Welcome to 2019
NAMI National Convention

Desi and Depressed:
Mental Illness in the South Asian-American Community
Asian American Mental Health Statistics

- 13.9% of adults report living with a mental health condition*
- Use mental health services at 1/3 the rate of White Non-Hispanic Americans
- Suicide is the 5th leading cause of death
  - 9th leading cause of death among non-Hispanic White Americans
- In women age 15-24, Asian Americans have the highest suicide rate among all racial and ethnic groups

Statistics from NAMI, WHO, NIMH and CDC Data
Why is that?

- There are many challenges that face the South Asian-American community when dealing with mental health issues
- These challenges are UNIQUE to the community, and need to be understood as such
Challenge: Mixed attitudes towards doctors and medication

- Many South Asians tend to avoid doctors and medications whenever possible
  - Not helpful
  - Can just get advice/treatment from their friends
- Only go to the doctor when things get very serious
- Not a lot of faith in psychiatrists and psychiatric medication
  - Big “fix it” mentality
Challenge: Social perception is important

- We are a very social culture, and are very clustered in the US
  - New Jersey, San Francisco, Dallas, Raleigh-Durham
- Gossip is very common
- People care a lot about what other people think of them
  - Log Kya Kahenge?
- There is no sense of privacy when asking for help with mental health
  - Fear of it becoming a topic of gossip
  - Fear of it reflecting poorly on people’s opinions of you and your family
Challenge: Mental Illness isn’t “real”

• Because the symptoms are usually emotions and behaviors, the thought is that you should be able to control these and “get over it”

• People who don’t can’t are not trying hard enough, are doing it for attention, or are just trying to cause drama
  • People, especially children, are held to an incredibly high bar for success
  • These attitudes can leech into other perceptions of the person

• Yoga and Prayer can make the “bad thoughts” go away
Challenge: Mental Illness is a “Privilege” or “a White Person’s Disease”

- Most of us are first generation, and our parents left everything back in their home country to come to America
- “You have it way better than we did, how can you be so sad/upset/angry/etc.”
- “In India we just worked hard and got over it, so you can too”
How to better reach the South Asian-American Community

• Understand that these are just some of the challenges facing the community
  • And always be ready to learn more

• Reach out to people who have already spoken up within the community and work with them
  • Dil to Dil and Mann Mukti
  • South Asian Mental Health Initiative and Network
    • Asha International

• Accept that the family will be heavily involved in the conversation
• Be proactive
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