



THE SOCIO-ECONOMIC EFFECTS OF POLYGAMY IN THE HOUSEHOLD LEVEL AMONG THE GAMMO PEOPLE: THE CASE OF BONKE DISTRICT, GAMMO ZONE, SOUTHERN ETHIOPIA

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Abstract: The aim of study is mainly to assess positive and negative socio-economic effect of polygamy among households in Bonke district of Gammo zone, SNNPRS. The discussion and finding is mainly focused on factors such as desire for a lot of children, use of wives and women as labor force, polygamous marriage as a symbol of high economic status, and inheritance marriage of relatives' wife; social and economic effects, for instance: Disagreement and conflict among family members, jealousy among household members, unequal distribution of resources, mutual distrust and disrespect among family members; role of government and community elders in regulating practice of polygamy; and Bonke society's attitude towards polygamy.

Index Terms - Household, polygamy, socio-economic, polygyny, and Gammo people

- **Introduction**

Polygamy is the state or practice of having more than one spouse simultaneously (Garner, 2004). The practice of polygamy occupies a unique place in the history of mankind. Polygamy has been practiced across a range of cultural and religious traditions from time immemorial. Polygyny dates back to the initial practice of shifting horticulture in Sub-Saharan Africa in order to maximize fertility and produce young males. Contemporary polygamy in North America involves both immigrants from countries where polygamy is legally recognized and Americans who are born into such societies. Polygamy is tolerated to some degree by almost half of the world's societies (Goldfeder, 2016).

Polygamy is a habit that practiced among all societies, cultures and religions of the world in traditional, medieval and modern periods. The practitioners of polygamy range from modern feminists to traditional patriarchs, illustrating the polygamy as a kinship system. For instance, Arctic Inuits (Eskimo) practiced polygamy in the recent past. The polygamy also practiced in the global community, mostly polyandry in the Himalayas and Mormon polygyny in the USA. In Asia, polygamy is customary practice to rich men to have more than one wife for a country like China. Africa is one of the world's highest prevalence of polygamy. So, Africa is termed as synonymous continent with polygamy. In sense, many African societies and countries practice polygamous marriage. Hence, various countries of Africa such as Ethiopia, Senegal, Kenya, South Africa, Mozambique, Chad, Gabon, Niger, Sudan, Tanzania, Zambia, and other Islamic societies practice polygamy denoting the multiple wives as wealth, power and fame (Zeitzen, 2008).

II. NEED OF THE STUDY

This research was presented detail analysis on polygamy and its effects among household members showing different social, cultural, and economic factors that aggravate polygamous marriage. As indicated by Hamadi, et al (2009), polygamy is

widespread in places where farming is main craft and needs to big labor force. In addition, children themselves are also used in farming works and then the children will be backbone of their parents when the parents will be old age. Accordingly, some culture is proud of polygamy and increasing number of children to ensure their social and economic positions. So, some societies and culture considered polygamy as reproductive strategy by men to increase their offspring.

On the other hand, opponents of polygamy argued that supporting and living with several wives produces more problems than it solves; such as adds financial strain, domestic conflict, and unfavorable living conditions. Thus, assets of households are subject to greater sub-division across generations. Often polygamous household invests in extra-married women proportion and in the number of their children. In the future generation, the increased size of husband's family means that there is loss of assets for each child to inherit (Spencer, 1990).

III. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The methodology section outline the plan and method that how the study is conducted. This includes population and sample, data and sources of data, theoretical framework, and method of data analysis and interpretation. The details are as follows;

3.1. Population and Sample

The nature of the population which is made up of different categories of people in different residence necessitated the use of stratified sampling. The population was divided into two major groups: Town and rural residences. For each stratum simple random sampling was used in order to select 100 polygamous household respondents for questionnaire, 8 participants for focus group discussion and 12 informants for interview out of the total of 159,089 populations.

Various members of the households (39 wives, 30 husbands and 31 children) are used as source of information during the data collection process. Furthermore, community leaders, religious leaders, concerned officials and experts and key-informants of the community are additional source of information in the study. Hence, total sample size of the study is 120 respondents.

3.2. Data and Sources of Data

In this study, the researcher is used both primary and secondary data sources. The primary data are collected from informants using various data collection instruments. Since the researcher is employed qualitative and quantitative approach in order to conduct the study, the relevant data collection tools are questionnaire, interview and focus group discussion. While secondary data were gathered from both published and unpublished materials such as books, newspapers, PhD Dissertations, MA Thesis, and journals.

