

USING STORYTELLING TO BUILD CAPACITY FOR CULTURAL AND COMMUNITY-BASED ORGANIZATIONS TO SUPPORT SURVIVORS OF FGM/C

A case study about the three-year collaborative project between Sahiyo, Asian Women's Shelter, and Silence Speaks.



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DISCLAIMER

This report was produced by Sahiyo, Silence Speaks, and Asian Women's Shelter, with funding from the Office for Victims of Crime, Office of Justice Programs, U.S. Department of Justice under award number 15POVC-21-GG-00988-NONF. The opinions, findings, and conclusions or recommendations expressed herein are those of the contributors and do not necessarily represent the official position or policies of the U.S. Department of Justice.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY



Background:

Survivors of female genital cutting (FGM/C) often struggle to find adequate support within existing gender-based violence (GBV) resources, as U.S. programs addressing domestic violence, sexual assault, and FGM/C have historically operated in isolation. Although all forms of GBV share roots in gender inequality, survivors of FGM/C frequently face distinct barriers in accessing resources for their physical, mental, and social health. This divide can mirror the isolation felt by survivors, who may already feel disconnected from mainstream services due to cultural stigma, and language barriers.



Purpose of the Case Study:

This case study reviews a three-year collaboration focused on using culturally grounded, trauma-informed methods to support FGM/C survivors and building the capacity of GBV organizations to provide trauma-informed support. By integrating storytelling, community outreach, and professional training, the project broadened its impact nationwide, fostering a network of informed practitioners and offering a model for culturally sensitive survivor support.



Project Objectives:

The project's design included five major objectives to be completed each year:

1. A digital storytelling intervention for survivors;
2. Additional supportive services for survivors;
3. Outreach and education to FGM/C-impacted communities;
4. Training for personnel interfacing with survivors; and
5. Broader community awareness on the harms of FGM/C.



Key Insights

Several critical insights that were instrumental in the growth of this project and can inform future efforts to address FGM/C and related GBV topics revolve around:

- **Survivor-Centered Approach**, centering voices of survivors to build better understanding;
- **Trust-Building**, which fostered community engagement and participation;
- **Bridging FGM/C and GBV**, enabling providers to apply existing skills with greater cultural sensitivity;
- **Cultural Competency**, enhancing staff confidence and organizational credibility; and
- **Flexibility and Adaptability**, ensuring training sessions evolved to meet diverse participant needs effectively.



Recommendations:

Based on lessons learned from the collaboration between Asian Women's Shelter (AWS), Sahiyo, and Silence Speaks, the following recommendations were developed for engaging GBV organizations in supporting FGM/C survivors: **a) conduct baseline assessments;** **b) adapt existing services to include FGM/C;** **c) partner with experts and survivors;** **d) provide staff with practical tools;** **e) engage with the community;** and **f) evaluate progress.**



ADDRESSING THE GAP IN INTEGRATED SERVICES FOR SURVIVORS OF FGM/C

Reason for this Project

To address the urgent needs of FGM/C survivors in the San Francisco Bay Area, a collaborative project was launched in January 2022, led by Asian Women's Shelter (AWS), Sahiyo, and Silence Speaks¹. Together, these organizations brought complementary expertise to the project: AWS has decades of experience providing culturally responsive support to survivors of GBV, focusing on immigrant and refugee communities with specific cultural and linguistic needs. Sahiyo, a leading voice in FGM/C intervention, is known for its work with South Asian communities, offering outreach, education, and advocacy to address and ultimately end FGM/C. Silence Speaks, specializes in trauma-informed digital storytelling, giving survivors a safe space to share their experiences and a platform to raise public awareness about the impacts of FGM/C.

This case study examines the objectives, design, and impact of this collaboration, highlighting both the challenges and successes encountered over the 3-year period of this project.

The report emphasizes the importance of culturally grounded, trauma-informed approaches in supporting survivors and preventing FGM/C within the United States (U.S.) and how these initiatives can be integrated in existing service for survivors of GBV. It also details how the insights and methodologies from the project have been shared in training sessions with organizations nationwide, broadening the project's reach and building a network of informed, compassionate practitioners.

By documenting the project's approach—integrating trauma-informed storytelling, community outreach, and professional training—this case study offers a valuable resource for service providers, advocates, and policymakers who seek effective, culturally sensitive methods to support FGM/C survivors. Through this study, we hope to encourage similar initiatives and inspire organizations to build informed, empathetic practices that empower both survivors and the professionals who serve them.

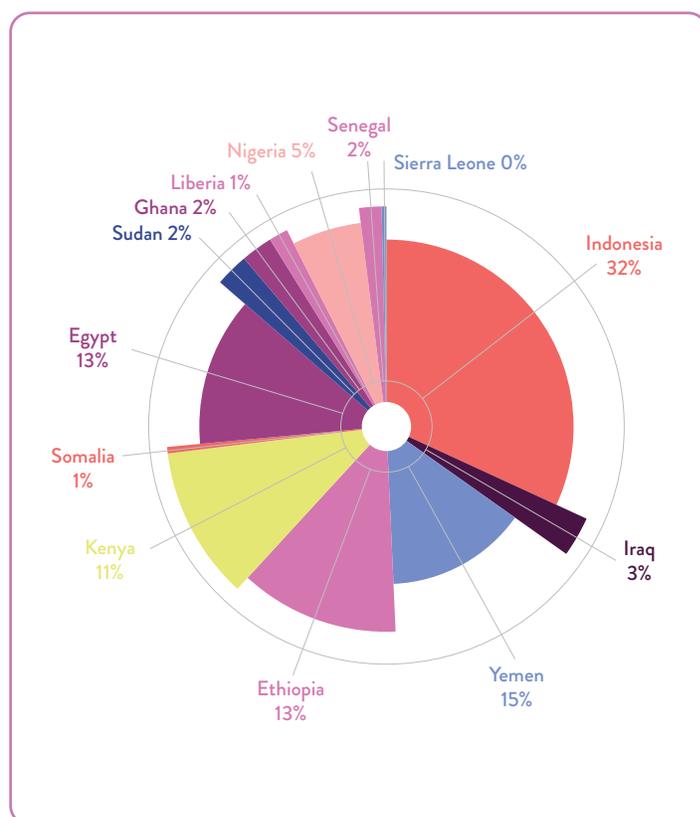
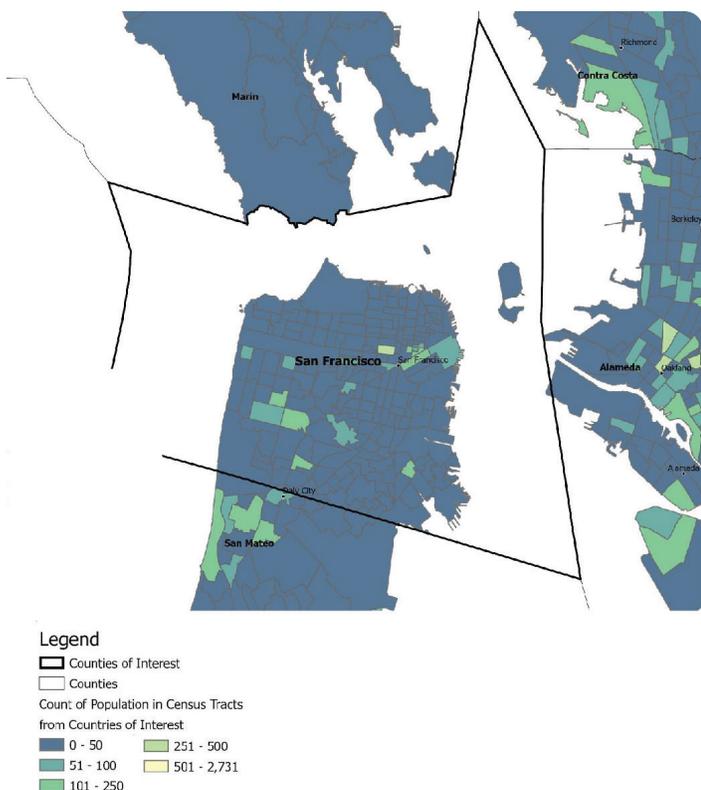


¹Led by Asian Women's Shelter (AWS), Sahiyo, and Silence Speaks

Background on FGM/C and Its Impact:

Regional Profile: Asian Women’s Shelter (AWS) Service Area

This profile primarily relies on combining two types of data: 1) country-based prevalence data for FGM/C²³ and 2) foreign-born population data in the U.S.⁴ Taken together, these data create a snapshot of where known high-prevalence populations live in a specific geography and in proximity to AWS’ service area. The maps and charts show foreign-born country-specific population percentages, as well as the actual neighborhoods or Census tracts with high percentages of these populations.



Further complicating this issue is the lack of local, culturally responsive resources that address the specific needs of FGM/C survivors, who often encounter additional barriers such as limited English proficiency, unfamiliarity with U.S. support services, and fear of legal repercussions or social judgment. These challenges highlight the need for targeted interventions that provide a culturally sensitive safety net and community education. In this context, AWS’ longstanding reputation for culturally grounded services has positioned it to meet these needs effectively. Over time, AWS has expanded its geographical scope, enhancing its ability to connect with and serve diverse populations across the Bay Area and greater California. Inspiring the need for a project that builds on that foundation, leveraging AWS’ deep community ties to create pathways for healing, advocacy, and systemic change.

²Goldberg, Howard, et al. “Female Genital Mutilation/Cutting in the United States: Updated Estimates of Women and Girls at Risk, 2012.” Public Health Reports, vol. 131, no. 2, 2016, pp. 340–347. <https://doi.org/10.1177/003335491613100218>.

³United Nations Children’s Fund (UNICEF). [Female genital mutilation country profiles](#).

⁴United States Census Bureau [American Community Survey 2015-2019 5-Year Data Release](#). December 10, 2020.

PROJECT OVERVIEW AND OBJECTIVES

FGM/C Project Overview

This project takes an innovative approach by blending survivor-centered storytelling with specialized training for AWS' client service providers (i.e., Crisis Line Counselors, Multilingual Advocates, and volunteers). While many service providers are already skilled in addressing GBV, the topic of FGM/C often brings a layer of hesitancy due to its complex cultural underpinnings and nuances per experience. This tension highlighted an opportunity to empower providers by leveraging their existing skills and adapting them to the unique needs of FGM/C survivors.

By focusing on both survivors and providers, the project aimed to raise community awareness while equipping service sector experts with tools to address FGM/C in a culturally sensitive way. The storytelling component allowed survivors to share their experiences, helping to break the silence around FGM/C and illuminate its cultural and personal complexities. As a training tool, these stories provided valuable insights, building empathy and enhancing a providers' ability to support survivors with integrated, trauma-informed care.

Project Achievements



Digital storytelling intervention for survivors:

Engaged 8-10 survivors each year in digital storytelling workshops, providing safe spaces for sharing personal stories. Participants created three-minute videos to be used as tools for community outreach and professional training.



Training for personnel interfacing with survivors:

Developed and delivered customized training sessions and resources for AWS personnel to bridge knowledge gaps and improve support resources. Additionally, conducted training sessions for community partners in healthcare, social services, and other sectors, using survivor stories to foster empathy and practical support strategies.



Additional supportive services for survivors:

Provided online support groups and engagement opportunities for workshop participants throughout the year. In addition to consulting regularly with AWS crisis line counselors (CLCs) and multilingual advocates to enhance their capacity to deliver confidential, survivor-centered support specifically tailored to the needs of FGM/C survivors.



Outreach and education to FGM/C-impacted communities:

Finalized survivor stories into educational videos and organized events/webinars to raise awareness across impacted communities and relevant sectors, like healthcare and social services.



Broader community awareness raising on the harms of FGM/C:

Launched a distribution plan for survivor stories, using online campaigns to reach a wider audience and raise awareness about the harms of FGM/C.



PROJECT DESIGN AND APPROACH

History of Collaboration:

The collaboration between AWS, Silence Speaks, and Sahiyo builds on a strong foundation of shared experience and a history of impactful partnerships. AWS and Silence Speaks have partnered since 2005 to offer trauma-informed, multilingual digital storytelling workshops to survivors of GBV in diverse communities, including Asian and Arab populations across the U.S. In 2017, they joined forces with Sahiyo, an FGM/C prevention organization, to pilot [Voices to End FGM/C](#) (formerly known as [Sahiyo Stories](#)).

Roles of the Collaborating Organizations

[Asian Women's Shelter \(AWS\)](#): AWS plays a foundational role by offering culturally responsive services to survivors of GBV. With decades of experience working within immigrant and refugee communities in the San Francisco Bay Area, AWS understands the importance of providing safe, linguistically accessible spaces for those seeking support. They bring expertise in trauma-informed care and cultural sensitivity, ensuring that survivors from diverse backgrounds feel respected and supported. AWS' role in this collaboration includes direct survivor services and crisis counseling tailored to the specific needs of FGM/C survivors, while also managing essential administrative and logistical support for the project.

[Sahiyo](#): A leading advocacy organization, Sahiyo focuses on FGM/C prevention and building survivor support, with specialized efforts to address FGM/C within South Asian communities. Founded by survivors and advocates, Sahiyo provides deep cultural insight into FGM/C and has developed trusted relationships with community members who may be hesitant to discuss this sensitive topic. Sahiyo's work emphasizes the importance of culturally grounded education, and in this project, they lead program engagement efforts, training and outreach development, awareness campaigns, and serve as a bridge between survivors and the resources they may not have known were available to them.

[Silence Speaks](#): Known for its expertise in trauma-informed digital storytelling, Silence Speaks brings an innovative approach to survivor support by facilitating safe, guided storytelling workshops. These workshops offer survivors, and fellow advocates, the opportunity to reclaim their narratives, using multimedia tools to share their experiences in ways that are empowering and impactful. Silence Speaks ensures that each story is crafted in a respectful, trauma-sensitive environment, allowing survivors to control how much they share and how their stories are presented. This storytelling approach not only aids in personal healing but also serves as an educational tool for the wider community.

This program has empowered over 80 survivors from varied cultural backgrounds—including Indian, Indonesian, and Egyptian women—through personal storytelling, helping them reclaim their narratives and build supportive connections. The success of this pilot and subsequent requests from healthcare providers, educators, child protection workers, and GBV advocates for culturally-sensitive training, speaks to the growing demand for culturally-embedded strategies to address FGM/C. This history between the partners on the project highlights how sustained collaboration can enhance the impact and dynamics of a project.



