

2025 ACTIVISTS RETREAT REPORT

sahiyo

United Against Female Genital Cutting

OUR MISSION

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.



SAHIYO U.S. ACTIVIST RETREATS: A BRIEF HISTORY: 2018-2024

Sahiyo held our first-ever U.S.-based Activists Retreat in January 2018 in New York. The retreat brought together individuals connected to the South Asian Dawoodi Bohra community who wanted a safe space to connect and discuss FGC. In subsequent years, Sahiyo has hosted eight retreats with 76 attendees.



Retreat Goals

Sahiyo recognizes that many advocates work in isolation from each other. The Sahiyo Activists Retreats aim to bring together these individuals to build a network of Bohra activists by:

1. Strengthening our relationships and connections with one another

2. Sharing best practices and providing tools for activists to utilize in their advocacy to bring awareness to and end FGC

FEBRUARY 2025 RETREAT

Sahiyo hosted the 9th annual Activists Retreat from February 23-25 in Atlanta, GA. For the three-day event, 12 individuals connected to the Bohra community and residing in the U.S. came together.

To ensure a safe and well-cared-for space, participants initiated the 3-day event by establishing ground rules, such as respect and confidentiality. Additionally, Sahiyo ensured the availability of on-call mental health support as needed.

During the retreat, participants were engaged in activities to:

- Increase their knowledge of FGC
- Discuss challenges speaking out against it within their communities, FGC's negative impact and consequences, and the need for self-care
- Gain tools on how to advocate within their communities to end FGC
- Build deeper relationships and connections to further their work

Workshops Sessions

Community-Led and Survivor-Led Movements

Discussed the importance of building a survivor-level movement and how to support survivors & community members to take the lead to end FGC.



Bohra Movement to End FGC

Gave an overview timeline of the Bohra movement to end FGC to highlight the history of survivors & community members engaging in the growing movement to end FGC over the years.

FGC and Healthcare

Learned about the basic facts about FGC, including its classifications, health complications, and updated data on FGC. Additionally, strategies for clinicians and patients to navigate clinical visits were discussed.



Intergenerational Discussions

Generation differences in approaching and discussing FGC were explored, and how dynamics between and within generations can impact the continuation of the harmful practices. Additionally, strategies on how multiple generations can work together to create change were discussed, such as guiding new parents to say no to FGC and finding ways to navigate religious and societal pressure.

Self-Care Activity

Amani Women Center, an Atlanta-based nonprofit working with FGC survivors, guided participants through a cloth button necklace-making session to uplift the Amani Women's Center's 'Save Our Sisters Initiative' - an initiative that supports refugee women's access to life-changing medical services, including restorative surgery due to FGC.

Action Planning

Participants set goals and developed an action plan related to the goals they had created for themselves and as a group to end FGC.

Goals include:

Create a toolkit on FGC for asylum lawyers

Create training material on FGC for medical students

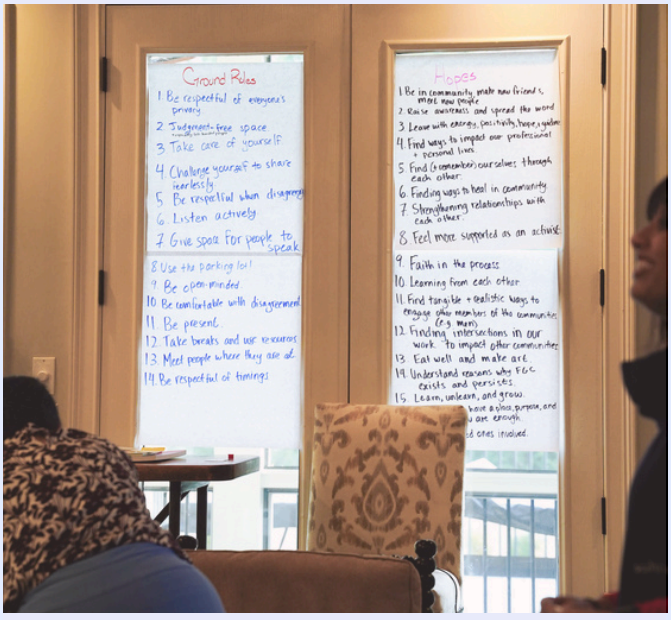
Raise community awareness in a non-judgmental way

Understand why survivors of FGC might continue it to the next generation

Engage with outreach and community engagement work

Get involved in encouraging Queer/Trans/Non-binary members of the Bohra community to speak up and speak out



