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Identity Construction in Polygamous Households: Psychological and Social Consequences for Women in Central Punjab

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Keywords: Polygamy; Gender Inequality; Emotional Neglect; Women's Well-Being; Patriarchy; Pakistan

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Abstract

This qualitative research work focuses on social, psychological and physical experiences of polygamous first wives in Sargodha, Punjab, Pakistan. The semi-structured interviews, informed by Feminist Theory and Intersectionality, were carried out with 11 first wives and their interviews analyzed through the use of the thematic analysis. Eight themes were identified as being associated and connected: emotional neglect, social marginalization, psychological distress, physical health degradation, religious justification and gendered silence, economic dependency, coping mechanisms and identity reconstruction. The subjects indicated the loss of emotional support, social respect, anxiety, sleeping difficulties. The results indicate that polygamy is a socially constructed institution, which supports gendered inequalities in rural Pakistan. The increased enforcement of family laws, the increase of community-based counseling and mental-health services, the enhancement of gender-sensitive religious education, and women economic empowerment are necessary to increase well-being in polygamous families.

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Keywords:

Polygamy; Gender Inequality; Emotional Neglect; Women's Well-Being; Patriarchy; Pakistan

Introduction

In Pakistan, polygamy, especially polygyny is a regulated but a socially challenged marriage norm. According to the Muslim Family Laws Ordinance (1961), it is possible to have more marriages with procedures that follow including authorization of current wives and evidence of financial stability. In

reality, the safeguards are frequently poorly applied, and traditionally accepted norms and masculinity take precedence over the law and offer many women no effective alternatives (Ghaffar et al., 2014; Naseer et al., 2021). As a result, the setup of polygamy is often not just a marriage institution but an institution that exists within the society that



is influenced by gender inequity, dependency caused by economic factors, and even culture. Such disconnection between the law and reality is a significant sociological issue because women in polygamous families are prone to emotional negligence, resource allocation, and even low social standing when they lack adequate institutions to support them.

In Pakistan, it is an institutionalized norm, which is supported by the Muslim Family Laws Ordinance (MFLO) of 1961 since it grants the male citizens the legal right of marrying a minimum of four women in the presence of the permission of having written consent of the current spouses or spouses and demonstrating financial strength to maintain all the dependent beings (Ghaffar et al., 2014). Nevertheless, the implementation and the achievement of these legal mandates have serious shortcomings with the administrative laxity and ingrained cultural biases in most instances eating up legal instructions thereby depriving a number of women any solutions to any legal compensation (Langrial & Shah, 2014; Naseer et al., 2021).

Consistent findings in international studies confirm that polygynous marital status is associated with mental distraught, lack of marital satisfaction and social isolation among women. Research in the Middle East and Africa identifies greater levels of anxiety, jealousy and depression among women in polygamous unions than that seen with monogamous unions (Al-Krenawi, 2013; Shepard, 2013; Sinai & Peleg, 2021), although studies on the United Arab Emirates show that first wives encountered decreasing social respect and rising family conflict with a subsequent marriage (Al-Shamsi & Fulcher, 2005). Similar results are obtained in Pakistani studies, which found that women often believe in silence, religious coping and endurance as a reaction to neglect emotionally and economically in polygamous families (Din et al., 2024; Naseer et al., 2021). Nevertheless, although these forms of research have escalated, majority of studies have been based on survey methods and have not specifically addressed women lived experiences, coping mechanisms, and identity negotiation in semi-rural Punjab.

Through the Feminist Theory and the Patriarchy Theory, marriage is one of the major locations where gender inequalities are replicated, via unequal emotional work, dependence and

control of decision-making (Connell, 2009). Polygamous practices can enhance such inequalities as they place women in a contest of affection and position as well as support male dominance within kinship structures. Intersectionality insight into how women became vulnerable, and used their coping mechanisms through the lens of class, education, and locality (Collins, 2000; Smith, 2009), whereas the Symbolic Interactionism perspective elucidates the effect of polygamy on reconstructing women identities based on the interactions that occur in everyday lives (Goffman, 1959).

