

Asian brides 'faking virginity'

By Perminder Khatkar
BBC Asian Network

In a desperate bid to conceal their sexual activity some British Asian women are taking extreme and drastic measures to fake their virginity when they get married, including surgery to restore their hymen.

Yasmin (name changed) is a confident A-Level student who is glad she has lost her virginity. She says for her it is simply a case of having sex with someone she chooses.

She knows that when she is older she will enter into an arranged marriage and she is happy to do that, as she does not want the risk of being ostracised by her parents and extended family.

She started going out with her non-Asian boyfriend and decided to take the next step in the relationship.

"I don't know who I'm going to end up marrying and with my current boyfriend I know him so well, and I trust him so much, and the first time you have sex with someone it's meant to be really special so I wanted to give it to someone who I trusted."

There's a big culture about keeping it a secret but at the same time everyone knows it's happening
Khyati Rawal, psychologist

In Yasmin's case, as with so many other young Asian women, there is a need for secrecy as it is still not acceptable for them to be a non-virgin on their wedding night.

"We haven't told that many people, he's told his best friend, I've told mine. I know the consequences if my parents ever did find out, it would be just disastrous.

"I don't even want to think about it."

Male pressure

Virginity is a big issue for second and third generation British Asians across the board whether they are sexually active or not, according to psychologist Khyati Rawal, who counsels young Asian women.

"There's a big culture about keeping it a secret but at the same time everyone knows it's happening."

"The women can have a number of anxieties. It can be when they've finished with a relationship they've been in and they're now deciding to settle down permanently, or they have met someone who will not tolerate the idea of sex before marriage, so there's suddenly a massive panic about 'oh my God they're going to find out'."

FAKING VIRGINITY

24 hymen repair operations on the NHS (2005/06)
Private procedure in London costs up to £2,000
Some health workers advise dripping red dye in bed sheets

And it is a big issue for men like 19-year-old Raz.

He says when he gets married, particularly if it is an arranged marriage, he will expect his wife to be virgin. For him it's all to do with respect.

If a girl has had sex before, as far as he is concerned, she does not respect her culture.

"You wouldn't be able to walk outside and hold your head up high because if you did find out your wife wasn't a virgin before you married her it makes you feel less of a man."

Fake blood

At the Brook Advisory Centre in Birmingham, Asian women are asking for advice on faking their virginity on a daily basis.

Jan Deeming, a sexual health worker says she would outline a number of options that were available to them.

"We would talk to women about using red dyes in place of real blood. We would tell them they could buy blood from a joke shop."

A few drops of this would be put on the bedsheet after the "first time" extended family sees blood on sheets and everyone thinks the girl is a virgin.

"It's not as if I or Brook agreed with this faking," says Jan.

"But the risks are so great to some women the consequences could have been dire."

Hymen surgery

Some sexually active young Asian women have fled or sought refuge because they fear their life is on the line if somebody found out.

Others are opting for a medical approach by paying to have their virginity restored through hymen surgery.

Professor Linda Cardoza, from London's King's College Hospital, says the young women she sees are very pleased to have found a source of help because they didn't think it was reversible.

He just couldn't accept I wasn't a virgin
Kully

"Hymen repair is usually requested by girls of Mediterranean or Asian origin," says Professor Cardoza.

"Sometimes African girls who come from societies where they may be ostracised if they had

sexual intercourse before marriage," she adds.

Hymen surgery is an outpatients procedure, usually carried out under general anaesthetic and costs around £1,500-£2,000 if done privately in a London clinic.

It is currently offered on the NHS only if the patient can prove that the issue of their virginity is causing mental distress.

The NHS says it carried out just 24 hymen repair operations between 2005 and 2006.

A big lie

When Kully (name changed), now a mother of two, got married, she knew there was no way she could have told her husband she was not a virgin.

She simply lied. "I did worry the first time we were going to have sex, what would happen? What if he said 'you're not a virgin'?"

In her previous relationship she had told her then boyfriend that she was not a virgin.

"At first everything was fine. He said it wasn't a problem. He said he wasn't a virgin either and everything was going well. But then he said he couldn't marry me. He just couldn't accept I wasn't a virgin."

My marriage is based on this one big lie

Kully

So when she was about to get married, Kully decided that she was not going to make the same mistake twice.

She says this time the stakes were higher. She was entering into a marriage.

She believes that if her husband ever found out, then this would probably end their marriage .

"I have to live with the fact that I have lied, and my marriage is based on this one big lie: That I wasn't a virgin."

The Asian Network Report: Like A Virgin can be heard on Monday 3 March at 1830GMT on BBC Asian Network radio

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