



# South Fraser Women's Services Society

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## Supporting South Asian Teenagers Exposed to Domestic Violence

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A Handbook for Secondary School Educators

South Fraser Women's Services Society  
With funding from the Law Foundation of British Columbia



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A Handbook for Secondary School Educators



*“School served as my shelter from many storms.....teachers opened doors to worlds  
for me that the rest of my life had slammed shut”<sup>1</sup>*

## Acknowledgments

The educator's handbook has been compiled by the Legal Information and Advocacy Program at South Fraser Women's Services Society [SFWSS]. SFWSS would like to acknowledge the Law Foundation of British Columbia for their continued support of the Legal Information and Advocacy Program. The funding received for this project ensures that SFWSS can provide a continuum of services to women who have experienced intimate partner violence, and require assistance with their family law issues.

For more information on the programs and services provided by South Fraser Women's Services please contact our Newton office at (778) 565-3638 or visit our website at <http://www.sfwomensservices.com>.

We would also like to acknowledge Pure Print & Design for printing the educator's handbook. For more information on their products and services please visit their website at [www.pureprint.ca](http://www.pureprint.ca) or call (604) 304-4545.



## Disclaimer

The information contained in this handbook provides general legal information and must not be interpreted as legal advice. If any students and/or their families require further assistance please refer them to the legal resource list on page 28.

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## Introduction

This handbook is designed for high school educators to enhance their understanding of domestic violence in the South Asian community, and the impact of family violence on adolescents. Domestic violence is not an individual problem but a social issue that is prevalent across all ethnicities, religions, and socio-economic status.<sup>2,3</sup> According to the World Health Organization (WHO) the prevalence of domestic violence ranges from 20% - 50% from country to country.<sup>2</sup>

In recent years the repeated homicides of South Asian women in the Greater Vancouver region has perpetuated a false impression that domestic violence is a cultural phenomenon accepted by the community. South Asian women are no more likely to experience domestic violence than women from other ethnic groups, but the struggles South Asian women experience has aspects unique to their community.<sup>3</sup> The South Asian community does not accept domestic violence as part of their culture although the remedies used in finding solutions may appear negative or condoning.

The use of violence against a female partner may also extend to children living in the home. In Canadian households where there is abuse, statistics reveal that 37% of children have witnessed some form of violence.<sup>4</sup> Educators may see on average 3-5 students in every classroom who have witnessed violence at home.<sup>5</sup> Exposure to family violence can affect how adolescents view themselves, their family, or life in general.<sup>6</sup> This can lead to negative changes in behavior such as withdrawing from friends and/or activities, lack of concentration, school truancy, and adopting violent or bullying behavior.<sup>3</sup> Educators are one of few professionals to have daily contact with adolescents, and early identification can lead to effective support and intervention for students and/or their families.<sup>1,3,7</sup>

This handbook will provide educators with information on the warning signs of students who might be experiencing difficulty at home, social and developmental impact on students, effective ways for educators to support students, and the legal requirements to report child protection concerns to the Ministry of Child and Family Development [MCFD]. At the conclusion of this handbook educators can refer to a comprehensive list of legal and community resources that be distributed to students and/or their families.

For the purpose of this handbook we will use the term *domestic violence*, commonly referred to as violence against women, spousal abuse, or family abuse. The most common form of domestic violence is abuse by a male intimate partner who exerts a combination of physical, psychological, sexual, or financial abuse in an attempt to control or intimidate his female partner.<sup>8</sup> Abuse in intimate relationships is usually part of a pattern of abusive behavior, and is likely to continue until there is intervention.<sup>6</sup>

## Domestic Violence Within The South Asian Community

To understand how some South Asian families view domestic violence it is important to highlight some of the belief systems which are heavily engrained and incorporated into the culture. These belief systems are typically considered positive, but when addressing issues of domestic violence these beliefs can create barriers for women who are living with an abusive partner. These beliefs include but are not limited to: <sup>457</sup>

- Karma (destiny)
- Fatalism (acceptance of fate)
- Filial piety (complying with familial and social authority to the point of sacrificing one's own desire)
- Collectivism (a greater emphasis on the needs of the group as opposed to any individual)
- Patriarchal family system (whereby the male is considered the head of the household)
- Izzat (honor)
- Sanctity of marriage

These beliefs usually bring the community together in times of joy and help families understand tragedy and the loss of a loved one. These heavily ingrained beliefs are used to justify positive behavior but unfortunately also used to rationalize or explain negative behavior. Examples of how these constructs can create barriers for women include: <sup>2</sup>

- The woman is told that the abuse is not her fault as she could not change her destiny. This may leave the woman feeling helpless in that she has no control of her life
- The woman's belief in fatalism hinders her ability to seek help if she accepts that the abuse is part of her fate
- The abuser or his extended family use the belief of collectivism to persuade the woman to sacrifice her own needs for the sake of the entire family
- The abuser manipulates the beliefs of filial piety, collectivism, and family honor to suit his own purposes in forcing his partner to remain with him
- The woman feels obligated to respect the views of the men in her family although their thoughts may be contradictory to her own
- The woman feels that she will bring shame to her family's honor by speaking out about the abuse

The involvement of the collective family can be instrumental in providing support and resources for a woman. In some situations however, the extended family can create barriers if they do not support her decision to leave and pressure her to keep the family united in order to salvage the marriage. In homes where there is family violence oftentimes there are other serious problems occurring simultaneously i.e. alcohol and/or substance abuse, mental health issues, gambling, debt problems or anger management issues. Simply pressuring the family to stay together will not resolve these serious problems.

