

**A Study of the Influence of Culture and Family on Second Generation Afghan
Women Aged 18-25 Living in the United States**

By

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Abstract

Objectives

This study aims to increase understanding of Afghan family and culture influence on romantic relationship development and reproductive decisions in second-generation Afghan women living in the United States.

Methods

Participants were second-generation Afghan-American women between the ages of 18-25, born in the United States, and were not legally married. Data was collected through five semi-structured interviews.

Results

The study identified several themes: romantic relationships outside of marriage are considered taboo, gender differences in relationships, parental approval is important, limited communication about relationships, and a hesitancy to discuss topics surrounding reproductive health.

Conclusions

Overall, this study found the influence of Afghan culture was present in regards to relationship development and reproductive decisions among participants; however, religion was identified as having an even larger influence.

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Problem Statement

There is limited evidence on the influence of culture and family on healthcare decisions, including use of contraceptive methods, among second-generation Afghan women living in the United States. This issue is important to the field of Maternal and Child Health (MCH) because research among other populations has shown that cultural and familial influences can greatly impact women's healthcare decisions and ultimately their health status. Understanding the strengths and implications of these influences among those who may be considered more removed from the original culture (i.e., second-generation) is key for informing future health education and services for this population.

Research Questions

This study aims to answer two main questions:

- 1) How does an Afghan family and culture influence romantic relationship development in second-generation Afghan women in the United States (U.S.)?
- 2) How does an Afghan family and culture influence reproductive decisions (current and future) of second-generation Afghan women in the U.S.?

Background

Second-generation immigrants are those individuals whose parents left their country of origin to settle in a new nation and thus started their families within the new country.¹ This new generation of individuals is born in a country different from their parents and often the rest of their family. The United States is often seen as a country of opportunities, a view that draws in immigrants from all over the world who wish to increase their status. Afghanistan has been a country in turmoil for decades and many of

its citizens have chosen to immigrate to the United States to escape the conflict. The first large movement of Afghan immigrants to the United States occurred after the Soviet invasion of the country in 1978.² These individuals and families can be found in large numbers in areas in Northern Virginia, Northern California, and New York.² These individuals have settled, had families, and established large communities within the country. The children of these immigrants have grown up and transitioned from adolescence to young adulthood in the United States with little exposure to political conflict in comparison to the youth of their parents; however, the Afghan culture brought over with their parents' generation may remain a strong influence.³ The number of Afghans in North America is uncertain, though there is an estimated 300,000 Afghans living primarily in the United States.³

Studies have indicated the presence of higher rates of reproductive health complications amongst Muslim immigrant women internationally, though data was not found on the rate of complication amongst second generation women.⁴ Research to understand how the Afghan culture influences health is key in promoting a healthy lifestyle, such as timely and appropriate health service utilization, in second-generation Afghan women living within in the United States.

Immigration and Acculturation

A study of the impact of acculturation on Afghan immigrant health is necessary given the limited data in this area. Studies of acculturation within the United States have been focused on the growing Latino immigrant population, however studies of acculturation amongst Afghan immigrants and their children are scarce. Acculturation is broadly defined as the “process by which individuals adopt the attitudes, values, customs,

beliefs, and behaviors of another culture.”⁵ The loss of culture among immigrants and their children is often attributed to acculturation. Previous studies of acculturation have identified varying levels and patterns amongst generations. Portes and Rumbaut (2001) identify three types of acculturation within their study: consonant, dissonant, and selective acculturation. This study identifies closely with selective acculturation, identifying the continued presence of the original family culture and retention of language and norms.⁶ Overall, this form of acculturation is associated with biculturalism of individuals.

Earlier studies on adolescent identity and development further supported the strength of the influence of family on the development of the second generation. Immigrant families often form their own social environment and work to preserve aspects of their culture of origin.⁷ For example, one previous study on second generation immigrant Algerian, Antillean, Moroccan, Portuguese and Vietnamese adolescents in France, identified the variance of cultural traditions preserved by different families.⁷ Experiences of each family member and differing values provide varying influences on the second generation whose experiences of their original familial culture only comes second hand from family and perhaps friends.

