

Journeying the Shoreline of Emotions: Unveiling the Lives of Wives in Challenging Polygamous Relationships

Muhammad Rezki | Sandy Aditya Pradana | Latipun

University of Muhammadiyah Malang

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Abstract:

The purpose of this study is to discuss the experiences of second wives in polygamous marriages and the psychological impact they endure while living in a polygamous relationship. The research method used is descriptive phenomenology, utilizing data analysis techniques. Participants were recruited from South Kalimantan and East Java through an online form using Google Forms. A total of four second wives participated in this study, with an age range of 23-45 years. Participants were selected using a snowball sampling method. Data were analyzed by repeatedly reading the transcripts and identifying key themes. The results of the study show that life in a polygamous marriage is full of challenges. The second wives feel that living in a polygamous marriage is a fate determined by God, and although they accept the marriage, they face issues such as feelings of dissatisfaction, vulnerability, jealousy, nagging tendencies, and irritating habits. The psychological impacts experienced by the subjects include frustration, annoyance, heartbreak, mental pressure, feelings of inferiority, anxiety, and restlessness. Communication in polygamous marriages plays a crucial role, where openness and good communication between partners can support a positive relationship, while the inability to be open and communicate can become a barrier.

Keywords: Polygamous marriage, Second wife

Introduction:

Marriage can change the social status and relationships of the couple. Before marriage, individuals live as singles and usually within their respective families. After marriage, they form a family (household) with the status of husband and wife. This can impact their social life, as they must adjust to their new roles as spouses. Marriage also has legal implications related to the rights and responsibilities of the couple. Married couples have the right to financial support from their partner and are responsible for debts and other legal obligations as a married couple (Johnson, 2020).

Marriage serves as a framework for achieving a happy and prosperous family, in addition to fulfilling several objectives, such as the continuation of the family line, meeting physiological and psychological needs, including achieving emotional well-being. All of these are related to the psychological needs inherent to human beings (Fitriyyah & Masykur, 2020). These goals are not always achieved, especially among women who are often faced with the choice between monogamy and polygamy in their surrounding environment (Fitriyyah & Masykur, 2020). Opportunities for polygamy within society reveal differing perceptions. Many people become

entangled in discussions and debates about long-term polygamy. This occurs not necessarily due to ambiguous arguments but more because of the interests of the involved parties, and the negative impacts of polygamy in Indonesia are often influenced by how many people engage in it. The concept of "justice" is a critical issue in handling polygamy, even though the Quran states, "If you cannot be just, then one [wife] is sufficient." Additionally, there is a prevailing impression among many people that polygamy is driven by lust, leading them to reject polygamy (especially women) (Romli, 2016). This is also supported by evidence that women in polygamous marriages report higher levels of emotional pressure, psychological issues, family conflict, jealousy, and stress compared to women in monogamous marriages (Al-Krenawi, 2013).

The evaluation of a marriage's suitability is referred to as quality; in psychology, this phenomenon is known as marital quality. Generally, marital quality describes the overall picture of a marriage (Rosa, A., & Putra, 2012). Not only in monogamous marriages but also in polygamous marriages, it is important to review marital quality. Marital quality is a multidimensional variable associated with other factors that can affect the stability of a marriage in terms of its continuation or dissolution (Rosa, A., & Putra, 2012). The definition of marital quality has undergone several methodological and conceptual changes in recent years (Johnson et al., 1992). Marital quality is a subjective perspective used to assess the condition of a marriage, encompassing aspects such as interaction, happiness, and satisfaction within the household (Spanier, 1976).

Marital problems are a part of the negative dimension of marital quality used to measure issues within a marriage. Problems that arise in a marriage may include jealousy and trust issues, which generally affect younger and less established couples, while older couples might deal with issues related to health (Rauer et al., 2019). Topics that can lead to marital problems include money, sex, jealousy, in-laws, commitment, and parenting,

which are often difficult to resolve. Additionally, other issues considered challenging to address include how couples spend their time together and the division of household tasks (Rauer et al., 2019).

