

## Adaptation of Polygamous Couples: The Experiences of Living Indonesian Women

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### Abstract

Polygamy is commonly perceived as a form of patriarchal dominance over women, and numerous preliminary studies have highlighted its detrimental effects on children's futures. However, this research offers an alternative perspective on polygamy in Indonesia, stating that it is not always inherently unjust toward women and that families practicing polygamy can be happy. It also aims to understand the dynamics of polygamous families by examining their profiles, reasons, relationships, and happiness. Using a qualitative narrative method, this study included women engaged in polygamous marriages. Participants were chosen via purposive sampling from Java and North Sumatra villages. The results showed that wives involved in polygamous relationships were of varying ages, and their husbands had diverse professions. Furthermore, this practice could occur with or without the wives' consent. Initially, the relationships among wives were usually strained, leading to conflict; however, over time, they made peace with their reality and developed a partnership that enabled them to help each other. Happiness in the polygamous family was interpreted based on awareness of the division of labor and fulfilling all the needs of life, specifically for the children's future.

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### Key words

Polygamy, wives, husband, women experience, Indonesia

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## Introduction

Polygamy has always been a topic of interest to researchers, particularly because it raises questions about power dynamics in patriarchal societies. Although considered a cultural norm in some communities, polygamy is often viewed as a form of male dominance over women, placing them at a disadvantage. Polygamy is widely accepted in several countries, particularly Muslim-populated communities, including in the Middle East (Daoud, Berger-Polsky, Abu-Kaf, & Sagy, 2020), Africa (Bamgbade & Saloviita, 2014), and Indonesia (Abdullah, Abdullah, & Ferdousi, 2015; Bamgbade & Saloviita, 2014). According to several studies, polygamy is most prevalent in these regions, with approximately 40 to 50% of women involved in such marriages (Bamgbade & Saloviita, 2014). Court records also indicate that polygamy is becoming increasingly common in some areas, including the Middle East (Naser-Najjab, 2015), as well as in Syria (Al-Krenawi & Kanat-Maymon, 2017). Polygamy is also prevalent in Southeast Asian countries, such as Malaysia, Brunei Darussalam, and Indonesia (Noviana, 2021; Nurlaelawati, 2020).

Despite being a social norm in Indonesia, debates on polygamy persist between proponents and opponents of the practice (Smith, 2014). Polygamous marriages were outlawed in Indonesia in 1970 (Nurmila, 2009); however, unofficial marriages, known as *nikah siri*, continue to occur in the community (Wirasti & van Huis, 2021). Several studies have highlighted various issues associated with this practice, including its psychological impact on women and children, as well as property disputes that often lead to family conflicts (Smith, 2014). Gumani and Sodi (2009) have stated that it affects women's health, and children from polygamous families have been reported as facing difficulties in pursuing educational activities (Bamgbade & Saloviita, 2014).

A woman's decision to accept a polygamous marriage as a viable option is driven by a various factors, many related to the safety and well-being of the woman and her children (Zainal, 2019). The acceptance of polygamy can also be linked to common family traditions (Yerges et al., 2017). These findings offer an alternative perspective to the prevailing narrative that polygamy is inherently oppressive toward women. This research seeks to present a different side of polygamous life, where women consciously choose to participate in such marriages and may also derive benefits for themselves and their families. Contrary to popular belief, polygamy can bring happiness and economic stability to a family while ensuring a secure future for their children (Zainal, 2019).

This account of polygamy and happiness presents a perspective that diverges

from the typical portrayal of polygamous life. It endeavors to demonstrate how polygamy can be advantageous not only for men but also for women willing to engage in this practice. This narrative highlights the experiences of Indonesian women who embrace and engage in polygamous relationships, who scholars often neglect (Smith, 2014). By portraying polygamy as a source of tangible and intangible benefits specifically for women, this alternative narrative offers a fresh discourse on its practice in Indonesia. It seeks to investigate the story of polygamy as a recognized and acknowledged phenomenon that offers distinct benefits to women.

