

ENGAGED
COMMUNITIES SERIES

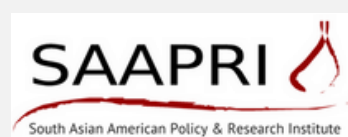


KNOW YOUR RIGHTS

Here's what you need to know

**Breaking the Silence: Domestic Violence and
Immigrant Rights**

October 9, 2025



Our Panelists

KNOW YOUR RIGHTS

Breaking the Silence: Domestic Violence and Immigrant Rights



Amrita Joshi

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Executive Director of South Asian
SOAR ta*



Aparna Bhattacharyya

Executive Director of Raksha, Inc

Big Ideas

Violence and immigration status are intertwined

- Immigration status often becomes a tool of control.
- Fear of losing status of children silences many survivors before they even seek help.
- Real safety requires immigration reform and accessible legal relief (VAWA, U-Visas, T-Visas).

Safety means more than leaving

- It isn't just about escape, but about stability, healing, and rebuilding life.
- Survivors need access to jobs, housing, and childcare to sustain independence.
- Community advocates fill gaps that shelters and state systems can't reach.

Systems built for some, not all

- Language barriers, stigma, and lack of interpreters often block immigrant survivors from support.
- Mistrust of law enforcement can turn victims away from seeking justice.
- Culturally grounded advocacy build trust where mainstream systems fall short.

Big Ideas

Policy must meet lived experience

- Laws like the Violence Against Women Act (VAWA), that provides protections and resources to domestic violence and sexual assault victims, only work if survivors know and can access them.
- Implementation varies widely by state and agency, leaving many unprotected.
- Survivors' voices must guide how policy is applied in real communities.

Healing is a community act

- Ending silence requires community to recognize and respond to abuse.
- Storytelling transforms shame into empowerment and policy change.
- Healing happens collectively when communities choose belief over blame.

From crisis to response prevention

- Move from reaction to prevention: building education, awareness, and early intervention.
- Programs that teach healthy relationships, consent, and gender equity in immigrant youth communities can prevent cycles of harm.
- Prevention also means dismantling cultural silence and creating space for open dialogue.

Our Panelists' Insight

Redefining safety as power

Amrita reframed safety as the power to choose, not just the act of leaving. Through SOAR, survivors learn to navigate immigration processes, secure legal independence, and build peer networks that sustain them beyond crisis. She emphasized that **survivors are not victims in need of rescue, they are leaders reclaiming agency in systems that often erase them.**

“How do we really acknowledge the systemic discrimination and injustice that survivors experience when engaging with law enforcement or the court system, and how can we create alternatives outside of that?” – Amrita Joshi

Culturally grounded advocacy

Aparna described Raksha's approach to meeting survivors where they are – linguistically, emotionally, and culturally. Many South Asian survivors fear judgement or disbelief from mainstream services.

Raksha bridges this gap by honoring survivors' languages, faith, traditions, and family dynamics while helping them navigate U.S. laws. Aparna stressed that **when survivors are understood in their own context, trust replaces fear, and the path to healing truly begins.**

Economic independence as prevention

Economic control keep survivors trapped; abusers restrict work permits, wages, or access to credit. Amrita discussed how SOAR's financial literacy and job training programs equip survivors to rebuild autonomy. Aparna added that immigrant survivors often face credential barriers that block them from stable employment. Both argued that economic development is not just recovery, it's prevention, making freedom sustainable.

Trust and Access

The panelists underscored that **trust is the cornerstone of every successful intervention**. Survivors' willingness to reach out depends on knowing that advocates will understand their culture and keep their stories safe. One negative encounter with police or an interpreter can silence an entire community. Building trust means consistent presence, in temples, language classes, and community spaces, where survivors already feel seen.

State lines, unequal protections

Aparna and Amrita drew attention to the uneven protections survivors face across state lines. Some areas fund immigrant legal aid and language access, while others rely solely on volunteer networks. Geography can determine whether a survivor receives shelter, legal representation, or protection from deportation. Both panelists called for **stronger federal coordination and consistent enforcement so safety isn't a privilege of location**.

Our Panelists' Insight

Legal relief as a lifeline

Both panelists emphasized that **knowing your rights can be the turning point between fear and freedom.** Many survivors don't realize they qualify for protections under **VAWA or U-Visas** until they connect with culturally specific advocates. Amrita highlighted how SOAR's "Know Your Rights" workshops demystify complex systems. Aparna added that streamlining applications and increasing legal aid funding could transform survivors' safety into long-term stability.

Community accountability

Ending domestic violence, they agreed, requires a collective response. Amrita called on allies to **listen to survivors as experts, not subjects of charity.** Aparna urged cultural and faith leaders to **name abuse openly and reject stigma.**

Education, empathy, and visibility, especially among youth, are key to prevention. Together, they framed accountability not as punishment, but as community care in action.

"The more that we can create spaces where we can talk about it, the more we can model ways that we can communicate, but also have someone you trust and love hold you accountable."

– Aparna Bhattacharyya

Additional Resources

Understanding your rights and protections

- **Violence Against Women Act (VAWA) Self-Petition**: Allows survivors who are abused by a U.S. citizen or lawful permanent resident spouse, parent, or child to apply for legal status on their own.
- **U-Visa (Victims of Crime Visa)**: Provides temporary legal status and work authorization to survivors who experience qualifying crimes (including domestic violence, trafficking, or sexual assault) and assist law enforcement.
- **T-Visa (Human Trafficking Survivors)**: Offers protection and a path to permanent residency for survivors of severe human trafficking who cooperate with investigations.

Community and cultural organizations

- **South Asian SOAR** (South Asian Survivors, Organizations Against Abuse), a national collective that supports South Asian survivors through leadership, advocacy, and policy change.
- **Raksha, Inc.**, an Atlanta-based nonprofit providing counseling, advocacy, and education for South Asian survivors of violence.
- **API-GBV** (Asian Pacific Institute on Gender-Based Violence), a national resource center that provides data, research, and technical assistance for API survivor organizations.

Reporting

National Domestic Violence Hotline: 1-800-799-SAFE (7233) or text START to 88788
24/7 confidential help in 200+ languages.