

PARENTS TALK BACK
How do you get married if you can't date?

We are not the first group to face a "marriage crisis" in the melting pot of America.

By we, I mean Muslim Americans. By crisis, I mean the challenge faced by one smaller community within a larger one when attempting to find a mate. More specifically, the "crisis" within ethnic communities refers to either a rising rate of intra-marriages across ethnic and religious groups, or an excess of eligible single women with fewer prospects within their own particular group.



AISHA SULTAN
 Parents talk back

For those who self-limit their choices to others of the same religious or ethnic background, the pool of viable candidates shrinks. Orthodox, practicing Muslims have another challenge on top of living in a land of slimmer pickings: Dating, in the American sense of the word, is off-limits. You're not allowed to cavort with the opposite sex until it's time to get married. But how exactly is that supposed to happen for generations of children less comfortable with the idea of arranged marriages than their parents may have been?

Long before there were niche dating websites or location-based hookup apps, there were meddling parents, friends, professional matchmakers and mere acquaintances setting up single people.

Then came the Internet. Jewish singles found JDate. Mormons could visit LDSPlanet. Many sites like ChristianMingle cater to Christians, although it seems like you're just as likely to find plenty of relationship-seeking Christians on generic sites like eHarmony.

Marriage-minded Muslims have their own matchmaking websites, but many American Muslims have found those culturally out-of-touch with their own values. They may seem too conservative, too regressive in gender expectations or too focused on physical appearance. Ghazala Irshad, a social media editor, wrote about this dilemma and new technological solutions on the horizon.

All the "rishta aunties" (yentas of a different faith) are complaining about older, educated, single Muslim women and the shortage of eligible men, she said. Irshad, a 30-year-old writer who has reported from around the world, could fit this crisis demographic in the eyes of these aunties. Most certainly, she does in the eyes of her grandmother.

The shortfall of eligible partners has launched all sorts of creative workarounds. Forget Silicon Valley; nothing spurs innovation like a mother needling her child to just get married already.

Irshad recently published a piece on BuzzFeed about a rise in location-based matchmaking apps for Muslims — like a tame version of Tinder, with a different endgame in mind: a walk down an aisle, not the walk of shame.

"If you're a single Muslim in North America, you know the thirst is real," she writes.

Irshad describes the efforts of enterprising Muslim millennials offering apps that widen social circles but stay within like-minded communities.

"This evens the playing field. It allows men and women to express interest, so girls don't have to be passive and wait for a guy to come court them," she said. Her own online dating profile describes how she's climbed the highest mountain in Indochina, dodged bullets while reporting on the revolution in Egypt, celebrated Eid with Libyan rebels in Benghazi after Gadhafi was killed and taught English to orphans in Cambodia.

Currently, she's traveling in Jordan and Lebanon, teaching photography to Palestinian, Syrian and Iraqi refugee girls as part of trauma counseling.

This is a woman who says she "hasn't had anything going on" in the dating scene for years. Previously, prospective suitors have described her as "too alpha female, too well-traveled, too ambitious."

Irshad, who is moving from Chicago to Boston, signed up with Bliss Marriage, but the app is so new that there isn't anyone else within a 200-mile radius of her yet. She also joined Ishqr.com, a site and forthcoming app that doesn't share photos until both parties express mutual interest in each other's self-submitted profiles. There are also SalaamSwipe and Crescent apps in the works, both of which will allow the spousal search to go mobile.

Irshad didn't expect her BuzzFeed Community self-published article to spread so far. She's gotten messages from Muslims in Europe who related to the story, and she's been interviewed by BBC World about the subject.

"I wanted to get the word out," Irshad said. She wanted other Muslim Americans who might be interested to sign up. It never hurts to increase the pool of candidates.

It may even prompt her grandma, who collected Irshad's biodata (basically a resume) to pass out to her own old-school network of possible suitors, to rethink her marketing strategy.

Aisha Sultan is a St. Louis-based journalist who studies parenting in the digital age while trying to keep up with her tech-savvy children. Find her on Twitter: @AishaS.

Flawed Social Security data say 6.5 million reach age 112

By **STEPHEN OHLEMACHER**
Associated Press

WASHINGTON — Americans are getting older, but not this old: Social Security records show that 6.5 million people in the U.S. have reached the ripe old age of 112.

