

# The Impact of Christian Teachings on Traditional Polygamous Marriage Practices among the Nandi Community, Kenya

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## Abstract

Marriage is a fundamental social institution that shapes family organization, cultural identity, and social order within human societies. Among the Nandi community, polygamous marriage has traditionally served important social, economic, and lineage functions that sustain communal cohesion. However, the introduction of Christianity created tensions with these indigenous practices, resulting in the discreet continuation of polygamy or the selective integration of Christian teachings with traditional values, thereby producing a dual value system. This study investigated the impact of Christian teachings on traditional polygamous marriage practices of the Nandi community. It was guided by Diffusion Theory, Structural-Functionalist Theory, and Acculturation Theory, and employed a descriptive research design. The target population comprised of 1,000 participants, from which a sample size of 286 respondents was determined using Glenn's (1992) tabulation. Data were collected through questionnaires, in-depth interviews, and focus group discussions, and analyzed thematically using the Likert scale approach and narration. The study found that while strong majorities affirm the relational and spiritual dimensions of Christian marriage (58.0%-73.3%), Christianity is simultaneously driving significant transformations in Nandi polygamous practices (61.8%-93.9%), even as church reconciliation strategies remain mixed and contested, with support and opposition often closely divided (45.0%-63.4%). It concluded that Christian marriage teachings have reshaped marriage in the Nandi community, but ongoing tensions reveal a complex negotiation between Christian ideals and traditional cultural norms. And the study recommended that churches in the region strengthen culturally sensitive and theologically grounded interventions to support a balanced reconciliation between Christian marriage ideals and Nandi cultural traditions.

**Keywords:** Christianity, Polygamous Marriage, Nandi Community, Cultural Transformation, Traditional Marriage Practices.

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## BACKGROUND OF THE STUDY

Marriage is a foundational social institution that influences family organization, cultural identity, and social order within human societies. Different societies have historically developed diverse marital systems such as monogamy, polygyny, and polyandry based on their cultural, economic, religious, and social realities. In the Western Christian tradition, marriage gradually evolved into an exclusive and lifelong union between one man and one woman through the influence of church teachings, ecclesiastical laws, and missionary expansion (Goody, 2012; MacCulloch, 2003). As result, monogamy became institutionalized not only as a religious ideal but also as a symbol of morality, civilization, and social stability. Even in contemporary secular societies, Christian monogamous marriage continues to influence legal and social structures (Pew Research Center, 2020).

In contrast, many indigenous societies across Africa traditionally embraced polygamous marriage systems deeply rooted in kinship organization, communal responsibility, lineage continuity, and economic cooperation. Among African communities such as the Yoruba, Maasai, Zulu, Akan, and Nandi, polygamy functioned as an important social institution regulated by customary laws and communal expectations rather than merely a private marital arrangement (Oboler, 1995). Within the Nandi community, polygamous marriage promotes social cohesion, labor organization, lineage continuity, and communal solidarity. However, the expansion of Christianity through missionary activity and colonial influence introduced monogamous marriage as the only biblically acceptable marital model (Magesa, 2010; Coontz, 2016). Christian missionaries condemned polygamy and often required converts to abandon multiple marriages as a condition for baptism, church leadership, and full participation in Christian life (Mbiti, 1969).

Despite the continued influence of Christianity, polygamy remains prevalent among the Nandi, especially in rural areas where customary traditions are deeply rooted. This practice is further reinforced by the Marriage Act of 2014, which recognizes customary marriages, including polygamous unions, thereby creating tension between Christian doctrine, state law, and cultural obligations (Republic of Kenya, 2014). Accordingly, some Christian converts continue to practice polygamy despite church condemnation, while others seek to reconcile Christian teachings with traditional marital responsibilities, resulting in what Kobimbo (2019) describes as a “dual value system.”

In addition, much of the literature on Christianity and African marriage systems remains largely historical, theological, or generalized, offering limited insight into the lived realities of local communities (Oboler, 2005; Magesa, 2010). As a result, the influence of Christian teachings on marital decision-making, household organization, kinship obligations, gender relations, and social cohesion at the grassroots level is insufficiently explored. The continued practice of polygamy alongside Christian influence, coupled with persistent tensions between religious teachings and traditional values, underscores the need for this study on the impact of Christian teachings on traditional polygamous marriage practices among the Nandi community in Kenya.

