



Love, Sex, Respect, and Physical Attractiveness in Marital Satisfaction and Remarriage: A Comparison Between Monogamous and Polygynous Marriages

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Abstract

Studies on polygyny have been limited to socio-economic factors. The psychosocial aspects involved in the trend of having more than one wife were not studied earlier. The current study explored the role of love, sex, respect, and physical attractiveness in the marital satisfaction of polygynous husbands, monogamous husbands, and monogamous wives. A total of 611 participants from diverse cities in Pakistan took part in the study, comprising 57 polygynous husbands, 57 first wives of polygynous husbands, 57 second wives of polygynous husbands, 220 monogamous husbands, and 220 monogamous wives. Sukoon Marital Life Analysis scale was used to gather data. The results indicated a significant elevation in marital satisfaction among polygynous husbands with their second wives compared to the satisfaction levels of monogamous husbands. Additionally, second wives demonstrated significantly higher satisfaction with their husbands when compared to their first wives. These findings lead to the conclusion that second marriages exhibit notably higher levels of marital satisfaction for both polygynous husbands and their second wives in contrast to the satisfaction reported by monogamous husbands and wives. This study contributes valuable insights into the psychosocial dynamics of polygynous relationships.

Keywords

polygamy, monogamy, marital satisfaction, marital quality, marital happiness, relationship quality

Marriage has been regarded as an extremely important aspect of humanity throughout history and across cultures (Baffour-awuah, 2014). Most cultures, especially the collectivistic cultures, view marriage as mandatory (Netting, 2010) and a lifelong bond between the couples and their families (Clover, 2003). Researchers have described several diversi-



fied purposes one may achieve from marriage. These mainly include happiness (Karney & Bradbury, 2000), intimacy (MacDonald & Jessica, 2006), sexual satisfaction (DeLamater & Sill, 2005), and reproduction (West, 2015). Marriage is also viewed as an institution that uplifts society (Eekelaar, 2007). Marriage has also been associated with several psychosocial benefits such as better physical and mental health (Robles et al., 2014; Whitton et al., 2014), prevention from depression and anxiety (Woods et al., 2019), and satisfaction with life (Carr et al., 2014).

Marital satisfaction implies the subjective satisfaction of the expectations one develops about marriage (Boguslaw et al., 1977; Spanier & Lewis, 1980). Earlier studies have concluded several contributing factors that increase or decrease the levels of marital satisfaction. These factors mostly relate to the moral values of the spouses such as being honest (Finkenauer & Hazam, 2000), compromising (Bertoni & Bodenmann, 2010), supporting (Cummings et al., 2008), forgiving (Meunier & Baker, 2012). Healthy communication and emotional expressions have also been associated with marital satisfaction (Allgood et al., 2020; Husain, Ahmed, et al., 2023). Being more religious may also improve marital satisfaction (Karimi et al., 2019). Marital satisfaction may increase (Williamson & Lavner, 2020) or decrease (Sorokowski et al., 2017) with the passage of time due to several psychosocial factors involved such as age, marital duration, socioeconomic condition, child rearing and familial responsibilities. Conflicts between couples have been regarded significant sources of marital dissatisfaction and may lead to divorce or separation (Williamson & Lavner, 2020).

Monogamy, having married one person at a time, has been regarded as the most conventional form of marriage (Campbell & Wright, 2010; Nugent & Cott, 2002). Polygamy, on the other hand, is a matrimonial relationship involving multiple partners at the same time (Al-Krenawi & Kanat-Maymon, 2017). The form of polygamy in which a wife has multiple husbands at a time is quite rare and is labeled as polyandry. Polygyny is referred to that form of marriage in which a man has more than one wife at the same time (Cleuziou, 2016; Purwanto et al., 2021). Polygyny has gained widespread acceptance and has been a prevalent practice in over 70% of societies globally throughout recorded history. (Al-Krenawi, 2012; Bao, 2008; Krieger & Renner, 2020; Thobejane & Flora, 2014). Middle Eastern and African societies have gained greater recognition for their prevalence of polygynous marriages. (Elbedour et al., 2003). Polygyny has been preferred by men with greater resources (Buss et al., 2001). The positive aspects of polygyny may include more reproduction (Gibson & Mace, 2007; Mulder, 2009) and support in agricultural work (Lawson et al., 2015). Polygyny has also been associated with adverse effects especially for women (Ashby & Gupta, 2013; Lawson et al., 2015; Mitsunaga et al., 2005; Rahmanian et al., 2021; Thobejane & Flora, 2014) such as poor psychological health of the senior wives and the children living in polygamous families (Elbedour et al., 2002; Fatoye et al., 2004; Henrich et al., 2012; Slonim-Nevo & Al-Krenawi, 2006), and presence of emotional violence among polygynous families (Cook, 2007). The adverse effects of polygyny on

