

'Exploring the limit: How far is too far?': Raising awareness of sexual violence among South Asian immigrants in the United States

By: [S. Sudha](#), Ritu Kaur, Joseline Kirkendoll, Promita Majumdar, and Vandana Shah

Sudha, S., Ritu Kaur, Joseline Kirkendoll, Promita Majumdar, and Vandana Shah. 2014. 'Exploring the limit: How far is too far?': Raising awareness of sexual violence among South Asian immigrants in the United States. White paper.

Abstract:

Kiran Inc, a non-profit in North Carolina providing crisis services to South Asian immigrants, conducted an event in 2014 to raise sexual violence awareness. Volunteers wrote and acted five short plays; a panel of experts facilitated discussion. The discussion highlighted ambiguity about when common interactions crossed into violence. Panelists suggested imbalance in power and control in crossing the line. Attendees completed an evaluation including the Illinois Rape Myth Acceptance scale customized for South Asian contexts. Most did not accept prevalent rape myths, but need more awareness on alcohol-related and same-sex violence. Strategies for primary prevention and additional awareness-raising were discussed.

Keywords: sexual violence awareness | South Asian immigrants | theater technique | South Asian women's organizations | culturally customized rape myth acceptance measure | Indian immigrants | sexual violence attitudes | community awareness

Article:

*****Note: Full text of article below**

‘Exploring the limit: How far is too far?’: Raising awareness of sexual violence among South Asian immigrants in the United States

S. Sudha PhD, Ritu Kaur MSW, Joseline Kirkendoll MA, Promita Majumdar MSW, Vandana Shah LLM

Corresponding author:

S. Sudha, Associate Professor, Dept. of Human Development and Family Studies, University of North Carolina at Greensboro. s_shreen@uncg.edu

Acknowledgements: Kiran Inc thanks the play script writers, the actors, panel members, and volunteers who made the event a success, and is grateful to Amrit Wadhwa for photographs. Kiran Inc is grateful to the NC Coalition Against Sexual Assault for providing input into planning this event. Kiran Inc is grateful to the United States Department of Justice Office for Violence Against Women - Culturally Linguistically Specific Services Program OVW-CLSSP 2013 whose grant 2009-UW-AX0017 funded this activity.

Keywords: Indian immigrants; sexual violence knowledge; sexual violence attitudes; community awareness

Abstract

Kiran Inc, a non-profit in North Carolina providing crisis services to South Asian immigrants, conducted an event in 2014 to raise sexual violence awareness. Volunteers wrote and acted five short plays; a panel of experts facilitated discussion. The discussion highlighted ambiguity about when common interactions crossed into violence. Panelists suggested imbalance in power and control in crossing the line. Attendees completed an evaluation including the Illinois Rape Myth Acceptance scale customized for South Asian contexts. Most did not accept prevalent rape myths, but need more awareness on alcohol-related and same-sex violence. Strategies for primary prevention and additional awareness-raising were discussed.

Keywords: sexual violence awareness, South Asian immigrants, theater technique, South Asian women's organizations, culturally customized rape myth acceptance measure,

In the evening of December 16th 2012, a young woman physiotherapy intern in New Delhi boarded a bus with her male friend, returning home after watching a movie. The bus driver and staff beat the man and gang raped the woman, assaulting her with an iron rod, then dumped the victims on the side of the road and drove away. The victims were discovered and taken to a hospital late at night. Though the critically injured woman received intensive care in India and Singapore, she died on December 29th 2012. This brutal crime incited public outrage in India and worldwide, and placed unprecedented pressure on Indian politicians, lawmakers, administrators, and law enforcement, for the lack of safety for women.

Such incidents are not isolated. However, despite decades of effort by women's organizations in South Asia and overseas, sexual violence had received less attention, since it is seen as very sensitive, and hidden within family and community relationships. Nonetheless, the death of the young New Delhi woman drew worldwide condemnation, giving South Asian women's rights activists fresh support in countering sexual violence. Overseas South Asian women's organizations who had previously faced difficulties directly addressing sexual violence found greater opportunity to do so. This paper describes one such effort by Kiran Inc, a not-for-profit organization based in North Carolina, USA, that provides free domestic violence and crisis services for persons with ties to the South Asian community (Kiran, no date, a). The event, titled 'Exploring the limits: How far is too far', held in February 2014, was a pioneering effort to raise awareness of and assess attitudes towards sexual violence in the South Asian community in the United States.

BACKGROUND

Sexual violence

Sexual violence can be perpetrated by an intimate partner, other known person, or a stranger. The World Health Organization and Pan American Health Organization (2012) describe sexual violence as including a wide spectrum of acts, such as rape, systematic sexual assault during conflicts, forced marriage, etc. The US Office of Violence Against Women (US Department Of Justice, 2014) defines sexual assault as any type of sexual contact or behavior that occurs without the explicit consent of the

recipient, while the United States Centers for Disease Control defines it using four levels: a completed sex act (penetration), an attempted but not completed act, an abusive act, non-contact sexual abuse (Basile et al, 2002). The Indian Penal Code Section 375, revised in 2013 following the public outrage engendered by the December 2012 death, defines rape as committed by males against females (under various conditions, including if the female is under age 18 years, or intoxicated, or consent has been coerced, etc.), but excludes marital rape unless the wife is under 15 years of age (Indian Penal Code, 1860). Other sections deal with acid attack, sexual harassment, disrobing a woman, voyeurism, stalking, and human trafficking. Many sections are not gender-neutral, only women are viewed as victims. All same-sex activity whether or not consensual is criminalized under Section 377, with the same punishment as that for rape. Inconsistencies in the definition of sexual violence between India and other countries with Indian-origin communities add to the difficulties of prevention and response among immigrants.

