

Forum on Domestic Violence Attracts Capacity Crowd

By **MARIA DRAGO**
Special to **India-West**

NEW YORK — Home is not the safe retreat we believe it to be, at least not for the one out of three women worldwide who are subjected to domestic violence in their lifetimes, Dr. Mary Ellsberg, an expert on gender, violence and human rights, said Jan. 22 at an Asia Society forum here. "The greatest risk is in the home," she stated.

Ellsberg served as a member of the core research team of the World Health Organization's landmark "Multi-country Study on Women's Health and Domestic Violence Against Women." She was one of five panel members for "Between Two Worlds: Domestic Violence, Immigration and Human Rights," a forum hosted by the organization Sanctuary for Families, with the goal of bringing together various community leaders and experts to discuss the particular challenges that immigrant victims of domestic violence face in the

U.S.

The forum opened with the screening of a short film, produced by Sanctuary for Families, about immigrants and domestic violence that featured four women — from Africa, Europe, South America and South Asia — who had experienced abuse in their homes in the U.S. and who had fled to safety. Several were in the audience, including Shamila Malik, who is now a trained outreach volunteer at the New York-based organization, Sakhi for South Asian Women. Sakhi was established in 1989 to combat violence against women from India and the South Asian region.

Ellsberg was joined on the panel by Purvi Shah, executive director of Sakhi for South Asian Women; Taina Bien-Aimé, executive director of Equality Now; Adolfo Carrión, Bronx Borough president; and Beth Silverman-Yam, director of Clinical Programs at Sanctuary for Families. Despite the cold weather, the auditorium was filled to capacity. A former member of



Seen at the domestic violence and immigration forum in New York City are (l to r): Purvi Shah, Mary Ellsberg and Dan Rather. (David M. Rheingold photo)

President Bill Clinton's cabinet and Ambassador to the United Nations, Richard Holbrooke, opened the event, while the panel discussion was moderated by former television news anchor Dan Rather.

Rather opened by asking Ellsberg to place the experiences of the abused women in context, and about the findings of the WHO study, which involved 24,000 women in 10 countries and was the first to quantify and establish patterns

of prevalence of abuse. Ellsberg said the study found that "domestic violence exists in all countries, and one out of every three women will have, at some point in her life, be beaten, raped or abused. In addition, these women are more likely to have physical and mental health problems and try to kill themselves."

When asked by Rather how New York City's communities are responding to domestic violence, Shah said, "Immigrants come with dreams and hopes. In an abusive relationship, women feel isolated and don't know what the avenues of justice are. The abuser might be the only person you know and love in this country. We want them to know there are other resources."

In New York, one advantage women at risk of abuse have, Shah explained, "is the diversity, resources and public transport, as they make for the possibility of mobility, more so than for people in rural settings." She added that for abused women, those who are on student visas or H-4s, accompanying a husband on an H1-B visa, it's a situation that can be further complicated by immigration laws if they do find the wherewithal to leave the abuser.

Speaking of the changing demographics in the city, Shah said, "The Bangladeshi community has really skyrocketed recently. We only have one woman who speaks Bangla and she's always in demand."

Shah went on to point out that there are more than 25 South Asian women's organizations in the U.S. and that they work together to share resources.

Carrión lamented that more progress has not been made on the so-called Beijing document, the Platform for Action agreement

followed the 1995 Fourth Conference on Women organized by the United Nations, in particular the lack of commitment to end discriminatory laws.

With regard to problems specific to the South Asian community, Shah said, "The abuser can make threats against the partner's family back home, and with the role of the extended family, it can mean that abuse is from not just the intimate partner." She concluded, "It's great to have laws, but it's about you and me as individuals, and our own actions and what we can do to end violence in our homes, neighborhood and communities. We want to get to a stage where women do not even have to access the criminal justice system."

Indian Firms to Offshore More

SAN JOSE (PTI) — Companies in India intend to step up offshoring, reflecting the trend of their Western counterparts, according to a McKinsey survey.

The number of Indian firms intending to hire staff in a country different from the company's headquarters increased to 42 percent in December 2006, the "Global Survey of Business Executives: Confidence Index," said. The level in September 2006 was 30 percent.

"In India, executives seem to be looking to offshore some of their own operations, after years of benefiting from Western companies doing the same," the survey said.

Business confidence was high in Asian countries, McKinsey said. About 81 percent of the executives in India said they planned to hire in 2007, while 56 percent of executives in China expected to see hiring growth.

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