## Literature Review

### Reasons Behind Polygamous Marriage

Many reasons have been proposed to explain the practice of polygamy. One is family tradition, while another is men's lack of sexual fulfillment (Enayat & ghe-lichi, 2021). In the latter case, due to their inability to experience sexual fulfillment during periods of abstinence, some males choose a polygamous marriage.

In some countries, men's financial, social, and political positions have been used to justify polygamy (Naseer, Farooq, & Malik, 2021; Shahjehan & Rahman, 2021). A man's prestige increases as the number of dependents increases, providing him with greater opportunities to engage in polygamy. According to one study, men frequently marry multiple women to increase the number of their children (Farooq-e-Azam, Rubab, Salahuddin, & Usman, 2021).

### Religious Influences on Polygamous Marriages

The practice of polygamy is based on interpretations of different religious teachings and customs, regardless of cultural or religious variance. The Koran justifies polygamy among Muslims, suggesting that it is acceptable, and provides instructions regarding how it can be practiced as taken from the Islamic Book, Al-Qur'an Surah Al-Nisa' (4) verse 3. The teachings of the Koran on polygamy are frequently interpreted as requiring wives to be treated fairly in all aspects of their home life. Additionally, Elbedour maintained that some Muslims are significantly more likely to practice polygamy (Elbedour, Onwuegbuzie, Caridine, & Abu-Saad, 2002). This trend (religious reason correlated with Polygamy) was also observed by Smith (2014). She examined a sample of women in polygamous marriages and discovered that people who follow traditional religions, such as Islam, are more likely

to marry multiple times based on the belief that the goal of entering heaven is best accomplished through polygamy. Zainal (2019) noted that some members of religious groups engage in official polygamy as part of their culture, while Nasser-Najjab found that polygamy was required by the sunnah of the Prophet (Naser-Najjab, 2015).

## Methodology

This narrative study focuses on the use of stories as data. Narrative inquiry aims to comprehend experience as it is lived and described, through both study and literature, by gathering stories (Savin-Baden & Van Niekerk, 2007). Therefore, a qualitative method was used to investigate data that were considered appropriate.

The present study only included female participants currently involved in polygamous marriages. They were specifically selected from two major regions in Indonesia, Java and Sumatra, to provide a broader perspective of the country as a whole. Although it is acknowledged that the participants do not represent the majority view, their personal experiences in polygamous marriages offer a unique perspective on an often-overlooked topic.

## Instruments

Information was gathered through interviews or the participants' stories. Unstructured interviews were prepared by drawing up some questions, and participants were asked to recount stories in response to those questions. The main questions covered in the interviews were: (1) Why do you engage in polygamy?; (2) What is the current situation of the wives' relationships?; (3) How are the spouses' responsibilities split?; (4) What do polygamous women experience?; (5) What do you feel about polygamy? (6) Are you happy with polygamy?; and (7) Why? As the recounted stories often did not fall within the scope of the study, the participants were prompted with additional questions.

## Procedure

Purposive sampling was used to recruit the four participants, who were asked to participate in the study individually. The interviews were conducted in Bahasa and Bahasa Daerah to facilitate all the participants. Participants were informed of the purpose of the interview, what would be discussed, and how the data would be

used were explained before the interviews, and their consent was obtained. They were also assured that their responses would be kept confidential and their anonymity protected. The participants were treated with respect and dignity throughout the interview process. At the end of the interview, participants were informed of the purpose of the study in detail, and if they had any concerns or questions, these were addressed. Finally, the participants were thanked for their time and for providing the data. All interviews were taped, and the data were translated into English before examination and analysis.

### **Data Analysis**

Data were examined by thematic text analysis (Widodo, 2014) using recurring themes, subjects, concepts, and conceptual structures. Thematic analysis can be conducted in several ways; however, the most popular method involves six steps: familiarization, coding, generating themes, reviewing themes, defining and labeling themes, and writing up (Caulfield, 2022).

## **Results**

The results are described based on the themes that emerged in the interviews and stories told by the participants. The themes included (1) motivation or reasons for practicing polygamy, (2) experiences of and relationships among wives, and (3) feelings of happiness about polygamy. Before elaborating on the themes, the participants' profiles are described.

