

THE INVISIBLE TRAUMA IN AFGHANISTAN

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ABSTRACT: *Sex is the prison for women in Afghanistan and invisible trauma refers to sex trauma which is nothing more than cultural trauma, perpetuated in a normative figure. The stigmatic interpretation of sex in Afghanistan over sensitizes forced sex and marital rape, extensively practiced in Afghanistan mainly in forms of forced marriage. This article focuses on how tabooed and stigmatic conception of sex in Afghanistan harshly victimizes the individuals, involved in forced sex and marital rape. The basis of both stigmatic sex perception and forced marriage are rooted in collective believes. Hence this article, on the basis of secondary data, tends to describe the contradictory cultural foundations of forced marriage and tabooed sex perception which sensitize forced sex including marital rape and causes severely traumatic consequences for the victims in Afghanistan.*

KEYWORDS: Tabooed sex perception; forced sex; marital rape; Trauma.

INTRODUCTION

What is sex trauma in Afghanistan? This is a question destined to be traced in taboo, which is fully diluted not just in Afghanistan but in a human history. As for what we know, there is no clear sense of a real and literary analysis on sex in a pathological sense till late centuries. Sex as a phenomenon hasn't been perceived seriously in human's life or its tabooed sense may have affected to be intentionally neglected. By tracing it in etymological sense through history it emerges in 20th century in literature, but it has come to be as phenomenon for social and behavioural science in late 20th century. Pathological study of sex and its consequences as social phenomenon in most of Islamic countries and Afghanistan is confronted by raw literary resources and strongly restricted by ritualistic cultural forms.

The Perception toward sex varies in different cultures and subcultures. Sexual perception, expectation, desire, practices and preferences are mostly influenced by culture (Bhattacharya, Cross, Bhugra, 2010) while in Afghanistan due to its stigmatic perception it is being kept as hidden dilemma. In fact its Invisibleness is its evilness, resulting in large proportionate of people (especially women) to be scarified of such invisible taboo. its rigid social and cultural judgments tied with hard and strictly believe boundaries. Therefore, it needs to be studied as other significant topics of social life and to be analyzed as a form of social action with its particular circumstances, implications and consequences. In Afghanistan, in addition to victimizing thousands of peoples throughout the country due to its stigmatic social conception, talking about such dilemma is considered a stigma. And until today there is not even a single raw investigation, titling issue in form of a social pathology. Hence this article is going to examine the cultural foundations of sex perception and forced marriage in Afghanistan in order to clarify how tabooed sex perception in

presence of extensively forced sex practices causes different sorts of social traumas, specifically for those who are victims of marital rape in form of forced marriage in Afghanistan.

LITERATURE REVIEW

To ask what sexuality is seems simple. However, being a multidimensional phenomenon, there are still vast ambiguities in its definitions. Sexuality is certainly related to sex, but when it is being defined, it seems quite complicated. The word sex is surrounded with esoteric sense, particularly in English language. Since sex refers not only to sexual activity (having sex), it marks the distinction between male and female anatomy. Contradiction exists in defining sex as a physiological need and psychological interference but the word sexuality is a comparatively new term. It became as common currency in late 20th century, mainly in Europe and America while anthropological and sociological studies were flourishing as never before. In its earliest scientific usage it referred to the human eroticism, but by adding the prefix such as hetero, homo or bio, it came to describe types of person embodied in a particular desire.

