

Co-Existence of Wives and Functioning of Polygamous Families: Love VS Arranged Second Marriages in Pakistan

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Polygamy is allowed in almost two third of all the human societies around the world under religious or cultural contexts where a man has more than one wife at the same time. The accurate data about the existence of polygamy is not available for any country in the world. Polygamy is legally practiced in Pakistan as well but not much appreciated culturally. As the previous studies have found polygamy causes various economic, physical and emotional problems for women and children living under, it becomes important to study the functioning of polygamous families. The present study is conducted with qualitative research methodology opting phenomenological research design by interviewing fifteen individuals, 5 husbands and 10 wives, currently living under polygamy in Kasur city of Pakistan. The study found first wife's infertility or inability to produce male child a leading cause of polygamy here in Pakistan and better functioning of polygamous families where second marriage was also arranged and both wives were living in the same house. In cases where second marriage is out of love through the court of law the first wife and other family members did not accept the second wife, not even allowed her to enter the home in most cases. In almost all cases the polygamous husbands give preferential treatment to second wife because of being younger than the first wife, being more beautiful and attractive or producing male child etc. First wife is neglected and developed a sense of deprivation in case of being infertile or unable to produce a male child.

1. Introduction

The word polygamy is derived from '*Polygamia*', a Greek word that means "frequent marriages" or "marriage to many spouses" (Wirastri & Van Huis, 2021; Amone & Arao, 2014). So, polygamy is a kind of marriage which has more than two partners at the same time. In the modern literature, a woman having more than one husband at a time is termed as '*Polyandry*' and a man having more than one wife at a time is termed as '*Polygyny*'. Polyandry rarely exists in the modern world and only few tribes of Tibetan region in China still practice (Bray, Wasson, Srivastava & Ziegler, 2024; Mitchell et al., 2014) while two third of the entire world's societies allow polygyny across the religions and cultures. The word 'polygamy' is interchangeably used with the word 'polygyny' in most of the modern academic literature and is the most common form of marriage where a man has two or more wives at the same time (Wirastri & Van Huis, 2021; Al-Sharfi et al., 2016) in this regard. In the present study the word polygamy is also used reflecting the polygyny.

The accurate figures about the existence of polygamy worldwide or nationwide are not available even in the countries with modern data bases (Amone & Arao, 2014; Wirastri & Van Huis, 2021;). Although polygamy is permitted in the country in religious context yet it is not widespread and no authentic data is available regarding the prevalence of polygamy in Pakistan (Shahjehan & Rahman, 2021). In general, polygamy is not acceptable socially and culturally disliked because second wife is not honored by the family, though it is practiced in rich landowning families most of the time across the country. Sinai and Peleg (2020) found in their study that first wives suffered from severe psychological and emotional distress because of their husband's second marriage causing dissatisfaction from their marital life and causing mistrust in the family. Another study found that the senior wives have to go through mental health issues like stress, anxiety and negative self-realizations because of their husband's second marriage creating a continues conflict within the household (Heath et al., 2020).

A multi-country report by WHO (World Health Organization) on intimate partner violence found that in countries where polygamy is allowed wives living in polygamous marriages are more vulnerable to be abused. Another recent research conducted in 16 countries found that wives living in polygamous family settings were more prone to be abused than the wives living in monogamous families (Ahinkorah, 2021). The literature further indicates that wives living under polygamy view the husband's time, money and attention unequal when split between which causes stress and emotional abuse for them (Zeitzen, 2020). The studies have revealed that women living under polygamous family settings accept and conceal the abuse and stress under the fear of losing food, shelter and security they have for themselves and for their children (Sinai & Peleg, 2020) because divorce is considered a taboo and there are lesser chances of remarriage for a divorcee. Such emotional, financial, and physical abuses women have to face under polygamy are directly linked to their mental health (Al Hourani, 2023; Al-Krenawi, 2016).

The study intended to investigate that how wives under polygamous family settings develop an atmosphere of peaceful co-existence making the polygamy functional and to what extent the love marriage through court which is not a socially acceptable way of marriage and an arranged second marriage contributes in it.

