**A Sociological analysis of marriage of**

 **underaged girls; victims of rape**

**under marriage contract in Iran**

**Author: Ali Tayefi**

**Introduction**

Every year in Iran, thousands of underage girls are subjected to rape under the pretext of marriage. The forcibly rape of children is celebrated by the family and friends, where the rapist, the groom, takes the child-bride to bed to forcibly rape her in her first experience of sexual encounter.

**Rape** is a sexual encounter where the victim is subjected to the violence, either due to ignorance, lack of right to choose, use of force to reluctantly consent to sex due to the element of fear.  According to international definitions, all individuals under the age of 18 are considered children. Generally, children lack the knowledge and the capacity both physically and mentally and the awareness, especially of the sexual relationships. In Iran, lack of sex education programs makes children prone to violence and harm more than other cultures, where children are taught about their body and its functions. It is for this reason that sexual relationship with under 18 children in Iran is an act of abuse and a barrier to the growth of girls, physically and mentally.

**Why white** **rape**:

The biggest rate of rape of children in Iran and indeed the world occurs when girl /children are married off to men of older age. White rape is a term which I used for this category of violence and the most common act of structured rape, where it is sanctioned by the family and accompanied by celebrations and festivities. White rape has a two-faced nature to it: on the one hand, the girl is subjected to rape by “husband” and on the other hand, there is no individual or organisation to object to this practice.

**Silent** **rape**:

Rape of children under the guise of marriage is the most silent form of rape where the victim, either due to fear of punishment or family honour and/or further violence consents to rape. Children are married off to form family and produce children while they are under deep psychological traumas of sexual encounters. Children as victims of silent rape can pass those traumatic experiences to their own children.

**Rape under the guise of chastity**

The most common justification of white rape is taken place under the guise of marriage is the defence of family honour.  The girl’s chastity and honour which is mainly due to lack of education, poverty and social inequality are the most common reasons to marry a child by force. Children who are married off under the age of 18 will be deprived of educational opportunities and corrosion of personal growth. Although child marriage takes place to chastise the collective honour but that concept will be severely eroded by the individual and the collective from another angle.

**Rape of individual by the society**

Rape of girl/child under the guise of marriage is imposed on the most vulnerable in the society. In this structure, the hegemony of the society over individual negates the rights and freedoms of the individual to decide its own path. It is in such cultural atmosphere that the child becomes victim of social chastity, collective or tribal honour and an instrument of reproduction of the patriarchal society. This is the most institutionalised historical abuse of children which continues to exist.

**Hegemony of tradition and religion over** **moral**:

The most important backbone of the continuation of the phenomenon of child marriage and white rape is its sanction by the religion and tradition. Religion and tradition are two institutions of the reproduction of the practice of child marriage, where its historical records can be traced in local tribes and religious sheikhs. In such structure, the girl/child is simply the instrument of reproduction and continuation of the family chastity, which is the most accepted form of violence against human moral.

**The** **aim**

The aim of the current research is the collection and presentation of the depth, severity and extent of psychological and physical damages to the girl/child and to campaign against the practice to stop it. Results of this research will be published (without individual details) to the public, human rights organisations and legal representatives of children’s rights.

**Method** **of** **research**:

To define the concept of rape under child marriage, I used narratives from personal experiences and individual reports presented by the victims. We asked those who had been married at young age to send their experiences of the first encounters with a man as their husband to the address given through the social media, Telegram. (alitayefi@)

* the current research aims to employ its findings to redefine and modify the rights of girl/child in the current laws and to highlight the importance of sex education and change of social behaviour.
* The recipient’s responses are descriptive and .analysed without interference by the researchers.
* The researchers’ analysis was based on critical analysis, upon which proposed responses will be introduced to eradicate the practice of white marriage.
* The method of collecting information was open ended questionnaires. This method enabled the researchers to contact the recipients and ask them the following questions:

1- age at the start of marriage and the first sexual encounter

2- age gap between the recipient/ victim and her husband

3- the way the sexual intercourse occurred and the behaviour of the husband

4- how the victim resisted forced sexual encounter and her understanding of the situation

5- support of the family in cases of severe sexual violence

6- description of fear of sexual encounter, the repetition and duration of the experience

7- description of physical, psychological and sexual abuse in childhood

8- description of pregnancy while under the age of 18 as a child

**Suggestions**:

There are two major routes to deconstruct rape of girl/child under the guise of marriage:

1. Delegitimization of child marriage by redefining it as White Rape.
2. Incorporate the international definition of the right of child and treaties into current laws.
3. Change the culture and current social norms and behaviours in order to eradicate the sanction of rape of children through marriage.

