

Sanjida Fairuse
HCAP Undergraduate Research Assistant
Reflection Blog Post

In this past Summer 2025 semester, I had the pleasure of participating in the HCAP Undergraduate Research Assistant program. During this program, I was mentored by Professor Iris Finkel, who provided immense support and encouraged me to think creatively, push myself, and always do my best. This was one of the first times I carried out an independent research project, and I am really proud of completing so many components to create a meaningful project. I hope this work brings greater awareness to the experiences of South Asian women who face language barriers in healthcare. Specifically, I focused on the impacts of language barriers on South Asian women in primary healthcare settings.

This was my first time creating a literature review, and it was both challenging and rewarding. I learned not only how to gather and analyze research but also how to organize it in a way that showcases the bigger picture. I practiced identifying themes and subthemes across different studies, noticing both the similarities and differences in how researchers approached the issue. I also gained experience in evaluating existing literature understanding its strengths, weaknesses, and the gaps that still need to be addressed. Most importantly, I learned how to connect all of this back to my thesis and explain why this research matters. While it was a learning curve, this process helped me build a good foundation in my research and showed me the importance of critically examining multiple works that focused on different behavioral topics, while also thinking about what still needs to be explored and pursued in the future.

Through this cohort, I had the opportunity to create my own questionnaire with the guidance of my mentor. This allowed me not only to critically analyze the results once participants submitted their responses but also to demonstrate my marketing skills by reaching eligible participants across social media platforms. I learned how to adjust my questions so they fit my paper more closely while also respecting the privacy and sensitive information of anonymous participants. One challenge I faced was running low on survey respondents, which pushed me to tap into my personal network and ask others to share the survey on their platforms, essentially using a snowball method to expand my reach to more participants.

I also conducted a study with five participants who were carefully selected as a small sample of first and second-generation individuals that have helped translate or interpret medical information for their South Asian immigrant mothers or female guardians in primary care settings. These interviews gave me a chance to discuss personal anecdotes and gain in-depth answers that the questionnaire could not capture. It was a very meaningful experience for me because I had never been on the opposite end of an interview before. My participants not only shared valuable stories but also gave me feedback on how to improve as an interviewer, which I

know will help me grow into a stronger and more confident researcher. Interestingly, this was also the first time my participants were interviewed for a research paper, so it became a learning experience for them too, as they reflected on how cultural and language barriers affect their guardians' healthcare on a daily basis. Managing my time and coordinating with participants who had busy schedules was another important skill I developed, and I am grateful they were willing to dedicate part of their time to my project.

I learned what kind of research I would like to pursue next because of this research paper and my study. I want to explore the intersections of fatalism and religious beliefs, reliance on traditional remedies, and historical trauma, such as the experiences in Burmese refugee camps or the Bengal famine, across South Asian communities and other minority ethnic groups. Based on different participants' answers and research papers on these topics, it would definitely be cool to delve deeper and take a look at how religious beliefs for illness and fatalistic views can delay treatment and be a barrier in addition to language barriers. I also want to explore how trauma shapes trust, resilience, and engagement with healthcare, since these are important for creating culturally sensitive interventions.

As a first-generation student, this opportunity helped me grow as a person by becoming more empathetic, thinking more critically, and working on a lot of self-development. I also learned how to properly write a research paper in a formal and academic way, which is a great skill that I can apply to future projects. Overall, I really loved my experience this summer, especially meeting all the HCAP staff and my mentor, and I hope to continue pursuing research in the future.