

The Connotations of 'Urfi Marriage at a Time of Reform: Views of AUCians

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Abstract

The purpose of this study is to investigate attitudes and perceptions of 'Urfi marriage among students of the American University in Cairo. The sample consists of 48 undergraduate AUC students of which 24 are males and 24 are females. All subjects are Egyptian nationals. All subjects completed a questionnaire consisting of 26 questions aiming at revealing attitudes and perceptions. The research reveals that AUCians tend to view 'Urfi marriage as being "cover" for pre-marital, illegal and secretive sexual relations. The majority stated that they would not contract this type of marriage under any circumstances and that society as a whole stigmatizes 'Urfi which in turn leads them to attaching stigma to it as well. A significant finding was that females overall tended to rate 'Urfi as risky enterprise more frequently than males. Discussion of the findings in the light of cultural and social factors and in relation to a particular layer of society (AUCians) is presented.

Introduction

Over time, norms, values, standards and cultural codes change and adapt to new economic, political, cultural and other environmental factors, and these are obvious, not only in public domains but in private lives as well. Egypt is no exception. For the past several years, values and norms in interpersonal relationships, and, in particular, in intimate relationships between and among young people, have been changing.

Since in Egyptian society "marriage has special importance", and primarily due to the fact that "culture and religion are more interested in the function of the individual within the society as a whole rather than the individual per se", (Saleh, 1993) the accents are put on the changes taking place in this domain. More commonly, we hear of the so-called Zawag al-'Urfi ('Urfi marriage), also known as "customary marriage" or "traditional marriage", which has become more prevalent, popular and sometimes seems to represent the only available option for the couple. Yet this form of marriage is controversial and elicits wide debates and hot discussions in the society as a whole. It even became more hotly debated after the implementation of changes in the Personal Status Law in the year 2000, which granted rights to divorce to 'Urfi married women and also the recognition of 'Urfi as "marriage" provided that a woman presents proof in the form of a marriage contract, or testimonies of the witnesses ("Patterns of marriage", 2003; Singerman, 2004; Berman, 2004).

It is of primary importance to define the terms to discriminate between the official marriage and 'Urfi marriage. According to Dawoud Alami, author of "The marriage in Islamic Law", marriage in Egyptian Law is a "social entity, the object of which is to preserve the human race by the establishment of families, kinship and nations", while Shari'ah should be a "connection and a joining and intermingling in love" (Alami, 1992). 'Urfi is considered to be "an unofficial way of tying the knot" (Shahine, 1998). This type of marriage is usually contracted without official documentation or formal contract and thus, no record of such a marriage is present in the government offices (Urfi marriage; Berman, 2004; Shahine, 1998). Some claim that 'Urfi marriage is actually "an unofficial but legitimate form of matrimony. It is religiously correct provided it complies with Islamic doctrine" (Shahine, 1999). In other words, 'Urfi is viewed as a legitimate and serious enterprise from a religious standpoint; according to Sharia' if the following conditions are fulfilled:

1. The consent of the two partners is present
2. Two male witnesses or one male and two females are present during the ceremony and all sign the contract
3. The marriage is declared publicly to social network including parents and neighbors
4. Payment of dowry, which is bride's gift
5. Accompanying legal guardian of a previously unmarried woman

(Shahine,1998; Shahine, 1999; Berman, 2004)

However, it becomes a controversy and is labeled "illegitimate" and "sinful" when the couple turns to secrecy which is often the case and when 'Urfi marriage becomes a means of sexual satisfaction rather than a means of family formation and consequent continuation of kinship (Shahine, 1998, 1999).

'Urfi, also known as traditional marriage, was historically prevalent being the only way marriages were contracted. However, with the growing population, it became complicated and almost impossible to keep track of all people and children, resulting from the marriages. The government had no other choice but to implement registration procedures which would later constitute the main difference between 'Urfi and official marriages (Shahine, 1998). 'Urfi marriage, while official marriages were already reinforced, gained popularity in the 1950s (Abaza, 2001). It, then, lost visibility for a while, and, nowadays, has re-emerged. There are some differences between 'Urfi in the 1950s and 'Urfi nowadays. If in the past 'Urfi marriage was contracted mainly by widows to maintain the state's pension, nowadays it is the way of dealing with changing sexual norms, increased economic pressures and demands placed on the youth, and releasing sexual tensions that are heated by the media and the society in general (Abaza, 2001). Research conducted by the National Population Council in collaboration with the AUC Social Research Center outlined five basic motivations or reasons for 'Urfi marriage nowadays. They are:

1. Economic constraints, which make official marriage virtually impossible for young people;

2. A couple's need to satisfy sexual desires "within a 'legitimate' framework"
3. A couple's desire to "make-up" for already existing intimate relationships within a "legitimate framework"
4. Refusal of official marriage proposal by a couple's families
5. Lack of religious awareness ("Patterns of marriage", 2003).

