

Extra marital affair and family discord : Way-out in Islam

Md. Abdullah Al Helal*

Abstract : Extra marital affair is one of the major factors leading to family disputes in Bangladesh. Simply stated, extra-marital affair is adultery and it is morally reprehensible. Studies have found that this illicit affair has resulted in the loss of trust between the husband and the wife, which is the foundation of conjugal life, leading eventually to divorce. Additionally, there are instances of suicide and murder related to these extra marital affairs. Indeed, the children are the worst victim. Studies also found that, relaxation of religious values is the root cause of this evil and it can be eradicated through faithful adherence to the values inherent in Islam. This paper documents this incidence of extra-marital affairs in Bangladesh and is based on both the primary and secondary sources.

Keywords : Family dispute, Marriage, Extra marital affairs, Islamic values, Divorce, Death.

Introduction

Marriage is commonly understood as relatively enduring relationship between male and female as husband and wife (Rao, 2000). It is a bond by which a man and a woman gain the religious, social and legal recognition to live together. It creates mutual obligations between husband and wife. Marriage is a universally recognized system to regulate sex life which sanctions procreation of children. No religion permits to satisfy this biological need outside the wedlock. Sex outside the marriage is adultery and is known as extramarital affairs. Extra marital affairs can be defined as relationships outside of marriage characterized by an illicit romantic or sexual relationship or passionate attachment between two people of opposite sex. In some cases, extra marital affairs are kept secret thus breaching the fundamental conditions of fidelity. Extra marital affairs may begin benignly i.e., without a physical relationship but may later evolve into a sexual relationship posing a threat to the marital relationship.

Extramarital affairs involve the infidelity (physical, emotional, mental) of someone who is married. It damages the trust, the foundation of relationship, among spouses. Trust is the predicator of a long-term relationship. The role of trust in enduring marriage relationship is vital. If the illicit affair does not end and trust is not rebuilt then it would

* Assistant Professor in Social Work, Centre for General Education, Northern University Bangladesh. E-mail : helalabdullah@gmail.com

adversely affect marriages and lead to divorce. In earlier times, poverty, dowry etc. were the causes of family discord. But now extra marital affair of husband or wife have emerged as a cause of grave concern among the people. Evidence shows that, it is not only destroying family but also leading to murder and suicidal death. Thus, it has added a new dimension to the social degrading that is really a shame for a civilized society. An enduring conjugal life and a healthy family system necessitate that avoiding or arresting illicit affairs. This study provides ample information regarding the magnitude and consequences of extra marital relations and explores the social degradation occurring due to this affair.

Literature review

Extra marital affairs have received some scholarly attention. Uchenna, Ohiri (2010 : 15) found that infidelity is a breach of good faith that applies in a number of contexts. In the context involving a close relationship, infidelity is referred to as cheating which is any violation of the mutually agreed upon rules or boundaries of a relationship. Another term for marital infidelity is adultery. The facts about marital infidelity (sexual unfaithfulness to a spouse) are worth noting. Though a majority of married people disapprove of extramarital relationships, national survey indicates that 15% of wives and 35% of husbands have experienced extramarital sexual affairs. These numbers increase by 20% when emotional affairs and sexual relationships without intercourse are included. Uchenna, Ohiri also found in his study that marital infidelity (sexual unfaithfulness to a spouse) can influence divorce among couples.

K.M.A. Aziz (1979) observed that while the level of women's premarital sexual activity may be significantly, but not hugely, below that of men, extramarital sex is probably much less frequent for women than for men. In Bangladesh, in contrast to the Middle Eastern Muslim societies, but probably in common with other South Asian societies, the sanctions against married women having sex outside marriage are much stronger than those against premarital sex.