The depiction of a marital relationship used to assess its suitability is referred to as quality; in psychology, this phenomenon is known as marital quality. Generally, marital quality provides an overview of the marital relationship (Rosa & Putra, 2012). Not only in monogamous marriages but also in polygamous marriages, it is important to examine marital quality. Marital quality is a multidimensional variable related to other factors that can affect the stability of a marriage concerning its continuation or dissolution (Rosa & Putra, 2012). The definition of marital quality has undergone several changes in recent years, based on methodological and conceptual considerations (Johnson et al., 1992). Marital quality is a subjective perspective used to evaluate the condition of a marriage, including aspects such as interaction, happiness, and satisfaction throughout the duration of the marriage (Spanier, 1976).

Johnson et al., (1986) Identifying the dimensions of marital quality, which are divided into two constructs: the positive dimension, including happiness and marital relationship, and the negative dimension, including disagreement, marital problems, and relationship instability. Marital problems are part of the negative dimension of marital quality used to measure issues within a marriage. These problems include jealousy and trust issues, which typically affect younger and less established couples, while older couples may deal with health-related issues (Rauer et al., 2019). Some factors that can cause marital problems include money, sex, jealousy, in-laws, attachment, and challenging parenting issues. Additionally, other topics considered difficult to resolve include how couples spend their time together and the division of household tasks (Rauer et al., 2019).

Based on the literature discussed earlier, the researcher is interested in conducting a phenomenological study that explores the lives of

second wives in polygamous marriages and the psychological impact they experience while living in a polygamous marriage.

Research Method:

Research Design

This study uses a qualitative approach with a phenomenological method. This approach is chosen because the research aims to understand the meaning of polygamous marriage from the perspective of second wives and to identify the psychological issues that arise after entering into a polygamous marriage.

Participants

Participants were recruited through an online form distributed via social media using Google Forms in South Kalimantan and East Java. Participant selection was conducted using a snowball sampling method, where 2-3 initially selected participants were asked to help identify additional participants with similar criteria (Naderifar et al., 2017). A total of 4 wives agreed to participate in this study. Of these, 3 are from South Kalimantan and 1 is from East Java. The participants' ages range from 23 to 45 years.

Research team

This study was conducted by a team consisting of one psychology professor who was responsible for the study design, methodological guidance, and overall project supervision, and two master's students in professional psychology. The master's students were actively involved in data collection and initial data analysis under the professor's guidance.

Procedure

Preparation: the researcher contacted participants, explained the purpose and procedures of the study, and obtained informed consent.

Interview implementation: interviews were conducted either in person or via online communication platforms, with each session lasting 60-90 minutes. Interviews were recorded

with the participants' consent to ensure data accuracy.

Field Notes: In addition to recording, the researcher also made field notes to document non-verbal observations and relevant interview context.

Data Analysis

Data were analyzed thematically using the method Colaizzi (1978) in descriptive phenomenology. Data analysis was conducted by re-reading all transcripts three to five times to gain a better understanding of the given meanings; reading each description and extracting significant statements; developing meanings for these key statements; grouping the identified meanings into thematic categories; and synthesizing the results into a comprehensive description of the phenomenology.

Results & Discussion:

This study identified two main themes that emerged in describing the meaning of marriage and the experience of being in a polygamous marriage from the perspective of second wives. These major themes reflect how the four subjects (second wives) interpret their marriages and the issues that arise after entering a polygamous relationship. All themes were derived from in-depth interviews with the four subjects in this study.

The first theme relates to how wives in polygamous marriages perceive their marriage in alignment with their actions. All the wives expressed that they feel destined to be in a polygamous marriage. Among them, some believe that being in a polygamous marriage can provide economic security. Additionally, some view their polygamous marriage as part of their life journey, particularly as an opportunity to learn acceptance and patience, and to willingly share affection with another woman.

