

Positive Evidences of Polygamous Family Structures: A Qualitative Analysis through Interpretive Phenomenological Approach

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Polygamy is generally considered a harmful cultural practice for women and children at the individual and community level. In current study counter evidences have been initiated as polygamy has also positive outcomes indifferent perspectives especially for infertile women, widows, and orphan children. A qualitative study approach was adopted. Nine females (first wives = 4, second Wives = 5) were approached. Their age range was 30-60 years as first wives ($M = 53.30$, $SD = 8.76$) and second wives ($M = 34.84$, $SD = 8.52$). Five participants had status widow and divorced before being co-wives. Data was collected through in-depth interviews. All the data was analyzed by interpretive phenomenological approach. A positive outcome of polygamy as one super-ordinate theme was generated. It had further three master themes as health, social and economic benefits were cropped up by different emergent themes. Health benefits incorporated sexual gratification, safety from illegal sexual relationships, security from sexually transmitted diseases, sharing chores during pregnancy, and avoid from extra marital affairs. Social benefits are integrated to facilitate rearing kids, sharing household chores, avoiding the stigma of divorce, and getting sympathy and respect from society and family. Economic benefits included accumulation in monthly income, a better future for children, and the need of

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society. The study highlights the importance of Islamic teachings, social guidance, and advice from family counselors to improve the environment of polygamous families both for the women and children according to the need of the family and community.

Keywords. Polygamy, positive outcomes, polygamous family structure, interpretive phenomenological approach

Polygamy has been accepted now at individual and social levels in miscellaneous cultures explicitly in Islamic communities (Naseer et al., 2021a). Polygamy is a kind of marriage in which a husband has more than one wife (Thobejane & Flora, 2014). Rohman, (2013) reported in his case study, a debate is always present for polygamy between fundamentalist and modernist. So the believers have divided into two groups. The fundamentalists, who support polygamy, believe that the practice of polygamy is a part of syariah. They claimed that Muslim men are permitted to be married to several women by Islamic Marital Jurisprudence. A textual basis is provided by the Holy Quran for polygamy practices in Muslim communities. *"Marry women of your choice two, or three, or four, but if ye fear that ye shall not be able to deal justly (with them) then only one"*(Surah Al-Nisa-4:3). On the other side modernists believe, after the Battle of Uhud these verses were revealed to protect the widows and orphans who were alone after being martyred of many Muslim men. So the followers argued that these verses have been revealed *"because Allah's concern for the welfare of women and orphans who were left without husbands and fathers who died fighting for the Prophet and Islam. It is a verse about compassion towards women and their children; it is not about men or their sexuality."* But in the modern world, most people miss interpret and claim to man's right to four marriages because it is supported and associated with religious doctrine. But the actual meaning is to be kind to the widows and orphans instead of sexual gratification by men (Surah Al-Nisa-4:21).

Furthermore, even for widows, it is mandatory to maintain equality and justice among all the co-wives in whatever a man possesses. If a man is incapable to sustain fair rights for two and perfect equality among the multiple wives, and no need as explained in the Holy verses then one is enough (Rehman, 2007). As Ash-Shirbeeni from the Shaafi'i School of Jurisprudence, said: *"It is a Sunnah not to marry more than one wife if there is no apparent need (Mughni al-Muhtaj 4/207)"* (Davary, 2012). As a recent systematic review had confirmed that without any reason when a person blend in polygamy, children from polygamous marriages experienced physical

and emotional abuse associated with parental neglect and abuse (Kee & Hassan, 2020). In another qualitative study on female children and young adults found that polygamous marriage formed an emotional abuse to the daughters since they have witnessed the mother's severe pain of second marriage and ascribe the mother's pain to it (Alhuzail, 2020). These abuses may be associated with more mental health problems, social problems, and lower academic achievement in children from polygamous marriages compared to monogamous marriages (Al-Sharfi et al., 2016).

