

# Polygamy case essay sample

[Family](#), [Marriage](#)



Polygamy, the practice where one husband has many wives, is a hotly debated topic in the world. This practice can be found in many parts of the world, especially in North Africa as well as in the Middle East. In the latter area, there are many instances of polygamy and this habit has been researched by many scholars, especially from the point of view that this practice has bad effects on the women and children who are in these families. Many research papers call for this practice to be abolished due to its ill-effects and many calls are made on legal and religious experts to take a strong stand against it as women suffer through this practice. This essay will try to explain the different aspects of polygamy with reference to Bedouin polygamous marriages (Abu Rabia, 2011).

What is polygamy Polygamy is a practice that is open to widespread misunderstandings. It is the practice which is defined as a relationship between one husband and multiple wives. It is neither exclusively Western nor non-Western and it has been practiced by some Hindus, Mormons, Muslims, and other cultural and religious groups throughout the world (Al-Krenawi Slonim-Nevo, 2006). Polygamous marriage is common in the Middle East, Africa, Asia, and the Pacific Islands . It also occurs in Europe, North America, and other Western Societies. Correct, accurate and current statistics on the prevalence of polygamy around the world are not available as all cases are not reported or recorded. In African countries, estimates range from 20 to 50 of all marriages.

There are higher rates reported among less educated husbands and wives. It is very prevalent among Muslims, and among rural residents. In recent years, there has been a significant increase in the rates of polygamy among

highly educated men who can afford a second wife. It was estimated in 2006 that in Muslim countries, 212 of all married men live in polygamous families. The most common number of wives per Muslim Arab man is two. The trend in polygamy has varied between different Arab countries. In some, the practice has declined, while in others the phenomenon increased, and in yet others have remained stable (Al-Krenawi Slonim-Nevo, 2006). The Law and Polygamy Abu Rabia (2008) argues that it is not an easy topic to address in terms of the law. This is especially so with reference to the problem of polygamous marriages in the Naqab desert area. According to her, there are many factors involved which make it a difficult issue to settle just in terms of the law. The law of 1977 classifies polygamy in the area as a crime punishable by imprisonment. However, it is not enforced among the Arab Bedouin as a result of so-called cultural sensitivity.

Due to the law not being strictly applied, men get away with polygamy (Abu Rabia, 2011). Opponents of polygamy argue that it is done selectively in view of other harsh treatments of the Palestine people. It seems as if the authorities allow this habit in order to maintain good relations with the tribal leadership at the expense of the Arab Bedouin women. Polygamy and the Islamic (Sharia) system Polygamy is embodied in Islam as a religion. A man is accordingly permitted to marry up to four wives (Koran, Sura 4, Chapter 3). Islam permits this only if some criteria are met a man may not have more than four wives at any time he must have the appropriate economic means to provide equally for more than one woman he should also pay attention to and care for all women equally (Al-Krenawi Slonim-Nevo, 2006). Sharia religious system controls issues of marriage and divorce among Muslims. The

system allows polygamous marriages under certain circumstances. It is argued that these marriages could have been performed by an official mazuun (Islamic notary). This highlights the discrimination against women and the favouring of mens rights according to Bedouin customs (Abu Rabia, 2008 Abu Rabia, 2011).

**Suffering of Women in Polygamous marriages** The women in these marriages are victims of a system. It does not happen in a vacuum. There are various factors that contribute to their suffering as well as their silence while suffering oppression and living as if they are invisible. Authorities give a kind of blessing to it by turning a blind eye to the womens plight. Also, polygamy is considered a part of the culture and life of Arab Bedouins (Abu Rabia, 2008). The women struggle for their place in the patriarchal tribal society that sees men as being socially supreme. This male supremacy subjugates women to polygamous marriages and to accept it as a part of their lives and they suffer from oppression and exclusion. Furthermore, there are various religious interpretations of polygamous marriages and these hinder any form of rational and intelligent debate of monogamous and polygamous marriages (Abu Rabia, 2008 Al-Krenawi Slonim-Nevo, 2006). Numerous studies of polygamous families found that women and children suffer a lot. They tend to be the main victims of this phenomenon. Most women suffer from low self-esteem, depression and anxiety. Additionally, they have problematic family relations and enjoy low satisfaction from family life.