Globally, sexual violence is a severe issue, and is intertwined with other forms of family or gender based violence. Though men and boys are affected too, the victims are preponderantly female. Over 35% of women worldwide have experienced some form of sexual violence from a partner or stranger, and estimates suggest that 40.2 % of women in the South East Asian region (including India and Bangladesh in South Asia) have experienced such violence (Garcia-Moreno et al, 2013). Partner violence and sexual violence form an epidemic that threatens the health, life, and human rights of victims and create a significant global health burden (World Health Organization, 2005).

Sexual violence among overseas South Asians

Sexual violence is also prevalent in South Asian diaspora communities. Most studies in North America in immigrant ethnic minority communities focus on intimate partner violence or domestic violence, rather than specifically on sexual violence. Shankar, Das, and Atwal (2013) suggest that domestic violence is at least as prevalent among South Asian immigrants as in the general population, though there is substantial under-reporting due to reasons including shame and embarrassment, preserving family and community honor, and reluctance to engage with law enforcement. Others argue that intimate partner violence, including sexual violence, disproportionately affects ethnic minorities in the US, and is

exacerbated by vulnerabilities caused by the immigration context (Stockman, Hayashi and Campbell, 2014). The vulnerabilities for South Asian immigrant women are magnified by collectivistic cultural norms, patriarchy, and rigid gender roles (Ahmad, Rai, Petrovic, Erickson and Stewart, 2013). However, most studies don't have sufficient sample size to distinguish among different ethnic subgroups, so estimating the prevalence of intimate partner or sexual violence in South Asia diaspora communities is imprecise (Mohapatra, 2012; Yoshihama, Ramakrishnan, Hammock, and Khaliq, 2012). The culture of silence on violence and sexual issues in South Asian cultures affects awareness, reporting, and response regarding sexual violence (Tummala-Narra, Satiani and Patel 2015).

Chinese and South Asian communities in the United States seem "largely silent" on the issue of marital sexual violence though domestic violence is "a fact of life" among them (Midlarsky, Venkataramani-Kothari, & Plante, 2006: 279). In general, South Asian women (overseas or in Asia) recognize violence to be physical abuse, unacceptable sexual practices, and/or sexual torture (O'Connor and Collucci 2016). Marital rape is usually not seen as sexual violence, because sex is seen as the right of the husband, part of male privilege (Mahapatra, 2012; Midlarsky et al, 2006). Women comply without awareness of their right to object. Mahapatra (2012) found 33% of immigrant Indian study participants in the US reported sexual abuse in the past year. Indian immigrants are reluctant to report, seeing the legal system as oppressive and police involvement as shameful. The experience of South Asian same-sex partners is marginalized due to discrimination from mainstream society and homophobia within their own heteronormative communities (Satrang and South Asian Network, 2008).

Forced marriage among overseas South Asians

Sexual violence also includes forced marriage and trafficking. Forced marriage is different from arranged marriage, as in the former, consent is not obtained or is coerced from those getting married. Forced marriage typically involves younger people. The United Nations has passed a resolution against forced marriage and child marriage. Forced marriage is recognized as a crime in the United Kingdom (UK). In the United States, eight states and Washington DC have laws against forced marriage. In the UK South Asian community over 1600 reports of forced marriage occurred in 2008; 85% of the cases

involved women forced into marriage and 15% involved men (Sinha, 2013). In the United States, the Tahirih Justice Center stated that 3,000 forced marriages occurred over 2011-2013, involving people from diverse religions and 56 countries (Heiman and Bangura, 2013). India's National Commission for Women (no date) and, and the Ministry of Overseas Indian Affairs (2007), caution that marriages between overseas Indians and Indians from India can sometimes be associated with violence and crime, including forced marriage, visa fraud, bigamy, financial fraud, sexual violence, trafficking, etc. and have issued informational brochures suggesting safeguards for people considering such marriages.

Human Trafficking

Human trafficking is another aspect of global sexual violence that affects South Asians, and is a cause and a consequence of human rights violations. Socio-economic inequality and political conflict lead to movement of people across borders and globalization enhances these flows. Accurate estimates are difficult to obtain, but around 225,000 people each year may be trafficked in South Asian countries Huda (2006). Men and boys are affected too, to a lesser extent than women. There is an intricate nexus between human trafficking, the HIV/AIDS infection, and poverty.

South Asians in North Carolina

Asian immigrant groups are among the fastest growing in the United States, and Asian Indians form the second largest Asian subgroup (Misra and Gupta 2004). Nationwide, this group grew 106% between 1990 and 2000 (US Census Bureau 2010), a rate that would be higher if immigrants from other culturally congruent South Asian countries such as Pakistan, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka, and Nepal are included. North Carolina, a "new gateway" state for immigrants, is among the top three states for growth of the Asian population during 2000-2010. Asian Indians are the largest Asian subgroup in North Carolina and 22 other states (Hoeffel et al. 2012). United States 2010 Census data show that Asian Indians in North Carolina number about 63,852 (adding other South Asians would increase that number) out of a total state population of 9,535,483. They are comparatively younger (median age 30.9 years vs. the state median age of 37.4 years); better educated (about 78 % of Asian Indians have at least bachelor's

degree, compared to about 26.5 % state average); and have a higher per capita income (\$ 84,357 vs \$ 44,958 for the state in 1999 dollars); than the overall population of the state.