Literature reported that with no condition when a man is incapable to preserve justice and equality among all the wives polygamous women face frequent psychological tribulations exclusively, they experienced more somatization, obsessive-compulsive, interpersonal sensitivity, depression, anxiety, hostility, phobic anxiety, paranoid ideation, psychoticism, marital dissatisfaction, jealousy, mental health troubles and lower self-esteem (Shepard, 2013; Rahmanian et al., 2021; Naseer et al., 2021b; Naseer & Malik, 2022c; Naseer et al., 2021d). On the bright side, polygamy also demonstrated positive impacts. Childless wives are willing to have legal and valid polygamous marriages than the other wives to obtain offspring and descendants for the husband. Besides that, warmth and affection for polygamous families may provide positive role models for children's mental health and self-esteem (Elbedour et al., 2002). Multiple benefits have been reported of such relationship if the man follows the true picture of Islam with the real purpose of religious doctrine. As one of the studies revealed that polygamous women share their responsibilities for child rearing, and household chores and also have several economic, social, and health advantages over monogamy (Tabi et al., 2010). Findings indicated that in these cultures, women contribute significantly to the wealth of the household and can thus materially benefit from the labor of an additional spouse (Naseer et al., 2021a).

Some additional advantages have also been seen in a study as men and women can find a legal relationship for sexual pleasure and intimate relationships and protect themselves from illegal sexual involvement (Rehman, 2007). Wadud and Barlas are two feminist Muslim scholars who are working to raise their voices in favor of women's rights by reinterpreting religious texts. Both have embraced Islam and now pointed out the three major causes to justify Polygyny. Wadud identified if a man sexually dissatisfied from her wife he had a right to take another wife rather than turn to prostitutes or have an affair, secondly if the first wife is infertile and unable to reproduce, and thirdly if the husband need another woman to take care of his

children then with another woman he can be married in the Muslim community (Wadud, 1999).

So, in the present time, most females have to prefer polygamy to secure from divorce in case of infertility or to protect themselves from the stereotype of having only daughters (Naseer et al., 2021a). Alam (2011) published his work and found in his study that when a person married a second woman and she conceived and gave birth the tension was relieved by his first wife who was infertile and then both wives can become friends. But it all depends upon the men and Polygyny would be a solution to domestic disharmony in such cases. Co-wives reported, initially, it seems harmful and insecure for the first wife but latter on both of the wives find benefits, particularly the widows and divorced women. Several countries, including India, Iran, Iraq, Bangladesh, Algeria, Lebanon, Morocco, Jordan, and Kuwait, allow women to include a clause prohibiting Polygyny in the marriage contract. Other countries, such as Iran and Pakistan, require that a man get permission to take a second wife from his first wife, and then show the court proof of his first wife's consent (Ali-Karamali, 2008). The consent from the first wife and the courts' permission will assist the man to take the first wife's confidence. The subsequent studies typically pointed out the reasons and challenges of multiple wives but the purpose of the current study is to highlight for the first time bright side of polygamy. Especially this study is prolific for the sexual needs and compassion of the widows and divorced women as well as the needs of orphan children in Muslim communities. Indeed the psychological impact of polygamous marriage on women and children was found to be relatively higher than monogamous marriage. But the purpose of current study is to provide awareness of the proper practices for polygamy should be strengthened so that its adverse effects can be minimized. The agencies and policy makers involved in polygamous practices should broaden and enhance their understanding of the correct practice of polygamy. So, extenuating the challenges confronted by polygamous women and children and cultivating a thriving and wholesome environment within polygamous relationships can be pursued.

Method

Sample

12 polygamous women were screened through snowball sampling. Only nine were approached through a purposive snowball sampling strategy according to the required criteria. Five women were not single before marriage ($n = 3$ (Divorced), $n = 2$ (Widows). Their status was (1st wife = 4, 2nd Wives, = 5) with an age range of 30-60.

First wives had age ($M = 53.30$, $SD = 8.76$) while second wives had ($M = 34.84$, $SD = 8.52$). The women having physical disability or diagnosed psychological issues (e.g. depression) were excluded. The divorced and widow status before marriage as well as women with infertility were included. Two divorced and one widow female had a child before being co-wife. Only 1st and 2nd wives, working and housewives were included. A qualitative research design was carried out.

