

Cover



ALBERTA MEN'S NETWORK

Well-Being and Healthy Relationships

Insights and Experiences of South Asian Men in Alberta
Community Research Brief



Human Rights
Education and
Multiculturalism
Fund



UNIVERSITY OF
CALGARY





ALBERTA MEN'S NETWORK

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Introduction

Overview

The Alberta Men's Survey (AMS) gathered responses on men's well-being and relationships from over 2,214 men in 42 unique localities. This research brief focuses on the insights and experiences of 89 South Asian men living in Alberta, representing 4% of the total AMS respondents. A structured questionnaire containing 23 quantitative and qualitative questions was prepared to collect relevant information through targeted, convenience, and snowball sampling methods. Data was collected online and in person by 51 trained research assistants from diverse backgrounds. Research assistants entered paper questionnaire data into SurveyMonkey by web-link or manual entry.

Context and Literature

Canada is an immigrant receiving country with a high level of ethnocultural diversity. Almost seven million Canadians were born outside the country (Statistics Canada, 2011). While immigrant communities are key contributors to Canadian identity and prosperity, South Asians, like other migrants, may experience numerous resettlement challenges resulting in stress and frustration, isolation, anxiety, and depression; in some cases, mental health concerns, interpersonal conflict and domestic violence are present (Ferzana & Archana, 2017; Robert, & Gilkinson, 2012). There is little research, however, on the well-being of South Asian men who have resettled in Canada, which limits services, supports and policies that are inclusive of this group. To explore and understand the capacities and resources required by a diverse population of men, this research brief focuses on the insights and experiences of 89 immigrant male Albertans of South Asian descent. This brief underscore the importance of family as one of the main enablers for well-being and health relationships, while financial instability and discrimination are key challenges. Further, the pervasiveness of discrimination, systemic barriers and underutilization of services pinpoint inter-sectional elements that negatively impact men respondents from South Asian heritage.

South Asian Albertans: Background

South Asia includes countries such as India, Pakistan, Sri Lanka, Nepal, Bangladesh, Maldives, Bhutan and Afghanistan (South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC), 1985). However, South Asian identity is a disputed concept. Allard, Kaddatz and Tran (2005) note that South Asians consist of people from a "range of ethnic, religious and linguistic groups who have varied ancestries, immigration histories and personal experiences (p. 20)". In Canada, South Asians comprise the country's largest racialized minority group, at 4% of the total Canadian population (NHS, 2011). There is a longstanding presence of South Asians in Canada with South Asian Canadians living in major metropolitan areas such as Toronto Vancouver and Calgary (Statistics Canada, 2011).



While South Asian Canadians make significant contributions to the cultural, political, and economic fabric of Canadian society, experiences with systemic barriers, such as racism, lack of credential recognition and other forms of discrimination are highlighted in research with this population (Guruge et.al. 2010). It is within this context that the Alberta Men's Survey uncovered further insights on the enablers and barriers to well-being experienced by South Asian Canadian men.

Socio-Demographic Profile of South Asian Canadian Respondents

Of the total South Asian Canadian men (89) who responded to the Men's Survey, the largest participant group were from India (55%), followed by Pakistan (27%), Nepal (7%), Bangladesh (5%), Sri Lanka (4%), and Afghanistan (1%). All 89 respondents were immigrants. Slightly more than half (51%) had acquired their citizenship status and another 41 percent were Permanent Residents. Immigration status varied by country of origin and the majority (28%) of those with citizenship were from India.

South Asian men who responded to the survey had a mean age of 40 years. The largest age groups were 31-40 years (25%) followed by 21-30 (24%), 41-50 years (21%) and men over 50 (23%). Only seven percent of the men were younger than 20 years of age. The majority (67%) were married or in a relationship (2%), although almost one out of four (23%) were single and approximately seven percent were either separated or divorced and one percent of did not disclose their relationship status. Calgary (85%), the largest urban center within the province, was the identified home city of most respondents, while the rest were from other municipalities.



“Being older I have gone through a lot of life and mentoring or facilitating groups would be a great way to support men in interpersonal relationships.”

-A survey respondent on men's roles in violence prevention

“It would be nice to have a place that can provide advice on legal and financial matters of life, can connect to a network of one's primary and alternative skill sets to help find alternative employment, serve to release one's stress”

-A survey respondent on the types of supports that men require



Survey Results

Financial Well-being

A majority (75%) of the men had paid jobs including, full-time (49%); seasonal employment (17%) or contract (9%). Another 25 percent indicated no income; (i.e. they were students, receiving income support, retired or unemployed). A higher percentage of men who had full-time jobs reported that they could put aside some of their earnings towards their savings (24%) compared to those who were paid by contract (2%) or in seasonal employment (2%). While a number of men had “just enough” to meet their needs, all of those who were unpaid indicated they struggled to meet their financial obligations.