Resistance and resources: South Asian Women's Organizations

South Asian women in the subcontinent and overseas have a long history of activism and mobilization around political, social, and economic issues, including violence against women. South Asian women overseas have formed organizations, especially in larger areas with a greater concentration of immigrants, and form a key supportive resource against family or partner violence. For example, Manavi, the oldest South Asian women's organization in the US, was formed in New Jersey in 1985 by six women coming together as a consciousness-raising group, who soon found themselves having to mobilize as a resource for unmet needs of women facing family and gender violence and related issues (Manavi, 2015). About 35 to 40 South Asian women's advocacy organizations appear to be listed in the US, mostly in larger urban areas of states with substantial immigrant populations. In the same tradition, Kiran Inc began in 1998 in the Triangle area of North Carolina, as two Indian-American medical students were exploring the impact of domestic violence on the lives of South Asians in the state. Together with other South Asian women in the area, they founded Kiran (meaning 'ray of light' in most South Asian languages) as a domestic violence and crisis service organization, that would also serve as a cultural bridge between the South Asian community and mainstream service providers (Kiran Inc, no date, b). Kiran receives about 40 calls a month on its crisis line, and has an active case load of about 35 cases per year, managed by a part-time skeleton staff and volunteers.

PLANNING THE EVENT

Kiran Inc was awarded a 'Culture and Language Specific Services Programs' grant by the US Office of Violence Against Women in 2013. The purpose was to build collaboration among local agencies to address the needs of South Asian victims of domestic violence, sexual assault, and stalking, through developing and delivering client services and building infrastructure. Goals included raising public

awareness, training, education, and policy change. The awareness raising event was part of the grant activities, as a timely response to the wave of public concern for the December 2012 victim.

Kiran board members, staff, and volunteers began planning the event in Fall 2013. The group consulted with the North Carolina Coalition Against Sexual Assault (NC CASA), which provides education, advocacy, and legislative input to combat sexual assault. This assisted in setting the parameters for the Kiran event, as follows:

1. The core objective was to create a platform for dialogue about common situations that hold the potential for sexual assault, aggression, and violence. Until this plan, there had been no steps taken by the South Asian community in North Carolina to acknowledge sexual violence among them. The planned event would represent a beginning.
2. The purpose of the event was to:
 - a. Raise awareness about sexual assault, aggression, violence in the South Asian community, and their occurrence in common situations,
 - b. Educate the audience on their rights and what is considered legal in the US, especially in those situations where legal rights in the home country may be different,
 - c. Leave the audience with the sense that they have options and resources available to them through services and ways to access those services.
3. The theme of the event was reflected in its title: ‘Exploring the limit: How far is too far?’, to sensitize the audience to the boundaries of sexual violence in common situations.
4. Since this was a pioneering event, involving comparatively few people as a first step would be optimal. Next steps could be taken from this foundation.
5. The event would draw on the South Asian tradition of street theater that raises awareness and dialogue on societal issues. Thus, the event would include a set of short plays, presenting vignettes illustrating situations of sexual violence, to spark audience dialogue.
6. A panel with expertise on medicine, mental health, research, and community outreach would speak and answer questions. An NC CASA representative would join the panel to provide general

information on laws in the United States, but not give legal advice, for example regarding marital rape being a crime in the United States but not in India. This role was in line with NC CASA's mission to facilitate primary prevention activities, and provide resources and options before situations escalate to violence.

7. NC CASA staff recommended that Kiran prepare for an increase in calls and caseload after the event. Kiran planned to provide a list of professionals for referrals, further publicize the Kiran hotline number, have a Kiran counselor at the event, and facilitate cooperation with representatives of mainstream agencies invited to the event.
8. Monitoring and evaluation of the event would help establish a baseline of sexual violence attitudes and knowledge in the South Asian community.

In January 2014, Manavi, the South Asian women's organization from New Jersey, organized an all-United States telephone conference call among US South Asian women's organizations to discuss issues relating to sexual violence among South Asian immigrants. The first author participated in the call. The discussion confirmed that, to the participants' knowledge, a community awareness event focused on sexual violence had not previously been held for South Asians in the United States. This community has not mobilized around the issue of sexual violence. There is lack of open discourse on healthy sexuality, as this topic is seen as very sensitive and private. It was recommended that South Asian organizations should work closely with mainstream organizations to meet common goals and close mutual information gaps.

Next, a Kiran volunteer reached out to other South Asian women's organizations in the United States, to assess whether they had conducted such a sexual assault awareness event. The volunteer reached out to 19 organizations in the largest regions. Twelve did not respond to multiple attempts to contact them. Of the remainder, one had identified sexual assault as a priority for 2014 and had conducted a staff training; a second had conducted an awareness event in 2013; and a third had not conducted an event but offered case-specific counseling on sexual violence based on clients' needs. Two responded that they did not have enough resources or expertise to make sexual violence a priority area; and another

organization's focus was more on child abuse and bullying rather than family or sexual violence. Thus, Kiran's event would be among the earliest efforts on this issue for the South Asian immigrant community.

The plays

Kiran staff and volunteers tackled the project of developing short plays that depicted vignettes of sexual violence. The group included one male and five females (the present authors among them), who met in person, then shared and discussed scripts on a file-sharing platform. All were South Asian immigrants rooted in diverse languages, religions, and regional subcultures of South Asia. Languages in the group included English, Bangla, Hindi, Punjabi, and Tamil. The group drew on personal experiences and observations to generate the scripts. The scripts, 3 to 5 minutes each in length were written and acted in English, since that was likely the common language among diverse attendees.