### **Participants' Profiles**

This study focuses on four women currently in polygamous marriages and explores the family dynamics within each case. In one case, two women (Adeta and Tania) are married to the same man, while in the other, Uwoh and Bunur are two of the four wives married to another man. By selecting these participants, this study aims to provide a comprehensive overview of this type of marriage and the dynamics of its practice. By involving these women connected by marriage ties to one husband, a comprehensive picture of their polygamous lives can be obtained. To protect the privacy of the participants, their names and identifying information were disguised.

**Table 1.**  
**Participants' Profiles**

No.	Name	Age	Village	Total Years of		Monthly Income (IDR)	Education	Religion
				Monogamous and Polygamous Marriage				
				Mono	Poly			
1.	Adeta	44	Yogya	11	4	3 million	Bachelor	Muslim
2.	Tania	39	Yogya	-	4	5 million	Bachelor	Muslim
3.	Uwuh	65	Deli Serdang	3	44	1.5 million	Elementary School	Muslim
4.	Bunur	42	Deli Serdang	-	21	Does not work	Elementary School	Muslim

Note. Mono: Monogamous and Poly: Polygamous

The participants were selected from two locations, Sumatra and Java, to represent polygamous life in Indonesia. However, it is acknowledged that the selection may not fully capture the overall phenomenon. The first participants were Adeta and Tania from Yogyakarta, married to a businessman. Moreover, they are economically well-off because of their husband's substantial income. Adeta, the first wife, is 44 years old, an entrepreneur, and holds a bachelor's degree. Tania, the second wife, 39 years old, also holds a bachelor's degree, works as an entrepreneur, and had a monthly income of 5 million IDR before marrying. Both Adeta and Tania actively participate in religious study groups.

The second group of participants, Uwuh and Bunur, were from Deli Serdang in North Sumatra, Indonesia. Their husband works as a taxi driver and barely earns enough to meet the family needs. Uwuh, the first wife, 65 years old, contributes to the family income by working as a cook in a restaurant, and had only completed elementary school. Bunur, the third wife, 42 years old, has not pursued any work outside the home and, similar to Uwuh, had only completed elementary school. Thus, both Uwuh and Bunur would be seen as inadequately educated. These differences in education and background may influence their polygamous experiences and practices. In fact, Uwuh's husband was married to three other wives. Bunur is the third wife. Uwuh and Bunur live in the same house with their husbands. The second and fourth wives did not live in the same house with them. Therefore, the second and fourth wives here are not involved as participants.

## Reasons

The acceptance of polygamy by different individuals often stems from unique

personal stories. One such factor is the influence of polygamy within family traditions, which may prompt individuals to embrace the practice. Despite having prior knowledge of polygamous lifestyles, accepting them as a part of marital life can be challenging. Adeta, for instance, initially refused to accept her husband's desire to make their marriage polygamous by taking a second wife. However, this eventually changed after witnessing the acceptance of polygamy in the family environment. It took Adeta seven years to come to terms with the idea of polygamy, at which point she agreed to her husband's proposal.

*At first, it was difficult for me. However, after realizing my brother and uncle were polygamous, I thought it would be okay for my family if my husband remarried...*

*.... therefore, bismillah... we discussed the matter calmly... and... he was patient... finally, when I was ready... although not 100%... almost seven years... the second wife was selected based on my criteria... I conveyed the technical requirements... and we both reached an agreement... bismillah... (Adeta, first wife; 44 years old).*

Tania felt compelled to enter a polygamous marriage because of societal and family pressures. As she was 35 years old and still unmarried, the family deemed this unacceptable, which caused Tania to reluctantly accept the proposal from a married man to make Tania a second wife. In other words, she was forced to agree to the marriage proposal because of family pressure. In most families and social circles, late marriages are not tolerated. Even though the proposal was from a married man, Tania was urged to accept.

