

# sahiyo

United Against Female Genital Cutting

## 2023 U.S. ACTIVISTS RETREATS



# INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

Sahiyo's mission is to empower Asian and other communities to end female genital cutting (FGC) and create positive social change through dialogue, education, and collaboration based on community involvement. We understand it takes many to bring about social change and we work with individuals, organizations, and coalitions collaboratively. We also recognize many individuals speaking out against FGC have been working in isolation from each other, and to build a collective impact, we need to grow our community of advocates.



## SAHIYO U.S. ACTIVISTS RETREATS: A BRIEF HISTORY: 2018-2022

Sahiyo held our first-ever U.S. based Activists Retreat in January 2018 in Brooklyn, New York. The retreat brought together eleven individuals connected to the South Asian Dawoodi Bohra community who wanted a safe space to connect on and discuss FGC. In subsequent years, Sahiyo has hosted seven retreats.

# RETREAT GOALS

The retreats aim to:

- Create a support system among Bohra activists working to empower their community to abandon FGC
- Develop a safe space for individuals to learn more about the issue of FGC
- Build individuals' overall capacity to engage in activism, including sharing knowledge, resources, and networks
- Sustain post-retreat continued engagement to end FGC



## 2023 RETREATS

In 2023, Sahiyo hosted two Activists Retreat for those connected to the Bohra community and living in the U.S.: a one-day virtual retreat in May attended by 10 participants and a three-day in-person retreat in Atlanta, GA in September attended by 16 people. During the retreats participants increased their knowledge on FGC; discussed challenges speaking about it within their communities, its impact and consequences, the need for self-care; gained tools on how to advocate against FGC; and built deeper relationships and connections to further their work. To create a safe space, participants discussed ground rules such as respect and confidentiality, and Sahiyo ensured that the availability of on-call mental health support if needed.

# WORKSHOPS & SESSIONS

## **The Bohra Movement to End FGC**

An overview of the Bohra movement to end FGC was shared to highlight the history of survivors & community members engaging in ending FGC over the years.

## **The Legal Reality of FGC in the U.S.**

FGC has been in the spotlight in the U.S. with various court cases involving the Bohra community. This session recognized the legal realities of FGC, including state and federal laws, as well as how advocates have supported FGC survivors through legal methods.

## **Self-Care for Activists**

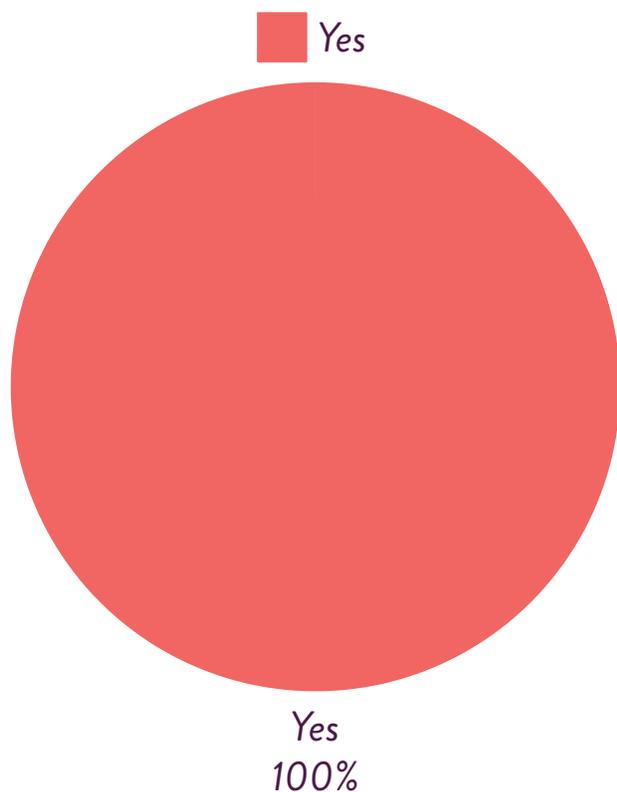
Triggers and burnout are common experiences for activists. During this session psychological frameworks to understand what happens in the mind and body during advocacy and burnout were discussed. Additionally, written exercises using a gratitude journal allowed participants to unwind, reflect on their activism journey and share coping strategies related to activist burnout. An optional yoga class was also provided.

## **How to Engage in FGC Conversations Toolkit Exploration**

Participants explored tips and tools on how to hold challenging conversations on FGC with respect and care with friends and family in their networks.

# PARTICIPANT EXPERIENCE

At the end of our retreats, participants were asked to fill out a post-event survey based on their experiences. **69% or 26 participants filled out the evaluation.**