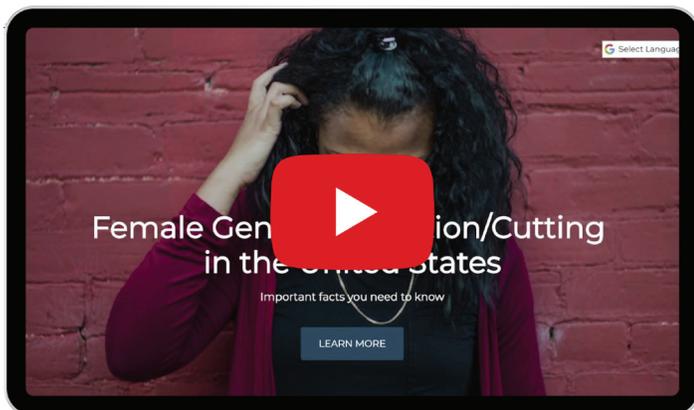
About the Voices to End FGM/C Project

Voices to End FGM/C is a participatory storytelling project that guides people through a hands-on process of sharing, recording, and editing meaningful personal stories. Through online and in-person workshops, we support storytellers in crafting their stories, creating powerful imagery, and learning the skills necessary for producing them as finished videos.

The courageous storytellers of Voices to End FGM/C reflect the diverse global communities and the different cultural contexts in which FGM/C occurs. Each storyteller has developed a unique personal story addressing the impacts of FGM/C on their life. As a collection, the stories explore the physical and emotional consequences of the practice; policy, and advocacy efforts toward criminalizing FGM/C; the need for educational programs for prevention; the role of healthcare providers in supporting survivors; and more.

See How Voices to End FGM/C Digital Stories Are Made

[The Story Behind Voices to End FGM/C](#)



Over the course of the project, we hosted three workshops to engage new participants, further uplifting the diverse global and local voices impacted by FGM/C. These stories not only dispel misconceptions and provide nuanced perspectives on the who, how, when, where, and why of FGM/C, but also continue to serve as powerful tools for education and awareness, inspiring deeper understanding and action across various audiences.

Leveraging the AWS Crisis Line for FGM/C Survivor Support

The AWS Crisis Line was an ideal entry point for integrating FGM/C services because it provided something unique: a survivor-centered, community-based resource that allowed for anonymous and non-judgmental support. Unlike existing options like the U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) Tip Line, U.S. Department Office for Victims of Crime FGM/C Line, or the Department of Justice (DOJ) Human Rights Section⁵ – which are primarily tied to law enforcement and mandated reporting– the AWS Crisis Line offered a space where survivors could seek help without the fear of legal consequences or the pressure to formally report. For many, especially those dealing with the stigma and cultural sensitivities surrounding FGM/C, having the chance to talk openly and safely had been virtually nonexistent.

The AWS Crisis Line’s anonymous, non-judgmental platform made it uniquely suited for addressing FGM/C survivors’ needs holistically. Survivors could share their experiences in a safe, confidential environment, which for many could be the first step in their healing journey. This approach acknowledged that not everyone who has undergone FGM/C views it as inherently negative, and some individuals may not even know that they have experienced it. The Crisis Line provided an accessible space where survivors could explore their feelings, access resources, and better understand the long-term impacts of FGM/C without fear of stigma, community backlash, or legal repercussions. One of the Crisis Line’s most distinct assets is its Multilingual Access Model Advocates/Interpreters (MLAMs), which allows the call center to respond in 41 languages, including over 24 Asian languages. This capability ensures that FGM/C survivors from diverse linguistic and cultural backgrounds can communicate in their preferred language, fostering trust and accessibility.

Many of the skills CLCs already possessed—such as trauma-informed care, cultural sensitivity, and crisis intervention—were directly applicable to FGM/C cases. Recognizing this, Sahiyo sought to provide additional training to equip them with the terminology, background, and tools needed to address the unique nuances of FGM/C while considering its intersections with other forms of GBV. By leveraging AWS’s existing infrastructure, including highly trained CLCs and MLAMs, the integration of FGM/C services proved to be more efficient and effective— offering a robust alternative to creating a service line from scratch.

Over the course of the project, we hosted a total of **7 trainings** with AWS staff members and CLCs, engaging approximately **40 participants** with each session, and **6 trainings** with AWS Volunteers and MLAMs, reaching **87 participants** overall. Additionally, we conducted bi-monthly check-in calls with AWS staff and CLCs to provide ongoing support and address emerging challenges. Across all training sessions, including those held for other organizations, we trained **more than 500 individuals** across diverse service sectors and disciplines. These efforts are explored in greater detail in the section titled, [Training and Technical Assistance Provided by Sahiyo](#).

⁵ U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE). [ICE Tip Line](#); DOJ OVC [Female Genital Mutilation/Cutting Survivor Support Line](#)- Call: 877-751-0880; Criminal Division U.S. Department of Justice (DOJ). [Human Rights and Special Prosecutions Section \(HRSP\)](#).

ASSESSING AWS' KNOWLEDGE AND COMFORT LEVELS WITH ADDRESSING FGM/C

Pre-Test Assessment Results

To establish a baseline understanding for integrating FGM/C support into AWS' services, Sahiyo began the collaboration by conducting a pre-test during an AWS staff meeting on March 15, 2022. This survey, distributed to 18 AWS team members, aimed to gauge their initial levels of knowledge, comfort, and preparedness regarding FGM/C, as well as their perspectives on the integration of FGM/C survivor services into AWS's broader GBV framework. The results not only highlighted areas for growth but also informed the structure and focus of subsequent trainings to be hosted by Sahiyo, such as FGM/C 101 training, an introductory course of the who, what, where, and when of FGM/C, that was held on March 24, 2022.

The pre-test included both scaled and open-ended questions designed to provide a holistic understanding of staff readiness. The scaled questions focused on four key areas:

1. General understanding of FGM/C.
2. Awareness of the global prevalence and impact of FGM/C.
3. Familiarity with U.S. legislation related to FGM/C.
4. Preparedness to support survivors of FGM/C.

Key Findings from the Scaled Questions

The results highlighted notable gaps in staff knowledge and confidence:

- **General Knowledge of FGM/C:** While 56% of respondents rated themselves between 2 and 3 on a 5-point scale, no one felt "extremely well-informed" (5/5). Approximately 33% rated themselves as a 1, indicating no prior knowledge.
- **Global Prevalence and Impact:** Scores averaged between 2.4 and 3.1, reflecting moderate awareness of FGM/C as a global issue. Only 11% of participants rated themselves a 4, and no one scored a 5, underscoring the need for deeper understanding.
- **U.S. Legislation:** This was the weakest area of knowledge, with 56% of respondents rating themselves a 1 and 33% a 2. No staff member rated themselves above a 3.
- **Preparedness to Support Survivors:** Scores ranged from 1.9 to 2.8, with 33% rating themselves a 2 and 22% rating themselves a 1. While one respondent rated themselves a 5, the majority felt underprepared to provide survivor-centered care.



Key Findings from the Open-Ended Questions

The open-ended questions offered qualitative insights into staff perceptions of both hesitations and benefits related to integrating FGM/C services.

Responses to the question, “*What hesitations do you have, if any, about integrating services to support FGM/C survivors within AWS services?*” highlighted a range of concerns.

- **Knowledge and Skills:** Some staff members and CLCs expressed a lack of confidence in their current knowledge, stating, “*I need support to equip myself with screening, sensitivity, and respectful, trauma-informed approaches.*”
- **Resource Availability:** Others voiced logistical concerns, such as access to resources, with one respondent noting, “*If they need further support, are there FGM-specific organizations in the Bay Area that can help with case management?*”
- **No Hesitations:** Other staff members and CLCs expressed no initial hesitations, viewing the integration of FGM/C services as a natural extension of AWS’s GBV mission (i.e., domestic violence, sexual violence, human trafficking, etc.). One respondent remarked, “*We’re just making sure we are ready for it as another form of GBV.*”

When asked, “*What are potential benefits you foresee, if any, about integrating services to support FGM/C survivors within AWS services?*” staff emphasized the importance of inclusivity and expanded support.

- **Enhanced Advocacy:** One respondent noted, “*I think it will make us a stronger advocate in helping survivors with this barrier,*” while another also highlighted how this integration aligns with AWS’s mission: “*We achieve a more holistic holding of different forms of GBV that marginalized communities and people assigned female at birth in the U.S. experience.*”
- **Community Impact:** Staff and CLCs also recognized the broader impact of such efforts, with comments such as, “*It would increase access for and awareness about FGM/C survivors in the community,*” and, “*Being able to expand our services in a field that’s not often talked about, but much needed, would be greatly beneficial to the community.*”

The pre-test results were instrumental in informing the development of a standardized approach to gathering input from individuals after subsequent training sessions. This iterative process ensured that future trainings progressively addressed both knowledge gaps and practical challenges, reinforcing AWS’s capacity to provide holistic, inclusive support for FGM/C survivors.



TRAINING AND TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE PROVIDED BY SAHIYO

Training and Technical Assistance for AWS Staff Members and Crisis Line Counselors (CLCs)

To ensure that AWS staff were fully equipped to support survivors of FGM/C, Sahiyo provided a comprehensive training and technical assistance (T&TA) program over the course of the collaboration. Each session built on the previous one, reflecting an iterative learning process that incorporated feedback and real-world challenges faced by AWS staff. As their knowledge and confidence grew, the trainings explored more specialized topics, such as the physical and psychological effects of FGM/C and advanced trauma-informed care techniques. Beyond formal training, Sahiyo also provided group consultations, resource development, and ongoing support to ensure the integration of FGM/C services was both sustainable and impactful.

FGM/C 101: Learning about Female Genital Cutting & Peer Facilitated



Discussion

The *FGM/C 101 Training*, held on March 24, 2022, marked the first step in Sahiyo’s T&TA program for AWS staff. This two-hour session was designed to provide a foundational understanding of FGM/C, focusing on its cultural, global, and U.S. legislative contexts. Key topics included the importance of trauma-informed and culturally sensitive services, the need for robust data and research,

and the critical role of community engagement in strengthening prevention, protection, and support for those at risk of FGM/C. By establishing a common baseline of knowledge, the training aimed to build staff confidence and prepare them progressively for addressing the unique needs of FGM/C survivors within AWS’s broader GBV framework.

Training Objectives:

- To enhance understanding of FGM/C
- To explore its cultural, global, and legislative contexts
- To discuss the physical, psychological, and social impacts of FGM/C
- To provide best practices for trauma-informed and culturally sensitive communication with survivors

The training combined presentations, multimedia survivor narratives, and interactive discussions to engage participants and encourage reflection. Staff were introduced to the World Health Organization's classification of the different types of FGM/C, its physical and psychological impacts, and the complex cultural justifications that sustain the practice⁶. Survivor stories, shared through videos from the [Voices to End FGM/C](#) program, were particularly impactful in fostering empathy and providing a human perspective on the realities of FGM/C. By addressing both the global prevalence of FGM/C and its presence in local communities, the training sparked meaningful dialogue about common misconceptions and the U.S. policy landscape supporting survivors and at-risk individuals. Breakout discussions further enhanced staff engagement by prompting participants to reflect on connections between FGM/C and other forms of GBV. Questions like, ***“What do you keep in mind when speaking with survivors of GBV that would be helpful when working with survivors of FGM/C?”*** encouraged critical thinking and grounded the conversation in practical applications. This comprehensive approach laid the groundwork for advancing staff readiness, starting with general knowledge and progressing toward more nuanced skills in survivor interaction and support.



Finding My Voice by Renee Bergstrom

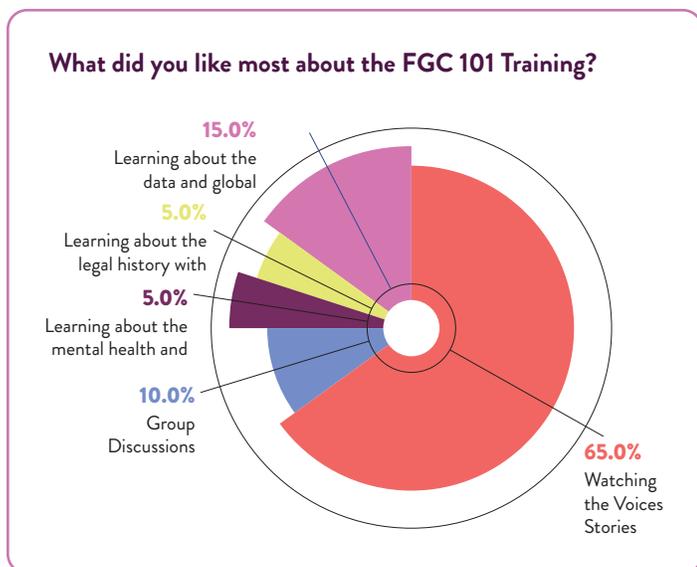


Renee's account challenges common misconceptions about who experiences FGM/C and highlights its profound physical and systemic impacts. Her story reveals how a form of FGM/C, known as clitoridectomy, was historically performed in the United States up until the 1960s to “treat” conditions such as hysteria, masturbation, and even lesbianism. Her story also sheds light on the long-term physical consequences of FGM/C, particularly during childbirth, and the lack of awareness among healthcare practitioners that exacerbated her challenges. This narrative is especially significant given the troubling trend of FGM/C being medicalized in some contexts today, with practitioners in certain countries—including the United States—justifying it as a “safer” alternative. Renee's experience underscores the urgent need for education, advocacy, and survivor-centered support to address the practice and the misinformation that perpetuates it.

⁶World Health Organization (WHO). [Female genital mutilation](#). February 2024.