Relationship Development

An individual’s family and culture can have a deep influence throughout their lives and potentially the lives of those who they interact with on a regular basis. It is the culture one grows up with that has the most significant influence on the development of an individual’s sense of self.⁸ An earlier study focused on second generation Afghans living in Iran, found that cultural influence and more specifically family may have a large

influence on the individual's choice in partner.⁸ Studies have also shown the key role of family expectations on those in the second generation, as many second generation immigrants experience the culture through their interaction with family.^{8,9}

Previous studies also identified the importance of friends on the development of a cultural identity and further influences within the second generation. One study examined the influence of friends of the same cultural background as a greater influence amongst second generation South Asian Muslims in the United States than friends not from the same cultural background.¹⁰ This study was in contrast to findings from a previous study of adolescents in France of varying ethnic backgrounds, examining the importance of family traditions and values on the development of individuals.⁷ Thus this study examines the possible influences of both family and friends on a young woman's romantic relationship development and reproductive health decisions.

Issues Faced by Afghan Women & Gender Roles

Examining the influence of culture is key in understanding gender roles within a society and how they may be translated into the second generation within a new country. These gender roles may be evidenced through the examination of relationship formation and marital norms and expectations passed between generations.⁸ Gender roles remain a source of contention amongst differing generations of Afghans, with second generation women adopting more egalitarian attitudes and practices.⁹ These gender roles may also effect relationship development, for example, dating without the intention of marriage is frowned upon amongst young Afghan women, however the same would not be true for young Afghan men.

Health Care Needs

Current gender roles within Afghanistan place restrictions on women's movement and access to healthcare, which may in turn influence the children of Afghan immigrants living in the United States and other liberal countries. Great strides have been made in Afghanistan towards improving women's access to reproductive health care, however, outside of the major cities many women still face difficulties in receiving the care they need.¹¹ The strict Islamic views on women's sexuality have created a gap in women's knowledge on sexual and reproductive health, including that of contraception options.

A study conducted in Australia among young Muslim women, found that participants' avoidance of sexual knowledge led to a decreased understanding of safe sex practices.⁴ In contrast, the prevalence of contraceptive use amongst married women in Afghanistan has increased, though rates remain low.¹² A secondary analysis of the nationally representative Afghanistan Health Survey 2012, found approximately 13% of married women between the ages of 15-49 reported the use of modern contraceptive methods.¹³ Data on unmarried women is scarce because of the strong conservative Islamic views within the country frowning upon any sexual activities prior to or outside of marriage; stressing the importance of virginity. Young women who engage in sexual relationships or even discuss sexual health topics risk their own reputation, as well as, the reputation and honor of their family.⁴ Any negative view of a young woman's reputation may lead to her being ostracized and limit her ability to find an adequate suitor, thus negatively impacting her future welfare.⁴ The importance of reputation and honor has been carried over from the first generation and remains as a strong influencer amongst

their families, though it's immediate influences and possible consequences have not been studied.

The number of second generation immigrants within the United States increases every day. A greater understanding of the influences of their “home” culture and familial influences is needed in order to address future health implications. Previous works examining the struggles of Afghan women have focused on first generation immigrant women, as well as, educational attainment within the second generation.^{14, 15} This study seeks to fill a gap in the current literature with a focus on the implications of cultural and familial influences on romantic relationship development and reproductive decisions and healthcare utilization of second generation Afghan women aged 18-25 living in the United States.

Methods

Participants were unmarried second-generation women born in the United States between 18 to 25 years of age. These women had at least one parent who emigrated from Afghanistan prior to their birth. Participants were recruited through contact with Afghan student and women's organizations, as well as, Afghan American professional organizations, through which contact was made through listserv emails and flyers. Semi-structure interviews were conducted ranging from approximately 1 to 2 hours in length. The interviews were audio-recorded with notes taken during the interview. An interview guide was developed based on the two main research questions of interest. These questions focused on respondents' family and family dynamics, their opinions on dating and relationships, family and cultural views on dating and relationships, and shifted to questions about reproductive health and discussion of family planning and contraceptive

use with family and friends. Ethical approval was received from the University of North Carolina Institutional Review Board. All participants provided written informed consent.

Upon completion of the interview the audio recording was transcribed and coded by the researcher. Codes were developed prior to completion of data analysis, however upon analysis additional inductive codes were developed. A matrix was developed to clarify themes and display relevant quotes.

Results

A total of five participants were recruited into the study. Interviewees ranged from age 18-25 years of age, with a median age of approximately 21 years. A majority of the respondents were undergraduate students, in their Junior and Senior years. Respondents overall varied in educational background.