women are primarily influenced by the socio-cultural background of the wives (Bove & Valeggia, 2009; Gibson & Mace, 2007; Thobejane & Flora, 2014; Winking et al., 2013) and their socioeconomic status (Fenske, 2015).

The earlier psychosocial studies on polygyny have been limited to exploring only the socio-economic factors such as the desire for more children, the illness of the first wife, the inability of the first wife to support in agricultural work, etc. (Elbedour et al., 2002; Hassouneh-Phillips, 2001; Slonim-Nevo & Al-Krenawi, 2006). The psychosocial factors such as love, sex, respect, and physical attractiveness in marital satisfaction and remarriage have been quite neglected in the earlier studies. The current study, therefore, bridges this knowledge-gap by analysing and comparing the levels of marital satisfaction among monogamous and polygynous couples. Sample for this study was taken from Pakistan i.e. a South-Asian country, the sixth largest population of the world, and a Muslim-majority nation having a collectivistic culture. In many Southeast Asian countries, such as Indonesia and Malaysia, Islam has played a significant role in shaping cultural practices, including marriage. Islamic law allows Muslim men to have up to four wives, if they can treat each wife justly. The spread of Islam in the region introduced polygyny as an acceptable practice, and it became ingrained in the cultural and legal frameworks of Muslim-majority societies. In Pakistan, polygyny is widely accepted, both from a religious and cultural standpoint (Azam et al., 2021). It is notably more prevalent in rural areas compared to urban settings (Charsley & Liversage, 2013). Despite Pakistani law requiring men to seek consent from their first wife before entering another marriage, marriages without spousal consent are legally recognized, as the legal framework is rooted in Islamic principles (Yamani, 2021). Apart from exploring marital satisfaction in polygynous marriages, the current study also compared the levels of marital satisfaction of both the spouses in polygynous and monogamous marital structures.

Method

Participants

The study involved 611 participants from Islamabad, Rawalpindi, Gujar Khan, and Gujrat in Pakistan. Purposive and snowball sampling techniques were used to recruit the participants. The participants included 57 polygynous husbands, 57 first wives of the polygynous husbands, 57 second wives of the polygynous husbands, 220 monogamous husbands, and 220 only wives of the monogamous husbands. The age of the participants ranged between 19 to 66 years with a mean of 36 years. The duration of marriage ranged between 6 months to 39 years with a mean of 9 years.

The Instrument

Sukoon Marital Life Analysis (Husain, 2024) was administered to analyze marital satisfaction. The scale defines marital satisfaction as the 'difference' or 'gap' between the 'desired marital life' and the 'actual marital life'. The scale contains four sub-scales namely sex, attractiveness, respect, and love. The response sheet involves a 6-point Likert scale ranging from extremely incorrect to extremely correct. The scale had already been tested and accepted in an earlier study for its factor structure, reliability, and validity (Husain, 2024).

Procedure

The study was conducted from January to May 2023. It was approved by the Departmental Ethic Review Committee of the Department of Humanities, COMSATS University Islamabad, Pakistan. The data collection process was in accordance with the 1964 Helsinki declaration and its later amendments. The participants were approached at their homes while visiting different cities of Pakistan (Islamabad, Rawalpindi, Gujrat, and Gujrat). The researchers utilized their personal contacts in this regard. Snow-ball sampling technique was further used to identify the participants. All the participants were informed about the purpose of the study and their consent to participate in the study was taken verbally. They were assured of the confidentiality of the data and were thanked for their participation.

Analysis

The data gathered was recorded and analyzed in the Statistical Package for Social Sciences. Independent and paired sample t-test along with descriptive statistics were observed.