## Socialization Of The Genders

Within the South Asian community the socialization of the genders can dictate the roles and responsibilities of men and women. There are families that still follow patriarchal traditions whereby the man is considered as the head of the household. At the bottom of the family hierarchy are the women and girls who are defined as homemakers.<sup>9</sup>



In a traditional patriarchal family violence can occur when a man feels justified in using his status to control his partner and/or children. Social norms about the appropriate roles and responsibilities of men and women can contribute to gender based violence.<sup>10</sup> Population Reports indicate that triggering events for violence perpetrated by men from patriarchal backgrounds include: talking back to the husband, not having meals prepared to his liking, an untidy home, questioning him about finances, going out without his permission, expressing suspicions of infidelity, and refusing sex.<sup>10</sup>

Moving to a western country where gender roles and responsibilities are extremely different from their home country can escalate family violence. This is especially the case where there is already an imbalance of power between the partners. Adapting to a new country can be problematic if the new culture conflicts with traditional patriarchal practices from their country of origin.<sup>8</sup>

A South Asian woman is more likely to be willing to incorporate western values into her lifestyle as opposed to an abusive partner who may resist such change.<sup>8</sup> Abusive partners are likely to adapt some western values providing that they maintain power and control of their partner.

For example, a man may realize that his partner must work in Canada so they can afford to pay the household expenses. Although the woman may appear independent and financially stable she may have no access to her income earned or any other financial resources. Those men who value traditional patriarchal beliefs would feel disrespected by a woman who did not comply and would likely use violence as a means to maintain control.<sup>9</sup>

## Use of Mediation In The South Asian Community

When issues of abuse arise it is preferred that family and friends provide mediation in the hopes of peacefully reuniting the family.<sup>9</sup> In some situations mediation can be an effective mechanism for reconciling the family, but for the purposes of this guide we will focus on the barriers created for women through mediation. Mediation can be an ineffective intervention especially if only short term solutions are discussed, without resolving any of the key issues.<sup>11</sup> Key issues may include the women's safety, physical violence, or drug/ alcohol abuse but these issues become sidelined if the focus turns to simply reconciling the parties.<sup>11</sup>

Friends and family can be ineffective mediators as they may not be aware of the dynamics of power and control or the cycle of violence in abusive relationships. If the abuser becomes remorseful the mediators may take his apology and pleas for reconciliation at face value, unaware that the abusive cycle will occur again and in some cases actually escalate the abusive behavior. Mediators may also not be aware of the genuine fear that the woman may have of her partner and his use of fear and intimidation to maintain control of the relationship.<sup>11</sup>



It can be hard for mediators to believe that any problems are occurring in the home especially if the abuser is well respected or known in the community. The abuser may come across as a well spoken and sophisticated individual in comparison to the violent abuser that the woman sees. It may be difficult for mediators to distinguish between the abusers personalities.<sup>11</sup>

During mediation the woman is typically expected to have faith that any decision made is in her best interest and should be respected.<sup>9, 11</sup> The beliefs of collectivism can be used to discourage a woman from making an impulsive decision which will only protect her interest. The interest of the family unit is above all else and she is expected to sacrifice her needs to maintain the family unit.<sup>9, 11</sup>

## Why Do Women Stay in Abusive Relationships?

Educators may come across situations where a student's mother discloses that she is living with an abusive partner and requires help. For some women their child's school is one place where their abuser will not attend and a woman can safely access the resources she requires.

Many women may not be able to simply leave the relationship and it may even take several attempts before she finally separates. For many third parties the decision to remain with an abusive partner may be hard to comprehend. It may seem easy enough to leave, but often there are multiple barriers that prevent women from leaving. These barriers include but are not limited to:<sup>12,13,14,15</sup>

- Threat of physical assault or death
- Abuser threatens to injure himself, a third party (including pets), or commit suicide
- Abuser has threatened to kidnap the children if she leaves
- She believes that the abuse is her fault and focuses on changing
- She has no family or social support
- The abuser becomes charming and promises to seek help
- The woman still loves her partner and he uses her feelings to his advantage to keep her in the relationship
- The woman is financially dependent on her partner
- The partner is blackmailing her with damaging or incriminating information
- Fear of needing to leave the community to flee from abuser
- The woman abuses narcotics and/or alcohol and the abuser encourages the drug use as a means to maintain control
- The woman is led to believe that she will have no quality of life if she separates

- Feeling ashamed of how the community will perceive her for leaving
- The woman is provided with false information about her legal rights which discourages her from leaving
- She does not think that her story will be believed
- She does not realize that her partner's behavior is abusive
- She has no place to stay and local transition homes and shelters may be fully occupied
- The woman has a disability and may depend on her partner to assist her with her daily needs
- The woman cannot afford to hire a lawyer to obtain custody or protection orders. He threatens to hire an expensive lawyer who will ensure that she does not receive custody of the children
- The abusive partner is confrontational; he does not accept that the relationship has ended. The woman knows that if she separates he will become vindictive in an attempt to get even with her
- The woman was raised in an abusive home herself and believes that the abuse is normal behavior
- She thinks that her children will have no quality of life if she raises them as a single parent
- Believes that it is in the best interest of her children to have their father in the home

## Barriers South Asian Women Experience

There are universal barriers which may prevent women from leaving their abuser, but there are unique cultural barriers that South Asian women experience. These barriers include but are not limited to: <sup>11</sup>