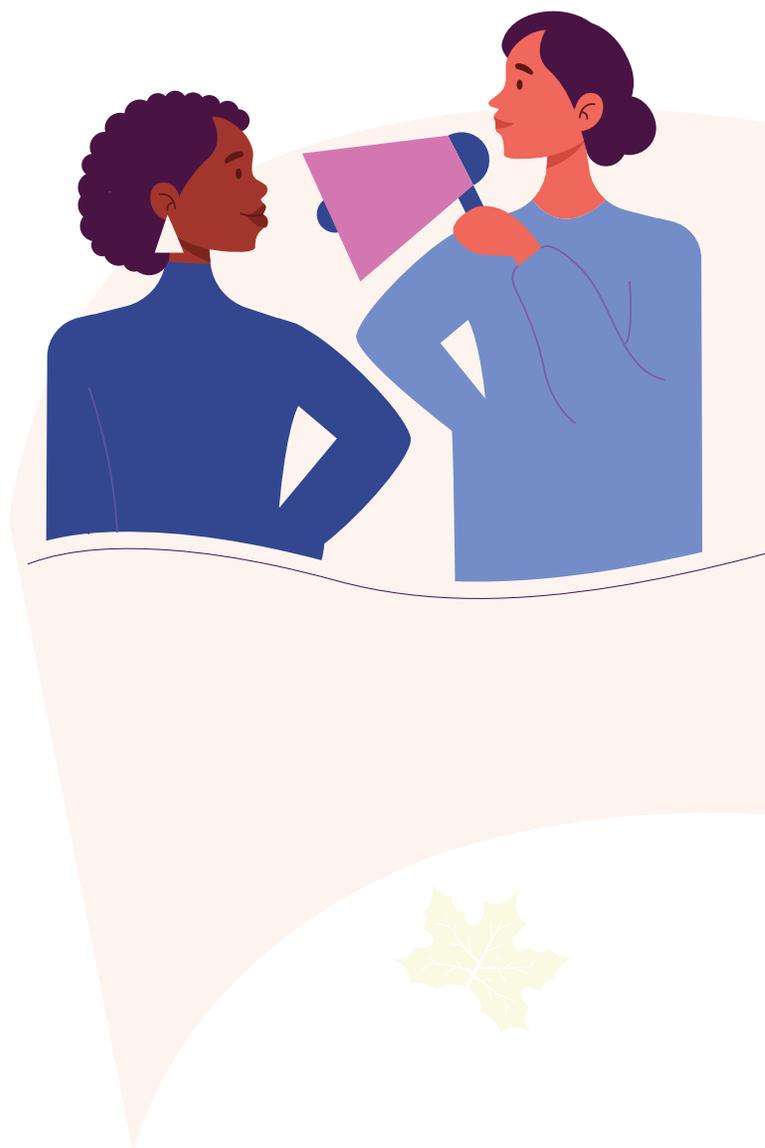
What Worked Well:

- Many of the staff members and CLCs highlighted the insights gained from survivor stories, describing them as “powerful.” One individual noted, **“I would love to hear more about survivor stories and what needs they have to prepare our service readiness.”**
- The combination of reflecting on data, group discussions, and survivor narratives was deemed as a “well-rounded” approach to addressing a sensitive and often hidden topic.



Peer-Facilitated Follow-Up Discussion

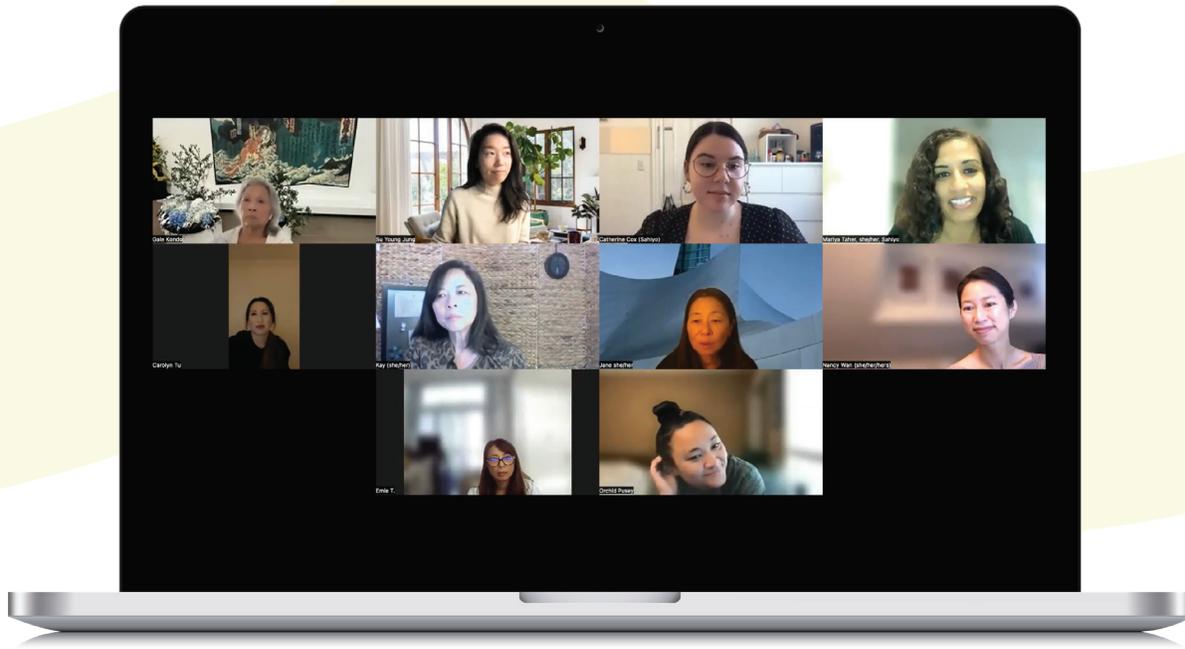
On May 18, 2022, a peer-facilitated discussion was hosted as a follow-up to the **FGM/C 101 Training**. The discussion reinforced the key themes introduced in the FGM/C 101 Training while encouraging collaborative problem-solving and deeper engagement. Staff expressed an increased understanding of the social norms and systemic factors underlying FGM/C and began to articulate strategies for integrating survivor support into AWS services. Feedback from the session emphasized the value of continued peer-led discussions and iterative learning opportunities, which have been incorporated into Sahiyo’s broader T&TA. This session aimed to deepen staff engagement with the topic, provide space for reflection, and address questions or concerns that emerged since the initial training.



Opportunities for Growth:

- Staff expressed concerns about their ability to provide appropriate resources, noting a lack of vetted local and national organizations specializing in FGM/C support. One individual raised the specific question, **“if they need further support, are there FGM-specific organizations in the Bay Area that can help with case management?”**
- Staff also sought more clarity on integrating FGM/C survivor support into existing AWS services, with one participant stating, **“I think it would be important for AWS staff to complete a few more trainings and to do practices such as role-play on the crisis line so that folks can feel more comfortable using language and talking about how to integrate the services.”**

Active Learning Training- Engaging Survivors of Female Genital Mutilation/ Cutting (FGM/C)

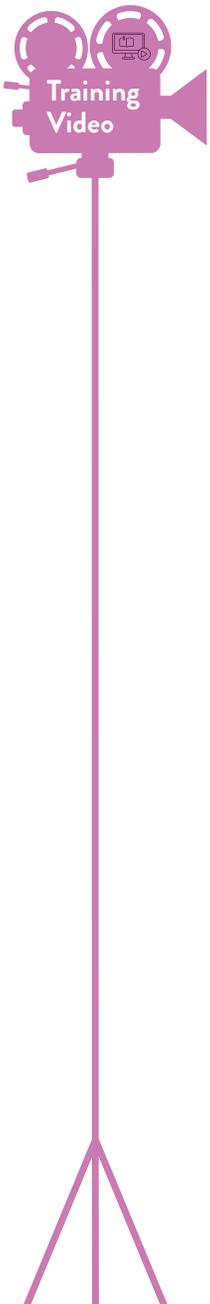


On June 30, 2022, Sahiyo facilitated its second training for AWS staff, titled **Active Learning Training – Engaging Survivors of FGM/C**. Building on the foundational knowledge introduced in the FGM/C101 session, this training took a more hands-on approach, equipping staff with practical tools and fostering skill development to better address the needs of survivors who call the AWS crisis line. Designed in response to staff feedback and ongoing conversations with AWS, the session emphasized familiarity with referral resources and scenario-based practice to build confidence in real-world applications.

Training Objectives:

- To deepen understanding of FGM/C through practical application.
- To familiarize staff with tools and resources developed by Sahiyo for supporting survivors.
- To build confidence in handling sensitive survivor interactions through scenario-based learning.
- To strengthen knowledge of referral options and enhance resource navigation skills.

Sahiyo developed a series of supplementary training resources for this session to equip advocates and service providers with the tools needed to support FGM/C survivors. These resources include a scenarios guide, FAQs, referral spreadsheet, and communication strategies. One of the key activities was an FAQ Scavenger Hunt, where participants used the **FGM/C FAQ Document** to locate specific answers to potential questions from survivors, such as details about health complications or legal guidance. This exercise helped familiarize staff with the FAQ as a go-to resource, ensuring they could navigate it confidently during real-time interactions on the crisis line. In a Padlet Brainstorming Session, staff reflected on their prior experiences working on the crisis line, highlighting existing knowledge and skills. This collaborative activity also fostered a dialogue about effective strategies for engaging FGM/C survivors, uplifting the **FGM/C Talking Points for GBV Advocates Document**. Another critical exercise involved Role-Playing, utilizing **Survivor Scenarios**, where advocates practiced responding to potential real-life case studies or survivor scenarios. This activity built confidence in addressing sensitive topics, such as emotional distress, stigma, and resource navigation, while emphasizing trauma-informed communication and collaborative problem-solving. Finally, staff were introduced to the **FGM/C Referrals Spreadsheet**, guiding them through its sections to identify appropriate referral options for specific survivor needs. This exercise ensured that staff could effectively connect survivors to relevant medical, legal, and mental health services.



Questions by Sarata



Sarata delivers a powerful message about the systemic barriers that FGM/C survivors often encounter when seeking care. In her story, she speaks candidly about the shame she experienced after being cut and the lingering, unanswered questions about the procedure's impact on her physical health. Her narrative exposes the compounded challenges survivors face, including societal stigma, inadequate provider training, and a lack of cultural sensitivity within healthcare systems. These barriers highlight a critical need for systemic change in how providers are trained to recognize and respond to the unique physical and emotional consequences of FGM/C. Beyond illuminating these systemic gaps, Sarata's story prompts advocates and providers to reflect on how they can bridge these divides by offering culturally sensitive, informed, and empathetic care.

INFORMATION SHARING.

For inquiries about this project or any of the training materials and resources mentioned above, please contact Sahiyo at info@sahiyo.org.

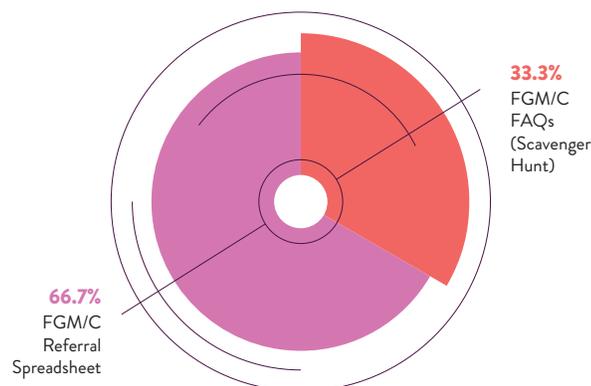
Details about the resources Sahiyo developed:

- **Survivor Scenarios:** A collection of real-life examples of survivor situations that service providers might encounter, designed to enhance the capacity of advocates in supporting survivors of FGM/C. This comprehensive guide includes a series of realistic and detailed case studies that reflect diverse survivor experiences and challenges.
- **FGM/C FAQ Document:** A reference guide addressing frequently asked questions about FGM/C, designed to equip advocates and other service providers with foundational knowledge and practical insights into FGM/C. This document serves as both an educational tool and a quick-reference guide for those working to support survivors of FGM/C, ensuring they can address complex questions with sensitivity and accuracy.
- **FGM/C Referral Spreadsheet:** A comprehensive directory that organizes critical support services and resources to ensure survivors receive timely, appropriate, and culturally sensitive care. The individuals and organizations outlined in the referral sheet are vetted resources, covering a range of services, from medical and mental health care to advocacy and legal assistance, ensuring survivors receive comprehensive support.
- **FGM/C Talking Points for GBV Advocates Document:** A list of key phrases and strategies for GBV advocates and service providers engaging with FGM/C survivors, emphasizing a culturally sensitive and trauma-informed manner. This resource provides practical information and approaches for navigating sensitive conversations and information sharing.

What Worked Well:

- Staff members and CLCS increasingly reported enhanced familiarity with best practices related to FGM/C and resources available for FGM/C survivors, including improved confidence in their ability to support survivors. One individual noted, *“overall, I’m feeling more prepared after this second training.”*
- A majority of the staff members and CLC’s also reported less concerns or hesitations about about integrating FGM/C into AWS’ services. Several individuals noted an improved ability to recognize how FGM/C “overlaps” with other issues related to GBV.

What did you like most about the Active Learning Training?



Training Objectives:

- To educate participants on the physical health consequences of FGM/C.
- To introduce medical and non-medical healing options, such as clitoral restorative surgery and pelvic floor therapy.
- To continue facilitating peer discussions and role-playing exercises to build confidence in supporting survivors.

The session featured an agenda packed with expert presentations, survivor narratives, and interactive activities. Expert speakers included renowned professionals that specialize in providing FGM/C care, sharing their insights on critical aspects of FGM/C and various treatment and healing pathways.

- [Dr. Crista Johnson- Agbakwu](#), an obstetrician-gynecologist, shared a presentation discussing in greater depth the health impacts of FGM/C. Drawing from her extensive work with FGM/C survivors and her expertise in providing culturally competent care, she reflected on common challenges faced by survivors seeking and receiving care and how these challenges impact patient-provider relationship dynamics.
- [Dr. Marci Bowers](#), a pioneering gynecologic surgeon known for her expertise in clitoral restorative surgery and transgender surgical care, introduced clitoral restorative surgery as a potential path to physical recovery for FGM/C survivors.
- [Angela Peabody](#), Founder and Executive Director of the [Global Woman P.E.A.C.E. Foundation](#), provided guidance on accessing surgical support and resources for survivors. Her advocacy and educational initiatives have long focused on ending FGM/C and supporting survivor healing through comprehensive care and outreach.
- [Dr. Nazneen Vasi](#), a specialist in pelvic floor therapy, shared non-surgical approaches to physical healing. Her presentation emphasized pelvic floor therapy as a vital component in addressing pelvic dysfunction and improving the overall well-being of survivors of FGM/C.