For females, 'Urfi marriage becomes an option when they pass or are afraid of passing "the proper age of marriage - that is, the early twenties," whereas for males it is often a mere satisfaction of the sexual drive (Shahine, 1998). Mainly 'Urfi is widespread among students and primary introduction of to-be spouses takes place on university campuses (Shahine, 1998, 1999; "Patterns of marriage", 2003).

Thus, some people accept 'Urfi marriage as an appropriate form of marriage, religiously right if conditions are fulfilled, and culturally acceptable since it is embedded in history and culture. However, nowadays 'Urfi is usually equated with secretive marriage and is, thus, stigmatized by people. Na'sr Farid Wa'sil, the former Mufti (Islamic advisory authority) of Egypt, said that "this phenomenon, is corrupt and wrong, and is not legal in Islam's law" (Berman, 2004). Others view it as a "cover" provided for prostitution. El-Gawhary in his article on sex tourism in Egypt, writes 'Urfi is used "to give prostitution an Islamic cover" (1995). This is the case, according to him, with the so-called "tourists" from the Gulf States who come to Cairo to seek sexual pleasure and contract 'Urfi marriages just for the summer time. Still others consider the phenomenon to be "on a par with adultery" (Shahine, 1999; "Patterns of marriage", 2003) and consider the marriage as being "unlawful" and constituting prostitution (Berman, 2004).

Taking into consideration all of the above, it becomes important to find out the actual attitudes towards and perceptions of 'Urfi marriage among students themselves, since they are the ones who, in most cases, turn to 'Urfi marriage. Moreover, it becomes even more important because 'Urfi is gaining more recognition by the government which already granted rights to divorce for women who had been 'Urfi married as well as rights for alimony if paternity is proven. All these indicate that the phenomenon has gained importance, and therefore needs thorough consideration and investigation. The main goals of the research are to find out attitudes towards and perceptions of 'Urfi marriage among AUCians, investigate the level of awareness about the phenomenon, and find out reasons behind one or another attitude.

Method

Subjects:

The subjects were 48 undergraduate AUC students of which twenty-four were males and twenty-four were females. The age group was 17-25 years. 85.4% were Muslims and 12.5% of the respondents were Christians. All informants were Egyptian nationals living in Egypt. The subjects were chosen by means of convenient sampling in different

locations around campus, including Falaki building, Main Campus, SS area, the Jameel Center and the library. Each subject was approached between 10:00 a.m. and 5:00 p.m.

Apparatus/Material:

Open-ended interviews were conducted with several people whom I had established rapport with, which allowed for probing the topic and identifying problematic issues. Based on these interviews, a questionnaire was designed. The questionnaire included twenty-six closed-ended questions and an open section for comments. Copies of the materials used are available in Appendix A.

Procedure:

I approached the participants individually in different locations on campus, introducing the study as “The connotations of ‘Urfi marriage in a time of Reform: Views of AUCians” after which all participants were asked to sign an informed consent form (Appendix B), provide me with their demographic information (gender, major, nationality, age, etc.) and answer a questionnaire. My friends and acquaintances were not included in the survey. Upon completion of the questionnaire, participants were debriefed as to the true purpose/topic of the study and thanked for their participation.

Results

For analysis of the study, a Chi-Square, Frequency Distribution tests and Descriptive Statistics were used. Throughout the analysis, alpha level of .05 was applied. All questions in the questionnaire were analyzed in the sequence they appeared on the questionnaire.

Perceptions of the subjects as to what ‘Urfi marriage is differed. 66.6% of all subjects considered ‘Urfi no more than just a “cover” for pre-marital sexual relationships, 58.3% marked it as secretive and still another significant group viewed it as illegal (31.25% of the respondents). Only one person (2% of the whole sample) marked ‘Urfi as customary and traditional. As for the reasons for ‘Urfi marriage 77% (37 male and female respondents) stated that it is only for satisfaction of sexual desire, 47.9% (23 of all respondents) mentioned poor economic conditions and 39% said the reason for such a marriage was refusal of the official proposal by one of the families. Only 2% of the respondents viewed ‘Urfi as a temporary state that will later lead to the full marriage.

The majority of subjects 93.8% said that they would not contract ‘Urfi marriage even under certain conditions mentioned in the questionnaire such as refusal of the official proposal, lack of economic resources, love and other. As for the attachment of stigma to the phenomenon, 77.1% attach stigma, whereas 22.9% do not as indicated in Table 1. Of those 37 subjects who stigmatize ‘Urfi 59.5% do so because they consider it to be against religion; 43.2% stigmatize it because “society as a whole disapproves of it and views it as “bad” and “dirty”. Only 29.7% mentioned the fact that no official documents exist and 27%, most of which were females, stigmatized it because they believed ‘Urfi was discriminatory and unfair to women. Out of those eleven respondents who did not attach stigma to ‘Urfi marriage, 54.5% did so because they thought it was not against religion; 27.2% chose option “other” and stated that whatever people are doing is “none

of my business” and people “should do whatever they want without being judged”. Still another respondent viewed ‘Urfi marriage as a manifestation of personal freedom.

