



# 2020 Annual Report

**Center for South Asian  
Quantitative Health and Education**

*Inspire healthy communities*



**RUTGERS**

School of Public Health

**Center for South Asian Quantitative Health and Education**

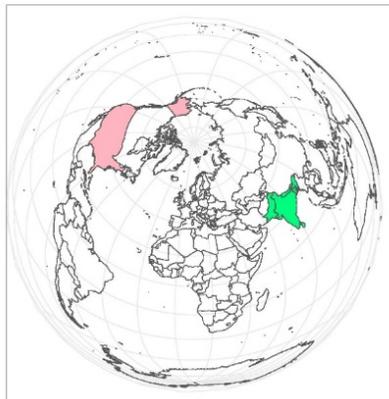
**School of Public Health**

**Rutgers, The State University of New Jersey**

**2020 Annual Report**

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## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Center for South Asian Quantitative Health and Education (SAQHE) was established during September 2019 in the School of Public Health at Rutgers, The State University of New Jersey, with the goal of improving the overall health of South Asians living in New Jersey and elsewhere through scientific research and community engagement. The research activities of SAQHE are supported by pilot funds from the School of Public Health and the Rutgers Cancer Institute of New Jersey.

Dr. Jaya Satagopan, professor of biostatistics in the School of Public Health, established SAQHE and serves as its inaugural Director. Ms. Tina Dharamdasani, a doctoral degree student in the School of Public Health, is SAQHE's Project Coordinator.

SAQHE's key accomplishments during 2020 are as follows:

- Completed data use agreement with the National Cancer Institute's Surveillance, Epidemiology and End Results program to study cancer in South Asian Americans.
- Published paper on the characteristics of breast cancer in Asian Indian and Pakistani Americans in the *International Journal of Cancer*.
- Obtained IRB-approval to conduct qualitative focus group studies of attitudes and perceptions about breast cancer among South Asian American women.
- Provided training opportunities to 3 students.
- Established partnerships with South Asian community organizations in New Jersey.
- Organized an invited session on "Quantitative Approaches in Health Sciences" at the virtual *International Conference for Statistics for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century* of the University of Kerala, India.

## **BACKGROUND**

South Asia is the southern region of Asia comprising of the countries of Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Maldives, Nepal, Pakistan, and Sri Lanka. South Asians are the fastest growing minority population in the United States (US), increasing by 40% from over 3.5 million in 2010 to over 5.4 million in 2017<sup>1</sup>. While many South Asians residing in the US (South Asian Americans) are employed in medicine and technology industries, several are also employed in lower wage jobs such as cashiers, taxi drivers and restaurant workers. Many South Asian Americans face numerous challenges ranging from lack of health coverage to difficulties obtaining affordable housing or college educations<sup>2</sup>. Thus, South Asian Americans constitute a diverse socio-economic population, notwithstanding their underlying diversity in language, diet, religion, and culture. In this diverse background, South Asian Americans confront a wide range of health issues<sup>3</sup>. There is limited data available on the health of South Asians due to lack of engagement of this population in scientific studies<sup>4</sup>. Therefore, there is an urgent need to address these gaps and advance the health of South Asians living in New Jersey and elsewhere. As the US population diversifies, it is imperative that all segments of the population be cognizant of their health, health risks, and the availability of health services, and make effective use of these services to lead an overall healthy life.

## **THE CENTER FOR SOUTH ASIAN QUANTITATIVE HEALTH AND EDUCATION (SAQHE)**

SAQHE was established during September 2019 within the School of Public Health at Rutgers, The State University of New Jersey.

SAQHE's overarching goal is to advance the health of South Asians living in New Jersey and around the world through data-driven scientific studies and community engagement.

## **LEADERSHIP**

Dr. Jaya Satagopan, professor of biostatistics in the Department of Biostatistics and Epidemiology at the School of Public Health, is SAQHE's Director. Ms. Tina Dharamdasani is SAQHE's Project Coordinator.

## **VISION**

To inspire healthy communities.

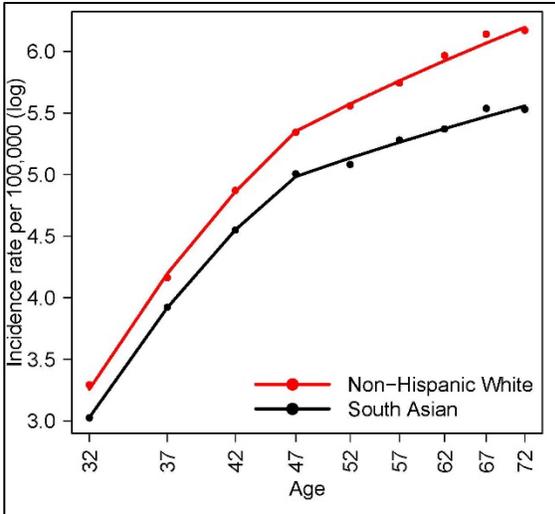
## **MISSION**

To improve the overall health of South Asians residing in New Jersey and elsewhere in the US and around the globe through data-driven scientific studies and by engaging collaboratively with South Asian communities.