3.3. Theoretical Framework

Scholars have written extensively on the nature, causes and effects of polygamy. Depending on the schools of thought to whom they represent, hence, explanations tended to place a lot of emphasis on one particular theory of polygamy while diminishing the importance of other competing theories. In this section, the researcher explained some of theories such as Anthropologist and Sociologist, structural-functionalist, Marxist, Reproductive, Feminist, Symbolic Interactionist theory of polygamy to provide frameworks for the understanding of polygamy.

Anthropologists and Sociologists treat serial monogamy, in which divorce and remarriage occur as a form of polygamy as it also can establish a series of households that may continue to be tied by shared paternity and shared income. As such, the polygamous marriages are similar to the household formations created through divorce and serial monogamy. There are causes of polygyny are ecology, economy, kinship, and warfare. The reasons behind polygyny are sexual, reproductive, economic and productive desires (Zeitzen, 2008).

According to Structural-functionalists, polygamy is necessary to have multiple relative through affinity (usually termed as formation of alliance). Then, such kind of interrelationship promotes the strengthening of the unity of one group of the society to secure peace having marriage relationship with different tribes (Fortes and Evans-Pritchard, as cited in Zeitzen, 2008). According to these writers, women are perceived as those who play reproduction or production units of community, in which their function is solely bearing children. And polygamy is considered as cultural practice among societies of

patrilineal descent and patrilocal residence in which emphasis given more on transmission of rights from male family than female (Clignet and Sween, 1981: 446-8, as cited in Zeitzen).

Marxists theorists pointed out that polygamous marriage system is related with gender based division of labour and women are understood as economic producers to their household members. According to this writer, division of labour based on sex brings an idea that wives as used as additional labour force to husbands (Murdok, 1981). Reproductive theorists observed that reproduction and fertility are culturally needed issue to polygamous marriage. For these theorists, desire to have numerous descendants is often driving force polygamous practice. Thus, many children are seen as prestige and power for practitioners as well as it is a wealthy man symbol. Childlessness is seen as a great misfortune for which women are usually held responsible. In polygamous societies, not having children opens up the possibility that a woman's husband will divorce her or marry a second wife to have children (Zeitzen, 2008). Feminist theory is concerned with how gender inequalities influence and are influenced by marriages and families. Feminists are critical of the traditional male domination of families a system known as patriarchy that is reflected in the tradition of wives taking their husband's last name and children taking their father's name. Patriarchy implies that wives and children are the property of husbands and fathers. Radical feminists talk of the colonization and occupation of women's bodies by men for their pleasure, with this appropriation symbolizing the subjugation of the women's life, mind and identity (Bilton et al, 1996).

Symbolic interactionism emphasizes the ability of individuals to actively or constructively interpret symbols in their actions. In contrast, functionalism suggests that social structures determine actions. The symbolic Interactionist perspective is concerned with how labels affect meaning and behavior. Symbolic integrationists also point to the effects of interaction on one's self-concept, especially the self-concept of children. The symbolic Interactionist perspective is useful in understanding the dynamics of domestic violence and abuse. Symbolic interactionism points to the change in societal definitions of divorce, as a reason for the increase in divorce and polygamy (Blumer, 1986).

3.4. Method of Data Analysis and Interpretation

The frequency distribution of descriptive statistics method of data analysis and interpretation was used that based on data that were collected by questionnaire. Narrative method of data analysis and interpretation was used in order to analyze information collected by interview and focus group discussion. Hence, the issues that discussed under the data analysis are causes for polygamous marriage, the effects of polygamy on household members, the attitude of Bonke society on polygamy practice, role of government bodies in regulating polygamy, and the relationship between polygamy and legality of its practice.

IV. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

4.1. Factors that Lead to Polygamy in Bonke Community

As it is suggested by the informants, there are factors which caused the practice of polygamy in Bonke society. Of these factors are desire for a lot of children, use of women as labor force, economic status, and marriage by inheritance.

4.1.1. Desire for Children

Sex preference and avoidance of childlessness are one of factors that motivate husbands to marry several wives in the polygamous household system of marriage. As indicated by information of participants, more of polygamous marriage among Bonke societies is undertaken in order to avoid the problem of childlessness from the first wife and to obtain either son or daughter if there is continuous give-birth of male or female child. 52% of respondents answered that practice of polygamous marriage in order to search for sons when first wife only gave-birth daughters and 19% are responded that searching for daughters from another wife is reason for spouses to marry the next wife. About 29% of respondents pointed out that polygamous marriage in the study area is caused by childlessness from first and second wife.