In reality, only a few could possibly be alive. As of last fall, there were only 42 people known to be that old in the entire world.

But Social Security does not have death records for millions of these people, with the oldest born in 1869, according to a report by the agency's inspector general.

Only 13 of the people are still getting Social Security benefits, the report said. But for others, their Social Security numbers are still active, so a number could be used to report wages, open bank accounts, obtain credit cards or claim fraudulent tax refunds.

"That is a real problem," said Sen. Ron Johnson, R-Wis. "When you have a fake Social Security number, that's what allows you to fraudulently do all kinds of things, claim things like the earned income tax credit or other tax benefits."

Johnson is chairman of the Senate Committee on Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs, which plans a hearing Monday on problems with death records maintained by the Social Security Administration.

Johnson said he is working on legislation to make it easier for Social Security to use information from states to maintain more accurate death records.

"There's got to be a legislative solution here, and that's the thing that we're going to try and determine," Johnson said. "The best death statistics really come from states, the vital statistics agencies."

The agency said it is working to improve the accuracy of its death records. But it would be costly and time-consuming to update 6.5 million files that were generated decades ago, when the agency used paper records, said Sean Brune, a senior adviser to the agency's deputy commissioner for budget, finance, quality and management.

"The records in this review are extremely old, decades-old, and unreliable," Brune said.

The internal watchdog's report does not document any fraudulent or improper payments to people using these Social Security numbers. But it raises red flags that it could be happening.

For example, nearly 67,000 of the Social Se-



In this Aug. 14, 1935, file photo President Franklin Roosevelt signs the Social Security bill in Washington.

curity numbers were used to report more than \$3 billion in wages, tips and self-employment income from 2006 to 2011, according to the report. One Social Security number was used 613 different times. An additional 194 numbers were used at least 50 times each.

People in the country illegally often use fake or stolen Social Security numbers to get jobs and report wages, as do other people who do not want to be found by the government. Thieves use stolen Social Security numbers to claim fraudulent tax refunds.

The IRS estimated it paid out \$5.8 billion in fraudulent tax refunds in 2013 because of identity theft. The head of the Justice Department's tax division described how it's done at a recent congressional hearing.

"The plan is frighteningly simple — steal Social Security numbers, file tax returns showing a false refund claim, and then have the refunds electronically deposited or sent to an address where the offender can access the refund checks," said acting Assistant Attorney General Caroline Ciralo.

In some cases, she said, false tax returns are filed using Social Security numbers of deceased

taxpayers or others who are not required to file.

The Social Security Administration generates a list of dead people to help public agencies and private companies know when Social Security numbers are no longer valid for use. The list is called the Death Master File, which includes the name, Social Security number, date of birth and date of death for people who have died.

The list is widely used by employers, financial firms, credit reporting agencies and security firms. Federal agencies and state and local governments rely on it to police benefit payments.

But none of the 6.5 million people cited by the inspector general's report was on the list. The audit analyzed records as of 2013, looking for people with birth dates before 1901.

President Franklin D. Roosevelt signed the Social Security Act in 1935, and the first old-age monthly benefit check was paid in 1940.

Many of the people cited in the inspector general's report never received benefits, though they were assigned Social Security numbers so spouses and children could receive them, presumably after they died.

OUT OF THE VAULT

Shower of sticks and stones baffles police

Pendleton police were baffled when a resident of 1802 West Railroad Street [S.W. Frazer Ave.] reported a rain of rocks, pebbles and sticks falling onto the roof of their house, apparently out of thin air, on April 2, 1915.

The house was occupied by Mr. and Mrs. Henderson Crowner, their daughter Helen and Eldon Hutchinson, the 16-year-old cousin of Mrs. Crowner. Sometime during the afternoon of April 2, Mrs. Crowner, Helen and Eldon heard what sounded like stones hitting the roof of the house. When they went outside to investigate, rocks ranging in size from pebbles to boulders were rolling off the slanted roof to the ground. A search turned up no one who could have been throwing rocks



RENEE STRUTHERS
 Out of the vault

arrived soon afterward, but was unable to locate the cause of the shower. The barrage continued at intervals throughout the evening and the next morning, and the next day the police returned to continue their search for the source of the rocks, to no avail.