*I got married at the age of 35 years as a second wife. Beforehand, I already knew I would marry a married man. But, I was pressured by my family and relatives, who insisted that I should have been married at my age. They also said that many people supported polygamous marriages (Tania, 39 years).*

Polygamy remains a socially and culturally accepted practice in Indonesia, particularly in rural areas, where traditional customs have a strong influence. Despite their rarity, individuals who engage in polygamous marriages are not worried about social repercussions from their families and communities. This aligns with the finding that rural populations strongly adhere to traditional ways in certain practices, including polygamous marriage. Al-Krenawi and Kanat-Maymon (2017) reported that family traditions may contribute to this practice.

For some wives, allowing their husbands to engage in a polygamous marriage is a means of protecting their families and children. In the case of Adeta and Uwoh, as first wives, the decision to accept polygamy was primarily driven by their desire to keep the family intact for the sake of themselves and their children. Adeta believed that rejecting polygamy and opting for divorce would have destroyed the family. Therefore, she had to suppress her feelings and accept her husband's request.

*Families must strengthen their bonds and remain united. My husband insists on remarrying... suppose I refuse to comply with these intentions, what will happen to my family? (Adeta, first wife, 44 years old).*

Unlike Adeta, Uwoh had to come to terms with her husband's extramarital affairs at a young age. Despite initial resistance, Uwoh eventually accepted her husband's proposal to marry an older woman. She had no choice, feeling that refusal and divorce would leave her struggling to provide for their children alone without a roof over their heads. Additionally, Uwoh was concerned about the potential negative impact of separation on the children's well-being and development, as they would not receive the same level of attention from their parents.

*I got married in 1970, then I was 15 years old, and my husband was 19. Within four years of our marriage and after having two children, my husband asked for permission to remarry. I was deeply saddened and devastated. However, if I refused his request, we would definitely fight. And no matter what happened...He would remarry with or without my permission. Opting for divorce was not an option because I wondered what would happen to me and my children, with no place to live and no food. I was not ready to be a widow either (Uwoh, 65 years old).*

The participants cited family harmony and integrity as the primary reasons for their decision to enter polygamous marriages. They believed that such arrangements would provide a stable source of shelter and livelihood for themselves and their children. Uwoh acknowledged that her husband had the right to take another wife, even without her consent. Therefore, she chose to accept the proposal, as there were no other viable alternatives (Nurlaelawati, 2020). Islamic law states that a polygamous marriage does not require a wife's permission and does not need to be registered. The Indonesian state, however, demands the registration of all marriages, and those that are not become invalid before the courts and in the eyes of



the law. This has led many Muslims to engage in polygamous marriages without the knowledge or consent of either the courts or their first wife. While such marriages are permitted under Sharia law, unregistered marriages (*nikah sirri*) are viewed with contempt by mainstream society (Chin, 2018). Islamic marriages that are not legally recognized do not provide state protection for the couple and their children. Moreover, Smith (2014) stated that mainstream culture is usually unsupportive of such marriages and regards them with contempt. In this case, however, the husband sought permission from the first wife to practice polygamy, which was registered with the Office of Religious Affairs (Nurmila, 2016; Nurmila & Bennet, 2014).

The second reason for practicing polygamy is religious teachings. Adeta and Tania, both educated women, were aware of the religious teachings that recognize polygamy and view polygamy as an act of worship and a way to strengthen their relationships and share happiness. Adeta, in particular, emphasized the positive aspects of polygamy and its potential benefits.

*I allowed my husband to practice polygamy... because it is justified by religious teachings... and I see my husband as a good and pious man and my adorable children; besides, polygamy has provided us with material well-being, and has made me feel very happy as a woman. Is it wrong of me to share my happiness with another woman? After all, everything ultimately comes from and is for Allah (Adeta, 44 years old).*

*I am active in recitation; therefore, I know that Islam allows polygamy, and I consider it an act of worship (Tania, second wife, 39 years old).*

The participants cited polygamy as a way of practicing religious teachings and demonstrating devotion. Understanding and adhering to these religious teachings strengthened the acceptance of polygamous marriages among those who found comfort and happiness in those religious doctrines and wished to share their husbands. These women approved of polygamy as a means of sharing their joy with other wives. Jealousy and anger were considered unnecessary because everything they did was in accordance with religious orders and for the sake of Allah. Therefore, personal and ego-driven issues were no longer excuses for not carrying out God's commands. These findings support Smith's (2014) observation that polygamy helps bring people closer to God by overcoming jealousy and other negative emotions.