4.1.2. Polygamy as Resource Management System

Resource management system is one of factors that initiated husbands to marry many wives in the polygamous system of marriage. According to information of respondents, some of polygamous marriage in the study area is carried out in order to control land, perform household activities and care for animals which are present in different environment. Controlling of land and other resources is one of the resource management systems that can also be one of major causes of polygamy compared to other styles (60%). Moreover, resource management style in polygamous household is determined by

performance of household tasks and care for cattle. As a result, the percentages of performing household activities (20%) and caring for animals (20%) are equally rated by respondents in the study area as Bonke district.

4.1.3. Economic Status as Cause for Polygamy

Economic status is another factor that enables husbands to marry many wives in the polygamous system of marriage. As pointed out by the respondents, 24% of polygamous marriage is formed in the study area by considering the possession of many wives and having many as a source of prestige and fame, property, man power and working force in the farmland or in the time of war to protect household members from external attack. About 23% of respondents answered that almost half of husbands assume many wives and children as prestige and fame in order to get recognition from neighboring people. Moreover, 28% of respondents replied that husbands assume many wives and children as wealth and property in polygamous households. Consequently, 25% of participants expressed that marrying many wives and giving-birth too much children can be taken as increasing the number of labor force in order to collaborate together while farming land. The 24% of respondents also answered that marrying many wives and giving-birth too much children can be understood as power and strength in the time of peace and conflict.

4.1.4. Marriage by Inheritance

Inheritance marriage is also another factor that may lead husbands to marry numerous wives in the polygamous system of marriage. According to informants, 11% of polygamous marriage system is concluded by inheritance marriage in the study area in order to take care for the children and wives of deceased or dead close relative or other family members. In due course of action, the husband may provide free services to the families of dead persons including building house and fence; provide food and clothes and rearing cattle as well.

4.2. Effects of Polygamous Marriage on the Household Members

In this section, the researcher intended to discuss on the negative effects that are resulted by polygamous marriage on household member. In this regard, the researcher explained the effects of polygamy dividing in to two broad groups: Social and economic condition of household members. Furthermore, the household condition can be perceived in terms of the number of wife, children, family member in-law, and husband whereby all personalities have their own economic needs and wants over scarce and limited resources. This in turn results in imbalance between human materials want and supply of resources to large number of household members.

Table 4.1: The distribution of negative effects of polygamy on household members

No	Negative effects of polygamy	The frequency of its effects		
		Male	Female	Percent (%)
1	Disagreement and conflict among family members	13	12	25
2	Jealousy among household members	11	11	22
3	Unequal distribution of resources	19	14	33
4	Mutual distrust and disrespect among family members	12	8	20
Total		55	45	100

Source: Survey, 2019

Depend up on table 4.1, about 25% of polygamous marriages result in disagreement and conflict among co-wives, husband and their children since household members under one roof compete with others due to presence of divergent interests. 22% of polygamy leads to jealousy and envious spirit among household members when co-wives and their respective children fight over single husband who manage two or more households. As indicated by the table above, 33% polygamous marriage creates unequal distribution of resources and agricultural inputs such as crops, cattle, fertilizers, land and financial resources. In this regard, husband may favor for either first wife or second and consecutive wives based on their good qualities. According to respondents, 20% of polygamous marriages resulted in mutual distrust and disrespect among co-wives, husband and their children when wives and her children try to control action and stance of the husband.

4.2.1. Social Effects of Polygamy on the Household Members in the Bonke Society

According to informants, the most common social effects of polygamy which emerge among those household are lack of collaboration, loss of love, lack of honest to one another, disrespect, misbehavior, conflict, and jealousy among co-wives. Informants indicated that divergent interest of wives leads to disagreement, anxiety and threat to one another, and with their husband. Moreover, one of the informants clearly stated that due to increased number of wives; the husband does not pay attention to look after the living condition of each wife. Thus, polygamous husbands of Bonke propose to divorce some of wives since the wife become ugly after giving birth children that range from two to three in number.

This implies that husbands try to divorce their first wives when wives become thinnest because of frequent reproduction. These circumstances promote grievance between husband's and wife's family members. Consequently, this is also another cause for conflict, murder, separation, disagreement and remoteness relationship among the household members, those families lead to complicated life style.

