



IMPACT OF POLYGAMOUS MARRIAGE ARRANGEMENT ON CHILDREN EDUCATION IN THE TEMPANE DISTRICT

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ABSTRACT: *One critical area that has received limited empirical attention in research is the impact of polygamous family structures on the education of children who grew up in such households. This study was therefore conducted to establish the effect of this cultural and social institution called polygamous marriage on children education. This qualitative study used a case study design to collect data from 20 individuals from polygamous families. Data was gathered using an interview guide and analysed thematically. From the data analyses, it was found that polygamous marriage has both positive and negative effects on the education of children from those families though the negative consequences seem to have outweighed the positive. It was therefore concluded that polygamous marriage has the potential of influencing children education positively or negatively depending on the character or attitude of the spouses involved.*

KEYWORDS: Polygamous Marriage, Polygamous Household Children, Education.



INTRODUCTION

Polygamy, which is the practice of having more than one spouse, has been a longstanding cultural and social institution in various parts of the world including Ghana. Polygamy can be classified into two main forms: polygyny (a man having more than one wife) and polyandry (a woman having more than one husband). In this study, the interest is on the former since it is the one considered acceptable and practiced in the northern part of Ghana including the Tempene District where the study was conducted. The prevalence of polygamy has been influenced by religious beliefs, cultural norms, economic factors, and legal regulations. It has been practiced in diverse cultures across the world. For instance, in parts of Africa, polygamy has been practiced as a traditional custom, and it has been linked to economic and social factors (Kuper, 2002). While polygamy has declined in many parts of the world due to legal and cultural changes, it still exists in some countries of which Ghana is one. Countries such as Saudi Arabia and parts of sub-Saharan Africa have higher incidences of polygamous marriages. Additionally, some immigrant communities in Western countries continue the practice within the boundaries of their respective legal systems (Clark et al., 2015; Al-Krenawi, 2000). With the shifting societal norms, legal and cultural changes as well as increased awareness of human rights, there has been that growing interest in understanding the potential impacts of this type of marriage arrangement on family dynamics, particularly on the education of children within such family structures.

While much attention has been given to the emotional and psychological aspects of polygamous relationships, there is a limited understanding of how this family structure or marriage type impacts children education, hence the need for this study to fill the gap by examining the potential influences of polygamy on children's educational journey.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Polygamous families often have larger household sizes due to the presence of multiple wives and their children. This can potentially strain the family's financial resources, as they have to be distributed among a larger number of dependents. As a result, there might be reduced financial capacity to invest in children's education, including expenses related to school fees, books, uniforms, and other educational materials (Chikwature & Oyedele 2016). A study by Gibson and Mckenzie (2010) found that polygamous families allocated fewer resources to children's education due to increased competition for resources. Also, studies have indicated that households practicing polygamy may experience economic challenges that can affect children's educational attainment (Doss, 2013; Sear & Marlowe, 2009). Again, studies have indicated that the academic achievement as measured by examination results was found to be lower among children from polygamous families than children from monogamous families (Al-Krenawi & Lighman, 2000; Al-Krenawi & Slomin-Nevo, 2008; Elbedour et al., 2003). However, in some cases polygamous households may provide children with access to a larger extended family network, potentially leading to increased emotional and financial support. This could positively impact children's education by offering them a wider range of role models and resources.

Again, in polygamous families, the husband's attention might be divided, leading to reduced involvement in children's education, such as helping with homework, attending parent-teacher



meetings, and offering academic guidance. Different research works have proven that the emotional availability of parents is an important factor in children's educational outcomes, hence the divided attention of the man in polygamous family could impact negatively on the children's motivation, self-esteem, and overall educational experience (Amato & Fowler, 2002).

Furthermore, the presence of multiple siblings from different mothers in a polygamous household might lead to complex sibling relationships and potential rivalry. Sibling rivalry can create stress and tension within the household, potentially influencing the children's emotional well-being and ability to focus on their studies (Jensen, 2012). Also, children in polygamous families could experience feelings of insecurity or a sense of divided loyalty among their parents and siblings. These emotional challenges might affect their self-esteem and motivation to excel academically.

Moreso, Egunsola (2014) in his study on the influence of marital status, family type and size on academic performance of secondary school students in Agricultural Science found that family type and size have a significant influence on students' academic performance. His study implied that students from nuclear families are likely to get more attention in their learning from parents than their colleagues from polygamous homes.

Last but definitely not the least, polygamous marriages have been criticized for reinforcing gender inequalities, as women's roles might be limited to managing the household and raising children. This can affect the children's attitudes toward gender roles and opportunities, potentially impacting girls' access to education. Research has shown that gender equality within families is linked to better educational outcomes for children (Kalmijn, 2015). However, Assimonye and Nneji (2020) found that home type (monogamous or polygamous) has no significant influence on students' performances in English and Mathematics.

METHODOLOGY

A case study design was employed in this qualitative study to gather data from information rich individuals who are directly involved in or affected by polygamous family arrangements to gain a comprehensive understanding of the effects of polygamy on children's education. Participants included fifteen parents (ten women and five men) and five children of various age groups from polygamous families who were selected through purposive sampling. The research was conducted in the Tempane District (one of the districts in northern Ghana) where polygamy is practiced and accepted, ensuring a diverse range of views. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with individuals who grew up in polygamous households and the data collected were analysed in themes. The thematic analysis involved the identification of patterns, themes, and insights within the interview data. It also involved a systematic process of coding, categorization, and interpretation of the narratives provided by the participants. Recurring themes related to children's educational experiences within polygamous families were identified. Guba and Lincoln (1985) criteria, as cited in Kombat et al. (2023), was adopted to ensure trustworthiness.



ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

Informed consent was obtained from all participants, ensuring that they understand the purpose, procedures, and potential implications of the study. Confidentiality and anonymity were also maintained and participants had the right to withdraw from the study at any point. The women (mothers) were labelled M1, M2, M3, ..., M10; the men (fathers) were labelled F1, F2, ..., F5 whilst the children were labelled C1, C2, ..., C5.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

From the analyses of the interview data, it was realized that polygamous marriage arrangements have both positive and negative influence on the education of students from such households.

The parents in particular revealed that polygamous marriage has negative implications on the education of their children citing that they (the parents) are not being able to provide the necessary educational support needed by all the children in the household as a result of limited resources coupled with the presence of multiple children from multiple spouses. They reported that their husbands find it difficult providing children with stationeries and other learning materials, payment of school fees, getting involved in children's assignments and homeworks as well as providing the necessary emotional and psychological support and educational guidance, and that this has resulted in their children performing poorly in their academics of late. Some even reported that their children had to quit school in order to engage in other means of livelihood and menial jobs as a result of their husband's inability to take care of them in school and that this happened when their husbands married their rivals and they all had to depend on the little resources their husbands had. This finding corroborates the findings of Al-Krenawi and Lightman (2000), Al-Krenawi and Slonim-Nevo (2008) and Elbedour et al. (2003) all of which found that children from polygamous families performed poorly in their academics. It also agrees with Chikwature and Oyedele (2016) whose study found that learners in polygamous families lack parental material and motivational support to continue with their education.

Below are interview transcripts in that regard:

M3: "To me, I will not say polygamous marriage is helpful considering what it has done to my children education. When I was my husband only wife with my three children, things were going well for us including my children education. My three children were all in a private school where they received better tuition and their father was able to provide all the things needed for success in their education but all that had to stop when he married a second wife and her children too started schooling. My children were withdrawn from the private school and they had to attend our village public school together with my rival children because our husband could no longer afford to take care of our eight children in the private school neither talking of getting involved in doing their assignments and homework's as usual of him and since then I have observed that my children no longer attend to their books as they use to. In fact, just last two terms the integrated science teacher of the one in Junior High School two complained about his unsatisfactory performance which I think it is as a result of my husband inability to provide the necessary stationery, guidance and monitoring or tracking their learning as he used to do."



M7: "Polygamous marriage is not for the poor. My husband tried it and it has brought a mess to all of us including our children education. As we speak now, it is only the little ones who are currently attending school but their elder brothers have to stop schooling and engage in some menial jobs since their father cannot provide for their education any longer as a result of the presence of multiple children in the house."

F1: "I will not advise any young man out there to marry more than one wife. I am a victim of that situation and I know the negative consequences of this marriage arrangement. I was advised negatively by my friends to take a second wife and I am now suffering in it. My main worry is how it is affecting my children education, I no longer get the time to help them in their school work's due to the pressure mounted on me to work extra hard just to make ends meet. I find it difficult sending them to good schools due to my low-income level coupled with the high number of children and this has serious implications on my children education."

The positive part of the polygamous marriage arrangement was seen from the responses of the children and some of the parents (fathers). It was discovered that polygamous marriage promoted some kind of healthy competition in students learning among children of rival mothers and this has led to an improvement in children's academic performances. It was also found that the educated grown children from polygamous families served as role models for their step brothers and sisters and that these educated siblings served as a motivation and encouragement to the young ones to also study hard and be like their role models. This finding is contrary to most of the findings in literature (Chikwature & Oyedele, 2016; Al-Krenawi & Lightman, 2000; Al-Krenawi & Slonim-Nevo, 2008; Elbedour et al., 2003). As those studies in literature found polygamy to have a negative influence on learners' education, this particular finding in the current study revealed a positive impact of polygamy on learners' education.

Below are interview transcripts in this regard:

F3: "I think polygamous marriage have impacted positively in my children education. I say this because anytime I am talking to the little ones about education, I use their elder ones who are now government workers to cite as an example for them to follow and this have actually been motivating and encouraging them to learn hard because they want to one day be like them. Also, these role models of theirs have been playing several roles including paying their school fees, providing awards for whoever is placed from first to third in any subject just to motivate and encourage them to learn."

C4: "I think it's good our father married three wives. Our elderly siblings though from different mothers, have been helping us a lot. They assist us in our studies and even provide us with the necessary learning materials needed for us to be successful in our studies. Also, myself and my step sister have been learning together and competing keenly in class and that led to a tremendous improvement in our performance. In fact, both of us are always placed among the first seven students in all the subjects and we are happy for that."



CONCLUSION

Based on the findings of this investigation, it was concluded that polygamous marriage has both positive and negative influence on children's education though the negative impact is more than the positive. Polygamous parents, especially the wives, should therefore ensure that they live peacefully with one another, inculcating the habit of togetherness among their children in order to eliminate any unhealthy rivalry among them which has the potential of disrupting their studies and academic pursuit.

Future Research

Longitudinal studies should be conducted to provide insights into the long-term impact of polygamous family structures on educational attainment and career paths. Also, comparative studies should be carried out across different cultural contexts to offer a broader viewpoint on this complex issue.

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