

Experiences of Women in Polygynous Unions in Hammarsdale, South Africa

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ABSTRACT Traditionally, polygyny has been excused on three major points- economics, culture and morals. Economics used to be a viable reason for a man to be in a polygynous marriage because during the industrial revolution, many men from rural areas had to leave their homes and wives, and go to the cities to work and live there for months. Many polygynous unions now are not separated by distance because the man makes his two wives live in close proximity to each other so he can see them, and this discredits the economic excuse. In this study, the researcher seeks to understand why independent, educated, 'modern' working women in particular, should choose to enter into such relationships. The aim and overall objective of the research is to find the views of peri-urban women on polygyny. The research is based on case studies and is narrative in nature because the participants shared their experiences through stories.

INTRODUCTION

Polygyny is a very complicated and complex topic to research because intrinsic to it are several factors which are deeply intertwined. Amongst these are culture, tradition, and societal expectations, personal and even political considerations. The persistence or decline of polygamy is often used as an indicator of social change in Africa. However, most data and research use the term "polygamy" without reflecting on what is being measured. Thus, international comparative research often ignores temporal and spatial differences in the conceptualization of polygamy, and the implications for subsequent analyses (Coast 2011). The Oxford English Dictionary defines *polygamy* as having more than one wife or husband at the same time (Thompson 1995: 1059). The dictionary also defines *polygyny* as polygamy in which a man has more than one wife. The choice to conduct this research on polygyny is because it allows men and not women to marry multiple partners. Helander (1958) articulates that in the past this dispensation was sanctioned to chiefs and wealthy men because they alone could afford to pay *ilobolo*, which is a process whereby a man pays a certain number of cattle or money. Further, the practice was justified in traditionalist societies since biblical times as necessary for taking care of female population surplus due to warfare and decimation of male population. In recent years,

there seems to be a development in that any man regardless of his financial situation can marry more than one wife even though the factors cited historically to justify polygyny may no longer be applicable. Polygyny has been defended by some men in terms of 'tradition and culture', but a cursory observation suggests that it is currently being embraced even amongst women. It seems that some women are willing to allow a husband to take a second wife and even in arranged marriages some women seem content to enter into a polygynous union because they will be answering the call of duty. This study seeks to explore why even some middle-class educated women enter polygynous marriages.

Philip and Jones (1990) assert that polygyny is not chiefly restricted to African countries, but it is also practiced in the Middle East and in some parts of America, such as the Mormons for example, as well as on the Asian sub-continent. The root of the problem investigated in this study lies with South Africa. Because of the multifaceted nature of polygamy, culture, religion and law are also used to justify it at times. In dealing with this subject, a question of morality becomes part of the debate. In South Africa, the topic has been at the forefront in recent years because of South African President, Jacob Zuma, who is an overt polygamist. By adopting a polygamous lifestyle, people in high positions highlight a hyper-masculinity and a model of manhood, which objectifies women. Thus, the main

reason for this study is that the practice of polygyny is the foundation of inequality between men and women because at its root it renders women inferior to men because men are allowed to have more than one wife, whereas women are denied that privilege by the very fact that they are women. It allows men and not women to marry multiple partners and an understanding into the reason that independent, educated, 'modern' working women choose to enter into such relationships is important in the 21st century.

Review of Polygyny in African Countries

Polygyny is a multifaceted topic to research because there are so many issues intrinsically linked to it. In recent years, this has become a very relevant, visible and controversial topic. Polygyny is a complex subject because religion is quoted, culture used to justify it, morality is questioned and the law is ambiguous. Polygyny has been researched by numerous researchers and scholars. Studies conducted in the past on polygyny have been mostly from a male's perspective and seldom from a female's.

In Africa, polygyny was and still is used as an adaptive practice that provided a man with many children, therefore workers that added to his wealth. Polygyny ensured that the population size was constantly growing and it prevented depopulation. Although polygynous marriages were more commonly found in rural areas and amongst the less educated. Cook found that well-educated women in polygynous societies were in monogamous marriages but the reverse was true for men. Well-educated men who were financially successful were expected to take second and/or third wife (Cook 2007: 236).

