

Examining Patterns of the Quality and Satisfaction of Marriage in Polygamous Families

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ABSTRACT--Previous studies on polygamy tend to focus on how polygamous marriages contribute more to conflicts and negative family dysfunction compared to monogamous marriages. This study aims to gain more understanding of polygamous marriages by investigating the quality and satisfaction of family members who practiced polygamy in Malaysia. A total of six families were interviewed. This involved 21 respondents consisting of six husbands, five first wives, five second wives, one third and fourth wife, as well as three children, all of whom were interviewed based on predetermined inclusion criteria using purposive sampling. Qualitative study taking phenomenological approach was used in this study. In-depth face-to-face interviews were conducted based on the interview questions that developed earlier. Interviews were transcribed and analyzed using thematic analysis and six themes emerged as follows: greater appreciation and understanding, applying knowledge and conducting activities in the household, positive interactions between wives and co-wives, respect for the opinions and views of wives and co-wives, patience in learning to understand the characters of husband/co-wives and, from the children's perspectives, a desire for their fathers to give them advice and guidance, and to help and resolve family problems while managing their family well. In conclusion, polygamous marriage can produce a form of marriage quality and satisfaction based on the themes emerged from the interviews with the respondents as they seek to maintain the psychological well-being of family members. These findings also serve as important information in developing instruments and intervention modules, and for suggesting prospective dimensions and indicators of well-being that can promote the positive development of polygamous families.

Keywords-- polygamy, quality, satisfaction, marriage

I. INTRODUCTION

Polygamy can be seen as representing symbolic distinctions between traditional and western values (Abdullah, 2004). It is very significant in countries that practice Islamic sharia law where the basic principals are based on the Al-Qur'an scripture that allows men to marry two, three or four (maximum) wives, as opposed to her religious scriptures that do not set clear conditions on how many women a man can be married to at one time. Recent research shows that only 0.8% to 7.1% of men in polygamous marriages have three wives, while very few have four or more

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wives (Al-Krenawi, A, Slonim-Nevo, & Graham, 2006). Polygamy is a legally acceptable practice in Malaysia and it is supported by Islamic or Shari'ah law. In Malaysia, polygamy is associated with traditional Malay culture. It is a tradition, passed down by the forefathers who saw it as part of Shari'ah, that was started in the pre-colonial era (Abdullah, Abdullah & Ferdousi, 2015).

While it is a legally accepted practice, it is not well accepted especially by women in Malaysia (Zeitzen, 2018). Members of the public, especially Malay women, often led to believe that polygamy is something to be feared, avoided, and that it is impractical. This has resulted in polygamy becoming a controversial social and moral issue (Alamgir, 2014). According to Zeitzen (2018), in the Malay culture, typically there are two categories of reaction to polygamy, one is to accept polygamy because it is mentioned in the Qur'an and it is not to be criticized or opposed to regardless of whether people want to be part of it or not, and two, to use one's own personal judgement to reject the practice in one's life. In fact, polygamy has become a polemic that is linked with sexual behavior, maintaining the dignity of women (single mothers, children), upholding the patriarchal system, and issues of inheritance (Zeitzen, 2018).

This polemic can result in creating an unhealthy, stigmatized, and problematic view of polygamous marriages as providing a dysfunction home environment that can adversely affect the function and form of the family relationships. We argue that this current view of looking at polygamy as a legally acceptable but dysfunction family unit that can potentially be detrimental to family members, particularly women and children is inadequate. This approach does not provide a neutral and comprehensive understanding of the process and impacts of polygamy. It is important to look at polygamous marriages from a wider and more neutral perspective. This study is part of the attempt to provide more neutral and comprehensive understanding of polygamous marriages by focusing on relationships within this type of marriage.