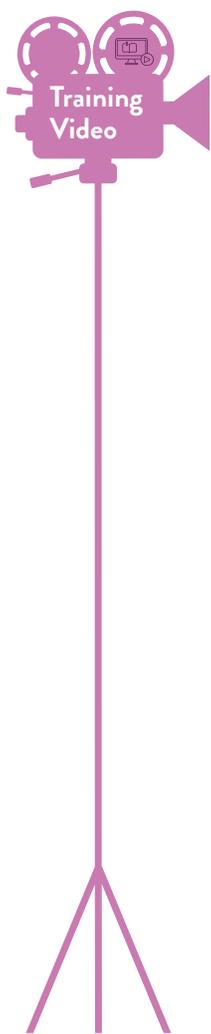
Following the expert presentations, a brief Q&A session was held to clarify any concepts and explore best practices for supporting survivors. The session was wrapped up with AWS staff members and CLCs participating in breakout sessions and role-playing exercises, to reflect on prior knowledge learned, explore the presented concepts, and continue practicing responding to survivor scenarios.

Opportunities for Growth:

- When asked the question, **“Are there any lingering topics or questions you are still wondering about/would like to learn more about regarding FGM/C?”** the majority expressed satisfaction with the information shared during this session. However, the discussion led to suggestions for coordinating check-in meetings as touchpoints for status updates and ongoing consultation.
- Overall, staff members and CLCs expressed concern about the lack of sufficient locally available resources tailored to the needs of FGM/C survivors. However, they found motivation in acknowledging, **“it’s okay to recognize that there aren’t enough resources available right now, but we’re working to expand those services.”**

Physical Impacts of FGM/C and Healing Training & Peer Facilitated Discussion

On February 22, 2023, Sahiyo hosted the **Physical Impacts of FGM/C and Healing Training**, a two-hour session that delved into the physical health consequences of FGM/C and explored pathways to healing. As part of the larger effort to integrate FGM/C survivor support into AWS’s GBV prevention services, this training introduced staff to expert perspectives, survivor narratives, and interactive role-playing exercises and building familiarity with potential service referrals.

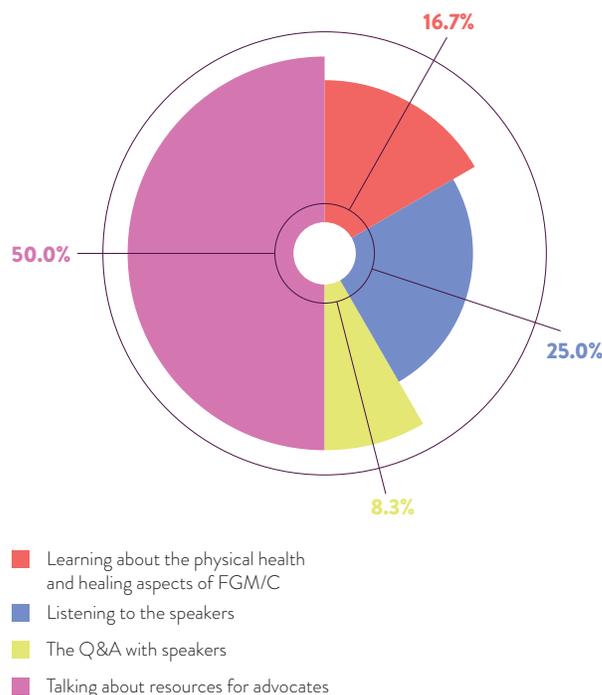


How Many Women? by Comfort Dondo



Comfort Dondo shares her deeply personal experience of undergoing a Type IV form of FGM/C in Zimbabwe, highlighting the severe complications and silence that often accompany the practice. Her story underscores the lack of understanding survivors face, even within healthcare systems, as therapists unfamiliar with her specific type of FGM/C dismissed her concerns. Comfort’s narrative emphasizes the critical need for greater awareness of the diverse forms of FGM/C and the importance of addressing both the physical and emotional impacts in survivor care.

What did you like most about the Physical Impacts of FGC and Healing Training?



What Worked Well:

- On a scale of 1 to 5 (1 being Unsatisfactory and 5 being Very Satisfactory), all expert speakers received ratings of 4s and 5s, highlighting strong engagement and widespread appreciation for their presentations.
- Staff members and CLCs noted the session as **“a good reminder from the last session,”** with many emphasizing that they **“keep learning something new,”** particularly regarding the resources available to support survivors.

Opportunities for Growth:

- Many staff members and CLCs noted that the training enhanced their ability to support survivors who open up about their experiences, particularly by deepening their understanding of health services and their importance. However, they also expressed a desire to strengthen their skills in providing appropriate emotional support during sensitive conversations.
- In general, the AWS team highlighted ongoing interest in improving their ability to refer survivors to appropriate resources, emphasizing the importance of **“raising awareness and building more connections to resources for FGM/C survivors”** and becoming more informed about the diverse services survivors may need.

Peer-Facilitated Follow-Up Discussion

On April 19, 2023, a peer-facilitated discussion was hosted as a follow-up to the *Physical Impacts of FGM/C and Healing Training*. This 90-minute session provided an interactive platform for participants to revisit key concepts from the training, address lingering questions, and engage in additional practical role-play scenarios. Designed to foster peer-to-peer learning and skill-building, the session encouraged participants to explore strategies for supporting survivors navigating complex medical needs. By deepening their understanding of the potential health implications of FGM/C, participants gained critical context for handling real-life calls from survivors, taking on step closer to strengthening pathways for effective referrals.

Mental Health Impacts of FGM/C and Healing Training



On February 7, 2024, Sahiyo hosted the *Mental Health Impacts of FGM/C and Healing Training*, an 1.5 hour session that focused on understanding the psychological and emotional consequences of FGM/C, emphasizing trauma-informed care and therapeutic interventions to support survivors. This training was developed based on feedback from the previous session, with AWS staff members and CLCs wanting to improve their trauma-informed responses while effectively navigating survivors' emotional needs. The training provided a comprehensive exploration of the mental health impacts of FGM/C, equipping participants with the tools to address these complex needs with sensitivity and expertise.

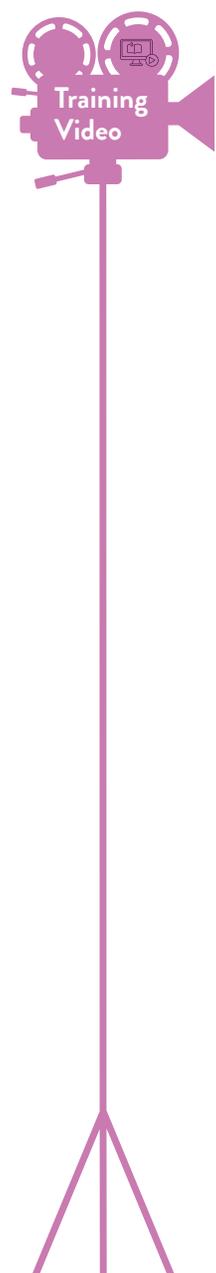
Training Objectives:

- To explore the psychological and psychosexual impacts of FGM/C on survivors.
- To identify the connections between FGM/C and trauma-related conditions.
- To introduce trauma-informed interventions and therapeutic approaches to support survivors.

The session featured expert presentations and discussions led by Sahiyo team members and guest speakers, including:

- [Jo Keogh, LPCA](#): A Licensed Professional Counseling Associate specializing in treating women with PTSD resulting from FGM/C, child sexual abuse, sexual assault, and rape. She delivered an in-depth overview of the psychological consequences of FGM/C, highlighting common challenges survivors face, including anxiety, depression, and shame. In addition to sharing information about trauma-related conditions such as PTSD and dissociation, focusing on how trauma can manifest differently from person to person.

- [Joanna Vergoth, CSW NCPsyA](#): A licensed psychotherapist specializing in trauma and founder of [forma](#), with over 20 years dedicated to the healing of trauma, including the treatment of survivors of FGM/C. She led a discussion about the psychosexual consequences of FGM/C, including its effects on intimacy, relationships, and self-perception, providing insight into how these issues intersect with mental health. Concluding the session with sharing trauma-informed interventions, offering practical strategies for supporting survivors, such as grounding techniques, validation practices, and referral pathways to mental health professionals.



I Didn't Dare Ask by Caroline Ilogienboh



Caroline recounts her experience as an 11-year-old girl in Lagos, Nigeria, where she endured the trauma of being cut—a practice justified in her community as a means to prevent promiscuity. Her story served as a poignant illustration of the lasting mental health consequences of FGM/C, including shame, isolation, and emotional trauma. The video provided participants with an intimate glimpse into the lived experiences of survivors, fostering empathy and deepening their understanding of the complexities of FGM/C. Caroline's narrative set the stage for discussions on how to support survivors dealing with similar feelings of isolation and psychological pain, underscoring the importance of trauma-informed care and survivor-centered approaches.

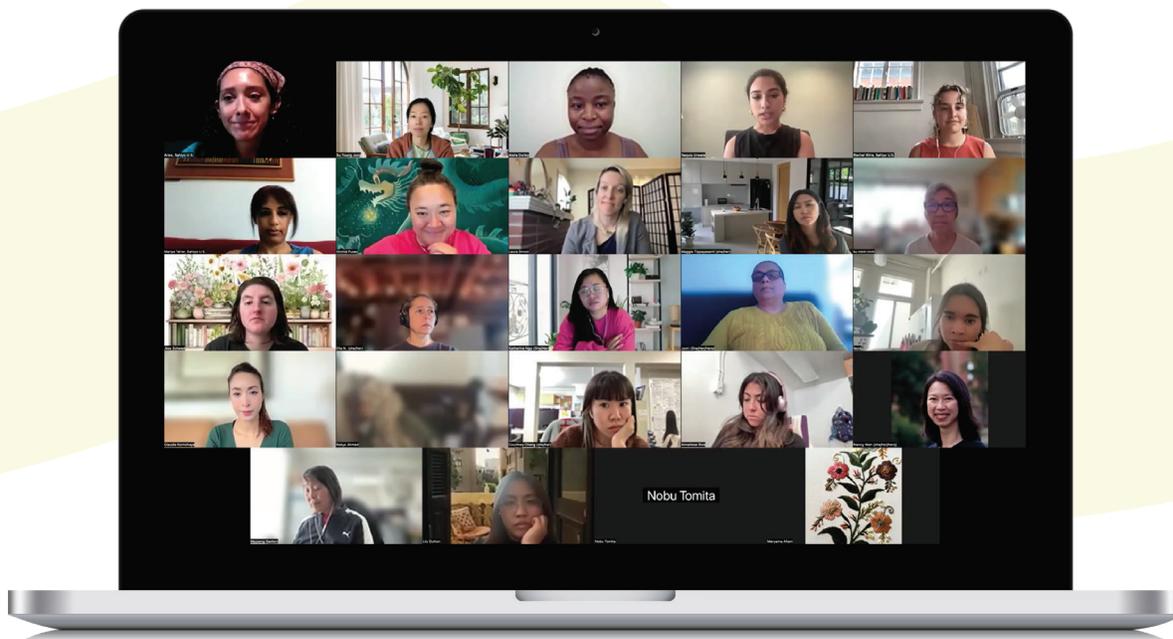
What Worked Well:

- Staff members and CLCs highlighted the impact of integrating survivor narratives with clinical expertise, with one individual noting, ***“Hearing people’s perspectives that experienced FGM/C was super impactful and eye-opening, especially in understanding how their experiences shaped them individually and culturally.”***
- The clarity and depth of the presentations on trauma and psychological consequences were widely appreciated, described as ***“engaging and valuable”*** by several attendees, particularly for shedding light on trauma-informed interventions.

Opportunities for Growth:

- While the group valued the training, some expressed concerns about effectively supporting survivors in a crisis line context, given the limitations of ***“not being face-to-face, having no ongoing relationship, and probably only one chance to support the survivor.”*** Additional guidance on tailoring trauma-informed approaches for such brief interactions could enhance preparedness.
- A few individuals expressed a desire for more culturally specific information about regions where FGM/C is prevalent to better understand how social and cultural factors influence survivors' experiences and needs. As one individual noted, ***“AWS clients come from many backgrounds,”*** making this context crucial for effective support.

Insights on the Intersectionality of FGM/C



On July 17, 2024, Sahiyo hosted their final professional training session titled *Insights on the Intersectionality of FGM/C*. This 90-minute session explored how intersecting identities, such as gender, race, and cultural background, influence the experiences of survivors of FGM/C and their access to care. This session combined presentations, survivor narratives, and interactive activities facilitated by Sahiyo's training and research team. Findings from Sahiyo's [Critical Intersections](#) study provided a foundation for contextualizing systemic barriers faced by survivors and the challenges organizations encounter when integrating FGM/C services. The session aimed to deepen participants' understanding of intersectionality and equip them with strategies for providing holistic, inclusive support to diverse survivor populations.

The training began with an exploration of intersecting identities, focusing on how gender discrimination and racism amplify the barriers FGM/C survivors face. This segment set the stage for discussions on how cultural, racial, and gender-based dynamics influence survivors' access to care and their experiences within support systems. A discussion followed about cross-collaboration, highlighting strategies for fostering partnerships between organizations to enhance survivor support. This segment drew from real-world examples and lessons learned through the Critical Intersections study and Sahiyo's collaborative work with AWS and Silence Speaks. Participants examined how these challenges can be reframed as opportunities for

Training Objectives:

- To introduce participants to the concept of intersectionality and its relevance in the context of FGM/C.
- To explore how intersecting identities—such as gender, race, and cultural background—affect survivors' experiences and access to support.
- To provide practical strategies for addressing challenges related to cross-cultural collaboration in survivor care.

leveraging organizational expertise to create inclusive and effective support systems. Interactive components encouraged active participant engagement. In breakout groups, staff members and CLCs worked through client scenarios to identify how intersecting identities influence survivors' needs and developed tailored support strategies. A group recap followed, allowing attendees to reflect on key takeaways and share diverse perspectives. The session concluded with a Q&A segment, providing an open forum for participants to ask questions, clarify concepts, and discuss actionable insights



My Body Belongs to Me by Zahra Qaiyumi



Zahra's story delves into a personal exploration of the lasting impact of FGM/C on her identity, body autonomy, and sense of self, describing the duality of her upbringing in a Dawoodi Bohra Muslim household in the United States and the cultural practices that shaped her childhood. Zahra's narrative sheds light on the intersectionality of her experience, balancing her appreciation for her cultural heritage with the pain and confusion of undergoing khatna (FGM/C). The details about her experience with FGM/C highlights the complexity survivors often face—navigating love for their community while grappling with the harm caused by deeply entrenched practices. Ultimately, offering a lens into how intersecting identities—cultural, religious, and geographical—can influence the lived experiences of FGM/C survivors.