A neighbor, Ben Pierce, who lived at 501 Maple Street [S.W. 16th St.], was skeptical about the

story until he witnessed it with his own eyes. Pierce described rocks rolling to the ground off both sides of the roof, but said he was unable to see any of the missiles until they were within a few feet of the roof. Sticks were also strewn about the roof. He went inside the house and found stones, chips and a handful of dirt that had come down the chimney. Another neighbor, Thelma Coffman, had a boulder the size of a man's head land near her feet, but it hardly dented the ground. When another rock hit her in the head she "felt it no more than if it had been a feather bag."

The house, a small three-bedroom building with no attic, sat by itself in the center of a large lot. High bluffs rose behind it about 50 feet away

with several clumps of bushes at the base, but the police beat the bushes and found no one hiding there. According to neighbors, anyone throwing stones from that distance would have cracked the shingles, but no such damage was found on inspection of the roof. And there was no way for anyone to hide on the roof itself.

The incident frightened the house's occupants so much that they refused to sleep there. A search of the *East Oregonian* archives did not turn up any information that the mystery was ever solved.

Renee Struthers is the Community Records Editor for the *East Oregonian*. See the complete collection of Out of the Vault columns at eovault.blogspot.com

ODDS & ENDS

Suspect spray-paints face in failed attempt to avoid identification

MADERA, Calif. (AP) — A man suspected of stealing a car spray-painted his face black in an attempt to evade police in Central California.

The *Fresno Bee* reports Monday that 23-year-old Jose Espinoza ran from police after being caught with a stolen car.

Officers caught up to Espinoza and arrested him Saturday night with his face painted black.

Police booked Espinoza into the Madera County Department of Corrections, where he remained Monday morning. It wasn't immediately known if he has an attorney.

Ikea nixes massive hide and seek games at Dutch stores

THE HAGUE, Netherlands (AP) — Ikea has a message for people wanting to converge on its stores for giant games of hide and seek: Go play someplace else.

The phenomenon has taken off online in the Netherlands where a whopping 19,000 people signed up to a Facebook group promoting a game at Ikea's Amsterdam branch next month. Another 13,000 signed up for a game in the Ikea store in the city



This combo of booking photo released by the Madera Police Department shows 23-year-old Jose Espinoza.

of Utrecht. But the Swedish retail giant has bad news for folks wanting to hide among its room-like furniture displays: The numbers signing up are getting out of hand and the events have been blocked.

"We have contacted these pages on social media and humbly asked them to have their hide and seek games somewhere else," Ikea spokeswoman Martina Smedberg in Sweden said Tuesday.

Ikea doesn't want to be a spoilsport, but safety comes first. "In general we are happy that our customers are playful and want to have fun together with friends and family," Smedberg said. "But unfortunately this hide and seek phenomenon

has reached proportions where we can no longer guarantee the security of those who are playing or our customers and employees."

Bowler throws grenade instead of ball in Ukraine, 2 injured

KIEV, Ukraine (AP) — Two people have been injured while bowling in a rebel-controlled area of east Ukraine after a player rolled a grenade instead of a ball.

A separatist-run news agency cited emergency services official Sergei Ivanushkin as saying Friday that the separatist-held parts of Luhansk region have seen a spate of accidents recently because of careless use of explosives. Ivanushkin

said a man and woman were hospitalized after Thursday's incident.

The blast occurred at a "cheburechnaya" — a restaurant serving fried pastries — that also offered duckpin bowling, which uses a ball without holes on a relatively short lane.

East Ukraine has been wracked by war for almost a year, during which time the region has become flooded with small arms and grenades.

Bill sent out in 1969 returned to Maine water district

BRUNSWICK, Maine (AP) — A bill for \$1.40 sent out by a Maine water district almost a half-century ago has finally been returned.

The Brunswick and Topsham Water District mailed the bill to a resident of Topsham in October 1969. The bill was supposed to be returned to the water district by the post office because the customer's post office box had been closed.

However, it didn't find its way back to the district until last Tuesday, 46 years later.

Linda Deacetis, the district's executive secretary, tells *The Times Record* she was quite surprised to receive the bill. The district believes that the customer has since passed away. The bill had a 6-cent stamp on it.