For the question about prevalence of ‘Urfi marriage among different socio-economic classes, the distribution of the answers was peculiar. 16.7% believed it was more prevalent among lower classes; 18.8%-middle; 6.3%-upper whereas 58.3% of all respondents believed it was spread in all classes (Table 2, Fig. 1). The majority of subjects, 79.2% considered ‘Urfi more prevalent among 18-25 years age group. As can be seen in Table 3, Figure 2. 70.8% would not approve of ‘Urfi for any of the mentioned groups of people, whereas 12.5% would approve it for university students (Figure 3). Data indicates that 83.3% consider ‘Urfi a risky enterprise and 16.7% do not see it as such (Figure 4).

The Chi-Square revealed that there is a relationship between the gender of the respondent and his/her belief whether ‘Urfi is a ‘risky enterprise’ or not. Females were more likely to rank ‘Urfi as a ‘risky venture’ $X^2 (1, N=48)=5.4, p=.048$. The result was statistically significant. Among the most common reasons for calling ‘Urfi a ‘risky enterprise’ were lack of rights and guarantees available/granted to women, absence of documents, ‘Urfi being against Islam and “against norms, values and morals of the Egyptian culture”. However, the majority of respondents considered ‘Urfi risky because of its impact on children from such a marriage. Some respondents said, “children from such a marriage face a lot of problems”; “they are not raised in a good environment” and “children lose their financial rights, and the society will not accept them easily”.

As for the prevalence of the phenomenon, 14.6% of the whole sample claimed they knew someone ‘Urfi-married. On average, each person knew two such couples. As Figure 5 shows these couples were mainly from the respondents’ social class. 85.4% of the sample did not know anyone who was ‘Urfi-married. The majority of subjects engage in discussion of ‘Urfi marriage (68.8%).

The Chi-Square indicated that males and females engage in discussions of ‘Urfi marriage and there is no significant difference between them $X^2 (1, N=48)=.873, p=.534$. Of those who do discuss ‘Urfi do so with friends (45.5%), family (30.3%) and teachers (6.1%) (Figure 6). The reported attitude of the respondents’ families towards ‘Urfi marriage was generally strongly negative (77.1%) and only 2.1% stated that it was strongly positive. No correlations were found between religion and responses.

Open-ended comments:

Out of all subjects ten provided their feedback in the comment section where they expressed their ideas and thoughts that were not included/mentioned in the closed-ended part of the questionnaire. Some people added that it is totally against religion, but some, however, stated that it is religiously right provided all conditions are satisfied and there is no secrecy and the marriage is announced as it is supposed to be according to the law. One respondent wrote that “‘Urfi, as we know it nowadays, is not as it is really in Islam”. Another commented: “when stories are told about ‘Urfi marriage, they always have a bad ending”.

On the other side of the coin there are two opinions that view 'Urfi from slightly a different perspective. As a 19-year-old female wrote, "Urfi marriage is more prevalent in our society due to the lack of proper religious awareness amongst the growing generation, confusion of what is right and wrong. It can also be due to the low economic standards where low class people lack sufficient money to marry and hence seek 'Urfi marriage for sexual satisfaction. Overall, I think that 'Urfi marriage shouldn't be blamed on the individuals doing it but rather on the whole society" (Appendix D). Another female, 20, commented: "I think that one way to reduce its harms is to acknowledge that we live in a world that is becoming more and more liberal towards sexuality and Arab conservative societies need to keep up with that liberalization. Young boys and girls are bombarded with ideas that portray sex as a normal thing and so if they're told that just speaking with the opposite sex is wrong, they will resort to their own methods and would dismiss what society has to say" (Appendix D).

Discussion

Despite the fact that 'Urfi is a customary marriage, perceptions of the subjects were consistent with the "negative attitudinal pole" prevalent in the contemporary Egyptian society. The majority of all subjects perceived 'Urfi marriage as a "cover" for pre-marital sexual relationships which is consistent with attitudes stated in Shahine (1998, 1999) and El-Gawhary (1995). A significant number of the respondents also viewed 'Urfi as being secretive and illegal, which has also been mentioned in the literature before (Shahine, 1998, 1999). The majority of the subjects also attach stigma to the phenomenon and do so because they consider 'Urfi to be against religion and because "society as a whole disapproves of it and views it as "bad" and "dirty". This finding in turn compares to the attitude stated by Na'sr Farid Wa'sil, the former Mufti of Egypt in Berman (2004).