The exposure of the nature of white rape and forced marriage of children can deter elders in the family and parents to stop the practice and prevent the rape of children by those rapists called husband.

We have emphasised many times that a big part of what is registered under forced marriage of children is sexual rape practiced under the sanction of law and religion. Therefore, the number of children as victims who get divorced and are registered as divorcee hides the true nature of the practice.

To categorise the children who lack the mental age and maturity and unable to defend their rights, under the terms of divorcee, widow and similar terms when they separate from the abuser is not acceptable. The usage of such terms for children is an extra act of violence against them which must be eliminated.

For centuries, tradition and sharia have sanctioned child/girl marriage based on the age and the biological nature of the child. In such culture, children are responsible and expected to behave as adults; care for husband, have children of their own and permit the male domination over their bodies as well as wealth and whatever is categorised under the marriage contract.

In modern terms, any sexual relations with children under 18 and which is practiced under marriage contract is unacceptable and is an act of paedophilic. Rape of children by older men has a long history which goes back to the ancient world. However, the practice had been sanctioned by the Islamic clerics of all branches of Islam. It is up to the sociologists and human rights organisations as well as cultural institutions to highlight the nature and the extent of the practice.

The following are testimonies of victims of “white rape” in their own words. We are grateful to those who told us their stories and enabled us to compile this research.

Testimonials of a number of victims of “White rape”.

1- **Married at 13; now 67 years old:**

Hope God will grant you a respectful life and make you stronger. I am one of those who was forced to marry an animal of a husband by my father. I was a child, crying and didn’t love him. I was also hungry while living with that man. My father-in-law also wanted to sleep with me and whenever his wife was out in the afternoons, I had to go up a ladder and hide until late in the evening when he would turn to the neighbour’s maid and forced himself on her. Its many years that I cannot even cry. At present, I have 3 children from such rapes. I was walking the streets on the first days and the scars of the first days of rape had not healed.

2**- A 30 years old woman who was married off at 16:**

I was still in high school when they married me off to a man who was 13 years older than me, had married twice and divorced his wives. I was a child and didn’t know what is a husband and that life. It was a week after the wedding that I understood what has happened. My mother never told me anything. On the wedding night some women told me things which didn’t register. After the guests were gone, my husband sat me down and preached about sexual act. It was a horrible night. I was ashamed but prepared myself for him to do whatever he wanted to do. There was no love except the pain I felt. In the morning, my sister-in-law and uncle’s wife demanded the bloodied handkerchief to prove my virginity.

For a whole year, I was crying and sorry about the fact of marriage. Why didn't my mother support me? I was thinking of running away, hated my husband and at night when he would come to bed, I would busy myself to avoid his advances. My husband never let me take contraception pills and so I got pregnant after 6 months.

Now, I am unhappy. We don’t understand each other and unable to divorce as he will take my two children’s custody. My only hope is my two children.

3- **A 36 years old woman, married at 16:**

My father didn’t let me study further than 4 years. I loved to study. My crime was my acquaintance with my brother’s friend who wrote me a letter saying he wanted to come and get permission to marry me. One evening, my brothers saw the letters and beat me up violently.

A few months later, my brother saw a girl at work and wanted to marry her. In a deal between them and my family, I was married off to one of the girl’s family. I never enjoyed my life and feel like a 50 years old woman. My husband forced himself on me although I was running away from him. He is only two years older than me but I don’t love him. I didn’t know how to avoid pregnancy and as a result of birth at young age, have chronic back pain which the doctor says is due to pressure at birth on my spine. I never forgive my father and brother.