A variety of codes were identified prior to the coding of the interviews. Some of these codes included: biculturalism, secret, family, marriage, and religion. Religion was the most commonly used deductive code, as a majority of the respondents identified the importance of religious ideals over the cultural norms. Though identified as similar to religious views, the Afghan cultural views were not given the priority over the individual's religious beliefs. In regards to characteristics of an ideal partner, all five respondents identified no requirement for their partner to be Afghan but rather one of similar beliefs. Specifically, an individual with "*similar religious belief*" and similar cultural ideals however, one respondent identified that the cultural beliefs could not be held "*to the point where it...drowns everything out.*"

Codes of Farsi/Dari terms were developed as a result of consistent use amongst all respondents. The most commonly used code by all respondents was the Farsi/Dari word

“maymanee.” Respondents identified “*maymanees*” as large gatherings either at home or at some type of banquet hall or restaurant attended by families and friends of Afghan descent. These gatherings or parties were identified as a large portion of their familial gatherings. Respondents consistently stated gatherings with extended family, who lived in close proximity, occurred at least once a month and gatherings with out-of-state family members occurred at least once or twice a year. As identified by the respondents the importance of family is a large part of Afghan culture.

Respondents all stated spending large amounts of time with both their immediate and extended family. One respondent stated that she spent time with her cousins almost every week:

“If I don’t see them during the week I definitely see them over the weekend.”

There were six major themes that arose when coding the transcriptions: the taboo nature of romantic relationships without a goal of marriage, marriage and traditional relationships, differences observed in regards to gender and relationships, the importance of familial and parental approval, communication barriers, and hesitancy to discuss topics surrounding reproductive health.

Taboo Nature of Relationships

Interviewees had various personal opinions on romantic relationships. A key distinction to be made is the taboo nature of relationships refers only to romantic relationships other than those involving engagement or marriage, and included any realm outside of courting with the primary intention of marriage. There were varied responses amongst the participants, however one common theme arose when asked about the views

of family and culture on relationships. When asked about the cultural views on romantic dating relationships that they have learned from their family one respondent stated:

“I feel like it’s really taboo to talk about it, so we never really do...”

This sentiment was echoed in later interviews with respondents. Amongst the respondents no direct reference was made to the views on sexual relationships within the Afghan culture and amongst their own families. However when asked to describe cultural views on what she referred to as the “western idea of dating,” on one respondent alluded to the negative view of sexual relationships outside of marriage, however she did not directly refer to sex.

“I feel like that just doesn’t exist. It’s frowned upon and if someone finds out your dating someone it’s just a rumor and you’re seen as...if you’re a girl, I think, you’re seen as like, oh she has a boyfriend, she’s dirty or whatever. It’s just a really bad stigma. Yeah, it just doesn’t exist. Either you’re single or you’re engaged or you’re married.”

Though a topic that was not discussed, the taboo of romantic dating relationships was widely understood and recognized view amongst the respondents. One respondent described the source of their understanding of this taboo as gained not from direct means but rather in a roundabout way.

“They kind of teach their kids...um they give their kids direction and how to live their life, what they’re supposed to do, but they never tell you what you’re not supposed to do.”

“...You know you kind of pick up on like, just on those social etiquette of what your parents expect from you and if they never really bring up the possibility of dating you just assume that it’s not allowed”

Despite the taboo nature of relationships, respondents acknowledged the presence of secret relationships amongst others within the community. However, none of the respondents stated they themselves took part in any hidden relationship.

“I feel like, I feel like it’s really hard on our generation when it comes to dating because...I’ve never heard of a case where it wasn’t done in secrecy.”

Respondents identified the issues that arise from this view of relationships that may occur among adolescents and young adults. This was another common thread that linked greatly with the key focus on the importance of parental respect and approval.

Marriage & Traditional Relationships

Marriage, though discussed, was not a code used as widely as it was initially believed it would be. Though respondents identified marriage as important they conveyed that it was not a current primary focus, but rather they were focusing on their education in the coming years. A majority of respondents agreed that courting or dating relationships are allowed, both religiously and culturally, but only if conducted within the realm of getting to know each with the intention of getting engaged. Respondents vocalized the traditions involved in what one individual referred to as the Afghan version of *“courting.”*

Another commonly referred to word was *“khastegari”* or *“khastegar.”* In Farsi, khastegari refers to the act of a man coming to a woman’s home to ask for her hand in marriage, in the traditional since, he and his parents arrive the woman’s familial home to ask her father for her hand. A khastegar is what a man is referred as when is asking for a woman’s hand in marriage.

