

Adjustment to Marriage and Happiness among Women in Polygamous Marriage

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The present study was conducted in the West Kameng district of Arunachal Pradesh, India, to explore adjustment to marriage and happiness among women in polygynous marriage. 60 women in polygynous marriage with one or more children were selected for the study. On the adjustment to marriage, the biggest percentage of women (53%) were averagely adjusted. On the level of happiness, the biggest percentage of women (45%) were somewhat happy. Adjustment to marriage was found to be related with happiness among the women in the study. It was implied from the present study that happiness may be a function of the balance between satisfaction and tensions in the married life.

Keywords: Happiness, Adjustment to marriage, Polygamy, Polygyny

Marriage is one of the most important institution in a society. The institution of marriage is socially and legally sanctioned, generally between a woman and a man. Marriage is not only a union between a man and a woman, but also there are customs, rules and beliefs about the duties of a man and woman in a marriage along with upbringing of offspring. Marriages have taken many forms over the ages. One of the more common form of marriage practiced in societies worldwide is polygamy. The high prevalence of polygamy in many societies also suggests that it is deeply embedded in cultural and religious obligations (Al-Krenawi, et al., 2001).

Polygamy is one form of marriage where there is more than one spouse at a time. One of the most typical form of polygamy is polygyny, in which two or more women share a husband. Polyandry is another form of polygamy where two or more men shares a husband. Polygyny was once common, with the term polygamy often used as a synonym for polygyny. Even in societies that allow or tolerate polygamy, polygyny has been the more accepted form. However, polygamy as

form of marriage has never been the exclusive form of marriage.

Polygamy as a form of marriage is not uncommon in India. In a survey of married women in India in 2019-2021, 1.4% of women reported being married to husbands who had another wife or wives (International Institute for Population Sciences (IIPS) and ICF, 2021). The highest prevalence of polygamous marriage in India is found among the tribal populations in the North-eastern states. In Arunachal Pradesh, 3.7% of married women surveyed were married to husbands who had another wife or wives. In Arunachal Pradesh, the district with the highest prevalence of polygamy reported was in Kra Daadi with 16.4%, followed by the district of Kameng with 10% (International Institute for Population Sciences (IIPS) and ICF, 2021).

The reasons for practice of polygamy is stated to be varied and multi-faceted across cultures. The reasons for polygamy can be due to faith as is within Islamic faith, or traditional practices or even due to agricultural and population needs (Al-Krenawi & Graham, 2006). Many studies

have argued that women in polygamous marriages are more disadvantaged compared with women in monogamous marriages. For instance, Shepard (2012) reported women in polygamous marriages to be more likely to have mental health problems along with decreased marital satisfaction. Mothers in polygamous families have also been reported to experience negative emotions, including sadness and loneliness (Gadban & Goldner, 2020). Women in polygamous marriages have also been reported as having higher psychological distress along with problems in family functioning and marital relationships (Al-Krenawi & Graham, 2006). The negative effects of polygamy not only extend to women's mental health but also affects the upbringing of children (Bahari, et al. (2021).

Polygamy in Arunachal Pradesh is an interesting case, where the women activists are pushing towards banning of polygamy in the state. The president of Arunachal Pradesh Women's Welfare Society (APWWS), Kani Nada Maling, in a letter to the Governor of Arunachal Pradesh reiterated the need to ban polygamy (The Arunachal Times, 2024, April 9). Amid the increasing cases of domestic violence and homicide which have been linked to the practice of polygamy, Maling reiterated the need to ban polygamy which is laying the groundwork for violence against women's rights. She stated that the harmful practice of polygamy has negative consequences for women and children. Despite the persistent appeal from various women organisations, the state government is yet to take a concrete action against the practice of polygamy.