- Believing that she will be deported back to her home country if she separates and is not a Canadian Citizen at the time of separation
- She has immigrated to a country where she has no family or social support. Her only connection is with her husband's family
- The woman is in the process of sponsoring her parents. If she separates her husband and/or his family will withdraw the sponsorship application. Although the sponsorship process can take up to 5 years the woman feels that once her family arrives they may be able to assist in stopping the abuse
- She is an immigrant to Canada and does not understand the legal process. She is easily influenced by her abusive partner who falsifies information about the law so that she will be persuaded to stay
- She does not have permanent residency status and would not qualify for any services such as Income Assistance or Legal Aid
- She is deterred from calling the police when violence occurs because of her negative experiences in her home country where police can be violent and corrupt
- He threatens to harm family members in her home country where there is the likelihood of bribing authorities and avoiding criminal charges
- The concept of marriage is considered a lifelong commitment. The woman does not want to bring shame to her family by leaving
- Her family is pressuring her to remain in the relationship
- Religious and spiritual leaders are forcing a reconciliation and do not understand the dynamics of abuse
- She believes that she was destined to live with her partner and that she is helpless from altering her future

- She is deterred from seeking external resources as they will promote the breakup of the relationship
- Her lack of English skills will prevent her from accessing mainstream services
- She will be blamed by the community if she makes the decision to leave. The community may think that she did not try to salvage her marriage and acted selfishly by abandoning her husband

For the reasons noted above a woman may not be able to leave her partner. It is vital that educators respect a mother's decision and provide as much support as possible.

Refer a woman to an agency if she needs support or assistance with any legal issues. Encourage the woman that if she or her children are facing immediate danger then she should not jeopardize her safety or that of her children and call emergency services immediately.

### South Asian Power & Control Wheel



The South Asian Power and Control Wheel was adapted from the original Power and Control Wheel developed by the Domestic Abuse Intervention Project.

**Use of Intimidation:**

- Hiding or destroying personal documents
- Pressuring her to drop criminal charges
- Abusing family or friends who are close to her
- Using black magic or consulting with astrologers or psychics

**Emotional Abuse:**

- Reprimanding her for acting like a Canadian woman
- Convincing her that the community will view her as being a bad wife for leaving
- Using tactics such as blackmail to maintain control

**Isolation:**

- Blaming women's family for relationship breakdown so he restricts her contact with them
- She is restricted from working, banking, driving or other daily activities
- Screening her mail and telephone calls

**Minimizing, Denying, and Blaming:**

- She is blamed for escalating violence because she called the police or family members
- Denying that any abuse has occurred
- Justifying abuse as he thinks woman is not fulfilling her obligation of being a good wife

**Using Children:**

- Making woman feel guilty because she did not provide her partner with a son
- Children encouraged to disrespect their mother
- Woman becomes fearful that he will win custody of the children or he may harm the children on an access visit
- Making false claims of child abuse against her

**Economic Abuse:**

- Abuser depletes resources by sending family money overseas to his family
- She is prohibited from accessing any money or keeping any assets in her own name
- Abuser threatens to stop working so that he does not have to pay child/spousal support

**Male Privilege:**

- Abuser uses his status as head of household as justification to exert physical, psychologically, and sexual control over his partner
- Woman is forced to maintain traditional female role of homemaker
- Telling her that she needs to accept his extra martial affairs

**Coercion and Threats:**

- Abuser is reputable in the community and threatens to tarnish her reputation
- She thinks abuser will call immigration and have her deported
- He threatens to kidnap the children and take them to his home country
- He threatens to harm her family and friends in her home country. He knows there is more likelihood that he would be able to bribe authorities and avoid criminal charges

## The Crush Generation

Educators are likely to encounter a diversity of students many of whom are children of immigrant parents. Although these adolescents are Canadian by birth they can be heavily influenced by the values and beliefs imposed from their parent's country of origin. These first or second generation Canadians are referred to as the "crush generation" as they find themselves sandwiched between two different and sometimes conflicting cultures.

There are many Canadian adolescents of South Asian descent who are raised to respect and follow traditional South Asian values of collectivism and established gender roles.<sup>16,17</sup> Simultaneously the dominant Canadian culture they are living in value independence and gender equality.<sup>16,17</sup> For the crush generation these conflicting values can lead to identity confusion with adolescents attempting to make sense of who they are.<sup>18</sup>

South Asian parents who are more liberal and open to embracing Canadian norms are less likely to have children who experience conflict than parents who enforce the negative traditions of their homeland.<sup>16</sup>

Adolescents may feel the difference of cultures when it comes to sibling relationships. In some families the sons may be raised with the expectation that they must protect their sisters. The perpetrator of violence might become the brother if he considers it his duty to protect the family honor and restrict his sister from dating, engaging in sexual activity etc.<sup>19</sup>

The structure of the family unit has started to change within many South Asian homes. Although some families are becoming more individualized whereby parents and adolescents respect freedom and individualism there are families that insist on maintaining collectivism. There are many South Asian adolescents that are living with extended family and it can be extremely stressful residing with an extended family who dictate tradition beliefs.<sup>11</sup>

Adolescents differ from younger children as they are expected to live under some degree of parental control, but as adolescents they are also expected to start separating from their families and establish independent identities of their own. South Asian adolescents are encouraged to remain dependant on their families even though adolescents may feel the pressure from the mainstream culture to assert their independence<sup>20</sup>.

In regards to violence in the home students may want to disclose the abuse to school authorities or counsellors but, deeply ingrained family values of maintaining family honor and reputation may prevent them from doing so. Children may be raised not to discuss issues of abuse and even approaching the issue with family members may have a negative outcome.<sup>2</sup>

Some South Asian students may require additional support and positive reinforcement so that they feel reassured that they are making the right decision by disclosing the abuse.