Khan and Arefeen (1989) reported that married men had sex outside their marriages with the relatively small number of local women who wanted extra money or presents, who were bored with their husbands or hostile to them, or whose husbands were away for long periods. Some men also visit prostitutes when working alone in the cities. Seema Amin (2012) said that euphemistic use of the word 'affair' itself in Bangladesh—in a society where extramarital relations and divorces are increasingly common, we continue to use the word 'affair' for any romantic or sexual relation at all. This is an ironic indication of the continued power of orthodox cultural norms, where romance and particularly sexual 'affairs' function in a there-not-here world of silence.

A pilot study was conducted by ICDDRDB (2006) in one urban area and in one rural area during December 2004 - January 2005 among men aged 18-49 years in three

purposively selected urban areas (Dhaka metropolitan, Chittagong metropolitan, and Bogra town) and three rural areas (Faridpur, Rajshahi, and Cox's Bazar districts) of Bangladesh. The findings show that, Overall, 17.5% of the respondents ever had pre- or extra- marital vaginal/anal sex (non-marital sex) in the past year. The corresponding figures were 9.9%, 8.6%, and 2.2% respectively for sex with female sex workers, casual female partners, and males/transgenders. This survey has revealed higher levels of non-marital sex - almost 27% of never-married men, and 13% of ever-married men reporting non-marital sex in the past one year-compared to reported rates of non-marital sex in the 12 months preceding the survey ranging from 8-24% (Bhuiya *et al.*, 2004). On the other hand, several small sub-national surveys have found 47% (Caldwell *et al.*, 1999) and 56% (Hawkes *et al.*, 2002) of males had pre-marital and extra-marital sex respectively. These data are either too scanty or not nationally representative for modeling HIV.

Societal norms act to discourage and even to deny the existence of sexual relations outside marriage. Nearly 90 per cent of Bangladesh's population is Muslim and most of the remaining ten per cent is Hindu. The tenets of both these religions strongly condemn extramarital sexual activity and indeed any overt expression of sexuality. The behaviour of women is particularly affected. Among both Muslims and Hindus, women who are judged to be too open in their relations with men are likely to be condemned as immoral, effectively proscribing any relationships of easy friendship. Muslim society, in particular, has been marked by the institution of *pardah* (veil) in which women are expected to seclude themselves from the company of unrelated men. This concern for the reputation of women was in part responsible for early marriage : until recent times the great majority of girls married in their early teens (Caldwell and Indrani, 1999).

Z. Sachedina (1990) viewed that, Islam, in contrast to the often qualified views of Christianity and Hinduism, places no strictures on the enjoyment by men of sex, provided it is within marriage; indeed Islam regards sex within marriage as one of the good things of life.

Extra marital affairs : A qualitative study

As discussed above, no social system permits extra marital relationship and hence those involved in this illicit affair would not like to make their activities to public. This has to do with social condemnation and punishment. The affair comes to public attention only when these lead to murder, suicide or violence. As such it is difficult to gather information from the respondents about their extra marital relationship. Consequently, this research relies upon secondary sources to explore the linkages between extra marital affairs and family dispute and to analyze Islamic values and injunctions which provide solution to the crisis emanating from this illicit affair. This study is based upon information gathered through scanning news papers, journals, books, and through

browsing internet. The author also visited the Bangladesh National Women Lawyers Association (BNW) to collect their documentation on extra marital affairs.

