

The Special Challenges of COVID-19 for Asian Americans

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Saheli, Support and Friendship
for South Asian Women



New Threats and the Deepening of Inequities among Minority Groups

- The COVID-19 public health crisis highlighted inequalities and disparities among majority and minority communities.
- Disparities in income, working conditions, wages, health, and basic needs have been magnified.
- Saheli is a social work agency, it has been working for twenty-five years in Burlington MA, towards helping South Asian women who are domestically and sexually abused. We present briefly how we are bringing a survivor-centered social justice lens to the task of improving the lives of South Asian survivors.



How did Saheli respond to the public health crisis in Massachusetts?

- Domestic and gender-based violence are heightened by cabin fever and the proximity to abusers. Going to work offers women a chance to be away physical and emotional violence. Schools offer children a safe heaven from abusive, warring and neglectful parents.
- Saheli's strength was language access and cultural responsiveness. Social workers could not meet clients in person for confidential discussions and counseling.
- Closures of all courts had a significant impact on wait times, especially for people in litigation who need interpreters.
- Mental health counselors reach clients through tele-therapy sessions now, it is not the same. Already isolated women are feeling overwhelmingly alone, fearful and depressed.

How Saheli's clients experienced the pandemic as it exacerbated existing inequities in society due to structural racism and gendered violence.

- **Cabin Fever.** As people are pushed further inside, they will be met with psychological effects of enclosure and isolation.
- **Housing, Rents and Mortgages,** Support for Utility Bills and Food Insecurity, the demand for help was overwhelming, fortunately, the State stepped in and helped Saheli with funds.
- **Hourly wages,** poverty and care for dependent children, parents or others remained extremely inadequate, and threats of losing jobs constant.
- **Work and the Risk of Infection.** As establishments around the state continued to shut their doors or shift to working remotely, certain workers were pushed out and disproportionately affected.
- **Transportation and the increased spread of infection were a significant threat.**

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- **Health Care.** A significant vulnerable population does not qualify for anything beyond emergency care.
- **Childcare.** Mothers without paid sick leave, are forced to choose between supporting themselves financially and risking children and family safety and wellbeing.
- **Immigration status.** This virus poses a serious threat to the undocumented -ineligible for Medicaid, refrain from going to police or hospitals even if they exhibit symptoms, out of fear of exposing their status.
- **Historical Animosity Towards Asians.**
- **Next Steps:** The pandemic has slowed down our progress. We need your help to advance language access, culturally responsive social services, expand protections for domestic and sexual assault survivors, economic security and economic assistance, and justice and legal help.

AWFH History: *from Adversity to Advocacy*



2005



2010



2012

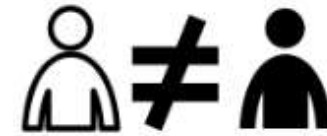


ASIAN
BREAST
CANCER
PROJECT



asian women for health

Issues Asian Women & Girls Are Facing:



1. Low health literacy & preventive care utilization
2. High rate of depression, anxiety & suicide ideation
3. Model minority myth & racism, sexism, ageism

Stats & Facts about AA Mental Health

- **AA girls** have the highest rates of depressive symptoms of any racial/ethnic/gender group (NAMI)
- **AA women (15-24)** die from suicide at a higher rate
- **AA women (65+)** have the highest suicide rate (OMH)
- **PTSD, Trauma/DV & Problem Gambling**
- AA have the **lowest utilization rate** for mental health services (NAMI)

The Impact of Covid-19 and Anti-Asian Hate on AAPI Mental Health

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Charlestown High School





Consequences of Covid and Anti- Asian Hate

At the Family Level:

- Parents are restaurant workers with reduced hours and/or are unemployed
- Facing threats of eviction and/or owing back rent
- Buying less food to afford covering monthly rent
- Fear of being a victim of anti-Asian hate

At the Individual Level:

- Low Self-Esteem
- Moderate to severe depression
- Suicide ideation and attempted suicide
- Academic disengagement (Straight A/ AP students at risk of not graduating)



AAPI Experiences

- "A student said "I'm not racist but I don't want to sit next to that student. [indicated Chinese student] *I don't want to get the virus.*" I explained to her how Student 2 hadn't left the country recently and there was only one case out at UMASS at that point and that not all Chinese students are carrying the disease." --Teacher J.
- "There is an in school SAT on 4/27. It may be the only chance for some of the juniors to take the SAT. Many Chinese students signed up for that day, but they are really worried about their commute on that day, and have decided they need to travel in groups to prevent anything that could be harmful to them." ---Teacher H.
- "I wanted to go back to school but I was more worried about the places where there's a lot of people and my family are not vaccinated. As for [being targets of anti-Asian violence], I was abused on the subway while [being] discriminated [against and] although someone stopped the man's abuse, no one else on the whole subway spoke [up] for us..." -- Student T.



The Impact: Suffering in Silence

- AAPI Youth are suffering in silence and are coping in isolation
- Chronic stress from Covid and anti-Asian hate contribute to an increase in social emotional needs that destabilizes their mental health undermine support and academic engagement
- AAPI youth are cultural brokers for their families but their mental health needs undermines the capabilities of these “brokers” and AAPI families are left with a heavier burden to get resources and services