## The Different Faces Of Abuse

For educators to intervene affectively it is important to recognize all forms of abuse. The chart below identifies the forms of violence against teenagers, effects, and whether the behavior constitutes a criminal offence.<sup>4,21,22</sup>

TYPE OF ABUSE	EFFECTS	CRIMINAL CODE VIOLATIONS
<p><b>Physical:</b> punching, kicking, slapping, shaking, scratching, strangling, burning, cutting, shoving, whipping, stabbing, shooting</p> <p>Physical abuse can also include punishment or disciplining the child i.e. locking the child in a room without food or water</p>	<p>Scaring, welts, bite marks, permanent disability, broken bones, death</p>	<p>These behaviors are crimes. There is also an obligation to report these behaviors to MCFD. Please see page 30 for MCFD contact information.</p>
<p><b>Emotional/Psychological:</b> insults, scapegoating, intimidation, blaming, rejection, screaming, humiliation, criticizing</p> <p><b>Neglect:</b> Failure to provide age appropriate care supervision, ensure that child has shelter, food, clothing, medical care and/or other needs that may prohibit normal development</p>	<p>Reduced self esteem and self worth, anxiety, depression, hinder normal social and cognitive development, develop self destructive behavior i.e. cutting, drinking, abusing narcotics, suicide</p> <p>Malnutrition, developmental delays, health problems,</p>	<p>Although these behaviors are not considered criminal code violations, the behaviors are still a form of abuse. There is also an obligation to report these behaviors to MCFD</p> <p>Under the Criminal Code of Canada neglect is considered a crime. There is also an obligation to report these behaviors to MCFD</p>
<p><b>Sexual:</b> sexual touching, intercourse, threatening sexual acts, asking child to expose their body for sexual purposes, exposing child to sexual activity, making child watch pornography</p>	<p>Feelings of shame and guilt, suicidal thoughts, reduced self image, pregnancy, post traumatic stress, self blame, reproductive problems</p>	<p>These behaviors are crimes. There is also an obligation to report these behaviors to MCFD</p>

## How Students Are Exposed To Violence At Home

It is important to note that the affects of witnessing domestic violence are as horrific and damaging as being the victim of abuse. There are many ways in which an adolescent can be exposed to family violence including: <sup>14,59</sup>

- Witnessing their mother or primary caregiver being assaulted
- Hearing arguments
- Seeing their mother with injuries
- Being present when emergency services attend the house
- Seeing the arrest of a parent
- Forced to participate in the abuse against their mother/primary caregiver
- Being held hostage or abducted by the abuser

Adolescents witnessing violence on a daily basis may foster negative beliefs about power and gender roles. Unhealthy beliefs adopted from seeing family violence include: <sup>14,59</sup>

- Violence can be used as a tool to get what you want
- Blaming the victim for violence
- It is acceptable to abuse others
- You are not accountable for your actions
- Women should be subservient to men
- It is normal behavior to hurt people you love
- It is acceptable to break the law
- There are minimal or no consequence for male abusers
- Unhealthy, unequal relationships are acceptable
- Men have the right to dominate and control the lives women

Abuse of Children Power & Control Wheel<sup>23</sup>



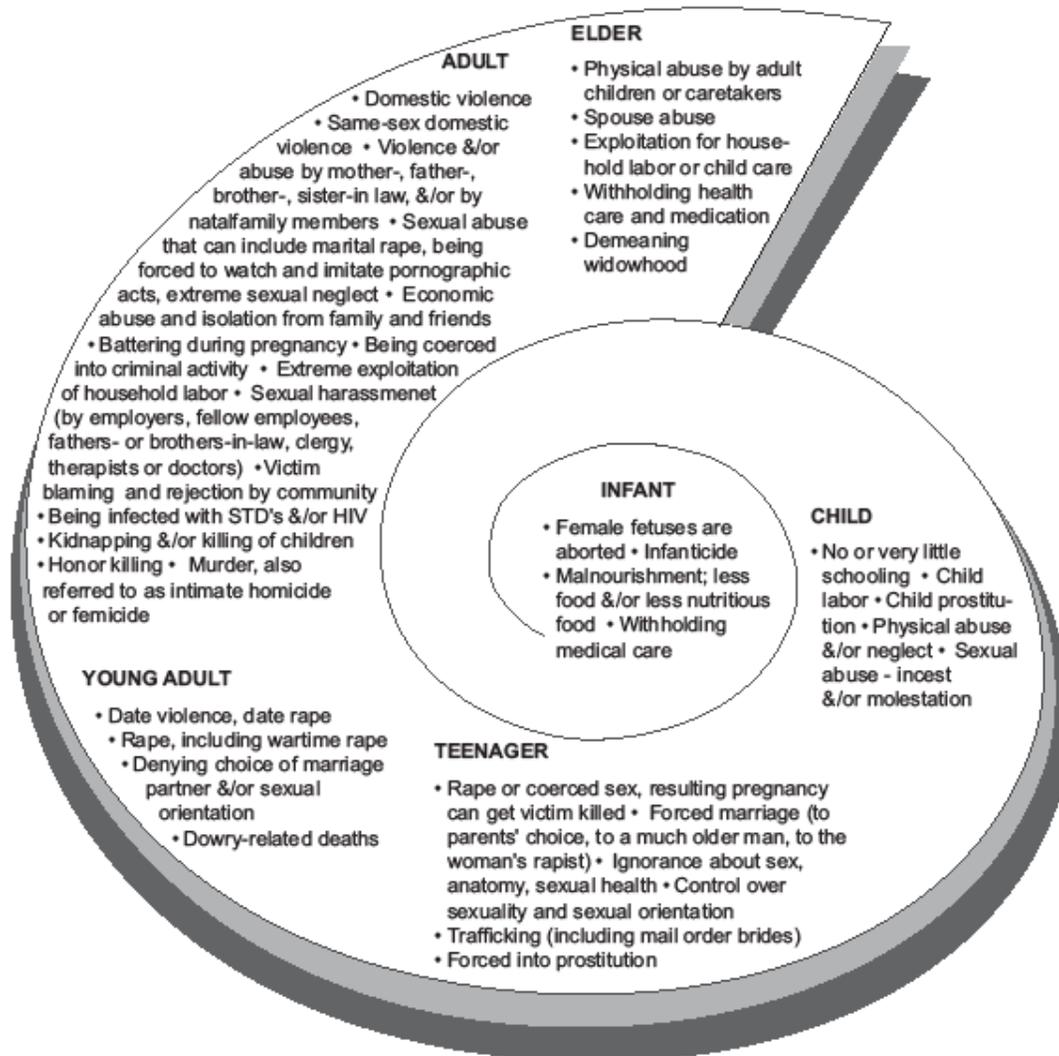
Developed by Domestic Abuse Intervention Project, Duluth, MN.