At the same time, academic research related to polygamous marriages in Malaysia still focused on the point of view of religion, women's rights and the law (Alamgir, 2014; Abdullah, 2004). Most of the polygamy looked at involves cases of abuse, mistreatment and injustice against polygamous women, and the average woman interviewed has experienced trauma, along with her children, at the hands of an abusive husband (Arif Rohman, 2013). As a result, polygamy is still largely considered impractical, unprofessional, negative, oppressive, unfair and degrading of women's and wives' dignity, and is such often the target of criticism (Slonim-Nevo & Al-Krenawi, 2006). There are very few studies addressing polygamy in terms of quality and satisfaction among polygamous members. Furthermore, the differing forms of quality and satisfaction in polygamous families have not been widely discussed. As a result, currently available information on polygamy is still vague and insufficient to contribute to solutions to issues and help families to better adjust. Essentially, there is still little research on this subject, as well as a research gap in whereby the focus on the issue does not look at relationships as a whole. This study sets to address this research gap by trying to understand the quality and satisfaction of relationships within polygamous marriages.

Previous studies have also concluded that not all polygamous families end in divorce, and that polygamy can be a better alternative to divorce (Al-Krenawi, 2012; Trochim, 2006). Children who live in polygamous families are more likely to stay with their parents and do not want a divorce, because this can have a very negative impact on the family (Al-Krenawi, 2012). Very few studies have focused on the implications of polygamy from the perspective of children, or have focused on individual family members to provide a comprehensive picture of the real situation in polygamous life as pertains to patterns of the quality and satisfaction in polygamous marriages. This study tries to address this research gap by looking at quality and satisfaction in polygamous marriages from the perspective of all family members including husbands, wives and children.

II. STUDY OBJECTIVE

The objective of this study is to explore patterns of the quality and satisfaction in polygamous marriages. This is examined from different perspectives. The focus is on how each family member views the quality of relationship within their family. Relationship quality refers to good relationships and how sharing with one another gives effective results to a relationship and to what extent their happiness arises from that relationship. The quality of family relationships is a reflection of the life experience of what is going on in a family whether positive or negative. Quality in a relationship is important because it reflects the quality and well-being of a family. While relationship satisfaction refers to the degree of happiness in the relationship between couples, their feelings about relationships, perspectives and perceptions about family relationships in general. Satisfaction in family relationships can also be understood as the level of happiness that family members experience and how they fulfill each other.

III. STUDY METHODOLOGY

Design

This study used a qualitative approach to achieve the objectives and answer the research questions. Qualitative study taking phenomenological approach was used. This Qualitative study being elusive because it does not specify exactly what and how the study should be conducted at the beginning of the study (Trochim, 2006). Qualitative research involves inductive reasoning to understand specific situations including history and individual experiences. This approach allows for more opportunities to explore quality and satisfaction in polygamous marriages.

Sampling and Procedure

Six families participated in this study. Altogether, there were six husbands, five first wives, five second wives, one third and fourth wife, as well as three children. The total number of respondents was 21. All of these families have been practicing polygamy for two to 10 years. The method of sampling was intended sampling and virtual snow bowling with set criteria was used. All interviews were recorded after informed consent was received from the respondents. The interview guide was developed by the researchers in the form of semi structure questions and the researcher acted as instrument. The location of study was conducted at home based on respondents' appointment

and request. Each family takes two to three days to complete the interview and each interview lasted for one to two hours and all interviews have been kept confidential and secure and carried out separately.

Data Analysis

The data analysis method employed is thematic analysis. Information from the data was analyzed through several coding methods. The key words in the transcripts serve as an indicator that gives meaning to the phenomenon which are then categorized and generate a new concept. The data encoding process consists of three phases, as suggested by Brown and Clarke (Brown & Clarke, 2006). The data obtained from the interviews was transcribed and analyzed individually to identify the themes that were merged. A total of six families were interviewed and the total number of respondents was 21, reaching saturation after no new themes were found.

Demography

This study involved 6 families (A-F) practicing polygamy in Malaysia. Altogether, 21 family members were interviewed. The respondents were six husbands, five first wives, five second wives, one third and fourth wife, as well as three children. All the respondents were Malay Muslims. Table 1.0 below summarizes the demographic profile of the respondents in the study

Table 1.0:Demographic Profile of Respondents.