“Maybe it's destined by a higher power, even though... I didn't want it, but then again, it's destined by a higher power, so what can you do... (26-27)”

““Actually, it's more because I'm a widow and also because I'm not working." (3853)”

“Be patient, Ki ai, keep being patient. Perhaps it's my path to learn to be a patient person. Because he also needs to be fair to his first wife. (861-862)”

This is consistent with Fahmi's (2016) study which found that most second wives in polygamous marriages believe that being a second wife is a path determined by God, and they must accept and endure the marriage. Abbas (2014) study also found similar results, but it also revealed that, in addition to destiny, there are several factors that contribute to their acceptance of a polygamous marriage, one of which is economic necessity. This is in line with Masri (2019) who suggests that the phenomenon of polygamy can be driven by economic conditions. This supports the research findings regarding their reasons for agreeing to marry a man who is already married. Among the reasons are economic factors, such as being promised financial assistance to meet their needs, as well as having children from a previous marriage who are still teenagers, and being compelled to enter into a polygamous marriage due to pressing circumstances.

The results obtained by other researchers regarding the problems experienced during a polygamous marriage are consistent with the views of Bauman (in Ault, 2012) who states that polygamous marriages are more complex and complicated than monogamous marriages due to the presence of one husband with multiple wives. Having multiple wives leads to a greater number of problems, including irritability, sensitivity, jealousy, increased criticism or nagging, unstable moods, annoying habits, reduced quality time, and the emergence of imprudent spending behavior.

The first issue is irritability, which is evident among all four subjects. This is also consistent with the finding that women in polygamous marriages have higher emotional levels (Al-Krenawi, 2013; Fitriyyah & Masykur, 2020).

“Sometimes I take my frustrations out on the children. It's just that they are so innocent and don't understand much. One is already tired, and then when the husband comes home, there's more to deal with” (1649-1650)

“...I am a person who gets easily emotional, perhaps like... well, like a child, quick to anger, and gets upset over minor issues. Maybe that's what my husband considers when he hesitates to marry me. Yeah, whether... my husband is also unsure if he truly wants to be with me or what he actually wants...” (2455 - 2459)

Anger is a reaction to an obstacle that prevents the completion of an action or effort. It is often accompanied by various forms of behavior (Al Baqi, 2015). The instability of emotions often leads to conflicts within the household. The anger experienced by wives in polygamous marriages is caused by several stimuli, including dissatisfaction with the husband's behavior, which tends to be quiet, and irritating traits of the husband that can make the wife nagging and irritable.

Secondly, having feelings that are easily hurt is also one of the marital problems experienced by wives in polygamous marriages.

““The hurt feelings are troubling, as if they are being concealed. It feels like being constantly wounded, and that continues even now” (229-230)

According to Wijayanti dan Khasanah (2021) psychologically, all wives experience hurt feelings when seeing their partners with other women. Additionally, many wives blame themselves. Wives in polygamous marriages often feel inferior when comparing themselves to other women, and the position of being a second wife makes them feel sad and guilty, leading to emotional pain. These feelings often lead polygamous wives to feel pressured or stressed due to the negative assumptions they face, as they are perceived as disruptors of the household (Islamiyah & Supraptiningsih, 2018).

Research conducted by Khotimah (2010) shows that polygamous wives experience several psychological impacts, including feelings of jealousy, guilt, fear of causing problems, and stress. It is known that jealousy often becomes a topic of debate between the husband and wife in polygamous marriages. These feelings of jealousy include fears of loss and negative thoughts.

“... sometimes, my wife Anum feels that my husband is jealous. There are many things that happen in our lives” (95-96)

“... I tend to be straightforward, so if I get a little suspicious, I start to think whether you might be involved with someone else's wife” (3067-3068)

For a wife in a polygamous marriage, feelings of jealousy are inevitable. Even though she knows she is the second wife, the desire to be the only one and to be prioritized still arises within her (Islamiyah & Supraptiningsih, 2018). However, when she has children, these feelings of jealousy tend to be forgotten as her focus shifts to taking care of her children.

The nagging and dissatisfaction of a polygamous wife can sometimes lead to disagreements between husband and wife. These differences of opinion often become a cause of problems within the family (Maloko & Rahman, 2020). The wife tends to hold on to her opinions and is unwilling to compromise.