In this situation, it is important to consider polygamy not just in terms of laws, but also within the context of the actual experiences of women in a particular socio-cultural context. Semi-rural areas like Sargodha where kinship is very strong and there is surplus patriarchy offer a valuable contextual setting in examining the impact of polygamy on the emotional, social and physical health of women. The paper thus examines how the first wives in polygamous families feel neglected, marginalized, suffer psychological traumas and health complications and how the wives exercise different coping patterns and types of resiliency under the limited structural circumstances. Through qualitative inquiry, utilizing these experiences, the research is aimed at creating context-specific sociological evidence that can guide more research to debate on family law enforcement, gender equality, and women wellbeing in Pakistan.

The study will help to achieve a more comprehensive picture of polygamy as a multidimensional social phenomenon instead of individual marital preference, by combining the feminist, patriarchal, intersectional, and interactionist viewpoints. It brings light on the discrepancy of legal ideals and lived realities and how cultural practices, economic dependency, and gender relations of power influence women experience in addition to revealing the accommodation strategies by which women use to negotiate dignity and agency in polygamous families.

Literature Review

The issue of polygamy has been under sociological and psychological research since a long time as a

type of marital setup linked to gender-based disparities and unequal well-being outcomes. Similar analyses on Middle Eastern and African cultures are consistent in reporting that women in a polygamous marriage received lower marital satisfaction, emotional neglect, and increased anxiety and depression than women in a monogamous one (Al-Krenawi, 2013; Shepard, 2013). The same concept can be supported by the qualitative studies of Bedouin-Arab and Gulf, where it is observed that first wives tend to be jealous, lonely, emotionally less attentive after the second marriage, and this is an indication of inequality in the distribution of affection in the polygamous family (Al-Shamsi & Fulcher, 2005; Sinai & Peleg, 2021). These conclusions align with the theme of emotional neglect determined in the current research and support feminist discussions that marriage arrangements are capable of recreating unequal emotional labor and interdependence (Connell, 2009).

Another consequence of polygyny that has been documented in a large number is the social marginalization. Studies show that remarriage of the first wives by husbands can lead to loss of status in their kin groups and stigma in local communities in which return to family and marital harmony are related to the manifestation of honor to women (Al-Shamsi & Fulcher, 2005; Thobejane & Flora, 2014). This marginalization is made in wider sense of patriarchal systems of kinship that give priority to the male lineage and control, which is attributed to patriarchy theory and Yamani (2022) argued concept of bargaining with patriarchy. In the Pakistan's studies, it is stated that women in polygamous families tend to isolate themselves and be silent because of fear of a stigma and family-instilled pressure (Din et al., 2024; Naseer et al., 2021).

A large amount of literature also associates polygamy with mental discomfort and degradation. In polygamous families, women complain of greater prevalence of depression, anxiety, insomnia, and psychosomatic disease than monogamous wives (Abd Razak et al., 2020; Yilmaz, 2022). Systematic reviews also postulate greater family conflict, economic stress and minimal well-being in children in polygamous families, showing a more extensive societal impact. These results concur with the themes of psychological distress and physical

illnesses in the current study, which help us to refer to sociological assertions that mental health is conditioned by structural inequality, as opposed to individual ones.

The reaction of the women towards polygamy is often influenced by the religious speech and cultural traditions. The studies related to Muslim dominant societies reveal that women tend to process suffering in terms of religious focus (where patience and persistence are paramount), despite inequality in treatment (Naseer et al., 2021). Islamic jurisprudence allows polygyny because of strict rules of justice but sociological studies show that in the real world these are seldom achieved especially when there is inadequate legal regulations and patriarchal principles prevail (Ghaffar et al., 2014). These dynamics are aligned with the concepts of religious justification and gendered silence that were determined in the current study.

