

Narika

A domestic violence helpline for South Asian women

For Immediate Release
Sunday, 10/30/2011

Narika Workshop on Gender Preference and Sex Selection

(Fremont, CA) - "There are now more medically sanitized ways of ensuring that you have a son. So instead of having a girl born and feeding her opium or burying her alive you can now prevent her from being born at all." – Dr. Sunita Puri.

Narika, the anti-violence agency that works with South Asian survivors of domestic violence and human trafficking, held a workshop on gender preference and sex selection to address the issue of gender violence in the form of gender preference and sex selection and to talk about the occurrence of the issue among South Asians in the SF Bay Area today. There were approximately 30 participants at this workshop. **Purpose of the Workshop:** The purpose was to engage community members with dialogue to better understand how they perceive these issues in their community and to encourage them to think about ways they can take action to address it.

The workshop began with group discussion. The participants were asked to talk about what they understood gender preference and sex selection to be and their direct and/or indirect experiences with it. This was followed by the panelists speaking. Professor Raka Ray talked about how the same issue here looked very different in South Asia (focusing primarily on India). **Professor Ray said** "It's hard to get at one factor that can explain son preference; it goes beyond culture, income, female education level, access to medical resources etc." **Dr. Sunita Puri** elaborated on the emergence of technology and its use (misuse) among South Asians in the U.S. "Sex selection happens in the US, whether a woman is coerced into it or is doing it by choice, the reasons are complex and multi-faceted." **Dr. Sujatha Jesudason** spoke on the complexities of deterring sex selective abortions without compromising a woman's autonomy on her reproductive rights. "It's important to also think about the pressures males go through with rigid gender roles...."

A 30 minute Q&A took place following the panel. This was followed by the participants reconvening in their groups and then discussing possible solutions. Male participant "This was an amazing workshop, I did not realize just how much of a problem gender inequality is for us, Narika needs to have more workshops like this." Female participant "Narika is so important, holding workshops that talk about very real issues are important. We may not be able to change society's mentality overnight but at least through Narika we can start talking."

Dr. Sujatha Jesudason: Executive Director of Generations Ahead. With over 20 years as an advocate for women's rights she works at the intersection of issues too often considered separately: economic inequality, domestic violence, cultural norms, discrimination and gender roles. Sujatha holds a doctorate in sociology from the University of California Berkeley.

Dr. Sunita Puri is a physician and researcher at UCSF. She conducted a 6 year long study of sex selection among South Asian immigrants in the US. She is a Rhodes Scholar and a graduate of Yale University. She has worked in the field of domestic violence as a counselor and educator.

Professor Raka Ray: (AB Bryn Mawr 1985, PhD University of Wisconsin-Madison 1993) is Sarah Kailath Chair of India Studies, Professor of Sociology, South and Southeast Asia Studies at the University of California, Berkeley. Her areas of specialization are gender and feminist theory, inequality, cultures of servitude, middle classes, and social movements.