'Sexual violence' includes a multitude of topics, such as child marriage, to trafficking, rape, sexual harassment, incest, etc. Group discussion led to a decision to focus on situations involving persons known to victims, because a) these are more common, but receive less attention as the media and the public are more attuned to the sensational cases of attack by strangers, b) they would strike a more immediate chord among the largely middle class NC South Asian community, and c) they would address the theme of the event which was to recognize when an incident crossed a line into sexual violence. Due to time constraints only five scenes could be staged; thus the group decided on the following vignettes:

1. A woman is harassed at a social event. Is she to blame because she has dressed in a "revealing" way?
2. A female boss presses her male employee for sexual favors, and when refused, threatens to withhold professional opportunities. Is this sexual violence?
3. A wife complains to a friend that her husband is forcing sex on her. Her friend informs her that marital rape is not a crime in India, but is a crime in the US. What can the wife do?
4. A daughter-in-law is assaulted by a senior male in-law. This sometimes occurs in South Asian joint (extended) families, but is rarely spoken about. What should the family members do?

5. A teenage girl is assaulted by a family friend, in a home setting where she is supposedly safe.

How should the family respond?

Group members concurred that a scenario with a male victim should be included, to address the fact that although females are preponderantly affected by sexual violence, men and boys are also affected. The group discussed whether to depict a female perpetrator with a male victim, or a same-sex situation with a male perpetrator and a male victim. The group concluded that Kiran Inc did not have sufficient resources and expertise to appropriately portray or support persons experiencing same-sex violence. Thus, the scenario of a female harasser with a male victim was selected. These plays would provide the context for audience discussion and the panel presentations. The plays remained open-ended, not providing a resolution, but giving a chance for the audience to offer their views and learn about available resources.

A female volunteer with theater experience took the responsibility of casting and directing the plays for the event. Initially it proved difficult to cast some of the negative male roles, because volunteer male actors were reluctant to portray perpetrators in sensitive topics such as sexual assault. Ultimately, some male volunteers did come forward to play these challenging roles, and one male role was played by the female volunteer dressed as a man.

The panelists

A panel of four members was invited to answer audience questions and provide information. These included two physicians, one who specializes in mental health and another involved in community health care; a researcher with expertise on violence against women; and the Director of Prevention and Evaluation at NC CASA, who was also co-chair of the NC State Sexual Violence Coalition.

RAISING AWARENESS AMONG OVERSEAS INDIANS: THE KIRAN INC EVENT

The event was scheduled for two hours on a Sunday in February 2014, in a local area community center. It was publicized widely in the NC Triangle area, through community email lists, a weekly radio show aimed at South Asians, Facebook, and personal word of mouth. Audience attendance exceeded expectations. They included men and women, teens and seniors. The capacity of the room was 100

people; all the seats were filled and there were several people standing in the back. However, only 55 attendees formally signed in. Almost all were South Asian or had ties to the South Asian community.

The event opened with a welcome, introduction to Kiran's services, and announcement of the program by Kiran board members. The plays were enacted and videotaped (Figure 1). The panel members made brief presentations on topics such as the long term impact of sexual violence; why college-aged girls might blame themselves for the assault rather than the perpetrator; how primary care medical practitioners need to screen patients for domestic and sexual violence; statistics on sexual violence in India and among overseas Indians; how more sexual crimes are committed by known persons rather than strangers; information on primary prevention strategies; and on 'rape culture' including victim-blaming, which is common among mainstream and immigrant communities.

The audience was extremely engaged. The discussion was deeper than the organizers had expected, they had previously been concerned that the sensitive nature of the topic would make the audience hesitant to delve beneath the surface. But the audience probed issues such as the description of rape culture, consent in marital sex, verbal abuse, and comparison of sexual violence in mainstream and migrant communities. The questions addressed the theme of the event: how to know when things had gone too far, when commonplace ups and downs in interaction could cross the line into violence, e.g. when could yelling during an argument be considered violence. Panel members suggested that when there was a power imbalance between the people involved in an interaction, and one member felt powerless before the other member, then the line had been crossed. Strategies for primary prevention were discussed, and several recommendations made. The event went over the allotted time, and had to be concluded. After the event, the audience continued discussing among themselves and with the event participants. Many of them wanted to know more about the topic.

Monitoring and Evaluation: Design

Two Kiran volunteers with research expertise designed and administered a monitoring and evaluation component to get feedback on the event and to set a baseline reading of community awareness and attitudes toward sexual violence. They designed a questionnaire that included selected items from the

Illinois Rape Myth Acceptance Scale, or IRMA (Payne, Lonsway and Fitzgerald, 1999). The IRMA scale was originally developed for the mainstream US population, and comprises 45 items, with Likert-scale answers ranging from 1=not at all agree to 7=very much agree. The items taken together measure an underlying concept of general rape myth, with seven subcomponents (for e.g. ‘she asked for it’; ‘rape is a deviant event’, ‘it wasn’t really rape’, etc.).