Another main aspect of female vulnerability in a polygamous marriage is economic dependency. Research in South Asia and Africa indicates that women who have no independent incomes or rights to property are more distressed psychologically and have less bargaining power in polygamous families (Malik et al., 2021; Rossi, 2019). Women empowerment programs have been found to enhance independence and welfare of women, which implies that some of the evils of polygyny can be averted by having financial empowerment.

Regardless of these structural constraints, women and coping strategies are also as researched as well as their resilience. Qualitative research indicates that women usually depend on religious piety, maternity, you and family aid, or unofficial economic functions in order to preserve honor in unequal partnerships (Sinai & Peleg, 2021; Naseer et al., 2021). According to the Symbolic Interactionism approach, these strategies are identity reconstruction strategies formulated to cope with disordered social roles (Goffman, 1959). Such results resonate with the themes of coping and identity negotiation used in the current research, and how women use limited agency in patriarchal structures.

This is in spite of this emerging body of literature, which still contains gaps. Most of the studies are based on the quantitative surveys measuring marital satisfaction or mental-health results without discussing lived experiences of

women in culturally particular settings. The research on the qualitative studies in rural Punjab is limited, and there are hardly any studies concerning the intersection of emotional, social, physical, and symbolic aspects of polygamy in the lives of women. The current research provides a gap that is filled by looking at the accounts of Sargodha first wives to offer context-related sociological evidence concerning the multidimensional effects of polygamy in Pakistan.

Theoretical Framework

The conceptual framework on which this study is informed was an amalgamation of Sociological aspects based on Feminist Theory, Patriarchy Theory, Intersectionality, and Symbolic Interactionism in the understanding of why women lived the way they did in polygamous marriages in Pakistan. Put together these views position polygamy not just as a form of marriage but as institution of gender based upon the relations of power, cultural representations as well as the laws.

In the sociological terms of feminism, family institutions tend to reproduce more gender imbalance by giving preference to male power and limiting female accessibility to emotional, economic and symbolic assets (Connell, 2009). Young people are normalized in terms of inequality of emotional work and reliance in marriage, especially in patriarchal societies. In polygamous families, they are compounded because women strive to gain the affection, financial aid, and social positions as men remain the ones making the decision of marriage (Al-Krenawi, 2013). Feminist theory would therefore explain emotional neglect, jealousy and limited agency by the participants as structural findings of gender dominance other than the individual's individual experiences.

Immediately connected with it is the patriarchy theory, perceiving polygamy as an extension of a broader method of male hegemony in a kinship, blood lineage and power network (Yamani, 2022). In Pakistan, the Muslim family law ordinance in 1961 aligns with customary law, in which, in many cases, people tend to put the men in charge of deciding if they should marry depending on their culture (Ghaffar et al., 2014). Islamic jurisprudence only allows polygyny when there are strict guidelines of justice but empirical studies have demonstrated that equality does not occur among

wives and hence results into unequal share of affection, resources and status (Al-Krenawi, 2013; Naseer et al., 2021). The Patriarchy theory thus follows in aiding the analysis of the interaction between religious interpretation and cultural expectations and economic dependence to reinforce a gendered inequality in polygamous families.

Intersectionality goes further to enhance the analysis through depicting the way the experiences of women differ in relation to class, education, rural-urban place and family status (Collins, 2000). In such semi-rural regions as Sargodha, first wives are frequently exposed to a compound form of vulnerability because of the economic opportunities, strong kinship demands, and restricted mobility. The intersectional analysis acknowledges the fact that the manner in which women cope (e.g. through religious obedience, silence, or informal economical action) gets influenced by their social positions within such structures of crossing of gender, class, and place (Yamani, 2022).

Last but not least, the theory of symbolic interactionism describes the way in which women make sense of identity and negotiate identity in polygamous marriages through daily interactions. There is loss of status, emotional neglect that is caused by disruption of socially esteemed roles as wife and mother (Ryff, & Singer, 2014). Women are forming a new meaning through the interactions with the co-wives, immediate family members, and community people, but they sometimes internalize the silence as virtue and sometimes assert their agency in work, childbirth, or spirituality (Goffman, 1959). This lens points out the strength of women and takes into account structural limitations.