Referring to the Oxford Dictionary of English, the word was firstly recorded in 1836 and further used in poem titled "*the lives of plants, upon their sexuality*" by William Cowper. Later on, the English writer Charles Kingsley in "Paradise and Hell" associated sexuality with argumentative rationality. But in 20th century it became gloomy and there was no serious intension to redefine the issue. However, coming to Jeffery Weeks, in 1986 he claimed sexuality as a historically contingent, which is well defined in specific period of the history. David M. Halper argues the same as sexuality is to be understood first and foremost in its historical context and the analysis in last centuries are limited to their own historical context. To illustrate the rise of sexuality as a modern phenomenon, from 1860 through 20th century, which is simultaneous to the emergence of sexology, is the correct and sketched start to study it in today's figure (Bristow, 2007). Even in past literary works in west sexuality reflected as tabooed phenomenon. Limited social literature and non-professionalized investigations of the issue as a social phenomenon in early centuries are the evidences. The term sexology includes examining sexuality from various perspectives including psychoanalysis elaborated by Sigmund Freud, Jacques Lacan. Coming to analysis of French philosopher Michel Foucault, he defined the issue quite distinctive with strong interconnectedness between sexuality and power that examined the sexuality desires laden of conceptual frames of discourse constructed by power. He acutely clarifies how sexuality constructed in cultural dynamics, which raised critical wave by Judith Butler, Gayle Rubin, and Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick toward masculinity and feminines. Focusing in social science in late 20th century beside all others, there are two more works: "*In Sexual Conduct: the Social Sources of Human Sexuality*" (1973) written by John Gagnon and William Simon's "*Social Organization of Sexuality*," published in 1994. Though these researches describe the issue scientifically on statistical basis with no ethical interference, it is hard for their readers to gain insights into the cultural conditions and the ideological pressure of the issue (Bristow, 2007). Whereas the main concern in this article is to examine the cultural gravity of the phenomenon, it is significant to cite the literatures by prioritizing the basis of historical and cultural relevancy. There are several studies devoted to sexuality as multidimensional topic in late years, which are oriented to cultural roots.

In 2010 the book “*Clinical Topics in Cultural Psychiatry*” described the way culture determines the perception and attitudes in every relation, including sex relation. It explains the cultural valuations toward sex and defines sex in positive and negative way. In other terms, culture draws the legitimate and illegitimate boundaries for being in a relation which is in fact the reflection of a collective perception. The different societies define it in a various normative features (Bhugra, Dinesh, Cross, Bhattacharya, 2010).

But the book “*Sex without Consent: Young People in Developing Countries*” published in 2005, due to its evidence based assessment in developing countries seems quite distinctive. It includes various articles based on multidimensional scope. Mainly it is concentrated on non-consensual sex and it claims that fewest researches devoted to non- consensual sex experience and its outcomes (Jejeebhoy, Shah&Thapa, 2005). Overly, it is a book contently touching the point from the perspective of social and behavioural science, mainly followed by sociological perspective. On the other hand, due to its consistency to issue in relevant context (developing countries) and following diverse perspective, it can be prioritized rather than many others.

However, the mentioned literatures have one point less in common and neglecting to title how cultural perception influences the sex relation. Neither point to consent nor non-consent sex, both notions defined diversely in different context. It is mainly based on cultural perception rather than physical attachments. Social perception toward sex is mainly supported by culture and it steps beyond physical and biological attachment which does not remain as the substantiated phenomenon anymore. Even the secrecy reflection of the phenomenon is a reflection of culture. But still defining the notion on the basis of cultural influences is an illusion, which is not specified in all prior literatures related to sexology and neither in Afghanistan. Meanwhile coercive and non-coercive sex is not merely related to biology and physic of an individual, rather than it is a character constructed in collective believes and cultural valuations. In the other sense these are the cultural manufactures that involve the humans to seek justification for their actions.

Distinctiveness in its perceptions is supported by culture as a supporting source of constructing the significance. Even the way it emerges in social perception as taboo and sensitive or ordinary phenomenon comes from cultural valuations. Therefore the sex definition varies; it can be variously interpreted through different cultural contexts that subsequently shape the personal attitudes and normative structures in specific cultural orientation. The gravity of perception of sex is derived of collective perception and interfered by social judgments. Even the sense and perceptibility of sex as a notion and behaviour comes from culture. Because culture is a wide territory that interferes in each corner of human’s life. It functions as invisible force but crucially influences the human life. “It is Culture which tells us what to do and how to act” (Alexander&Thompson, 2008). Due to its prevailed role in humans believe and lives, it crucially influences humans life. Hence the sex coerciveness and consensus are also based on cultural valuations; do not merely refer to a physical character.