### Statement of the Problem

Marriage among the Nandi community is a vital cultural institution that promotes lineage continuity, social cohesion, economic cooperation, and kinship support. However, the introduction of Christianity brought monogamous marriage teachings that conflict with traditional polygamous practices. Consequently, many Christian converts experience tensions between religious expectations and cultural obligations, leading to clandestine polygamous

unions, moral dilemmas, and the emergence of a what can be described as irreconcilable “dual value system” in which Christian teachings and traditional practices coexist in contradiction. In addition, although several studies have examined Christianity and African marriage systems, most have adopted historical, theological, or generalized perspectives, with limited empirical focus on the lived experiences of the Nandi community. There is inadequate empirical evidence on how Christian teachings have influenced traditional polygamous marriage practices among the Nandi. This gap necessitated the present study to examine the impact of Christian teachings on traditional polygamous marriage practices among the Nandi community in Kenya.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

Christian teachings on marriage profoundly reshaped traditional polygamous marriage systems across many societies, particularly in Africa, Asia, and parts of the Middle East (Lamin, 2009; Anderson, 2014). Historically and traditionally, polygamy functioned as a socially embedded institution that served multiple purposes, including labor organization, lineage continuity, social security for women, population growth, and the strengthening of kinship and political alliances. Within many African communities, for instance, polygamous households contributed to agricultural productivity and ensured communal resilience through extended family networks. However, the expansion of Christianity through missionary activity and colonial encounters introduced a competing moral framework that positioned monogamy as the only legitimate and divinely sanctioned form of marriage, thereby reshaping indigenous marital norms and practices.

The Christian rejection of polygamy is primarily rooted in biblical interpretations of marriage, especially Genesis 2:24, and Jesus’ teachings in Matthew 19:3–9, which affirm a lifelong monogamous union between one man and one woman (Mulvaney, 2019). While the Old Testament contains examples of polygamous relationships, many Christian traditions interpret these as historical concessions rather than normative ideals. Informed by this, Christian doctrine highlights monogamy, exclusivity, fidelity, and permanence as central ethical foundations of marriage. Through missionary preaching, catechesis, and institutional regulations like baptismal conditions, church discipline, and leadership restrictions, these ideals are consistently transmitted to societies where polygamy has long been culturally normative (Bompani & Frahm-Arp, 2017; Witte, 2012). In many mission contexts, converts are required to abandon existing polygamous unions to fully participate in church life, often producing moral dilemmas, fractured households, and community tensions.

Scholarly writings widely observe that these Christian interventions significantly undermine the social legitimacy of polygamy and restructure indigenous marital systems. For instance, in many traditional African contexts, polygamy had functioned and continues to function as a vital socio-economic institution that supported food security, widow care, and communal solidarity (Sarpong, 2013). However, missionary discourse frequently dismisses these functions and redefines marriage through Western Christian ideals, thereby imposing a moral hierarchy that favored monogamy (Magesa, 2010). Colonial legal frameworks also reinforced this shift by recognizing civil and Christian monogamous marriages while marginalizing customary polygamous unions (Merry, 2000). Gradually, monogamous marriage became associated with modernity, education, and social advancement, contributing to the gradual erosion of polygamy’s public legitimacy.

Despite these structural pressures, the influence of Christian teachings on polygamy is not uniform or absolute. Polygamous practices persist in many societies, often in modified,

negotiated, or partially concealed forms (Shorter, 2006; Phiri, 2011). In some contexts, individuals maintain traditional polygamous arrangements while simultaneously participating in Christian faith, resulting in what scholars describe as a “dual moral system” in which Christian doctrine and indigenous practice coexist in tension (Gifford, 1998; Kroeger, 2007). This persistence underscores both the resilience of culturally embedded institutions and the limitations of doctrinal authority in fully transforming lived social realities. In response, African theologians such as Mbiti (1969), Oduyoye (2001), and Nyamiti (2015) advocate for inculturation approaches that engage polygamy as a complex social institution requiring contextual theological interpretation rather than treating it solely as a moral deviation.

Gender dynamics is another significant element that complicates the relationship between Christian teachings and the practice of polygamy. Christian critiques often frame polygamy as inherently oppressive due to unequal marital relations, emotional strain, and diminished mutuality (Turaki, 1999; Oduyoye, 2001). However, feminist scholars caution against assuming that monogamy is inherently more equitable; they argue that gender inequality exist in both systems depending on broader socio-economic conditions (Amadiume, 1997; Tamale, 2020). Moreover, while Christian monogamy introduced ideals of emotional intimacy, companionship, and personal choice (Cherlin, 2009; Parsitau, 2018), it has also, in some cases, weakened extended kinship support systems that previously provided collective care for women and children.

Additionally, contemporary legal pluralism also shapes the interaction between Christianity and polygamy. Many African states, including Kenya, recognize both customary polygamous marriages and statutory monogamous unions, allowing individuals to navigate multiple legal and cultural frameworks (Banda, 2021). At the same time, generational shifts influenced by migration to urban centres and other areas, education, and global Christian norms lead many young people to prefer monogamous marriage, often associating polygamy with tradition or incompatibility with modern Christian identity (Pew Research Center, 2020; Gathogo, 2017). Even so, polygamy remains socially significant in various rural and culturally rooted settings where economic and communal inducements continue to sustain its practice.

