-profit resources, to reach this growing community. Moreover, it is important to examine the South Asian community in the Washington D.C. metropolitan area through a lens that includes Montgomery, Howard, Prince Georges and Baltimore Counties in Maryland, and Fairfax and Arlington Counties in Virginia. Such a comprehensive analysis will provide us with valuable information about South Asians in the entire metropolitan area.

SAALT and the APALRC look forward to working closely with stakeholders and with members of the South Asian community to reach our collective goals of greater community involvement, participation, and empowerment.



Survey of South Asians Living or Working in DC



We represent two non-profit organizations who want to better understand your needs and experiences in DC through this short survey. **All information in this survey is confidential and anonymous.**

1. What is your age?

2. What is your cultural background?

- Bangladeshi Indian Nepali Pakistani
 Sri Lankan American Other: _____

3. What is your sex?

- Male Female Other

4. What is your native language?
(Please check all that apply.)

- Bangla/Bengali English Gujarati
 Hindi Malayalam Nepali
 Punjabi Sindhi Tamil
 Urdu Other: _____

5. How would you rate your ability to speak, write, and read English? (1 being equal to 'poor'; 3 being equal to 'average/intermediate'; 5 being equal to 'fluent')

	Poor	Average	Fluent
Speak	1	2	3 4 5
Write	1	2	3 4 5
Read	1	2	3 4 5

6. How long have you lived in the US?

 years

7. Where do you currently live?

- DC VA MD Other: _____
 If DC, indicate ward/neighborhood: _____
 If VA or MD, indicate county: _____

And how long have you lived there?

 years

8. Are you currently employed?

- Yes **If YES**, specify occupation (e.g. lawyer, small business owner): _____
 No **If NO**, specify status (e.g. student, retired, homemaker): _____

Where do you currently work?

- DC VA MD Other: _____
 If DC, indicate ward/neighborhood: _____
 If VA or MD, indicate county: _____

9. What is the highest level of education you have completed?

- Secondary school University degree/Bachelor
 High school Graduate/Professional
 Other: _____

In what country did you complete your highest level of education?

- U.S. Country of origin Other

10. What is your annual household income, including all earners in your household?

- Above \$100,000 \$30-49,000
 \$50-99,000 less than \$29,000

11. What is your religious affiliation? (Mark one even if not practicing)

- Buddhist Jain Hindu
 Christian Muslim Sikh
 None Other: _____

12. What is your immigration status in the U.S.?

(This information is confidential and anonymous.)

- U.S. citizen (by birth) U.S. citizen (naturalized)
 Greencard holder
 Undocumented/no immigration status
 Temporary (H1-B, F1, K1, etc.)
 I prefer not to respond Other: _____

If you are not a U.S. citizen, what is your citizenship?

Specify: _____

13) In the past year, do you think you or your family members have experienced unfair treatment in any of the following situations:

(Please check all that apply.)

- When dealing with police or government officials (court, immigration officials, airport security)
 In your neighborhood with other community members
 When searching for housing (renting/buying)
 At work or when applying for a job
 In a store, bank or restaurant
 In school or university
 Religious institution
 In your home
 No, I have not (Skip to question 14)
 I do not know if I have (Skip to question 14)
 Other: _____

a) If you think you or your family members have experienced unfair treatment, do you feel it is because of the following:

(Please check all that apply.)

- National origin Immigration status
 Race or skin color Sexual preference
 Religion I don't know
 Difficulty speaking English/ my accent
 Other: _____

14. What services do you need to help you do your daily activities more effectively?

(Please check all that apply.)

- Health Services (general, reproductive, mental)
- Job/professional training
- Housing and financial advising services
- English language tutoring
- Legal Services
- I have not needed any services (Skip to question 16)
- Other: _____

15. If you have experienced trouble accessing any of the above services, do you think it is because of the following:

(Please check all that apply.)

- Your ability to speak or understand English
- Your immigration status
- Cultural differences
- Lack of transportation
- Financial reasons
- You did not know you can access these services
- You do not know where to go for help
- Other: _____

16. In the past year what kinds of legal services have you needed? ('Needed' does not mean you have specifically used these services in the past year.)

- Immigration
- Family issues (divorce, adoption, child custody)
- Labor/employment
- Discrimination (racial, ethnic, gender, religious)
- Criminal defense (traffic violation, burglary and theft)
- Taxes/finances
- Public benefits (housing, social security, food stamps)

17. Have you or your family members ever had problems with the following:

(Please check all that apply.)