Polygyny in traditional Africa was to ensure that every woman in the village had a husband in order to procreate. Polygyny also enabled the husband to take a second wife if the first wife was barren or unable to give him a son. Polygyny in traditional Africa was an adaptive practice, which ensured all women were married and had children that contributed to the survival of the community (Cook 2007: 238). One of the reasons that have been highlighted for men to take additional wives is that if they assumed the wife to be barren then additional wives would bear him children. No solution has been presented to suggest what the recourse is if the man has several wives and they are all childless. The patriarchal

belief would be that all the wives are barren and the man is just unlucky because a man being barren is something that could never happen.

Laws on Polygyny in South African and Internationally

South Africa has the most progressive Constitution according to the international world. The South African Constitution has been conspicuously quiet on the topic. The Bill of Rights clearly states that if a practice is by its very nature discriminatory towards a group of people it is not supported or sanctioned by the law but there is also the Customary Marriages Act, which recognizes the practice of polygyny. The Bill of Rights states that if any cultural practice is discriminatory, it is not protected. The question then becomes is the customary practice of polygyny contravening Section 9 of the Bill of Rights. If a certain group is allowed a certain 'privilege' based on their gender and race and other groups not extended such a privilege, that is, the fundamental nature of discrimination, which renders such a practice polygyny unconstitutional. The Constitution states that if there is a contradiction between customary law and Bill of Rights, the latter takes precedence. Polygynous marriages are unconstitutional because in the South African Bill of Rights the equality clause supersedes the right to culture and polygyny discriminates against women and people traditionally not indigenous to South Africa such as White people. Another issue that is never raised within the law is that by allowing men to take another wife, the emotional and financial positions of the existing wives are weakened. The man in a polygynous marriage asserts all power both financial and physically over his wives and may act as a dictator to whom his wives must serve and obey, and although the law may in theory alleviate the cruel consequences of such a union in practice, it fails to intervene. The law does recognize monogamous and polygynous customary marriages by The Recognition of Customary Marriages Act no 120 of 1998. Section 6 of the Act maintains the financial position of a wife in a polygynous marriage by stating that, "*A wife in a customary marriage has, on the basis of equality with her husband and subject to the matrimonial property system governing the marriage, full status and capacity, including the capacity to acquire assets and to dis-*

pose of them, to enter into contracts and to litigate, in addition to any rights and powers that she might have at customary law". According to the Act, wives in a customary marriage enjoy equal status with their husband after the marriage in terms of the law and might not always adhere to this provision of the law. The Act clearly aims to limit the harsh discriminatory effect of traditional patriarchal practices on married women (Republic of South Africa Constitution Act 108 of 1996 The Recognition of Customary Marriage Act 120 of 1998).

Customary law is defined as "the customs and usages traditionally observed among the indigenous African people of South Africa, which form part of the culture of these people". This means a White man cannot legally enter into a polygamous marriage because he is not indigenous to South Africa and neither is his culture. The Law does not explicitly state that a Black woman cannot enter into a polyandrous marriage but it is understood to be illegal. The law is also silent on homosexual Black men if they are allowed to enter polygamous marriages with other men. The Constitutional court may not declare polygyny unconstitutional because it recognizes the traditions and customs of a particular community whose traditions and culture were previously disrespected and marginalized during Apartheid, while also not sending a message that those groups prohibited from entering polygamous marriages are less worthy of such a privilege and that it does not affect their human dignity.

In KwaZulu-Natal customary law, extramarital affairs by either spouse are sufficient cause for the dissolution of the marriage. If a man has been cheated on by his wife, whilst in a polygynous marriage the result may be different because of the disparity in status between men and women in a patriarchal society. Before the Recognition of Customary Marriages Act was enacted in November 2000, traditional unions were given limited recognition. The Act addressed the issue of divorce as well as creating a distinction between those marriages concluded prior to November 2000 and those entered into afterward. Customary marriages since November 2000 where the man has not been previously married will be deemed to be in community of property, which means the couple has equal share in the estate profits and losses. If a man in a polygynous marriage wishes to dissolve a

marriage with any of his wives he will have to go to court to do so and as with civil marriage, the party requesting the divorce will have to show that the marriage has broken down irretrievably. If a man in a polygynous marriage launches divorce proceedings he may consider calling for the repayment of the *lobola* given to the wife's family. In terms of Customary law, if a man suspects his wife of having an extramarital affair which results in a pregnancy, if the man asks the wife who the father of the child is and she refuses to answer the customary marriage may be dissolved and the amount paid in damages will be determined by the court (Snider 2010: 21).