What Worked Well:

- The AWS team appreciated the session's focus on how FGM/C intersects with domestic violence and GBV. While many participants were familiar with the connection between gender inequity and FGM/C, the session helped contextualize the issue within their existing work. One individual noted, **"FGM/C is a deeply complex and sensitive issue that does not exist in a vacuum."**
- The use of survivor scenarios was consistently found to be an effective tool for applying knowledge to real-world situations. One participant shared, **"The client scenarios were complex, and learning how to provide emotional support was important,"** particularly in addressing the diverse identities and needs of survivors.

Opportunities for Growth:

- The group expressed a desire to explore additional factors—such as religion, class, and education—and how these intersect with FGM/C. A deeper understanding of these dimensions could enhance the team's ability to address the diverse experiences and barriers faced by survivors.
- While the training boosted participants' confidence, there remains an ongoing need for skill-building and resource development to ensure survivor-centered, trauma-informed care, particularly in complex cases. As one participant noted, **"Simply having knowledge and a strong background knowledge in the issue will make clients feel more comfortable to disclose their experiences with you."** Continued focus on practical tools and techniques could further empower staff to create safe, supportive environments for survivors.

BI-MONTHLY CONSULTATION CALLS WITH AWS CRISIS LINE COUNSELORS (CLCS)

Following the launch of FGM/C-specific services on the AWS Crisis Line on August 26, 20-22, Sahiyo introduced quarterly consultation calls to provide ongoing support and technical assistance to CLCs. Co-facilitated by Sahiyo’s Executive Director

Mariya Taher and mental health professional Joanna Vergoth, the consultation calls combined emotional and peer support, practical learning, and expert guidance to strengthen AWS’s ability to serve survivors of FGM/C.

Purpose and Approach

The consultation calls served as a critical follow-up to AWS’s integration of supporting FGM/C survivor into its existing services, aiming to:



Each session included the following core components:

- CLCs shared their experiences with FGM/C-related calls, offering insights into their challenges and successes.
- Discussions encouraged counselors to reflect on their responses, identify lessons learned, and seek feedback from peers and facilitators.



- Facilitators provided real-time advice on complex cases and shared updated resources, such as referral sheets, talking points, and mental health support strategies.

- The group reviewed survivor stories from the Voices to End FGM/C program, analyzing each narrative to explore appropriate communication strategies, action plans, and referral pathways.

- A dedicated call log was used to document FGM/C-related calls, tracking key details such as call topics, patterns, and outcomes.
- Insights from the log informed service adaptations, resource development, and training updates to better meet the needs of callers.

The consultation calls revealed valuable insights into the ongoing implementation of FGM/C services on the AWS Crisis Line, fostering a culture of continuous learning and support within AWS. By creating a structured environment for reflection and discussion, these sessions enabled CLCs to process the challenges of handling complex calls while navigating practical solutions. Importantly, the calls have also

underscored the need for building greater connections to local services, including legal and healthcare support, that would be appropriate for FGM/C-impacted communities. This ongoing engagement has enhanced the quality of survivor services at AWS and empowered counselors to approach their work with greater confidence, empathy, and preparedness.

Asian Women's Shelter to Implement Services Supporting FGM/C Survivors

In collaboration with Sahiyo, AWS expanded its crisis line in August 2022 to include services for survivors of FGM/C and their communities. This launch coincided with Women's Equality Day on August 26, 2022, marking a pivotal step in addressing the gaps in resources available to underrepresented populations impacted by FGM/C in the United States.

Sahiyo provided a series of in-depth, interactive trainings to AWS staff, volunteers, interpreters, and crisis line counselors. These sessions covered the physical and mental health consequences of FGM/C, strategies for survivor-centered support, and navigation of the limited resources available to survivors and their loved ones. These efforts have enhanced AWS's capacity to provide culturally sensitive, trauma-informed services to those affected by this harmful practice.

The expanded crisis line now offers a dedicated space for survivors and community members to seek support, ensuring they have access to informed, compassionate assistance.



Hotline Operator:

San Francisco Asian Women's Shelter

 1-877-751-0880

Hours of Operation:

Monday - Friday, 9:00 AM - 5:00 PM PST

Through this collaborative pilot project, Sahiyo and AWS are working to reduce the harms of FGM/C by building sustainable systems of support for survivors and their families.

TRAINING AND TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE FOR VOLUNTEERS AND MLAMS

In addition to training AWS staff and CLCs, Sahiyo regularly provided FGM/C 101 Trainings to AWS volunteers and MLAMs as part of their spring and fall domestic violence (DV) training programs. This initiative ensures that every cohort of AWS volunteers completes their required training hours with a foundational understanding of FGM/C, recognizing the importance of FGM/C as a potential client experience. To date, Sahiyo has trained six cohorts of volunteers, more than 40 volunteers, refining the content of the FGM/C 101 Training with each iteration based on participant feedback.

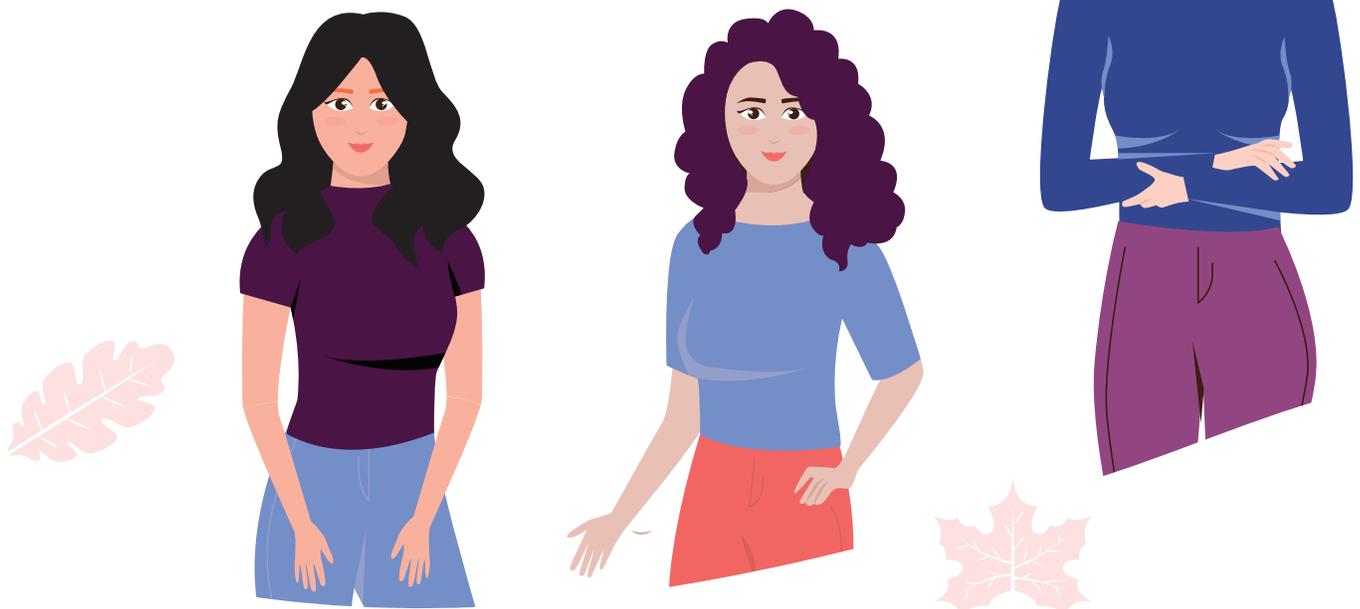
Purpose and Integration

The inclusion of FGM/C 101 in AWS's volunteer training program reflects a commitment to ensuring that all individuals working within AWS have the cultural awareness and trauma-informed knowledge necessary to support survivors of FGM/C. Volunteers and MLAMs play a crucial role in AWS's outreach and support services, often serving as point of contact for clients. By equipping them with this training, Sahiyo and AWS ensure consistent messaging and survivor-centered care across all levels of service delivery.

Training Overview

The FGM/C 101 Training delivered to AWS volunteers covers:

- An overview of FGM/C, including its types, prevalence, and physical and psychological impacts.
- Connections between FGM/C and other forms of GBV, focusing on shared dynamics of power, control, and silence.
- Survivor-centered approaches for supporting individuals impacted by FGM/C.
- Practical tools, such as the FAQ and Talking Points documents, to guide volunteers in responding sensitively to survivor disclosures ([See Appendix C](#)).



Feedback and Insights

Volunteer feedback has played a pivotal role in shaping the training.

- Many volunteers appreciated the inclusion of survivor stories but expressed a desire for more actionable steps they could take. One participant remarked, *“The testimonial videos were really hard to watch and left me wondering what I can do to help. I would’ve liked more info on what we can do as volunteers at AWS or as individuals in our community, state, or country to help.”*
- Participants valued the inclusive approach to the training, which addressed experiences across diverse survivor identities. *“Thank you for including trans and gender non-conforming experiences in this training! I’m so grateful for your advocacy and education, and your partnership with AWS,”* one volunteer commented.
- The emphasis on trust-building and communication was noted as essential. *“The ability to help someone is based on communication and building trust. Knowing about the challenges of FGM/C—who, why, how, and more—means those conversations can move quickly to information, action, and solutions, because AWS is prepared,”* said another participant.

Although the core content remains consistent, the training has evolved through volunteer insights shared. Adjustments have included:

- **Enhanced Visuals:** More infographics and data visualizations to make complex topics easier to understand.
- **Scenario-Based Learning:** Introducing more survivor scenarios and digital stories to uplift the diversity of experiences, and also the role of advocates that are not survivors.
- **Interactive Elements:** Adding activities such as discussions around current events involving FGM/C, quizzes, and small group discussions to increase engagement and ensure knowledge retention.

The FGM/C 101 training has proven effective in raising awareness and building confidence among volunteers. Participants consistently report a deeper understanding of FGM/C and its impacts. As one volunteer shared, *“I think knowledge is power. Learning about FGM/C more in depth made me more aware of this type of trauma.”*

See [Appendix B](#) for the full timeline of the training sessions and calls hosted with the AWS team.



BUILDING PARTNERSHIPS AND EXPANDING IMPACT

Sahiyo collaboration with AWS has established the organization as a trusted provider of T&TA. Over time, Sahiyo has cultivated partnerships and connections with various organizations and individuals looking to introduce the topic of FGM/C into their work.

ORGANIZATIONS TRAINED:

Health-Based Organizations:

- [George Washington University \(GWU\)](#)- The Milken Institute School of Public Health at GWU is dedicated to advancing public health through education, research, and policy. For this training GWU invited Sahiyo to deliver a guest lecture on FGM/C, highlighting the intersection of FGM/C and maternal health outcomes.
- [Northeastern University](#): Located in Boston, Massachusetts, Northeastern University is a private research university known

for its cooperative education program, integrating classroom study with professional experience. Sahiyo presented at their International School Nurses Conference on the intersections of FGM/C, cultural dynamics, and survivor care to students and faculty. With a specific focus on the role of school nurses in identifying and supporting students impacted by FGM/C.

Health-Based Organization Spotlight: Grand Rounds on Female Genital Cutting

In April and May 2024, Dr. Crista Johnson-Agbakwu delivered two Grand Rounds presentations on female genital mutilation/cutting (FGM/C): one at Brigham & Women's Hospital and another at George Washington University for their department. To enrich the sessions, Dr. Johnson-Agbakwu incorporated videos from the [Voices to End FGM/C](#) project. These videos showcased personal experiences of FGM/C from both survivors and healthcare providers— offering a deeply human perspective on FGM/C, going beyond traditional clinical case studies to uplift the voices of those with lived experiences.

“

The audience was deeply moved. In fact one audience member was brought to tears. I had a couple others prepped to go as well, but we ran out of time. The feedback that I received was very powerful, and I'm going to continue to use these videos in future educational efforts.

Dr. Crista Johnson-Agbakwu

Presentation Highlights:

Tailored for clinical audiences, including OB/GYN providers, nurses, residents, and students—the presentations were well-received. Survivor stories provided a unique opportunity to emphasize the importance of respectful listening and patient-centered, trauma-informed care.

Voices Story:

[Not Medicine by Anonymous](#)



Community-Based Organizations

WomanKind: WomanKind is a nonprofit that works with survivors of GBV, including domestic violence, human trafficking, and sexual violence. They provide critical services and advocate for policies to support survivors and prevent future violence. Sahiyo led a training session during WomanKind's staff monthly meeting. This session provided a comprehensive overview of FGM/C and its impacts, equipping attendees with a baseline understanding of FGM/C, also discussing their role in addressing FGM/C.

Community-Based Organization Spotlight: **Bridgewell**

On November 8, 2023, Sahiyo, in partnership with the US End FGM/C Network, offered a Continuing Education Units session for social workers, advocates, and service providers to understand the physical, emotional, and social impacts of FGM/C. **Bridgewell** is a human services organization that offers support to individuals with disabilities, mental health issues, and those facing homelessness.

Presentation Highlights:

The training focused on equipping participants with the tools needed to provide survivor-centered, culturally responsive care. The key objectives of the training were to provide an introductory understanding of what FGM/C is, including its prevalence in the U.S. and globally, share best practices in working with survivors of FGM/C, enhance provider confidence in talking about FGM/C with clients, colleagues, and peers. Over half of the attendees stated they learned something new, with many citing their limited awareness about the prevalence of FGM/C in the U.S.