- Finding help to learn English
- Obtaining health care/health insurance
- Enrolling your children in school
- Dealing with teachers, counselors or parents at your childrens' school
- Dealing with mental health issues
- Finding information about safety in your home
- Finding financial assistance for basic needs (food, clothing, housing)
- Finding legal aid
- Negotiating or obtaining your salary
- Managing racial tensions with other members in your community
- Seeking services for the elderly (nursing homes, health, etc.)
- Other problems: _____

18. Please check what activities you have been actively involved in during the past year:

- I vote in elections
- I am a member of a religious/cultural organization
Specify: _____
- I am a member of a civic organization (Charitable, political, PTA)
Specify: _____
- I am a member of a neighborhood organization
Specify: _____
- I volunteer
Specify: _____
- I have not been involved in the above activities in the past year
- Other: _____

19. Have you ever met with a DC government official or public decision-maker to voice your concerns about a specific issue? (e.g. Mayor's Office, DC Police, Office on Asian and Pacific Islander Affairs, etc.)

- Yes No
- IF NO**, I do not know about this possibility
- IF NO**, I do not know where to go
- IF NO**, I do not have an issue to voice opinion on

20. To which extent do you agree or disagree with the following:
(1 being equal to 'Strongly disagree'; 3 being equal to 'Neutral'; 5 being equal to 'Strongly agree')

If I am unhappy about a local issue, I feel I can express my concerns to a local ward representative

Strongly Disagree	Neutral	Strongly agree
1 2	3 4	5

I would like to be actively involved in solving problems that affect my local community

Strongly Disagree	Neutral	Strongly agree
1 2	3 4	5

21. Please complete the following sentence:

My life as a South Asian in DC would be easier if _____

Thank you very much for your participation in our survey. If you would like more information on our work or would like to be further involved in this survey and project, please provide us your:

Name:

Email/phone:

