



RAKSHA Program Narrative

Raksha, meaning “protection” in many South Asian languages, serves the South Asian community. The South Asian Community consists of individuals from Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Pakistan, Nepal, and Sri Lanka.

Community Need for the Program: Like any community, South Asians in DeKalb County are impacted by violence; however, they face additional barriers to accessing assistance due to cultural stigma, language barriers, and a lack of knowledge about their rights. The South Asian community in DeKalb County includes over 20,000 individuals. The fastest-growing populations, the Bhutanese and Bangladeshi communities, have high rates of limited English proficiency. Many South Asians living in Clarkston and around Buford Highway also have limited English proficiency and little experience with American cultural norms. These immigrants and refugees face the daunting task of settling into a new country, securing employment, learning unfamiliar laws and societal expectations, and providing for their families. Parents grapple with the challenge of guiding their children through issues they themselves have never encountered. Meanwhile, children must navigate a new environment with limited assistance from their parents due to these cultural and experiential gaps.

Since 2020, the need for immigrant survivors to access financial, rental, and food assistance has increased due to the pandemic. Many of our clients were not eligible for stimulus packages or unemployment because they are waiting for immigration relief based on being abused by their spouses or other victimizations. Raksha also serves victims of crimes who have severe mental health needs as a result of victimization that occurred years ago and resulted in PTSD that prevented them from applying for victim compensation while they were eligible and immigrant survivors who were never notified of victim compensation when their loved one was killed by their spouse. Since many of the survivors we work with have language barriers, they have not been able to access county based financial assistance even though they are in dire need of financial assistance in order to remain housed and able to feed their families.

In addition, some South Asian immigrants and refugees have had unanticipated legal consequences due to a lack of knowledge about U.S. law surrounding teen marriage. Many of the youth who enter into these marriages do not know that such marriages are illegal in the United States, and parents and communities that continue to encourage, support, or pressure youth into these marriages are unaware that they are breaking the law. They may only learn about the law when the teen has given birth to a child or someone raises concerns about statutory rape when the husband is considerably older than the teen (25 and above). Education around laws concerning marriage is sorely lacking within these communities. Women and girls often believe they must comply with the wishes of men in their families and do not know that they can refuse to get married and have a right to refuse sexual acts in relationships. These issues are often brought to light in Raksha's youth and chat groups, where youth can speak freely about the issues they face and learn from each other and staff about options for handling these issues. Although they present considerable benefit for the youth who are able to attend, this is a small portion of the youth we need to reach. Adults in the community are also facing difficulties and need to know about the services that Raksha provides. In addition to providing crucial culturally



and linguistically competent services such as counseling, advocacy, and youth groups, Raksha would like to put resources towards community-specific education efforts that could help the community know what resources are available, their rights and the impact of certain laws on their families and cultural practices.

The crime victimization in the local South Asian community is further exacerbated by hate crimes impacting Asian communities, which create more fear in accessing help from systems. Raksha has been working with other community and civil rights organizations over the past two years to address the needs of the community impacted by the Atlanta March 16th Shootings as well as the broader needs of API community as it relates to hate crimes.

Sexual Assault and Stigma: Raksha has continued to see an increase in the number of calls from survivors seeking support as a result of previous and current sexual assaults/molestation, some of which have been against teen girls in DeKalb County. There is a lot stigma and shame in reporting sexual assault in our communities, which can sometimes lead to a survivor being pressured to marry her assailant based on cultural ideas about purity. Raksha wants to continue to build upon the recent heightened community awareness about domestic violence and sexual assault to educate community members about violence and inform them of available resources to help them heal from the violence they have experienced.

Research on domestic and sexual violence within immigrant communities is sparse, with even fewer studies conducted within the South Asian community. A study in 2002, of 160 South Asian women in heterosexual relationships in the Greater Boston found that ⁽¹⁾:

- 40.8% the participants reported that they had been physically &/or sexually abused by their current male partners or in their lifetime;
- 36.9% reported having been victimized in the past year;
- 65% of the women reporting physical abuse also reported sexual abuse;
- 30.4% reporting sexual abuse reported injuries, some requiring medical attention.
- In a separate study ² of 143 women, 64% of Indian and Pakistani women reported experiencing sexual violence by an intimate partner. However, reporting sexual violence or seeking counseling support is rare. Some of the primary social and cultural beliefs and norms about sex, sexuality, gender and family roles mean that survivors of sexual assault do not feel safe to report assaults or seek support.