The research outlined several reasons for contracting 'Urfi marriage as viewed by the subjects which correspond to those proposed by Abaza (2001) and research conducted by the National Population Council in collaboration with the AUC Social Research Center ("Patterns of marriage", 2003). Respondents stated that 'Urfi nowadays serves only for satisfaction of sexual desires, avoidance of great economic demands placed on youth and for contracting a union between a man and a woman in case of refusal of the official proposal by one of the families. However, in contrast to Shahine's claim (1998) that 'Urfi marriage becomes an option for females who have passed "the proper age of marriage" and for males willing to satisfy sexual desire, for AUCians 'Urfi was not an option at all even under certain circumstances. This might be due to the overall negative attitude towards 'Urfi marriage, or the fact that most AUC students possess economic resources appropriate for official marriage, or due to a rejection of such behavior in the respondents' social class. However, this finding might be 'faked good' and is an attempt by the respondents to present their ideal self rather than actual/real. Thus, this result should be considered with caution.

The prevalence of the phenomenon was stated to be among people of 18-25 years of age. The finding is consistent with the findings reported before (Shahine, 1998, 1999;

“Patterns of marriage”, 2003). It is peculiar that although the vast majority of the respondents view ‘Urfi as something negative, “dirty”, secretive and illegal and 93.8% claimed they would never contract ‘Urfi marriage, some respondents actually knew ‘Urfi-married couples. On average each person knew two, which were mainly from the respondents’ socio-economic class. This in turn is consistent with another finding of the research which was that subjects believed that the phenomenon of ‘Urfi was spread and prevalent in all socio-economic classes, not only in lower-middle as stated in the previous literature (“Patterns of marriage”, 2003).

Research has indicated that there is a relationship between perceiving ‘Urfi marriage as a risky enterprise, and gender of the subject. Females tended to rate ‘Urfi as risky venture as compared to the males. Females ranked it as risky more often than males primarily due to the lack of rights and guarantees available for women in such a marriage, absence of documents and its impact on children. This is in line with other arguments already put forth in various sources. It is reasonable for women to rate ‘Urfi as risky since they are the population that is most vulnerable in that case. There is a great possibility that the husband, who usually keeps the contract, might destroy the only proof, thus leaving a woman unprotected and unable to get the paternity alimony, divorce or claim any other rights to her husband (Shahine, 1998, 1999). Moreover, since ‘Urfi marriages as perceived by males are commonly contracted for mere satisfaction of the sexual urge, men are very cautious not to impregnate their partners. However, sometimes pregnancy does occur, and the female becomes the one most affected and at risk (“Patterns of marriage”, 2003). She is then faced with shame, or the dilemma of either to keep the baby or to get an abortion, all of which carry very harsh and difficult social consequences.

Finally it is important to mention the views of the minority who provided their comments in the open-ended section. One person wrote that “‘Urfi as we know it nowadays is not as it is really in Islam” which is consistent with the views presented by Shahine (1998, 1999) and Berman (2004). Another proposed that individuals are not to be blamed; rather the society is the factor responsible for the phenomenon, which is very close to, what Saleh proposed in her M.A. thesis “Early Marriage: experience, perceptions, and attitude” (1993). She wrote that Egyptians are more interested and concerned about the society than the individual per se which is very important for understanding such a complex social phenomenon as ‘Urfi marriage. Finally, one respondent expressed ideas that Arab societies are on their way of liberalization and that they need to acknowledge that. Moreover, youth is driven by the media, which emphasizes sex and portrays it as something acceptable. Thus youth, being prohibited to practice this liberty find their own ways, one of which is ‘Urfi marriage. This argument is exactly the same as presented by Dr. Mona Abaza in her “Perceptions of ‘Urfi Marriage in the Egyptian Press” (2001).

These few opinions and arguments are present in the society. However, if these views spread and become more obvious in the society, the consequences might be quite serious and substantial.

Limitations

There were several limitations of the present study that should be taken into consideration while considering the results. First and foremost, the sample was not large enough and not representative enough which might have led to statistically insignificant results. However, it was chosen in such a way that any differences in majors and other factors were evenly counterbalanced. Acquaintances of the researcher were not included so as to protect anonymity. Data was gathered in all three campuses at different locations of the university including Falaki, Social Sciences and Main. Moreover, only individuals were targeted in order to avoid group pressure.

Another limitation of the study was lack of relevant literature and scientific research. Only one research was available and the rest were articles stating opinions, attitudes and general views of the society and some officials and authorities. This might have influenced the formulation of the whole research and questionnaire. However, this is an indication that more research is needed in the field.

It is also important to note that the questionnaire used for the survey potentially limits the generalizability of results and accuracy of conclusions, since it was not normalized on the Egyptian population. Since this questionnaire was designed to measure attitudes and perceptions, the answers do not indicate or predict real life behavior, and might even present idealized views and attitudes. Also it should be noted that the questionnaire does not cover the whole complexity of the phenomenon.