2. Literature Review

The existing literature indicates that polygamy affects mental health of children and adolescents as studied by Al Hourani (2023), finding higher interpersonal-sensitivity and depression and lower family functioning amongst them. The studies have also found more problematic relations between children and parents living under polygamous family settings, especially the children having problems with their father indicate lower family functioning (Ahinkorah, 2021). The studies have also found that adolescents remain impartial between their parents in conflict situation to be safe and this is their self-protection strategy in polygamous families too where no cohesive or supportive mechanism shields them (Zeitzen, 2020). Moos and Moos (2013) has studied polygamous family functioning using the 'Cohesion' subscale of the 'Moos Family Environment Scale' which measures support, help and commitment among the family members. The major findings of the study were the negative association of polygamy with family functioning, the family cohesion had negative correlation with depression, family cohesion had positive correlation with self-esteem, and had negative correlation with anxiety (Al Hourani, 2023; Moos & Moos, 2013).

Previously polygamy is studied mostly in Middle East and Africa focusing its physical and emotional effects on women and children. A study conducted in Kenya revealed that children living in polygamous families are not fully vaccinated and they are more malnourished than the children living in monogamous families or with single mothers (Merdad, 2021). Typically, it is expected from the father to provide for the cost of food and immunization which polygamous fathers cannot provide most of the time for all of their children. Anjorin et al. (2020) in their study across 32 African countries found that children living in polygamous families were suffering from 'wasting' 11 times more than the children in monogamous families and 7 times more of being underweight. Another study found in Nigeria that children in polygamous families suffer more from 'stunting' than other children and their faces indicate poverty, neglect from their families and sufferings of diseases (Amare et al., 2018). So, the existing literature has indicated that polygamy affects children along with women in multiple ways due to malfunctioning of the polygamous family as an institute for children's nurturing.

Some of the researchers have studied the benefits of polygamy and found that polygamy is not always exploitative and abusive. There are some positives of polygamy if functioning properly, especially the peaceful co-existence among wives can benefit them economically and reduces the burden of domestic chores by dividing the tasks (Thobejane & Flora, 2014; Aamir et al., 2022; Hassan et al., 2022; Khan et al., 2022). The studies indicate that women might feel uncomfortable at first when a new woman enters the family but with time the level of cooperation develops and

they start living harmoniously if being treated equally. A study conducted in Kirgizstan revealed that some women showed their interest to be in a polygamous marital relation if given the choice and surety to be treated well (Rehman, 2019). Some studies have found that in a well-functioning polygamous family children's physical growth, cognition development and social adjustment is not affected at all (Al-Krenawi & Kanat-Maymon, 2015; Al-Sharfi et al., 2016). So, from the above literature review it can be interpreted that the functioning of a polygamous family seems more important while assessing polygamy's impact on the lives of the individuals living under.

Summarizing the literature, it can be interpreted that previously polygamy is mostly studied in Middle Eastern and African societies. Very few researches are conducted in Pakistani or South Asia context which enhances the significance of this research. Polygamy is studied mostly focusing on sociocultural or economic aspects and physical or mental health of women and children living under polygamous family settings (Rehman, 2019). No study is found exploring the functionality of polygamous families in Pakistani context with diffraction between love and arranged marriage. Some studies are conducted highlighting the benefits of polygamy especially the economic potential of manpower in agrarian societies where polygamy existed with more intensity as tool to produce more and more human resources for the business (Merdad, 2021; Hassan et al., 2022; Hassan et al., 2023; Mughal et al., 2023). There was a gap in the existing literature regarding the peaceful co-existing of wives in polygamy in Pakistan which the present study is expected to minimize to some extent.

3. Research Method

As debated through the literature review that the phenomenon of polygamy exists in varied context around the world affecting individuals' lives differently. So, interpretivism seems the most suitable approach to study the phenomenon of polygamy believing that no underlying factors govern the human behavior and social realities are constructed through social interaction with the subjective understanding of the individuals (Merriam & Tisdell 2016). In this way the study opted qualitative research method with phenomenological research design including the individuals who have lived experiences of polygamous family settings. In total 15 participants were interviewed purposively from ten different polygamous families, including 5 first wives, 5 second wives and 5 polygamous husbands from district Kasur, Punjab-Pakistan, using the interview guide specifically designed for the study. The collected data through interviews was transcribed and analyzed thematically extracting inductive and deductive codes from the data and generating different themes. To Ensuring the anonymity and confidentiality of the participants' identifications like names, cast, age etc. are altered under the guidelines of the research ethics.