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The objective of this research is to investigate peri-urban women's views of polygyny. Neuman (1997) discusses the many reasons for social research, one of which is to find something new and original to research in the social world. The methodology is qualitative in nature. The research is conducted as case studies and narratives are used so that the participants could share their experiences through their life stories. Creswell (2009) expresses that qualitative research is best used when exploring and seeking to understand why certain individuals or groups ascribe to a social or human problem. The main objective of the research is to find out peri-urban women's views on polygyny. By listening to and recording the stories and experiences of women in such unions, the study sheds light on various facets of polygyny, the motives behind such practices, and other issues pertinent to it. Questionnaires were used and individual interviews were conducted. The study consists of 10 women ranging from age 28 to 85 years old. All the participants were in polygynous marriages. However, only one woman from each of these ten families was part of the research for this paper, and 5 of these case studies will be discussed in this paper. Participants were from a peri-urban suburb, Hammarsdale, which is approximately 45 kilometers southwest of Durban. A peri-urban area refers to a transition or interaction zone, where urban and rural activities are juxtaposed, and landscape features are subject to rapid modifications, induced by human activities (Douglas 2006). During the 1980s and 1990s, it was a notorious hotspot of political violence and the trauma experienced by lo-

cals, during this time still continues to affect the daily lives of many. Although peace now prevails, people face a myriad of social challenges such as crime, unemployed youth, drugs and alcohol abuse, HIV/AIDS and teenage pregnancy.

The research utilized convenience sampling combined with snowball sampling. The rationale for the choice of sample was based on women who had some educational background and were in polygynous marriages. These participants were selected on a voluntary basis. The language factor was taken into consideration and all the interviews were conducted in isiZulu only. These have been translated into English. Some of the questions hope to get answered are, *Why do women enter polygamous marriages? Is coercion part of the reason? If given an option would they stay married in that polygamous marriage or do they prefer a monogamous marriage? Do societal expectations of patriarchal communities contribute to these women accepting these types of marriages, assuming that they are in favor of such marriages? Is there any common link between women in polygamous marriages? Is there a particular type of woman who is more prone to a polygamous marriage? For example, do factors such as education and family background contribute? How do these women feel and act towards other women within the same polygamous marriage?*

RESULTS

Analysis of Case Studies

Although 10 case studies were conducted for this research, only 5 of these will be discussed and specific questions will be addressed.

Respondent 1 (80-year-old)

The first respondent was an eighty-year-old grandmother who got married in 1952. She said the main reason she married was because she felt societal pressures to do so. She said she grew up in a polygynous family so she had always wanted to be married into a polygynous marriage. She was fortunate because she married a traditional man who adhered to the correct ways of following tradition. Her husband asked her as his first wife if it was alright if he took the second, third and fourth wives and she agreed. As a woman who was advancing in age she did

not want to fulfill the other duties a wife had to for her husband so she welcomed additional wives into her family. She only bore her husband's one child and was happy about that. The other wives bore him children as well. The reason her husband took the second wife was because she was no longer interested in sexual intercourse. With the issue of HIV/AIDS the respondent did not have any knowledge of it except to say that she has heard of it and that is it killing thousands of people every day. She said she did not have sexual intercourse anymore with her husband so she did not worry about contracting it or any other disease for that matter.

The respondent did say she spent most of her time with her husband because he is old too and they are both retired. She says that there is jealousy and bitter fighting amongst the other wives for resources and she plays the role of mediator because she is the first wife. She feels pity for other wives in polygynous marriages because she sees how their husbands do not respect them and had just found out that their husband is marrying or already married to someone else and they must just accept it. It is also disheartening to see how their husbands continue to take wives and have mistresses and other illegitimate children outside the marriage and they are not accountable to anyone for their behavior.