Measures

The following measures were used in the current study.

Participant Demographic Information Sheet

The information related to participants was collected through the demographic information sheet. This sheet included information on age, status (first or second wife), status before marriage (single, divorced, or widow) profession, education, husband's profession, number of children, and monthly income.

Interview Guide

The interview guide was pre-planned however some probing questions were also asked. The questions included in the interview guide were (translated from Urdu to English for non-Urdu readers):

1. Do you believe polygamy should be accepted in our community?
2. Being 1st/2nd wife what did you find the benefits of this polygamous family structure?

Procedure

Formal permission was obtained from the institution of University of Narowal, Narowal, Pakistan for data collection in 2022. 12 participants have been screened out from the Punjab and its surroundings through a purposive snowball sampling strategy with the help of the co-authors. Nine participants were willing for an in-depth interview. So according to their feasibility and availability time and location was decided. The researcher approached the participants at their decided spots. The ethical guideline was strictly followed because of the sensitivity of the phenomenon. Some preliminary questions were asked for developing rapport with the participants and

the importance of the study was explained to each participant. Then the main question was asked and the audio was recorded by obtaining their permission. Only those participants were included who gave both verbal and written consent also falling in the determined criteria. They were assured that the privacy and confidentiality of the data would be maintained. After collecting the data all was transcribed and discussed with the co-authors only for the need of the study. The transcribed data were analyzed by interpretive phenomenological approach.

Results

The study was conducted to seek the positive outcome and benefits of polygamous families. The collected audio data was transcribed and a superordinate theme was generated. It was further incorporated into master themes and emergent themes.

Super Ordinate Theme: Positive Outcomes of Polygamy

The major and super ordinate theme was identified as positive outcomes of polygamy. This theme emerged from three master themes health, social and economic benefits. The transcribed data was translated from Urdu to English for understanding the non-Urdu researchers.

Table 1

Health Benefits as Positive Evidences of Polygamy (N = 9)

Super Ordinate Theme	Master Themes	Emergent Themes	f
Positives Outcomes of Polygamy	Health Benefits	Sexual gratification	5
		Safety from the illegal sexual association by men and women	4
		Security from sexually transmitted diseases by men	3
		Sharing chores during pregnancy	4
		Avoid extra-marital affairs by men	6

Maslow's theory proposed in 1943 viewed human motives as based on innate and universal predispositions (McLeod, 2007). The physiological and love and belongings were two major needs of his

hierarchy. Similarly in the present study [Table 1](#) indicated majority of the participants reported the health benefits of polygamous women. Five participants reported that to fulfill sexual needs, polygamy is a good option both for males and females. For example, Mrs. Tanveer (first wife) was an educated and working female. Initially, she did not accept the 2nd wife though she was infertile at that time, later she adjusted to her she said: *"it's a natural desire to fulfill one's physical needs either male or female"*. The second wife of Mr. Tanveer who was a divorced female had a kid. Miss Amina said *"Islam gives a legal way to fulfill the desires (sexual desires), then every divorced female has a right to remarry as the males do instead to live alone"*. She further said, *"It's a natural need of the human body, and one should talk about it and family also should consider it"* She also said *"our society mostly ignores the basic needs of the female when she become widow or divorced by someone, but comparatively for males society has a soft corner. There is a contradiction in society rules in terms of gender's biological needs"*. Four participants described that to be safe from illegal relationships, polygamy is a better option being citizens of Islamic society. Mrs. Mustafa was also another first wife. She has only one daughter. She told she convinced her husband to have a second marriage. She said *"because of my illness I am unable to fulfill all the responsibilities of my husband so allowed him to marry. To me it was better to allow him for 2nd marriage instead he involved in some illegal (sexual) relationship"*. She also reported, *"Though I faced a lot of challenges after second marriage of my husband but at the end I am satisfied that an officially allowed a woman is present in my husband's life who can fulfill his desires instead he commit some immoral relationships"*. Another female Mrs. Arslana second wife generally said *"I am not criticizing anyone but I think it's better to become co-wives of a man rather be engaged in some unethical intimate relationship by a widow or divorced woman"*. She further clarified *"every person either male or female has a right to have a legal partner for any kind of sexual commitment"*. Three participants said most of the males when unable to satisfy by their female partners engaged in illegal sexual activities and there can be chances of sexually transmitted diseases. Mrs. Ahmed another first wife said *"I heard from some of the persons that my husband has engaged in some illegitimate activities, so I permitted my husband to marry someone else instead to be involved with such relations"* She additionally explained *"My husband has an affair before marriage. I came to know he has still in contact with her. He used to abuse me and my kids. To me, it is better to accept her as a co-wife rather than feel this pain every day"*. Four of the participants told that they have accepted polygamy because during pregnancy co-wives helped them.