## Theoretical Framework

The study was informed by Social Change Theory, proposed by Kurt Lewin (1947). The theory posits that societies transform when new beliefs, values, institutions, and social practices interact with established cultural systems. In the context of the Nandi community, the introduction of Christianity brought new teachings concerning marriage that interacted with pre-existing Nandi marital norms, including polygamy. Christian teachings concerning monogamy, fidelity, marital exclusivity, and the Christian understanding of marriage consequently became forces of cultural and social transformation. However, such transformation was not necessarily complete or uniform; individuals and communities continue to resist, negotiate, adapt, or selectively incorporate new values while retaining elements of traditional marriage practices.

## METHODOLOGY

The study employed a descriptive survey research design and was guided by the Social Change Theory. The target comprised 1,000 participants, made up of lay church members, elders, pastors, individuals in polygamous and monogamous marriages, and Christian educationists, as illustrated in Table 1.1 below.

**Table 1.1: The target population, sampling techniques and sample Size**

| Target group                   | Target Population | Sampling Technique | Sample Size | Percentage  |
|--------------------------------|-------------------|--------------------|-------------|-------------|
| Church Members                 | 250               | Simple Random      | 68          | 23.8%       |
| Community Elders               | 125               | Purposive          | 50          | 17.5%       |
| Pastors                        | 125               | Purposive          | 32          | 11.2%       |
| Members of monogamous marriage | 250               | Simple Random      | 68          | 23.8%       |
| Members of Polygamous marriage | 250               | Simple Random      | 68          | 23.8%       |
| <b>Total</b>                   | <b>1000</b>       |                    | <b>286</b>  | <b>100%</b> |

*Source: Researcher (2026)*

From the target population of 1000, a sample size of 286 respondents was determined using Israel Glenn's (1992) tabulation formula. Israel recommends that, from a target population of 1000, and adequate sample size is 286 respondents. Data were collected using structured questionnaires, interview guides, and focused group discussions. From the sample size of 286, 131 respondents participated in answering the questionnaire that generated quantitative data, while 155 participated in the interviews and focused group discussions for qualitative data.

The purposive sampling of 50 community elders was based on their direct knowledge and experience of traditional Nandi marriage customs, including polygamy, bride wealth, marriage rituals, and customary decision-making. Elders were therefore intentionally over-sampled because they possessed specialized historical and cultural knowledge that ordinary community members might not have had. In contrast, the 68 church members (27.2%) were sampled at a lower proportion because they were primarily included to provide perspectives on the influence of Christian teachings and contemporary marital practices. The unequal sampling proportions were therefore deliberate rather than accidental, whereby oversampling community elders ensured adequate representation of information-rich participants with specialized knowledge of traditional practices, while the comparatively lower proportion of Church Members was sufficient to capture Christian perspectives within the study. This approach strengthened the study by ensuring that groups with greater relevance to specific research questions were adequately represented.

The analysis of quantitative data was done thematically using the Likert-scale approach whereby items were scored on a five-point scale, ranging from 1 to 5, to measure respondents' levels of agreement with each statement. Strongly Disagree (SD)=1, Disagree (D)=2, Neutral (N)=3, Agree (SA)=4, and Strongly Agree (SA)=5. Higher scores indicated stronger agreement with the statements, while lower scores indicated stronger disagreement. While qualitative data was analyzed in verbatim.



## RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

The objective of the study was to examine the impact of Christian teachings on traditional Nandi polygamous marriage practices. The thematic field questionnaire results informed by Likert-scale items are as presented in table 1.2 below.

**Table 1.2: The impact of Christian teachings on Traditional Nandi polygamous marriage practices**

| ITEM                                     | D -<br>Disagree | SD -<br>Strongly<br>Disagree | N -<br>Neutraal | A -<br>Agree   | SA -<br>Strongly<br>Agree | Total<br>&<br>% |
|------------------------------------------|-----------------|------------------------------|-----------------|----------------|---------------------------|-----------------|
| Decline of Polygamous marriages          | R-23<br>%-17.6  | R-18<br>%-13.7               | R-9<br>%-6.9    | R-67<br>%-51.1 | R-14<br>%-10.7            | 131<br>100%     |
| Transformation of Bride Wealth Practices | R-13<br>%-9.9   | R-8<br>%-6.1                 | R-7<br>%-5.3    | R-90<br>%-68.7 | R-13<br>%-9.9             | 131<br>100%     |
| Erosion of Traditional marriage Rituals  | R-16<br>%-12.2  | R-5<br>%-3.8                 | R-6<br>%-4.6    | R-93<br>%-71.0 | R-11<br>%-8.4             | 131<br>100%     |
| Change in Marriage Decision-Making       | R-15<br>%-11.5  | R-13<br>%-9.9                | R-9<br>%-6.9    | R-87<br>%-66.4 | R-7<br>%-5.3              | 131<br>100%     |

**Key:** R – Respondents, %-Percentage

**Source:** Field Data, (2026)

The study themes (decline of polygamous marriages, transformation of bride wealth practices, erosion of traditional marriage rituals, and change in marriage decision-making) presented in table 1.2 guided the collection and analysis of data. These themes emerged from the study's central concern with how Christian teachings have influenced and transformed traditional Nandi polygamous marriage practices. They were developed by examining key dimensions of traditional Nandi marriage that are likely to be affected by Christian beliefs, values, and institutional practices.