Finally, it is crucial to point out that the study cannot be generalized to the whole Egyptian population since AUC students are a very specific population and constitute a peculiar layer in the society. Also, the findings should be taken with caution since due to the size of the sample and lack of random sampling, these might not be generalizable to the whole AUC student community.

In spite of the limitations, the current study identifies certain directions for further research. It would be reasonable to examine the issue on a larger sample, and direct it towards awareness about rights and changes taking place in the domain of legal affairs and human rights. Moreover, it would be reasonable to interview people from various age groups, not only students, as well as choose subjects from various socio-economic classes. Another interesting and important relationship that might be established through further research is the one between pre-marital sexual relations between the sexes and prevalence of 'Urfi marriage. Further investigation of the issue would also need more qualitative methods such as interviews, case studies and document analysis. Also the questionnaire should include more variables. These will broaden the scope of the research and its validity.

Conclusion

In the meantime, the present study provides information about basic dynamics in the AUC student community regarding 'Urfi marriage, their attitudes and perceptions, ideas and thoughts. Given the fact that the phenomenon has been spreading and the government has had to offer something to accommodate all this population, the

research has shown that AUC students are either not aware of the amendments put forth by the government, or are not ready to accept these. They manifest very strong negative attitudes and perceive 'Urfi as something wrong, "dirty" and illegal. It seems that nowadays this term is taken and used to communicate this perception rather than to mean what it originally means - traditional/customary marriage.

AUC youth know very little about the Personal Status Law changes of 2000, and continue to perceive 'Urfi marriage as illegal. Most of them cannot even imagine themselves in the shoes of those who do choose 'Urfi and are positive about it. It is clear that a higher socio-economic status, such as that of most AUCians plays a role in the perception of 'Urfi marriage.

The topic is important and relevant to the development of the society. As the society changes, as media and interactions become more liberal and economic pressures continue, percentages of positive youth attitudes towards 'Urfi marriage may increase. If the society is not prepared, or not aware of the attitudinal shift, the Egyptian community may suddenly have to deal with a large-scale moral dilemma.

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Appendix A

Connotations of 'Urfi marriage

1. In your perception 'Urfi marriage is (choose all that best apply):

- a. Secretive
- b. Customary/traditional
- c. Religious
- d. "Cover" for pre-marital sexual relationships
- e. Illegal
- f. Legal
- g. Other (please specify):_____

2. The reasons for 'Urfi marriage usually are:

- a. Economic conditions (lack of resources)
- b. Satisfaction of sexual desire
- c. Love
- d. Refusal of official proposal by one of the families
- e. Temporary state that will later lead to full marriage
- f. Other (please specify)_____

3. If some of the conditions mentioned in question #2 or other conditions are present in your life, would you choose to contract 'Urfi marriage?

- Yes No

4. Do you attach stigma to 'Urfi marriage? (Stigma being "a mark of disgrace or infamy; a sign of severe censure or condemnation, regarded as impressed on a person or thing).

- Yes No

If to this question you answered "Yes" proceed to question # 5; if you answered "No", go to question # 6.

5. If "yes", it is stigmatized because (choose what you consider the most important):

- a. No official documents exist confirming marriage
- b. Society as a whole disapproves of it and views as "bad" and "dirty"
- c. It doesn't guarantee economic benefits and stability
- d. It is discriminatory and unfair to women (lack of rights granted to a woman)
- e. It is against religion
- f. Other (please specify):_____

20. **Gender:** Male Female

21. **Age:** _____

22. **Religion:** _____

23. **Nationality:** _____

24. **Major:** _____

25. **University year:** Freshman Sophomore Junior Senior
 Graduate

29. **Marital Status:** Married Single Engaged

Appendix B

Consent Form

I am Yulia V. Akinfieva, a graduating senior at AUC, psychology student. This research is conducted in partial fulfillment of the requirements of ECLT-322 (Writing in Humanities and Social Sciences) course. The topic of the research is “The connotations of ‘Urfi marriage at a time of Reform: Views of AUCians”’. All the respondents of this survey are AUC students. The information gathered will be included in a research paper that subsequently will be presented at the First Undergraduate Research conference and published in the Undergraduate Research Journal. You will be required to fill in a questionnaire, which will take 10-15 minutes. The research is completely anonymous i.e. your name will not appear on the questionnaire and the signed consent form will be kept separate from the data. The participation in the research is completely voluntary and can be terminated at any point without any penalties.