Mental Health

Very few men (4%) indicated they had experienced a mental health challenge. This percentage was far lower than the Canadian average of twenty percent (Robert & Gilkinson, 2012), which corresponded to the percentage indicated by overall Men’s Survey respondent group. The stigma surrounding mental health disclosure requires further study.

Well-Being

Respondents were asked what factors they believed are important to their personal well-being. The majority (89%) considered family as the major factor, closely followed by a good job (73%) and financial stability (72%). Friends (57%), spirituality (53%), meaningful goals (48%) and fair treatment by others (42%) were also reported.

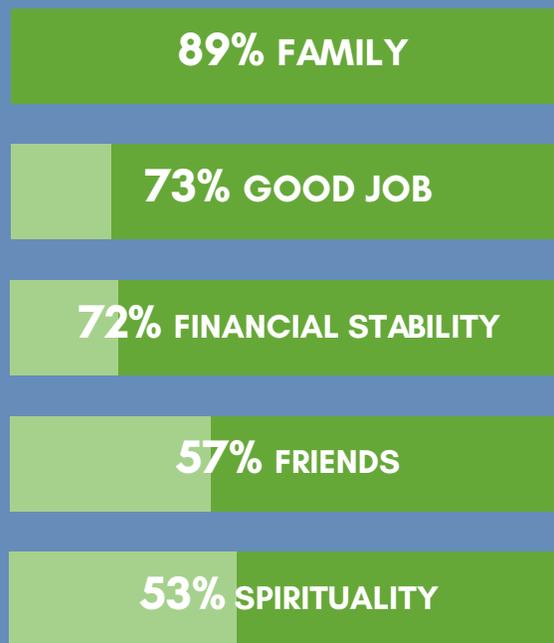
The majority of respondents (78%) perceived financial challenges and discrimination (60%) as the main barriers to well-being and healthy relationships. Other barriers most often indicated were unsatisfactory job/career (54%), family conflict (48%) and insufficient work/training (37%). (See page 7.)

Skills Needed for Healthy Relationships

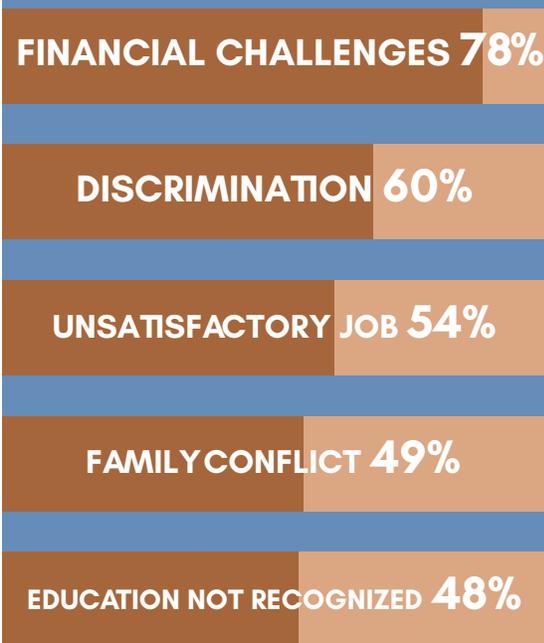
Most respondents (88%) reported that trust was the most important personal skill they needed to form healthy relationships followed by patience (78%), listening and understanding (67% each) and caring about other people’s feelings (61%). More than half (58%) also noted that being flexible to change is essential. (See page 7.)

Respondents were also asked if they would attend a service hub specifically for men. More than three out of five (63%) agreed while the remainder (37%) were not in favour. When asked to explain what type of environment they would like to attend to receive supports, responses were diverse, focusing on psycho-social concerns, networking and skill-building for employability and financial opportunities.