4. Findings

4.1 Factors Leading Towards Polygamy

The collected data revealed that major factors behind the practice of polygamy in Punjab include first wife's inability to produce a male child or not being able to produce at all. Under

rigged patriarchal influence males' ultimate desire after marriage is having male children and when a wife goes through infertility it further makes her vulnerable towards divorce or being stuck in polygamy. In case of first wife's infertility and not being able to produce any child, the husband decides either divorce or having another wife and in such scenario polygamy for the first wives becomes more acceptable option. There was a case in the study where first wife was unable to produce a male child and the husband decided to get another wife at the age of 50 just to have a male heir for his property. There is another case in the study where the first wife was unable to produce at all and the husband married another wife 10 year after his first marriage to have children. In typical Punjabi culture there is a practice of exchange marriage which mostly takes place against the will of the boys and girls of both families and can be labeled as forced marriage. The study data revealed that males react against the forced marriage later when they become financially independent by marrying another wife of their own choice. Arranged marriage with huge age gap between the husband and wife is another leading factor behind polygamy, especially in cases where first wife was older than the husband. The study found that such individuals decide to get a younger wife in later years when the first wife reaches the age of menopause. In five cases out of ten the second marriage was a reaction against the first marriage which was actually a forced marriage arranged by the parents.

4.2 Love or Arranged Second Marriage

Only in the two cases out of ten cases studied the second marriage was arranged by the family and both second marriages took place in a socially acceptable way according to the cultural practices. One because of the absence of male child and the other because of the first wife's infertility and in rest of the eight cases the second marriage was out of love and took place in the court of law which is not a socially acceptable or a traditional cultural way of marriage. The study data revealed that the second marriage taking place out of love through the court of law is usually kept hidden from the first wife and other family members initially and revealed later to avoid opposition. According to the country's legal framework the husband must acquire prior written permission from the 'Arbitrary Council' for second marriage but the study has exposed that in no case including arranged and love marriages the written permission was taken from the council. In arranged marriages the first wives were aware of the second marriage and somehow gave their consent but in love marriage cases the first wives were kept under-the-dark intentionally. The study also revealed that even the court didn't ask the husband to provide the written permission from the council which was a legal requirement before registering the second marriage.

4.3. Acceptance for Love VS Arranged Second Marriage

As per the acceptance for the second marriage by the husband's family and his first wife is concerned the study found more acceptance for arranged second marriage and no acceptance for second marriage out of love through the court because marriage through the court of law is considered elopement which is a taboo in Pakistani culture. And elopement is socially and culturally considered an unacceptable pattern of marriage for women. Arranged second marriages

had a strong social and cultural justification behind like first wife's infertility or absence of male child etc. which creates a margin and acceptance for second marriage. In the cases of arranged second marriages both wives live in the same house with joint or extended families most of the time and there is a respectable working relation amongst the spouses and with other family members as well. On the other hand, there is no acceptance for second marriage under love through the court and elopement. The study found that in such cases the first wife reacts with the support of her parents and in-laws and doesn't allow the second wife to enter the house and in seven out of eight love marriage cases the second wives were living in the separate homes. There was only one case where the first wife allowed her husband to bring the second wife home and both were living together peacefully while in other cases of second marriage out of love the second wives were not accepted at all.

4.4 Co-Existence of Wives

The study data revealed that there is a better co-existence amongst wives where second marriage was arranged out of necessity, either under the desire of having children or for the need of male child. Only one case of second love marriage where both wives were living peacefully seems exception because of poverty both wives stitch clothes from their home for the villagers and contribute in the family income and the husband drives rikshaw to earn livelihood. In the arranged second marriage cases both of the wives live together in the same house; both participate in domestic chores and both look after the husband and children. The younger wives contribute more in domestic responsibilities as compared to the first wives. The first wife looks after the children while the second wife completes the household tasks or attend the husband. The study found greater level of cooperation between wives in arranged second marriages and the second wife feels confident and comfortable in the house as she married in culturally acceptable manner. In cases of second love marriage through court (elopement) the second wife is never accepted neither allowed to visit the first wife's home and she lives in a separate house. In such cases the first wife resists the most and don't accept the second wife while the second wife intends to be included in the husband's existing family. Second wife didn't show any grudges for the first wife but the first wife blames and curses the second wife openly and think she has broken her family by trapping the husband.