For example, Mrs. Abdullah was feeding a baby she was the second wife of her husband she told: *"though in the beginning, my husband's first wife was not happy with me as she has no kids. But later she accepted me and even she cared me during my pregnancy and also cared my ex-husband's child (male child)"*. She further reported that *"My husband's role is very important in all scenarios, as he always tried to maintain equality among both of us. And First wife also takes care of my kids"*. The first wife of Mr. Tanveer told that *"when I looked after during pregnancy to the 2nd wife on the request of my husband, Allah also blessed me with a child"*. *Being realistic I just cared for her kids like my own"*. She further said *"It's better to live with a co-wife instead to get the discouraging remarks from the family and society. Why I should be against it while our religion has permitted it to man"*. Six participants said extramarital affairs are common now a day. So it's better to choose a co-wife instead multiple affairs by husband, said the infertile wives and job holders especially. Mrs. Kamaal reported *"It was painful for me but before the second marriage of my husband I was used to ill psychically and depressed psychologically but after the second marriage I am quite well and relaxed. At least nobody talk me about my infertility. Before second marriage of my husband I was all time scared about my future"*.

Table 2

Social Benefits as Positive Evidences of Polygamy (N = 9)

Super Ordinate Theme	Master Themes	Emergent Themes	f
		Help in rearing children	4
		Sharing Domestic Chores	5
Positives Outcomes of Polygamy	Social Benefits	Polygamy is a better option than Divorce	7
		Get sympathy and respect from husband, family, and community	4

Table 2 indicated the second master theme as the social benefits of polygamy. Four of the participants reported that they try to help each other in the rearing of children. Especially the females who were working and educated were more realistic. As Mrs. Tanveer (a teacher) told *"Whenever I purchase something (like cloth, shoes, etc.) I also fetch for Amina's kids. I know she also looks after my kid in my absence"*. She additionally added, *"I believe when I love someone else's children, Allah will bless my kids. We often help each other in*

domestic everyday jobs". When the researcher approached the second wife Amina she also had the same remarks. Amina said, *"I am a divorced female, I can understand a female's worry about a life partner, but my children also give respect to the first wife of my husband like a mother and she also cares for my children like her own. Especially I am very satisfied about the future of my kid from my ex-husband"*. Moreover, both described that they also help each other with household chores. Seven participants claimed that divorce is not a sensible decision. Particularly the infertile women agreed that it was a quite better option to live with a husband and co-wife than to live with a tag of a divorced woman. One of the participants Mrs. Kamaal said *"Initially I was against the second marriage of my husband, and even I decided to get a divorce from him, but I came to know later our society never accepts infertile and divorced women, even my own family so I decided it's better to admit my destiny and live with my husband and co-wife. We have also divided our household chores"*. Mrs. Arslan another 2nd wife with a child reported that *"in the beginning, the first wife disliked me and discouraged me in every matter but as I was already divorced woman with a child so I decided whatever would be I'll not choose the option of divorce. I have already faced a lot of consequences"*. She further said, *"I requested to the first wife, we should live together with this reality instead to think about separation, as she was thinking about it"*. When the researcher asked the probing question about divorce approximately all women suggested absolutely divorce is not a better decision in such cases because our society is very cruel and when religion allows polygamy then we should also admit it. Furthermore, four participants narrated that they accepted the decision of their co-wife because of family and social pressure. One of the participants Mrs. Kamran, a second wife (a widow) with two orphan children told: *"I always do respect the first wife, because my kind behavior causes me to get more affection from my husband for me, especially he behaved well with my orphan kids"*. She further reported *"I have faced numerous challenges with two kids, so now I have decided whatever the circumstances I'll have to stay in this house. I'll never choose the option of divorce but latter circumstances became better"*. Mrs. Tanveer reported, *"When I accepted the request of my husband for second marriage with Amina, he and his family gave me more respect. Allah knew my intentions and He also granted me, children. As my husband has accepted her child"*. Most of the participants (even second wives agreed) said it's better to get consent from the first wife for second marriage and probably for second-marriage widows and divorced women should be preferred rather see a single girl who can easily find some proposal.