Where a number studies have indicated a negative effect of polygamous marriage on women's mental health and marital relationship (Al-Krenawi, et al., 2001; Al-Krenawi & Graham, 2006; Shepard, 2012), the present study aims to explore the level of marriage adjustment and happiness

among women engaged in polygamous marriage in the district of West Kameng in Arunachal Pradesh. The study also aims to explore if the level of marriage adjustment among women engaged in polygamous marriage is related with their level of happiness.

Objectives of the study

- To examine the level of happiness and marriage adjustment among women in polygamous marriage
- To examine the difference on happiness and marriage adjustment between women from rural and urban areas
- To examine the relationship between happiness and marriage adjustment among women in polygamous marriage

Method

The study was conducted in the district of West Kameng in Arunachal Pradesh. The sample for the study consisted of 60 women in polygamous marriage. All the participants in the study had one or more child and were aged between 25 and 65 years. Data was collected from the participants after being briefed about the purpose of the study and obtaining informed consent. Participation was voluntary and participants were assured of confidentiality.

Two psychological tools were used for the study. The first tool used in the study was the Oxford Happiness Questionnaire by Peter Hills and Michael Argyle (Hills & Argyle, 2002). The questionnaire has 29 items scored on a 6-point Likert scale from strongly disagree to strongly agree. The total score on the questionnaire is obtained by averaging the responses from all the 29 items. The score obtained from the questionnaire ranges from 1 to 6, with higher score indicating more happiness and lower score indicating less happiness. Interpretation for the scores as follows: between 1-2 is considered "not happy"; between 2-3 is considered

“somewhat happy”; between 3-4 is considered “not particularly happy or unhappy”; 4 is considered “somewhat or moderately happy”; between 4-5 is considered “rather happy”; between 5-6 is considered “very happy”; and 6 is considered “too happy”.

The second tool used in the study was the Marriage Adjustment Inventory by C.G. Deshpande (1997). It has 25 items and assesses participant's agreement or disagreement with each statement. The total score on the inventory ranges from 25 to 125, with lower score indicating better adjustment and higher score indicating poorer adjustment. The respondents are said have very high marriage adjustment when the score is between 25 to 45; high marriage adjustment when the score is between 46 to 65; indifferent marriage adjustment when the score is between 65 to 85; low marriage adjustment when the score is between 86 to 105 and very low marriage adjustment when the score is between 106 to 125.

Results and Discussion

Descriptive statistics was used to examine participants level of happiness and marriage adjustment. On the participant's level of happiness – 13% were “not happy”, 45% were “somewhat happy”, 30% were not “particularly happy or unhappy”, 5% were “somewhat or moderately happy”, 5% were “rather happy or pretty happy”, and only 1% was “very happy”. The biggest majority 45% were found to be “somewhat happy”. The greater percentage of women being less happy in the study may be due to experiences of emotional difficulties including, anger, jealousy, emotional distress, competition, loneliness, and lack of intimacy with their spouse (Tabi, et al., 2010). Tabi, et al. (2010), in their qualitative study of women in polygamous marriages reported that polygamy is always painful and bitter for women.

Comparative studies of women from polygamous and monogamous marriages have indicated that women engaged in polygamous marriages have poorer mental health, lower self-esteem and lower life satisfaction compared with women from monogamous marriages (Al-Krenawi & Lev-Wiesel, 2002; Hamdan et al., 2008). Al-Krenawi and Graham (2006) are of the view that polygamous marriages not only affects the mental and physical state of women but also their off-springs.

On the participant's marriage adjustment – 2% were very high on marriage adjustment, 27% were high on marriage adjustment, 53% were average on marriage adjustment, and 18% were low on marriage adjustment. Most women (53%) were only averagely adjusted to marriage. Sinai and Peleg (2020) also reports women in polygamous marriages to be having lower marital satisfaction than women in monogamous marriages. Women in polygamous marriages may have poorer marriage adjustment due to repression of their feelings and avoiding expression of their needs and desires, to have a home to reside in and to manage the lifestyle imposed upon them by the society (Sinai & Peleg, 2020). Although women in polygamous marriages may experience poor marriage adjustment, divorce is never an option for them as the relationship is bounded by social and religious norms (Sinai & Peleg, 2020).

