

Driven to Suicide

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Mother of three sets fire to herself in desperate bid escape an abusive marriage.
I was just a baby in my cradle when my parents set up an arranged marriage for me.

I remained with my parents until I was 15, when I had my wedding. The year was 1999 – and it was the beginning of my miserable life.

I should have set myself on fire then.

When I got married, I was a secondary school student. From the start, my husband treated me very badly, especially when I told him that I wanted to continue school. Although he had promised me to let me carry on my education after the wedding, as soon as we got married he broke his promise.

My husband is uneducated and can't even read and write. He is a veteran Kurdish fighter and knows about nothing but guns.

When I told him that I was ready to go back to school, he beat me. I saw no other choice but to forget about my education. Yet that was not the end of my hardships.

He was very jealous; he never let me leave the house alone to go shopping, let alone go for a walk. So my life was confined to the house. We were also living with his parents, who weren't the nicest people.

Shortly after I gave birth to our first baby, she became very sick. My husband was not at home, and none of his brothers and sisters wanted to come with me to a hospital. I decided to take the baby on my own, and when I returned, my husband and his mother both beat me. I was 18 years old then. That was the first time I tried to set myself on fire, but one of my husband's sisters stopped me.

Nothing changed after that, and we continued with our miserable life. I never spent one day with him without drama. His mother was even worse than him, and she was always creating trouble.

Although I thought about leaving him several times, my family never supported me. They were always telling me that I was his wife and he could control me. In the eyes of both families, I was more an object than a human being.

My husband wanted a boy, but we had three girls. He blamed me for this. He would get angry and threaten to marry another girl.

It was in the fall of 2007 when I finally persuaded him to let me go to evening classes. I wanted to get out of the house and this school was a great place to study.

But soon things turned nasty. His mother didn't like the idea of me going to school. She is illiterate and believes that education is against family values. For people like her, a woman is the property of her husband.

One afternoon in December 2007, as I returned home from school, I saw my husband in front of our house standing with a stick in his hand. When I got closer to the house, he attacked me in front of our neighbours and he pushed me into our house. I was crying, screaming and asking why he was beating me up, but he never answered and continued hitting me until he broke my right hand.

He never let me go to the hospital for treatment. Instead, one of our neighbours bandaged it up.

After that incident, I decided that it is better to die than to live such a life. What kind of life is it when you share your house with your parents-in-law, who don't have the slightest bit of respect for you?

What kind of life is it when you aren't given your rights as a human being? When you are not even allowed to leave your house?

One evening, I decided to escape from my husband's tyranny. Having no family support and not knowing where to go, my only choice was to commit suicide.

In our house, we never lacked weapons. I thought about killing myself with my husband's AK-47 rifle, but I was hesitant. I had heard a story about a girl in our area who had tried to commit suicide by shooting herself, but she survived and was handicapped for the rest of her life.

For three days, I thought about a way to end my life. Eventually, I decided that I must set myself on fire. It was an easier choice. And I remember when I was a kid one of our neighbours set herself on fire and she died.

One night, I put my three kids to bed and kissed them as much as I could. Throughout the entire eight years that we lived together, my husband never slept with me.

That night, I cried a lot. I went to the bathroom which was a few yards from my room. I took a gallon of kerosene with me. I sat in the bathroom and cried more. I thought about every single minute of my life, about how miserable it was.

With tears pouring from my eyes, I grabbed the gallon of kerosene with my left hand and poured it over myself, from the top of my head to my toes. When all of my clothes and body were soaked, I put the container aside, closed my eyes, flicked the lighter and placed it on my chest. All of a sudden, my body was on fire. I rushed out of the bathroom, screaming for help. In a minute, everything went black.

Five days later, I woke up in a hospital in Sulaimaniyah. It was terrible to open my eyes and know that I was alive. I was so disappointed that I had another chance to live.

My husband and his family had told the police that my case was an accident; that I caught fire from kerosene while I was making bread.

As soon as I could talk, I told the police investigators the truth. My husband was detained for a short time and then freed on bail.

I spent three months in the hospital. Life was really hard there. Every day, I would see young girls and women like me who came to the hospital with burns. I would see some of them die and some of them survive.

I really envied those who died. I thought they had escaped the miseries brought on by their oppressors. It is better to die once and for all than to die every day of your life.

My husband visited me several times while I was in the hospital. Every time, he tried to convince me to change my statement to the investigators. I refused.

When my health was strong enough to be discharged from the hospital, I chose to go to a women's shelter in Sulaimaniyah rather than going back to my husband.

At the shelter, my life is better, and I see my daughters frequently. But I'm in a dilemma. While my husband says that he will be nice to me if I go back, I just can't believe him. I think he only says that because he is worried that he might eventually be held responsible for my failed suicide attempt.

I don't know what the future has in store for me, but I don't want to go back to my husband. I know that I'm not alone. There are hundreds of women who have similar stories to mine, and it is just sad that no one is coming to their defence.

Darun Mohammed – a pseudonym used for security reasons – was interviewed by Amanj Khalil, an IWPR-trained journalist who has reported on the increase in self-immolation and suicide attempts by Kurdish women in Sulaimaniyah.

Topic: [Iraqi Women's Voices](#)

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