4.2.2. Economic Effects of Polygamy on the Household in the Bonke Society

According to view point of interviewed informants, having many wives to man in marital relationship devastates the accumulation of income, and basic needs not be attained successfully. Then, inability to fulfill those basic needs means danger on health condition of families because it brings mal-nutrition and vulnerability to deadly diseases. Informants pointed out that in many polygamous household of Bonke society have a problem of population pressure. In case, the household members lack chance to develop the habit of saving due to population growth and this also enables to lead the living standard in the form of hand to mouth from generation to generation.

Furthermore, there are different cases in which wives in polygamous marriages have suffered from physical, economic and sexual abuse. Polygamy creates inequality amongst co-wives since the husband cannot care for the needs of more than one wife, and polygamous marriage gives men limitless power and authority over wives and children. This condition leads to unfavorable situation for mutual co-existence and fades harmonious relationship, unequal treatment of co-wives, and envy over share of resources. In this case, women are used as objects after polygamous marriage. The disagreements among the co-wives more often damage the children in polygamous households. Such children tend to believe that the polygamous lifestyle affects the happiness and all the good opportunities.

4.3. Attitude of Bonke People towards Polygamous Marriage

Based on the informants' point of view, polygamy is neither bad nor good. In sense, fear of evil (locally known as 'Gomme'), patriarchic administration of the household members, searching of many children, and consideration of many children as prestige and important for land holding system are appreciated portions of polygamous marriage and its practice in Bonke societal culture. Whereas consequences of polygamy such as economic under-development, frequently occurring conflict among household members, and increase of population through high rate in the family are rejected effects of polygamy.

Therefore, participants concluded that when talking about perception of Bonke society towards polygamy; the practice of polygamy is not entirely good or not entirely bad. Hence, participants come up with idea of compromising the activity of polygamy as harmful cultural practice and useful cultural practice based on societal attitude towards polygamous marriage in the Bonke. This means polygamy has simultaneously positive and negative consequences. Thus, it is hard to simply categorize and express polygamy as either harmful or useful traditional practice in the context of Bonke society. However, in fact that polygamy is one of harmful cultural practice since the negative impacts of polygamy on household members are much more than positive impacts.

4.4. Legality and Acceptance of Polygamy in Bonke Social Courts and Local Elders

According to some of respondents, polygamy is harmful to women and thereby opposes the International Human Rights Laws and UN Universal Declaration of Human Rights. Polygamy is a form of nationalism and a mechanism to maintain group identity through patriarchy, whereby there is male dominance over females and it paves way for gender in equality. Safety, nonviolence, equality, autonomy, mutuality and truthfulness are generally acknowledged as required for minimal human justice in sexual relationships. From the human rights and international law perspective, consent is a key issue in sexual ethics.

At the same time, various forced sexual activities such as rape, abduction, prostitution and polygamy were illegal practices. In modern system, marital relationship is morally permissible only if both participants have common consent and full agreement. In addition, polygamy is viewed as discrimination against women that promotes gender inequality where there is violation of the right of women to marry and form a family in the exercise of their free consent and choice. Such kind of violations and discriminations further strengthen marital conflicts and disagreements among household members.

4.5. The Role of Government Organizations in Managing Polygamy Practice

This section tries to analyze and evaluate how the FDRE Constitution, the Criminal Code and the Family Law respond to the legitimacy of regulating plural marriage raises a host of debatable questions in terms of the role of state in the interference of private family relationships so as to ensure gender equality by state commitment. The current penal code has criminalized the practice of polygamous marriage in article 650 (1) as follows:

Whoever, being tied by the bond of a valid marriage, intentionally contracts another marriage before the first union has been dissolved or annulled, is punishable with simple imprisonment, or, in grave cases, and especially where the criminal has knowingly misled his partner in the second union as to his true state, with rigorous imprisonment not exceeding five years. According to the FDRE Criminal Code, polygamy is generally casted as an offence punishable by the law. In this regard, polygamy is not permitted in legal documents of current Ethiopia and law punishes those who violate marital relationship of spouses.

From a legal point of view, marriage is legally monogamous in many countries whereby a person can only have one spouse although bigamy and adultery are illegal that lead to a situation of informal polygamy in which there is no legal recognition for non-official spouses. Polygamy violates the equality of men and women in marriage in which equality of treatment with regard to the right to marriage. This implies that polygamy is restricted to polygyny in practice that violates the dignity of women and should be outlawed. Furthermore, it is also expressly provided that a person shall not conclude marriage as long as man or woman is bound by bonds of a preceding marriage.

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