One attendee remarked,

Amazing training. I would recommend it to everyone I work with at DCF (Department of Children and Families).

Another attendee reflected on the digital stories shown during the training,

The videos were helpful - giving survivors the voice they need in explaining what they experienced and how they felt through the trauma they still continue to endure was very impactful.

Voices Story:

[Validation by Maryah Haidery](#)



AshaKiran: AshaKiran is a nonprofit dedicated to providing culturally sensitive services to individuals experiencing crises, particularly within the South Asian community. The training was tailored to address the unique context of Alabama, a state with no current laws criminalizing FGM/C. Specific data and figures were shared to highlight the prevalence and potential risk of FGM/C within the state. Additionally, Sahiyo presented a case study of its work with AWS to showcase how crisis lines can be expanded to support FGM/C survivors, given AshaKiran's similar focus on crisis intervention.

Government and Advocacy Coalitions:

Government Spotlight: Virginia Department of Criminal Justice Services

On August 8, 2023, with over 130 professionals registered, Sahiyo hosted a training for the Virginia Department of Criminal Justice Services (VA DCJS) titled

“Cross-Collaborative Work: Incorporating Female Genital Mutilation/Cutting Survivors into Support Services in Virginia.”

One attendee shared,

“

I have heard of it but always thought it was not part of American culture.

Program Manager, Virginia Department of Corrections (VADEC)

The session highlighted FGM/C as a human rights violation and form of GBV occurring globally and within the U.S., including in communities not traditionally associated with it. Participants included representatives from the Virginia Office of the Attorney General, Homeland Security Investigations, public health professionals, and victim advocates from organizations such as the Fairfax County Police Department and LAWS Domestic Violence and Sexual Assault Services. The training explored the prevalence of FGM/C, its connections to trauma and GBV, and the legal framework addressing it in the U.S. This session underscored the importance of cross-sector collaboration in supporting survivors and combating FGM/C.

Voices Story:

Please Listen by Absa Samba



- **San Francisco Domestic Violence Consortium (SF DVC)**: SF DVC founded in 1982, is a network of seventeen domestic violence service agencies that come together with the goal of providing high quality, coordinated and comprehensive services to San Francisco’s victims of domestic abuse. The services of the individual agencies include emergency shelter, transitional housing, crisis lines, counseling, prevention programs, education and legal assistance. Sahiyo engaged with advocates and community-based attorneys during their monthly partner meeting to equip local service providers with tools to address FGM/C within GBV frameworks.
- **MassNow**: MassNOW is a state chapter of the National Organization for Women, focusing on advocating for women’s rights and equality in Massachusetts. Their work includes addressing issues such as reproductive rights, economic justice, and ending violence against women. This training explored the potential impacts of FGM/C on menstrual health and highlighted recent Massachusetts-specific developments, including state laws against FGM/C, data on its prevalence, and the work of the Massachusetts Coalition Against FGM/C.
- **South Asian SOAR**: South Asian SOAR is a national collective of survivors, organizations, and allies dedicated to ending GBV in the South Asian community. They focus on advocacy, community engagement, and providing support to survivors. This training spotlighted the case study of Sahiyo’s collaboration with AWS, showcasing how ongoing reflection and tailored training sessions can strengthen the capacity of GBV organizations to support FGM/C survivors.

Advocacy Coalition Spotlight: ICASA’s 2024 Statewide Sexual Assault Conference

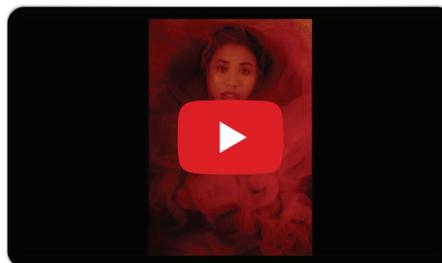
On May 22, 2024, Sahiyo presented **Female Genital Cutting (FGM/C) 101: Building a Better Understanding** at the Illinois Coalition Against Sexual Assault (ICASA) conference in Springfield, Illinois. This session offered an introduction to FGM/C, covering key topics such as terminology, the different types of FGM/C, health impacts, and global prevalence, with a special focus on data from the United States and Illinois.

Attendees left the session equipped with actionable steps to engage in meaningful conversations with clients about FGM/C, as well as access to resources to guide their continued learning. The audience included rape crisis center staff, counselors, advocates, prevention specialists, and management professionals, all playing a pivotal role in supporting survivors of sexual violence.

Post-Training Outcomes: As a follow-up to the conference, ICASA has invited Sahiyo to lead a webinar in January 2025, focusing on how race and racism shape the movement to end FGM/C and the ability to support survivors effectively. Drawing on Sahiyo’s original [survivor and advocate-led research](#), the webinar will highlight the racialization of FGM/C and associated discriminations, presenting actionable recommendations for adopting anti-racist approaches to ending FGM/C.

Voices Story:

On Being a Nonbinary Survivor of FGM/C by
Dena Igusti



The presentation was incredibly impactful for someone like me who had little knowledge of FGM/C. Many more at risk in the US than I thought.

ICASA Conference Attendee

See [Appendix A](#) for a full list of organizations partnered with to deliver training sessions.

LESSONS LEARNED FROM THIS PROJECT

LESSONS LEARNED

Over the course of this three-year collaborative project, numerous lessons were learned that can provide valuable insights for future initiatives aimed at addressing FGM/C. These lessons highlight the importance of strategic planning, adaptive training, and organizational readiness in fostering impactful and sustainable change.



Training Preparation and Execution

Delivering impactful training required deliberate planning and a commitment to fostering engagement. Lessons include:

- **Prepare Proactively:** Confirming speakers, finalizing agendas, and vetting materials well ahead of time were essential steps in maintaining the quality and coherence of sessions.
- **Facilitate Open Communication:** Stopping for questions, clarifying definitions, and encouraging open discussions ensured participants were aligned and confident in their understanding of complex topics. Additionally, emphasizing that trainings were spaces for curiosity and learning, reassured participants that missteps or “saying the wrong thing” were part of the learning process.
- **Build Confidence in Skills:** Explicitly connecting FGM/C to participants’ existing work can bridge knowledge gaps and help participants adapt their skills to new contexts. By reminding GBV advocates that they already possess critical tools—like validating responses, providing trauma-informed care, empathy, and active listening—we helped participants feel more confident in supporting survivors of FGM/C.
- **Keep it Interactive:** Interactive elements, such as online polls, breakout groups, and case studies, were helpful for engaging participants to address the complexity of FGM/C. For instance, we integrated current news on FGM/C and survivor narratives from the Voices to End FGM/C project to ground the training in real-world contexts, helping participants connect theoretical knowledge to lived experiences.



Evaluations

Tracking progress and adapting to feedback were key to ensuring the project’s effectiveness. Lessons include:

- **Begin with a Baseline:** Initial evaluations provided a foundation for measuring growth and identifying areas for improvement. Early surveys helped us establish metrics for tracking progress and refine our questions over time to yield more actionable insights.
- **Stay Responsive:** Flexibility in evaluation methods allowed us to adapt to participant preferences. For example, incorporating Zoom polls during training sessions streamlined data collection and significantly improved response rates. We supplemented this with follow-up surveys to gather additional feedback when necessary.
- **Capture Additional Feedback:** Common questions and comments raised during training sessions were documented carefully, enabling us to provide tailored responses and supplementary information in follow-up emails and resources. This approach not enhanced the immediate impact of our trainings but also demonstrated responsiveness to participants’ needs.





Organizational Capacity

Scaling efforts to meet the needs of diverse stakeholders required increasing internal capacity. Lessons include:

- **Train a Broader Team:** Expanding the pool of trained facilitators allowed us to lead more sessions and address the needs of varied audiences while maintaining consistency and depth. Empowering volunteers within Sahiyo's network to co-facilitate sessions strengthened our ability to deliver culturally sensitive and survivor-centered support across multiple touchpoints.
- **Leverage Support Networks:** Drawing on our network of clinicians, advocates, and community leaders added depth and perspective to training sessions, such as enriching discussions on topics like providing trauma-informed care or learning about the physical and mental health impacts of FGM/C.



AWS Crisis Line for FGM/C Survivors

Expanding the AWS Crisis Line highlighted the importance of coupling service provision with outreach and community engagement. We found:

- **Increase Awareness:** Outreach campaigns and materials were essential in informing communities about the support line and encouraging its use. We realized that simply having the service available wasn't enough without active promotion. To address this, we developed targeted flyers and outreach emails for universities, culturally specific organizations, and related groups, particularly within California, AWS's primary service area.
- **Integrate Outreach with Service Delivery:** Proactive communication about the crisis line fostered trust and encouraged survivors to seek support. By consistently promoting the line in all events, training sessions, and outreach activities, we reinforced its visibility and relevance as a support services for FGM/C survivors.



KEY INSIGHTS FROM THIS PROJECT

KEY INSIGHTS

The lessons learned during this project informed several key insights, which have been grouped thematically to highlight the essential elements of our approach and their impact. These themes—ranging from trust-building to cultural competency—reflect the foundational principles of our work and highlight strategies that are adaptable to diverse contexts. Together, they represent a cohesive approach for supporting survivors and advancing the conversation around FGM/C.



Survivor-Centered Approach

A core component of the training was centering the narratives and voices of survivors. This survivor-centered approach humanized the issue, highlighting the presence of FGM/C in the U.S. and the diversity of survivor experiences. By incorporating survivor stories into the training—through digital storytelling and lived-experience narratives—we not only raised awareness but also informed the development of resources and services that respond to survivors as whole individuals, rather than solely as victims or survivors. This approach reinforced the importance of empathy, resilience, and survivor autonomy in creating effective and meaningful support systems.



Trust-building

In our experience, effective community engagement and trust-building are foundational to implementing meaningful FGM/C outreach and training programs. Drawing on existing relationships within the community was invaluable for identifying the right partners, establishing a shared mission, and gaining essential support for this project. These trusted connections helped break down logistical, most importantly, cultural and social barriers that might otherwise have limited participation over the 3 year period of this project—enhancing both the digital storytelling process and professional training sessions. Investing time and resources in building trust with community members and partners before beginning outreach activities allowed us to better understand the needs and concerns of the community, which led to more impactful training sessions and awareness raising efforts.



Bridging FGM/C and GBV

To meet the specific needs of service providers, we tailored our training to link FGM/C with broader GBV topics. This approach enabled providers to apply their existing skills in new contexts, deepening their understanding of FGM/C as a form of GBV while diversifying their approaches to survivor support. By prioritizing interactive, ongoing training sessions over the course of the project, providers were able to build confidence and cultural understanding incrementally, which was essential for addressing this complex topic effectively. Additionally, we incorporated empathy-driven exercises, such as client case studies, that were particularly impactful in reducing initial hesitancy. These exercises fostered greater sensitivity around FGM/C, allowing providers to engage with the topic more comfortably and compassionately.



Cultural Competency

Building cultural competency across the organization was recognized as a vital component early on, especially as we integrated FGM/C training for AWS personnel into their standard domestic violence training hours. Ongoing cultural competency training among facilitators and support staff not only strengthened the credibility of the program but also enhanced AWS's reputation for providing reliable, sensitive support. This commitment to cultural competency has not only improved AWS staff's confidence in supporting FGM/C survivors but has also attracted interest from other organizations eager to learn from and collaborate with us on this work.



Flexibility and Adaptability

Flexibility and adaptability were central to the project's success. We tailored various program components—such as training methods, content, and supplemental resources—to engage AWS staff and other partners in ways that felt relevant and empowering. This adaptability extended across all training sessions, from those delivered to AWS staff to those offered to external organizations and professionals. By continuously adjusting the program based on participant feedback and emerging needs, we ensured that each session evolved to be more impactful and well-aligned with the specific context of each group.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR ENGAGING GBV ORGANIZATIONS IN SUPPORTING FGM/C SURVIVORS

RECOMMENDATIONS

The collaboration between AWS, Sahiyo, and Silence Speaks offers a replicable model for integrating support for FGM/C survivors into broader GBV services. The following recommendations highlight key strategies and practical steps based on lessons learned from this partnership:



Conduct Baseline Assessments:

Assess your organization's current knowledge, comfort levels, and preparedness on being able to provide services related to FGM/C to understand where to start and how to design effective interventions.

- **Pre-Assessments:** Use surveys, focus groups, or interviews to identify staff knowledge gaps, hesitations, and readiness to address FGM/C survivors' needs.
- **Collaborative Feedback:** Incorporate open-ended questions to gather staff insights, concerns, or ideas for improvement.
- **Data-Driven Design:** Reassess after training to track progress and identify areas for continued growth. Utilize findings to shape training priorities, resource development, and service integration strategies.



Adapt Existing Services to Include FGM/C

Consider adapting existing GBV services to include FGM/C survivors. For example:

- **Crisis Lines:** Add questions about FGM/C to intake forms and ensure staff know how to provide culturally sensitive responses.
- **Case Management:** Equip support team with referral lists for medical, mental health, and legal resources tailored to FGM/C survivors.
- **Support Groups:** If the organization runs support groups for GBV survivors, create spaces where FGM/C survivors feel welcome and safe.



Partner With Experts and Individuals with Lived Experience

You don't need to be an expert in FGM/C to get started—partner with those who are:

- Collaborate with FGM/C experts, including provider specialists or organizations like Sahiyo to provide field-specific insights or training and technical assistance.
- Collaborate with survivor-led groups to ensure services and materials are sensitive to lived experiences.



Provide Staff With Practical Tools

Your staff need the right tools to support survivors. These could include:

- **FAQs:** A document answering common questions about FGM/C.
- **Referral Lists:** A regularly updated list of trusted organizations and professionals who specialize in FGM/C-related services.
- **Scenarios for Practice:** Real-life examples staff can use to role-play conversations with survivors or their families.



Engage With the Community

FGM/C is a sensitive topic, and engaging communities impacted by it requires trust and cultural understanding. To do this:

- Partner with cultural leaders and grassroots organizations to build credibility.
- Create outreach materials in multiple languages and ensure they are culturally appropriate.
- Focus on education and empowerment to foster open conversations.



Evaluate Progress

Evaluation helps you understand what's working and where to improve. Some ideas include:

- Use pre- and post-training surveys to measure changes in staff knowledge and confidence over time.
- Keep records of FGM/C-related services provided or cases to track trends and identify gaps in service.
- Collect and implement feedback from clients to address areas of improvement within your organization.