The participants' perspectives show that the reasons for polygamous marriages are not single but varied, with the most prominent being (1) religious teaching, (2) social and family traditions, and (3) age. This supports Yuliantini et al.'s finding that there are several factors behind the willingness of a wife or woman to be polygamous, including (a) male wealth, (b) considerations of ancestry or social status, (c) considerations of masculinity or good looks, and (d) religious considerations (Yuliantini, Abidin, & Setyaningsih, 2008).

However, over the past decade, the Indonesian community has seen an increase in piety and closeness to God through polygamous and non-polygamous marriages (van Wichelen, 2010). Most Indonesians remain opposed to polygamy (Nurmila, 2008). However, those who practice this custom are sometimes considered symbols of piety (*pious* men and *pious* women) (Ahmadi, Rofiqoh, & Hefni, 2022). Lestari (2016) stated that spiritual beliefs play a vital role in marital happiness, as faith can bring purpose and meaning to life. It is concluded that marital satisfaction is measured by how religion influences the roles and judgments of the couple. Similarly, Yuliantini et al. (2008) reported that religious beliefs are a crucial factor in marital satisfaction.

### Relationship between Wives

The first wife and the other wives in the two polygamous marriages examined here have a harmonious relationship. Although Adeta and Tania live in separate houses, their homes are near each other, and they manage their households without interference. They have a friendly rapport and engage in various activities together, often taking photographs to document their closeness. This is because they knew each other very well beforehand. Adeta played the role of a mentor to Tania before proposing her as a second wife to her husband. As partners in this unique marital arrangement, they are not rivals and celebrate their happiness by posting pictures on social media. However, their posts have received some backlash from concerned friends who fear that their photos may set a precedent for others.

The intimate relationship between wives, as depicted by Adeta and Tania, is a form of partnership. This is because they knew each other before entering a polygamous lifestyle, and the knowledge of their personalities supports accepting the reality of sharing a husband. The partnership is balanced and supports each of them for the greater good despite both being married to one husband. Additionally, they do not view each other as rivals to be eliminated. This unique relationship is successful because of their self-awareness and understanding of others; that is, they

do not see the presence of another wife as a threat to their personality or status. The relationship between these wives indicates that polygamy does not necessarily hinder intimacy or acceptance of other women in the husband's life (van Wichelen, 2009).

In contrast to the story of Adeta and Tania, Uwoh's experience was different. Initially, Uwoh often felt jealous and hurt but promised not to engage in conflict, regardless of the situation. Thus, to avoid prolonged conflicts, she does not express these emotions to her husband or the other wives, although occasional tensions may arise. The parties involved in the relationship prioritize building connections with each other and suppress their feelings for the sake of family integrity and their children's future. They are committed to creating and sustaining a harmonious and peaceful polygamous household while practicing their religious teachings. While Umoh's story reveals some dissatisfaction, this is overshadowed by her belief in a just and all-knowing God who designs all circumstances to be good. These testimonies about the realities of daily life may be perceived as a form of helplessness; however, there are hints of how Uwoh finds her inner strength to endure and tolerate the situation—which ultimately, comes from a belief in God.

The difficult situation encountered is shared where Uwoh and the cowives face the challenge of being the family's breadwinners when their husbands can no longer fulfill that role. However, this situation highlights the reality of being in a polygamous marriage. This is consistent with the findings of Yerges et al. (2017) that women continue to maintain such marriages even when living alone. The participants acknowledged that avoiding conflict is essential as it cannot solve the problem. The key to a happy marriage is finding ways to resolve problems instead of avoiding them (Lestari, 2016). The participants' experiences suggest that avoiding conflict is key to happiness in polygamous households.