There is a strong research literature explicitly showing social consequences of forced sex multifaceted and traumatic for young people in developing countries that adversely affect the behaviours, relationships and probably leads to deviance. In addition, mental health disorders such as depression, anxiety, addiction, suicide and negative physical consequences like unsafe abortion

and sexually transmitted infections including AIDS are counted as risky outcomes (Jejeebhoy et al, 2005). Therefore, due to stigmatic and tabooed sex perception in Afghanistan, forced sex carries mistier social outcomes. Because in Afghanistan, the notion of sex is culturally the most exaggerated notion linked to social honor and social dignity that forced sex in such a sensitized perceptibility is more injurious and unbearable to victims.

Sex, coercive taboo

The late year's reports of human rights commission reported honor killing as shocking phenomenon in Afghanistan. In recent years (2011-2012) 243 cases of honor killing had been registered in human rights commission offices. The reported victims are all women, those who are raped or had sex out of marriage or even socially labeled as deviant, being seen as the symptoms of family dishonor. It rarely happens to men involved with such circumstances, even if he would have been labeled as a deviant, it is not perceived and symbolized shameful as it is perceived in women's case. The data reported by AIHRC seems as strong evidence but still many incidents are out of list and it is hard to believe the contained data in reports as actual incidents. Due to its culturally stigmatized significance and social insecurity, many cases are intentionally kept hidden by the victims. Even talking of such issue seems to be socially shameful and symbolizes dishonor (Saramad et al, 2013). Though the notion of sex in Afghanistan is a taboo and stigma and it still defines issues related to social honor and dignity. The sex notion in such cultural context embodies mainly the social and cultural sense rather than physical or biological character. To stay away of sex relation till marriage is seen as preserving strong cultural value and it is being thought as a major pre-condition norm of marriage, that curiously being practiced in generational socialization process. Under other circumstances, the sex relation beyond particular legitimate ways, defined deviance by social traditions and Islamic law that may lead to harsh punishment, even death. In such a way it spontaneously dresses itself in cultural value and occupies preponderant status which eventually strengthens its social basis.

Gradual practice of such stigmatized perception in socialization process of ordinary life changes it to an ironic reality (Kivisto, 2008). Maintaining such value is perceived as supporting culture and social believes. Obviously, preserving of such exaggerated phenomenon decorated in a normative figure with strong normative pressure in collective mentalities causes the individual to feel dignified. The value preserved and practiced by a lay person or a girl socialized in such a culture gives a kind social satisfaction. Socially, she feels honored that she could hold the cultural support by practicing it in form of dominated cultural value. In other sense it gives her/im self-esteem (Anderson & Taylor 2006). Contrary, being forced to sex, which is a stigma, supported by social and cultural sensitized basis, causes a severely poor self-esteem and results uneven psychological, physical and social disorder which is extensively practiced in Afghanistan in various forms including marital rape.

Now the question arises, how to define non-consent sex (forced sex)? Heise, Moree and Toubia outlined a range of coercive situations as:

“the act of forcing (or attempting to force) another individual through violence, threats, verbal insistence, deception, cultural expectations or economic circumstances to engage in sexual behaviours from violent forcible rape to more contested areas

that require young women to marry and sexually service men not of their choosing. The touchstone of coercion is an individual women's lack of choice to pursue other options without severe social and physical consequences” (Jejeebhoy et al, 2005).

Notions of “cultural expectation” and “coercion” in mentioned definition acutely describe the point we mean in Afghanistan. The non-consensual sex or coercive situation here refers to non-justified ways of interaction for oneself, which is mainly valued by social perception. Sexual intercourse is not merely biological interaction; rather it is overly existential interaction of individuals which includes an individual's thoughts, attitudes, emotions, instincts, perception and social valuations. In a wide sense it is defined on social and cultural basis in form of a social action, which is basically involved of thought and social valuation process. Meanwhile in Afghanistan's cultural context, sex based identification of woman is a social reality. Girls and women experience it in their socialization routine. Therefore, sex service for men are considered coercive and culturally expected role of a woman which is a kind of sex based identity creation. It is a relation, very imbalanced and women are mainly symbolized with obesity.

Whereas in socialization procedure people absorb the culture, laws, habits, rituals and practices and socialization becomes the basis for identity, that human defines oneself in it and establishes the personality (Anderson&Tylor, 2006).