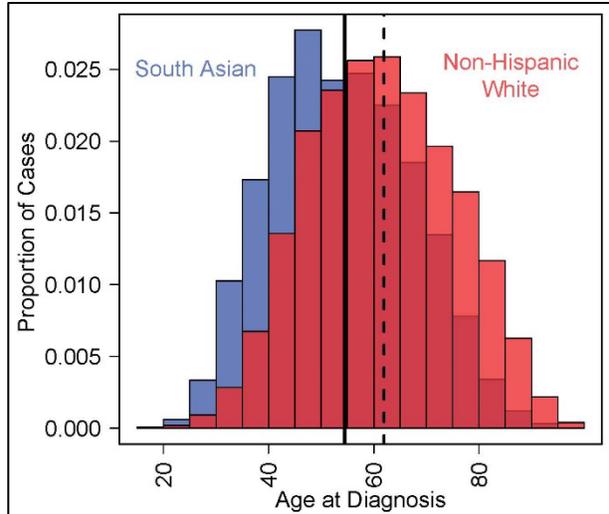
## **FOCUS AREAS**

SAQHE address its vision and mission through the following focus areas:

1. Conduct fundamental research on the health of South Asian Americans;
2. Provide opportunity to students to do research projects related to the health issues of South Asian Americans;
3. Raising health awareness among South Asian Americans;
4. Foster collaborations with education and research institutes from South Asia;
5. Build partnerships with industry to work on common health related issues and research.



Breast cancer incidence in South Asian women increases with age at the same rate as in non-Hispanic White women. Data source: <https://seer.cancer.gov/>



South Asian women diagnosed with breast cancer are younger, on average, than non-Hispanic White women. Data source: <https://seer.cancer.gov/>

## ACCOMPLISHMENTS DURING 2020

During 2020, SAQHE completed key activities in several focus areas.

### South Asian breast cancer study

Breast cancer, which is amenable to screening and early detection, is increasing rapidly among South Asian American women. SAQHE established the **South Asian breast cancer study** at Rutgers to develop strategies for reducing the burden of breast cancer in this population.

1. SAQHE completed a data use agreement to access cancer data from the National Cancer Institute's Surveillance, Epidemiology and End Results (SEER) program.
2. SAQHE collaborated with Rutgers Cancer Institute of New Jersey and the New Jersey State Cancer Registry to examine breast cancer among South Asians.
  - a. Breast cancer incidence rate in South Asian American women increases with age and the rate of increase slows down after around age 47 years.
  - b. South Asian American women are young at the time of their breast cancer diagnosis, have aggressive disease as characterized by regional or distant stage, higher grade, and estrogen receptor negative tumors, are likely to receive chemotherapy or subcutaneous mastectomy or total mastectomy.
  - c. South Asian American women are followed for a considerably shorter duration after their cancer diagnosis.

**Satagopan JM**, Stroup A, Kinney AY, **Dharamdasani T**, Ganesan S, Bandera EV. Breast cancer among Asian Indian and Pakistani Americans: A surveillance, epidemiology, and end results-based study. *International Journal of Cancer*. 2020 Oct 25. <https://doi.org/10.1002/ijc.33331>

3. As a follow up to this work, SAQHE received IRB approval to conduct qualitative focus group studies to examine attitudes and apprehensions about breast cancer among South Asians (IRB number: Pro2020002217).

### **Trainees**

SAQHE's trainees are pursuing projects focusing on cancer in South Asian Americans. All the trainees are students from Rutgers University.

- Ms. Dharamdasani, SAQHE's Project Coordinator, is pursuing a doctoral degree in epidemiology, focusing on breast cancer among South Asian American.
- Ms. Grace Kuo, a master's degree student in the dual biostatistics and epidemiology program, is studying survival and tumor characteristics of cervical cancer patients.
- Ms. Lydia Lo, an undergraduate degree student in the industrial engineering program, is studying the characteristics of South Asian American breast cancer patients receiving subcutaneous or total mastectomy.

### **Community partnerships**

To develop future programs to raise health awareness among South Asians, SAQHE established partnership with 3 organizations serving New Jersey's South Asian community:

- i) **EBC Radio** (<https://www.ebcmusic.com/>) is the most widely heard South Asian radio station in the mid-Atlantic region that also regularly features health communication programs for the South Asian community.
- ii) **Sai Pariwar Temple** (<https://saipariwar.org/>) is an Asian Indian non-profit organization that serves as a cultural and community center accessible to everyone in New Jersey, regardless of religion, age, sex, and financial means.
- iii) **Yuva Sangeetha Lahari** (<https://yuvasangeethalahari.com/>), a non-profit organization headquartered in New Jersey, promotes classical music from southern India and also interacts with other partner organizations that disseminate Asian Indian classical music.

### **Collaboration with South Asian education and research institution**

SAQHE established collaborations with the Department of Statistics, University of Kerala, India by organizing an invited session on "Quantitative Approaches in Health Sciences" at the virtual *International Conference for Statistics for the 2<sup>1st</sup> Century* during December 2020.

### **FINANCIAL SUPPORT**

SAQHE is currently supported through pilot funds from the School of Public Health and the Cancer Institute of New Jersey.

### **OUTLOOK FOR 2021**

SAQHE looks forward to launching the IRB-approved breast cancer study during 2021. SAQHE also looks forward to continuing to expand its community partnerships, scientific studies, and collaborations during 2021.

Interested organizations or researchers may contact SAQHE at [saqhe@sph.rutgers.edu](mailto:saqhe@sph.rutgers.edu).

## REFERENCES

1. SAALT. Demographic Characteristics of South Asians in the United States. In: SAALT Takoma Park, MD; 2012.
2. Together SAAL. Demographic characteristics of South Asians in the US: Emphasis on poverty, gender, language ability, immigration status. In: Washington, DC: SAALT. [http://saalt.electricembers.net/wp-content/uploads ...](http://saalt.electricembers.net/wp-content/uploads...); 2012.
3. Together SAAL. Health Care Issues Affecting South Asians in the United States. *Online Report*. 2009.
4. Mukherjea A, Ivey SL, Shariff-Marco S, Kapoor N, Allen L. Overcoming challenges in recruitment of South Asians for health disparities research in the USA. *Journal of racial and ethnic health disparities*. 2018;5(1):195-208.

