

***Psychological Well-Being and Bullying/Victimization
Among Adolescents from Polygamous and Monogamous Families in Saudi Arabia***

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Abstract

Family structure is an important context for children's upbringing. Polygamy is a type of marriage that affects the structure of the family. This research investigated the impact of polygamy (one man married to more than one wife) on adolescents in Saudi Arabia. The research aims were to investigate differences between adolescents from polygamous and monogamous families in the following variables: psychological well-being (self-esteem, satisfaction with life, depression) and bullying/ victimization.

Participants were a total of 98 students from schools in Riyadh City; 49 students from polygamous families and 49 students from monogamous families (71 boys, 27 girls; mean age = 15.36 years). Questionnaires and tests to measure demographic variables, self-esteem, satisfaction with life, depression, bullying, and victimization were administered in schools. All tests have been previously validated for use in Saudi Arabia.

The results found statistically significant differences between participants from polygamous and monogamous families in all dependent variables. Adolescents from monogamous families reported higher self-esteem and satisfaction with life than adolescents from polygamous families. Also, adolescents from polygamous families had higher depression, bullying and victimization scores than adolescents from monogamous families.

Conclusions were that polygamy had negative effects on the psychological well-being (self-esteem, satisfaction with life, depression) and behaviour (bullying) of Saudi adolescents.

Keywords: polygamy, polygamous family, adolescents, psychological well-being, depression, bullying.

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Introduction

Polygamy occurs in several forms. The most common form of polygamy is polygyny. This occurs when a man has more than one wife at the same time. Polygamy is permitted in various countries in the Middle East, Asia and Africa, although not practised by all. Factors affecting the occurrence of polygamy include cultural, social, economic, political and religious factors (Al-Krenawi, 2014; Al-Shamsi, & Fulcher, 2005). In Saudi society, polygamy is practised more than in other Middle Eastern societies (Alkhateep, 2007; Al Sharfi, 2009). The reasons for men to be polygamous are similar in Middle Eastern societies. In Saudi society, economic revolution through the last 30 years has played a role in the prevalence of polygamous relationships, in addition to social and cultural factors which support polygamy (Ymani, 2008; Al-Seef, 2008). Polygyny is permitted in Islamic Sharia law for particular circumstances which are related to women's health such as chronic disease and infertility, also to protect widows and single women (Farahat, 2002). However, Al-Seef (2008) stressed that men tend to be polygamous without respecting these conditions, so that polygamy is considered one of the main causes for divorce.

Most psychological research on polygamy has focussed on the adults rather than children in the family, particularly the wives (Al-Krenawi & Graham, 2006; Shepard, 2012). Research on the wives in polygynous marriages has found negative effects on their mental health which may have an effect on their children (Abbo, Ekblad, Waako, Okello, Muhwezi & Musisi, 2008; Al-Krenawi and Graham, 2006; Shepard, 2012). Also, Shepard (2012) summarized the findings of 22 studies on the mental health of women in polygynous marriages that found a higher prevalence of somatization, depression, anxiety, hostility, psychoticism, psychiatric disorder, reduced life satisfaction, reduced marital satisfaction, problematic family functioning and low self-esteem. Al-Krenawi (2014) and Al-Krenawi, Slonim-Nevo & Graham (2006) reported negative effects of polygamy on men's family functioning which could have negative effects on children. Also polygamous fathers are often absent from the daily lives of their children because the father's time and resources are divided between wives and the children of each wife.

Studies of adolescents in polygynous families have found that they have poorer mental health than those in monogamous families (Al-Krenawi, Graham & Slonim-Nevo, 2002). AlSharfi, Pfeffer and Miller (2015) summarised the results of research that compared children and adolescents from polygamous and monogamous families. Children and adolescents from polygamous families were found to have more mental health problems, more social problems and lower academic achievement than those from monogamous families.

Elbedour, Onwuegbuzie, Caridine & Abu-Saad (2002) discussed several reasons why polygamous family structures might have negative effects on children. These tended to focus on the negative effects on the entire family system. Polygamy affects the relationship between marriage partners as well as the relationship between parents (especially the father) and children. The effects of poor relationships between polygamous marriage partners were found to negatively affect adolescents by Al-Shamsi & Fulcher (2005). They found that adolescents of first wives had low self-esteem and showed symptoms of depression because of the continuous conflict between their parents (Al-Shamsi & Fulcher, 2005). Also, the negative effects of

polygyny on mothers and the effects of these on their children were discussed by Elbedour et al (2002). In addition, Cherian (1994) suggested that polygamy weakens the parent-child bond which results in reduced emotional satisfaction and security for the child.