Being labeled with such sex based identity is simultaneous with several risks. It increases the risk of objectifying women as commodity of the man's leisure, irrespective of their will. Especially in forced marriage which functions as a mechanism of coercive sex which is called marital rape. Many researchers regard this as the most common and coercive, which is oriented to desire to hurt, humiliate and dominate through sex (Finkelhor, Straus, Gelles, Hotaling, Richard, 1983) while for whom sex internalized as taboo with heavy cultural diligence can be more traumatic in its coercive form. Therefore, such a cultural exaggerated form of sex in its compelling form in forced marriage leaves victims with injurious, social and psychological traumas. Forced marriage here doesn't refer a stereotype format; rather it functions as a culturally justified mechanism which is legitimized by respecting the traditional way of ancestors, elders and preserving the family's dignity. Its normative rigidity can be clearly traceable in recent evidence from Afghanistan, characterized by 3.8 percent of the honored killings as the result of refusing a forced marriage (Saramad et al, 2013). But still it is accompanied by a wide inclusion and normative intimidation throughout the country.

Generally, the present evidence describes the women as the most of the victims who suffered forced sex in their relations and there are adequate literatures in developed world which are to the point. However, in developing countries, in spite of being major victims the literature is non-sufficient and non-relevant. It rarely titled in a phenomenal status. Considering various sociocultural contexts (Jejeebhoy et al, 2005), it is hardly possible to generalize the women as the main victims in different society and support the mentioned points as analytical framework. But due to some relevancy in mentioned variables, enables us to assume it abroad even in Afghanistan that transcendental victimized number is women.

Patriarchal structure of Afghanistan which caused a woman to be treated as subordinate person and labeled as a second human with stigmatic countenance in traditional culture, influences the women lives in many ways. It reflects nothing rather than a kind of rooted patriarchal mentalities of men who have been treated as lords which is visible in many cultural practices and past literary works (Saramad et al, 2013). Obviously in a society characterized with male dominance mentality, being a woman can be risky in many cases; likewise in selecting a life partner. Because in such sterile collective rationality, sex service is defined as a central role for women (Saramad et al, 2013), which flows to sex based identity creation, eventually ending in ordinate and subordinate relation between man and woman and results forced marriage and coercive sex in families. It is nothing than a black sheet which is socially constructed in form of culture, is widely practiced even today.

From forced marriage to forced sex

Marriage is an institution in which interpersonal relationships, generally intimated and sexual relation is acknowledged. But forms of marriage are depending on a culture or subculture from which a person comes. The act of marriage creates some normative and legal obligations between the individuals who are engaged in such relation on the basis of some culturally defined norms. In some countries, the man willing to pay a bride the price for a woman in exchange of socially legitimate sexual access, which is in fact, a traditional type. In traditional marriages the obesity of women and command for man is considered as a major role division. Such a traditional type is simultaneous with the perception that defines sex relation as inevitable and core function in marriage. Contrary to this, in modern marriages, selection of partner involves either the couple going through a selection process with full autonomy (Mathew, 2010). However in Afghanistan, among various traditional marriage models like exchange marriage, polygamy and early marriage, forced marriage is one of the most commonly practiced forms. In forced marriage, there is no consideration of autonomy, freeness and choice based life partner selection right for the couple; rather it is a kind of pre-destined process. Mostly father and elder son of the family are considered the men of decision maker for other family members, especially for girls. Such patriarchal social structure causes the women to be majority of the victims in forced marriages. In the year 2011, 172 cases of forced marriage, registered in different regions of the country are the evidence which is mainly rooted in culturally justified interpretations of Islamic law (Saramad et al, 2013). Stepping out of such normative realm in many cases can be labeled deviance and shameful. To be noted that most of the violence against women reported in 2011, 2012, and 2013, including forced marriage, is linked in collective believes. It is traditionally justified in forms of social and religious traditions, without referring to the accurate interpretations of sharia. Therefore it caused rigidity in roots, vastness in practice and perceived as legitimized form in ordinary life. The below case is a clear evident of forced marriage in Afghanistan.