Extra marital affairs at the global level

Recent studies show that 45-55% of married women and 50-60% of married men engage in extramarital sex at some time or another during their relationship (Atwood & Schwartz, 2002). Shirley Glass (2003), a marriage and family therapist, in her 20-year practice found that 46 percent of unfaithful wives and 62 percent of unfaithful husbands had affairs with someone at work (London Gal, 2012). It is the most significant reason for separation between husband and wife. The official divorce rate according to the latest US Census Bureau is 3.6 per 1000 total population; latest research suggests that it could be as high as 50% of all marriages that take place. Increasingly, infidelity figures as the chief cause of marriage break down. L Betzig (1992), a researcher on anthropology, wrote a paper titled "Causes of conjugal dissolution : A cross-cultural study" which found infidelity to be the single most cited cause of divorce in over 150 cultures including the US. An interesting fact about extramarital affairs and divorces is that the divorced spouses rarely marry the paramour who caused the marriage breakup and even when he/she does, the resulting marriage is far from a happy one. Extra marital affairs are also linked to murder and suicidal death. For example, in England and Wales, about 100 women are killed by partners or former partners each year; 21 men were killed in 2010. In 2008, in France, 156 women as against 27 men were killed by their intimate partners. Statistics shows that about 40-70% of murders of women were committed by their husbands or boyfriends. In addition, a woman is beaten every 18 minutes in the USA. In Peru, 70 per cent of all crimes reported to the police involve women beaten by their husbands (Shariar, 2012). In 2011, almost 1,000 Pakistani women were murdered in the name of honour-killing of whom 92% were for alleged extramarital affairs (Tariq, 2012). Furthermore, straying spouses who seek a new romance to send the pulse racing again could get more than they bargained for as extramarital sex increases the risk of a heart attack. Dr Graham Jackson, a heart specialist at St Thomas's Hospital in London, found couples in long-term relationships were far less likely to suffer heart attacks while having sex than those having affairs or one night stands. He found that 75 per cent of the cases of sudden death during sexual activity involved people who were taking part in extramarital sexual intercourse.

Extra marital affair and the family system in Bangladesh

When a family declines, ancient traditions are destroyed; the spiritual foundations for life are lost, and the family loses its sense of unity (Agha, 2012). In recent times, it has raised a grave concern among the conscious people of the country due to the rising family discord caused by this illicit affair and its attendant features. Extramarital affairs affect families in a multitude of ways. The man or woman who gets involved in extra marital

affairs forgets that it might adversely affect the future of her/his family members. Like all other countries, extra marital affairs are the major factors leading to divorce in Bangladesh. This is due to the fact that extramarital affairs damage the trust in a relationship and trust is the predicator of all long-term relationships. There is tremendous damage done to the sense of trust between the partners that may never be recovered. According to the Dhaka City Corporation (DCC) report, in 2005, the number of divorce registered was 5,525. During 2006 to 2011, the figure for divorce stood at 43,007 (Kaler Kontha, January 7, 2012). The major determinant of divorces in these cases is extra marital relations of either the wife or the husband. Habibur Rahman conducted a study on suicide in Jhenidah, where the highest number of suicides occurs in Bangladesh. He also found, extra marital affairs causing suicide in association with poor economic condition, illiteracy, dowry etc. (Daily Star, 2006). Evidence shows that husbands beat and, in extreme cases, kill their wives for involvement in illicit affairs. There are also reports of men being murdered for their involvement in extra marital affairs. Very often these incidents are reported in daily news papers and local satellite channels. To stop the menace of adultery, husbands kill their wives and the latter, with the assistance of their relatives, kill their husbands. Those involved in extra marital affairs even kill their innocent children in order to prove their love to the second party. Wives finding out the illicit affairs of their husband s and being helpless commit suicide. According to the report of Dhaka Metropolitan Police, extra marital relationship is the major factor in most murder cases across the country. On June 05, 2010 at Adabar, Dhaka, a child named Samiul was murdered because of extra marital affairs. This case created great uproar in the country. The investigation found that Samiul's mother, Ayesha Humayra, killed her son in collaboration with her lover in order to maintain secrecy about their illicit affair. On July 30, 2010, a mother, Bilashi, committed suicide with her two sons at Shahjanpur; on August 10, 2010 at Banani, a mother committed suicide with her two sons under train; on August 4, 2010 a child, Tanha, was killed at Sipaibagh; on June 10, 2010, Rita committed suicide with her 12 year old son, Pabon, and 10 year old daughter, Payel, at Jurain. All these suicides and murders were caused by extra marital affairs (Daily Kaler Kontho, January 7, 2012).

Factors influencing extra marital affair

Extramarital sex never had moral acceptability in Islamic societies, in particular, and other societies in general. The spouse who engages in extra-marital sex is guilty of adultery and is subject to the punishment of stoning to death according to Islamic law. In open and liberal societies, immorality of changing partners is becoming a norm (Agha, 2012).