- 1 Our volunteers included: Swathi Bonda, Puneet Cheema, Jason Chambers, Leena Kapila, Pooja Miglani, Dharana Nepal, Poonam Patel, Sadia Rehman, Param Randhea, Ganesh Subramanian, and Nicole Varma.
- 2 2007 DC Asian Census Profile, D.C. Mayor's Office Asian and Pacific Islander Affairs, available at: <http://www.apia.dc.gov/apia/cwp/view,a,3,q,639005.asp>, last accessed on May 13, 2009.
- 3 Center for Social Justice Research, Training, and Service, "D.C.'s Immigrant Community," available at: <http://socialjustice.georgetown.edu/students/service/dcsp/immigrant/>, last accessed June 15, 2009, and Grantmakers Concerned with Immigrants and Refugees, 2006.
- 4 2007 DC Asian Census Profile, D.C. Mayor's Office Asian and Pacific Islander Affairs, available at: <http://www.apia.dc.gov/apia/cwp/view,a,3,q,639005.asp>, last accessed on May 13, 2009.
- 5 "Census 2000 State Legislative District Summary File (100-Percent)," U.S. Census Bureau, available at: <http://apia.dc.gov/apia/cwp/view,a,3,q,639005,apiaNav,%7C31474%7C,.asp>, last accessed June 25, 2009.
- 6 D.C. Language Access Act, D.C. CODE ANN. §2-1931 (2004).
- 7 2007 DC Asian Census Profile, D.C. Mayor's Office Asian and Pacific Islander Affairs, available at: <http://www.apia.dc.gov/apia/cwp/view,a,3,q,639005.asp>, last accessed on May 13, 2009.
- 8 "Demographic Characteristics of South Asians in the United States: Emphasis on Poverty, Gender, Language Ability, and Immigration Status," SAALT 2007, available at: <http://www.saalt.org>
- 9 The "Other Asian" category includes Asian populations that are not specified on census or American Community Survey forms, such as Bangladeshi, Nepali, Pakistani, and Sri Lankan as well as Cambodian, Laotian, Hmong, and others.
- 10 2007 DC Asian Census Profile, D.C. Mayor's Office Asian and Pacific Islander Affairs, available at: <http://www.apia.dc.gov/apia/cwp/view,a,3,q,639005.asp>, as of May 2009.
- 11 Of our sample of 250 respondents, 197 South Asians live or work in Washington, D.C. Our findings only concentrate on individuals that live or work in D.C.
- 12 Census 2000 State Legislative District Summary File (100-Percent), "U.S. Census Bureau, available at: <http://apia.dc.gov/apia/cwp/view,a,3,q,639005,apiaNav,%7C31474%7C,.asp>, last accessed June 25, 2009.
- 13 S.A. Mohanty, S. Woolhandler, D.U. Himmelstein, S. Pati, O. Carrasquillo, and D.H. Bor, "Health Care Expenditures of Immigrants in the United States: A Nationally Representative Analysis," *American Journal of Public Health*, August 2005, (95) 8: 1431-1438.
- 14 Rastogi, M., and Suthakaran, V. *Mental Health in A Brown Paper: The Health of South Asians in the United States*, South Asian Public Health Association (2002).
- 15 In January of each year, the federal government releases an official income level for poverty called the Federal Poverty Income Guidelines, and often informally referred to as the "Federal Poverty Level." For D.C. the 200% poverty level is for a family of the size of 1 earning a gross yearly income of \$21,660. More information is available at: http://www.coverageforall.org/pdf/FHCE_FedPovertyLevel.pdf, last accessed June 25, 2009.
- 16 The DC HealthCare Alliance program is designed to provide medical assistance to D.C. residents who are not eligible for federally-financed Medicaid benefits. They include non-disabled childless adults, non-qualified aliens and some individuals who are over-income for Medicaid.
- 17 All families must meet the following income guidelines: Family of one (1) \$17,180 (only for emancipated youth under the age of 19) Family of two (2) \$23,220 Family of three (3) \$29,220 Family of four (4) \$35,300 Family of five (5) \$41,340 Family of six (6) \$47,380 Family of seven (7) \$53,420 Family of eight (8) \$59,460
- 18 185 people out of our 197 sample responded to this question. From the 185 respondents, 59.5% thought they had not experienced unfair treatment in the last year (in any of the situations we provided: when dealing with government officials or police, in neighborhood or community, when searching for housing, at work or applying for a job, in a store, bank or restaurant, in school or university, in a religious institution, or at their home) or did not know if they had.
- 19 74 people answered this question on why they felt they experienced unfair treatment and 123 people skipped this question. While the number of survey respondents who answered these questions was low, this low turn-out is also indicative of an incomplete or limited understanding of what may or may not constitute unfair treatment. This hesitance to convey discriminatory or unfair treatment is not uncommon in immigrant and first generation communities as many individuals are unwilling to acknowledge victimization or disparate treatment for fear of retaliation; and advocacy and legal service organizations are always cognizant of this hesitancy in all interactions with South Asian callers and clients.
- 20 Various semi-structured interviews were conducted in March and April 2009 with South Asian small business owners—mainly consisting of commercial businesses (general stores, liquor stores, etc.).
- 21 More information on community organizations offered by the D.C. government is available at: http://app.answersplease.dc.gov/services/resources/keywords.asp?id=_OXU16W8IY&name=Community%2FNeighborhood+Services or by phone at: (202)463-6211.
- 23 National Action Agenda: Policy Recommendations to Empower South Asian Communities in the United States, SAALT 2008, available at: <http://www.saalt.org>, last accessed June 13, 2009.
- 24 This percentage is within the sample of those that felt they had been treated unfairly in the last year by government officials or police.
- 25 Response from the open-ended question: My life as a South Asian in D.C. would be easier if..., from "A Survey of South Asians Living or Working in Washington D.C.," 2009.
- 26 In fact, since September 11th, organizations such as the Sikh Coalition have been raising awareness campaigns on hate crimes, employment discrimination and airport profiling in Gurdwaras (Sikh temples) across the United States. According to the Sikh Coalition, from September to December 2007, 32 separate complaints of discrimination were filed with the Transportation Security Administration (TSA). More detailed information on hate crimes post-September 11th can be found at: Post-9/11 Hate Crimes Trends: Muslims, Sikhs, Hindus, and Jews, The Pluralism Project at Harvard University (2005). For more information on employment based discrimination: Muslim/Arab Employment Discrimination Charges since 9/11, U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (2002).
- 27 "A Milestone for Sikhs in D.C.," *The Washington Post*, February 18, 2006.
- 28 Report to Subcommittee on Human Rights and the Law, Committee on the Judiciary, U.S. Senate, United States Government Accountability Office, GAO-08-892 (2008).
- 29 Home Is Where the Work Is: Inside New York's Domestic Work Industry, Domestic Workers United and DataCenter, July 2006, available at: <http://www.datacenter.org/reports/reports.htm>, last accessed June 26, 2009.
- 30 Response from a focus group participant when responding to the question: Where do you see the community ten years from now?
- 31 D.C. Language Access Act, D.C. CODE ANN. §2-1931 (2004).

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