

To the elders in the Asian Community, marriage is the most sacred of all institutions; a big wedding and new home paid for daddy dearest, who expects nothing in return except a string of grandchildren...

It is not surprising therefore that when things don't work out to plan, many will continue to live in an unhappy, and often abusive relationship instead of separating, or god forbid, divorcing. For many women who fear judgement over mental anguish, they would rather put up with betrayal and womanising, even suffer emotional or physical abuse, than be branded a failure who 'deserved it'. And for those living under the shadow of the extremely strict family, the very idea of dishonouring them doesn't bear thinking about.

When the first generation champion the success of arranged marriages, squarely blaming the influence of the west for any downfall, they often overlook the fact that many people stuck with an unhappy marriage because they were too afraid not to.

Historically, if a traditional arranged marriage did not work out, there remained an expectation on the woman's part to accept her fate and put up with whatever her destiny had brought her. Parents were often too proud or embarrassed to accept, or even acknowledge, that they had any part to play; their daughters were under immense pressure to stick it out, especially when there were young children involved. Leaving the marriage was not an option. Divorce carried a stigma - which was to be avoided at all cost.

As an element of choice entered marriages in the Asian Community, if a love marriage did not work out (especially where the marriage took place without the parents' blessings), women were often too afraid to end the marriage for fear – fear of having to hear the phrase 'I told you so' for years on end, fear of financial worries, the fear of being alone, the fear of losing their home where there were young children.

The impact of living in a western culture where a large percentage of marriages end in divorce, a decline in close knit-community living and the growing education and independence of Asian wives are all cited by community leaders

as possible reasons for the increase of failure of both arranged and love marriages.

The younger generation were (and often still are) accused of giving up too easily, not being tolerant enough, failing to compromise or being too modern.

As the community continues to adapt to life in the UK, attitudes towards divorce are thankfully changing. There is an increasing acceptance that not all marriages are happy. Marriage is no longer an economic or social necessity to be endured, but a union with high expectations. There has been a move away from the often crippling cultural and social stereotypical view of the Asian divorcee.

Even when an Asian woman has summoned up enough courage to end a marriage, aside from the cultural issues she may face, the road ahead is often a difficult one. Whatever community a woman comes from, the decision to divorce can be as difficult to make as the

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decision to marry in the first place.

When a marriage fails, there are often feelings of disappointment, anger and/or resentment. Divorce can be one of the greatest stresses in life – and ranks on the same level as bereavement. Whether a woman is seeking a divorce or having to respond to a divorce instituted by her husband, it is a period of immense emotional upheaval.

Some people feel when they are confronted with a legal separation from the person they have committed their adult life to, their whole life – and not just their marriage – is falling apart. The future stops existing and only an empty present looms ahead.

A woman finds she has to face two elements of divorce- the legal process and the experience.

The "experience" comprises of several stages such as disappointment, shock, anger, guilt, pain, hatred, grief and, eventually, acceptance. Each individual will have a different experience.

The legal process can be daunting and overwhelming. It is an unfortunate fact that once the process commences people have to make difficult decisions, including decisions that impact on their financial future, during a time when emotions are at a high.

Matters become even more difficult when children are involved. There is no universally "right" way of telling the children you are splitting up. A divorce can be a sad and disrupting experience for the children, but research has shown that ultimately children are better off being brought up by separated or divorced parents rather than continuing to live in an unhealthy environment where their parents are in constant battle with one another.

As a divorce lawyer who has practiced matrimonial law for many years, there is not much that I haven't seen or heard about when it comes to relationships. We have all read about celebrity break ups in the national newspapers and magazines,

but many ordinary individuals have their own stories to tell.

Whatever the reasons for a divorce, and whatever your journey leading to it, you can come out the other side in one piece. The goal of a divorce lawyer should not be to bereave the marriage or analyse what went wrong, but instead to help you through the process and to assist you in accepting, adjusting and moving on with your life in the most emotionally healthy way.

Many clients are quite traumatised at the start of the process – their initial instructions are given amidst tears and upset. However with a helping hand they reach the end of the process with renewed energy, great confidence, a positive attitude and hope for the future. They propel back into life as a single woman with a feeling of empowerment. A celebratory divorce party is becoming increasingly popular marking the end of the journey and a new start. Life does not end after divorce, and for many, it begins. ▶