Both of these theoretical perspectives lead to polygamy being viewed as a social institution that is influenced by gendered relations of power and cultural interpretations of religion. They allow the study to read women narratives as a manifestation of structural inequality and negotiated agency in Sargodha, which provide a sociologically neutralized comprehension of social, psychological, and bodily impacts of polygamy in modern Pakistan.

Methodology

In this study, a qualitative phenomenological research design was used to consider the experiences of first wives living in polygamous marriage in Sargodha, Punjab. The study based on Feminist Theory, Intersectionality and Symbolic Interactionism examined how the nature of gendered power relations, location in the practices of class and cultural meanings determine the emotional, social and physical well-being of women in polygamous homes. The 11 first wives were recruited with purposive sampling and those who had been in polygamous unions at least five years and whose husbands had remarried. The sample size was diverse after age, education, and socioeconomic to include the intersectional diversities. The semi-structured in-depth interviews (60-90 minutes) presupposed recording the interviewing on consent and discussing the marital relations, emotional experiences, social status, health problems, coping mechanisms, and impressions of religion and law.

The Departmental Research Committee, University of Sargodha was reached out, and approval was given by the Ethical Committee. Informed consent was signed by the participants, pseudonym was used to keep the observation anonymous and the interview was done in secure places, where the participants were allowed to choose the place. The data analysis was done based on thematic analysis on the basis of feminist and patriarchal perspectives. After subjecting the transcripts to Nvivo-like processes, the transcripts were subjected to open coding procedures that identified the initial categories, the presence of an axial coding procedure that ordered the categories into sociological themes (e.g., gendered silence, emotional neglect, negotiated agency, selective coding) to understand the fundamental narratives about the effects of polygamy. Member checking and peer debriefing helped to increase credibility and audit trails helped to establish dependability and confirmability. Reflexive notes were also upheld in order to explain positionality of the researcher in culturally sensitive gender research.

Table 1

Thematic Table

Main Theme	Sub-Theme (Open Codes)	Illustrative Quote	Sociological Interpretation
1. Emotional Neglect & Marital Displacement	Loss of attention; jealousy; abandonment	<i>"When he married again, I felt invisible in my own home."</i> (P3)	Demonstrates patriarchal emotional hierarchy where women compete for affection, reflecting structural gender inequality.
	Unequal time distribution	<i>"He stays mostly with her now. I wait alone every night."</i> (P7)	Illustrates gendered emotional labor and unequal marital investment under polygyny.
2. Social Marginalization	Loss of social respect; stigma	<i>"People stopped inviting me after his second marriage."</i> (P5)	Shows symbolic interactionist loss of identity as 'respected wife' within community norms.
	Exclusion from decisions	<i>"They don't ask me in family matters anymore."</i> (P2)	Indicates patriarchal decision-making structures removing women's agency.

3. Psychological Distress	Anxiety; depression; insecurity	<i>"I cry quietly so children don't see."</i> (P6)	Emotional suffering linked to structural inequality rather than individual pathology.
	Low self-esteem	<i>"I felt useless when he treated her better."</i> (P9)	Reflects intersection of marital competition and gendered worth tied to husband's approval.
4. Physical Health Consequences	Headaches; sleep problems	<i>"Since his remarriage, I cannot sleep and my head hurts daily."</i> (P4)	Demonstrates psychosomatic stress linked to marital inequality.
	Lack of medical care	<i>"He said doctor visit is waste of money."</i> (P8)	Shows economic control and gendered health neglect in patriarchal households.
5. Religious Justification & Gendered Silence	Misuse of religion	<i>"They say Islam allows it, so I must stay quiet."</i> (P10)	Highlights tension between lived religion and patriarchal interpretation.
	Fear of stigma	<i>"If I complain, they call me bad Muslim."</i> (P1)	Symbolic control through moral labeling, maintaining patriarchal order.
6. Economic Dependency	Lack of financial autonomy	<i>"All money is in his hands; I cannot buy medicine."</i> (P8)	Shows structural dependency reinforcing women's vulnerability.
	Informal work attempts	<i>"I started sewing to support my children."</i> (P11)	Demonstrates negotiated agency within constrained patriarchal economy.
7. Coping & Resilience	Religious coping	<i>"Prayer gives me patience."</i> (P6)	Reflects culturally mediated coping consistent with intersectional context.
	Children as motivation	<i>"I live only for my children."</i> (P1)	Shows maternal identity as emotional survival strategy.
8. Identity Reconstruction	Self-worth through work	<i>"Now I earn a little; I feel stronger."</i> (P11)	Symbolic interactionist identity rebuilding through economic agency.
	Acceptance & endurance	<i>"Maybe Allah tests me."</i> (P6)	Indicates moral reframing to cope with structural injustice.

