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# Scourge of infidelity

Men and women will stray from their marriages but at the end of the day, they should ask themselves if it is worth the pain that follows for a moment of ecstasy.

**W**IVES in Miri are a worried lot. Many of them have gotten together on a mission to flush out their husbands' "extracurricular" activities and they have made no secret about it by making it known that they want authorities to clamp down on massage parlours, particularly those that hire "China dolls".

The issue of straying husbands is as old as time itself and it is not restricted to just men straying with women from China. There are in fact, professional single women out there who are involved in multiple relationships with men – married and unmarried.

In the past, it was almost taboo for a married woman to stand up to her husband who strayed.

In most traditionally orthodox communities, it was the woman's shame, if her husband strayed. It would mean that she was not capable of "taking care" of her man.

Oppression and lack of education back then contributed to this perception.

However, the issue of husbands going astray has received even more publicity in this day and age, thanks to advancements in the fields of education, science and psychology.

One of the major concerns when husbands go astray is that their reckless behaviour puts their wives and families at risk, in terms of health.

Welfare, Women and Family Development Minister Datuk Fatimah Abdullah is certainly worried as she recently brought up the issue on the rise in sexually-transmitted diseases or STDs in the state that has been attributed to straying husbands who seek sexual gratification outside their marriages.

Which brings us to the question, are men naturally wired to stray? And why do they stray?

Variety is the spice of life, some may say.

I was in my favourite coffeshop last week when I eavesdropped two well-educated "SYTs" (sweet young things) talking about their tumultu-

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ous relationships with their boy-friends.

One was telling the other that a guy she used to date told her it would be boring to “eat fried chicken everyday” or “eat the same salted fish”. In other words, he expected her to understand that he needed some “variety”.

Such selfish mindsets can only lead to disaster.

It is a wonder that, despite being educated and warned of the risks, some men still proceed with having extramarital affairs, or like to be involved in more than one relationship.

Do they not realise the heartbreak and stress that they are placing on their wives and families?

Okay, heartbreak and stress aside, even more seriously, do they not also realise that they are taking risks with their own health and that of their wives and children?

STDs come in many forms – some bacterial, parasitic and more dangerous, viral (which include incurable diseases like herpes, and even HIV, where a person ends up being a life-long carrier).

Are they not concerned that if they bring home STDs like herpes and impregnate their wives, their unborn children are also at risk of contracting the disease?

We’ve all heard of the saying, the “seven-year itch”, where the supposed urge for infidelity takes place after seven years of marriage.

The original meaning of the “seven-year itch” can be traced back to the early 19th century in America where it was used in reference to a particularly irritating and contagious skin complaint (not caused by STD) which lasted seven years.

Ironically in the context of this day and age, I perceive the saying as appropriate to describing infidelity because someone who has the “seven-year itch” is likely to bring back some form of contagious disease.

To be fair, there are also women who also stray and have extramarital affairs. Yet, worldwide studies have shown that the matter of straying is highly prevalent among men.

For example, a study carried out in India and published in the British Medical Journal has shown a high prevalence of HIV, herpes and syphilis among married couples across the country, and 85% of the time, it is the man who brings home the infections.

The study also found that men who stray do not use protection because they assume that they are safe because they have a delusional belief that their “scandal”, like the wife, is faithful to them.

There are women who seem to have resigned themselves to the fact that men are naturally and biologically-wired to stray.

The same woman in the coffee-shop whom I mentioned earlier told of how her sister “advised” her not to harp on the issue because men are “naturally promiscuous” and that despite their many flings, they will always come back to their “one true love” at the end of the day.

I also overheard the woman saying her sister packs condoms for her husband when he goes on his business trips and tells him to “do what you want to, but do not bring back diseases to this household”.

Do these perceptions signify that

we are fighting a lost cause against infidelity?

I sincerely hope not. I believe that the majority of the men out there are sensible human beings who are dedicated to their wives and families.

Women who are victims of infidelity should not give in easily.

Should their men continue to be unfaithful, they should try and get to the core of the problem and work out their marriage.

If all else fails, they should just save themselves from the desolation of a wretched marriage and from the risk of contracting STDs.

Frankly speaking, and as a member of the male species myself, I do not see the point in bringing home misery in the form of heartbreak, or an incurable disease. It is not worth the while.

And besides, I believe in karma – what goes around, comes around.

At the end of the day, the unfaithful man who once so eagerly sought to relieve his “seven-year itch” may end up scratching himself for life in unmentionable places.

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