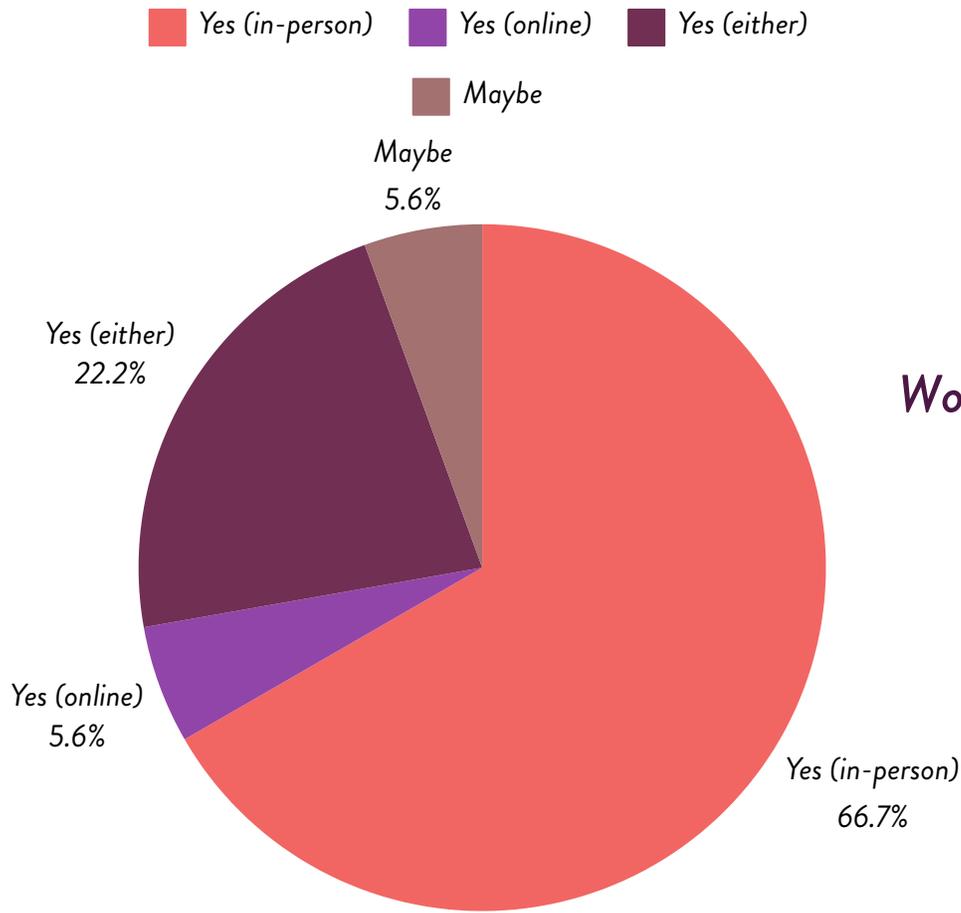
*Did the retreat achieve its goals and mission?*

Important findings to note are that 100% of participants agreed the retreat achieved its goals and missions. Additionally, as seen in the graph on the next page, 100% of participants said they would participate in another Activist Retreat in one form or another.

*“I connected with people who were open, honest and vulnerable to share not only their experiences but also their challenges and restrictions. Agreeing to disagree and coming to a common space is really what community led activism strives to do!”*

*- September 2023 Sahiyo Activists Retreat Participant*

# PARTICIPANT EXPERIENCE



Would you attend a future activists retreat?

“Learning how to be more public in my activism, and learning how to have conversations with family members and community members”

*-May 2023 Sahiyo Activists Retreat Participant, talking about her personal goals for the retreat*

“There is so much to do and that can be done about FGC, and our stories are vital to it.”

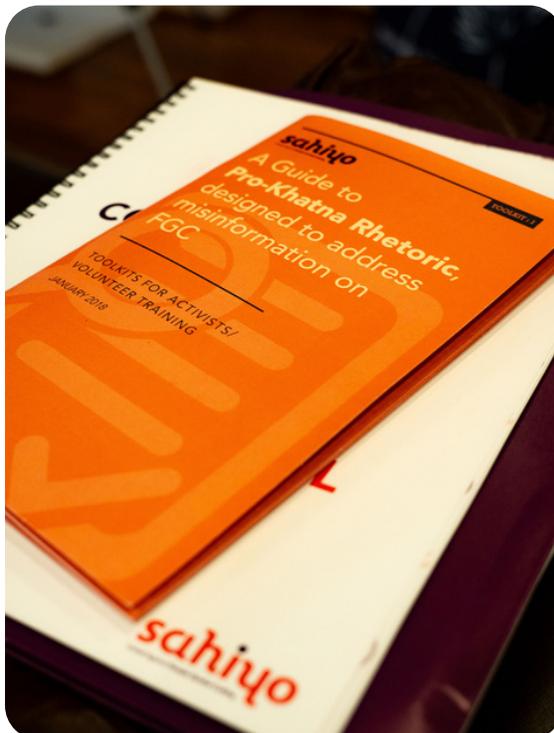
*-September 2023 Sahiyo Activists Retreat Participant*

# ACTION PLANNING SESSION

The retreats concluded with a session, in which participants discussed individual and group goals on what and how they would like to proceed around understanding and advocating on FGC after the retreat. Some examples are listed below:

- Create a toolkit on FGC for asylum lawyers
- Create training material on FGC for medical students
- Raise community awareness in a non-judgmental way
- Understand why survivors of FGC continue the practice
- Be an active member of advocacy efforts
- Engage with outreach and community engagement work
- Get more involved in encouraging Queer/Trans/NB members of the Bohra community to speak up and speak out

Sahiyo continues to work with our retreat alumni to support them in achieving their goals through one-on-one meetings and virtual group gatherings.



# Thank you to all who made the 2023 Retreats successes!



@SahiyoVoices

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## CONTACT US

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### Disclaimer

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