The integration of FGM/C survivor support into GBV services is an essential step toward ensuring equitable access to quality services addressing the diverse needs of survivors. The collaboration between AWS, Sahiyo, and Silence Speaks shows that organizations without prior experience in FGM/C can, with the right partnerships, tools, and commitment, develop effective, culturally sensitive, and survivor-centered programs.

LEVERAGING OPPORTUNITIES FOR GROWTH AND SUSTAINABILITY

OPPORTUNITIES LOOKING FORWARD

The success and impact of the collaboration between AWS and Sahiyo has enhanced support for survivors of FGM/C and opened doors to further structural change. The project's innovative approaches—of integrating FGM/C services into existing GBV frameworks, conducting tailored training programs, and fostering continuous learning have enabled Sahiyo to scale its efforts and broaden its reach.

US Department of Justice, Office of Violence Against Women, (DOJ OVW)

One notable example is Sahiyo's role as a partner in the U.S. Department of Justice's Office on Violence Against Women (DOJ-OVW) **Emerging Issues and Training and Technical Assistance (T&TA) grant program**. This grant aims to provide T&TA to existing grantees of DOJ OVW programs to address emerging forms or newly acknowledged form of GBV, including FGM/C. The project seeks to build capacity to ensure culturally sensitive, trauma-informed support for FGM/C survivors nationwide.

This project aims to:

- Reach a broader audience of service providers and advocates, equipping them with the knowledge and tools needed to support survivors and prevent FGM/C.
- Develop new, scalable approaches to survivor care and prevention, including customized training materials and community engagement models on FGM/C.
- Strengthen the ability of key sectors—such as healthcare, law enforcement, and social services—to address FGM/C as a critical public health and human rights issue.

Washington State Department of Health (WA DOH)

Sahiyo has partnered with the Washington State Department of Health (WA DOH) to support the implementation of Washington law RCW 43.70.614, in the [Prevention of and Response to FGM/C initiative](#).⁷ This legislation, passed in 2023, aims to prevent and respond to FGM/C through education, outreach, survivor services, and interagency coordination. Sahiyo is providing expert consultation, developing training programs, and creating culturally tailored educational materials to support Washington in addressing FGM/C amongst its diverse populations.

This project aims to:

- Enhance the capacity of Washington-based organizations to provide effective support to FGM/C survivors.
- Develop scalable models for education and outreach that can be adapted and implemented in other states.
- Advocate for survivor-informed, culturally sensitive policies and practices that address the complex needs of individuals impacted by FGM/C.

These projects allow for the creation of resources that have helped to scale innovative solutions around addressing FGM/C nationwide. As a result of these projects and partnerships, a more inclusive and informed network of service providers is being built to address the multifaceted challenges of FGM/C prevention and survivor support.

⁷Washington State Legislature. [RCW 43.70.614 Female genital mutilation—Education Program](#).n.d.

APPENDIX A: COLLABORATING ORGANIZATIONS AND NEW PARTNERS



Sahiyo

Mission Statement:

Our mission is to empower Asian and other communities to end female genital cutting and create positive social change through dialogue, education, and collaboration based on community involvement.”

Populations/Geographies Served:

While Sahiyo aims to work with all communities impacted by FGM/C in the United States, they focus on support to Asian communities, in recognition that many Asian, Pacific Islander Communities & Middle East & North Africa communities (API & MENA) are left out of the discourse on FGM/C. Thus Sahiyo specializes their focus on these communities impacted by FGM/C and residing in the U.S.

About the Organization:

Sahiyo formed in 2015 as an advocacy collective of South Asian and other survivors of female genital cutting (FGM/C), also known as female genital mutilation, to address the lack of acknowledgment of FGM/C as GBV and child abuse impacting U.S. women. Sahiyo empowers underrepresented communities to advocate for their inclusion within FGM/C discourse and support them to create systemic change to end this centuries-long practice. Sahiyo utilizes collaborative grassroots campaigns and storytelling techniques to train communities to lead this change. Sahiyo also partners with frontline workers (i.e. healthcare providers) to create culturally sensitive systems of care for survivors and with the government to address policy-level change.

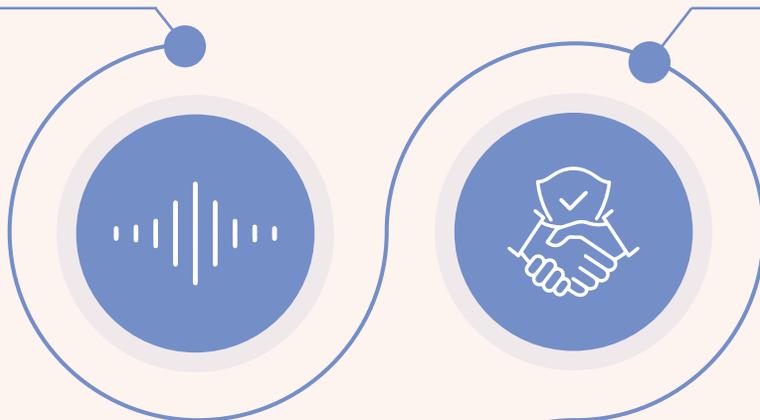


Programs

Sahiyo has many programs that aim to address the needs of their communities, including:

Voices to End FGM/C:

Voices to End FGM/C, launched in 2018, is a joint partnership by Sahiyo and Silence Speaks that uses digital storytelling to elevate the conversation of FGM/C in the United States. This project has since brought together 82 survivors through workshops to surface their personal experiences of FGM/C. These stories have been shared widely through online distribution, screening events, and media articles.



Bhaiyo: Male Allies:

Launched on the International Day of Zero Tolerance for FGM/C in 2021 to engage male-identifying individuals in the work to end FGM/C. The program works to achieve this goal by educating male-identifying individuals on how to support survivors of FGM/C and impacted communities and generating resources that raise awareness and advocacy.

Activists Retreats:

Every year, Sahiyo hosts an Activist Retreat to build a network and a support system of Bohra activists to advocate for the end of FGM/C. These retreats aim to create a safe space for individuals to learn more about the issue of FGM/C and build the capacity to engage in sustained post-retreat activism. The retreats allow activists to engage publicly or anonymously and has been growing to include individuals from all FGM/C impacted communities.

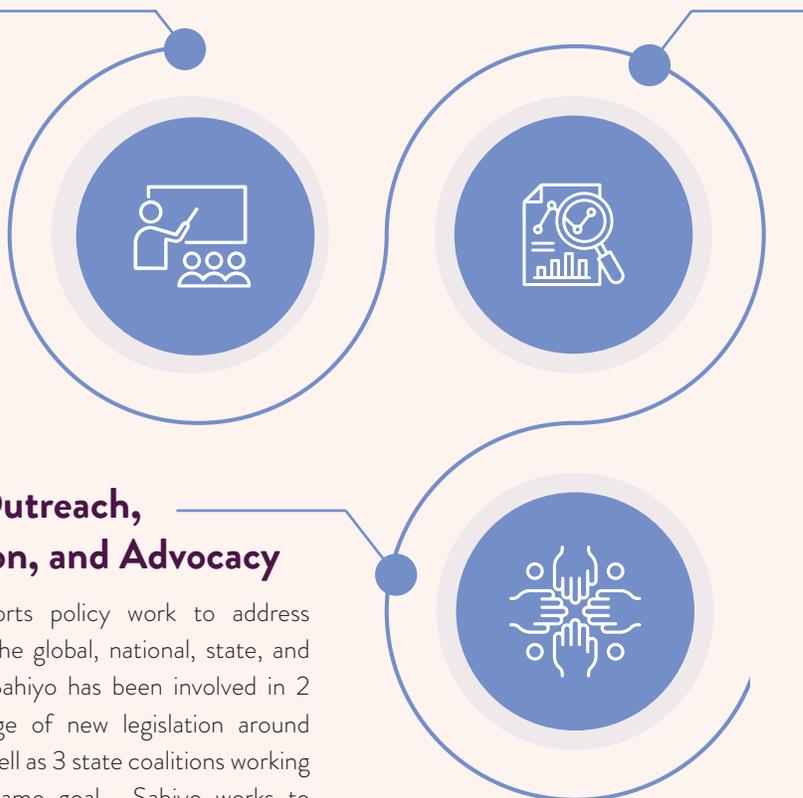
Community Outreach and Education

Sahiyo’s community outreach and education efforts are focused on raising awareness and fostering dialogue to end FGM/C. Through community webinars, public meetings, and media campaigns, Sahiyo engage with diverse audiences to inform and empower individuals. Educational resources are created to support those impacted by FGM/C, raise awareness, and to advocate for its elimination.



Training and Technical Assistance (T&TA):

Sahiyo’s T&TA programs are designed to equip professionals and community leaders with the knowledge and skills necessary to effectively address FGM/C. They offer comprehensive training sessions for healthcare providers, social workers, educators, and activists, focusing on the health implications, legal aspects, and cultural sensitivity surrounding FGM/C. These programs include workshops, webinars, and interactive sessions that provide practical tools and strategies for prevention, support, and advocacy.



Policy Outreach, Education, and Advocacy

Sahiyo supports policy work to address FGM/C on the global, national, state, and local levels. Sahiyo has been involved in 2 states’ passage of new legislation around FGM/C, as well as 3 state coalitions working toward the same goal. Sahiyo works to ensure that policies and laws are informed by and created in partnership with communities impacted by FGM/C in order to achieve wide-scale abandonment of the practice and to support survivors.

Research:

Knowing how research is critical to understanding the prevalence and impact of FGM/C, Sahiyo conducts innovative research to bridge the gap in data that exists on FGM/C globally. Sahiyo has pioneered major studies since its inception, including the first-ever global study on FGM/C in the Dawoodi Bohra community. In 2023, Sahiyo completed a project titled, “Critical Intersections”, which explores the intersection between FGM/C and other forms of oppression such as racism, Islamophobia, transphobia, and other forms of harm.

Contact:

Sahiyo

-  <https://sahiyo.org/>
-  info@sahiyo.org
-  +1 (508) 263-0112
-  45 Prospect Street
Cambridge, MA 02139





Asian Women's Shelter (AWS)

Mission Statement:

"The mission of AWS is to eliminate domestic violence by promoting the social, economic and political self-determination of women and all survivors of violence and oppression."

Populations/Geographies Served:

While AWS primarily addresses the cultural and language needs of immigrant, refugee, and U.S.-born Asian and Arab women and their children, it extends its services to individuals of all genders, ages, races, nationalities, language communities, abilities, and income levels.

About the Organization:

AWS was founded in 1988 to address the urgent and unmet needs of survivors of domestic violence and human trafficking, especially those who are immigrant or refugee women, children, LGBTQ+/GNB, and/or youth. AWS welcomes survivors of all genders, ages, races, nationalities, language communities, abilities, income-levels and more. The survivors we work with every day embody courage, hope, and incredible determination. They inspire our unrelenting commitment to end violence in our families, communities, and world.



Programs:



Direct Services:

- **Shelter Program:** Safe, confidential housing Emergency services, including food, clothing and ongoing health services. Involves multilingual support, culturally competent services, intensive case management, and coordination of support services (i.e., legal advocacy, counseling, mentoring, etc).
- **Multi-Lingual Access Model (MLAM) Program:** To overcome language barriers, AWS utilizes a pool of multilingual advocates and volunteers, ensuring services are accessible in 41 languages, with over 24 Asian languages (i.e., Vietnamese, Japanese, Tagalog, Hindi, and Punjabi).
- **DV and Trafficking Crisis Line & FGM/C Support Line:** Trained crisis line workers respond to calls and connect callers with language advocates when needed. Callers can get over-the-phone support, safety planning, access to AWS services, and information and referrals.
- **Case Management:** Each resident at the shelter works closely with a Women's or Children's Advocate to address their short-term and long-term needs and goals. They are supported through intensive individual case management, counseling sessions, medical/mental health/immigration appointments, the facilitation of safe, enjoyable outings and transition assistance into permanent housing.
- **Queer Asian Women and Transgender Support (QAWTS) Program:** Established in 1991, QAWTS addresses intimate partner violence within the LGBTQ+ community, offering comprehensive services and innovative prevention strategies tailored to queer survivors.
- **Asian Anti-Trafficking Collaborative (AATC):** Provides legal and social services to trafficked people, including assistance with visas, shelter, case management, interpretation, advocacy and independent living skills. In addition to providing training and technical assistance to build awareness and response among other community-based organizations
- **Ngoc Thi Pham Fund:** An educational scholarship program that is specifically designated for domestic violence survivors and their children. Funds are used for residents at the shelter to assist with school supplies, textbooks, tuition, and other education-related expenses.





Community Building:

- **Public Awareness:** Community education events that facilitate dialogue and learning on topics such as Anti-trafficking and Domestic Violence 101. In addition to participating in public awareness opportunities, such as conferences, campaigns, and community fairs.
- **Grassroots Mobilization:** 1) *Chai Chat*, an initiative that reaches out to the Asian and Pacific Islander LGBTQ+ communities to equip them with tools and strategies for practicing and promoting healthy relationships in all areas of their lives. 2) *Multilingual Digital Storytelling*, a space for advocates and survivors of violence to share their stories using the creative tools of digital imagery and audio recording. 3) *Volunteer/ MLAM Mobilization*, training course to become educated anti-violence activists and domestic violence counselors. 4) *Community Action Teams (CATs)*, teams formed by volunteer and language advocates that work on projects or initiatives that are grounded in their own skills and capacity related to pressing needs, current issues and creative opportunities in their communities. 5) *Creative Interventions*, a collaborative project with partners based in Oakland, working to craft an ‘on-the-ground’ toolkit for those doing community-based violence interventions.
- **Systems Advocacy & Change:** AWS seeks to avoid the duplication of services and build a cohesive, diverse network of resources for survivors who are seeking support. By encouraging community collaboratives, they help break down the isolation and create a community response toward ending violence against women.
- **Capacity Building:** 1) *Training*, technical assistance opportunities offered nationally and internationally on anti-oppression frameworks and practices, anti-homophobia, cultural competency, language access and on the intersection of domestic violence and anti-trafficking work. 2) *National Peer-to-Peer Technical Assistance*, a peer-to-peer model tailored to support U.S.-based organizations that are focused on domestic violence, sexual assault, human trafficking and stalking. 3) *Powerful Peer Forums*, a peers forum at which representatives from participating organizations of the National Peer-to-Peer TA come together to engage in meaningful dialogue, strategy-sharing and movement building work.