Children are often victims of abuse or witness forms of abuse of the mothers this could be physical or verbal. Various studies (Al-Krenawi Slonim-Nevo,

2006 Abu Rabia, 2011) done in different countries show that polygamy can lead to co-wife jealousy, competition as well as inequality when resources are distributed. Husbands in these marriages are supposed to treat wives and children equally, but in some cases this does not happen. Jealousy arises easily when a wife is pregnant and the husband goes to the other wife for sex. Inequality also leads to rivalry and fights among children of different wives. Another problem is that many wives show signs of mental illness and many children do so, too. These mental wives have been reported at inpatient and outpatient facilities in Kuwait. A similar pattern emerged in India and Nigeria and in other Arab Countries. Children in the Middle East and Africa show signs of emotional, behavioural and physical problems. Many of them also exhibit negative self-concept, lower school achievement and greater social adjustments than children from monogamous marriages.

Findings also report that adolescents are less inclined to polygamy and object to it from the point that it is economically expensive and causes communication problems (Al-Krenawi Slonim-Nevo, 2006). Al-Krenawi and Slonim-Nevo (2006) report in a previous study on the effect of polygamous marriages on the psychological, social and educational functioning of Bedouin Arab children, mothers and husbands. Their findings show that the children from these marriages had more mental health problems as well as social difficulties than their counterparts coming from monogamous families. These children performed poorly academically and had poor relationships with their fathers. The wives of these marriages also showed more mental problems than wives from monogamous marriages. The conclusion from this is that polygamy is detrimental to proper functioning of the family unit

despite the fact that some polygamous families appeared to function well with only small problems. The growing problem of Polygamy in the Bedouin Society in the Middle East Polygamy remains a problem in the Arab Bedouin society and it is a growing one.

This issue affects life across the spectrum of social, cultural, legal and political life. It is reported that the polygamous marriages are growing in numbers and that in certain areas it is as high as 30 of marriages (Abu Rabia, 2008 Abu Rabia, 2011). The women, caught up in this act seem to be helpless. It is shown that more than 90 of the women are unemployed. To aggravate the situation, over 60 of teenage girls drop out of school. This can be seen as a feeder for future polygamous marriages due to low levels of education and a lack of reasoning abilities. Furthermore, polygamy is found in all sectors across the Arab Bedouin society and it is not always that higher levels of education and social-standing would mean a drop in the situation (Abu Rabia, 2008 Al-Krenawi Slonim-Nevo, 2006). It is not that women do not speak out against polygamy however, they are few. It is also not the norm and those who speak out are supported by their families and others.

Despite this, they are in the minority. Possible causes of increase in Polygamous marriages The Bedouin holds the sociocultural perception of that the larger the social unit, the greater its power, influence, and honor. This idea could be one of the explanations for the prevalence of polygamy. By marrying many wives he enhances the chance of having many sons. Through this the increasing of the number of members in the family unit happens and this enhances the persons honor and influence (Al-Krenawi,

1998). This means that socially and psychologically, polygamy and its large families lend power and prestige. This premise is held despite the economic burden of supporting more than one household (Al-Krenawi, 1998). Another explanation for polygamy is embodied in Islam as a religion that permits a man to marry up to four wives (Koran, Sura 4, chapter 3). Additionally, polygamy is related to the phenomenon of exchange marriage that is, when two men marry each others sisters. As soon as one of them marries a second wife, the other is pressured to do so too. Another wife is married as well to balance the honor and power in the family. Other circumstances that promotes polygamy are a womans sterility, an inability to Give birth to male offspring, and mental or physical illness.

Chamie (1986) reported that women often prefer to marry as additional wives rather than remain childless, divorced or widowed. Widowhood, in the case of a bereaved brother, can serve as a catalyst for taking a second wife- when the man dies his widow retains his property and his children. When the brother marries the widow, the deceaseds brothers family properties are retained. It would seem that polygamy reflects on the state of affairs of the Bedouin society. This could be seen as an expression of an identity crisis. Critics attribute this to the forced removals and resettlement of Arab Bedouin in some areas. Many of these new sites are poor communities now and some people feel hopeless. According to Abu Rabia (2008 2011) polygamy was limited, and few men married more than one woman. It was always perceived that polygamy was restricted to sheikhs and rich men. Polygamy has a profound effect on the Arab Bedouin society. This is noticeable through the regression experienced and its former patriarchal

lifestyle. It is argued that polygamy is one response to this chaos (Abu Rabia 2008).