People resort to extra-marital affairs for several reasons. As gleaned from various newspaper reports and documents, extra marital affairs are due to lack of emotional bonding between the husband and the wife. Marriage is supposed to bring about emotional attachment between the couples so that each depends on the other for comfort

and caring, understanding and cooperation. The couples need to take in each other's interest into consideration, each other's work, hobbies and activities. Marriage requires love, compassion and understanding and communication. If the couple fail to communicate their feelings, desires and expectations, their marriage will be adversely affected which may compel the partners to seek emotional bonding and peace outside the marriage.

Religion and religious practices may also contribute to extra marital affairs. If both spouses have good grounding in religion and if they are practicing Muslims then the chances are that they would stay away from infidelity. Religion and religiousity is important in a relationship as religion teaches morality and sense of dealing for a happy conjugal life. There are many examples where religious people are seen to treat their spouses in a very pleasant way. Several studies have shown religious practices to be inversely related related to extra marital affairs.

Women in financially independent and higher positions of power are also likely to be unfaithful to their partners. It is found that women, just like men, when they are working hard in stressful jobs, and are gainfully employed or are financially well-off, tend to make different decisions about how faithful they want to be. It has been observed quite frequently that financial independence is the single, biggest factor contributing to a woman having an extra marital affair.

Yet another factors contributing to extra marital affairs is the mass media which reaches far and wide and is extremely popular. Of significance in this respect is television which has an impact on its viewers. Relatively uncontrolled electronic media in Bangladesh has led to equally uncontrolled flow of cultural programmes which has adversely affected the value system of Bangladeshi citizens irrespective of age and gender. There have been constant calls from the public asking the government to regulate the content of television and electronic media and to save Indian cultural attitude from wholesale transformation. However, these calls fell on the deaf ear. In the meantime, western cultures continue to penetrate the society thus changing the food habits and sexual orientation to the young and old. Western satellite TV channels have eroded the religious values and promoted a secular type of world where relationships are shared and extra marital affairs are not considered a relationship that has to be abhorred. The anonymity and easy availability of online dating now results in many more spouses looking for love outside marriage.

Effects of extra marital affair on children

On an average, 80 mentally disturbed people visit the hospital a day. About 40 per cent of them become mentally disordered due to such extramarital relationships (Shahriar, Sakib: 2012) However, The children are usually affected the most. They feel insecure in staying with such parents (Arzoo, 2010). They feel as if they have suddenly lost the parent they

always trusted and the love which belongs exclusively to them has been taken over by an outsider. They are traumatized by the change in the emotional climate in the home. They may develop regressive problems such as physical illness or night terrors. They may withdraw or act out in an effort to get their parents stop the affair. Their distress may result in school related problems, anxiety, depression, bullying, and victimization.

Extra marital affairs also negatively impact the identity and moral development of adolescents. The adolescents look to their parents as role models and expect that they be given training to behave as normal people and develop and retain stable relationships with people of their age groups. Parents characterized by infidelity cannot fulfill the functions of a role model and hence adolescents find no ideal to strive for. From here it is just an easy step to venture into dysfunctional relational patterns leading to promiscuity, dishonesty, and a belief on the appropriateness of jettisoning love and trust.

Islam : culture, marriage and family

Islam is the only approved religion to Allah (SWT). Qur'an and Sunnah is the foundation of Islam. Islam is not only a religion but also a complete code of life. It lays down clearly the principles of conduct for family, society and life. The greatest beauty of Islam is its distinct culture, '*thaqafah*,' which is based on the Qur'an and Sunnah as well as on great human experience and learning (*a'raf* and '*adat*'). The Islamic Culture is theocentric, upholding strict *Tawhid* (monotheism), emphasizing worship and devotion as well as the *Halal* and avoidance of the *Haram*. It also emphasizes equality, truthfulness, honesty, modesty (*Haya*'), and cleanliness or *Taharah*. Islamic culture emphasizes patience and reminds the believers to work in a steadfast manner and put their trust in Allah, the Lord and Sustainer of the universe.