4- **A 46 years old woman, married at 17**:

I never saw him before the ceremony. They forced me by beating me to marry him. My brother injured me by a knife on the wedding night. My kidney still hurts from the wound.

Two years passed and I still didn’t want to stay with the man and often returned to my parents. My father would send me back by kicking me. Sometimes, I would stay at my parent’s door all night.

My husband was much lower than me in status and everyone was asking why I married him. That increased my rejection of him. I wanted divorce but he loved me and wouldn’t let me go. No one helped me, even my mother.

On my wedding night, a relative accompanied me in order to take back the bloodied kerchief. That night I had to let him do what he wanted. But for a year, I wouldn't let him come close to me. He persisted and as a result I got pregnant after year two. My only happiness is my son and for that I accept the unwanted life I am living.

5- **A 56 years old woman, married at 15**:

A bitter memory of that 15 years old girl who was engaged to be married is always in my mind. My mother, ignorant, without knowing her playful daughter who always climbed the walls, wedded her to a distance family. She was afraid this playful girl might tarnish her honour.

One day, on the way from a sewing class she appeared along with her aggressive son and took me to the doctor to get a certificate of my virginity. That was a hard blow to my spirit and for years I hated myself as a woman and to avoid conflict with the family, I would keep quiet at home.

I had no knowledge of sexual relations between men and women but I remember that my mother gave me a white kerchief and advised me how to use it. My husband, who had knowledge of such matters, acted in a more mature way and for moths I was crying and depressed. For years, I hated being a woman as I reminded myself that I am unable to do what men do and did what men could do and my female personality lost colour as I had gained nothing but humiliation and pain for being a woman.

6- **A 33 years woman, married at 17:**

We were a poor and populated family. When my husband asked for my hand, everyone was happy except me. He was the only son, 3-4 years older than me and was given a house.  I had no feelings for him and everyone said you are a child, you don’t understand. You will not have a better husband than him.

I was in mourning on my wedding night, going crazy and thinking of running away. I couldn’t accept him as my husband. I wanted to study, go to university but they wouldn’t let me get high school diploma. The first few years of our marriage was hell. I wanted to runaway but had no money and no place to go.

Sexual relations were his wish. I had no feelings for him. After few years, my mother- in-law and others raised the issue of wanting a grandchild. That was bringing my world to a collapse. I couldn’t accept to have a child with a man I hated. I was thinking of divorce but my mother was blaming me all the time. At last, I got pregnant and now have two children. There is no love between us but I am continuing with the unwanted life.

7- **A 34 years old woman, married at 17:**

I was about to get my diploma when my husband’s family approached us. Their son was 13 years older than me and had seen my cold approach. When my family consented to the marriage, I did everything in my power to reject it. They went ahead with preparations and on the wedding day, I was crying so much that the beautician has to do my face 3 times.

My husband tried to explain that all girls are worried on the first days of marriage

But I didn’t love him. On the wedding night, although I was dead tired, I had to produce the kerchief to my husband’s family. I threw up the first time he approached me. He could have waited until next day but he went his way. That wasn’t the first time. He would want to sleep with me whenever he wished, even when I had my periods which caused infection. Slowly, I learnt to put drugs in his dinner to avoid him.

After some years, he changed his behaviour and accepted I have rights as well. I continued my studies and have financial independence with two children. The memory of the first years of my marriage had never gone away.

8- **A 19 years old woman, married at 15**:

I came from a very poor family. I was at the third year of an evening school. It was in mid-August that two men from the village nearby came to our house. After they left, my mother and father’s behaviour told me what was the purpose of that meeting. My mother told me vaguely. And my grandmother did most of the wedding preparations. My nonstop crying made my parents feel guilty but my grandmother said they are under financial pressures and the man is a good catch. Anyway, I had to marry one day.

We got married end of summer. My husband had just returned from military service. He was as shy as me. The day they took me for virginity test, my grandmother explained a little bit. In the examination room, I was shivering so much that the doctor had to stop for a while.

After the wedding ceremony, grandmother gave me a kerchief and explained what I must do. My husband was inexperienced and didn’t know what to do.

Anytime I remember those days and how a bloodied kerchief brought joy to my family, I feel worthless.