The respondent does admit to initially wanting a polygynous marriage but now later in life she does regret having agreed to be a part of a polygynous marriage. She says it is very stressful being a married woman alone, let alone adding other wives to the marriage. She said she would never recommend this type of marriage but is grateful to have been blessed with a good, decent husband who respects her and their culture and traditions, and allowed her to have a voice when deciding to be part of a polygynous marriage or not.

Respondent 2 (68-years-old)

The second respondent is a sixty-eight-year old woman who got married in 1954. The respondent says she got married because in her culture women are expected to get married regardless of the type of marriage. The woman said she is the first wife and her husband married two additional women. Although the respondent said she was expected to get married, she was also in

love her husband. She bore her husband two children and the other wives in total bore him four children. She does discuss sexual intercourse with her husband. She admits to not having a lot of knowledge of HIV/AIDS but is aware that many people are dying because of it. The respondent is adamant she does not have HIV but does not clarify how she knows this with certainty. She reiterates that her husband does not have it but does not clarify how she knows this information. The respondent does voice concern of possibly contracting the disease and is deathly afraid.

The second respondent does admit to being unhappy in her marriage. She says there is constant fighting with the husband over the other wives as well as constant fighting with the other women over the husband. The fighting has also affects the children because the children have derogatory names as a result of the constant fighting and bitterness amongst the wives and husband. She also believes the fighting and jealousy is because the husband does not respect her and the other wives because he did not discuss taking on additional wives with her being the first wife she found out from other people in the community that her husband was marrying a second wife. The husband did not discuss taking a third wife with her or the second wife and that as a result, festered resentment and bitterness. She is very angry about the polygynous marriage because she did not want to be involved in a polygynous marriage and she was not even consulted about her husband taking additional wives. She would never ever recommend this type of marriage to any woman because it is degrading and unfair to women but she admits that she would rather remain in an unhappy marriage than be a single woman. As a married woman she has a status in the community and that is worth more than happiness.

Respondent 3 (65-year-old)

The third respondent married her husband in 1968 and she married him because she was madly in love with him. Her husband would later on marry five other additional wives. She gave birth to eight children and in total there are fourteen children in the polygynous marriage. She admits to discussing sexual intercourse with her husband and the other wives. She admits to not knowing anything HIV/AIDS but does know it

kills people. She says her husband and she do not have the disease but does not explain further as to how she knows this information because she also admits to not having had an HIV test.

This respondent is melancholic when discussing the state of her marriage today. She remembers when she first got married and it was just the two of them as a couple and they were happy and in love. Then the children started being born and suddenly she was no longer enough for her husband and she found out her husband had a mistress and then she became a second wife without consulting her. Then the third wife told her he had impregnated another woman and now he has to marry her and he did and then two more wives came after that. She says that everyone except the husband is unhappy in the marriage but the wives are all civil to one another to keep the peace. There is jealousy amongst them and the new younger wives are given special names.

She indicates that a polygynous marriage is the road to unhappiness and bitterness. She states that no woman can ever be happy sharing her husband with another woman or women. This type of marriage is very depressing and stressful on the wives and sometimes even the children. The children are unhappy if their mothers are unhappy and the fighting does affect them. It is not a healthy environment for children to grow up in, an environment of fighting, jealousy, resentment and possibly witchcraft. The husband is oblivious to the tension and unhappiness because he is the reason they are fighting and he keeps going and having affairs with mistresses and impregnating or marrying them without taking into consideration of the feelings of his wives or children. The respondent says she would never recommend this type of marriage to anyone and she feels pity for the young women who want to get married in this day and age because men are unfaithful and they use polygyny as an excuse to cover up their infidelities and philandering ways.

Respondent 4 (55-years-old)

The fourth respondent married in 1980 and she is the second wife. She is the second wife in a polygynous marriage of in total four wives. She has two children and the other wives in total have four. She said she got married to her

husband because she was in love with him and she did not know he was already married. She found out a week before her wedding that her fiancé at the time already had a wife. She initially wanted to call off the wedding but her father and family refused saying that the man had already paid *ilobolo* for her and that she was in the eyes of the ancestors already married to him. She went through with the wedding but she was not happy. The relationship deteriorated quickly after she gave birth to the first child. Her husband's first wife hated her even more after she had a child and they've had numerous physical confrontations. The respondent does admit to worrying about contracting HIV especially after her husband took two more additional wives and the rumors in the community that he has a mistress. She does discuss HIV/AIDS with the other wives and admits to having limited knowledge of it but insists she does not have it but does not clarify how she knows this.