At the time of the event, this scale had not previously been used with South Asian cultures, and some items might not be relevant for the South Asian cultural context. Discussion indicated that the number of questions needed to be reduced, and several items modified or substituted. The volunteers modified the scale to incorporate cultural and logistical considerations, and drew on their personal cultural and professional backgrounds to frame additional questions. Examples included ‘there is no such thing as marital rape’, ‘sometimes it is better to keep quiet to preserve family honor’, and ‘rape is unlikely to happen if a woman is in the company of her family’. Questions on same-sex violence were added, such as: ‘it is impossible for a woman to molest another woman’, ‘a man who has been raped has lost his manhood’, ‘No self-respecting man would admit to being raped’, were added. A total of 23 questions were included in the final measure. The original 7 number scoring system was retained. For all questions, a lower number “1=not at all agree” reflected disagreement with rape myths. The IRMA-based scale used here represents a modification whose psychometric properties have not been validated as in the original, but nonetheless addresses cultural variations and same-sex rape myths, in a way that the original does not.

The next part of the questionnaire asked attendees to rate the event in terms of quality and importance. There were five questions, answered on a scale of 1 (strongly agree) to 5 (strongly disagree). Other questions included: attendee’s age, sex, education, occupation, country of birth, and language. A final question asked whether the attendee personally knew anyone who had experienced sexual violence.

Monitoring and Evaluation: Results

Announcements were made requesting the audience to fill out the evaluation forms which had been distributed to all attendees. Over a hundred people attended, 55 people filled out the evaluation forms: 8 were males and 41 females (others did not fill out the information on gender). Almost all had

college education and professional occupations. Languages spoken included English, Hindi, Gujarati, Tamil, Telugu, Malayalam, Bangla, Kannada, and Japanese. Most people were born in India, a few in the US, Japan, and Africa, representing diaspora backgrounds.

Table 1 shows that the overall mean of all the items on the modified scale reported by the participants was 1.67 (on a scale of 1 to 7) suggesting that the attendees who filled out the forms largely disagreed with the statements indicating rape myths. There was little variation in the responses to all the items. Most people answered in the ranges 1-3 (indicating disagreement with the myths) or 4 (indicating they felt neutral). Few people answered in the 5-7 range indicating agreement with the myths; people were as likely to just not answer the questions.

The most agreement with rape myths was in response to the idea that if a woman is drunk, she is at least partially responsible, followed by believing that rape is unlikely to happen in the company of family members. The response about women's culpability if they are drunk echoes current discourse on sexual assault in the US. The response that women are safe in the company of family members suggests a lack of awareness of the greater likelihood of sexual assault by family, friends, or known people. There was also some agreement with rape myths in same-sex situations (albeit still below 7.5% agreement). This lack of variability may be because people who attend such an event are already sensitized on issues of sexual violence, and may also reflect the preponderance of females among those who responded.

The mean score for the questions on opinion of the importance and quality of event was 1.33 (not shown in a table), indicating a high opinion of the event. Overall, the attendees tended to fill out the extreme values of the scale, resulting in little variation in the responses.

Forty-one people answered the question on whether they personally knew anyone who had experienced sexual violence, 20 of them answered 'yes'. This is a very large percentage of positive responses, and future outreach and monitoring efforts in the South Asian community must probe this issue to understand the prevalence of sexual violence and response.

A small subset of attendees wrote additional comments. One man wrote: "This program should be performed in all towns at their community centers in NC. I think people will get a lot from this this and

will increase awareness in the Triangle.” Another wrote “I wish the question of how to erase stigma attached to rape was asked. For many in our culture, it is a fate worse than death, they think.” One woman, answering whether she knew anyone who had experienced sexual violence wrote: “I have to think how to answer this question. I know of some incident among acquaintances in the past, but we were not sure if it was sexual violence. Thinking more about it now, I believe it was sexual violence.”

RECOMMENDATIONS

The discussion generated many recommendations to raise awareness and respond to sexual violence in South Asian immigrant communities, which include:

1. Sexual violence has not been much discussed in the South Asian community. This ‘culture of silence’ has implications for covering up sexual violence, and needs to be changed through open dialogue and additional awareness raising, which organizations like Kiran can facilitate.
2. This type of awareness raising event should be repeated with diverse audiences, such as diversity trainings in corporate offices where large numbers of South Asians are employed, faith-based settings, colleges, health fairs, and media events.
3. Evidence-backed outreach strategies should be used. For example, specific community leaders such as business and religious leaders should be invited for awareness raising, so that information can further ripple out from them to their groups. These groups may have members who are affected by sexual violence but who have not hitherto mobilized on this issue. This is a practicable strategy, which has not been attempted in the NC South Asian community.
4. Men need to be specifically engaged. Statistically speaking, men are more likely to be perpetrators, but can also be victimized by sexual violence, and moreover are the family members and friends of women who are victimized. South Asian domestic violence programs often recruit men on their Boards, train them as volunteers, and run men's groups. Thus, men’s voices must be heard, and their input solicited on programs and interventions. What do men think their role is in

addressing sexual violence in the South Asian community? What do they think is the root cause of the problem and how would they go about addressing it?

5. Examples of violence prevention programs such as The Green Dot bystander intervention training (The Green Dot, 2010) need to be customized for the South Asian community and put into practice. This program trains bystanders to feel empowered to recognize sexual assault and stop it when it is occurring. Community leaders can also be trained to be ‘responsible bystanders’, who can take small and positive steps when they witness or hear of an incident.
6. There is need for greater dialogue about the connection between alcohol consumption and sexual assault and on same sex rape / assault.
7. Researchers need to develop culturally appropriate and easy-to-administer instruments to gauge attitudes toward sexual violence in diverse communities. Scale items should be generated in a systematic and culturally responsive manner. Scales should have fewer items and answer categories to avoid participant fatigue. The questionnaires should also be administered to community members in a variety of venues and occasions, to gauge attitudes among a wider population rather than only among those who attend such events.
8. South Asian women’s organizations overseas should co-ordinate their efforts on raising awareness of sexual violence, and cooperate with mainstream service providers to fill mutual information and program gaps.