“Three years ago I was forced by my parents to get married with my cousin, who was a soldier in the national army. One month later different kinds of violence started and every day I was beaten without any reason. Under different accusation, such as talking with my father or other scant reasons he beats me. He repeatedly threatened me to death by knife and weapon. Out of fear and panic to be killed I aborted my child three times. Now I want to divorce, but I have no one to help me. Many times Jirga (traditional meeting) intervened to settle our problems, but my husband does not abide by his promise

and again continuous to beat me. The Jirga forced me to go to my husband's house. But he does not abide by his promise and beats me repeatedly. Therefore, I do not believe in the decision made by Jirga”(Hasrat, 2011).

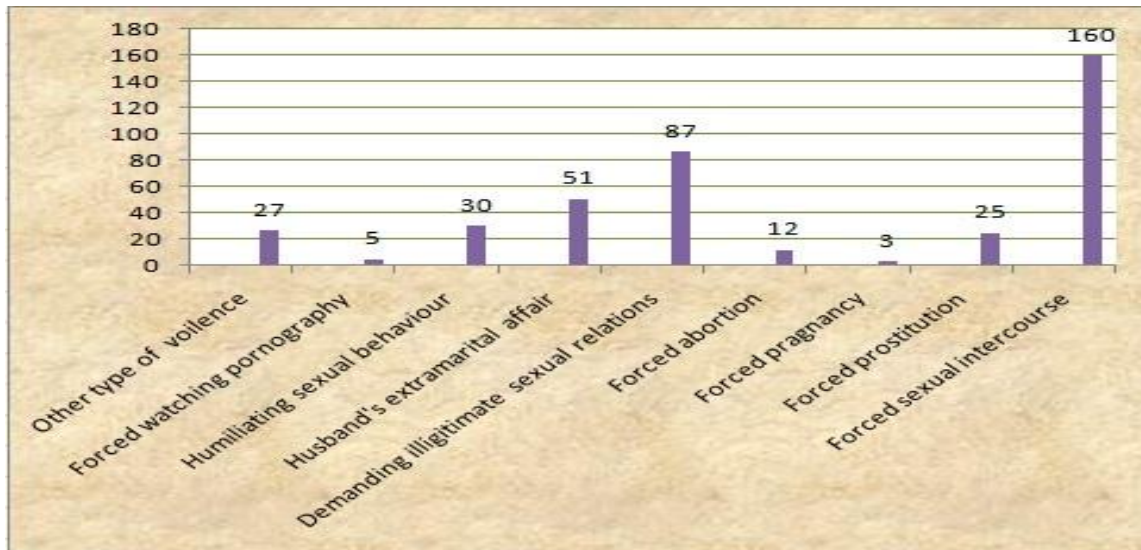
The mentioned case acutely clarifies the forced marriage, as socially and culturally legitimate model with strongly cultural justifications. It is traditionally and widely practiced as a culture, in order to justify the honor and respect of the family and elders. Though sex relation defined as major functions in marriage institution, in traditional cultural context of Afghanistan, it is dramatically over-exaggerated. Even serving sex for man is defined as a major role for women, irrespective of their intention and satisfaction. Parallel to such evilness in collective mentalities, the patriarchal structure of society has caused it to be perceived as a norm. Obviously she perceives the sex coercive and non-consent in such relation, which is coercive with harsh physical abuse.

In today's terminology it is defined as “marital rape” and forced marriage considered as pattern of traditional practices that facilitate forced sex (Mariam, Purna, Thomson, 1998).

Sexual violence

Sexual violence is one of the most concerning violence, extensively practiced in different forms. Due to its tabooed nature, mostly it is not publicized by victims and Medias. It remained hidden but crucially harming. In spite of its stigmatic pattern, in last three years Afghanistan Independent Human Right commission drafted reports related to violence against women that reflect serious cases of sexual violence in various types, including forced sex which is well described in following Diagram.