Family	Respondent	Age	Years of Polygamy	Occupation
(A)	Husband	51	10	Businessman
	First wife	51	10	Teacher
	Second wife	36	10	Teacher
	Son of the 1 st wife	26	10	Accountant
(B)	Husband	37	4	Businessman
	First wife	37	4	Teacher
	Second wife	36	4	Teacher
	Third wife	42	4	Business
	Fourth wife	31	3	Housewife
	Son of the 1 st wife	14	4	Student
(C)	Husband	52	10	Businessman
	First wife	48	10	Housewife
	Second wife	39	10	Housewife
	Son of the 1 st wife	22	10	Businessman
(D)	Husband	37	2	Officer
	First wife	36	2	Housewife
	Second wife	22	2	Student
(E)	Husband	50	17	Lecturer
	First wife	55	17	Housewife
(F)	Husband	34	7	Businessman
	Second wife	34	7	Teacher

IV. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

In this study, the quality and satisfaction of relationships were viewed in terms of the extent to which family members felt supported and satisfied by the support and service they received from each other in the context of polygamous life. The exploration focuses more on specific aspects of relationships that lead to the quality and satisfaction of family members' relationships based on their experiences of polygamy. Relationship quality refers to good relationships and how sharing with one another has an important effect on a relationship, and to what extent happiness can be generated as the result of that relationship (Holman, 2002). The quality of family relationships reflects life experiences from what is happening in a family - whether positive or negative. Quality in a relationship is important because it reflects the quality and well-being of a family. Meanwhile, relationship satisfaction refers to the degree of happiness in a relationship between the couple, as well as their feelings about the relationship, and their perspectives and perceptions of the family relationship in general (Fatimah, Selvaratnam & Ibrahim, 2012). Satisfaction in family relationships can also be understood as the level of happiness that family members experience and how they fulfill each other's needs.

In this study, exploration in terms of quality and satisfaction as pertains to polygamy was divided according to the perspective of the husbands, wives and children. From the findings, themes that were both similar and different were derived from the perspectives of family members. Six overall themes emerged when it comes to marriage quality and satisfaction. These are - greater appreciation and understanding, applying knowledge and conducting activities in the household, positive interactions between wives and co-wives, respect for the opinions and views of wives and co-wives, patience in learning to understand the characters of husband/co-wives and, from the children's perspectives, a desire for their fathers to give them advice and guidance, and to help and resolve family problems while managing their family well.

A. Husbands' Perspectives

i. greater appreciation and understanding

A few husbands acknowledged that greater appreciation and understanding of their wives was important in terms of polygamous marriage quality and satisfaction. According to the husband in family A, it is important to understand his wives first before asking them to understand him. Only when a husband understands what his wife wants can effective communication and spousal relations take shape. Family fulfillment and a better home environment comes from a better understanding of the wives. Below are some example responses from the respondents of this study;

"... Actually, this marriage needs family fulfillment,. This is not just about polygamy or monogamy. Without this fulfillment, the home will be a bland place. How can we achieve family fulfillment? We need to understand each other and be understood. We need to understand first what our wives want and understand their vision. This will enable effective communication..." (husband from family A)

Similarly, the husband from family B said that to ensure that marriage quality and satisfaction is obtained, it is important for the husband to understand the burdens of his wife. It is common for conflicts and problems to occur in polygamous marriages because there is no effort from the spouses to understand each other properly. It is important for a husband to respect his wife before he can understand her. The transcript from the family B husband is as follows;

"...My wife does not burden me. When I am experiencing some problems, she tries to act understanding and not burden me further. The real problems in polygamy honestly occur in the relationships among co-wives, which is impossible to control. They don't want to understand each other, and this gives rise to conflict. People in polygamous marriages struggle to handle this. They want to be understood by other people, without showing understanding themselves first..." (husband family B).