In line with the social change theory, the *decline of polygamous marriages* captured changes in the acceptance and practice of multiple-wife marriages following the Christian emphasis on monogamy; *transformation of bride wealth practices* reflected changes in traditional marriage negotiations and exchange systems as Christian teachings reshape perceptions of marriage and family formation; *erosion of traditional marriage rituals* captured the diminishing, modification, or replacement of customary ceremonies and practices following Christian conversion and church marriage requirements; while *change in marriage decision-making* reflected the shift from decisions traditionally influenced by parents, elders, and extended kin toward greater involvement of couples and Christian institutions. Collectively, these themes provided observable indicators through which the study was able to assess the extent to which Christianity has contributed to modification or transformation of traditional Nandi polygamous marriage practices.

On the decline of polygamous marriages the quantitative findings indicated that 41 (31.3%) participants disagreed, 9 (6.9%) were neutral, and a majority 81 (61.8%) participants were of

the view that christian teachings on marriage have led to the decline of traditional Nandi polygamous marriage model. A participant in the interviews asserted:

*In my village almost every month we have church marriages and rarely do we have polygamous marriage unions. Young people do not very much see the value of polygamy. Many sustain the view that the church condemns polygamy leading to its gradual reduction among the Nandi community (Interviewee, 27).*

Another participant in the FGDs added:

*Today there is a shift to monogamous marriage and a total disregard of traditional Nandi community forms of marriage. This is majorly happening with the young generations (FGDs, 5).*

Even though a sizeable minority contests or is uncertain about the decline of polygamous marriages, the dominant view within the study population shows that Christianity plays a great role in reshaping marital practices among the Nandi community. The interview excerpts deepen this interpretation by emphasizing the increasing prevalence of church weddings over the declining polygamous unions, especially among younger generations. This reflects a significant generational shift in values, where young people are increasingly socialized within Christian settings that prioritize monogamy. The perception that “the church condemns polygamy” reinforces the normative force exerted by religious institutions, which often define acceptable marital behavior through teachings, premarital counseling, and church regulations.

The verbatim findings align with the observations of Hayford and Trinitapoli (2019), who argue that religious institutions play a central role in shaping family behavior by embedding doctrinal expectations within everyday social practices. Similarly, Kalu (2020) observes that Christian doctrine, particularly as disseminated through missionary activity and local churches, historically promoted monogamy as the ideal form of marriage while discouraging converts from entering into or maintaining polygamous unions. In the same manner, Meyer (2021) posits that Christian communities actively sustain moral frameworks that redefine acceptable marital practices, thereby influencing adherents to conform to monogamous standards of marriage.

However, the presence of 31.3% of respondents who disagreed indicate that the decline of polygamy is neither uniform nor uncontested. Cultural resilience is still evident, as some community members continue to value polygamy for its traditional functions, such as lineage expansion, social status, and social security. This view of the findings is consistent with Ashuma (2019) and Yuya, et al. (2021) who hold that polygamy persists in certain contexts due to its deep cultural roots and perceived social and economic benefits.

The findings on the transformation of bride wealth practices indicate that 103 participants (78.6%) supported the view that bride wealth practices have been transformed, while 21 (16.0%) disagreed and 7 (5.5%) were neutral. These findings reveal a strong agreement among respondents that Christian teachings have significantly altered this traditional institution within the Nandi community. This overwhelming majority suggests that the influence of Christianity on bride wealth is not only widely recognized but also deeply experienced at the community level. In support of the view of the majority, participants in the FGDs informed:

*Christian church influence has adversely diminished the traditional Nandi practice of bride wealth. Bride wealth is no longer viewed as a requirement for marriage but instead the consent of the couples. Among the Nandi community, bride wealth meant thanksgiving to the family of the girl and demonstrates the bridegroom's ability to responsibly take care of his new wife. The Christian doctrine on marriage does not underscore this role (FGDs, 33).*

The qualitative data from FGDs reinforces this transformation by illustrating how the Christian doctrine is reshaping the meaning and necessity of bride wealth. Traditionally, bride wealth in the Nandi community was a central component of marriage, symbolizing gratitude to the bride's family and serving as proof of the groom's readiness and capacity to assume marital responsibilities. However, participants observed that the Christian influence has shifted emphasis away from these customary obligations toward the mutual and individualized couple consent as the primary basis for marriage.