Her experiences in a polygynous marriage have been horrendous. There is constant fighting, bickering, jealousy and incessant accusations of witchcraft. The wives loathe each other and it is a stressful environment to live in everyday. The husband does not respect or support them nor does he want to get involved in trying to mediate for peace. She admits that had she been stronger when she was young, she would have cancelled the wedding because in hindsight she realizes that it was a mistake. Her husband had lied to her and said he was single when he was not. She too was angry that she had been lied to and did not want to marry a man who was already married but her family forced her to do it saying that she should consider herself very lucky to have a man who wants to marry you regardless of the type of marriage it is. It is better to get married and be a married woman than die a single woman with no status in the community.

Respondent 5 (28-years-old)

The fifth respondent was the youngest and most recently married one. She got married in 1998 and there are four other wives in the polygynous marriage. She has one child from the marriage but the other wives in total have seven children. The reason she got married was because she had sex with her sister's husband and she fell pregnant and her family forced him to

marry her. She is regretful for having betrayed her sister by having had sex with her brother-in-law. She also mentions that being in a polygynous marriage is difficult and is fortunate to have her sister as the first wife because she knows how difficult it can be to be in a polygynous marriage with other strangers. She says that the husband will have sex with the other wives during the day and he will come and want sex from her at night. She said that they have a quasi-sex schedule they have with their husband and he does not always keep to the schedule. The husband arrives at their houses whenever he desires to and demands that they cook for him or have sex with him even if it is not their turn to. The young wife says there is a discussion of HIV/AIDS because the first wife in her marriage is her sister. She is aware of the dangers of having multiple partners and that it kills and she is deathly afraid of contracting it.

She did not want to marry this man because he was already married to her sister and he had many other wives but she fell pregnant and was forced to. There is constant fighting amongst the other wives although with her she is fortunate to have her sister as an ally against the other wives. There is jealousy amongst the wives and even amongst the young children. The children are also given derogatory names reflecting the hatred and anger within the marriage. She states that polygyny is a bad practice and that men keep taking on more wives, which they cannot afford but their culture allows them too. The women and children are unhappy because of the constant fighting, bickering and jealousy. The competition and stress is not a good environment to be involved in and it certainly is not a good environment to raise children in. She hates her husband and herself for the mistake she made and curses the day she was weak and had sex with him and fell pregnant. She is just grateful her sister is a good Christian woman and forgave her because she believes she would never have survived being in a polygynous marriage without a friend (sister wife).

Analysis of Questions

Analysis of some of the questions posed will be discussed and tabulated. Responses from all 10 participants are reflected with some participants indicating more than one reason for their marriage.

Question 1: Are you legally married? Or was ilobolo only paid?

Answer: All said yes. It was customary marriage (Table 1).

Every respondent answered 'Yebo' (yes) to question 1. Question 1 was important to ask first because there are many people who just pay *ilobolo* and consider themselves married and not go through with an actual wedding ceremony. Consideration was also taken into the importance of the respondents being legally married in terms of customary law and recognized by the government as a legitimate marriage because it adds an element of legitimacy to their marriage. It is interesting that the issue of 'love' followed by 'pressures of society' and 'culture' rated the highest for reasons of getting married.

It is interesting to note that the oldest women, the 80-year-old, had no knowledge at all of HIV/AIDS. Her reasoning was that she is old and has no interest in sex and therefore was not apprehensive when her husband wanted to take a second wife whom he could have sex with. The oldest woman had no concerns at all about

contracting HIV/AIDS because she was no longer sexually active. The younger women had some knowledge of HIV/AIDS. Although the younger women's knowledge was not extensive on HIV/AIDS, they were aware of the dangers of having multiple sexual partners but they also acknowledged that they are in a situation in which they have no control over their own sexuality or that of their husbands. The younger women did express fear of asking their husband to use a condom because he would get angry and never have sexual intercourse with them again and possibly punish them by not giving them money for support. All these women insist they do not have it but they did not specify how they are so certain of their HIV status if they have not been tested. They also insist their husband does not have it and they do not say how they are so certain of his status since they say he has not been tested either (Table 2).