DIAGRAM 1: TYPES OF SEXUAL VOILENCE IN 2011

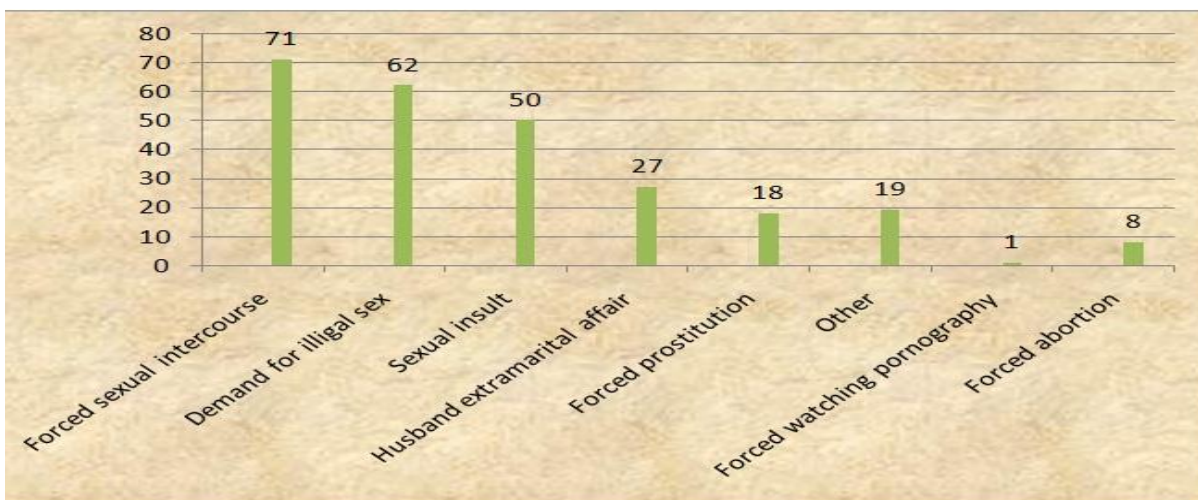


(Hasrat, 2011, 27)

The data in diagram reveals the types and frequency of sexual abuse, including vast sexual violence in many forms that depicts forced sexual intercourse as extraordinary ascended phenomenon. It gives an account of highly objectified and violation of women rights and autonomy. Obviously, the broadly practiced forced sexual intercourse due to its socially stigmatic sense can be troublesome,

traumatic and injurious for the victims. For further clarification it will benefit us to consider the following figure representing the six months assessment of sexual violence in the year 2012. It is reported one year later than figure (1), but still depicts horrifying situation.

DIAGRAM 2: TYPES OF SEXUAL VIOLENCE IN 2012



(Hasrat&Pfefferle, 2012, 16)

In figure (2) the harsh face of sexual violence is evident. Forced sexual violence represented with the highest rate. It worths noting that diagrams represent general assessment of sexual violence in multidimensions, not particularly within families. As it is one of the main concerns in this article that still there is no specific statistical data representing sexual violence evaluations in families. But on the basis of mentioned evidence in all reports related to sexual violence, most of the incidents are within family. Though both figures reveal two separate assessments from two different times, they have a common evident point, describing forced sexual violence as extraordinary high and increasingly happened within family which is certainly with coercive disposition. Over all, such internalized and constitutionalized discrimination causes violence to be prevailed more in sexual forms, even in social sphere. But in order to reach the significance of harsh victimization of such perception in extensive practices of forced sex, referring to the consequences would benefit a clear sense.

The consequences

Rape is mainly characterized as coercive sex and marital rape is reported a common one in research literatures after 1980. Especially in societies with patriarchal structure, dominated by discriminated normative figures like Afghanistan, where forced marriage, still practiced as phenomenon rooted in traditions and women obesity, gets its justification in collective mentalities. Definitely the consequences of forced sex due to its social and cultural sensitivity can be a dilemma. The gravity of such dilemma tied in contradictory confrontation of stigmatic conception of sex and practicing forced marriage in forms of social tradition. It embodies a kind of two confronted attitudes; stigmatized sex conception sensitizes sex relation whereas the forced marriage legitimizes it. Such cultural contradictory flow to instillation of two types of absolutely confronted attitudes that cause

individuals, who, involved of forced sex and forced marriage, feel guiltier and dishonoured than ever. Eventually the mentioned contradiction flows to severe psychological and social traumas.

