

Effects of Polygamy on Education in Kenyan Society

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ABSTRACT: *The paper examines a general understanding of Polygamy and its positive and negative effects on family among the Somali Communities. Polygamy is one of special of interest and a distinguished feature in Muslim communities. It remains a controversial issue not only in Kenya but also in many Muslim countries around the world. There is an argument whether polygamy is appropriate or inappropriate to our family as well as society. Some societies, especially in rural areas, it is believed that Polygamy is helpful to career women who might have to work late and then go home and take care of their children or husband. On the other hand, Polygamy is forbidden in modern society, as polygamy has negative effect on the family and society especially it makes a conflict among wives. In some cases, polygamy is permissible in order to give chance to the aged woman who has not been married. In that case, polygamy is viewed the way to help to those group. Based on the discussions, the paper attempts to discuss the issues of Polygamy and its effect on family in Kenya as well as other Muslim countries. Furthermore, the application of Family law is still debatable among scholars. Some scholars view that it gives a positive effect, while others do not. Based on the discussion, the paper attempts to discuss the issues of Polygamy and its effects on family. The paper is based on both primary and secondary information.*

Keywords: *Polygamy, Islamic family law, Orphans, Widows, Communities, Feminists*

I. INTRODUCTION

In the last decades, polygamy has been considered as an important issue in public, political, and academic arenas (sheikh Abdirahman et al 2004). It is estimated that somewhere between 80,000 and 100,000 people still practice polygamy today. Especially, in Sub-Saharan Africa is the major global region where the practice remains widespread, accounting for about 20-50 percent of all marriages (Caldwell & Caldwell, 1990). Polygamy in particular constitutes one of the distinctive features of the marriage in many countries and while its frequency may be declining, it is still widely practiced (Kincaid, 2003). Although Polygamy has been practiced all over the world for many centuries, there is an argument whether polygamy is appropriate or inappropriate to our society. Polygamy remains a controversial issue in Kenya as well as in many Muslim countries around the world. Some believe that Polygamy is very helpful to career women who might have to work late, and then go home, and take care of their children or husband. Conversely, majority believes that Polygamy is inappropriate as it has a huge negative effect to the family. The common effect of Polygamy is making a conflict among wives. In Polygamous, conflict among wives usually arises in management of family. It is difficult for family management especially to arrange and sharing the task. On the other hand, it is difficult for husband to be fair to his wives. In

Polygamous family, children also might lose their respect to their parents. Therefore, Polygamy is a controversial issue in many societies. Polygamy is legally forbidden in the Western Christian society. It is argued that Polygamy helps to continue a very high fertility level (Caldwell et al., 1992). It has thus contributed likely to increase population growth in many countries. As the form of behavior, Christian missionaries have considered Polygamy as morally wrong. Even some well-educated Christianized African elites in Sub-Saharan Africa feel polygamy shameful behavior. (Karanja 1994). However, Polygamy is a controversial issue among the scholars. Some of the view can be presented here. It is said that Polygamy can be considered as it allows widows and orphans to be taken care of in a society in which women usually do not have independent means of financial support. Besides, there are some cases where polygamy is permissible in order to give chance to the aged woman who has not been married. For such, Polygamy is viewed the way to help to those group. It is important to note that Polygamy is legally recognized in Islamic Family Law. Islamic family law formulates husband wife relation such as marriage, divorce and family life. It is also related to the moral and social aspects of marriage and divorce (Moors 2003). Thus, family law directly affects on the daily life of people. Likewise, Polygamy the application of Family law is debatable among scholars. Some scholars view that it gives a positive effect, while others do not. However, it is argued that in the Arab World, the religious scholars dominated family relations. The religious scholars were allowed to deal with the domain of family law, but it was understood that they would refrain from obstructing in constitutional and administrative matters (Masud, 2001). According to the western non-Muslim observers, Islamic law appears to be a stagnant, archaic, violent and oppressive, which are difficult to imagine in modern times (Aminah, 2006). However, in many Arab countries, still it forms the basis of the legal system though in many cases it has been changed and codified.

II. OBJECTIVES

The general objective of the study is to examine the general understanding of polygamy and its effect on family as well as in society. Some specific objectives of this study are as follows: (1) To discuss the concept of polygamy from Islamic perspective

(2) To examine perception and understanding of Polygamy among Somali Communities. The study is based on two main types of data. Firstly, secondary information was gathered to discuss the concept of Polygamy from Islamic perspective. Secondly, primary information has been also gathered from interview in order to examine the general understanding and effect of Polygamy on family as well as society. The information was collected from the selected study areas namely, Takaba secondary school and Takaba Primary school.