All the wives alleged that there was jealousy amongst them. All the younger wives said there was constant fighting and name-calling going on between them. One wife said there is constant fighting because they were all vying for

Table 1: Why did you get married?

<i>Issues identified</i>	<i>Comments</i>	<i>Popularity of comments</i>
<i>Culture.</i>	It is the Zulu culture, which expects a woman to get married regardless of the type of marriage.	3
<i>Expected to get married.</i>	Patriarchal society we live in expects women to be married.	1
<i>Pressure of society to get married.</i>	Society looks down on old, unmarried women.	3
<i>Love.</i>	In love with the man.	4

Table 2: What do you know about HIV/AIDS?

<i>Issues identified</i>	<i>Comments</i>	<i>Popularity of comments</i>
<i>Ignorant of HIV/AIDS.</i>	Has no interest in sex and that is why allowed her husband to take a second wife he could have sex with.	1
<i>Heard of HIV/AIDS.</i>	Five women have heard of HIV/AIDS.	5
<i>Has limited knowledge of HIV/AIDS.</i>	Although they have very little knowledge of HIV/AIDS they all know that it is real and it is killing a lot of people.	3
<i>Fear of possibly contracting HIV/AIDS.</i>	Know that many married people have HIV/AIDS because their husbands were unfaithful to them.	5
<i>Discuss HIV/AIDS with other wives.</i>	Do discuss with other wives and try to find out if their husband is being faithful to all of them.	1
<i>Discuss HIV/AIDS with husband.</i>	Does discuss HIV/AIDS with her husband, who insists he is faithful to all his wives.	1
<i>Does Not Discuss HIV/AIDS with Her Husband.</i>	Does not talk about sex or HIV/AIDS because it is against her culture to discuss such things.	1

the husband's time as well as limited resources for their children. One woman said they all intensely hate each other but they keep up appearances for the husband and the family. They are all civil to one another. The oldest woman said she experienced no unhappiness, jealousy or fighting because all the young wives respect her and treat her like their mother. Regarding name-calling, the wives said they all have specific derogatory names for each other because they hate each other. One wife said the younger wives are given specific names. As for witchcraft, the wives all accuse each other of using witchcraft to bewitch their husband if the husband gives one particular wife more time, attention or money.

The wives expressed how unhappy they were in their marriages but would rather stay unhappy than a single woman. They said they are respected more in society since they are married women. There were two wives who felt that they were being used and abused in their marriages but had no other alternative but to take the abuse because they want the respect and recognition of being a married woman in society. One wife expressed that she felt taken advantage of because she was old and the husband paid more attention to the younger wives

and took care of their needs before hers. One wife said she is in a hopeless situation and she and the other wives all know they all may be infected with HIV but are too afraid to go and get tested. They know that they all may be infected because their husband is a womanizer. Six women expressed that it is the patriarchal society they live in that devalues them and uses them whilst the husband is praised for having many wives regardless of their happiness. All the wives felt societal pressures to get married regardless of the type of marriage. They admit they too are to blame to some extent because they want to get married for the respect they receive in society but are unhappy in their marriages (Table 3).

The participants were unanimous in saying that their husband is not allowed to take a mistress but do understand that they were all technically mistresses before they became wives. One participant reiterated that although in a true polygynous custom the husband is not allowed to take a mistress but in reality he does take one if he wants one and no one can stop him. One wife did try and stop him by reporting him to the family and the elders told him to stop behaving like a child and to start behaving like a married adult and to end the affair. He then decided to marry the mistress and she became his second wife (Table 4).

Table 3: What are your experiences in a polygamous marriage?