Four years on, I have a daughter, have passed university entrance exams along with my husband who also wants to continue studies. We have decided to never impose our decisions on our daughter.

9- **A 82 years old, deceased, married at 13 (narration by her friend)**

Marriage of a child is always due to poverty, or sometimes over dealings with relatives by the dictators in the family

Aunt “P” is not with us anymore. She was my mother’s playmate and my mother is telling you her story.

Ahwaz, 1951, kampoo district

“P” and I were playmates. She was 13 and I, 15 years of age. My father was an army officer and although “P” father was not an army man but our families were close and we spent weekends at the officer’s club. “P” had lost her mother and her dad was a very old man. Nevertheless, he was always after young daughters of an army officer.

The colonel was not happy but the old man was so persistent that an ugly deal was sealed between them. “P”’s dad married the colonel's sister and the 36 years old colonel married the 13 years old “P”. The poor child didn’t know what was happening to her. On the wedding day, she took her doll and runaway to our house. They took her back.

For a while we were still playmates and they would buy us expensive clothes and took us to the officer’s club. Gradually, we heard rumours that she has refused to let the colonel to sleep with her. She was not the happy child anymore though. She often sneaked into our home and asked about sexual relations. Finally, one night, under beatings and by force she was taken by the colonel. That continued in the same way for years.

We were separated and lost touch as my family moved to Tehran. Years later, after the war, I found my childhood playmate. She had divorced the colonel with 4 children. Sometimes, she would stay in the same house just to be with her children. Her selfish dad had long died and the unfortunate step-mother was finally free.

One new year I went to visit. The colonel was an old, bad tempered man who spent most of his time in a room. “P” was a middle-aged beautiful woman, witty and full of hatred of the colonel whom she called the dictator. He finally passed away, the children went their own way. “P” was just experiencing a meaningful relationship when her heart gave in and got breathing difficulties. Years of living in a violent relationship and financial difficulty took its toll and she passed away few years ago.

10- **A 56 years old woman, married at 15:**

I was just 14 when men came to ask my family for my hand. I was promised to one of these suitors who was my brother’s friend. My parents and sister promised me to him after he finished his military service. One day, when I arrived from school and was tired, my mother ordered me to wear my chador and offer tea to some guests. I had never seen the boy but he said he had been in love with me.

I was 15 when they sat me down to the marriage ceremony amid tears. What I saw in the mirror in front of me was a lanky dark man which frightened me. I told my sister I am walking away but she informed my uncle who whispered in my ear that my father will have a heart attack if I refuse now.

While I was crying, the clergy read the marriage rites and my sister confirmed the approval in my place. At night, the family prepared to take me home. My father objected to the matter and said that was against the agreement, where I was meant to stay home until I turned 18. Upon their insistence they took me away while I was screaming not to be taken away. With a smirk my husband said he will bring me back tomorrow.

Now that I am writing this, the memory of that night seems like a horror film. In the wedding chamber, a red light was on. He undressed me by force while I was crying and telling him not to touch me. He was drunk and strong, put his hand over my mouth and raped me. I still feel the pain in my heart. He told me that he had promised the men in the family to take my virginity in 10 minutes and exited the room.

When his mother and sister entered the room, I couldn’t hear anything. I was frightened. I hated my sister because she hadn’t warned me. I was bleeding for 40 days but that didn’t deter him from raping me several times a day. I couldn’t even sit down. His sister took me to a doctor who said: “were you trying to convert a Christian? “This girl has got infection. Her husband must have been an animal.

My sister-in-law told the doctor that I am her brother ‘s wife. The doctor asked whether they have brought me from a village.

He was raping me daily even when I was 9 months pregnant with my first son. Even when I was in labour. I was begging him not to do this but he would say he couldn’t control himself. He was telling me: “why do you think I married you? I didn’t spend money to rub myself against the wall!”  I was bleeding but he brought me a blanket and left just as my water broke and my child was born. The doctor who tended to me was angry and said my parents have married me off to an animal.

My husband would force himself on me even when I had my periods, even when children were around. He didn’t believe the woman had to enjoy sex, in which case she was a prostitute. I had no one to go to and he never cared for me. Before he died, I tended him for 16 months. People thought he was a good man and loved me.