“... actually, I am quite selective. I don't really know why, maybe because I want the best. I'm picky about food, picky about clothes, but that's just how I've always been...”

“I like to dress neatly, pay attention to my appearance, and think about how I look”

This nagging behavior is often accompanied by anger, which makes the issues drag on. One of the impacts of a polygamous marriage is the psychological effect related to emotional instability. The wife may become more sensitive, emotionally uncontrolled, often feel sad, overly skeptical, and easily offended (Masri, 2019). Emotional instability is experienced by a wife in a polygamous marriage, which makes her often irritable. This condition frequently leads to problems between husband and wife.

Communication plays a crucial role in the continuity of a polygamous marriage. Openness in communication among polygamous partners supports a positive attitude, but this is different if the partners are closed off and unwilling to be open (Trisuntari & Surachman, 2021). A wife in a

polygamous marriage who has good communication and is willing to share her problems with her husband is likely to resolve her issues effectively. In contrast, a wife with a closed communication pattern tends to keep her problems to herself, which leads to an accumulation of unresolved issues. This also impacts the emergence of problems in the marriage. Regarding irritating habits, a wife in a polygamous marriage can cause issues in the marriage with her behavior that can frustrate and anger others, especially her husband. These irritating habits can lead to the husband ignoring her, which may make the polygamous wife feel sad and hurt.

Maloko dan Rahman (2020) busy schedules experienced by either the husband or wife, or both, can make the household atmosphere unstable. This is felt by a wife in a polygamous marriage who also has a demanding job. Additionally, not living with the husband further reduces the limited time she has with him. Unpredictable visiting schedules and the time spent with the first wife often make the second wife feel jealous and sad. Economic stability in a polygamous marriage also plays a crucial role in the continuity of the marital life (Masri, 2019). A working wife without children can easily manage her finances wisely and save money. In contrast, a non-working wife with children faces difficulties in managing her finances effectively, leading to additional problems. This aligns with Khotimah (2010) research, which states that economic dependence on the husband makes a polygamous wife struggle to meet her daily needs.

This study has some aspects that could not be detailed because they were not found in the subjects, including dominance, having had sexual relations with others, using drugs or alcohol, and having legal issues. Dominance was not observed because in the marriage, dominance is held by the husband. The polygamous wife tends to adhere to the boundaries set, thereby not causing problems in the marriage. Having had sexual relations with others was also not found because the subjects had never engaged in such relations and felt satisfied with their biological needs. Regarding the use of

alcohol or drugs, no issues were found because since getting married, the subjects have not consumed alcohol. Lastly, regarding having legal issues, none were found because the subjects are law-abiding citizens and do not have marital problems that intersect with legal issues.

In a secretive polygamous marriage, the wife in the polygamous relationship faces difficulties in interacting openly. Additionally, opposition from the family further restricts the marital life of the polygamous wife. She tends to prefer solitude and has less social interaction with those around her (Islamiyah & Supraptiningsih, 2018). The long-distance relationship experienced by the polygamous wife results in physical separation from her partner. Consequently, this situation leads to various psychological conditions for the polygamous wife, such as anxiety, stress, emotional instability, and feelings of loneliness. Additionally, living apart also causes several issues in the marriage, one of which is frequently feeling jealous when seeing others with her husband (Muhardeni, 2018). This causes the polygamous wife to prefer keeping her problems to herself and to have no one to share her grievances with except her husband. A wife with a troubled past in her marital life tends to be more cautious and careful in maintaining her household relationship. Additionally, a wife who desires to create a harmonious household tends to have fewer problems in her marriage due to her good self-control.

Conclusion:

This study explores the life of a second wife in a polygamous marriage and finds that their experiences are fraught with challenges. The wives feel that living in polygamy is a fate determined by God, and although they accept the marriage, they face issues such as irritability, feelings of hurt, jealousy, nagging tendencies, and annoying habits. The study also indicates that economic conditions can influence polygamous marriages. Communication plays a crucial role in polygamous marriages, where openness and good communication between partners can support a

positive relationship, while the inability to be open and communicate can become a barrier.

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