Results

Interpretive analysis of existing data of interviewing 11 first wives in polygamous marriage situations in Sargodha indicated that there were eight interrelated themes that communicated the multidimensional nature of polygyny on the lives of women. Participants reported emotional negligence, social exclusion, mental distress, physical health declines, religious legitimacy and silence of the gender, economic dependency, coping, and reconfiguration of the identity. These are the themes on which women translated their experiences in the daily family dynamics and the social order to the larger extent.

Emotional neglect and marital displacement after the husband had remarried was most widely reported. Respondents stated that they felt abandoned, ignored or displaced in their respective households. One of the women said, when he remarried, *"I felt invisible in my own home"* (Participant 3). Another answered, *"He stays mostly with her now. I wait alone every night"* (Participant 7). Uniqueness on distribution of time, affection and monetary funds was seen by women as an indicator of weakening matrimonial relationships. Emotional neglect did not always stop at the home, it would be in the relations of the women to relatives and neighbors.

Social marginalization was very closely linked to emotional neglect. The respondents have claimed that they were not involved in family decision making, that they were not highly respected in their kinship groups but they have faced stigmatization in the society. One participant mentioned, *"People stopped inviting me after his second marriage"* (Participant 5), and another said that *"They don't ask me in family matters anymore"* (Participant 2). Women said that they lost their identity as valued wives and socially excluded, especially in the semi-rural environment when family rights and marital cohesion have a very strong symbolism.

There was also a lot of psychological distress experienced by the participants. The feelings of jealousy, anxiety, depression, and negative self-esteem were typical. Some of the females stated, *"I cry quietly so my children don't see"* (Participant 6) and one more said, weighed down, *"I felt useless when he treated her better"* (Participant 9). Emotional pain was widely characterized as chronic

and internal, and the women did not want to confront it as it would disrupt the family dynamics. A number of the participants associated the tendencies of suffering emotions with the feeling of insecurity regarding the future of their children.

Bodily illnesses were often related to emotional stress and financial disregards. Women complained of headache, sleeping difficulties, tiredness and reproductive health. According to the respondents, one participant affirmed that *"Since his remarriage, I cannot sleep and my head hurts daily"* (Participant 4). In some instances, medical care was not affordable due to limited financial autonomy; one of the respondents justified it by stating, *"All money is in his hands; I cannot buy medicine"* (Participant 8). According to the respondents of the study, the factors that led to deteriorating health were stress, lack of nutrition, and inaccessibility of healthcare.

Religious speech came out as a coping tool as well as a silence tool. A few women said that spouses or family members ensured that they could justify remarriage with religious expressions and discourage grievances. Participant 10 responded by saying that *"They say Islam allows it, so I must stay quiet"* (Participant 10). Another reason was that one said, *"If I complain, they call me a bad Muslim"* (Participant 1). Women said that they were under moral pressure to bear suffering so that there was harmony in the family and that they did not care about the social standing of their families.

Women were also vulnerable due to economic dependency. A large number of participants did not have their income and depended on husbands to survive. Others tried to earn some income, which was slightly in number like sewing or looking after cattle and cows. One of the women mentioned, *"I started sewing to support my children"* (Participant 11). These tasks were valuable only in terms of momentary financial assistance and a boost of self-esteem.