Table 3*Economic Benefits as Positive Evidences of Polygamy (N = 9)*

Super Ordinate Theme	Master Themes	Emergent Themes	f
		Addition to monthly income	3
Positives Outcomes of Polygamy	Economic Benefits	Women vs. Men employment ratio	5
		Better future for children	4

Polygamous family structures also have some financial and economic benefits. Three participants claimed that if any co-wife is working then definitely it would be an addition to the family income. As Mrs. Tanveer told, *"I am a teacher and facilitate my husband to run the family"*. Mrs. Kamran was also a working lady as she was working in a hospital she said *"I have to contribute 50% share of my salary for home grocery and other needs and I think it's my responsibility and rest of I use for my kids and myself"*. She further said, *"It's better to contribute to a peaceful home environment rather than any dispute. This contribution strength my status at home. I am pleased that my kids have their father now"*. She also reported *"before 2nd marriage I was able to support my kids financially but I realized me and my children need a role for safety as the society is very cruel and it is difficult to live without husband"*. Mrs. Ahmed has a school. She is the principal of the school and described *"I am an independent woman and never ask my husband for any demand in terms of financial needs, infect I support him in many conditions financially"*. Furthermore, five participants described that females are now more educated and independent than males.

So most of the co-wives who were independent were living in a better environment than the women who were housewives. Four participants told that if co-wives and husbands have appropriate employment then they can provide a better future for the children. Mrs. Gulzar was a lecturer and her husband was also govt. employee. So when she is on job the co-wife looks after her children as well. So she said, *"I have a commitment with my co-wife to look after my children in my absence in return both of our children have got admission to the same schools"*. Amina also told that first wife always behaved with her appropriately. Her husband also maintained equality between both wives and children. Particularly she was satisfied about her child.

Discussion

The main concern of the study was to seek out the counter-evidence of polygamy in Pakistani culture. Especially for women having the status of a widow or divorced before blending into a polygamous family structure. Literature indicated that widows and divorced women and children face a lot of emotional, behavioral, and psychological problems without a husband and father (Trivedi; 2009; Sharma, 2011; Al Gharaibeh, 2015; Waseem et al., 2020). In the current study, 3 females had status divorced and two were widows. Mrs. Arslan a 2nd wife who has already faced the cost of separation said *"in the beginning, the first wife disliked me and discouraged me in every matter but as I was already a divorced woman so I decided whatever would be I'll not choose the option of divorce. I have already faced a lot of consequences"*. As one of an indigenous study in Kashmir revealed the experiences of divorced women (Khan & Hamid, 2021). They reported in their qualitative study the reasons for divorce and the challenges faced after divorce. The study uncovered that violence/family interference; infidelity/second marriage of spouses were the dominant reasons for the dissolution of marriage, followed by childlessness, and incompatibility. But after divorce the real problems they faced as numerous social, economic, cultural, and psychological challenges including stigma of divorce.