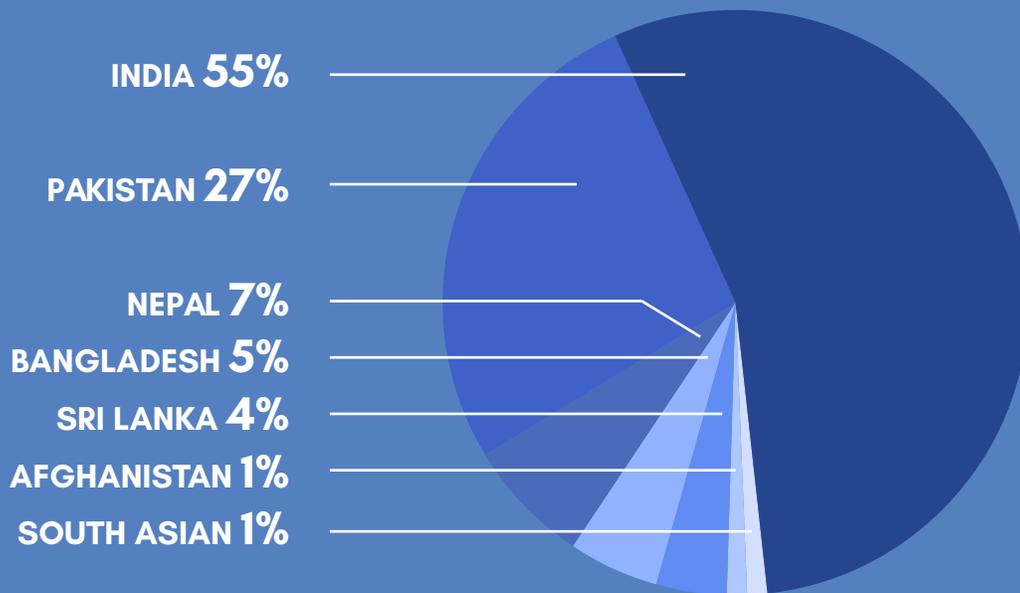
TOP 5 ENABLERS TO WELL-BEING



TOP 5 BARRIERS TO WELL-BEING



COUNTRY OF ORIGIN



TOP 5 PERSONAL SKILLS NEEDED TO HAVE HEALTHY RELATIONSHIPS

88%
TRUST

78%
PATIENCE

67%
UNDERSTANDING
AND CARING ABOUT
OTHERS

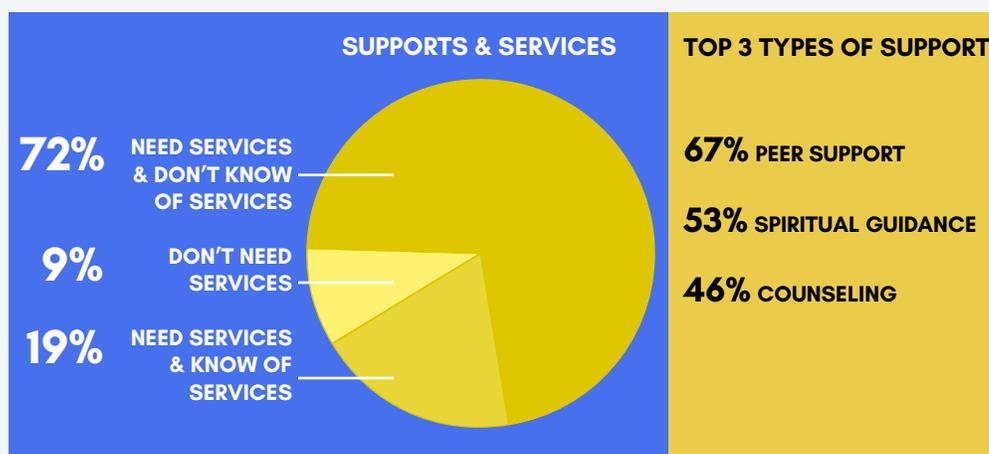
61%
FLEXIBILITY
TO CHANGE

58%
ABLE TO
MANAGE
STRESS

Awareness and Utilization of Supports and Services

Almost all (91%) respondents indicated that men sometimes need support and services for their own well-being and to maintain healthy relationships. However, most (72%) did not know where to go and whom to approach for assistance. (See figure below.)

Those who responded affirmatively to the need for support were further asked what services they would use. Most (67%) indicated that they would access peer-support followed by spiritual guidance (53%) and counselling (46%). Other types of preferred supports were financial mentoring (43%), skill-building workshops (40%), support groups (39%), healthy male role-models (35%), a safe place for men to hang out (33%), and skills training for fathers (18%). (See figure below.)



What Qualities Describe a Man?

Men were asked the qualities that describe a man. The five characteristics most frequently named were Honest; Responsible; Strong; Hard-Worker; and Caring.

Men's Role in Violence Prevention

While 27 percent of South Asian respondents agreed that they could take action to contribute to men's well-being and healthy relationships without violence or abuse, more than half (57%) reported that they were not sure. About sixteen percent men in the Alberta survey indicated that they did not think they could contribute.

Summary and Recommendations

Eighty-Nine South Asian Albertans completed the Alberta Men's Survey, with the majority living in Calgary, an urban center of more than one million people. Most respondents were married, working full-time and defined themselves as heterosexual. All identified as immigrants to Canada from eight South Asian countries, with over fifty percent indicating India as their country of origin. The mean age of the respondent group was 40 years. Most respondents had post-secondary education including university and technical and trade certificates. This study uncovered key insights that centralize family and financial security as priorities for South Asian men, while financial hardship and discrimination factored prominently as stressors, negatively impacting personal and relational wellness.