The Abuse of Children Power and Control Wheel produced and distributed by the Abuse Intervention Project provides a framework for educators to see how students can be victimized by abuse in the home.

## Lifetime Spiral of Gender Violence<sup>24</sup>

### **ABUSES ENDURED BY A WOMAN DURING HER LIFE CYCLE**

Although some of these occur at a specific stage in a woman's life, most can reoccur or continue throughout her life.



Developed by: **ASIAN & PACIFIC ISLANDER INSTITUTE ON DOMESTIC VIOLENCE**

The Lifetime spiral of Gender Violence wheel produced by the Asian & Pacific Islander Institute on Domestic Violence illustrates how violence against women can spiral over a lifetime. If professionals are aware of abuse or neglect they can appropriately intervene in hopes of breaking the cycle of violence that young women may spiral into.

## Warning Signs That A Student Is Experiencing Difficulties

There are warning signs that educators can look for that may indicate that a student is experiencing problems at home. Please note that these are guidelines and any one factor does not necessarily mean that students are witnessing or being abused. There may be more cause for concern if students are showing multiple behavioral problems. Indicators that students may be showing difficulty include: <sup>1,3,4,5,20,21</sup>

- Difficulty concentrating in class
- Become aggressive or bullying peers
- Continually worrying about safety of family members
- Student looks unwell, unusually thin, or malnourished
- Hiding injuries sustained including a black eye, bruising, dislocated jaw, missing teeth, pulled out hair, strangulation marks, bite marks, or broken bones
- Sustaining injuries in the shape of any object such as a hand, stick, belt or stove element
- Withdrawal from friends and/or activities
- Complains of insomnia, fatigue, or headaches
- Adopting stereotyped beliefs about gender roles
- Involvement in criminal activities
- Alcohol and/or substance use
- Suicidal ideations or attempts

- Self destructive behavior i.e. self mutilation
- School truancy
- Expressing feelings of worthlessness and hopelessness
- Running away from home or being scared to return home
- Dating violence
- Experiencing post-traumatic stress

Students may not necessarily become aggressive or difficult and may instead become focused on academic achievement, social events and sports. These students may not appear to be affected by the problems occurring at home. It is properly more accurate that these students have turned their attention towards finding stability and regaining some control in their lives.<sup>1</sup>

Physical warning signs of abuse or neglect may include: <sup>20</sup>

- Injuries with a pattern or in the shape of an object such as a hand, stick, buckle, stove element etc
- Bruising in places such as the ears, eyes, neck, arms, and back
- Student looks unwell or malnourished
- Poor hygiene
- Sexually transmitted diseases or pregnancy

## Barriers Preventing South Asian Students From Disclosing Abuse

Some South Asian students may experience additional cultural barriers when disclosing abuse. These include: <sup>4</sup>

- Language barriers prevent student from being able to communicate fluently in English
- They have been raised not to discuss family matters outside the home. It is considered a shame to the families honor if the community learns that the child disclosed personal information to authorities
- Unknown immigration status (fears that they or their mother could be deported if they disclose)
- Fear that the abuser could kidnap them and take them to India/Pakistan
- Lack of knowledge about how service providers will react if they disclose the abuse
- Student blames him/her self if parents separate
- Their mother could be kidnapped and taken to her country of origin
- Fear of repercussions from elders such as grandparents
- Threatened from extended family members not to disclose abuse

## Developmental Impacts Of Witnessing Abuse At Home

Educators need to be aware of the effects witnessing abuse at home as there could be immediate and long term consequences which could affect key aspects of a student's development. <sup>14,5,7</sup>

### Key Aspects of Development:

- Communication and negotiation skills may be poorly developed
- Healthy transition to adolescence may be difficult
- Premature independence
- View of self may be distorted
- Develop eating disorders or self mutilation
- Over exposure to violence has desensitized the adolescent and they consider aggression as part of normal behaviour

### Relationship Skills:

- Difficulty establishing healthy relationships or thinking that unhealthy relationships are normal
- Becoming involved in dating violence
- Avoiding intimate relationships or intentionally seeking out intimate relationships
- Forming negative gender type stereotypes: believing that the use of violence will bring you what you need, women are weak, men should be in charge of their partner lives

**Purberty:**

- Using increased size to physically intimidate others
- May try to physically interevene and protect their mother from the abuse

**Peer group influence:**

- More susceptible to peer influence to impress friends
- Increased use of drug and/or alcohol use

Some South Asian adolsents may be living in a home where they are receiving conflicting information about family and gender roles in comparsion to western mainstream culture.<sup>7</sup> This can create an enormous sense of identity crisis expecially when adolescence is typically considered a time for self exploration.