All co-wives agreed that divorce should never be an option. As Mrs. Kamaal said, *"Initially I was against second marriage of my husband, and even I decided to get a divorce from him, but I came to know later our society never accept an infertile and divorced women, even my own family so I decided it's better to admit my destiny and live with my husband and co-wife"*. Most of the females in the current study during the interview reported that to fulfill their sexual desires and avoid illegal relationships, polygamy is the best option. A divorced female Miss Amina said, *"Islam gives a legal way to fulfill the desires (sexual desires), and then every divorced female has a right to remarry as the males do instead to live alone"*. She further said, *"life is not ended after divorce and our society should talk about it and consider the physical needs of women in a fair way"*. In a previous qualitative study on polygamy Lodhi and Siddiqui, 2016 found both men and women are the same, and both seek psychosexual desires from each other. Moreover, the evils spread without marriage can be overcome. These are also in line with the current perception of the participants as three participants said most of the males when unable to satisfy by their female partners engaged in illegal sexual activities and there can be chances of sexually transmitted diseases.

As one of co-wife told *"I heard from some of the persons that my husband has engaged in some illegitimate activities, so I permitted my husband to marry someone else instead to be involved with such relations"*.

The Muslim Family Laws Ordinance, of 1961 also permitted Pakistani men polygamy. The consent from the first wife and showing it in court for the second marriage is essential according to this law (Husain et al., 2019). With this reference in the current study, four females claimed that it's better to accept a co-wife than other options. As Mrs. Tanveer, one of the first wives said *"It's better to live with a co-wife instead to get discouraging remarks from the family and society. Why I should be against it while our religion has permitted it to man. Being realistic a female has no right to spoil her and her children's lives"*. In some studies it has been reported in polygamous families if co-wives establish a good relationship then both help each other in child rearing and household chores (Naseer et al., 2021a). Though it rarely happens it all depends on the husbands. As similarly in the current study Mrs. Abdullah said: *"though in the beginning, my husband's first wife was not happy with me as she has no kids. But later she accepted me and even she cared for me during my pregnancy"*. She further reported that *"My husband's role is very important in all scenarios, as he always tried to maintain equality among both of us. And fist wife also take care of my kids"*. Husband's equality in all matters is very significant as Qu'ran states *"but if ye fear that ye shall not be able to deal justly (with them), then only one, or (a captive) that your right hands possess, that will be more suitable, to prevent you from doing injustice. If a man cannot deal justly with more than one wife, then he must marry only one"*. So according to Islam, only one wife is enough if a man cannot sustain equality among more than one wife. A few studies revealed that co-wives also cause addiction in husbands; finances and also get privileges from society (Naseer et al., 2021a). As the current findings are in line, three co-wives were contributing to the husband's monthly income and also helped him to run the family. This study has counter findings as compared to the previous one which indicated that polygamous families cause numerous psychological and mental health problems (AL-Sharfi & Pfeffer, 2020). But if the man follows the true picture of Islam then polygamy can also have positive consequences and also it would be a blessing for widows, divorced females as well as for orphans. People mostly associated polygamy with Islam but this family structure was also existed before Islam. After Islam the Holy Prophet SAW presented the actual reason of polygamy as He married at 25 when was wealthy and young with only lady Hazrat Khadija but

at 50years old he married ten females. The purpose behind these marriages was to provide the protection and dignity to the widows (Rizvi, 2007). Three co-wives reported that polygamy is better option for the divorced and widow females and their children. So the study revealed the positive shreds of polygamous family structures if it is followed by the religious aspects.

Implications and Recommendation

This was a qualitative study further quantitative study can be conducted to highlight the outcomes of polygamy by comprising diverse data. Cross-cultural studies can be cried out to compare the different cultures and states regarding co-wives' experiences. Only Polygyny was discussed in the current study further multiple wives can share their feelings emotions and behavior in polygamy. Children are the main body who are influenced by this kind of family structure so their in-depth experiences and needs must be discussed in this study. A study on monogamy, polygamy, and single parents and their children' experiences can be discussed in future and compare their experiences.

Implications

The study is a significant contribution in favor of polygamy according to the needs explained by Islam. There is an urgent need to teach and educate society about the actual purpose of polygamy. The study is fruitful for home settings, religious settings, health settings, and counseling, especially for women who are widows, divorced, or orphan children. There is a dire need to educate men and women before blending into polygamous family structures for the physical and psychological health of both men and women as well as for children who are an important source of society.

Conflicts of Interest

The authors declare that there are no conflicts of interest.

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