Polygamy from Islamic Perspective

Polygamy is also a controversial issue in Islam. (White & White, 2005). The misconception about Islam is the notion that it unconditionally allows a man to marry four wives. Some scholars believed that keeping four wives is a man's essential physiological need only. However, According to the Quranic verse Polygamy may occur to protect the rights of orphans. (Verse III. Surat An-Nisa). Therefore, it is obvious that the permission to marry more than one wife has been given for the establishment of social justice. In the Holy Qur'an the permission of marrying more than one wife is considered as a matter of emergency, permitted Muslims to marry more than one woman, which is discussed in the opening verses of Surah Nisaa, as follows: *If you fear that you would not be able to deal justly with the orphans, marry two, three or four of the women who are lawful for you. However, if you fear that you would not be able to deal justly then one only.*

Three implications of the verse mentioned above are very clear that Muslims are allowed to have more than one wife only in case of some essential need. It is, therefore, obvious from this that the permission of marrying more than one wife has nothing to do with a man's lust for more than one wife. A person can have more than one wife if a moral or social need arises. In that case, a man's lust is certainly not important. It is important to note that whatever the need to be, the number of wives cannot exceed four in any situation. At the same time, if a person is unable to do justice to his wives, he must restrict himself to one.

Furthermore, the Qur'an provides a suitable reference how one wife is enough for a man when the Almighty created Adam; he made Eve for him as his only wife. From this example, it is obvious that the Almighty had intended a man should have not have more than one wife as He had created one wife for Adam instead of many. This shows us that as far as a man's physiological needs are concerned, they are completely satisfied even if he has a single wife. In addition, in normal circumstances the ideal family is one formed by a single couple.

Indeed to say that polygamy in Islam is conditional upon certain circumstances. The issue of polygamy in Islam is understood in the light of community obligations towards orphans and widows. It is certainly not a license for men to satisfy their lust. The permission is, in fact, a proof of the universal applicability of Islam. Using this attitude, which would have been impossible to overcome had Islam totally forbidden polygamy, can solve a number of problems. In Islam, Polygamy is permissible if a man is necessarily able to do justice among the wives.

Measuring People's Perception on the Issue of Polygamy

It is stated that the paper is also based on primary data collection and information. A total of 50 respondents were interviewed among Somali Communities. Table 1 presents the total number of respondents were chosen from the study area. It indicates that three respondents have been selected from various women. Single married women, 20 respondents have been chosen 12 women from polygamy 10 from devoice women and 8 from old women. In addition, the in -depth interview have been presented.

Study Area and Total Respondents

Faculty/ Division	Number of respondents
Monogamy women	20
Polygamy married women	12
Devoice women	10
Old women	8
Total	50

The paper attempts to examine the overall effect of polygamy on family and society. Too many, polygamy is seen as an inappropriate relationship because they believe that polygamy oppresses women and children, but there are also those who believe that polygamy is appropriate and beneficial to society. Polygamy is always associated with problems and bad effects like jealousy, strife, murder and disparities. Though Polygamy has a negative effect to family as well as society, it has been practiced in kenya as well as in other

parts of the world for many centuries. Thus, it is said that when a family decides to add a new wife to their family, the decision should be carefully considered and must be approved before the husband and new wife can get married (Altman & Ginat, 1996). There are many who believe that polygamy is beneficial because it allows men to have many children and helps society (White & White, 2005). On the other hand, many view polygamy as an inappropriate relationship (Moore-Emmett, 2004).

Some believe that polygamy is appropriate because it encourages procreation and helps eliminate prostitution (White & White, 2005). On the other hand, there are those who think that polygamy is inappropriate because it oppresses both women and children (Moore-Emmett, 2004). Based on the above-mentioned argument, there is a mini research has been conducted at Takaba Secondary school and Takaba Primary schools. Respondent's understanding regarding polygamy were measured based on few questions. The results are presented in table 2. When respondents were asked about the issue of Polygamy, majority (60%) considered it as an important issue in Kenya. It can be said that Polygamy is not a new issue in Kenya. Regarding the statement whether Polygamy is acceptable or not, majority of respondents (80%) reported that they like to support it whereas only few respondents (20% are not agreed with the same statement. However, there is an argument in the literature whether polygamy are acceptable or not. The major justification for polygamy was that it encouraged procreation (White & White, 2005). Some studies showed that more children could be created if a man had many wives. It was believed that a man who had many children would be rewarded in the afterlife and this became an incentive for men to marry many women and have as many children as possible (Altman & Ginat, 1996).