Participants reported coping strategies and resiliency though emotionally depressed. Women depended on religious enhancements, emotional isolation, assistance by natal families, and attachment towards their children. The participant said, *"Prayer gives me patience"* (Participant 6), and the next one wrote, *"I live only for my children"* (Participant 1). The strategies could make women not sink in emotional situations even during tough times.

Lastly, there were some participants who were involved with identity reconstruction. Women tried to restore self-esteem through tiny economic individual activities, becoming part of the community, or maternal functions. One of the women said, “*Now I earn a little; I feel stronger*” (Participant 11). Others reinterpreted their experiences to constitute a moral test or spiritual test. These are stories that depict the manner in which women bargained dignity in limited marital patterns.

Altogether, the findings indicate that females in polygamous unions both went through interdependent demands regarding emotions, connections, psychological, and physical well-being and took up strategies and types of resilience. These results demonstrate how complex the lives of the women living in polygamous families in rural Punjab are.

Discussion

Results of this research offer context-related support to the idea that, polygamous marriage in Sargodha has multi-layered emotional, social and physical effects on women and are in line with international and Pakistani literature on polygyny. The stories of emotional neglect, jealousy, and marginalization narrated by the participants correlate with the studies that found that women in polygamous marriages experience greater depression, anxiety and marital dissatisfaction than women in monogamous marriages (Al-Krenawi, 2013; Shepard, 2013). The same trends are being reported in the Middle East and African settings, where affection and resources are not distributed fairly, which leads to the development of emotional insecurity among the co-wives (Al-Shamsi & Fulcher, 2005; Sinai & Peleg, 2021). The current research builds on this evidence by offering qualitative data on rural Punjab by demonstrating how emotional neglect is manifested in the form of the loss of dignity and identity with reference to kinship networks.

On Feminist Theory front, the findings depict that polygamy perpetuates the gendered power structures in the family. Connell (2009) suggest that marriage has a way of institutionalizing unequal and emotional labor and economic dependence that positions the male authority on top and restricts the autonomy of women (Feminist

Sociologists). These structural inequalities are reflected in the reliance of the participants on husbands, in terms of healthcare, finances, and social status. Certainly, Naseer et al. (2021) in Pakistan observed similar conclusions; they identified silence and religious coping among women in polygamous marriages as very common because of economical dependency and stigma fear.

Social marginalization theme also goes to prove the presence of Patriarchy Theory in perpetrating polygamous practices. Patriarchal norms that value the male lineage and power meant that the participants were excluded even in deciding issues that affected the family, and for communal events. (Yamani (2022) introduces the idea of bargaining with patriarchy, which helps to understand the reason why some women take polygamy even suffering emotionally, bargaining on the restricted security in unequal order. Similar research in South Asia indicates that polygyny is commonly legitimized by such cultural requirements as obedience, favoring sons, and a stay of honor (Ghaffar et al., 2014; Malik et al., 2021). The current results speak to the fact that legislation like the Muslim Family Laws Ordinance (1961) is poorly practiced, which is not a new argument, other laws have been argued to have no real effect on women protection.

The psychic suffering of the participants, which constitutes anxiety, insomnia, and low self-esteem, are also proofs of the correlation between polygyny and mental health issues and psychosomatic illness (Abd Razak et al., 2020). The description of headaches, sleeping difficulties, and the absence of medical attention provided by participants can also be related to the scientific findings that showed that emotional stress in polygamous families can cause permanent health deterioration (Yilmaz, 2022). This study supports the sociological meaning that mental health is produced through structural inequality but not personal inability because of emotional neglect in relation to the physical health outcomes.