The findings and their interpretation are consistent with the observations of Hayford and Trinitapoli (2019), who argue that personal choice and spiritual commitment increasingly take precedence over communal considerations in contemporary Christian understandings of marriage. Similarly, Meyer (2021) maintains that Christian teachings tend to spiritualize marriage by emphasizing love, covenant, and personal faith, thereby downplaying material exchanges such as bride wealth. This interpretation aligns with the FGD findings, where participants observed that bride wealth is "no longer viewed as a requirement for marriage," indicating a shift from an obligatory cultural institution to a symbolic or optional practice.

At the same time, the findings also indicate that this transformation represents a gradual loss of cultural meaning and communal significance. Participants in the FGD emphasized that bride wealth functions not only as an expression of appreciation, but also as a social mechanism for validating marriage and strengthening ties between families. Its diminishing role signals a weakening of communal bonds and traditional structures of accountability. This perspective is consistent with the observations of Clark and Brauner-Otto (2021), who underscore that the decline or modification of bride wealth practices in contemporary African societies often reflects tensions between preserving cultural identity and adapting to changing religious realities.

Nevertheless, the minority of respondents who disagreed (16.0%) indicates that the transformation of bride wealth has not been universally accepted. Some members of the community continue to uphold the traditional significance attached to polygamous marriage, either by maintaining aspects of the practice or by integrating traditional customs with Christian marriage rites. This finding confirms the position of Ashuma (2019) and Yuya et al. (2021), who argue that bride wealth in Kenya remains a resilient cultural institution that is often adapted rather than completely abandoned. This adaptation reflects the negotiation between cultural traditions and religious transformations, demonstrating the dynamic and contested nature of cultural change, where continuity and transformation coexist.

Quantitative responses on the item of the erosion of traditional marriage rituals revealed that 21 (16.0%) participants were in disagreement, 6 (4.6%) were undecided, and an overwhelming majority of 104 (79.4%) agreed with it. This overwhelming majority suggests that the perceived decline of ritual practices is both widespread and significant, pointing to a broader process of cultural transformation influenced by external forces such as Christianity and modernization. In support of the majority view, a participant in the interviews asserted:



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*Today, both for monogamous and polygamous marriages rituals like anointing of the bride with oil, circumcision of ladies before marriage, and the test of virginity by the elderly aunts. Rituals that played an important role of guiding and counseling are no longer practiced. These rituals are being replaced by church instructions, which in most cases are done by people who are not informed and experienced in matters of marriage. This erodes the consideration of marriage as an important rite of passage among the Nandi community (Interviewee, 14).*

The qualitative data provided a deeper insight into the nature and implications of this transformation. The interview data explains the disappearance of several key rituals that traditionally marked the transition into marriage, including practices such as anointing of the bride, initiation rites, and mentorship by elderly family members. These rituals traditionally served not only symbolic functions but also practical roles in preparing individuals for marital responsibilities through guidance, counseling, and moral instruction. Their decline, therefore, represents more than a loss of cultural expression; it signifies the weakening of indigenous systems of marriage knowledge transmission.

The replacement of these rituals with church-based instructions further highlights the marriage transformative force of Christianity. Participants observed that church teachings are taking over the role once played by elders and extended family networks. While Christian instruction tends to emphasize moral and spiritual dimensions of marriage, they lack the culturally embedded experiential knowledge that characterized traditional mentorship systems that sustained marriage. This view is consistent with Hayford and Trinitapoli (2019) who hold that Christian institutions reframe rites of passage by substituting communal rituals with doctrinal teachings. This shift reflects a movement from community-centered to institution-centered forms of marital preparation.

In addition, the findings suggest that the erosion of traditional rituals has implications for how marriage itself is perceived among the Nandi community members. The interviewee's assertion that marriage is no longer regarded as a significant rite of passage points to a broader cultural shift in which the symbolic weight and communal recognition of marriage are increasingly diminishing. This view is reiterated by Meyer (2021) who sustains that when traditional rituals are abandoned or reduced, the social and spiritual meanings attached to life transitions also become less pronounced. In the Nandi context, this may result in a redefinition of marriage from a deeply embedded cultural institution to a more individualized and less ritualized union.

The view of a minority of respondents (16.0%) that disagreed with the assertion that traditional rituals are eroding cannot be ignored. It indicates that some elements of these practices can persist or can be adapted. For instance, it is not possible to entirely abandon cultural practices but they are often reinterpreted to align with new religious settings. This is indicative that the process is not one of complete erosion but rather selective transformation of marriage practices.

