

# 2024 U.S. ACTIVISTS RETREAT

**sahiyo**  
United Against Female Genital Cutting

# 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 that 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. ACTIVIST RETREATS: A BRIEF HISTORY: 2018-2024

We 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, we have hosted seven retreats. This report provides information about our 8th retreat.

*Create positive change  
through dialogue*

*Build relationships  
with other activists*

## RETREAT GOALS

*Empower communities  
to end female genital  
cutting (FGC)*

*Provide information  
and tools for activists  
while developing a North  
American Activist Network*

## 2024 RETREAT



**Previous U.S. Activist Retreat, 2018**

In 2024, Sahiyo expanded who could take part in our retreats to include additional API-SWANA individuals beyond the South Asian Bohra community who were impacted by FGM/C. This pilot workshop included 14 participants representing diverse ethnic backgrounds and gender identities who joined in a virtual space over the course of three days. The retreat included discussions, knowledge-building workshops, action-planning sessions, and self-care activities. Survivors and advocates across the U.S. were able to connect with one another, hold discussions on FGC in a respectful manner, and gain new advocacy tools to strengthen their work to end FGC in their communities.

# WORKSHOPS & SESSIONS



## **Why Community-led & Survivor-led Movements are Important**

This session highlighted the importance of survivors and community members taking the lead in ending FGC, especially since they are the ones most affected.



## **Communications & Framing on FGC - Social Norms**

This session focused on why framing matters when it comes to advocating to end FGC and highlighted how effective activism relies on telling the right story in the right way at the right time.



## **Legal Landscape on FGM/C in the U.S. Context**

An introduction and overview of the international, national, and state-level legal protections for survivors and people at risk of FGM/C living in the U.S.



## **Community Identity Mapping**

This interactive activity used reflective prompts to explore each participant's unique and multi-layered identities within the community, assets that give us strength, and the challenges and barriers that shape how we show up (or not) in our community.



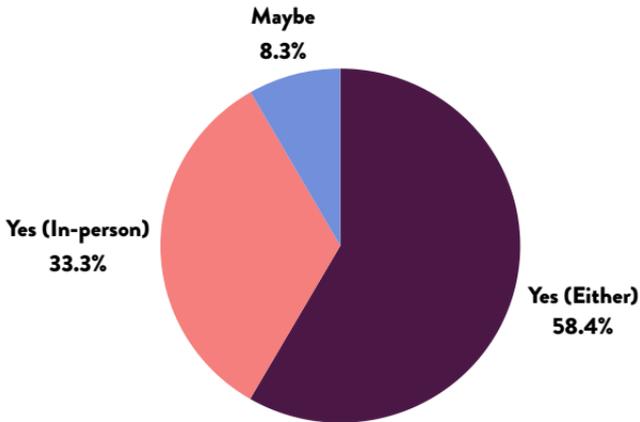
## **Action Planning**

Participants were given the opportunity to leave with a set of personal goals as well as group goals for the upcoming year.

# PARTICIPANT EXPERIENCE

At the end of our retreat, 12 participants filled out an evaluation of their retreat experience. 91.6% said they would attend another retreat, and 8.3% said they would maybe attend in the future.

## Would you attend another retreat in the future?



“Connecting with others and listening to how others navigate around FGM/C made me feel not alone and more comfortable in talking about it.”

-2024 Sahiyo Activist Retreat Participant

“Openness of participants and facilitators.”

-2024 Sahiyo Activist Retreat Participant

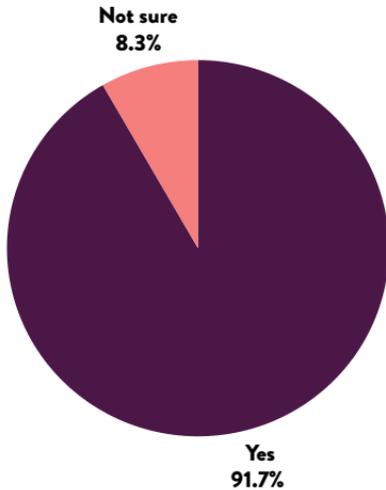
“Safe space sharing and of course meeting up with my pals!”

-2024 Sahiyo Activist Retreat Participant

# PARTICIPANT EXPERIENCE

Participants shared how successful the retreat was in helping them fulfill their own personal goals. 91.7% said 'yes' and 8.3% said 'not sure'.

*Did you feel the retreat succeeded in helping you fulfill your personal goals for attending it?*



“I felt very connected to the others in the group and also learned so much about FGM/C in other communities as well as in the US landscape. I was grateful for the self-care activities throughout and for the space to plan out specific action items for goals.”

*-2024 Sahiyo Activist Retreat Participant*

“I was moved by the many different people and perspectives around FGM/C and how I’m not alone.”

*-2024 Sahiyo Activist Retreat Participant*

“Having lots of discussions between information sessions helped me feel in a community with other survivors and advocates.”

*-2024 Sahiyo Activist Retreat Participant*



**Retreat Participant Packing Materials**

# ACTION PLANNING SESSION

The retreat 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:



*“How to help girls at risk of FGM/C”*

*“How to approach community members/leaders about FGM”*

*“Navigating community trust as an FGC survivor, intersectionality in FGC spaces (i.e. prison abolition, queerness, etc.)”*

*“Handling trauma and how to heal”*

# Thank you to all who made the 2024 Retreat a success!

## CONTACT US



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### *Disclaimer*

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