DISCUSSION

The pioneering event organized to raise awareness of sexual violence in the South Asian community in North Carolina, organized by Kiran Inc in February 2014, was a success in terms of planning, execution, and outreach. The aim had been to take a first step toward raising awareness about sexual violence in this immigrant community, an issue often hidden in the culture of silence. This silence was breached by the crime of December 2012, and there was unprecedented community responsiveness to

this sensitive topic. Since this event was a first step, organizer goals were modest, but the audience exceeded expectations in terms of numbers of attendees and discussion participation.

The Kiran event successfully used theater techniques to raise awareness and spark discussion. The use of street plays is well-established in South Asia to raise awareness of social issues, including gender violence (Ahmed, 2006). Other communities globally, such as Israel, Uganda, Taiwan, the US, and Indian immigrants in Australia, Canada, and the United States, have used participatory forum theater to address gender violence (Mitchell and Freitag 2011; O'Connor and Colucci 2016; Yoshihama and Tolman, 2015). This technique can elicit community views and concerns in the generation, enactment, and response to scripts, and is a powerful methodological tool in addition to interview methods or focus groups. Theater techniques engage audience interest for sensitive topics in ways that conventional methods do not, and foster deeper community involvement for response (Yoshihama and Tolman, 2015). The Kiran event was another demonstration of these advantages.

The Kiran event assessed audience attitudes by using a culturally customized version of the IRMA rape myth acceptance scale. This customization was a preliminary effort, rooted in the researchers' insider familiarity with the culture. Due to lack of resources, a systematic effort to generate and validate scale items through ethnographic methods, cognitive interviewing, and psychometric techniques could not be attempted. There has been little prior cross cultural adaptation or validation of the IRMA scale. Efforts are emerging such as the development of CRMA, the Chinese Rape Myth Acceptance scale, which translates the English scale into Chinese rather than assessing and adapting the items for the Chinese context (Xue et al 2016). Given the global prevalence of sexual violence, the culture of silence, and seeming acceptance of a variety of justifications for rape, there is urgent need to cross-culturally validate the IRMA scale, and develop and validate additional such measures, including same-sex violence, for South Asia and other regions. The audience indicated little acceptance of most rape myths, perhaps because they chose to attend this event and presumably had some degree of prior interest, and because mostly females responded to the questionnaire. Still, their responses indicated need for awareness on

same-sex violence, and the role of alcohol in rape. Kiran Inc has hitherto not been able to engage with the South Asian LGBT community or develop working relationships with organizations serving them.

Twenty of the 55 attendees (about 36%) indicated that they knew someone who had experienced sexual violence. This high response could be due to the self-selection of event attendees and questionnaire responders, but is nonetheless eye-opening, and indicates substantial need for sexual violence awareness, prevention, and response. Kiran leadership currently estimates that issues of sexual violence are entwined with about 80% of their active case load. Other forms of assessment such as anonymous clicker technology (Yoshihama and Tolman, 2015) might have yielded a higher response rate.

The event also generated recommendations for initiating bystander training. Bystander intervention can be effective for preventing violence that occurs in contexts of family, friends, or known persons ((Yoshihama and Tolman, 2015). Such programs also appear effective for college populations in the US (Moynihan et al, 2015), and have been attempted in India (Miller et al, 2014), but need wider dissemination. Bystander programs need to be culturally customized for diverse groups, implemented, and systematically evaluated. Another recommendation was to repeat this awareness raising for other groups. Kiran Inc was able to hold a teen awareness event in 2015 for girls, that covered a variety of related topics, including dating violence.

Although the Kiran Inc event was successful and exceeded organizer goals for outreach and assessment, there are nonetheless some limitations. First, the event and the plays were conducted in English. This would have not have reached immigrants with limited English familiarity, though it was accessible to middle-class South Asians broadly reflective of this population's profile in North Carolina. English is also likely the common language among immigrants from different regions of South Asia. Also, not all attendees filled the evaluation; additional methods must be tried. Next, as with other smaller scale community organizations, ongoing budget constraints and associated staffing shortfalls and high staff turnover are a fact of life for Kiran Inc, and limit its ability to follow many program recommendations made in this event. The organization's lifeblood is the dedication of its part time staff and volunteers. An ongoing lacuna is Kiran's inability to engage with the South Asian LGBT community,

and further efforts must be made for mutual outreach. Also, sexual violence survivors were not explicitly involved in planning the event, due to logistical difficulties, and due to concern for their privacy and confidentiality. Further, the modification of the IRMA measure used in the event has not been established, and strongly needs systematic validation. Despite these limitations, the event conducted by Kiran Inc represented a pioneering step in the ongoing struggle to address awareness, prevention, and response to sexual violence among immigrant communities in the United States, and yielded valuable recommendations for further action. It further demonstrates that South Asian women's organizations such as Kiran Inc and others of its kind, in the subcontinent or overseas, form an important resource in the effort against sexual violence worldwide.