Amongst the chaos different religious movements with different religious dogmas develop and this gives a sense of belonging where identity and leadership is concerned. It is these same Islamic religious movements that provide a religious cover for polygamy. Instead of challenging beliefs on polygamy and taking a stance against it, their silence seems to condone it and polygamy thrives (Abu Rabia, 2008). Abu Rabia (2008) argues that this silence is perpetuated by the systems that are supposed to protect Arab Bedouin women from this scourge. She refers to the criminal justice system, Islamic law (Sharia) and the silence of the Palestinian leadership. The latter is seen as weak (Abu Rabia, 2011). Polygamy in the UAE In the UAE we also find polygamous marriages. Reasons for these are the same as in other countries. The problems arising from polygamy are more or less the same as reported in other countries. A study in the UAE by Al Toneji (2001) found that when men married again most of them could not be fair between their wives and this caused many problems. In this study, 75 of the respondents agreed that men with more than one wife had financial problems due to the fact of having to run two households.

In those households where things went well, the husbands succeeded in being fair between their wives by spending enough time with them and their children (Fulcher, 2002). These men dealt with them equally and provided them with enough money. Al Darmeki (2001) reports on the UAE governments encouragement of polygamous marriages in order to boost the



population of the UAE due to the low numbers of the population. What can be done about women in polygamous marriages Many researchers argue that the fight for the womens rights must be conducted by academics, religious persons, representatives of the oppressed Arab Bedouin women. Social, political and womens rights movements all need to make a combined effort from a legal and social point of view (Abu Rabia, 2008 2011). Some argue that the plight of the women should not be limited to law enforcement or punishment but be opened up within the Bedouin community and government realm (Abu Rabia, 2011). Community awareness is one way in which the negative effects of polygamy can be raised.

This awareness could be done via the media, religious leaders as well as the formal and informal education systems. This awareness-making might lead to public discussions touching aspects of the benefits and negatives of polygamy. The issue of the economic implications can also be discussed. Furthermore, the psychological stress and burdens can be highlighted and then people can choose how they want to live their lives. It is important that programs be developed to help women and children to cope when they are in a polygamous family. They are the ones who suffer difficulties. One way of helping them is through a support group for wives. Wives would be able to share their feelings with other women and find suggestions and ideas on how to cope and resolve conflict or bad feelings. Children of these marriages could benefit through after-school programs. Also, social advisers and family therapists should develop techniques and plans on how to assist polygamous families. Families could be advised how to cope and resolve and co-exist in

harmony. Problem-families can learn from successful polygamous families and exchange experiences (Al-Krenawi Slonim-Nevo, 2006 Fulcher, 2002).

These ideas of intervention will not succeed easily as co-operation is needed from affected people. Also, Arabs are not naturally inclined to open up or being advised in matters as sensitive as these type of marriages even when they know they have problems. Polygamous marriages are deemed to be by personal choice, so ways and means need to be developed to get affected parties to open up and be open to advice. They need to be ensured of confidentiality to get them to co-operate (Al-Krenawi Slonim-Nevo, 2006).

Conclusion Polygamous marriages are found all over the world. However, there are large numbers of these among Islamic people, especially in North Africa and the Middle East, where there are large numbers of Bedouins in these marriages. There are many reasons for the increase of polygamous marriages. These range from religion, prestige to increase of family size. In many countries the main reason is the blind eye of the rulers. They do not wish to upset the Arab Bedouins. Problems from these marriages are well-known but there is silence from influential leaders and religious clergy.

Most of the women in these marriages suffer exclusion from male-dominated societies and suffer. They suffer in silence from low self-esteem, stress, jealousy and even mental disease. Children are also suffering in these families and they also suffer from underachievement of fighting with siblings. Furthermore, they do not adapt well with their peers. Arab culture and ideas prevent open discussion of this topic. There are possibilities for programs to help polygamous families, wives and children cope. However, this will not be

easy as the confidence of those involved need to be gained. It is hoped that through education and intervention this phenomenon can be decreased or at least the people in it will be less prone to suffering. It is hope that those marriages that are functioning well can be role-models to struggling ones.

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