Although, it has been thought that urbanization can lead to women empowerment, as women can enjoy greater social, economic and political freedom, Dhamija et al. (2025) reports that barriers to women empowerment are widespread even in urban environments. This study thus explored if urbanisation can influence happiness and marriage adjustment among women in polygamous marriages. T-test was used to examine the difference on happiness

and marriage adjustment between women from rural and urban areas. A significant difference on happiness was found between women from rural and urban areas ($t(58) = 3.135, p < .05$). In this study, on average women from urban areas ($M = 3.81, SD = .23$) reported being happier as compared to women from rural areas ($M = 3.21, SD = .27$). This study indicates that urbanization can lead to improving wellbeing of women in polygamous marriages.

This study found no significant difference on marriage adjustment between women from rural and urban areas ($t(58) = 1.287, p > .05$), although women from urban areas ($M = 69.37, SD = 1.34$) had averagely higher marriage adjustment compared with women from rural areas ($M = 73.9, SD = 1.42$). In this study urbanization was found to have no impact on marriage adjustment among women in polygamous marriage. This may be attributed to the fact that polygamy is deeply rooted in tradition and religion. Dhamija et al. (2025), may have rightly stated that the effects of urbanization are gendered and rarely benefit women. It may be stated that urbanization does not affect much changes to the existing arrangement of polygamy and polygamous relationship.

Correlation was used to examine the relationship between happiness and marriage adjustment. Happiness and marriage adjustment were found to be significantly negatively correlated ($r(60) = -.619, p < .01$), indicating that greater happiness was associated with better marriage adjustment. Spanier and Cole (1976) in an evaluative study of the concept marital adjustment, argued that happiness is an important component of marital adjustment. It was also argued that well-adjusted marriage is characterized by personal happiness and that poorly adjusted marriages will contribute to unhappiness. The

finding from this study that happiness is correlated with marriage adjustment provides evidence to the study by Spanier and Cole (1976). The findings from this study also indicates that, good marriage adjustment can be a significant source of happiness, and that individual happiness can also contribute to more satisfying and stable marital relationship.

Correlation was also used to examine the relationship of happiness with three dimensions of marital adjustment: sexual satisfaction; satisfaction of love and affection; and satisfaction with spouses' relationship. Happiness was not significantly related with sexual satisfaction ($r(60) = .047, p > .05$). Happiness was not significantly related with satisfaction of love and affection ($r(60) = -.06, p > .05$). Happiness was significantly negatively correlated with satisfaction with spouses' relationship ($r(60) = -.348, p < .01$), indicating that greater happiness was associated with greater satisfaction and better relationship with spouse. Where Spanier and Cole (1976) argued that relationship with spouse can affect marital adjustment, it can be concluded that greater personal happiness is associated with lesser tension and anxiety between spouses leading to better marriage adjustment.

Conclusion

The present study is not without limitations. In the first place, the sample of only 60 women limits the generalizability of findings from this study. Another aspect of limitation about generalizability in the present study, revolves around the lack of comparison groups for women in polygamous marriages with women in monogamous marriages. The study is also limited to exploring only two variables – happiness and marriage adjustment. Future studies can benefit from including a larger sample size with comparable groups and

include more variables for study including mental health and coping strategies. However, despite the limitations in the study, the findings indicate that polygamy has negative implications for women's mental health and marital relationship. Where the present study found most women to be less happy and only averagely adjusted to marriage, it is essential to bring about awareness about the negative effects of polygamy on women. It is necessary to disseminate research findings of the negative effects of polygamy on women, for policy makers to be aware and to affect changes. Where polygamy has clear negative effects on the mental health of women, and the mental health of women being stated to be essential in the upbringing of children, it is important that the policy decision makers take a concrete decision against the practice of polygamy.

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