

Washington University in St. Louis

Washington University Open Scholarship

Spring 2017

Washington University
Senior Honors Thesis Abstracts

Spring 2017

Invisible Violence: Battered South Asian Women's Experiences in the American Legal System

Bianca Jahnavi Kaushal
Washington University in St. Louis

Follow this and additional works at: https://openscholarship.wustl.edu/wushta_spr2017

Recommended Citation

Kaushal, Bianca Jahnavi, "Invisible Violence: Battered South Asian Women's Experiences in the American Legal System" (2017). *Spring 2017*. 62.

https://openscholarship.wustl.edu/wushta_spr2017/62

This Abstract for College of Arts & Sciences is brought to you for free and open access by the Washington University

Senior Honors Thesis Abstracts at Washington University Open Scholarship. It has been accepted for inclusion in Spring 2017 by an authorized administrator of Washington University Open Scholarship. For more information, please contact digital@wumail.wustl.edu.

INVISIBLE VIOLENCE: BATTERED SOUTH ASIAN WOMEN'S EXPERIENCES IN THE AMERICAN LEGAL SYSTEM

Bianca Jahnavi Kaushal

Mentors: Jami Ake, Linling Gao-Miles, and Mary Ann Dzuback

This project examines the experiences of battered South Asian women in St. Louis and their journey through the legal system to obtain justice against their South Asian abusers. Through a partnership with Saweraa, St. Louis's only South Asian domestic violence agency, I connected with nine current or past clients. In addition to their in-depth narrative interviews, I interviewed the Saweraa's only staff member in order to understand her strategies for supporting clients through the legal system.

Throughout the project, I move from the macro to the micro to explain why battered South Asian women in St. Louis struggle to obtain justice. In my first chapter, I trace the development of the Nonprofit Industrial Complex by pairing historical analysis of the Battered Women's Movement with direct observations of mainstream domestic violence agencies. This reveals a disjunction between the priorities and capacity of mainstream agencies and the needs of battered South Asian clients. In my second chapter, I articulate the structural necessity for Saweraa, a sparsely staffed organization that provides wrap-around services to clients. I develop a theory of a "perfect advocate" who coded herself as an ally while deftly maneuvering the legal system. Finally, I address the clients themselves, and explain how their interactions with a "perfect advocate" shield them from the cultural incompetence of the legal system and mainstream agencies. Combined, these interviews demonstrate how the interpersonal effectiveness of a "perfect advocate's" work conceals the deep inadequacies within the legal system. Ultimately, her advocacy style removes burden from the legal institutions to meet the needs of marginalized populations in culturally-competent ways. The project concludes with recommendations on how Saweraa can sustain itself in the current funding climate without forgoing a commitment to wrap-around services. I also advocate for courts and legal-adjacent intuitions like DV agencies to adopt a margins-to-center approach.