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Recommended Citation

Zylstra, Priyanka, "(Re)Locating South Asian Women in Apna Ghar: Evolving Cultural Narratives within Domestic Violence Intervention" (2018). *Spring 2018*. 144.

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(RE)LOCATING SOUTH ASIAN WOMEN IN APNA GHAR: EVOLVING CULTURAL NARRATIVES WITHIN DOMESTIC VIOLENCE INTERVENTION

Priyanka Zylstra

Mentor: Jami Ake

The stories and statistics of domestic violence worldwide are greatly alarming and a number of academic studies have found specifically high rates of domestic violence in the South Asian immigrant population in the United States. Situating these statistics within today's American political and neoliberal landscape led to my research on how service providers conceptualize domestic violence intervention in immigrant and South Asian communities. In the 1980s, numerous South Asian Women's Organizations formed throughout the United States to address domestic violence within the South Asian immigrant community, recognizing a need to center ethnicity in domestic violence intervention. I investigate how Apna Ghar, a non-profit agency that historically served the South Asian population in Chicago, understands and responds to the intersection of ethnicity, culture, and gender in its approach to intervention. Apna Ghar provides a crucial case study for assessing the current relevance of and need for culturally specific domestic violence organizations and a way to investigate the role of South Asian identity in domestic violence intervention today. Apna Ghar has expanded to specializing in immigrant women, leaving behind culturally regionally-specific model and embracing a deficit-based strategic intervention. I found the South Asian identity subsumed within a broader immigrant framework. The divisions to identify target clientele and what constitutes commonality have altered, focusing on identities as immigrant versus non-immigrant, invoking a citizenship-based binary to mark those at a distance from the conceptualized normative survivor. Examining how organizations, like Apna Ghar, understand their role in society and how they present themselves within today's political context in order to reach and expand a target population, receive funding from donors, and perpetuate or challenge patriarchal structures contributes to our understandings of NGOs in the neoliberal landscape and the contradictions and tensions that arise from the non-profit industrial complex.