The quality and satisfaction of relationships described by husbands A and B clearly show that understanding and appreciation are the keys to bringing happiness to polygamous life although it is undeniable that conflicts and issues often occur between husbands and wives. A husband who always cherishes and understands his wife can make his wife less depressed, dissatisfied and angry and allow her to handle her emotions better in dealing with her husband, co-wives and children. Marriage is universal and very significant in its quality as it is rich in knowledge and its own philosophy (Fatimah, Abdul Aziz, Khairul Anuar, & Mohd Nasir, 2009). Previous studies have shown that there is a significant relationship between marriage and personal interaction (Wan

Shahrazad, Yusoff, & Azlan (2011). Personal interactions involve how an individual can understand others before expecting others to understand themselves first. This clearly underlines the importance of a husband's role in valuing and understanding his wives in order to achieve quality and satisfaction in a polygamous marriage.

ii. applying knowledge and conducting activities in the household

It was found that there some of the husbands in the study applied knowledge and conducted activities in their households to improve the quality and satisfaction of their polygamous marriages. Based on information from the husband of family E, when it comes to improving the quality of polygamous family members' relationships with one another, it is important to fill the family's time with spiritual activities such as reciting the Quran and reciting the Sunnah, praying in congregation and having family discussions. Spending quality time with family member tends to be better if the family prays and does other activities together. The response from the husband of family E is quoted below;

" ... Okay. ermmm...me and my 1st wife have made the Quran and Sunnah our guidance, so we pray together while relaxing at the same time. We also have family discussions and talk to each other's, so we can see where our families are lacking - so we can fix this. So, we usually pray together once in a while. Our time is like that. – just sharing duties, and we stress the need for tolerance..." (Husband family E).

Family institutions provide many psychological, social, and economic benefits to individuals, families and children by contributing social and emotional support which can result in financial and material benefits (Slonim-Nevo & Al-Krenawi, 2006). Spending family time doing shared activities such as prayer and eating together is a powerful source of social support for family members (Al-Krenawi & Kanat-Maymon, 2017). As such, it is clear that in polygamous families, there is a need to emphasize the holding of family activities together, rather than separately, to create a sense of unity and family happiness.

iii. positive interactions between first and co-wives

The findings showed that to enhance the quality and satisfaction of polygamous families, the creation of positive interactions among the different wives is required. In this way, good relationships can be built with each other. Good communication results in huge success in polygamous families. The husband from family A said that when spouses can develop positive interactions with each other, this automatically has very positive implications for the children involved. Similarly, the husband from family B said that if co-wives are able to interact positively, by accepting each other's soul and feelings, they can become like sisters – albeit not biologically. The following are some sample transcripts of some of the respondents:

" ... it's nice to be able to interact positively with the co-wives... and when I'm feeling negative, my wives are positive, so my wives make me feel positive. It's important to be positive, no matter what. I have to support not only one, but four wives, I feel like ... ohhhhh ... it has been a success ... to get to this point ... It's good to interact positively, so the kids can get along. So, I think like, what else do I want to do? There's a lot of fun here for us..."(husband from family B)

The husbands from families A, F and E, also described the same things - that the first and second wife need to relate to each other almost like siblings, so that they can interact well and ensure the psychological well-being

of the family. ‘‘... The senior wife should understand and accept the junior wife like a younger sister, although not in a biological way. Then nothing is out of the ordinary and everyone is treated the same...’’ (husband from family A).

‘‘...She still shows respect to me even though we live with the second wife. I am grateful that my first wife can understand the situation and makes everything easier. There are lots of kids' issues, and they are busy with school and Quranic classes. In our polygamous marriage, my first wife doesn't do all the household tasks alone, but together with her junior wife. This makes it easier for us to manage our family better ...’’ (husband from family F).

‘‘... Ermmm...It's difficult to describe the feeling of joy I felt at the moment I saw my first and second wife cooking together. What's more, their food is really good and they help me in my efforts to manage my family..’’ (husband from family E).