## Responding To A Mother's Disclosure Of Abuse

If a mother makes a disclosure that her partner is abusive then educators need to be mindful of the following guidelines:<sup>157</sup>

- Be supportive and listen to her story
- Do not judge her for the decisions she has made
- Make her aware that support services are available for her [please refer to page 28 for a list of legal and community resources]
- Provide some initial contact in the community if the mother needs assistance with immediate needs such as food, shelter, and financial aid. It may be a daunting challenge for the mother to find the means to leave her abuser as well as adequately provide for her child
- Encourage the mother to seek counselling for her child especially if the child is experiencing unusual behavior problems
- Share any concerns you have about her child
- Let her know how the school can support her child
- Inform the mother of the schools obligation to report disclosed or suspected cases of child abuse or neglect
- Encourage mother to contact community agencies to assist her develop a safety plan
- Let the mother know that any information disclosed will not be shared with her partner. Providing information to the abusive partner could endanger the mother and/or the student

## Responding To A Student's Disclosure Of Abuse At Home

In British Columbia if anyone believes that a child [under the age of 19] is being abused, neglected, or living in a unsafe environment then in accordance with the Child, Family and Community Service Act they are obligated to report their concerns to the Ministry of Children and Family Development [MCFD].<sup>20,21</sup> MCFD works in conjunction with the authorities, justice system, and health care system to ensure that children remain safe. If a student makes a disclosure of abuse at home then educators should be mindful of the following:<sup>17,20,21</sup>

- Remain calm and hear the story. Educators may feel angry on hearing the information, but remaining calm will reassure the student that it is safe to disclosure
- Let the student tell the story in their own way
- Be clear about the limits of confidentiality. Do not promise that the information shared will remain a secret as the disclosure may need to be reported to MCFD or the police
- Be supportive and let the student know that they are not in trouble. Showing compassion is likely to increase the student's confidence in continuing to seek help or share concerns in the future
- Reassure the student that they did not do anything wrong
- Do not pressure the student to disclose information
- Try to understand that they may be apprehensive about speaking especially if they have been threatened by the abuser
- Explain to the student any measures that need to be taken i.e. calling MCFD. Students are likely to experience vulnerability after making a disclosure and informing students of the steps required may decrease their anxiety
- An educator's role is to support the student and not criticize the parents. The student's sense of loyalty may prevent them from disclosing if they feel that their family is being judged

If educators are required to make a complaint to the Ministry the following information may be needed:

- The child's name, date of birth, and location
- Any immediate safety concerns
- The nature of the child protection concern
- Information the child/parent has disclosed
- Any information about the alleged offender (s)
- Information about the parents (i.e. names, date of birth, and address)
- If any other children are in harm
- If the child does not speak English
- The names of agencies or people involved with the child

If all this information is not available then educators should still make a complaint and provide as much information as possible.<sup>21</sup> There might be additional information or measures that educators should take in accordance with their school or district policies.

After a report is made MCFD will complete a risk assessment and can intervene immediately if the child is at immediate risk. Intervention could include removing the child from the home but only if no other measure can protect them.<sup>21</sup> If a removal occurs then a court process will commence.<sup>20,21</sup>

If there is not an immediate risk but the child still requires protection then the Ministry could work out an agreement with the parents or guardians.<sup>20,21</sup> If parents require more information on the Ministry or the process after a complaint is made then refer parents to the Legal Services Society's publication, Parent's Rights, Kid's Rights: A parent's guide to child protection law in BC. This publication is available for free and can be downloaded from: [www.lss.bc.ca](http://www.lss.bc.ca)

## Supporting Students Who Are Experiencing Difficulties

How Educator's can assist their students: <sup>1,5</sup>

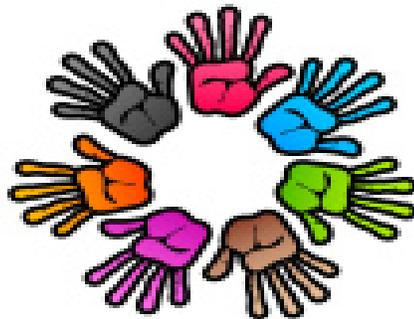
- Remember that there may be other explanations as to why the student is having difficulty in class and that witnessing abuse in the home is only one possibility
- Provide information on available resources in the community
- Refer the student to the school counsellor
- If possible educators may want to adjust homework or project deadlines. This may be necessary if the student suddenly has to leave their home and is staying in a transition home, with family, or in foster care
- If students are unable to complete homework from home then arrange the use of classrooms before or after school
- Check in on a periodic basis to see if student has any concerns
- If the students home situation is affecting their academic performance then educators may want to speak with the parents regarding their concerns and how the parents can support their child
- If speaking with parents then suggest professional help in a non threatening manner

Consider the possibility that a student's lack of concentration or change in behavior may be the result of other factors in the student's life such as the death or illness of a loved one, bullying, homelessness etc. Regardless of the circumstance it is important that students are supported and are provided a safe place to express their concerns and feelings.

## Creating A Safe Environment for Students

Educators can assist students and their families in maintaining the student's safety at school. If the mother is in need of safety planning then it is suggested to refer them to a local community agency where they can create a comprehensive safety plan. An educator may want to explore the following information in order to maintain some safety and stability while the student is at school: <sup>1,5</sup>

- If there are court orders preventing a parent from access to the student then these orders should be on file
- If possible collaborate with other colleagues who interact with the student to create a safe structure for the student to disclose information
- Enforcing non acceptance of violence
- Increase positive connections to school [i.e. matching a student's strengths and interest with a particular project or activity].
- Introducing student to peer tutoring and/or mentors if such programs are available
- Encouraging student to contact a neighbor or family member if violence at home escalates
- Maintain flexibility around school events that maintain the safety of the student, parents, and staff (i.e. arranging separate parent teacher conferences if there are in restraining orders in place)



## Legal Resources

**Access Justice:** Women who meet financial eligibility can meet with a family law lawyer to discuss their legal issues free of charge. All appointments are confidential. To arrange an appointment call the client line at (604) 878-7400.

**Dial-a-Law:** A free library of automated legal information on a variety of legal topics. To access these service please call (604) 687-4680 or toll free in BC 1-800-565-5297.