The evidences in Afghanistan represent 404 cases of sexual violence registered in the year 2011. Among various types of sexual violence like forced abortion, forced prostitution, forced pregnancy, illegitimate anal sex, the forced sexual intercourse is reported horribly ascending (Hasrat, 2011). Obviously it leads to largely victimized people in forms of isolation from family and community, panic, feeling of shame, guilt and insecurity, hostility and revenge, social and moral deviation, suicide, depression, feeling dishonor, escaping home, family break up, prostitution, divorce and addiction. Young girls in particular are majority of the victims and some of victims deviated to social prostitution. In many cases they resort to suicide as the ways to get rid of non-satisfied situation (Hasrat, 2011).

DISCUSSION

In late 20th century, “sex” for social and behavioural experts parallel to other problems raised as multi-dimensional phenomenon. Particularly after 1980, there was enough and multidimensional research literature related to issue in developed countries. But in developing countries due to its ritualistic structure, it never got to be titled as serious topic. Rather it is typified as a taboo that invisibly creates catastrophes in families and social spheres. Afghanistan can be one of the real portrayals of human dignity violation and human catastrophe in this case. In Afghanistan though “sex” as a notion stereotyped in its stigmatized form, it has been the grave of thousands of human who have been victimized in the silence of such invisible taboo by being forced to sex and being raped in the families and society, particularly the women who died and die every day with feeling guilty of being in a physical relation which is socially stigmatized. But it never got the chance to be titled as a phenomenon, it remained as a taboo and stigma. Hence this article assumes “sex” as more complex notion in Afghanistan which appears to be stigma but happens widely in its forced form within families.

The culturally sensitized sex perception in a society with widely forced sex practices is a traumatic society. Such tabooed perception harshly causes severe social and psychological injuries for the victims living in a territory, where sex is overly sensitized but sex service for a man irrespective of woman’s autonomy, believed as socially expected role. Including all sexual assaults, forced marriage in Afghanistan is one of the most common mechanisms of forced sex and marital rape. Such coercive relation which internalized as stigma causes more injuries for Afghan women compare to other societies. It ends in traumatic consequences like isolation from family and community, panic, feeling of shame, guilt and insecurity, hostility and revenge, social and moral deviation, suicide, depression, feeling dishonor, escaping home, family break up, prostitution, divorce and addiction.

Humans are jailed in social perceptions, which they construct and then become the objects and devotees of their own constructs. Partly life, death, peace, prosperity and shame, including all causes of sufferings, flow out of such constructed perceptions. Therefore, humans justify every life incident on the basis of their self-made perception figured in a system of social valuation, particularly, cultural and social perceptions, which are shaped and privileged by normative

pressure with preponderant influences. The same is with stigma, which is nothing rather than a normative and collective based perception that influences the human life. In such away the stigmatized sex perception affects the women self-esteem in coercive relations. Such perception is more risky in society like Afghanistan, where forced marriage is a tradition and forced sex is a wide practice.

CONCLUSION

How sex as stigma cause more injuries in Afghanistan? In spite of its culturally stigmatized face, it is extensively practiced in forced forms. Though it is socially and culturally stigmatized, mentioned data reveal forced sex as extensive and invisible phenomenon practiced in different forms, including marital rape. Sex as culturally stigmatized phenomenon overly sensitizes it for those who are the victims of forced sex in forms of rape, exchange marriage, polygamy, early marriage and forced marriage. They perceive sex as they think of what the people think. They perceive it stigma because they think that people think of it as a stigma. Imagine what will be the consequences of forced sex for whom sex is stigmatized but forced to it?

Therefore sex in such a cultural judgment for who are forced to marriage and coercive relation causes catastrophic consequences and poor self-esteem which is a form of cultural trauma. This article on the basis of mentioned data claims that wide practice of forced sex including marital rape due to its socially stigmatized perception can be more traumatic with severe psychological and social consequences in Afghanistan. Hence it recommends educational empowerment of the mass, criticizing absurd social traditions and suggests strengthening legal prohibition of forced sex and forced marriage as the path to decrease the victims in such a silent territory.

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