When he was in comas, I told him I forgave him for what he did to me on the first night of marriage.

Nowadays, I am psychologically ill. Some years ago, when I told my psychologist what I have gone through, she cried with me. I think all men are like that. I wish someone would love me for me.

11- **A 20 years old woman, married at 13:**

When I was married off to my cousin, I was a child. My mother, worried that I might get pregnant and frightened me of the act of intercourses. We officially got married a year later. Our families found out that I was still a virgin a year later. My mother had frightened me of sex to the extent that I wouldn’t let him near me. As was tradition they resorted to prayers and sorcery but to no avail.

After two years they took me to a gynaecologist to take my virginity which didn’t work. Various psychologists and doctors couldn’t help. After 6 years, I decided to take my own life but was saved. At present, my family and I are suffering for a mistake my mother made.

12- **A 40 years old woman, married at 14**:

At 14, I was married off to a man 11 years my senior. The next day after marriage my classmates were considering me a married woman who might pass on her sexual experiences to others. I had the feeling of someone who has committed a crime. I was a child and wanted to study and play like other kids. I was crying every day.

Table to summarise the findings of information gathered on the research: White Rape

|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Narrator’s age | Age when married | Rapist age | Victim education level | Victims feelings and reaction to rape | Rapist attitude to sexual relations | Victim’s Physical & psychological state  | / |
| 67 | 13 | - | - | Keeping away from the act of sex | Feeding her alcohol & raping her | Psychological symptoms/blaming father | 1 |
| 30 | 16 | 29 | Second year of high school | Shame & shy/escaping from sex | Forced sex & preventing use of contraception | Unhappy marriage/mental divorce/blaming family | 2 |
| 36 | 16 | 18 | 4th grade schooling | uninterested in sex & avoiding it | Forced sex even in pregnancy | Chronic back pain/ anger towards father | 3 |
| 46 | 17 | - | 4th grade of adult education | Surrender by force | Resistance & forced to sexual relations  | Staying in marriage for the sake of children | 4 |
| 56 | 15 | - | - | Ignorant to sexual relations/depression/crying | - | Unhappy of her gender/acceptance of masculine roles/humiliation and harassing | 5 |
| 33 | 17 | 21-20 | Elementary education | Indifferent to sex | Forced sexual relations | Mental divorce | 6 |
| 34 | 17 | 30 | High school diploma | Lack of love/ nauseated by sex/used sleeping pills to deter him | Forced to have intercourse even during periods | Permanent scars from unpleasant early experience  | 7 |
| 19 | 15 | - | High school/no diploma | Anxiety & worry | Anxiety & worry | Trying to make life better | 8 |
| Narrated by friend deceased at 82 | 13 | 36 | - | Avoiding sex | Beating & violence to force sex | Heart problems & asthma | 9 |
| 56 | 15 | - | - | Fear/begging to stop/tear of vegina, bleeding and infection | Violent & drunk/forced intercourse even when pregnant | Mental disorder | 10 |
| 20 | 13 | - | - | Lack of sexual relations | - | Attempting suicide / & mental disorder/ | 11 |
| 40 | 14 | 25 | - | Fear & resistance | Violence/threat | Suicide attempt/ lack of interest in sex /husband infidelity | 12 |

**Translated from Farsi by: Rouhi Shafii**

Hi!

According your announcement I send you my last research report (by attach) about child early marriage that I have tried to emphasis that the term "Child Marriage" should change to the new term "White Rape". As I tried to justify my idea in the report, the early marriage is a unwanted sex relation which has been legitimized by tradition and religion. Most of the narrations which I have gathered in this report, confirm that the early marriage is enforced rape prepared by parents, masculine society, dominant tradition och official laws in which children rights have been neglected.

I Hope this rapport can use like a basis to the change of terminology of Child marriage. Delegitimazing of the Child marriage by redefining of term to the Rape is a effective way to stop it within the public Culture and changing the minds.

Here is my CV:

<https://www.researchgate.net/publication/260219682_Ali_Tayefi_CV_2014>

All the best

Ali Tayefi

0046762236589