

Study identifies successful methods to recruit South Asian women for breast cancer research

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South Asian American women increasingly are diagnosed with breast cancer at younger ages and with more advanced disease compared with other groups, a fact made even more alarming because they are underrepresented in studies, said Jaya Satagopan, an associate dean for faculty affairs and professor at the School of Public Health and member of the Cancer Prevention and Control Program at Rutgers Cancer Institute of New Jersey.

A study she led tackles a crucial factor in addressing the issue: the recruitment of South Asian women in research.

The [study](#), published in *PLOS ONE*, conducted during the COVID-19 pandemic found that broadcast media, such as [radio](#), is an effective recruitment tool.

"Collaborating with a community-based radio station to disseminate study information allowed listeners to hear directly from the researchers, thus helping strengthen community partnerships and credibility at a time when traditional in-person community interactions were suspended due to the pandemic," said Satagopan.

The research, known as the South Asian Breast Cancer (SABCa) study, was initially focused on understanding [breast cancer](#)-related health attitudes in this rapidly growing yet understudied population. But Satagopan shifted her research focus during the pandemic to recruitment while working with local community organizations, potentially reshaping future community-based health research.

"To our knowledge, this is the first study on recruiting South Asian American women through community partnerships during the COVID-19 pandemic," Satagopan added.

Recruitment efforts included outreach to multiple [community organizations](#) in 2021 to disseminate the SABCa study information. Researchers noted that as these organizations progressively engaged with pandemic-related needs, they had to redirect their strategy. This included community radio, Rutgers Cancer Institute's Community Outreach and Engagement Program, and Rutgers Cooperative Extension's community health programs.

Satagopan said this experience demonstrates that adopting alternative strategies, particularly promoting the SABCa study through broadcast media like radio, was successful in recruiting their target demographic.

According to researchers, radio became a trusted source of information and connection for the public during the pandemic, especially among South Asian communities in New Jersey, New York, and Eastern Pennsylvania.

A popular community radio station among this community, known for its diverse South Asian content, EBC Radio, collaborated with the study researchers to promote the SABCa studyâ€"which was advertised using culturally resonant methods, including music and greetings in multiple South Asian languages.

Additionally, Satagopan was invited to EBC Radio's talk show, where she discussed the study and encouraged listeners to share the information in their community networks.

"Use of culturally tailored outreach approaches and trust in community radio and the Rutgers Cooperative Extension and their staff as credible cultural brokers in the community were among the facilitators for recruitment and retention of participants," said Satagopan.

She noted family dynamics, including the support of men as champions

of women's health, also encouraged participation. Findings also suggest that participants' comfort levels with technology and assistance with digital tools, such as Zoom and DocuSign, were crucial in retaining them in the study.

"Our study can inform strategies for recruiting understudied populations to research studies even beyond the pandemic," Satagopan said.

Future research should recognize limitations in partnership opportunities during crises and utilize multilingual study protocols, said Satagopan, adding it should identify and engage diverse cultural gatekeepers and pursue targeted social media advertising to engage potential participants.

More information: Jaya M. Satagopan et al, Experiences and lessons learned from community-engaged recruitment for the South Asian breast cancer study in New Jersey during the COVID-19 pandemic, *PLOS ONE* (2023). [DOI: 10.1371/journal.pone.0294170](https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0294170)

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