<i>Issues identified</i>	<i>Comments</i>	<i>Popularity of comments</i>
<i>Jealousy.</i>	Every wife is jealous of each other.	8
<i>Constant fighting.</i>	There is constant fighting with the co-wives over husband's attention, time and limited resources.	7
<i>The pretense.</i>	All the women pretend to like each other but they all hate each other. They keep up pretenses for the husband and the children.	1
<i>Name-calling.</i>	The wives are constantly fighting and calling each other derogatory names.	6
<i>Witchcraft.</i>	There are constant accusations of other wives using witchcraft on the husband.	6
<i>Unhappiness.</i>	Every woman expressed her unhappiness because of the constant bickering and tension.	8
<i>Feelings of being used and abused.</i>	Two wives expressed their feelings of just being used.	2
<i>Taken advantage of.</i>	One wife felt she was taken advantage of because she is old and her husband kept marrying younger people.	1
<i>Unappreciated.</i>		3
<i>Patriarchal society, which encourages abuse of women.</i>		6
<i>Societal expectations</i>		8
<i>Wanted this type of plural marriage.</i>	Wanted this type of marriage because as she got older she realized her husband had needs she no longer had an interest in fulfilling and therefore welcomed a second wife.	1

Source: Author

Table 4: Is it alright if your husband has a mistress/girlfriend whilst in a polygamous marriage?

<i>Issues identified</i>	<i>Comments</i>	<i>Popularity of comments</i>
<i>Husband does have mistress.</i>	These wives suspect their husbands to have a mistress.	6
<i>Husband is not allowed to have a mistress.</i>	Husband has to ask permission.	6
<i>Husband is allowed to have a mistress.</i>	Agree that all the following wives were mistresses first before becoming wives.	
<i>Husband takes a mistress if he wants one and no one can do anything about it.</i>	Live in a patriarchal society where the husband has all the power to do as he pleases.	1
<i>Reported to family about husband's mistress.</i>	Took action against him.	1

Table 5: What are your thoughts on polygyny?

<i>Issues identified</i>	<i>Comments</i>	<i>Popularity of comments</i>
<i>Not fair to women.</i>	N/A	6
<i>Hate it.</i>	N/A	4
<i>It is a bad situation to be in.</i>	N/A	6
<i>It is wrong and degrading to women.</i>	N/A	6
<i>It is not a good thing but do understand the patriarchal society we live in.</i>	N/A	2
<i>Is a good thing that builds families?</i>	N/A	1

All the women agreed that polygyny is a dire situation to be married into. The older woman agreed with the other woman that it is a grim situation to be married into but also admitted to being fortunate to have a husband who is respectful of her and always asks her permission

before he does take another wife. She also admits that she sympathizes with the other wives who are not as fortunate as her to have a truly cultural husband who follows the traditions and cultures as they should be followed and not like the men today who have no sense of what real culture or tradition is and go around disrespecting their wives and spreading diseases and death to them with their philandering. Four of the women said they hated it but will have to tolerate it because they want to be married to somebody. They said they get respect in their communities if they are married women. All the women agreed it is very degrading to women and some women went on to say that they feel like old rags that are used and discarded when a new young wife arrives. Two of the women said it is a dreadful situation to be married into but do understand that they live in a patriarchal society where the men have all the power. The oldest woman was the only one who was happy in her marriage and she said she likes this type of marriage because it builds families (Table 5).

One woman said it was moderately successful because being in a polygamous marriage can

Table 6: How do you rate your polygamous marriage?

<i>Issues identified</i>	<i>Comments</i>	<i>Popularity of comments</i>
<i>Moderately successful</i>	It is not an easy marriage but if the people involved are committed they can make it a success.	2
<i>Successful</i>		1
<i>Highly successful</i>	It is a highly successful marriage because everyone affable and there is harmony and the children are happy.	1
<i>Moderately unsuccessful</i>		
<i>Unsuccessful</i>		
<i>Failure</i>	No communication at all	1
<i>Dismal failure</i>	The husband does not provide them with basic needs.	2

never be the same as being the only wife to your husband. There are things that happen against your will that you are unable to control or do anything about. There are always misunderstandings with one's spouse, which result from lack of proper communication. It is not easy to open up to your husband when you are in a polygynous marriage. Another wife said it is very difficult and sometimes contemplates divorcing him because he no longer does the things he is supposed to do for her as his wife. He does not know how to balance his love for both of them. He loves the other wife better and he cannot even pretend to care for her. This makes her think of leaving him and she cannot always control her bitter feelings. One wife said it used to be a happy marriage until he took more wives because it meant fewer resources for her and her children. She says he always complains about having too much to pay for such as food, clothing and education for the children and yet he is the one who went and got the wives. Only one wife said she is happy and everything is in harmony and the children are all happy as well in their polygynous marriage. One wife said it is successful because they all get along and there is open communication. Two of the wives who said their marriage is a dismal failure said exactly the same thing that there is considerable conflict and marital difficulty. There is a lot of misunderstanding. Their husband does not buy food for them; he only buys for the other wife and her children. This affects their children negatively. With the exception of the one wife almost all the wives speak about the same issues that concern them in this type of marriage. Most said there is constant conflict, fighting, tears and stress and it affects everyone in the family (Table 6).

