

# Subgroup Report

## Bengali Speaking Newcomer Women

This report summarizes data for the Bengali-Speaking HEAL Group, delivered in partnership with the Bengali Community Centre of Toronto and implemented from June to August, 2023 with 11 participants.



Colours of a Dream Life



Peaceful Mind, Messy is Beautiful

## Participant Profile

Screening data indicated that most participants rated their abuse situations at home on a 10-point scale with an average score of 7.3 for the group.

82% of women reported PTSD symptoms, reported symptoms included:

- Negative thoughts
- Anxiety
- Difficulty sleeping
- Feeling trapped

Within the participant group, only one woman spoke of having accessed support services and using service referrals. Among the remaining women, 8 stated they have not accessed any support services.

Further, 2 women reported facing language barriers, 2 mentioned dealing with physical ailments, and 2 emphasized their focus on self-empowerment to overcome challenges in their current situations.

All participants identified themselves as heterosexual and belonging to the South Asian ethnic group. The average length of stay in Canada ranged from 2-8 years.

- 22% were between 45 and 64 years old
- 44.5% were between 25 and 44 years old

- 66% were renting their homes
- 22% are living with family and friends
- 12% chose not to disclose housing status

- 60% were Canadian citizens
- 20% were permanent residents
- 10% were refugee claimants
- 10% listed their immigration status as "other"

## Referrals and Support Needs

- Almost all women had difficulty communicating in English with service providers to get the help they needed. Many requested English support classes.
- 50% of women requested support for mental health.

# Quantitative Findings

## Bengali Speaking Newcomer Women

Quantitative data were collected using Pre- and post-program surveys. It measured changes in participants' self-efficacy and knowledge of available support services using a 5-point Likert scale. Results reflect group averages and overall outcomes.

### **Self-Efficacy: Participants noted increased capacity in viewing their situation positively.**

- Prior to program, 80% of women agreed or strongly agreed they viewed their situation positively, rising to 100% post program.
- Participants feeling capable of addressing issues of violence in their lives increased from 50% pre-program to 90% post-program.
- Participants noted a 60% improvement in reducing self-blame and anxiety related to past trauma.

### **Relationships & Community Connections: The program significantly improved participants' stress levels due to family relationships**

- Reports of stress due to family relationships decreased from 60% pre-program to 30% post-program.
- 80% of women reported feeling a sense of safety and trust in their current relationships, both pre-post post-program.

### **Knowledge of Rights & Services: Participants noted fewer barriers to accessing services post-program:**

- Awareness of Safety and Health resources stayed steady at 90%.
- Reduced barriers: 50% of women showed improved scores, indicating fewer barriers to accessing services and resources post-program.

## Impact Summary

The HEAL program significantly enhanced participants' knowledge, skills, and well-being. All participants reported increased understanding of their rights, available services, and mental health strategies. Data indicate that the HEAL program had a positive impact on participants' well-being, social connections, and satisfaction with the program. Key outcomes include:

- 82% reported improved knowledge about healthy relationships
- 67% reported reduced feelings of loneliness
- 64% of participants reported improved ability to seek and receive emotional support through family and personal relationships
- 67% reported feeling less lonely
- 73% reported feeling reduced stress

## Takeaways

The HEAL program substantially improved participants' self-efficacy, relationships and community connections, and knowledge of rights and services. Participants reported stronger social connections and increased awareness of available resources. Further, participants reported being capable of addressing violence in their lives, and reduced self-blame and anxiety due to past trauma.

*"Experience was very good. Drawing and dance ribbon activities were really helpful. They tried a lot to help us, to respect us to take care of us."*  
– Participant



# Qualitative Findings

## Bengali Speaking Newcomer Women

Qualitative data were collected through pre- and post-program surveys, in-program feedback surveys, focus group discussions, and follow-up interviews at 3 and 6 months. The purpose was to explore participants' experiences of the HEAL program throughout time.

**Improved Mental Well-being:** Before the program, participants sought to improve their mental well-being and build community connections. After the program, they reported that engaging in art activities promoted socializing, enhanced well-being, and provided valuable information about settlement support services.

**Self-Efficacy:** Participants developed confidence and resilience, learning to manage anxiety and anger, prioritize their needs, and navigate challenges more independently. The sessions offered a safe space to express emotions, empowering them to advocate for themselves and maintain a positive, patient outlook on life.

**Community & Belonging:** The program resulted in 80% of participants reporting stronger connections with the broader community, while the remaining participants indicated intentions to find ways to engage and connect more fully.

**Knowledge & Wellbeing:** Participants learned strategies to stay calm in stressful situations, such as coloring, ribbon dancing, and deep breathing. They also recognized the value of sharing their challenges with their support networks to manage stress.

*"This program is really beneficial for me, I had no idea that women had rights and a powerful voice. Also, we learned how to make colors to express my feelings and emotions (happy and bad). Furthermore, I want to know how to be satisfied (happy, mental wellbeing) permanently through different tricks." – Participant*

**Program Features & Satisfaction:** The sessions provided an open space for discussion and sharing of emotions using art making techniques. As a result, it enhanced confidence and self-efficacy among participants to express themselves and become more independent.

**Building Healthy Relationships:** The program helped participants understand and define healthy relationships. Many felt empowered to apply this knowledge by seeking support or asserting boundaries in unhealthy relationships.



## Takeaways

The HEAL program successfully enhanced self-efficacy, mental well-being, knowledge of rights and services, and social connectedness. Participants were able to both build and define healthy relationships and identify strategies to get involved in their communities. The program supported participants in speaking up for themselves and become more independent.

*"I will share my problem with someone. Then my problem will become lighter." – Participant*

# Future Considerations

## Bengali Speaking Newcomer Women

### Enhancing engagement using body based expressive arts techniques

The creative and movement-based aspects of the HEAL curriculum, including painting, clay work, and ribbon dancing, movement, and music were highly valued by participants. Integrate expressive arts and movement activities that promote self-expression, emotional regulation, and enjoyment, were central to participant engagement and wellbeing.

### Strengthening peer support and safe spaces

Participants benefited from sharing experiences in an all-Bengali, culturally familiar environment, which fostered trust and a sense of safety. Future programs should continue supporting small, culturally cohesive groups where participants feel comfortable sharing, building relationships, and connecting across generations.

### Cultural sensitivity and program retention

Culturally tailored practices, such as group discussions in Bengali, shared meals, and outdoor activities, supported engagement and sustained participation. Future programs providing culturally relevant experiences and interactive sessions can maintain high levels of satisfaction, retention, and long-term wellbeing.

### Practical application of coping tools

Participants reported improved mental well-being through breathing exercises, self-regulation techniques, and EAT methods but expressed a need for more practice opportunities. Future programs should include follow-ups or dedicated sessions to help integrate coping strategies and self-care into daily life.

### Expanding community connection and increased access to resources in community

Participants expressed interest in applying what they learned to support family, peers, and newcomers. Future programs should continue promoting community engagement and offer structured opportunities to access culturally relevant resources, including mental health support, rights education, and settlement services.



Learn more at [Access Alliance Arts for Family Health](#)

## Connect

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