Uwoh and Bunur, who initially struggled with jealousy and competition, now cooperate and support each other in household chores. Both accept the reality of supporting each other to meet their needs, especially when their husband is inactively providing for the family. They consciously share their workload at home and outside without assigning specific tasks to each other. Although there is no task division, they understand each other's responsibilities; for instance, when one person cooks, the other may do the laundry. The division of tasks is based on individual awareness because both believe that trying to prove oneself right will not improve their lives. Making peace by accepting reality is a way to survive in the difficult circumstances faced by polygamous families.

The partnership established among the parties involved affirms that the wives

are aware that living in such marriages is a reality of life. However, rather than viewing the other wife as a rival, they strive to accept them as friends with similar life circumstances. This approach not only helps avoid conflict in the family but also promotes self-preservation. Recognizing that ongoing conflict can be detrimental to oneself and the children, a partnership is pursued to maintain family harmony. As meeting basic needs alone is not feasible, building a partnership is a viable option for sustaining a polygamous marriage.

### Happy with Polygamy

Religious teaching has been discussed as a reason for the prevalence of polygamous marriage. Many supporters of polygamy consider it a part of the *sunnah* or tradition of the Prophet Muhammad, and men often cite this as their reason for engaging in the practice. Since the Prophet Muhammad practiced polygamy, his *sunnah*, and other similar traditions should be followed (Ahmadi, Rofiqoh, & Hefni, 2022). This study's participants identified religious motivation as a factor contributing to the success and happiness of their polygamous marriages. Belief in Allah as the source of happiness led them to view polygamy as a religiously sanctioned practice aligning with their faith's teachings.

*Am I wrong in sharing happiness with other women? After all, everything comes from Allah (Adeta, 44 years).*

Tania, the second wife, and Adeta's potential rival, agreed with the statement made by Adeta that religious motivation is a key factor in the success of their polygamous marriage.

*I know that Islam allows polygamy, and it is considered as a form of worship.*

Religious teachings and strong faith in Allah play a vital role in reducing or even eliminating conflicts that may arise in polygamous marriages. This is because belief in Allah and religious teachings makes the individuals involved, patient, and resilient. In polygamous marriages, the focus is on the positive rather than negative aspects. They believe that Allah is just; thus, they accept whatever situation they are in, bringing peace and tranquility to their hearts

*Allah has infinite justice, does not sleep, and is all-knowing. Therefore, I stay calm*

*and strive to maintain peace. I do not want any conflict* (Uwoh, 65 years).

Belief in Allah enables Uwoh to remain calm and patient when dealing with conflict. This attitude prevents further escalation of the situation in case of disputes and promotes a harmonious and peaceful marriage with minimal disagreements. This demeanor also inspires Bunur, the third wife, to strive for the same level of tranquility and harmony in their marriage.

It has been argued that polygamous marriages can provide social and economic security for certain groups of women. However, others have suggested that this practice can create economic difficulties and harm women's well-being (Naseer, Farooq, & Malik, 2021; Yerges et al., 2017). Although Islamic law allows women to control their assets and sign contracts, these rights may not extend to women in polygamous marriages. Women who are neglected or denied protection by other wives may also face abuse that negatively affects their children's welfare (Naseer, Farooq, & Malik, 2021). For example, preliminary research has reported that polygamous families tended to have lower socioeconomic status than monogamous ones, due to factors such as parental education and income (Al-Sharfi, Pfeffer, & Miller, 2016).

The participants viewed their polygamous marriages as a source of stability and well-being, specifically when compared to alternatives such as divorce. Adeta and Tania are both well supported, as their husband is successful entrepreneur with large income. Moreover, their children attend reputable schools in the city and receive a good education.

*Alhamdulillah, financially, we are well catered for, and our children also attend good schools. The finances are shared according to needs. The first wife has six children while I only have two; therefore, it is adjusted* (Tania, 39 years).

In this case, the participants justified polygamy to gain social and economic privileges, where men with multiple wives demonstrate their financial superiority. Polygamous families tend to live level lives and have a higher social status than those who are not involved in such marriages (Lawson, Schaffnit, Hassan, & Urassa, 2021). Women who participate in polygamous marriages to gain social status or financial benefits (Muzammil, Affan, Alwi & Masturiyah, 2021) may benefit from various levels of social and economic control within their family structure. This appears to be a promising prospect for prosperity and well-being in their lives, as observed in the experiences of Adeta and Tania.