Table 2: Measuring Perception and Understanding of Polygamy

Variables	Agree	Disagree
Polygamy is an important issue in Kenya.	60%(30)	40%(20)
Most of people are familiar with polygamy by reading books, journals and newspaper	40%(20)	60%(30)
Most of people think that polygamy is acceptable	80%(40)	20%(10)
Polygamy is appropriate for our family as well as society	30%(15)	70%(35)
Polygamy has negative effect on family as well as social life.	70%(35)	30%(15)
Religious believe has an influence on polygamy?	70%(35)	30%(15)
Men's financials ability encourages them to be involved in polygamy.	60%(30)	40%(20)
Wife's bed behavior has an influence in increasing polygamy.	80%(40)	20%(10)
Polygamy has negative effect on children	70% (35)	30% (15)

Another justification for polygamy is the notion that men are by nature polygamous and that women are by nature monogamous (White & White, 2005). It is believed that men have strong and unlimited sexual needs, which would be easily met with more than one wife (Altman & Ginat, 1996). It was also assumed that polygamy would give all women the opportunity to get married and have children, which would eliminate unmarried women who were usually victims of sexual and economic exploitation (White & White, 2005). Polygamy would also help eliminate prostitution and child abandonment (White & White, 2005). Others thought that polygamy allowed women to have a more liberal life. A woman in a plural marriage does not have to worry as much about her family because she has other women there to help her.

Some believe that polygamy is very helpful to career women who might have to work late, and then go home, and take care of their children or husband. In a plural marriage, the other wives are there to take care of the children and the husband, which takes some stress of the career woman because she now has less to worry about.

Again, respondents were asked to say their opinion whether Polygamy is appropriate or not. Thought majority of respondents (70%) do believe that polygamy is inappropriate to family as well as society, some respondents (30%) believe in Polygamy. It is not surprising to know that some people considered polygamy as the appropriate to family as well as to society. In the literature, it is observed that there are people who believe that polygamy should be considered appropriate; there are many people who believe that polygamy should be deemed inappropriate.

When respondents were asked to give their opinion whether Polygamy is appropriate for our family as well as society, the results show that about 70% respondents feel that Polygamy is inappropriate towards our family and society. As the main reason they do believe that when men marry more than one wife, they cannot share their love to their wives fairly. Thus, this might be an unequal treatment and injustice to family as well as society. Respondents were also asked about the effect of Polygamy on family as well as society. Majority of (70%) respondents agreed that Polygamy has negative effective as it brings domestic violence in family. They also reported that children in polygamous families are forced to constantly work and take care of their younger

siblings. Therefore, children from polygamous families are not allowed to go to school and, because of this, they may not be able to help their family economically. This situation also negatively effect to children in the family.

As the possible reason, three questions are formulated such wife's bed behavior and Men's financials ability encourages them to be involved in polygamy. Men's financials ability encourages them to be involved in polygamy and it was found that moderate level of respondents (60%, 40% and 80 %) do agreed that the above mentioned factors might be the reason for Polygamy but majority disagreed in their opinion. Among the questions, most of respondents (70 %) disagreed that Religious preference might be the reason for Polygamy. As we know that Religious preference is a well-known practice in Somali as well as well other Muslim countries. However, in this paper, surprisingly there is not such influence on Polygamy based on respondent's opinion.

The paper also conducted depth interview to examine the effect of polygamy among the family members. Some students are chosen as the respondents who came from Polygamous family namely Mohamed Sharif Fatuma Musa. He shared his experience saying *"Like my siblings, I do not get enough attention from my father. Most of times, we are afraid to talk with my father when is in home as we find him stressful. We do not have any a holiday trip as our siblings and friends do. In fact, I do not have any sweet moment with my father to share.*

This is common in polygamous families where father is busy, even sometime he is forced to constantly work in order to provide the financial for family members. Therefore, children from polygamous families have little opportunity to go for holiday with parents and other family members. Even sometimes children's are not allowed to go to school, as father is unable to provide support due to financial constraints. . This situation also negatively effect to children in the family Similar negative opinion was observed when Salami Bte Ali was asked to give her opinion. She said: *"My husband Mr. Ahmed is a taxi driver. I am second wife having with six children. First wife of my husband also have seven children. As a taxi driver, it is difficult for him to bear the expense of our large family. Even children do not get enough food in our family.*

From the above two statements, it can be said that the effect of polygamy on family has both economic and emotional aspects The research has found that many men in both lower and middle economic groups, husbands are unable to contribute to the economic maintenance of their family members.

III. CONCLUSION

Polygamy with Islam is not unfair or biased but there is some misunderstanding. According to Islam, taking a second wife, even with the free consent of the first wife, is a violation of the law. Islam never encourages marrying more than one such as way. Concern with the application of laws is still debatable among scholars. Even the effect of Polygamy is also debatable as some scholar's view that it gives a positive effect, while some others are in contrast. Based on the perception of Somali communities, it was observed that Polygamy is a well-known practice in Kenya as majority of respondents familiar with the issue. It was also observed that Polygamy has negative effect on family especially for children. Children in Polygamous family do not get enough attention and economic support from family. However, majority believes that polygamy is an inappropriate relationship. However, the implication of Islamic is still controversial issue in Kenya.

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