

Infidelity Abroad

By: Robin Pascoe

Infidelity abroad happens frequently and is invariably the man's, according to Jeremy Morley, a British lawyer working in New York City and founder of www.international-divorce.com. "Overseas postings often wreak havoc on family life," says Morley, a former expat himself whose clients now find him from all over the world.

"When a man goes on an overseas assignment, everything is suddenly different for him. The new location is far more exotic than 'home' which may have become mundane; his daily routine is often refreshingly different; his work is more interesting and as a result, he feels more interesting and alive than before; and he feels special because he receives unusual attention, especially from women," says Morley.

But in the evenings, when he returns to his home in the new city, he finds the same wife and kids and the same old issues, as well as some new ones related to overseas adjustment. His wife does not treat him like the interesting, youthful and special person he felt like at work. Instead, she's been dealing with the kids who have no friends, hate the new school, and can't stand the food. Or she's bored and meets no one except some other expat wives who are also depressed.

"She can't wait for her husband to come home so that she can complain to him and have him share in some of the household chores. The contrast is stark so he prefers to spend time at the office, and that eventually leads to an affair," he explains. Thrown into this mix is the fact that in some parts of the world, a lavish Raj-style colonial way of living with cars, drivers and servants enhances a man's sense of self-confidence and self-worth just as his spouse is losing hers. Also, in cultures where feminism is a foreign concept, women are raised to put a man's needs above her own which can have an intoxicating effect on many men.

Spouses should hope for the best, but plan for the possible worst, advises Morley. "If a woman is moving to a country whose attitudes towards women are not advanced as Britain or other Western countries, the divorce should probably take place in Britain. The best way to maximise the chance of that occurring is for a woman to maintain British contacts, in particular by retaining the family home. Don't sell it before moving overseas," he advises.

Steps to take for protection

Be financially informed; gather up all key documents before it is too late. Morley says many husbands try to hide their assets; Obtain competent legal advice as quickly as possible, including advice about the local law as well as the law of her home country; When a husband sees the errors of his ways (as frequently happens according to Morley) he often begs his wife's forgiveness and promises to be faithful. While it's great to kiss and make up, get his promises in writing. And while he's making those promises, get them before he changes his mind.

A woman should take charge of her own case. She shouldn't allow lawyers to make decisions without her full knowledge and complete involvement. She should do her research, ask all of her own questions, and demand intelligent and detailed answers.

If it all sounds terribly cynical, remember it's the same old story being played out everywhere in the world where men accuse their wives of being cold or forgetting about them (or simply being boring) and women feel like their husbands have suddenly had a "personality transplant" according to Morley and start behaving like a teenager with silly young girls.

"Everywhere in the world, clients justify whatever it is that they do, however egregious it may be," he says. "This certainly applies to divorce clients. Very few cheating husbands admit that they did wrong. Instead, they blame their wives for their marital mistakes and they express pride for having withstood temptation for so long."

In the case of the expatriate life, where temptation can be compounded by culture shock, women are well advised to follow Morley's final bit of advice if their husband becomes unfaithful far from home: "First steps are critical. The important early decisions include whether to stay overseas or return home, whether to give up the overseas home, or whether to take the children out of school and bring them back to England or the home country. A woman should never make these critical decisions without being fully informed of their possible repercussions on her legal situation."

Not all infidelity leads to divorce

In the months before Pamela (not her real name) discovered her husband was cheating on her during their overseas posting, she says his attitude towards her degenerated from respect to name calling to verbal abuse. Not knowing what was going on, she just assumed she was being the "imperfect wife" until she discovered bank deposit slips to a bank unknown to her. The person's name on them was female, unknown to her, and totalled more than £800.

She confronted her husband and he confessed to his infidelity immediately. "It helps that he's a terrible liar," she says. "I was in a foreign country, no credit cards or cash, no way to leave with the children without my husband's permission, middle-aged, with no job prospects. I was profoundly scared."

Yet, two and half years since she discovered he had been unfaithful, Pamela remains married and they continue to live on assignment. "While I would definitely leave if my children or I were in danger, I believe almost all marital problems can be worked out," she says.

Pamela believes that finding support is key after discovering the infidelity. While it's a vulnerable time, a real person to confide in is important. If no one is available, she suggests online counselling and recommends www.marriagebuilders.com.

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