Focus on Family, Social Ties, and Spirituality

AMS results indicated that family, a good job and financial stability are important factors for South Asian Albertan respondents that ultimately contribute to maintaining and developing healthy relationships. The men further placed emphasis on friends, spirituality, meaningful goals and fair treatment by others as other key factors that enable them to be happier and healthier. Research with ethno-cultural communities who maintain strong family and community ties further emphasizes the benefits of these associations in facilitating both social and instrumental supports such as employment.

Financial Hardships and Discrimination

Results from the Men's Survey suggest that South Asian Albertan respondents experience a number of systemic barriers that affect their well-being and healthy relationships. Moreover, the men also considered unsatisfactory job/career; family conflict and insufficient work/training as other major factors that affect their well-being and healthy relationships. The findings revealed that financial and work-related hardships and discrimination are key barriers to their well-being. A majority stated that discrimination was a key concern, and one out of four indicated that they are not able to meet their basic needs. In particular, the men with contractual or seasonal jobs or those who are unemployed, students, retirees or receiving social support struggled to meet their financial obligations.

The Men's Survey findings make an important contribution in bringing forward the systemic barriers faced by South Asian Canadian men. These findings emphasize experiences of marginalization and further validate prior research that highlights a number of barriers to well-being, including non-recognition of education credentials (Li, 2001; 2003; Reitz and Bannerji & Verma 2009), lack of Canadian labor market experience (Aydemir & Skuterud, 2004), work-related factors (Pendakur and Pendakur, 2007), and language proficiency (Anisef & Kilbide, 2003; Chiswick & Miller, 2003). In addition, Aydemir and Skuterud (2005) found that racialized populations face more severe consequences due to economic recessions than white populations. Beach et al. (2008) argue that immigrants who enter a new country in times of economic recessions are likely not to perform well in the labour market in comparison to the immigrants who entered at a time of economic prosperity.



Mental Health, Financial Instability and Low Income

A very small percentage (4%) of South Asian Albertan respondents indicated they had mental health challenges, while the Canadian average remains at twenty percent (Smetanin et al., 2011). Findings from the Canadian Alliance on Mental Illness and Mental Health (2008) indicate that almost half of individuals surveyed claimed that if they had a mental health problem, they would be uncomfortable revealing it to others. The issue of mental health needs to be examined further as Almeida (1996) notes that mental illness and emotional difficulties for ethnic clients are often exacerbated by the intersecting influences of (1) stresses of immigration and acculturation, (2) adaptation to a racist culture, and (3) the hierarchy of the male-centered family system.

Service and Support Use

Almost all the South Asian Albertan men expressed that men do need supports and services, and many identified family conflict as a major concern; however, most did not know where to go and whom to approach. When asked about the type of supports they would use, most commented that peer-supports, spiritual guidance, skill-building workshops and financial mentoring may be useful. Support and services for South Asian communities should concentrate on both personal and systemic factors.

Violence Prevention

The majority of survey respondents were unsure if they had a role to play in preventing violence, and only one out of four (27%) indicated that they could make a contribution. These findings suggest that more work is needed to involve men in conversations on their potential roles in gender equity, positive role-modelling, and creating the community groundwork which reduces the possibility for violence to occur. Supporting and equipping those men who do see a role for themselves is one way to build a network of leaders and advocates. Further study in this area may elucidate how South Asian men can uptake further roles in violence prevention work at a community level.



Recommendations

- **Anti-racist policies** are urgently needed that address the intersections among immigration, resettlement, and racialization in Canada.
- **Broaden the scope of services for men and boys**, with a focus on creative outreach, and education; the delivery of supports should be enabled by community-based or neighbourhood-based, peer-based and informal organizations and networks.
- **Lifelong learning** can be used as a strategy that will assist South Asian Albertan men in de-learning patriarchal values and attitudes.
- **Further research into the mental health outcomes of Canada's men** population is necessary in order to inform the development of policies and programs directed to meet the needs of this group, including South Asian Canadians.

All levels of government should collaborate to evaluate and take concrete actions within identified timelines to mitigate ongoing systemic marginalization of immigrants racialized Canadians. Measures should include but are not limited to credential recognition, pay equity, addressing racialized 'glass ceilings' and other forms of structural inequality. A strategy (policies and practices) should be identified to address social and economic inequality, including various forms of discrimination.

Men can assume the roles of facilitators, lifelong learning educators, and community advocates to prevent domestic violence in their families and respective communities. Focusing on men's needs will be more useful, rather than settlement needs identified by dominant institutions. Integrated models of settlement service delivery like the Community Hubs model or through the services offered by multidisciplinary collaborative teams (CDCD, 2012) are recommended to offer a seamless continuum of diverse services for South Asian immigrant men in their own communities.

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