Figure 1: Enacting a short play on a sexual violence related theme during the Kiran Inc event “How Far is Too Far”, February 24th 2014, North Carolina, USA



Table 1: Attitudes toward Rape Myths among Kiran event attendees

	% mostly disagreeing (1-3 on a 7 point scale)	% Neutral (4 on a 7 point scale)	% mostly agreeing (5-7 on a 7 point scale)
A woman who dresses in skimpy clothes should not be surprised if a man tries to force her to have sex	83.3%	7.5%	7.5%
If a woman is willing to “make out” with a guy, then it’s no big deal if he goes a little further and has sex.	75.9%	13.0%	3.7%
A lot of women lead a man on and then they cry rape	70.4%	13.0%	9.3%
When women are raped, it’s often because the way they said ‘no’ was ambiguous.	87.0%	3.7%	1.9%
If a woman is raped while she is drunk, she is at least somewhat responsible for letting things get out of control	74.1%	3.7%	16.7%
If a woman travels alone, especially at night, it is her own fault if she gets raped.	92.6%	3.7%	
A woman who “teases” men deserves anything that might happen.	94.4%	1.9%	
If the rapist doesn’t have a weapon, you really can’t call it a rape.	96.3%		

Raising sexual violence awareness: S. Asians in NC

If a woman doesn't physically fight back, you can't really say that it was rape.	90.7%	1.9%	
Rape is unlikely to happen if a woman is in the company of her family	85.2%	1.9%	9.3%
Men from nice middle-class families almost never rape.	94.4%	3.7%	
Sometimes it is better to keep quiet to preserve the family honor.	83.3%	7.4%	3.7%
There is no such thing as marital rape.	94.4%		1.9%
Men don't usually intend to force sex on a woman, but sometimes they get too sexually carried away.	77.8%	9.3%	7.4%
If a woman isn't a virgin, then it shouldn't be a big deal if she is forced to have sex.	79.6%	11.1%	5.6%
Women tend to exaggerate how much rape affects them	90.7%	1.9%	
Although most women wouldn't admit it, they generally find being physically forced into sex a real "turn-on."	81.5%	7.4%	1.9%
It is impossible for a woman to molest another woman	90.7%	1.9%	
A man who has been raped has lost his manhood	81.5%	5.6%	5.6%
No self-respecting man would admit to being raped	64.8%	20.4%	7.4%
I would have a hard time believing a man who told me he was raped by a woman	83.3%	3.7%	7.4%

Raising sexual violence awareness: S. Asians in NC

Male rape is more serious when the victim is heterosexual than when the victim is homosexual	74.1%	11.1%	5.6%
Any healthy man can successfully resist a rapist if he really wants to	79.6%	11.1%	3.7%
Mean of the 7 point scale, for all items: 1.67			
N=55			

The percentages reported above are based on grouping the values as described in the table headings.

References

- Ahmad F., Rai N., Petrovic B., Erickson P. E., and Stewart D. E. (2013). Resilience and Resources Among South Asian Immigrant Women as Survivors of Partner Violence *Journal of Immigrant and Minority Health* (2013) 15:1057–1064 DOI 10.1007/s10903-013-9836-2
- Ahmed A. R. K. (2006). *Theatre media as a means of raising awareness on issues of violence against women and women rights: A case study of Bangladeshi and Indian theatre organizations*. A research study submitted in the fulfillment of the requirement for the Research Fellowship awarded by South Asia Regional Initiative/ Equity Support Program Implemented by the Academy for Educational Development (AED) 2006 Retrieved from http://www.academia.edu/8354402/Theatre_media_as_a_means_of_raising_awareness_on_issues_of_violence_against_women_and_women_rights_A_case_study_of_Bangladeshi_and_Indian_theatre_organizations_Fellowship_with_AED
- Basile K.C., Saltzman L.E. (2002). *Sexual violence surveillance: uniform definitions and recommended data elements version 1.0*. Atlanta: Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, National Center for Injury Prevention and Control; 2002. Retrieved from: http://www.cdc.gov/ViolencePrevention/pub/SV_surveillance.html
- Garcia-Moreno C., Pallitto C., Devries K., Stockl H., Watts C., Abrahams N., and Petzold M. (2013) *Global and regional estimates of violence against women: prevalence and health effects of intimate partner violence and non-partner sexual violence* Report by the World Health Organization, London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine, and South African Medical Research Council. Copyright World Health Organization 2013.
- Heiman, H. and Bangura R. (2013). Forced Marriage in Immigrant Communities in the US. *National Center for Victims of Crime Conference Sept. 9, 2013*. Retrieved from: <http://victimsofcrime.org/docs/nat-conf-2013/ppt-tahirih-and-sauti-yetu-for-nevc-conference-sept.pdf?sfvrsn=2>

- Hoeffel, E. M., Rastogi, S., Kim, M. O., & Shahid, H. (2012). The Asian population 2010. *2010 Census Briefs*. Washington DC: U.S. Census Bureau.
- Huda, S. (2006). Sex trafficking in South Asia *International Journal of Gynecology and Obstetrics* 94, 374-381
- Indian Penal Code (1860). Retrieved from <http://indiacode.nic.in/>
- Kiran Inc. (no date, a). *Who We Are* Retrieved from <http://www.kiraninc.org/>
- Kiran Inc. (no date, b). *Our History* retrieved from <http://www.kiraninc.org/our-history.html>
- Lombard and MacMillan. (2009). eds *Violence Against Women: Current Theory and Practice in Domestic Abuse, Sexual Violence, and Exploitation* Jessica Kingsley Publishers: London and Philadelphia
- Mahapatra N. (2012) South Asian Women in the U.S. and their Experience of Domestic Violence *Journal of Family Violence* (2012) 27:381–390 DOI 10.1007/s10896-012-9434-4
- Manavi (2015). *Herstory* Retrieved from: <http://manavi.org/about-us/herstory/>
- Midlarsky, E., Venkataramani-Kothari A., & Plante, M. (2006). Domestic Violence in the Chinese and South Asian Immigrant Communities *Annals of the New York Academy of Sciences Volume 1087, Violence and Exploitation Against Women and Girls* pages 279–300, November 2006 DOI: 10.1196/annals.1385.003
- Miller E., Das M., Tancredi D. J., McCauley H. L., Virata M. C. D., Nettiksimmons J., O'Connor B. Ghosh S., and Verma R.. (2014). Evaluation of a Gender-Based Violence Prevention Program for Student Athletes in Mumbai, India *Journal of Interpersonal Violence* 29(4) 758-778 doi: 10.1177/0886260513505205
- Ministry of Overseas Indian Affairs. (2007). *Marriage to Overseas Indians: A Guidance Booklet* Ministry of Overseas Indian Affairs, Government of India, New Delhi. Retrieved from: http://moia.gov.in/pdf/Marriages_to_Overseas_Indians_a_Guidance_Booklet.pdf

