

The 1st South Asian American Health Conference
General Session

Keynote Presentation: Who are South Asian Americans, Cultural and linguistic Diversity, Issues and
Challenges, Urgency for Action

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Good morning. I just wanted to thank the planners of the conference and UMDNJ for putting this really critical piece together and then also for inviting me to speak. It's a privilege and really very humbling to be in front of all of you. And I wanted to thank you all for being here this early. So [End side 1] ...and also because I'm hoping that I can tell [] whether you've seen some of this data before, I'm going to do a very brief overview just to give some context to the more detail that we're going to hear later today.

So basically, we're going to do just a review of Census 2000 and data about South Asian Americans in the US and also in New Jersey because it's our space here today. So I want to ask a question, how many folks in the room filled out a census questionnaire in 2000? Okay. And out of those folks who did fill out one, thank you, for one. But then number two is, how many filled out a long form? You would know the difference, definitely. Okay. So anyone who filled out a census form has seen this question, which is basically the question on race and this is where we get our data about South Asian Americans and basically all Americans. So I just wanted to highlight the question and identify the areas where we have specific Asian categories. People could write in their category. And I'm going to go into some more detail. But you've heard a lot about the census and you've also heard about under count, and I wanted to just make a quick note that the decennial census is just a snapshot of the people who are in the country on April 1, 2000. So it's regardless of immigration status. It's regardless of how long you've been in the country, whether you're a citizen, whether anything else. Even if you were visiting you could have filled out a census form if you got one. A lot of people didn't. And the under count is not analogous to the undocumented population, although the undocumented population was more resistant or more scared, it doesn't necessarily mean that if there's an undercount of 4000 that means that that's the undocumented population. Just so people are clear on that because that comes up a lot.

Some differences between census 2000 and previous enumerations. The Asian and Native Islander, and Other Pacific Islander was combined into one race in previously enumerations. But census 2000 it was split. And this is significant, especially for the Pacific Islander population. Number two is

that the Census Bureau gave us more detail on Asian groups. They collected detail in the past but they did more detail, and I'll show that on the next slide. And the respondents, for the first time, could select more than one race. Which really means that the data was very, very rich this time and for the first time we can really capture the complexity of our changing population. Here I just wanted to highlight that in red and with the stars, for those folks who have the printouts, you can see that the red categories are the new ones, and Bangladeshi, Pakistani and Sri Lankans, for the first time are just aggregated in this data. This is absolutely critical for us. This is really, really critical for anyone studying South Asian populations, especially in the centers, such as California, New Jersey and New York, Huston and Chicago and other places, of course. But this is the first time that we – we got population totals and we got some other data in the past, but now all of the sample data from the long forms that some of you filled out, which include income and all the really good stuff, we can actually get for these communities as well.

I wanted to just highlight, because we can capture more than one race it's very, very important to note that the Bureau gives us two different numbers for a specific race category. One is race alone and is alone or in combination with any other group. It is absolutely critical when we talk about members to recognize this. And as you can see, this is a New York City number for Bangladeshi's, and Bangladeshi Americans number just under 5000 in 1990 and the census total in 2000 for Bangladeshi alone was almost 20,000. Not too shabby. It's still a growth of 280 plus percent. But if you look at the full number, of folks who marked Bangladeshi either alone or with anything else, it's a tremendous growth. This is one of the largest and fastest growing populations in New York City. And that is important data that we need to – it's been captured. We need to make sure that we understand that.

Number two, South Asians in the nation and in New Jersey. I wanted to retread this question of what are South Asian Americans. The common cohort that we've heard over the years, the most commonly accepted definition includes these seven nations. And then it's also very important to recognize Diaspora populations, from Europe, from Australia, from Canada, from the Pacific Islands, from the Caribbean especially, and from Africa. So I just wanted to note that. And the South Asian data, again, the Census Bureau does not aggregate South Asian as a race category. So there is an aggregated Asian category and there's just aggregated individual groups. So Pakistani, Indian, Bangladeshi and Sri Lankan. So we have to manually aggregate that data if we want to show a South Asian number. And you have to be very careful because you can't add certain groups together. You cannot add race alone or in combination with other groups. This is a little too much detail. If you're interested you can feel free to ask me personally.