In a study³ of 62 battered women (20 African American, 22 Hispanic, and 20 South Asian) who had accessed domestic violence services:

- South Asian women were more likely to seek help from family members than African American or Hispanic women. The difference was notable in the proportion of women

¹ Raj & Silverman of (Raj A. Silverman J. *Intimate Partner Violence against South-Asian Women in Greater Boston. Journal of American Medical Women's Association. 2002; 57(2): 111-114.*

² Yoshihama M, Bybee D, Dabby C, Blazevski J. (*Lifecourse Experiences of Intimate Partner Violence and Help-Seeking among Filipino, Indian and Pakistani Women: Implications for Justice System Responses. Washington, DC: National Institute of Justice; 2011.*)

³ Yoshioka MR, Gilbert L, El-Bassel N, Baig-Amin M. Social support and disclosure of abuse: Comparing South Asian, African American, and Hispanic battered women. *Journal of Family Violence. 2003; 18:171-180*



who disclosed the violence to their father (40.0% of South Asian, compared to 11.1% of African American and 8.7% of Hispanic) or their brother (55.0% of South Asian, compared to 16.7% of African American and 21.7% of Hispanic).

Following disclosure, South Asian women were significantly more likely to be advised by family members “to stay in the marriage” than other groups of women. Raksha has seen this research reflected in the direct services we provide and community education and outreach requests we receive. Recently, we have gotten a number of calls from health centers, doctors, and law enforcement officers in DeKalb County who needed help or technical assistance in working with South Asian survivors who were sexually assaulted by their husband or other family member.

Program’s Primary client/customer: Raksha serves survivors from the South Asian community and other immigrant communities. The South Asian community consists of individuals from Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Pakistan, Nepal and Sri Lanka and their descendants. The local South Asian community is linguistically, culturally, and religiously diverse, with members speaking more than 20 languages. South Asians are the largest Asian American community in the Metropolitan Atlanta area and have more than tripled in size over the past ten years. DeKalb County has the fastest growing Bangladeshi and Bhutanese communities, and cities in DeKalb County such as Chamblee, Clarkston, Decatur, Tucker and Doraville have higher averages of South Asian populations than the rest of DeKalb. In addition, there are a number of cultural and religious centers in DeKalb County that serve South Asians. Domestic and sexual violence survivors from any community face many obstacles when they try reaching out for support; however, survivors from immigrant communities face additional obstacles, such as limited English proficiency, lack of a support network if they are recent immigrants, lack of knowledge of the immediate community and available resources, and fear about immigration consequences. As the first and only organization in the Southeast to address the needs of South Asian survivors of violence, Raksha is filling a critical gap in service landscape of the DeKalb County community.

Scope of Services: Raksha’s licensed counselors provide individual counseling in English, Urdu, Gujarati, Hindi, and Punjabi. We provide other services in Bangla, Gujarati, Hindi, Punjabi, Tamil, and Urdu and utilize interpretation services for other South Asian languages. Interns provide additional linguistic support when necessary. As part of providing technical assistance to local mainstream organizations, Raksha also provides legal and emergency interpretation services for survivors. Raksha provides services to clients outside the South Asian community when comparable culturally competent, linguistically appropriate services are not available within their community. Raksha’s cost for providing counseling at an outside agency is approximately \$100 per therapeutic hour and \$50 per interpretation hour, totaling \$150 per hour of counseling that clients receive. Raksha also provides clinical assessments for immigrant survivors, which are critical for applying for immigration relief. These letters normally cost over \$2,000 with private practitioners. Raksha offers these culturally competent and linguistically appropriate services related to abuse for adults, youth and children at no charge to both individuals and their families because we feel strongly that survivors should not have to pay to heal from the abuse that they suffered.



Raksha provides individual counseling for adults and children, once a month support groups for women and children and advocacy services which include but are not limited to safety planning, emergency financial assistance, economic empowerment, and other programmatic referrals. The counseling and advocacy services are on-going and scheduled based on the client's need.

In addition, Raksha's advocates provide referrals to pro-bono attorneys specializing in domestic violence and/or immigration issues; accompaniment to court proceedings; and advocacy with mainstream service providers to obtain more resources for Raksha clients. The advocates help many of our clients become economically self-sufficient by working with survivors to remove barriers such as learning about public transit and securing affordable and safe housing. If the client has never worked, the advocate working with her will try to ascertain what type of work the client is able or interested in doing, and if any training is needed. The advocates also work with clients to help them obtain scholarships to fund their studies.