The quantitative findings on the change of marriage decision-making reveal a substantial shift in authority structures within the Nandi community. A clear majority of 94 respondents (71.8%) agreed that decision-making in marriage has changed, while 28 (21.4%) disagreed and 9 (6.9%) were undecided. This distribution suggests that most participants perceive a significant transition from traditionally collective, elder-guided processes toward more individualized forms of marital decision-making. Participants in FGDs added:

*The Christian doctrine of marriage has shifted authority from elders to individual marrying persons. Elders do not have any say when it comes to matters of marriage like age, where to marry from, whom to marry, etc. All this was important as it helped to avoid marriage among relatives, places elders in charge of advising new couples, and provided moral education for elders, which helped to sustain marriages. This is one of the reasons why today even in religious monogamous marriages there are several cases of violence and separations (FGDs 10).*

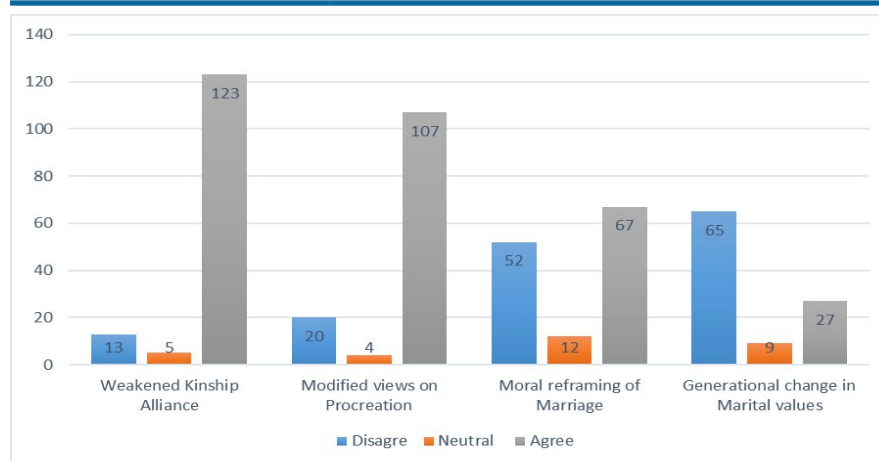
The narrative data from the FGDs provides important context for understanding this transition. FGD participants perceived a connection between the decline of elders' authority in marriage processes and increasing cases of marital conflict, violence, and instability. However, this represents a cultural interpretation of social change rather than a verified causal between reduced elder involvement and domestic violence. The participants' views reflect the community's understanding of the traditional role of elders in promoting marital harmony and stability, while recognizing that domestic violence is a complex phenomenon influenced by multiple social, relational, and structural factors. Participants observed that the Christian marriage doctrine has contributed to relocating authority from elders to the individuals entering marriage. Traditionally, elders played a central role in guiding marital choices, including determining appropriate partners, ensuring compliance with kinship norms, and offering counsel grounded in experience and communal values. This system functioned as a social safeguard, which helped to prevent intra-clan marriages, reinforce moral expectations, and provide ongoing mentorship to couples.

However, as participants noted, the Christian doctrine and practice emphasize personal choice, consent, and individual responsibility, thereby diminishing the authority of elders in marital matters. This finding is consistent with Hayford and Trinitapoli (2019) who assert that Christian teachings across sub-Saharan Africa have contributed to a reorientation of family life by prioritizing the autonomy of individuals over extended family control. And also by Meyer (2021) who argues that Christian moral frameworks tend to privilege personal faith and decision-making, thereby weakening traditional communal structures such as elder authority.

At the same time, the qualitative responses highlighted negative consequences associated with this shift. For instance, participants expressed concern that the decline in elder involvement has led to the erosion of critical guidance mechanisms that previously sustained marital stability. The absence of elder oversight in marriage matters is considered a contributing challenge leading to marital conflict, domestic violence, divorce, and separation even within Christian monogamous marriages. Such claims resonate with scholarly theses that the weakening of traditional support systems can leave couples without adequate social and moral guidance (Clark & Brauner-Otto, 2021).

The minority of respondents (21.4%) who disagreed are indicative of the fact that elder influence has not been entirely eliminated and may persist in certain families or contexts. In many African societies, elders continue to play advisory roles, albeit in less formal or authoritative capacities (Kimani (2020). Thus, it indicates an ongoing negotiation between traditional norms and religious values on marriage.

The study continued to discuss the findings of other themes of influence illustrated in the chart below.