DISCUSSION

Polygyny is a very complicated and complex topic to research because intrinsic to it are several factors which are deeply intertwined. Amongst these are culture, tradition, and societal expectations, personal and even political considerations. Furthermore, there are many risks in a polygynous marriage, the most dangerous being the danger of contracting HIV because of the multiple sexual partners. The women in this study mentioned that they have a deathly fear of contracting HIV but will continue to have sexual relations with their husband

without a condom because they are afraid the husband will no longer support them if they ask him to use a condom. Many women suffer physical, emotional, psychological as well financial abuse in marriage but more so in a polygynous one. The women in this study spoke of the abuse and the multiple natures of this abuse. Firstly, by their husband, secondly by their in-laws and thirdly, by the other wives within the marriage. All the women expressed how unhappy they were in their marriages but would rather stay unhappy than remain a single woman. They said they are respected more in society since they are married women.

CONCLUSION

This study discussed polygyny that was until recently, a diminishing practice because of urbanization and the high cost of living, has experienced a 'comeback' of sorts because of the current president who is a polygynist and many other public figures who are polygynists as well. This study focused on women who willingly entered such unions and their reasons for doing so. The study is different than the previous studies conducted because it focused on women who were educated and had employment that made them financially independent. Previous studies focused on poor rural women who had no better option but to marry into polygynous marriages for a better life because in the past it was only wealthy men who could afford to support more than one family and unfortunately that is not the case in today's society, now it is just any man who wants to 'elevate his manhood' by having more than one wife but who he cannot support. The women expressed deep and sometimes paralyzing fear that they might have HIV or can very likely be infected with it in the near future because of their husband's many sexually partners. The women expressed that although they did make an income they still needed support from their husband and if they did not have sexual relations with him he would not support them and their children. The women also stated that they did not have control over their sexuality because the husband would arrive at their house whenever he pleased and if he demanded sex they would have to comply or he would abandon them. He would go and have sex with another of his wives and he would continue to support her. One woman expressed that at times

she felt no better than a prostitute, a prostitute within a marriage because she would have to do certain things to gain favors with her husband so he would support her and her children and not give more of the limited resources to the other wives. They also agreed that whether in a polygynous marriage or a monogamous marriage it makes no difference because the husband will have other sexual partners outside the marriage and they do not have the power to stop it because when they question their husbands about such behavior they are met with abuse and arrogant responses that they are men and can do as they please and no woman can tell them what to do or question their behavior.

Women suffer physical, emotional, psychological as well financial abuse in any marriage but more so in a polygynous marriage. The women in this study did speak of abuse but they are triply abused, first by their husband, then their in-laws and finally by the other wives in the marriage. These women spoke of the name-calling and that they all have specific derogatory names for each other because they hate each other. Thus, the plight of Black women in polygynous marriages is a moot aspect.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The findings show that regardless of education and financial stability, women are still victims of their culture, families and communities. This study revealed that Black women are oppressed by their culture, family, society, husbands and other women. What could be recommended for further research is that it could be delved in-depth the relationships between the co-wives and why they perpetuate the abuse of other women and the consequences of such abuse. If society accepts and encourages polygyny then that compelling societal force will bear upon women to succumb to its pressures and accept polygyny as a 'preferable' marriage

form. It would also be recommended that a study into the children of polygynous marriages and their thoughts and coping mechanisms of being in a union if where there exists constant fighting, jealousy and general unhappiness on all parties involved be researched and the impact thereof assessed. The children of such unions offered a very unique and intriguing angle to the issues of polygynous unions and most often than not the children do suffer a great deal and this suffering is largely ignored.

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