Multilingual Services: Raksha staff provides interpretation, translation and technical support to our clients in accessing mainstream agencies and shelters that serve South Asian women. When a survivor is expressing fear or distress, it is harder for her to understand what she is being told about options for accessing a temporary protective order or shelter even if she understands a little bit of the language. When she does have access to information about her options or safety planning in her own language, she is in more danger. When a survivor hears the issues in her own language, she better understands the situation and the nuances of the many systems she encounters. In that way, she is better able to make decisions that are right for her and her family. Raksha will utilize funding to provide increased access to interpreters and translators for legal proceedings and counseling as well as expanding support for clients who may not be South Asian and are in need of culturally and linguistically appropriate services.

Youth Program: Children who witness any type of violence in their homes are more likely to repeat those same violence patterns when they become adults. They are also likely to exhibit violence towards siblings, poor school performance and difficulty with other relationships. The goal of the Youth Program at Raksha is to break this cycle of violence. Licensed staff therapists coordinate and supervise monthly therapeutic activities for our youth clients. These activities focus on helping children find appropriate ways to express their feelings about the violence they have witnessed; build their self-esteem; heal by working through their feelings of anger; and find alternative means of coping with their trauma. Raksha also offers one-on-one counseling, with the consent of a parent, as needed or requested.

Through this DeKalb District 6 funding, Raksha plans to provide approximately 15-20 survivors and their children with 200 advocacy service units. This includes approximately \$2,000 of emergency financial assistance for each client, which may include housing, food, and/or transportation assistance. This emergency financial assistance helps clients overcome barriers to leaving abusive situations and receiving services. 10% of budget costs (\$4,000) will be allocated to administrative costs such as a portion of insurance and security system costs.



Training and Technical Assistance: To promote cultural sensitivity among local social service providers and criminal justice agencies, Raksha provides technical assistance to police departments, such as DeKalb County, Decatur, Chamblee, Emory, Dunwoody, City of Atlanta police departments; health care providers - Grady Hospital; battered women's shelters and domestic violence agencies such as Women's Resource Center; and criminal justice departments like the DeKalb County Solicitor General's Victim Witness Assistance Office.

Evidence Based and Best Practice Based Models. Raksha follows the National Council of Juvenile and Family Court Judges (NCJFCJ) set of standards to ensure that survivors from immigrant communities were kept safe and given competent support services. When we are not able to meet survivors' needs in-house, we refer them to appropriate services. Specifically, the NCJFCJ urged:

- Cultural competency that provides services in an appropriate language and with an understanding of cultural values and practices. *(Standard: cultural competency)*
- Staff working with survivors should be well-informed regarding immigration laws and the rights of survivors, so they can adequately communicate options to the client in order for her to make a well-informed decision regarding her situation. *(Standard: knowledgeable)*
- Safety planning must consider the special circumstances of immigrant survivors including: (1) the need to gather important documentation if it is safe to do so (*documentation regarding identity, proof of marriage, and evidence of abuse*); (2) documentation regarding protection order violations; (3) Telephone numbers for local shelters and police. *(Standard: knowledgeable)*
- Providing effective legal counsel to secure immigration relief that is available under VAWA (VAWA self-petition and U-Visa). *(Standard: effective legal counsel)*
- Utilizing protection orders to ensure child custody and child spousal financial support *(Standard: effective legal counsel)*

(National Council of Juvenile and Family Court Judges, Winter 2004. Synergy, pp 1-5.)
Counseling Services (Raksha Standards: cultural competency, linguistically appropriate)

Accessibility: Other than language access, one of the largest barriers that Raksha clients face is transportation. Raksha uses Uber Health to provide clients with confidential and accessible transportation to and from appointments. Raksha's office is centrally located and has public transportation options nearby. Raksha is committed to serving all clients, so staff work closely with clients who have disabilities in order to provide accommodations that allow them to access services. Raksha has also collaborated with the Georgia Center of the Deaf and Hard of Hearing and is able to contract with them to access interpretation if needed. In order to ensure our services are accessible to anyone who needs them, there are no eligibility requirements or



participant fees.

Authorized to Sign Contract:

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