**Figure 1: Findings of other themes of influence**

*Source: Field Data (2026)*

The quantitative findings in the chart illustrate that on the weakening of kinship alliances and point to an overwhelming consensus among respondents that this transformation is taking place within the Nandi community. Specifically, 123 participants (93.9%) agreed that kinship alliances are weakening, while only 13 (9.9%) disagreed and 5 (3.8%) were neutral. This near-unanimous agreement underscores the depth and visibility of this shift, suggesting that the restructuring of kinship relations is one of the most pronounced effects of changing marriage practices. Participants in the FGDs added:

*Christian doctrine of marriage emphasizes the nuclear family over extended kin involvement. This means that marriage is less focused on strengthening clan and lineage ties. But among the Nandi community, kinship ties is the foundation of marriage. Marriage is to enlarge the family relationships basis and the entire clan ties (FGDs 9).*

This narrative finding reinforces the point that the Christian doctrine tends to prioritize the nuclear family that is centered on the husband, wife, and children over the extended family and clan networks that traditionally defined Nandi marriage. In the indigenous Nandi context, marriage was not merely a union between two married individuals but a strategic alliance that strengthened bonds between families, lineages, and clans. It served to expand kinship networks, reinforce social cohesion, and ensure mutual support among relatives. However, the Christian emphasis on the nuclear family has reduced the centrality of these broader kinship obligations.

Additionally, the weakening of kinship alliances has critical social implications. In traditional Nandi society, kinship ties formed the foundation of marriage, ensuring that unions were embedded within a broader arrangement of collective responsibility and accountability. As noted by Kalu (2020), such systems fostered social cohesion by linking families together in enduring relationships that extended beyond husband and wife. Thus, the decline of these ties leads to reduced communal involvement in marital affairs and a weakening of social support systems that previously sustained marriages among the Nandi community.

The small proportion of respondents who disagreed (9.9%) signifies that kinship alliances still hold significance in certain contexts or among particular segments of the Nandi community. While Christianity may reshape the structure and emphasis of family life, it does not entirely eliminate the importance of kinship ties for the Nandi people.

The quantitative findings on modified views on procreation illustrated in figure 4.2 indicate a strong consensus among respondents that Christian teachings have significantly reshaped traditional understandings of childbearing within marriage. Specifically, 107 participants (81.7%) agreed with this position, while 20 (15.3%) disagreed and 4 (3.1%) were undecided. This overwhelming majority suggests that the redefinition of procreation as a central goal of marriage is widely recognized within the Nandi community. In support of the majority view, the interview response added:

*The Christian message on marriage has reshaped attitudes toward family size and lineage continuity. Among the Nandi traditional community, the ultimate goal of marriage is procreation, family and clan lineage. This is not as per the Christian teachings, where marriage is sustained even in the absence of child-bearing (Interviewee, 8).*

The interviewee asserts that in the traditional Nandi context, procreation is the ultimate purpose of marriage, ensuring the continuation of family and clan lineage. Children are not only valued for their social and economic contributions but also for their role in sustaining ancestral heritage and identity. However, Christian doctrine introduces a different theological perspective, stressing marriage as a covenant grounded in companionship, love, and spiritual unity, rather than solely in childbearing. This, consequently, makes marriage valid and meaningful even in the absence of children, which is inconceivable among the Nandi community.

These field findings are consistent with Hayford and Trinitapoli (2019) who assert that Christianity in sub-Saharan Africa has contributed to changing fertility norms by redefining the purposes of marriage and promoting ideals that extend beyond procreation. And also with Meyer (2021) who argues that Christian teachings tend to spiritualize marriage, placing greater emphasis on relational and moral dimensions rather than biological reproduction. Christian acceptance of childless marriages resonates with contemporary liberal thinking, where couples can choose to have or not to have children or large families.

On the other hand, the presence of 15.3% of respondents who disagreed indicates that traditional views on procreation are still influential for some Nandi community members; the cultural importance of children persists despite Christian influence because fertility continues to be associated with continuity of lineage, security, and social status. This means that Christian teachings are interpreted alongside enduring Nandi cultural marriage values.

The findings on the postulate that Christianity reframes the obligation aspect of marriage in figure 4.3 show that 67 respondents (51.1%) supported the view, while a substantial proportion of 52 (39.7%) disagreed, and 12 (9.2%) were neutral. These findings present a more nuanced pattern compared to other themes in the study. Although a relative majority affirms the reframing of marriage as less of a cultural obligation, the high level of disagreement indicates that this issue is contested within the Nandi community. In support of the majority, a participant in the interviews asserted:

*Marriage is a moral and spiritual institution rather than a cultural obligation. In marriage couples grow spiritually together adhering to its spiritual vocation. It is God who calls persons to marriage vocation and not the culture of a particular community (Interviewee, 22).*

The interview response stresses a shift from viewing marriage as a culturally mandated duty to understanding it as a moral and spiritual vocation. Within traditional Nandi society, marriage was often regarded as an obligation tied to communal expectations, lineage continuity, and social identity. Individuals are expected to marry not only for personal fulfillment but also to meet the expectations of the family and clan. In contrast, the Christian doctrine redefines marriage as a calling instituted by God, grounded in spiritual growth, mutual support, and adherence to divine purpose. This Christian theological perspective stresses on personal conviction and spiritual readiness rather than compliance with cultural norms. A shift that is consistent with Meyer (2021) who states that Christian teachings reinterpret social institutions by assigning them spiritual significance, thereby transforming practices that were once culturally obligatory into matters of personal faith and vocation. And also with Kalu (2020) claims that Christianity introduces a new moral setting in which marriage is understood as a covenant before God, rather than merely a social contract enforced by tradition.