- Misra R; & Gupta R (2004). Predictors of health promotion behaviours among Asian Indian immigrants: implications for practitioners. *The International Journal of Sociology and Social Policy* 24(12) 66-86 doi:10.1108/01443330410790821
- Mitchell, K. S., & Freitag, J. L. (2011). Forum theatre for bystanders: A new model for gender violence prevention. *Violence Against Women*, 17(8), 990–1013.
- Moynihan M. M., Banyard V. L., Cares A. C., Potter S. J., Williams L. M., and Stapleton J. G. (2015). Encouraging Responses in Sexual and Relationship Violence Prevention: What Program Effects Remain 1 Year Later? *Journal of Interpersonal Violence* 30(1) 110-132 DOI 10.1177/0886260514532719
- National Commission for Women (no date). Problems relating to NRI marriages: Dos and Don'ts Retrieved from: <http://ncw.nic.in/pdf/files/nridodont.pdf>
- O'Connor M. & Colucci E. (2016). Exploring domestic violence and social distress in Australian-Indian migrants through community theater *Transcultural Psychiatry* 2016, Vol. 53(1) 24–44 DOI: 10.1177/1363461515599327
- Payne D. L., Lonsway K. A., and Fitzgerald L. F. (1999). Rape Myth Acceptance: Exploration of Its Structure and Its Measurement Using the Illinois Rape Myth Acceptance Scale *Journal of Research in Personality* 33, 27–68 (1999)
- Satrang & South Asian Network. (2008). *No more denial! Giving visibility to the needs of the South Asian LGBTIQ community in Southern California*. Los Angeles, CA: Satrang.
- Shankar J.; Das G.; and Atwal S. (2013). Challenging Cultural Discourses and Beliefs that Perpetuate Domestic Violence in South Asian Communities: A Discourse Analysis. *Journal of International Women's Studies*, 14(1), 248-262. Retrieved from: <http://vc.bridgew.edu/jiws/vol14/iss1/15>
- Sinha (2013). In UK, forced marriage is a criminal offence now. *Times of India UK* May 10 2013. Retrieved from: <http://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/world/uk/In-UK-forced-marriage-is-a-criminal-offence-now/articleshow/19979537.cms?referral=PM>

Stockman J. K., Hayashi H., and Campbell J. C. (2014) Intimate Partner Violence and Its Health Impact on Ethnic Minority Women *Journal of Women's Health*. December 2014, 24(1): 62-79.
doi:10.1089/jwh.2014.4879.

The Green Dot (2010). <https://www.livethegreendot.com/>

Tummala-Narra P., Satiani A., and Patel N. (2015). Sexual Violence in an Immigrant Context: South Asian Women in the United States, pp 167-189 in *Gendered Journeys: Women, Migration and Feminist Psychology* eds Oliva M. Espín and Andrea L. Dottolo Palgrave MacMillan UK
10.1057/9781137521477_8

U.S. Census Bureau. (2010). *Current population survey, annual social and economic supplement, 2009*, Internet Release Date 2010.

US Department of Justice. (2014). *Sexual Assault* Retrieved from
<http://www.ovw.usdoj.gov/sexassault.htm>

World Health Organization and Pan American Health Organization (2012). *Sexual Violence Understanding and Addressing Violence Against Women Series WHO/RHR/12.37* Retrieved from http://apps.who.int/iris/bitstream/10665/77434/1/WHO_RHR_12.37_eng.pdf?ua=1

World Health Organization (2005). Multi-country study on women's health and domestic violence against women Retrieved from: <http://www.who.int/mediacentre/factsheets/fs239/en/>

Xue J., Fang G., Huang H., Cui N., Rhodes K. V., Richard Gelles, R. (2016). Rape Myths and the Cross-Cultural Adaptation of the Illinois Rape Myth Acceptance Scale in China *Journal of Interpersonal Violence* 1–33 June 5th 2016, DOI: 10.1177/0886260516651315

Yoshihama M., Ramakrishnan A., Hammock A. C., and Khaliq M. (2013) Intimate Partner Violence Prevention Program in an Asian Immigrant Community: Integrating Theories, Data, and Community *Violence Against Women* 18(7) 763– 783 DOI: 10.1177/1077801212455163

Yoshihama M. and Tolman R. M. (2015) Using Interactive Theater to Create Socioculturally Relevant Community-Based Intimate Partner Violence Prevention *American Journal of Community Psychology* (2015) 55:136–147 DOI 10.1007/s10464-014-9700-0