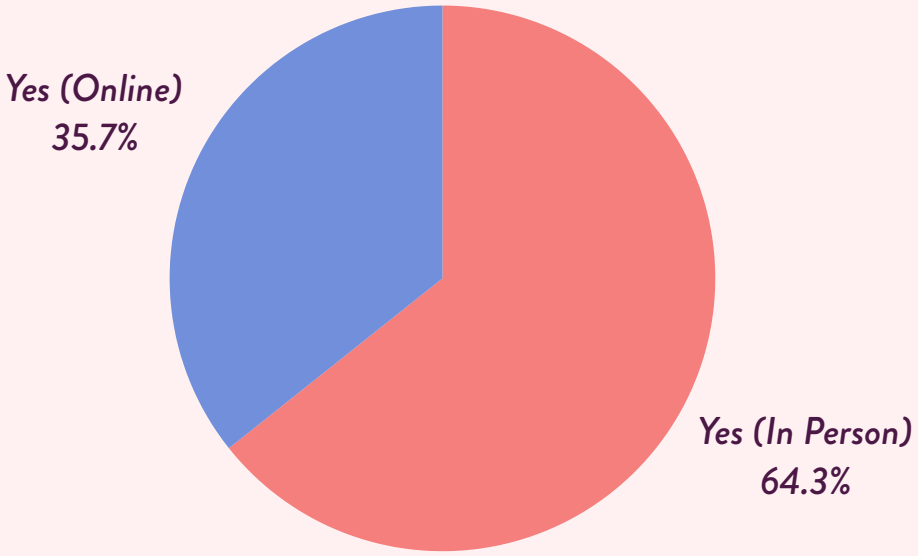




PARTICIPANT EXPERIENCE

After the retreat, 10 out of 12 participants filled out a survey regarding their experience.

Would you attend a future activists retreat?

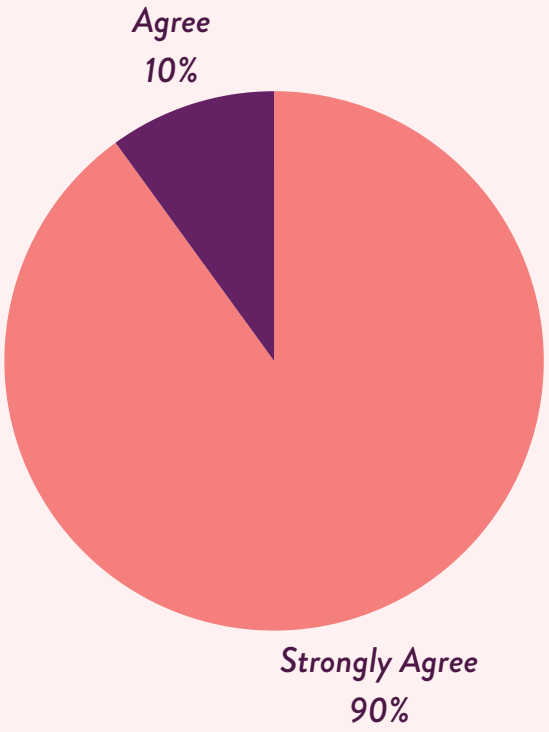


100% of participants said they would participate in another Activists Retreat in one form or another.



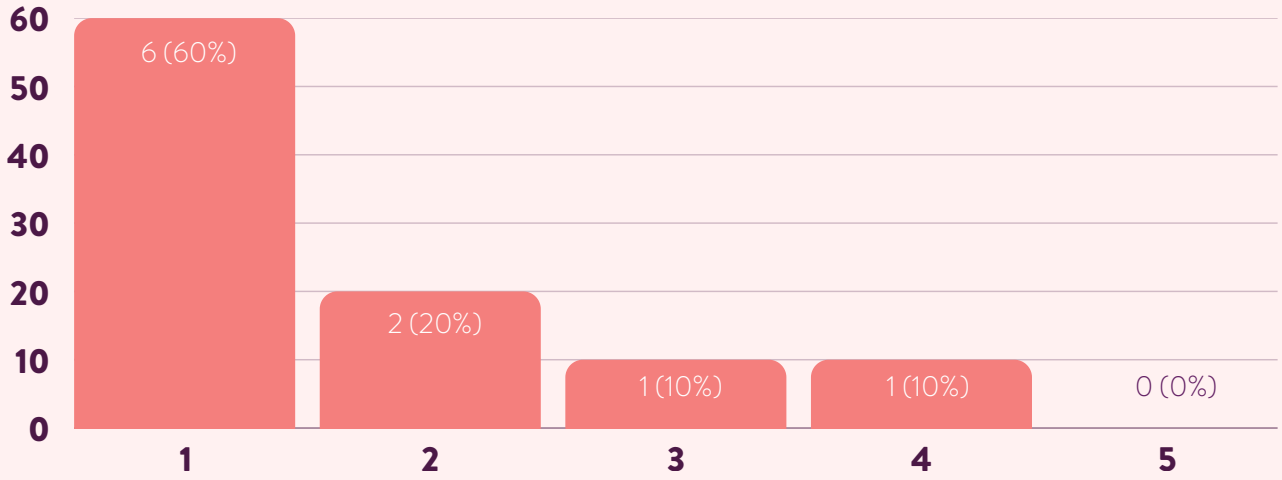


How strongly do you feel about the following statement? "This retreat has positively impacted my self-esteem."



90% felt that the retreat positively impacted their self-esteem, and more than 50% found their mental health improved as a result of attending the retreat.

How would you rate your overall mental health and well-being as a result of participating in the Activists Retreat program?



In Their Own Words...

> *"My way of giving back is to share my experience of the nuance of this practice given my many conversations around this issue."*
>
> ~ February 2025 Sahiyo Activists Retreat Participant

> *"The tribe needs to grow. It needs to reach more survivors. We need to be in situations that make us uncomfortable, otherwise we will never get to the other side."*
>
> ~ February 2025 Sahiyo Activists Retreat Participant

> *"Community members have credibility and access to intimate spaces within their groups to propel change. Importantly, when advocates come from within the community they are able to reclaim the power and initiate grassroot level change."*
>
> ~ February 2025 Sahiyo Activists Retreat Participant



LOOKING FORWARD

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



TO LEARN MORE, VISIT US AT:

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Disclaimer

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