**Family Duty Counsel:** Lawyers can meet with lower income women to discuss their family issues arising in Provincial Court or Supreme Court. To contact Family Duty Counsel at Surrey Provincial Court please call: (604) 572-2204. For Duty Counsel in New Westminster call (604) 775-1653.

**Family Justice Center:** Women are able to obtain legal information about Provincial Court. Woman can work with a counsellor to reach agreements outside of court. For women accessing the Surrey Family Justice Center please call (604) 501-3100. To find a center close to you please call the Lower Mainland operator: (604) 660-2421.

**Family Law Line:** Women who do not meet the eligibility for Legal Aid are able to receive next step summary advice from a family lawyer. All services are free and are provided over the phone. To connect with the law line then please call: 408-2172.

**Family Maintenance Enforcement Program [FMEP]:** This program can assist women collect child/spousal support payments for orders or separation agreements filed in court. For more information please call the enrollment office at: 1-800-663-3455.

**Lawyer Referral Service:** Women can be connected with a lawyer for an initial appointment fee of \$25.00 plus applicable taxes. For more information please call (604) 687-3221.

**Legal Aid:** Legal Services Society [LSS] provides legal services to people who cannot afford to hire a lawyer. If a woman meets the financial guidelines she may qualify for free legal representation in her family case. For women residing in Surrey they can apply at the local legal aid office. For more information please connect with Surrey intake office at (604) 585-6595.

**VictimLINK:** Provides immediate crisis support for victims of family and sexual violence, and help for all other victims of crime. To contact VictimLINK please call 1-800-563-0808.

## Culturally Competent Community Resources

There are cultural competent resources available to assist South Asian women and their adolescent children. There are resources available in the areas of family law, poverty law, criminal law, immigration, parenting, and employment issues. Please note these services and contact information are subject to change.



**Deltassist:** Women who have been victims of violence are able to receive free confidential counselling. Services are currently available in English, Arabic, Farsi, Hindi, Urdu, and Punjabi. Women are also able to receive assistance in completing tax returns. This service is available in English only. For more information please call (604) 594-3455.



**Delta Police Victims Services:** Provides assistance to women who have been victims or witnesses of a crime in Delta. Victim service workers provide information, referrals, court preparation, and accompaniment. Services are currently provided in English and Punjabi. For more information please call (604) 940-5019.



**Diversity:** For more information on all the services provided by Diversity please call (604) 597-0205. Women are able to access a variety of services including:

**The Stopping the Violence Program:** Women who haven been victims of violence are able to receive free confidential counselling. Services are currently provided in English, Punjabi, Hindi, and Urdu. The parenting after separation program provides free workshops for South Asian women who are separating and require information on custody, access, and co-parenting.

**Child and Youth Mental Health:** Specialized counseling is available to children and youth who are experiencing mental health issues such as anxiety, depression, and post traumatic stress. Services are currently provided in English, Punjabi, Hindi, Urdu, and Farsi.

**Family Counselling Program:** Counselling provided to immigrants who are dealing with issues such as marriage conflict, family violence, depression, and child protection. Counselling is currently provided in English, Punjabi, Hindi, and Urdu.

**Sexual Abuse Counselling:** Provided to immigrant or refugee survivors of childhood/adult sexual abuse. Counseling is currently provided in English, Punjabi, Hindi, Urdu, and Farsi.

**Children who Witness Abuse (CWWA) Program:** This program provides individual and group counseling for children aged 3-18 who have been subjected or witnessed violence at home. This program is currently available to children who speak English, Punjabi, Hindi, Urdu, and Farsi.



**Fraser Health:** Pre natal services are available to expecting mothers including:

**Surrey Pre Natal Clinic:** A free service provided to expecting mothers to routinely monitor the pregnancy. Physicians examine for any illnesses that could have a bearing on the pregnancy and assist the woman in developing her birth plan. Translators are provided to women who are unable to communicate in English. For more information please call (604) 587-3930.

**Punjabi Pre Natal Classes:** Free classes are available in Punjabi to expecting mothers who require information on labor and delivery, and breastfeeding. For more information or to register for classes please call (604) 587-7921.



**Ministry of Children and Families [MCFD]:** The Ministry works in the areas of child protection and family development, adoption, foster care, child and youth mental health, youth justice, and special needs children and youth. For more information on the programs and services provided by MCFD please call the Fraser regional office at 604-586-4100. Reports of child abuse/neglect can be made 24/7 at 310 1234 [no area code required].



**Multicultural Employment Resource Center:** Funded through Immigrant Services Society of BC. The program provides employment services including 1-1 employment counselling, resume and cover letter writing, and referrals to English or skills training. Services are currently provided in Punjabi and Hindi. For more information please call the Multilingual Employment Resource Center at (604) 595-4021.



**Newton Advocacy:** Women are able to receive free confidential information regarding income assistance, disability, housing, and CPP. Services are currently available in English and Punjabi. For more information please call (604) 596-2311.



**Options:** Women are able to access a variety of services including:

**Childcare Options Resource & Referral Program:** A resource & referral service providing child care information to families in Surrey, Delta, and White rock. Women are able to access and complete child subsidy applications. Services are currently provided in English, Punjabi, and Hindi. For more information please call (604) 572-8032 Ext 223 or 237.

**Children Who Witness Abuse Program [CWWA]:** This program is for children/adolescents aged 3-18 who have witnessed abuse/violence at home. Groups generally run for 10 weeks and children are grouped according to age. For more information please call: (604) 572-7411.

**Family Support Outreach Service:** An in-home service for parents of children birth to 13 years, which identifies and enhances existing strengths and resiliencies of families through education, information material and support. By referral only from the Ministry of Children and Family Development (MCFD) in Surrey or Surrey School District School Counsellors. Referral does not require a file to be opened by the Ministry. For more information please call: (604) 584-5811 Ext 236.