Your cooperation is highly appreciated

Having read the above I agree to participate in the research

Signature: _____

Date: _____

.....
Please tear off

“The connotations of ‘Urfi marriage in the time of Reform: Views of AUCians”

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For the results of the paper: attend the First Undergraduate Research Conference, “Reform in Egypt: Opportunities and Challenges”, May 18-19, 2005

Appendix C

Table 1

Percentage of respondents attaching and not attaching stigma to 'Urfi marriage

Subject's answer	Frequency	Percent (%)	Valid Percent (%)	Cumulative (%)
.....				
Yes	37	77.1	77.1	77.1
No	11	22.9	22.9	100.0
.....				
Total	48	100.0	100.0	

Table 2

Prevalence of 'Urfi marriage among socio-economic classes

SE class	Frequency	Percent (%)	Valid Percent (%)	Cumulative (%)
.....				
Low	8	16.7	16.7	16.7
Middle	9	18.8	18.8	35.4
Upper	3	6.3	6.3	41.7
All	28	58.3	58.3	100.0
.....				
Total	48	100.0	100.0	

Table 3

Percentage of approval of 'Urfi marriage for various groups

Class/group	Frequency	Percent (%)	Valid Percent (%)	Cumulative (%)
Widows	3	6.3	6.3	6.3
University students	6	12.5	12.5	18.8
Divorced	1	2.1	2.1	20.8
None	34	70.8	70.8	91.7
Other	3	6.3	6.3	97.9
All	1	2.1	2.1	100.0
Total	48	100.0	100.0	

Table 4

Family's attitudes towards 'Urfi marriage

Attitude	Frequency	Percent (%)	Valid Percent (%)	Cumulative (%)
Strongly positive	1	2.1	2.1	2.1
Negative	10	20.8	20.8	22.9
Strongly negative	37	77.1	77.1	100.0
Total	48	100.0	100.0	

Figure Captions

Figure 1. Prevalence of 'Urfi marriage among different socio-economic classes as stated by the respondents

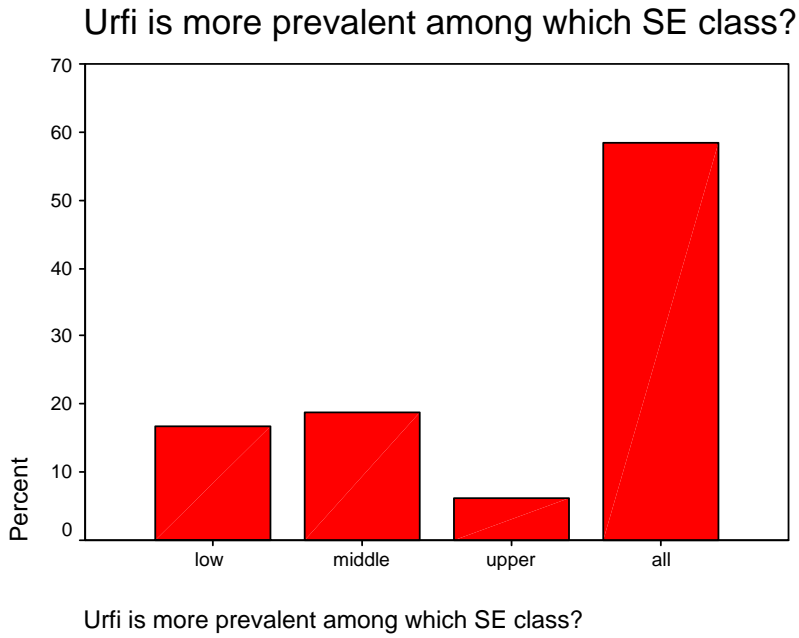


Figure 2. Prevalence of 'Urfi marriage among age groups as stated by the respondents

