

# MARRIAGE

## How early is too early?

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The idea of marriage is one that many of us find a bit intimidating at the moment, so much so that most of us would prefer to cling on to that life even after our mid-20s. However, news of our friends getting married before graduation, sometimes even as early as just after leaving high school, is not entirely uncommon. This brings up the question of how difficult it is to continue with one's education after the wedding festivities are over, and indeed, how difficult it is to handle life with a partner at such a young age, and whether the reality is ever as sweet as the expectations.

Sadia Afrin was engaged at 23, just after finishing her undergraduate studies. Sadia says, "I preferred to let my parents arrange the whole thing, rather than choosing a husband myself. I liked the man they had chosen for me, and as my parents felt it was the right time for me to get married, I obliged."

This seems to be the case for a lot of young girls – a good proposal comes along, and works out for the better. Sometimes, the girl in question is already in a relationship, and the proposals simply make for awkward dinner-table conversations.

"We were only 22 when we got married. Her parents were busy looking for a suitor for her, completely oblivious of our relationship. When she told me, I panicked, but I also found the courage within myself to talk to my parents about this. To my surprise they readily gave me their blessings, without raising objections," says \*Shams Ahmed on his marriage to \*Lamiya.

The support of parents is very important to make such marriages work. "My parents supported me and gave me the confidence to take on all the responsibilities that came with being married. My father talked to my to-be in-laws, explaining to them what a great future lay ahead for me, and won them over," Shams reminisced.

Balancing education with the responsibilities of being a wife/husband is the most concerning point regarding these marriages. Dr. Mortuza, a teacher at Gono Bishwabidyalay specialising in Reproductive and Child Health, says, "Living in a joint family is rare in these times, and as such, girls find themselves exempted from certain duties that come with marrying into a large family. They are able to continue their studies quite comfortably, as even the in-laws want their daughters-in-law to be well-educated. More people are aware of the importance of education, and are thus prioritising it accordingly." Sadia remarks, "Family planning is crucial. It is best to plan on having children after completing studies; otherwise it might all become overwhelming."

The in-laws, especially of the girl, and her husband

need to be supportive of her continuing her education. "If the husband is not supportive and her in-laws expect her to cook and do household chores all the time, it is difficult for a girl to concentrate on her studies," continues Sadia.

Andrea, who happily tied the knot at 19, stresses on the importance of having an understanding husband, "If after getting married, your husband helps you and co-operates, everything seems easy. Starting from household chores to my studies, my husband tries his best to help me out in every way he can."

Sometimes, however, marriage brings out the ugly reality of what felt like a dream. \*Sanjana Anwar, got divorced a year after getting married at 20. "At that age I was very emotional and also a little irrational. I decided to marry a guy I hadn't known for too long, but at the time it felt like the perfect decision. Once we began our

life together, I realised he was very immature. We always had fights, and soon my patience ran out. I was forced to face facts – he just wasn't the right person, and we ended it. I must admit that my parents had advised me to wait a few years (before getting married) but I didn't want to listen. It's been a while since the divorce and looking back, I realise that marriage is never something you should rush into – take your time, think carefully and do it right." When asked what her thoughts are regarding people getting married at an early age, she said, "I am not against it,



but I feel they have a slim chance of working out. Perhaps young people just have a dreamy idea of marriage and when the hardship comes they can't really deal with it."

"Married life is very difficult, and there will be obstacles to face whether you get married early or late. It all depends on your ability to embrace the challenges. You're dealing with a lot of new things, so it's hard," says Andrea.

Shams says, "Unfortunately, because I had to maintain a job and take care of my business, I couldn't continue with my Chartered Accounting Programme and came out halfway. My wife had to drop her MBA for a year, but she's continuing now."

Dr. Mohit Kamal, Professor and Head of Psychotherapy at National Institute of Mental Health, says, "Educating oneself is crucial in life. Being married while pursuing your education can definitely hamper studies and in turn, career. It is advisable to finish studies before getting married. This holds true particularly for females, as the more educated she is, the more conscious she is of her rights. When a young woman gets married, but hasn't completed her education, she is more likely to face marital abuse, whereas for an educated woman, her awareness will not allow such things to happen."

How successful a marriage will be really depends on the level of commitment, trust, understanding, communication and love between the partners, as well as their maturity. When rushing into marriage means having to juggle education, a new family and often part-time jobs all at once, then this may not be the wisest choice. Matrimony, after all, is a serious matter which one should step into after a lot of contemplation.

*\*Names have been changed to ensure privacy.*