As such, it was found that when the first wife can interact positively with her co-wives, it improves the quality and satisfaction of polygamous family relationships. When these inters-spousal relationships are positive, they can reduce conflict, negative thinking, jealousy and stress among family members. Previous researchers have stated that practitioners and policy-makers need to be aware of the consequences of polygamy for women (especially for first wives) in the context of their relationships with co-wives to reduce psychosomatic and psychological issues (Ahlborg, Person & Hallberg, 2005),

B. WIFE & CO-WIVES' PERSPECTIVES

I. Respect for the opinions and views of wives and co-wives

Two of the first wives in the study – from families A and B - stated that their husbands respect the opinions and views of their wives, be it the first second, third or fourth wife, and this was a source of great satisfaction to them in their polygamous marriage. A husband who listens to and accepts his wife gives her respect, promotes her self-esteem and enables her to play a very important role in every decision the husband makes. Below is an interview quote from one of the respondents on this matter;

‘‘...I respect my husband. Because he maintains things in the right way and follows his objectives. I need to accept my husband's second wife and she needs to accept me, so we match. This really matters. So that's why before my husband wanted to marry another woman, he brought her to meet me. Then I said okay. So, my husband and I agreed, but if I didn't have a good feeling about this woman, I would reject her and my husband would respect my opinion...’’(first wife from family A)

‘‘...Emmm...everything is okay, because he treats everyone the same all the time. This means that all the wives are the same. But, when it comes to me, I am old, the senior wife, so when my husband requests my opinion, he will do what I say. For another wife, he wouldn't do the same. This is a sign that he respects me. For example, when we go back to village, he gives priority to me...’’(first wife from family B).

Respecting the opinions and views of the wives, especially the first wife, gives these wives a much needed feeling in their polygamous marriage - it makes them feel loved. Before a husband decides to get married, the first wife always expects their husband to introduce his potential new wife. He needs to obtain his first wife's view and enable her to play a part in making the decision to allow the husband to marry another woman. This is

to ensure the quality of their polygamous marriage. Previous studies show that most families will be satisfied with their marriage if there is very good intimacy between family members, especially when it comes to making major decisions (Hoesni, Subhi, Alavi & Wan Azreen, 2013).

II. Patience in learning to understand the characters of husband/co-wives

The findings showed that patience in learning to understand the characters of the husband/co-wives is a way of enhancing the quality and satisfaction of a polygamous marriage. Understanding the character and personality of the husband/co-wives is key to maintaining happiness and joy in a marriage. According to the second wives from family A and E, through understanding the character of their husband and fellow wives, they are able to adapt to the family environment and relationship patterns. It makes it easier for them to understand the needs and desires of the first wife, as well as the dynamics between the first and second wife in terms of attitude, behavior, forms of emotion and personality types, such as introverted or extroverted. The following is from one of the respondents;

‘... My husband and I didn’t have much time to get to know each other. Not even one year. Before that we didn’t know each other at all, but within a year he already knew my personality. This is partly because we attended a personality class where we got a personality score. We needed to know whether we were a good match in terms of personality. This allowed us to celebrate each other’s strengths and weaknesses. Also, it enabled me to get to know my husband well, and for him to understand me - and he learnt that I’m a stubborn person...’(second wife from family A)

... the feeling of happiness....ermmmm...wishing thanks to God. Even though I’m an introverted person and my husband is an extrovert, this actually helps me a lot. I feel that this is a gift from God, and my husband is trying to teach me how good I am so I can face the public. If not, I am alone and nothing. But in this polygamous marriage, he teaches me how to be cool and relaxed when I talk to other people...’(second wife from family E)

This finding shows that understanding the character and personality of the people in a polygamous marriage is a way of achieving quality and satisfaction in such a marriage and ensuring its success. Previous studies have also emphasized that long-term relationships require love as a component for insight and understanding, which contributes to marital satisfaction (Rozmi Azlan & Yusoff, 2015). Efforts to recognize and understand the character/personality of those in a polygamous marriage are a sign of love and help to maintain marital satisfaction.