Another key term was “*nikah*,” the word used in reference to the Islamic marriage. However, though this term refers to marriage, the *nikah* was identified as occurring prior to the legal marriage and reception as a way to allow for the man and woman to spend time together without a chaperone present. This allows for the young woman’s reputation to remain intact if she is seen with the man, as other members of the community know they are engaged. These individuals, despite being married religiously, do not live together and are considered engaged not married until the time the wedding and legal documentation are completed. One respondent shared her own experience explaining the status of her relationship to her co-workers:

“So, so at work um, I had to take off and when I had to explain it to my manager and stuff I basically, mostly told them I’m getting engaged but I’m actually getting married religiously and they got so confused. They were like what are you talking about are you getting married? So I basically said imagine getting married at church but not going to city hall and getting legally married.”

Another area of interest in regards to marriage, was the openness of the respondents and their family on marriage or partnership to individuals outside of the Afghan community. One individual identified the openness of their family to the potential of a non-Afghan partner. While another respondent identified the immediate disapproval of their parents in regards to a previous suitor.

“...I came to college and then like I said I got this one khasgar. Um, I met him at a friend’s graduation party, I didn’t think anything of it because I was so Afghan at the time I wanted to marry and Afghan. Then he ended up finding me on Facebook, sending me a message, and was like super up front about his intentions and was like “hey, I met

you at the graduation party and I really, really liked you and I've heard a lot of great things about you. If you're willing to give me a chance I'd love to come and speak with your parents. I laughed, I was like hahaha look at this guy he thinks he wants to marry me, he's not Afghan, hahaha, you know? But for some reason I was like let me just bring it up to my parents to just see what they say. I told my parents about it, they rejected that guy completely."

Despite the traditional start of this possible relationship, the man's cultural background was a key deciding factor in the lack of development in the relationship. Other respondents also indicated their own lack of care in regards to a potential partners cultural background, however, the indication was made that their own families would not be open to an individual who was not also Afghan. One respondent indicated that in some cases, the cultural requirement of spouses may be even more specific with families preferring their daughter's partner to be of the same Afghan ethnic group or tribe.

Gender Differences in Relationships

Afghan society, like many others across the world, maintains a significant, what one respondent identified, "*double standard*" amongst young women and men. This she stated was evidenced by the differing experiences between herself and her brother in regards to senior prom.

"Ok, so one of my classmates asked me to prom. I don't know why, like I wanted to go obviously, every senior wants to go to prom, but I wore hijab so I was shocked from the beginning that a guy, that a guy wanted to go to prom with a hijabi girl, so I was taken aback by it but I never mentioned it to my parents because I was like they're never going

to be ok with so I'm not even going to try. But then my brother's senior year, he was like, encouraged to go find a girl to take to prom."

This difference amongst young women and young men was identified as widely recognized within the Afghan community. This difference was especially pronounced in regards to not only dating relationships but general relationships amongst young men and women.

"...If the guy is in the relationships then they're like 'oh he's just looking for a wife so it's all good' but if the girl is in the relationship everyone starts talking about her and what's wrong with her."

This negative view of young women who are seen out often with young men or are perceived to be in a relationship may cause negative impacts on their reputation in the Afghan community. The reputation of young women was referred both indirectly and directly amongst all of the respondents, while no such standard was identified in regards to young men. A key distinction in this regards, was the severe implications that were alluded to when assumptions are made within the Afghan community and rumor spreads. *"When they see a guy and girl together they make assumptions, no matter what they are doing."*

The behaviors of young women were identified as not only impacting their own reputation, but rather may reflect poorly on their family as a whole.

Importance of Parental Approval and Respect

Respondents all expressed a common belief in the importance of parental approval. This theme was expressed not only in regards to relationships, but also in a

broader sense on the individual's general life decisions and development. In response to the place of parental respect within the culture one individual stated:

"I mean respect for parents is like number one."

When speaking about the cultural rules surrounding dating and relationships, respondents identified the key role not just parents but elders in general play.

"...it's a culture that respects elders, so whatever the elder says you kind of have to go with that."

This respect for parents was acknowledged between all of the respondents and its importance was reiterated multiple times throughout the interviews. Though individuals stressed the importance of respect for elders and parents they acknowledged difficulties that may arise as a result of this need.