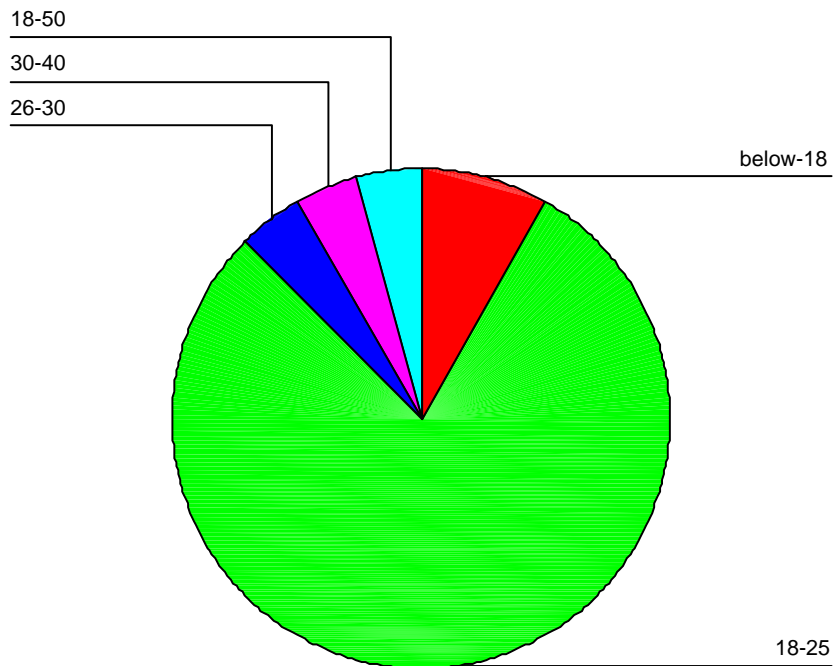


Figure 3. Approval of 'Urfi marriage by the respondents for particular groups

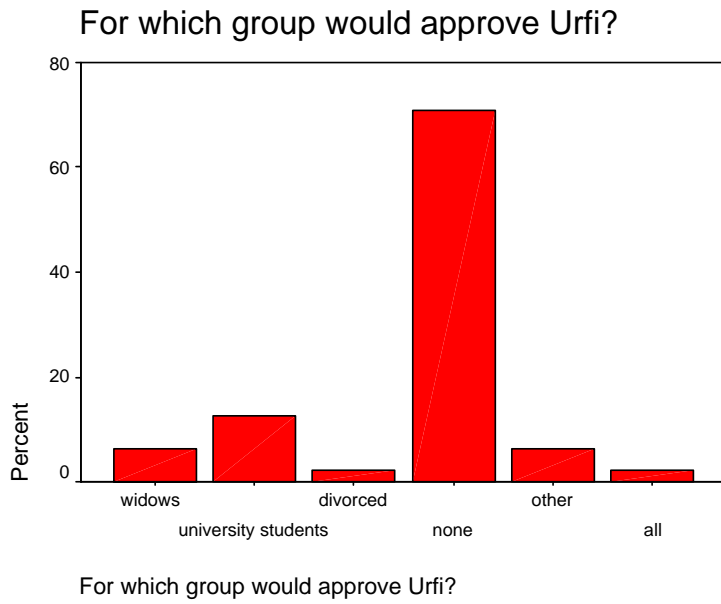


Figure 4. Respondents' perception risk involved in 'Urfi

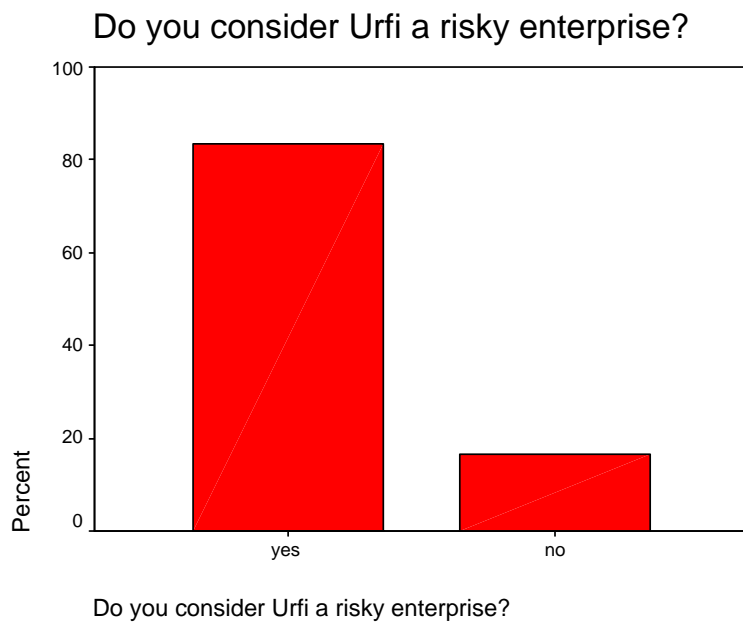


Figure 5. Social network of 'Urfi married couples known to respondents

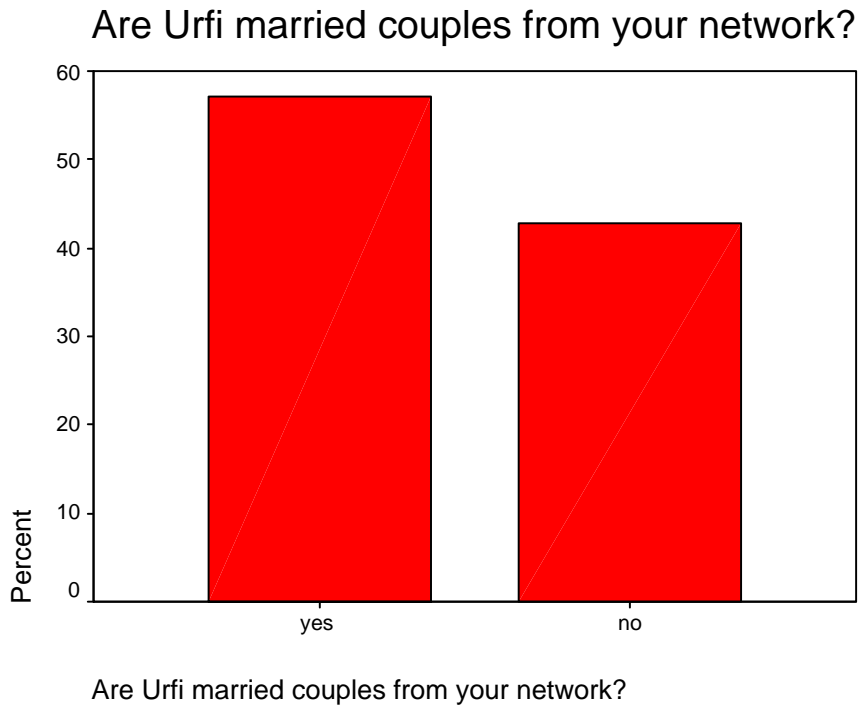
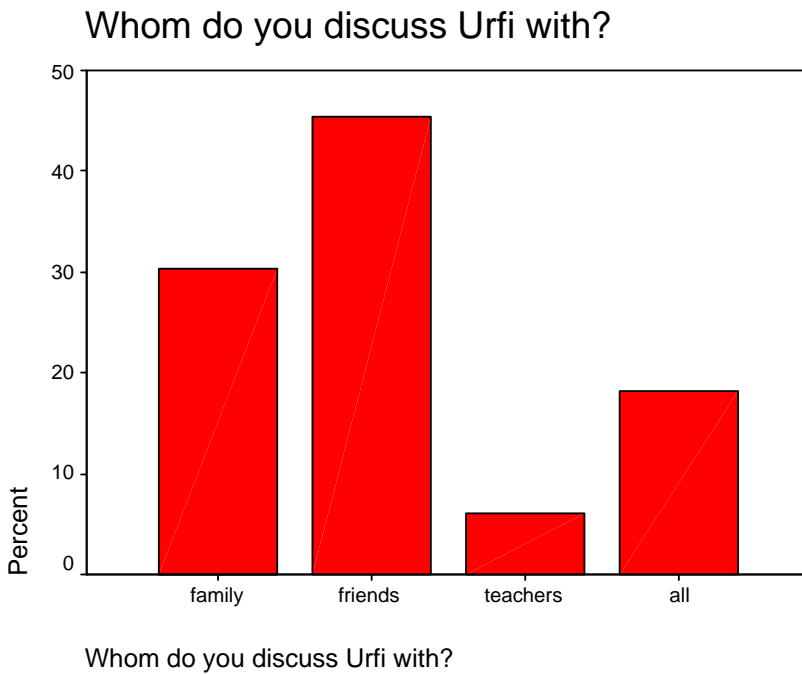


Figure 6. Subjects' discussants of 'Urfi marriage



Appendix D

"Its against my Christian Faith. It's against the Bible. It's against nature of love".

Male, 21, Christian

"In my point of view those people who marry 'Urfi are just trying to justify their actions in front of their conscience. They are totally irresponsible." *Female, 19, Muslim*

"Urfi marriage is a disgrace to females in the Arab world and to the Muslim community, and the couples who consider it should bear the consequences that come with such actions. I personally do not advise anyone to do it." *Female, 21, Muslim*

"Urfi marriage is more prevalent now in our society, due to the lack of proper religious awareness amongst the growing generation. It is the confusion of what is right and wrong. It can also be due to the low economic standards where low class people lack sufficient money to marry and hence seek Urfi marriage for sexual satisfaction. Overall, I think that Urfi marriage shouldn't be blamed on the individuals doing it but rather on the whole society." *Female, 19, Muslim*