Marriage is sanctified in Islam. According to the Qur'an: And among His Signs is this, that He created for you mates from among yourselves, that ye may dwell in tranquility with them, and He has put love and mercy between your (hearts): verily in that are Signs for those who reflect (30 : 21). This verse makes it absolutely clear that the Creator in His infinite wisdom has created human beings in pairs, in two sexes with different physical structures and different emotions and desires. Allah, the Almighty has then willed harmony between the two that each is a perfect counterpart of the other. This is beautifully expressed as : "Your wives are a garment for you, and you are a garment for them" (2 : 187). In other words, the relationship between a husband and his wife is supposed to be one of mutual protection and adornment. They should love each other, complement and support each other and lead a healthy, prosperous life. A married life lived in love and trust for the sake of Allah (SWT) is considered *ibadah*, a continuous worship. The Prophet (SAW) is reported to have said that when a man gets married, he has completed half of his religion!

The Qur'an clearly and unequivocally prohibits extra marital affairs. The Qur'an, in Surah 17, al Isra, verse 32, says : "Do not go near adultery, surely it is an indecency, and an evil way [of fulfilling sexual urge]. Islam has closed all the ways by which marital fidelity steps into human society. In this regard Allah (SWT) says, (24 : 30) "Enjoin (O Muhammad) believing men to lower their gaze and to preserve their chastity; It is what is most pure for you. In truth, God is fully aware of their acts" (24 : 31). "And enjoin believing women to lower their gaze and preserve their chastity, and not to reveal any of their attributes of beauty except that which is [manifestly] apparent, and to draw their veils over their chests".

The Qur'an teaches that all circumstances which can lead to extramarital sexual affairs must first remove. All laws and regulations in this regard can be summarized as follows: One, men and women are to dress decently. As sight constitutes the prime motivation of the sexual impulse in man, women are not to dress in such a fashion as to display their beauty. Two, there should be nothing in society which is of a sexually provocative nature. Indeed, in an Islamic society, cabarets, dance centres, beauty contests and the like are not permitted. Three, the unrestricted mingling of the sexes, which ultimately leads to adultery, is also disallowed. Four, the use of sex as a profession is completely forbidden. For in an Islamic society, prostitutes, call-girls, sex-bombs, nude models and the like are an impossibility. Five, men and women (excepting the husband or any relative with whom marriage has been prohibited) are not permitted to travel together. Six, men and women are not to converse freely except in the presence of a third person. Seven, unless they have become mates through the institution of marriage, men and women are not to gaze at each other with lewd passion. Eight, they are not to speak, or flirt, in a manner that evokes lust. Finally, in case of the men who cannot find contentment in a single woman, there is also the provisions - albeit, a conditional one -to marry more than one woman (Akbar, 2012).

The Prophet (SAW) in emphasizing the importance of chastity and integrity is reported have said that Allah (SWT) will shade seven types of people in His Shade on the Day including two men who love each other for Allah's sake, meeting for that and parting upon that; a man who is called by a woman of beauty and position [for illegal intercourse], but he says : 'I fear Allah'... and a man who remembered Allah in private and so his eyes shed tears' (Sahih Bukhari, Vol. 1, No. 629, p. 356). It is worth remembering that humanity was created to serve Allah (SWT) and, as Khalifatullah (Vicegerent of Allah) on earth, is entrusted with relating to fellow creatures and all other creations in the best way possible. All human actions carried out in accordance with the Shari'ah are acts of worship (ibadah).

Conclusion

It is evident from the presentation made above that marriage is a sacred institution aimed at populating the world with good souls. Extra marital affairs not only destroy the trust between husband and wife but also lead to divorce among them. Those involved in such illicit affairs are found sometimes to kill their children and quite often drives the other partner crazy to the extent that she commits suicide. Marriage leads to the establishment of family. None can deny its significance in providing social status, upbringing and socialization of the children and in creating a morally sound and healthy society. But this basic institution of the society is in great peril due to the prevalence of illicit affairs among the married people. So, in order to protect this noble institution and to maintain a healthy family life, the enforcement of Islamic prescription for family life is indispensable.