The findings also show the applicability of Intersectionality in comprehending disparity in the experience of women. Lower socioeconomic women attested to high dependence and fewer coping avenues whereas the women with residual education or maternal relatives bore more resilience. Intersectional theorists underline how

gender inequality consequences gender inequality has a connection with class, locality, and family structure to handle lived experience through interaction (Collins, 2000). Such trends have already been detected in Pakistani rural researches in the field of health where women help-seeking behaviour is contingent on family authority and financial assets.

Lastly, Symbolic Interactionism will be used to understand how women interpret polygamy by exchanging day to day interactions. Interviewees reported a sense of invisibility, uselessness or social stigmatization, demonstrating that polygamy ruins sense of identity as a respectable wife and mother. The meanings are negotiated through relationships whereas its theory of identity and stigma by Goffman (1959) explains why social labeling can lead to silence and withdrawal. However, there are those women who rebuilt identity by hard work through motherhood or informal employment, a trend also evident in qualitative literature covering co-wife coping mechanisms (Sinai & Peleg, 2021).

In general, the paper proves the existence of polygamy in Sargodha as a multidimensional social institution with intersection of gendered power relations, cultural norms and legal ambiguity. Women are resilient based on religious coping and economic adaptations though they still lack agency because of patriarchal systems. These results affirm the need to enforce family law, gender-sensitive religious education, mental health services, and economic empowerment activities more closely, which other policy recommendations in Pakistani gender and health research suggest (Naseer et al., 2021; Malik et al., 2021).

Conclusion

This paper examined the lived experiences of first wives in polygamous marriage in Sargodha, Punjab and found out that polygamy is a multidimensional social institution that has emotional, social and physical effects on women. Citing emotional disregard, social seclusion, mental anguish, economic reliance, and health-related issues, participants showed coping skills that were based on religion, motherhood, and informal economic practice. These results support international and Pakistani literature to conclude that polygamy frequently leads to affection, resources, and status

inequity between wives (Al-Krenawi, 2013; Naseer et al., 2021).

Through Feminist Theory and Patriarchy Theory, the paper presents how polygamy supports gendered power structures in the family, in which women do not have the free will to act the way they wish but instead accept the power of males as a story of culture and religion. Intersectionality also exposes the fact that women are more vulnerable to different education levels, classes and the localities whereby rural and economically dependent women are more disadvantaged. In the meantime, Symbolic Interactionism identifies the processes of emotional negligence and the stigmatization of women as having altered their identity, resulting in silence and negotiation of agency (through resilience and coping).

Despite the empowerment and flexibility women had shown, their agency was still limited by the structural inequality. The paper thus comes to the conclusion that polygamy in the context under the study cannot be treated as a non-social, personal marital contract, but a socially incorporated practice influenced by patriarchy, laxity in the process of enforcing the law and economic dependency. It is necessary to overcome its effects in a multidimensional policy intervention that involves legal reform, social awareness, and economic empowerment.

Recommendations

The results indicate that the harms involved in the polygamous marriages cannot be dealt with through single interventions since they need legal, social, and economic responses. Active implementation of the Muslim family laws ordinance (1961) enforcement should be implemented by active monitors through union councils and legal-awareness programmers amongst people to make sure that the women are not ignorant with regard to the marital rights before allowing them the rights to remarry. There should be accessibility and community based counseling services with appropriate mental health care that is gender sensitive especially in the rural districts to combat the emotional distress experienced by the participants. Interactions with religious academics and teachers would also be necessary to facilitate the understanding of Islamic family ethics that focus on morality, obligation, and

women dignity thus making it difficult to use religious rhetoric to discriminate against women. Providing economic empowerment services such as vocational training services, microfinance services, and home-based enterprise support, will help to ease the financial dependence of women and increase their bargaining power in the households. The stigma of complaints made by women and acceptance of equal marital norms can also be further challenged through community dialogue programs by universities, NGO and local

administrations. Lastly, the outreach should be enhanced by means of lady health workers and district hospitals to ensure that women in polygamous families get timely reproductive and mental healthcare. Collectively, these multidimensional measures have the potential of transforming the legal provisions into gains of their protection in their everyday lives and enhance the well-being of women under culturally sensitive structures.

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