24-Hour
Crisis Line

1-877-751-0880

Contact:

Asian Women’s Shelter

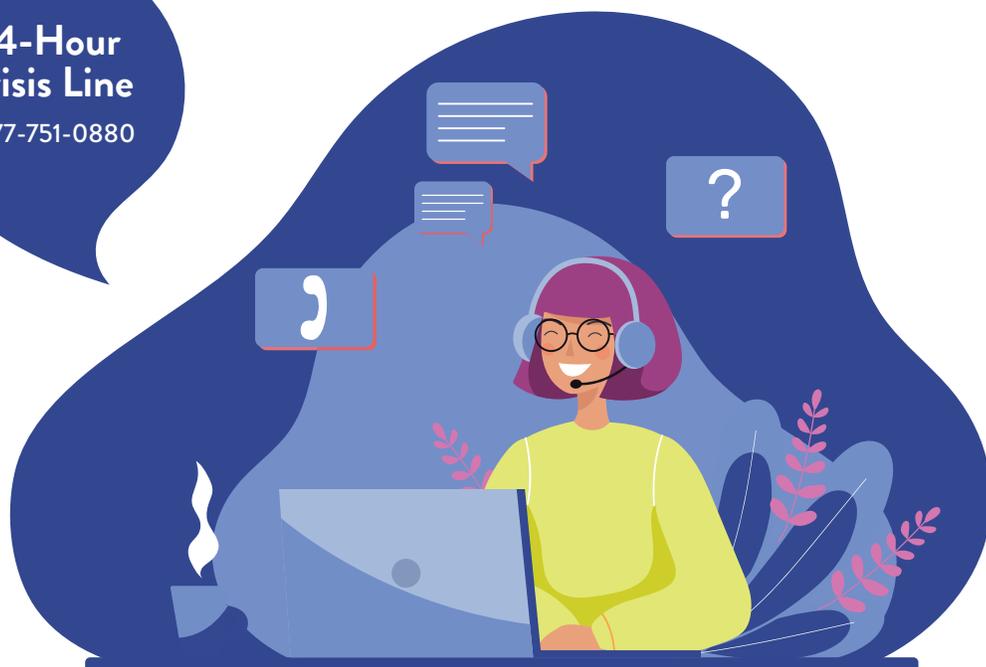
<https://www.sfaws.org/>

info@sfaws.org

Phone: (415) 751-7110

Fax: (415) 751-0806

3543 18th Street #19
San Francisco, CA 94110





Silence Speaks

Mission Statement:

Enhancing wellbeing. Building community. Advocating for justice.

About the Project:

Silence Speaks uses storytelling, creative arts practices, and participatory media to support the telling and witnessing of stories that all too often remain unspoken and unheard. Our work at the intersection of culture, health, and human rights creates a lasting record of courageously outspoken voices.

Current Projects:

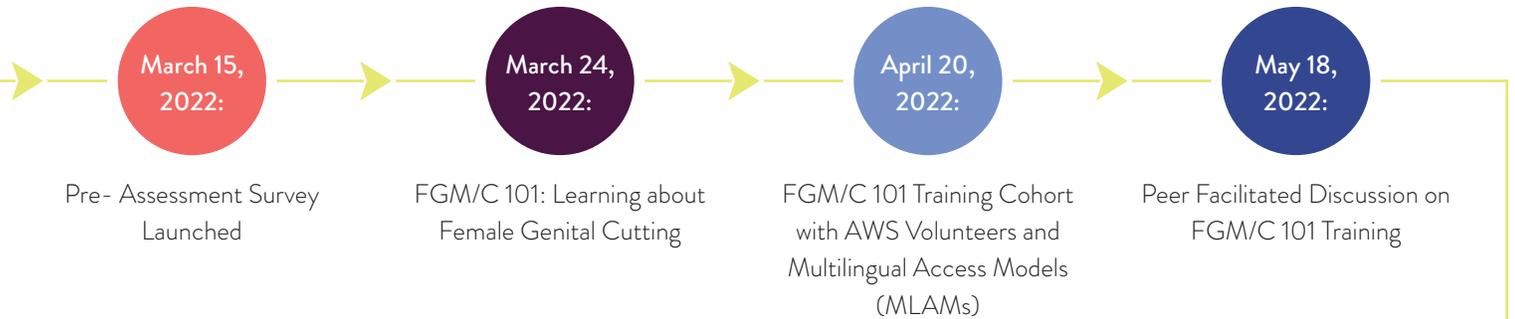
- **Multi-Lingual Storytelling: Asian and Pacific Islanders speak out for justice-** Digital storytelling with diverse API communities to frame stories as training and advocacy tools for educating service providers.
- **Stories of Home: Working in solidarity with refugees and immigrants in the U.S.-** Storytelling and artmaking in collaboration with refugee and immigrant groups, to challenge xenophobia and racism.
- **Rainbow Dialogies: Elevating the stories of LGBTQIA+ communities in India-** Using performance and digital storytelling to elevate queer voices and counter the relentless verbal and physical abuse they face.
- **Voices to End FGM/C: Enhancing survivor wellbeing, building a movement of advocates-** Engaging survivors and witnesses in sharing personal stories of the impact of cutting on their lives, and sharing stories for education and advocacy.

During the course of the project, new partnerships were developed with organizations that welcomed Sahiyo to train their members on considerations for FGM/C support and engage in outreach and awareness raising events. Ranging from medical institutions to government entities and community based organizations, these collaborations served as opportunities to raise awareness about FGM/C and explore strategies to enhance FGM/C survivor-centered support services.

- [AshaKiran](#)
- [Bridgewell](#)
- [Brigham and Women's Hospital](#)
- [End FGM/C Singapore](#)
- [George Washington University \(GWU\) - Milken School of Public Health](#)
- [Gulabi Stories](#)
- [Illinois Coalition Against Sexual Assault \(ICASA\)](#)
- [MassNow](#)
- [Northeastern University](#)
- [US Department of Justice, Office of Violence Against Women, \(DOJ OVW\)](#)
- [San Francisco Domestic Violence Consortium \(SF DVC\)](#)
- [South Asian SOAR](#)
- [Tight Lipped](#)
- [Virginia Department of Criminal Justice Services](#)
- [Washington State Department of Health\(WA DOH\)](#)
- [WomanKind](#)

APPENDIX B: TRAININGS WITH AWS MILESTONES

First Training with Asian Women’s Shelter (AWS) Staff and Crisis Line Counselors (CLCs)! This training provided an overview on the impact of FGM/C as a form of GBV, dispelled common misconceptions, and addressed its prevalence in the United States, including the legal landscape.



March 15,
2022:

Pre- Assessment Survey
Launched

March 24,
2022:

FGM/C 101: Learning about
Female Genital Cutting

April 20,
2022:

FGM/C 101 Training Cohort
with AWS Volunteers and
Multilingual Access Models
(MLAMs)

May 18,
2022:

Peer Facilitated Discussion on
FGM/C 101 Training

AWS learns more about the physical health impacts of FGM/C and treatment opportunities to address these issues (i.e., pelvic floor therapy and clitoral restorative survey). This training was supported by healthcare providers and survivor advocates that specialize in FGM/C trauma-informed care.

- Angela Peabody, [Global Women P.E.A.C.E. Foundation](#)
- Dr. Crista Johnson, [UMass Chan Medical School](#)
- Dr. Nazneen Vasi, [Body Harmony Physical Therapy](#)
- Dr. Marci Bowers, [ClitorAid](#)



Second ever training with AWS. This training provided a more in- depth exploration of FGM/C through the application of learning activities to help AWS navigate tools created by Sahiyo to understand how best to support survivors who call their crisis line.

- FAQ Scavenger Hunt
- Hard Skills Brainstorming Session
- FGM/C Survivor Scenarios
- California FGM/C Referral Contacts

February
22, 2022:

The Physical Impacts of
FGM/C and Healing Training

August
2022:

Sahiyo and AWS Announce
FGM/C Crises Line

July 30,
2022:

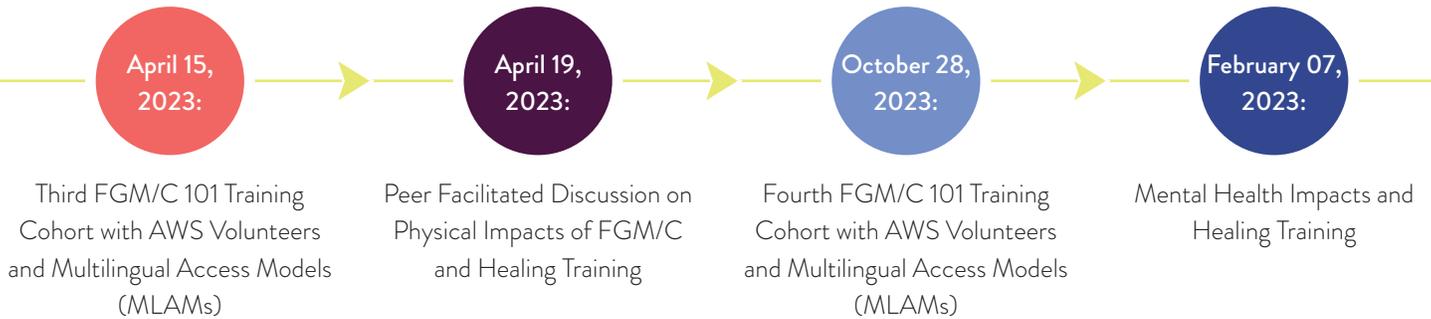
Active Learning Training-
Engaging Survivors of FGM/C

June 18,
2022:

Second FGM/C 101 Training
Cohort with AWS Volunteers
and Multilingual Access Models
(MLAMs)

AWS learns more about the various ways that trauma can manifest throughout the body and impact one's mental health. This training was supported by professional counselors that work closely with survivors of FGM/C and other forms of GBV.

- [Jo Keogh LPCA](#)
- [Joanna Vergoth CSW NCPsyA](#)



AWS gains insights into how FGM/C is deeply intertwined with other forms of social and systemic discrimination, impacting one's experience with FGM/C and seeking support. Findings from Sahiyo's [Critical Intersections](#) study were uplifted to frame challenges and hesitations with integrating FGM/C services as opportunities for cross-collaboration between organizations.



APPENDIX C: RESEARCH ON INTEGRATING GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE SUPPORT SERVICES

This pilot project was the subject of a research project evaluating the benefits and challenges of providing holistic services rather than siloed services to address FGM/C. The goal of the research was to better understand GBV service integration, while simultaneously exploring the perspectives of direct service providers on organizational collaboration as a means to support survivors of FGM/C in the United States. Insights are shared from interviews conducted with Asian Women’s Shelter Crisis Line Counselors, reflecting on the training and learning processes outlined in this report

Read about Sarrah Hussain’s research on Sahiyo’s [blog](#) and read the full report [here](#).



Integrating Gender-Based Violence Support Services

Sarrah Hussain
Program in Human Biology, Stanford University



Female Genital Mutilation

- Form of Gender Based Violence (GBV), also known as Female Genital Cutting (FGM/C)
- 200 million** women and girls worldwide
- 513,000** women and girls in the United States
- Typically performed on girls **ages 2-7 years**

Short Term, Physical	Long Term, Physical	Long Term, Emotional
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Pain Urine retention Infections Bleeding, Swelling Cysts 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Pregnancy complications Menstruation issues Sexual dysfunction Increased infection 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Depression, Anxiety PTSD, Self-Harm Somatization Sleep issues

UN Policy Note

- Sustainable Development Goal 5.3:**
 - End the practice of FGM/C to achieve gender equality by 2030
- Isolated GBV initiatives could benefit from sharing of knowledge and **coordinated efforts**
- To allow for:
 - increased coherence
 - better use of **time, knowledge, funds**



Project Aims

Evaluate effectiveness of Sahiyo’s training program

Understand integration effects & areas for improvement

Inform future collaboration between Sahiyo/AWS

What are the benefits and challenges of integrating FGM/C and Domestic Violence support services?

Services Integration

Sahiyo
FGM/C Organization

3, 2-hour training sessions
Monthly support calls
Reference documents
Ongoing advice/support

Asian Women's Shelter
DV Organization

Employees use trainings/new knowledge to better support

Survivors
of DV and FGM/C

Qualitative Methodology

March-May 2022
Help lead 3 trainings
Sahiyo collects pre/post training surveys

Winter 2022
Design Study

July 2022
IRB approval

August 2022
AWS opens hotline to FGM/C survivors

Nov-Dec 2022
Semi-structured interviews with 15-20 AWS employees

Winter 2023
Analyze data with multipass coding

Spring 2023
Dissemination of findings

Researcher involvement: longstanding relationship with Sahiyo as a previous employee of 2 years

Implications

Broadens support for survivors of FGM/C

Increases conversation/awareness about the issue

Prevents continuation of the cycle of violence

Adds to limited research

Encourages collaboration among organization

Addresses United Nations SDG 5.3

Current Support Landscape

Health Services

Zero Tolerance

Legal Action

Psychosocial Support

Community Leaders

Education

Under funded

Under staffed

Siloed

Community Organizations

Sahiyo: United Against FGC

Goal: Eliminate FGM/C through dialogue and collaboration

- Amplifies survivor voices
- Empowers communities to stop FGM/C
- Raises awareness for FGM/C

Asian Women's Shelter (AWS)

Goal: Eliminate domestic violence through survivor-centered care

- Shelter, food, clothing, health services
- Culturally competent case management
- Community education about DV

Asian Women's Shelter



www.sfaws.org



info@sfaws.org



Sahiyo



www.sahiyo.org



info@sahiyo.org



**ASIAN
WOMEN'S
SHELTER**



CONTACT US

sahiyo
United Against Female Genital Cutting



Silence Speaks



www.silencespeaks.org



amylenita@storycenter.org



Voices to
END FGM/C

Voices to End FGM/C



www.voicestoendfgmc.org



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