Uwoh and Bunur's husband works as a taxi driver, which results in a low income and economic status for their families. Therefore, the wives also have to provide financial support.

*In terms of survival, we work; other wives work to feed their children. Bunur helps me managing finances for the need of family. I have been working in a catering company despite being old (Uwoh, 65 years).*

Uwoh maintained that they do not reap any financial benefits from being in a polygamous marriage. On the contrary, Uwoh has to work hard to sustain the marriage, both in terms of finances and maintaining harmony among family members, and uphold the family's reputation. Owing to the husband's modest income as a taxi driver, she faced financial difficulties in the marriage. Uwoh had to work alone to earn money to support their children and buy food. This confirms that entering a polygamous marriage with an economically poor and inadequate husband leads to financial difficulties (Al-Krenawi & Kanat-Maymon, 2017; Yerges et al., 2017). In contrast, Adeta and Tania did not face any financial difficulties because their husband had a more stable income. This is in accordance with Yuliantini et al.'s (2008) study, stating that having a financially stable husband may help provide increased stability.

Despite facing financial difficulties, Uwoh found solace in the fact that they had a husband. She believed that allowing her husband to marry another woman was necessary for their survival and well-being. However, if she had divorced her husband, Uwoh would have been alone without a partner; hence, she ultimately agreed to her husband's decision to make the marriage polygamous. The husband's presence gave Uwoh a sense of security, knowing that they had a partner to rely on for food, shelter, and protection. This security and companionship may have given the participants the strength and willingness to work hard and support their families economically despite their challenges. After the husband passed away, Uwoh was overcome with grief, even more so given that she was struggling to provide for the family.

## Discussion

The everyday lives among the wives, in this case, eventually led to better communication and harmony. This contrasts with previous studies that reported that wives are often unhappy in polygamous marriages. The first wife usually feels an-

gry, hurt, and restless, whereas the second wife faces neglect or even violence. However, this study's participants reported that they were doing well and living in harmony, with no issues arising from the start of their marriage, supporting the observations made by Naseer et al. (2021). Polygamous marriages have often been linked to conflicts and competition among wives. Preliminary research has reported that women in such marriages tend to experience lower marital satisfaction and self-esteem and more problems with family functioning than those who practice monogamy (Naseer, Farooq, & Malik, 2021). They demonstrated their relationships' positive and happy nature by working together and supporting each other in caring for their children while engaging in household chores. The presence of another wife also provided them with a friend to share stories about tasks related to caring for their homes.

Polygamy does not always involve sadness and suffering. In fact, it can transform from something quite frightening to something desirable (Mutaqin, 2018). There are dynamics at play in polygamous relationships when wives accept their reality, specifically regarding their children's futures, leading to a reconciling of differences. In the end, polygamy is not only a family practice to be feared but a narrative about the partnership between wives who learn to accept each other. Although not a popular narrative, the story of polygamy presented here shows that it is not just a form of oppression against women but can also lead to happiness and fulfillment within their families.

## Conclusion

Stories of polygamous practices in Indonesia frequently suggest that these practices pose a threat to women. They feature women who did not initially desire polygamy but gradually accepted the reality of sharing a husband. In this challenging process, the wives justify polygamy based on religious or cultural beliefs and try to accept the situation by disregarding the family dynamics. They prioritize maintaining their futures and those of their children by acknowledging and accepting the presence of other wives in their husbands' lives. This marks the beginning of self-acceptance in a polygamous marriage. As wives gradually accept the division of tasks and responsibilities, they become more open to polygamy. The ultimate acceptance of this practice is not seen as a potential nightmare but as a means for wives to share and maintain family life. Consequently, it is practiced openly and brings happiness from the perspective of the women involved in such marriages.

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**Participants**

Adeta, 44 years old

Bunur, 42 years old

Tania, 39 years old

Uwuh, 65 years old

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