



## MARITAL CHALLENGES

# Silent struggles BEHIND CLOSED DOORS

In the era of new terminologies established every other week, one too many have popped up in your newsfeed. “Sleep Divorce” was one such term that caught my eye, encouraging me to delve further into the unknown. Understanding the concept and realising that couples abroad practice it sparked an inkling of questions: Do couples here implement such practices in Bangladesh? Are there any other practices to overcome marital issues? Is marital bliss not just a celebration or a responsibility weighed heavily with cultural expectations?

The answers to such questions and profound challenges must be discussed openly. Hence, my quest to find these answers led me to Dr Abdul Hamid, a noted psychotherapist at the MONOBIKASH Foundation.

He started by saying, “There are a plethora of issues that encompass marital issues.” He provides a glimpse into these less talked-about issues, highlighting the complex dynamics of asexual behaviour, erectile dysfunction (ED), the emerging concept of sleep divorce, and other challenges, such as communication barriers and societal pressures among Bangladeshi couples.

Asexuality in marriage, as Dr Hamid explains, is often misunderstood in a society that holds judgemental views on sexual norms. “This is not a disease, but how someone might naturally be, and discovering it within a marriage in our judgemental society often turns into a negative notion,” he states. The path to professional help is marred by misconceptions and a lack of acceptance, making it crucial for couples to foster understanding rather than seek unnecessary treatment.

Erectile dysfunction and demisexuality bring their own sets of challenges. Misunderstandings about these conditions

can lead to unnecessary suspicion and stress, impacting marital harmony. Dr Hamid emphasises the importance of distinguishing between these conditions to avoid confusion and undue strain — “While demisexuality, needing a strong mental connection for intimacy, can be addressed, asexuality is a natural state of being.”

The concept of sleep divorce is relatively new but is gaining attention. Dr Hamid remarks, “It’s a Western trend where couples choose to sleep separately to enhance sleep quality and personal productivity, though it might sacrifice intimacy.”

Such decisions can reshape traditional marital roles and expectations in a city like

Dhaka, where familial bonds are strong. To clarify, sleep divorce does not necessarily indicate emotional separation, but is a practical adjustment for better physical health.

Communication is the cornerstone of navigating these challenges. Dr Hamid advises, “It is crucial to discuss needs and concerns openly. Whether scheduling intimate moments or discussing personal struggles, recognising and validating each other’s feelings can fortify a relationship.”

Dr Hamid also addresses the psychological challenges that accompany sexual dysfunction within marriage, highlighting how societal pressures

exacerbate these issues.

“Erectile dysfunction is the most common problem we see, where individuals feel pressured to perform sexually, which can severely impact their mental health and marital harmony,” he explains. This undue pressure strains the relationship and can spiral into severe stress, affecting overall well-being. However, with the support of mental health professionals like Dr Hamid, couples can navigate these challenges and find solutions that work for them.

Furthermore, the impact of such dysfunctions on women in marriages is profound. Dr Hamid points out, “Continuing to pretend everything is fine is detrimental. This not only harms the relationship’s trust and commitment, but can also impact the couple’s emotional connection deeply.” He urges that acknowledgement and open discussion are vital in navigating these waters. “Faking satisfaction or compliance can lead to deeper resentments and misunderstandings, making honest communication about sexual health and preferences critical,” he advises.

Dr Hamid recommends strategies that foster trust and understanding when handling these sensitive topics within the marital dialogue.

“Trust is crucial, and it’s counterproductive to assume our partners know our needs. Open and honest

conversations, without assuming or playing games, can significantly clarify and resolve many underlying issues,” he suggests.

These conversations should be direct yet sensitive, ensuring that both partners feel safe and heard, thus preventing the build-up of resentment or misunderstanding.

Couples can improve their emotional and physical closeness by using therapeutic modalities like Emotion-Focused Therapy (EFT) and Cognitive Behavioural Therapy (CBT), which have been modified for the Bangladeshi environment. “These therapies are tailored to our cultural context, helping couples navigate their challenges effectively,” says Dr Hamid.

Marital challenges are more than just personal struggles — they are a reflection of a society in transition. The unspoken struggles of these couples are not isolated incidents, but rather a societal issue that demands our immediate attention and understanding.

In the quiet corridors of homes, couples are redefining intimacy, navigating their identities, and, in many ways, pioneering paths to personal fulfilment within the framework of traditional marital expectations.

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