Results

Analysis of monogamous couples did not reveal any significant differences between the overall marital satisfaction of monogamous husbands and wives (Table 1). The findings, however, revealed significant differences between monogamous husbands and wives for love, respect, and sex. Monogamous husbands, as compared to their wives, were significantly more satisfied with the love (Table 1; 80.72% VS 75.60%; $p = .001$; Cohen's $d = 0.331$) and respect (Table 1; 78.52% VS 72.02%; $p < .0001$; Cohen's $d = 0.395$) they received from their wives. Monogamous wives, on the other hand, were significantly more satisfied with the sex they received from their husbands (Table 1; 67.95% VS 64.31%; $p = .025$; Cohen's $d = 0.214$).

Table 1

Differences in Marital Satisfaction

Variable	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD	t/f	p	Cohen's d/η ²
MONOGAMY									
	Husband		Wife						
Marital Satisfaction between husband and wife ^a	70.94	12.08	70.80	11.49			0.125	.900	—
Attraction	71.14	16.82	73.69	18.10			1.529	.127	—
Love	80.72	15.99	75.60	14.89			3.472	.001	.331
Sex	64.31	16.56	67.95	17.43			2.242	.025	.214
Respect	78.52	15.73	72.02	17.19			4.138	.000	.395
POLYGYNY									
	First Wife		Second Wife						
Marital Satisfaction of first and second wife ^a	65.95	22.21	75.11	19.57			2.34	.021	.438
Attraction	71.00	20.86	74.79	19.40			1.00	.317	—
Love	61.13	27.00	71.98	25.09			2.22	.028	.416
Sex	65.98	24.99	76.50	21.57			2.41	.018	.451
Respect	64.11	27.67	75.36	22.61			2.38	.019	.445
Marital Satisfaction of husband with first and second wife ^b	69.52	17.74	78.21	16.38			2.930	.005	.388
Attraction	70.50	18.60	75.48	17.52			1.648	.105	—
Love	72.00	20.47	81.07	17.15			2.690	.009	.356
Sex	66.91	21.60	78.18	18.94			3.378	.001	.447
Respect	71.84	20.89	79.00	18.89			1.809	.076	—
MONOGAMY VS POLYGYNY									
	Monogamous Husband		Polygynous Husband with First Wife		Polygynous Husband with Second Wife				
Marital Satisfaction of husbands ^c	70.94	12.08	69.52	17.74	78.21	16.38	7.150	.001	.041
Attraction	71.14	16.82	70.50	18.60	75.48	17.52	1.617	.200	—
Love	80.72	15.99	72.00	20.47	81.07	17.15	6.312	.002	.037
Sex	64.31	16.56	66.91	21.60	78.18	18.94	13.552	.000	.076
Respect	78.52	15.73	71.84	20.89	79.00	18.89	3.666	.027	.022
	Monogamous Wife		First Wife		Second Wife				
Marital Satisfaction of wives ^c	70.80	11.49	65.95	22.21	75.11	19.57	5.094	.007	.030
Attraction	73.69	18.10	71.00	20.86	74.79	19.40	.646	.525	—
Love	75.60	14.89	61.13	27.00	71.98	25.09	12.618	.000	.071
Sex	67.95	17.43	65.98	24.99	76.50	21.57	5.148	.006	.030
Respect	72.02	17.19	64.11	27.67	75.36	22.61	4.860	.008	.029

Note. Bold values represent higher means.

^aindependent sample *t*-test. ^bpaired sample *t*-test. ^cANOVA.

Analysis based on marital satisfaction of polygynous husbands with their first and second wives revealed significant differences. Polygynous husbands were significantly more satisfied with their second wives as compared to their first wives (Table 1; 78.21% VS 69.52%; $p = .005$; Cohen's $d = 0.388$). This significant difference was also reflected for the love (Table 1; 81.07% VS 72.00%; $p = .009$; Cohen's $d = 0.356$) and sex (Table 1; 78.18% VS 66.91%; $p = .001$; Cohen's $d = .447$) they received from their second wives. The polygynous husbands did not reflect any significant differences based on the respect and physical attraction of their first and second wives. This could be interpreted here that the aspects of love and sex were significantly more important for the marital satisfaction of polygynous husbands as compared to respect and physical attractiveness.