PROVIDING ADVICE AND GUIDANCE

c. Sons’ Perspectives

Sons see that the quality and satisfaction of a polygamous marriage is enhanced by fathers giving regular advice and guidance to their wives and children, thereby relieving family problems and managing their family well. Despite being polygamous and not always spending time with their children and wives, fathers remain concerned about current problems and situations that their children face. These include academic achievement in school, career prospects and life planning. According to the son of family B, his father always provides him with motivational advice and encourages him to study diligently, not think about family matters, and focus on

schooling. Meanwhile, the son of family C said that the advice and guidance of his father was not empty or meaningless to him, but in keeping with the father's plan of action. All his father's advice included facts and served to boost the satisfaction within their polygamous family life. Below is a quote from one of the respondents on this matter;

“... not 100 percent. But look at it ... there is a lot of support in terms of school expenses and daily needs ... even if it doesn't work out at all ...my father just tells me to study hard ... for that motivation to be there and not think about home very much. Instead, I should focus on learning and not think about what is going on at home. My father is always available to advise me. If my father were to die, I would hope that my mothers and siblings help to keep me strong and not in a state of despair. But for now, my schooling is more important and I need to be careful in choosing my friends...” (son of family B)

“...Erm..my dad doesn't just give me advice and empty words. He also shows me how I need to do things. He helps me so much in terms of financial matters and teachings. So, when my dad entered into a polygamous marriage, I wanted to protest but I still respect my dad...”(son of family C).

The sons from these polygamous families always expect their fathers to provide them with the best help, advice and actions. They want themselves to be heard and given guidance to enable them to feel good about their polygamous family. Recent studies indicate that most children from polygamous families wish to form their own polygamous family (Al-Krenawi & Kanat-Maymon, 2017). Children do not want to be scolded, but rather want to enjoy good advice and communication with their father to enhance the satisfaction in their polygamous family. Open communication is one of the key indicators of the families' good functioning (Al-Krenawi & Kanat-Maymon, 2017). Active communication with children is important in giving them space to express their feelings, to enjoy enough love and attention, and to help them feel better in managing and improving their future.

V. CONCLUSION

In conclusion, six forms of quality and satisfaction emerged as themes in the polygamous marriages of the six polygamous families in the study. The methods for shaping the quality and satisfaction of the polygamy practiced by each family are different but have the same function – that is to increase happiness and well-being in the family, just as in any other monogamous family. Previous studies have shown that there is a significant relationship between a husband and wife's commitment, in terms of income, love and positive relationship, and their marital satisfaction (Rozmi, Azlan & Yusoff, 2015). In this study, it is important to highlight the practices that can enhance the quality and satisfaction of polygamous families and to ensure that family members are able to respond to and handle any problems within the family. The researcher found that the themes of greater appreciation and understanding, applying knowledge and conducting activities in the household, and positive interactions between wives and co-wives are widely seen by the husbands concerned as a means for achieving quality and satisfaction in their polygamous marriage.

Likewise, first and co-wives value respect for their opinions and views, as well as patience in learning to understand the characters of their husband/co-wives. Meanwhile, the sons' perspective is more about their fathers' actions in constantly giving advice and guidance to them, their siblings and mothers, thereby enhancing the ability to manage and handle family problems. These findings are consistent with findings related to the

quality and satisfaction of monogamous marriages, which is, an important component of enhancing marital satisfaction is through self-management, in terms of spouse's personality and behavior, how to handle family responsibilities, communication, decision-making and problem solving, finances, spending time together, romance and sexual expression (suzana, Norbayah & Sarah, 2018). Polygamy is still rejected by some women because they see it as incapable of unifying families, being difficult in terms of family management, and being overly traditional (Zeitzen, 2018). In fact, the idea of polygamous marriages is undergoing a revolution of sorts, whereby more and more sources of information are becoming available to help in strengthening the psychological well-being of polygamous families.

This study found elements like appreciation, understanding, providing guidance, positive interactions and patience are key in quality and satisfaction of relationship in polygamous marriages. In light of this, future studies could use the themes emerged in this study as variables in building a questionnaire to study - on a larger scale - aspects of polygamy as pertain to family quality and satisfaction. The findings of this study may also help counselors and therapists in providing the best possible intervention to help family members - in both family and individual counseling - improve the psychological well-being of polygamous households.

Ethical approval was granted by the Human Research Ethics Committee, University of Science, Malaysia (Ref USM/JEPem/18070324). Participants consented to anonymized quotes being used in dissemination.

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