Barriers in Communication

Lack of communication amongst parents and children was also identified by respondents in regards to relationships, both related to dating and marriage. Three of the respondents identified various reasons for lack of communication including: traditional or "old school" mentality of their parents and social etiquette dictating inappropriate nature of the topic. Two of the respondents cited lack of communication amongst parents and their children as possibly detrimental to the child's mental health.

"I feel like that's the biggest problem with the community. Like um, relationships and mental health are a huge part of life but they just don't talk about it. And what causes all the communication problems in families because kids aren't talking to their parents about it. They feel like they shouldn't"

Each of the respondents identified a lack of communication with their parents and family members in regards to relationships and especially in regards to any and all questions on reproductive decisions.

Hesitancy towards Discussion of Reproductive Issues

The second set of interview questions, primarily focused on reproductive health, were met with great hesitancy amongst all of the respondents. Though the first question focused on respondent's thoughts on future possible child bearing, each respondent hesitated prior to answering the question. One respondent was very hesitant discussing the topic and whispered the word "*sex*" whenever she mentioned it.

Another respondent acknowledged the lack of discussion of the topic was a result of respect.

"You know, in Farsi there's things that are ayab, you know there are things that out of respect you don't talk about with people..."

In addition to respect, one respondent indicated the lack of discussion as a result of not knowing what was considered wrong to ask. Further going on to indicate that because there was no understanding of what was considered shameful, an individual may inadvertently be seen as disrespectful and this could negatively impact their/her reputation.

"...You just don't know if what you're going to say or what you're going to ask is wrong. Even though it's really smart and really, really good to be asking those kinds of questions."

All of the respondents identified little to no discussion of anything in regards to reproductive health with their parents. When asked specifically if any discussion with their parents or other family members occurred, one respondent immediately answered: *“No, not at all.”*

One respondent did share a story revolving around her and her mother. Despite her mother having found a condom in her bag she never discussed it directly, but rather conveyed displeasure indirectly. Once informed it was from class, she immediately dropped the conversation.

“So I’m a public health major and so of course, one day in class, someone else was doing a presentation on condoms and contraceptives and they handed out condoms to everyone in the class...I just took it and put it in my bag. Next thing I know my mom she like, she like cleaned out my room, and of course she decides to clean out my bag too, and so she finds it, but this lady does not tell me that she finds it, like she’s being very passive aggressive um, she’s like...she never says it explicitly. So she like calls me during school one day, like randomly, and she like starts yelling at me. And I’m like she must of heard something, she must have heard some lady say something bad about me, God knows, maybe I was wearing ripped jeans or something one day...I was just like oh, ok cool, are you done now?...And I came home the next day and she’s still being weird. And she’s saying these vague things like you better not be in bad places, you better be clean...like a clean person, ‘tu bayad paak bashi’ [you have to be clean] or something like I don’t know... . And a certain point I couldn’t handle it anymore, I was like what are you saying...And she was like “I cleaned your room the other day” And I was like ‘ok’ [laughs]. She was like what was in your bag. Like she never, she didn’t even say what it

was, like she never directly said it. And then I like thought about it for like five minutes, like what is she talking about talking about? And then I was like oh my god, the condoms. And then I literally bust out laughing, like mom that was for class...”

Another respondent indicated the importance of discussing reproductive health earlier, sharing her experience beginning her period and asking her mother for help.

“And my mom told me what to do, what to use, and what’s going on, that’s literally all she did. She told me what to use, but she didn’t tell me why it happened, how long it’s going to happen, I didn’t know it was going to last a week, or more than that, you know...I was really scared.”

Though one respondent mentioned discussion of condom use amongst friends, it was repeated multiple times that it was only in the context of a joke and that because she was married it was an appropriate conversation.

“Like we found condoms in my friends purse, and they were like ‘Oh, what are you up to? And she’s like well I’m married so...But we don’t actually talk about it.”

Three of the respondents indicated that because they were single there was no need for the discussion to occur. One respondent, when further asked if any discussion occurred in a non-joking manner she indicated there was no reason for it.

“Like I don’t feel the reason to yet.”

Another respondent also indicated religious views about premarital sex, in addition to being single, as the reason for the lack of conversation amongst her friends group.

“We never talk like seriously about sex or contraceptives or having sex, because we’re all um....single and Muslims so it’s not really allowed.”

Despite the hesitation in discussing reproductive issues, there was an understanding of the importance of the topic. One respondent indicated that there was need to be open about the topic rather despite being uncomfortable.