Analysis of marital satisfaction between the first and second wives of polygynous husbands also revealed significant differences. Second wives were significantly more satisfied with their husbands as compared to their first wives (Table 1; 75.11% VS 65.95%; $p = .021$; Cohen's $d = 0.438$). This significant difference was also reflected for the love (Table 1; 71.98% VS 61.13%; $p = .028$; Cohen's $d = 0.416$), sex (Table 1; 76.50% VS 65.98%; $p = .018$; Cohen's $d = 0.451$), and respect (Table 1; 75.36% VS 64.11%; $p = .019$; Cohen's $d = 0.445$) they received from their husbands. The first and second wives of the polygynous husbands did not reflect any significant differences based on the physical attraction of the husbands.

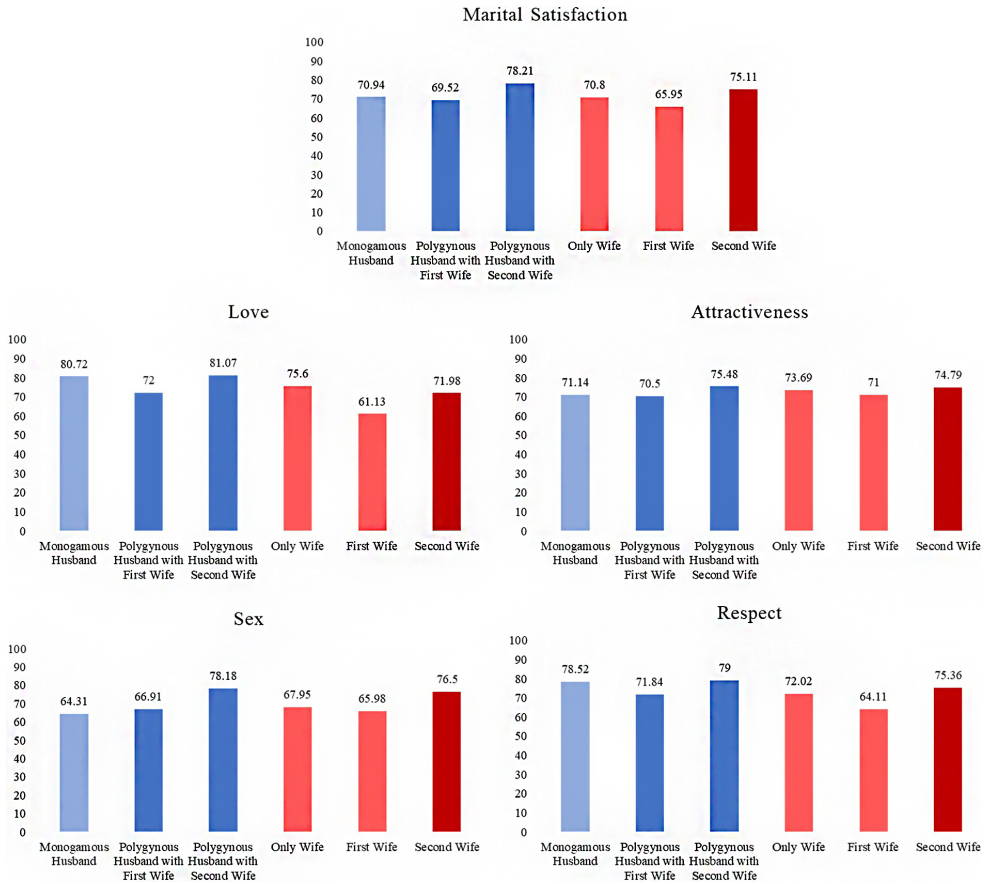
Discussion

The existing scientific literature on polygyny significantly lacked comparisons for husbands' marital satisfaction from their first and second wives. The current study bridged this knowledge-gap and explored marital satisfaction of polygynous husbands by drawing a comparison between their first and second wives. Apart from statistical tabulation, the findings of the current study have also been presented through simplified graphs (Figure 1).