So here's a quick chart just of the nation. This is Census 200 and I just circled a couple of the really interesting numbers. For one, this double – this growth of 100% or more for the Asian Indian population. The Bangladeshi population in the nation grew tremendously, the Pakistani population in the nation grew tremendously. This underlines the complexities, the diversity and some of the challenges that you all face and that we all face in our work with the communities as they grow and as they continue to become more diverse.

This is just an idea of where the population change occurred. This is by absolute numbers. So there are some places that are not surprises. Texas, Illinois, California and New Jersey and New York. But look at some of the other states. I think it's very important to note the South. There is a lot of growth in the South. There's growth in the Midwest. And there are also some surprises. You can't really see it but in some of these other states here we have some significant growth. And that's also important to recognize.

This is in the metropolitan – the New York City and Northern Jersey areas. Again, I think for folks who work here, folks who grew up here, this is not necessarily a surprise. We've seen the tremendous growth in New York City and also in Northern New Jersey, but it's not only limited to the enclaves that we all know of, the neighborhoods here or in Hudson County. So these are just the numbers for New Jersey and again, just highlighting some of the details, I think. This is just a useful chart. And you should feel free to reproduce these numbers for anything that you need.

This is a little breakdown by county in New Jersey just, again, to underline where folks are. Again, probably no surprise that Middlesex is the largest concentration, but then you also have Hudson County, Bergen, Morris, Essex and then the remaining counties in New Jersey constitute about a third of the population. The total South Asian alone population is 184,000 as per Census 2000. Again, there are folks who have marked more than one race, keep that in mind. So I have a little bit of detail here around the education of South Asians in New Jersey. Any time you aggregate this data it does, as you all know, it doesn't necessarily tell you the whole picture but I thought this was an important census note. About 13% of South Asians did not have a high school diploma. These are folks 25 and older. Compared with 18% of all New Jersey residents. 78% of South Asians had some form of post-secondary education, compared with 53% of all New Jersey residents. And 32% have graduate or professional degrees compared with 11% of New Jersey residents. And again, this is connected to immigration patterns, but I think it is important to note that it is a diverse population. And I think that affects our work as we move forward in trying to address some of the health disparities.

English proficiency. I think this is an absolutely critical slide and absolute critical data as well. About 70% speak English very well. This is self administered, again, the census form. For New Jersey

residence the response has been 11% that spoke English less than very well. We're talking about 30% for South Asians. That is a critical, critical number to keep in mind. And it's also important to recognize that when people are asked this question it's been seen that people round themselves up a little bit. I speak English okay, so I'll say very well. But even with the responses themselves, this is really, really important for us to note. Just a note of which languages are spoken at home for South Asians out of those who responded: Gujarti was the top language at 47,000 plus. Hindi, Punjabi, Urdu and then it's a little bit challenging to figure out what the other languages are, just because of the way that the Bureau reports. But this is just a snapshot for your info.

Occupation of South Asians in New Jersey, computer specialists, 13.5% of all computer specialists in New Jersey were of South Asian origin. Physicians and surgeons 13.1%, Lab and physical scientist about 10%, and then transportation occupations about 7.6% and motor vehicle operators about 7%. So this is just, again, of many, many trades these are just some that I decided to highlight. And then this is citizenship status. Just as an indicator, I think the little piece on the corner here just highlights the tremendous growth in the population, or just a breakdown – before 1980 we had about 22,000 folks come in who were foreign born. Between 80 and 89, 43,000 and after 1990 about 77,000. So a lot of the folks who have come in since 1990 are actually still not naturalized. So that may be important to note for your own work as we move forward.

So that is a very, very quick tour of some of the data. I'm sure that you all have questions and you should feel free to ask me. So I want to thank everyone, again, for coming.