"I think there are many social harms that result from Urfi marriages especially to women. I think one way to eliminate it and reduce its harms is to acknowledge that we live in a world that is becoming more and more liberal towards sexuality, and Arab/conservative societies need to keep up with that liberalization. Young boys and girls are bombarded with ideas that portray sex as a normal thing, and so if they're told that just speaking with the opposite sex is wrong, they will resort to their own method and would dismiss what society has to say altogether. Also I think 'Urfi marriages are yet another offense against women in these societies." *Female, 20, Muslim*

"Urfi marriage is considered unreligious and a disgrace in the society. However, college students might get Urfi married due to their family's decline of their partner. When stories are told about Urfi marriage they are always with a bad ending." *Male, 18, Christian*

"Urfi as we know nowadays is not as it is really in Islam." *Male, 20, Muslim*

"The declaration of the marriage of couples is the main principle in religious and legal marriage. However, in Urfi it is done secretly. That is the only point of conflict." *Male, 24, Muslim*

"Marriage is an essential fact that all the couples engage in, so it is best when it is obvious and with no secrets." *Male, 17, Muslim*

"Some people call the marriage that is done by only signing on a piece of paper Urfi marriage. This kind of marriage is actually illegal and against religion. For Urfi marriage to be legal, many conditions have to be satisfied. Consulting religious people would be the best solution to determine whatever is legal or not." *Female, 18, Muslim*

"Urfi marriage is wrong and is unreligious." *Male, 18, Muslim*