4.5 Polygamous Family Functioning

A polygamous family functions quite differently than a monogamous family because of more than one wife of a husband which require the husband's time, attention and money. In typical patriarchal societies the husband has to provide for all the financial needs of his wife/wives along with the children's needs too and in case of polygamy the husband's time, money and attention is divided which creates problems. The study data revealed that in cases where both wives were living in the same house it was easy for the husband to look after them and the children and the wives were not complaining about mistreatment or being ignored. The children were also being taken care of in such polygamous families and this indicates the smooth family functioning either

the second marriage was arranged or love marriage. In cases where both wives were living in separate homes it was difficult for the husband to divide his time, money and attention equally between them and take care of all his children properly. In such cases the husband was also not satisfied with his current marital state and the wives were also complaining against the husband and the other wife. Most of the first wives blamed the second wife for making their marital life miserable and some of them complaint against the husband for ignoring them and their children while giving preference to the second wife and her children. This indicates the malfunctioning of polygamous family as a social institution where some family members feel deprived or unsatisfied.

4.6 Discussion

Patriarchy is a universal phenomenon because women in the world are living with a compromised social status as compared to men. In traditional societies like Pakistan women are highly male dependent, socially vulnerable, has no power and this is indicated in the study as well. One indicator of women's powerlessness in Pakistani society is their vulnerability to compromise in polygamy sometimes. Because divorce is not a socially acceptable phenomenon in such societies and is considered a taboo that is why women compromise in polygamy over divorce (Al-Krenawi, 2016). As the study findings reflected that most of the first wives were not informed by the husband for second marriage decision and after knowing they compromised to live in polygamy because the other option was divorce which they could never accept (Ahinkorah, 2021). The previous studies have found that a wife's emotional well-being in a marital relation is associated with the husband's emotional attachment with her (Rehman, 2019; Hassan et al., 2023; Ahmad et al., 2023; Farrukh et al., 2023) and the study findings also support the existing literature. The study reflected from the cases where the polygamous husbands were living with the second wives, the first wives felt left-alone and emotional vulnerability while the second wives were feeling loved and satisfaction from their marital life. The literature indicates that polygamy causes resources dilution (Fairchild & McDaniel, 2017) and the present study found that first wives were complaining for resource sharing with the second wife and children. The first wives and their children actually think that all the resources belong to them and due to polygamy, they have to divide with another wife and her children which they think is unjust for them (Arthi & Fenske, 2018). Women with infertility or not having a baby boy feel emotionally distressed (Sinai & Peleg, 2020) and the study findings also highlighted this aspect in the cases studied. The previous research claims that men decided to becoming polygamous when they lose satisfaction from their existing marriage (Djuikom & Walle, 2018), but the study findings differ in the following contexts; in a typical Punjabi cultural context men decided to become polygamous in retaliation of the practice of forced cousin marriages arranged by their parents. Some studies have found that children living in polygamous families are more confident (Rehman, 2019; Al-Sharfi et al., 2016; Djuikom & Walle, 2018) and the present study didn't find any impairment among the children and none of the polygamous husbands or wives expressed any such disability or threat to their children because of being raised in a polygamous family setting.

5. Conclusion

The researcher would like to conclude the study findings that a polygamous family functions more effectively if both wives live in the same house with peace and harmony. Peace and harmony come when the first wife is taken on-board while deciding for second marriage and if the first wife is kept under the dark, she will resist after knowing and peaceful co-existence between the wives will not be possible. The first marriage under family pressures leads towards second marriage and polygamy in later years when the husband gets financial independence, so, the forced marriage should be discouraged at the start. Second marriage out of love through court is not considered a socially acceptable pattern of marriage which creates further problems in the functioning of polygamous families. Level of cooperation between wives is necessary for smooth functioning of polygamous families and first wife feels betrayed if not informed about the second marriage and does not cooperate in the functioning. So, the study found that in arranged second marriage there are greater chances of peaceful co-existence of wives making the polygamy more functional and in case of second marriage out of love through the court of law (elopement) there are lesser chances for both wives living together and such polygamous families malfunction mostly.

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