References

- Agha, S. Mansoor (2012). "Extramarital relations and their effects" available at <http://498afaq.blogspot.com/2012/01/extramarital-relations-and-their.html> (Accessed October 15, 2013).
- Akbar, M M (2012). "Eliminate Extramarital Relationships" available at <http://www.nicheoftruth.org/pages/punishment.asp> (Accessed October 19, 2013).
- Amin, Seema (2012). "Strategies of Power in a Hiccupocracy" published in Daily Star (English Daily) on 03.05.12 available at <http://www.thedailystar.net/magazine/2012/05/03/perspective.htm> (Accessed October 21, 2013).
- Arzu, Alpha (2010). "Mental patients on rise for extra marital affairs, say experts" published in Daily Star (English Daily) on 30.09.2010, available at <http://www.thedailystar.net/newDesign/news-details.php?nid=156554> (Accessed October 21, 2013).
- Atwood, Joan D. & Limor Schwartz (2002). The New Affair Treatment Considerations. *Journal of Couple & Relationship Therapy: Innovations in Clinical and Educational Interventions*, 1:3, pp. 37-56.
- Aziz, K.M.A. (1979). *Kinship in Bangladesh*. Dhaka: International Centre for Diarrhoeal Disease Research, Bangladesh.
- Betzig, L. (1989). "Causes of conjugal dissolution: A cross-cultural study." *Current Anthropology*, 30, pp. 654-676.
- Caldwell, Bruce and Pierisb, Indrani (1999) "Continued high-risk behaviour among Bangladeshi males" (pp.183-196). In John C. Caldwell, Pat Caldwell, John Anarfi, Kofi Awusabo-Asare, James Ntozi, I.O. Orubuloye, Jeff Marck, Wendy Cosford, Rachel Colombo and Elaine Hollings (eds), *Resistances to Behavioural Change to Reduce HIV/AIDS Infection in Predominantly Heterosexual Epidemics in Third World Countries*. Canberra, Australi: National Centre for Epidemiology and Population Health, Australian National University.
- Daily Star (2006). "NOT WAY OUT" available at <http://www.thedailystar.net/magazine/2006/08/03/sfeature.htm> (Accessed October 21, 2013).

Glass, Shirley P. (2003). "Seven Tips for Preventing Infidelity". <http://www.preventingdivorce.com/prevent-infidelity-and-affairs.htm>. (Accessed November 20, 2013).

ICDDR, B (2006). "Assessment of Sexual Behavior of Men in Bangladesh: A Methodological Experiment". Dhaka : Centre for Health and Population Research.

Khan, Z.R. and Arefeen, H.K. (1989) "Potita Nari: A Study of Prostitution in Bangladesh" Dhaka: University Press Limited.

LondonGal (2012). "Extra Marital Affair in the workplace available at <http://www.ummah.com/forum/showthread.php?324364-Islam-and-Extra-Marital-Affairs-in-the-Workplace> (Accessed October 05, 2013).

Rao, C. N. Shankar (2000). "Sociology : Primary Principles". New Delhi: S. Chand Company Ltd.

Uchenna, Ohiri (2010). Factors Influencing Divorce". Enugu: Caritas University, Amorji-Nike.

Sachedina, Z. (1990). "Islam, procreation and the Law" International Family Planning Perspectives 16: 107-111.

Shahriar, Sakib (2012). "Extramarital Relation: Its Reason and Solution" available at http://www.thefinancialexpress-bd.com/more.php?news_id=95230&date=2012-01-21 (Accessed September 15, 2013).

Tariq, Zoia (2012). "Proud to Kill" published in Forum (A monthly publication of Daily Star) available at <http://www.thedailystar.net/forum/2012/November/proud.htm> (Accessed October 21, 2013).