This reorientation of marriage leads to a strong emphasis on individual choice and spiritual compatibility between partners. However, the relatively high proportion of respondents who disagreed (39.7%) indicates that the traditional view of marriage as an obligation is still influential among the Nandi community members. Marriage continues to be closely linked to communal expectations such as procreation, social status, and the continuation of family lineage. For these participants, marriage retains its family duty, regardless of Christian reinterpretations. The Nandi community continue to navigate multiple value systems simultaneously, blending cultural expectations with Christian teachings. The possible outcome of this is that marriage is understood both as a spiritual vocation and as a social obligation, depending on context and individual belief.

Finally, the study discussed the field findings on generational change in marital values. Quantitative results demonstrated a relative majority of 65 (49.6%) in disagreement, 9 (6.9%) neutral, and 57 (43.5%) in support of the postulate. Unlike other themes in the study, these results do not show an explicit consensus but rather reflect a close balance between opposing views. This reveals that perceptions of generational change in marital values are contested, with some respondents recognizing significant shifts among the youth, while others perceive continuity in traditional or established marriage norms. On this, qualitative results reiterated the following:

*Younger members of the Nandi community tend to favor Christian marital norms like monogamy, church weddings, individual consent, etc., over polygamous traditional practices (Interviewee, 25).*

Another participant added:

*The young generation is indifferent to marriage values, some marry for fun, and others do it as a trial to see if it works. This means it is not seen as a vocation with specific roles to play in society (FGDs, 12).*

These qualitative findings provide a better understanding by highlighting explicit and observable tendencies among younger members of the Nandi community. One participant noted that young people tend to favor Christian marital norms such as monogamy, church weddings, and individual consent over traditional practices like polygamy. This is because young people among the Nandi community are more likely to internalize Christian marriage norms that emphasize personal choice, romantic attachment, and monogamous unions, thereby contributing to gradual cultural transformation of the practice.



At the same time, the qualitative data introduces a critical perspective regarding the perceived weakening of commitment to marital values among some Nandi community members. In the narrative, the assertion that some young people “marry for fun” or treat marriage as a trial suggests a shift not only in the form of marriage but also in its perceived seriousness and social function. Traditionally, among the Nandi, marriage is regarded as a lifelong institution with clearly defined roles and responsibilities tied to family, community, and lineage.

It is also important to consider that the developing perception of marriage as experimental or optional reflects the influence of broader global cultural trends, including individualism and changing attitudes toward commitment. These contrasting qualitative comprehensions help to explain the divided quantitative responses. On one hand, some respondents recognize that younger generations are adopting Christian marital ideals, signaling continuity in values albeit within a different framework. On the other hand, concerns about declining commitment and shifting attitudes toward marriage suggest a perceived erosion of its traditional significance among the Nandi community.

In addition, the relatively high proportion of respondents who disagreed (49.6%) demonstrates that many people among the Nandi community still perceive stability or resilience in marital values across generations. This may be due to the continued influence of family structures, community expectations, and religious institutions that reinforce certain norms despite changing attitudes. This view is in tandem with Ashuma (2019) and Yuya, et al. (2021) who observe that in many Kenyan communities, generational change is often moderated by enduring cultural and religious underpinnings that maintain continuity even amid the existing and experienced transformation.

## CONCLUSION

The study concludes that Christian teachings have significantly transformed traditional Nandi polygamous marriage practices. The findings reveal a decline in polygamous unions, changes in bride wealth practices and traditional marriage rituals, increased individual autonomy in marital decision-making, weakening of kinship alliances, and shifts in procreation norms and marital obligations. These transformations reflect the growing influence of Christian ideals that promote monogamy, personal choice, and spiritualized understandings of marriage. However, the study also establishes that traditional norms and communal expectations continue to persist and interact with Christian values, indicating an ongoing negotiation between indigenous marital traditions and emerging religious ideals.

## RECOMMENDATION

The study recommends that churches and community institutions establish programs and educational initiatives to address the ongoing cultural transformations affecting marriage practices within the Nandi community. These interventions should seek to balance respect for enduring cultural values with Christian teachings on marriage. In particular, pastoral counseling, premarital education, and community dialogue forums should assist couples and families in navigating changing marital expectations, understanding the theological basis of monogamy, and managing transitions related to bride wealth, kinship obligations, and family decision-making practices. Such initiatives would help reduce intergenerational tensions, preserve constructive cultural values, and promote marital stability within the evolving social context of the Nandi community.

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