**Healthiest Babies Possible:** A program within Options that provides support, education, and one-to-one visits for pregnant women residing in Surrey, Delta, and White Rock. Services are currently provided in a variety of languages including English and Punjabi. For more information please call (604) 583-1017.

**Multicultural Services Program:** Information and support services are available to immigrant newcomers to Surrey and Delta. Immigrants can receive assistance on a variety of issues including employment, social services, healthcare, housing, childcare subsidy, and multilingual income tax clinic. Services are currently provided in English and Punjabi. For more information please call (604) 572-4060 or (604) 596-4357.

**Sexual Abuse Counselling Centre [SACC]:** A counselling service for children and youth who have disclosed sexual abuse. Referrals are open and clients must have reported the abuse to the Ministry of Children and Families or the police, and are no longer in contact with the offender. For more information please call: (604) 584-5811.

**Suicide Prevention, Education & Counselling [SPEAC]:** Suicide risk assessments, crisis intervention, and short term counselling for children and youth in Surrey, White Rock, and Langley. Children can be referred by a school counsellor, Ministry of Children and Families, community agencies or self referral. For more information please call: (604) 584-5811.

**The Family Mentoring Program:** Aims to provide parents with a positive role model for support, assistance, advocacy and guidance. The Family Mentoring Program provides one-to-one mentoring support to parents in their home and community. For more information please call: (604) 584-5811.

**Threshold Women's Program:** A community based outreach program that works with women who have experienced abuse. Services are currently available in English and Punjabi. For more information please call: (604) 572-5883.



**Parenting Awareness Education Program:** South Asian parents can enroll in an 8 week parenting program to develop skills in areas such as parenting, social pressure, resolving cultural conflict, and communication. Services are currently provided in English and Punjabi. For more information please call: (604) 951-8363.



**Progressive Intercultural Community Services Society [PICS]:** Provides immigrants with a variety of employment programs including career counselling, ESL, and job finding clubs. These services are available in a variety of languages including English, Punjabi, Hindi, and Urdu. For more information please call (604) 596-7722.



**Representative for Children and Youth:** Advocates for improvements to the system of services for children, youth and their families. It is the responsibility of the Representative to initiate reviews and investigate government agencies that provide services to children in B.C. For more information please call toll free at 1-800-476-3933.



**South Fraser Women's Services Society [SFWSS]:** Women are able to access a number of programs/services including:

**Clothing Exchange:** Women can access quality women's clothing (casual and business attire) along with children's and infant outfits. Shoes, bags, hats, bedding and small household items are also available. For more information please call: (604) 536-9611 Ext. 221.

**Family Law Legal Resource Library:** This resource is available to women who are self representing in family court. The library is equipped with computer/internet access, case law material, and self help guides that can assist women prepare for court. For more information please call: (778) 565-3638 Ext. 503.

**Laundry Program** [By appointment only]: Women are able to access a washer and dryer and laundry detergent is supplied. For more information please call: (604) 536-9611 Ext. 221.

**Legal Information & Advocacy Program:** Advocates provide women with free confidential legal information as it pertains to their family law issues. Advocates can assist women with the preparation of court documents (both Provincial & Supreme Court). Where necessary advocates will also accompany clients to court (please note that advocates cannot represent clients in court). Services are currently provided in English, Punjabi, and Hindi. For more information please call (778) 565-3638 Ext. 502.

**Shower Facility** [By appointment only] Women are able to access a clean and private shower. The facility is wheelchair accessible. Towels and toiletries are supplied. For more information please call: (604) 536-9611 Ext. 221.

**Trauma Counselling Program:** Women are able to access either short term crisis counselling or long term counselling. There is a wait list for these services. Women are able to register for group counselling sessions including Anger, Boundaries and Communication (ABC), Assertiveness for Women, Self-Esteem, Emotional Eating, Moving Forward: Beyond Survival (childhood sexual abuse) and Understanding and Coping With Trauma Stress (women do not access our counselling program can register for a group). For more information regarding individual or groups counselling please call (604) 536-9611 Ext 230.



**Surrey RCMP Victim Services:** Women are able to receive free confidential information if they have been a victim of crime or tragedy in Surrey. They may or may not have reported the crime to police or be involved with the criminal justice system. Services are currently available in English and Punjabi. For more information please call (604) 599-7600.



**Surrey Women's Center:** Women are able to access a variety of services. For more information please call (604) 589-1868.

**Counselling:** One-on-one counselling provided to women over 19 who are survivors of violence. Services are currently provided in English and Punjabi.

**Crisis Support/Support Line:** Support workers provide one-on-one crisis intervention and emotional support for survivors of violence. Services are currently provided in English and Punjabi.

**Victim Services:** Women are able to receive free and confidential information if they are victims of a sexual assault, child sexual abuse, or require assistance with the criminal court process. Services are currently available in English and Punjabi.



**The Centre For Child Development:** The centre provides services for children with special needs including communication therapy, family services, medical referrals and assessments, occupational therapy, physiotherapy, supported child care, integrated preschools, psychology services, and recreation therapy. Services are currently provided in English and Punjabi. For more information please call (604) 584-1361.



**Youth Against Violence Line:** A 24/7 province wide multilingual line for youth affected by violence. Youth who are concerned about their safety or want to anonymously want to report a crime can access the line for help. Parents, teachers, or service providers concerned about the well-being of a young person, can also call for assistance and information. To access this service please call 1-800-680-4264.



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# South Fraser Women's Services Society

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## Supporting South Asian Teenagers Exposed to Domestic Violence

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A Handbook for Secondary School Educators

South Fraser Women's Services Society  
With funding from the Law Foundation of British Columbia



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