“Sometimes I feel so uncomfortable because I don’t know how to approach the question, but we’re mature now, so it’s important.”

Despite hesitancy surrounding discussion of reproductive health topics, all of these young women indicated the presence of basic knowledge in specific topics, such as contraceptives, as a result of their time in school. The avoidance of the discussion of sexual health may lead to serious gaps in a young woman’s health care knowledge and future utilization of safe sex and contraception methods.

Conclusion

Despite the removal from an ancestral country, the culture of origin often remains strong within families. This study was conducted with the aim of understanding the influences family and culture have on the relationship development and reproductive health knowledge and decision-making of second-generation Afghan American women living within the United States. Several themes emerged through the study including, the taboo nature of premarital romantic or dating relationships, marriage and traditional relationships, differences observed in regards to gender and relationships, the importance of familial, community, and parental approval, communication barriers, and hesitancy to discuss topics surrounding reproductive health.

Recognition of the need to move past cultural ideals was not an expected outcome of the data and provides key insight into the views of young second-generation women. These women often identified the modern views they held in comparison to their parents

and other family members. The identification of the need for individuals to adapt to American culture and society was an unexpected finding. Despite these more contemporary views and beliefs in regard to culture, the respondents all maintained the importance of their religion. Though religion is often tied into the culture of a country, especially one in which a large majority of the country is of the same religion, the two were identified as separate beliefs in regards to relationships and relationship development. There were the Afghan beliefs and ideas and there were the Islamic views of relationships. Though similar, they were referred to separately.

Perhaps the most striking finding was the hesitancy to discuss reproductive topics in general and specifically decisions amongst the respondents. With a distinct lack of serious discussion of reproductive health amongst either family or friends, these young women lack knowledge that may be vital to leading a healthy life. This finding was in direct agreement with previous research conducted amongst young Muslim women in Australia.⁴ The rationale provided was that as they were in school and unmarried, the information in regards to contraceptives or family planning was considered superfluous and unnecessary. However, as the respondents identified both contraceptives and family planning as topics which are not discussed, the question remains how this information will be accessed and received once they believe they are ready for it. The hesitancy by respondents to state the word “sex” is perhaps the most telling finding of the study. However, any attempt to address this discomfort may be met with great pushback as the root of the discomfort may not only be cultural but also religious.

The findings of the study also identified the reference to mental health amongst the respondents. The self-identification of mental health issues amongst these young

women provides a previously unconsidered area of analysis. The mental health issues these young women may face will vary significantly from those faced by the elder generation of Afghan immigrants, such as their parents, who may have faced post-traumatic stress disorder and/or depression after departure from Afghanistan. As identified by each of the respondents, young women seen in the company of a young man they are not related to, are immediately thought the worst of; their reputation and social standing possibly tarnished beyond repair. In a society where men and women are together in variety of settings and relationships are not taboo, young Afghan American women may face anxiety and other stressors when balancing the views of both cultures.

Limitations

There are several areas in which this study was limited. Despite widespread recruitment through various organizations, participation in the study was voluntary and the number of participants in the study was small, with only half of the targeted sample size of ten. With a small sample size and the qualitative study design, the information gleaned from this study would not be generalizable beyond the study group; but may be transferable to other second generation Afghan-American women of similar age. The participants in this study were all undergraduate students and thus have likely been exposed to some sort of sexual and reproductive health education in their time at school. Findings may differ if the study were repeated with primarily graduate students. Also the questions focused on in this study were general and based primarily on relationship development, research on sexual and reproductive health was briefly touched on but more research is needed to truly understand the health issues faced by this population.

Recommendations for Future Research and Work

This study presents an important launching point for future research. With various key indicators of the necessity to further evaluate gender differences evident within the Afghan culture and community. It is recommended for future studies to include a male sample for comparison. Future work may also focus on a similar group, examining the differences amongst young women who immigrated to the United States at a young age and thus maintain a stronger cultural connection to their country of origin. A focus on this group would provide comparative data and allow researchers to develop interventions to address the specific needs of the population. Research may also focus primarily on sexual and reproductive health knowledge within this population and delve deeper into the topic.

Future research and programming should target communication within families as the key medium for improving overall health and knowledge of contraception among second generation Afghan American women. By working within close and extended family networks, conversations about relationships and maternal health will develop organically, informing not only the young women involved but also helping to challenge cultural taboos within the family and larger Afghan community, as a model for conversations in other immigrant communities.

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