The findings of the current study revealed that polygynous husbands were significantly more satisfied with their second wives as compared to the marital satisfaction of monogamous husbands. Furthermore, second wives were significantly more satisfied with their husbands as compared to their first wives. Second marriage, in other words, carries significantly higher levels of marital satisfaction for both the polygynous husbands and second wives. These higher levels of marital satisfaction were based on the love and sex that the polygynous husbands received from their second wives and the love, sex, and respect that the second wives received from their polygynous husbands. Love, sex, and respect, in other words, were the three prime reasons in the current study for which the second marriage can be regarded successful for polygynous husbands and second wives. Love, being a mixture of several emotions (Reis & Aron, 2008) involves longing, attachment, closeness, affection, passion, intimacy, and commitment (Schoenfeld

Figure 1

Comparisons of Marital Satisfaction Between Monogamous and Polygynous Spouses



et al., 2012; Sternberg, 1986) and is regarded extremely important for marital satisfaction (Reis & Aron, 2008). Sexual satisfaction also plays an important role in the overall marital satisfaction (Birnbaum et al., 2006; Breznsnyak & Whisman, 2004; Hendrick & Hendrick, 2002; Regan, 2000; Santtila et al., 2007; Simpson & Campbell, 2013; Sprecher & Cate, 2004; Tavakol et al., 2017; Yabiku & Gager, 2009). Respect is based on the moral dimensions of the relationship (Graham et al., 2011) and leads to relational commitment and marital success (Brandau-Brown & Ragsdale, 2008; Gordon et al., 2005; Roya et al., 2011; Sadeghi & Samani, 2011). While previous studies have emphasized the significance of women's physical attractiveness and personality-related attributes for marital success (Hoyt &

Hudson, 1981; Husain, 2023; Husain, Zahid, et al., 2022; Husain & Gulzar, 2015), the present study unveils a distinctive perspective. Contrary to expectations, the findings indicate that physical attractiveness did not emerge as a significant factor influencing marital success in this investigation.

In conclusion, it is evident that love, sex, and respect stand out as the principal factors in the inclination towards seeking additional wives. Moreover, these elements bear significant implications for an individual's emotional, sexual, moral, and psychosocial well-being (Husain, 2022b). Women from collectivistic cultures, such as Pakistan, have historically been stereotyped as possessing lower levels of sexual (Husain, Kiran, et al., 2023) and emotional intelligence (Husain, Inam, et al., 2022), coupled with heightened moral expectations (Husain, Wasif, et al., 2023) and conformity to cultural nobility (Husain, 2022a; Husain & Aziz, 2014; Husain & Imran, 2021; Husain & Nadeem, 2022; Husain & Qureshi, 2016) as compared to men. These factors make them prone to be mentally more disturbed (Husain, 2018, 2020a; Husain & Faize, 2020) and more vulnerable to exploitation and abuse (Husain, 2020b, 2020c) than men from the same cultural background. Women from collectivistic cultures, in the light of the current study, should recognize that physical attractiveness does not play a pivotal role in satisfying their husbands. Instead, prioritizing love, sex, and respect proves more instrumental in fostering marital satisfaction. This understanding underscores the need for a shift in focus towards these core aspects to promote healthier relationships within the cultural framework.

Conclusion

The current study has explored the dynamics of polygynous marriages in Pakistan, addressing a critical gap in existing literature by analyzing the psychosocial factors influencing marital satisfaction. The findings highlight that polygynous husbands exhibit significantly higher levels of satisfaction with their second wives compared to monogamous husbands with their sole spouse. Additionally, second wives in polygynous marriages express greater satisfaction with their husbands than the first wives. These results emphasize the importance of considering psychosocial dimensions, such as love, sex, respect, and physical attractiveness, in understanding and comparing marital satisfaction across different marriage structures.

Moving forward, future research in this domain could benefit from a further exploration of the specific psychosocial factors contributing to the heightened satisfaction observed in polygynous marriages. Investigating the interplay between cultural, religious, and individual beliefs shaping attitudes towards polygyny could provide a richer understanding of the complexities involved. Furthermore, a longitudinal study tracking the evolution of marital satisfaction over time in both monogamous and polygynous marriages would offer insights into the stability and dynamics of these relationships. Educational programs promoting awareness and understanding of the psychosocial com-

plexities of different marriage structures could contribute to more informed societal attitudes and practices.

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Data Availability: Data associated with this paper can be presented on demand.

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