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# Polygamy In Modern Age

## Introduction

Polygamous marriage is always a sensitive topic that is often being portrayed as an outdated practice and should be abolished as the world progresses. The numerous cases of unsuccessful polygamous marriage, such as abusive and controlling partner has painted a negative image on polygamy. Due to this misconception, movements have been created to go against the practice with the hope that women will be given justice and fairness in marriage. The claims do not only corroded the true intention of polygamy, especially in Islam, but also have influenced the non-Muslim's perception of the teachings of Islam. Truthfully, it is quite difficult to acknowledge the true reality of polygamous marriage. Because of this, there will always be arguments about whether polygamy is appropriate or not. Oftentimes, it has become a subject of an argument due to the patriarchal characteristics of most societies around the globe. The wives will potentially be mistreated by their husbands in polygamous marriages. The majority believes that polygamy will give negative implications for the family and will create conflicts in family management. Such impacts may be subjective and probably depends on how the individuals managed their household. All in all, it is very important to know the essence of polygamy and how it works in modern days despite the backlash and controversies surrounding it.

## Concept and History of Polygamy

Polygamy in general can be defined as having more than one wife without limitation in terms of the number of wives. The term Polygamy is a unification of two Greek words, Poly (many) and Gamos (marriage). According to Collins Dictionary (2019), polygamy is referred to as the custom in some societies in which someone can be legally married to more than one person at the same time.

However, in Islam, the meaning of Polygamy is slightly different. In the Arab language, polygamy is referred to in two words; Ta'addud which is the root word of Ta'addada that means to multiply or more in amount, and Zawjat which is the root word of Zawwaja that carries the meaning of to unify two things or to marry off a man and a woman.

If we look upon the history of polygamy back in the ancient days, the majority of historians agreed that polygamy has existed way before the existence of Islam. It has been practiced by society and deemed as the norm for people in that era due to the difficulties in committing monogamous relationships. In the society of Arab Jahilliyah, for instance, polygamy is not bound to any restrictions such as the number of wives and equality in treating the wives. A man can have more than four wives and the number can exceed hundreds. Apart from that, there are no guidelines about the needs of all the wives without being biased. The practice, however, has been polished and altered according to the rules of Islam, which are more appropriate and just towards women.

## Polygamy in Islam

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In general, polygamy is permissible in Islam but only if men can fulfill the conditions of it. “If you fear that you shall not be able to deal justly with the orphans, marry women of your choice, two, or three, or four; but if you fear that you shall not be able to deal justly (with them), then (marry) only one...” (Al-Qur’an 4:3). Based on this verse, it is clearly said that polygamy or polygyny is neither mandatory nor encouraged. It is permitted as long as the husband can be just and able to provide for their wives.

Furthermore, the Holy Qur’an also reminds them of the difficulty of being fair between multiple wives. “Ye are never able to be fair and just as between women, even if it is your ardent desire: But turn not away (from a woman) altogether, to leave her (as it were) hanging (in the air). If ye come to a friendly understanding and practice self-restraint, Allah is Oft-forgiving, Most Merciful” (Al-Qur’an 4:129).

## **Polygamy in Other Religions**

The practice of polygamous marriage does not only applied to the religion of Islam. In other religions, it is also permissible to do so although it is more common in the past rather than in the modern days. Judaism, for instance, the practice of polygamous marriage are permissible in the Jewish society before Rabbi Gershom decided to make it forbidden in the 11th century.

The impact of polygamous marriage may affect either positively or negatively, depending on how it is viewed and practiced by an individual. Positive implications of practicing polygamous marriage are fruitful if we were to look at the aspects of expanding the offspring and avoiding cases of sexual exploitation on unmarried women. In some cases, polygamous marriage is one of the best ways to solve the problem such as inability to procreate and child abandonment. Spouses who have difficulties in having a child of their own may be subject to polygamous marriage so that the husband could have children of his own. Due to the high numbers of career women out there, it is very helpful for them to have another person in the household to assist them with the chores and taking care of the children. There will be less risk of children feeling abandoned by their own parents, as there will be literally another mother figure at home to depend on.

However, there are obvious negative implications on practicing polygamy, and usually, the emergence of cases regarding polygamous marriage derives from the injustice of husband toward the wives. Statistically speaking, it was found that out of nine women in polygamous marriages, every single woman had experienced psychological abuse, which is more than half of them have suffered physical, economic, and sexual abuse. (Nurrohmah, 2013). It was a clear indication that polygamous marriage is still widely misused by men and there is a lack of understanding in practicing it.