Family problems such as poor cohesion, economic difficulties, father absence and emotional distance are more prevalent in polygamous families (Al-Krenawi & Slonim-Nevo, 2006; Elbedour et al, 2002; Elbedour, Abu-Bader, Onwuegbuzie, Abu-Rabia, El-Aassam, 2006; Al-Krenawi, Slonim-Nevo, 2008). Father absence has been found to affect behavioural problems such as aggression, addiction, and sexuality among adolescents from polygamous families (Al-Samaree, 2002). Studies of Saudi families with absent fathers (through divorce or death) have found father absence to have negative effects on the psychological well-being of children, including behavioural problems and bullying (Aldarmeki, 2001; Al-Krenawi, 2014; Almuhareb, 2003; Alsamaree, 2002; Alseef, 2008; Alsharfi, 2009; Elbedour, et al 2003; Lamb, 2010). As the father in Saudi society is the authority figure in the family, father availability is important for shaping adolescents' behaviour.

Although there have been many studies of the role of parents and the family in child and adolescent development, there have been few studies of adolescents growing up in polygamous families. According to Al-Krenawi (2014), rates of polygamy remain stable and are increasing in some societies. There is a need for more research on children and adolescents in polygamous family contexts. Therefore this study will investigate the effects of polygamy on adolescents by comparing two types of family structure (polygamous and monogamous) in Saudi Arabia.

The research aims were to investigate differences between adolescents from polygamous and monogamous families in the following variables: self-esteem, satisfaction with life, depression, and bullying. Also, as polygamy affects men and women differently (Al-Krenawi, 2014), the research aimed to compare boys and girls from polygamous and monogamous families.

Method

Participants

Participants were 98 students, 71 boys and 27 girls; 49 students were from polygamous families and 49 from monogamous families in Riyadh. The mean age for participants was 15.04 years and the age range was 13 – 18 years. Participants were sampled by using two types of selection. Participants from polygamous families were selected through teachers' identification. Adolescents from monogamous families (in the same age ranges as those from polygamous families) were sampled randomly from school registers.

Materials

A demographic questionnaire asked questions about age, gender, father's income and occupation, mother's occupation, number of siblings, whether child of first or second wife, and time spent with father. Measures of Self-Esteem (Rosenberg, 1979), Satisfaction with Life scale (Diener et al, 1985), depression (Lovibond & Lovibond, 1985) and a Bullying questionnaire to measure bullying and victimization (Abu-

Khazal, 2009) were used. All questionnaires have been published and validated for use with Arab adolescents and were considered to be culturally relevant instruments. All materials prepared in English were translated and back-translated into Arabic for use in Saudi Arabia. Also, consent forms, information sheets and debrief sheets for teachers, parents and participants were provided.

Psychometric properties of the instruments were calculated for this sample using Cronbach alpha to show the internal consistency. For self-esteem alpha = .72, for satisfaction with life alpha = .74, for depression alpha = .87, for bullying alpha = .96, for victimization of bullying alpha = .97.

Scoring procedure

Each item in the self-esteem scale was scored on a 4 point scale with higher scores showing higher self-esteem. Each item in the Satisfaction with Life scale was scored using a 7 point scale with higher scores showing more satisfaction with life. Items in the depression scale were scored on a 4 point scale with higher scores showing more depression. Items on the bullying and victimization scales were scored using 5 point scales with higher scores indicating more bullying and more victimization.

Procedure

After the researcher received the consent forms from the parents, principals, and students, the questionnaires and tests were administered in two sessions by the researcher to avoid tiring the participants. For the girls' school, school counsellors administered the questionnaires for cultural reasons.

Ethics

The ethics of this study were approved by the University of Lincoln School of Psychology Research and Ethics Committee and AL-Baha University. Also, permission was given from the Saudi Cultural Attaché and Education management. Parents gave written consent. Participants were informed that they do not have to participate if they do not want to, that they do not have to answer every question and that they can withdraw from the research at any time and withdraw their results up to two weeks later.

Results

Parents' education, employment and income

Education levels for fathers were as follows. For polygamous fathers: not school educated, n = 18; less than high school, n = 15; high school, n = 4; bachelor degree, n = 11, postgraduate, n = 1. For monogamous fathers: not school educated, n = 4; less than high school, n = 17; high school n = 17; bachelor degree, n = 11, postgraduate, n = 0. There were more uneducated polygamous fathers than polygamous fathers and more monogamous fathers had completed high school. These differences between polygamous and monogamous fathers were statistically significant; $\chi^2(4) = 18.08, p = .001$.

There were no statistically significant differences between polygamous and monogamous mothers in terms of education. The majority had not been school educated. For polygamous mothers: not school educated, n = 25; less than high school, n = 12; high school, n = 7; bachelor degree, n = 5, postgraduate, n = 0. For

monogamous mothers, not school educated, $n = 20$; less than high school, $n = 14$; high school $n = 6$; bachelor degree, $n = 9$, postgraduate, $n = 0$.

There were no statistically significant differences between polygamous and monogamous fathers for employment. The majority of fathers were employed; 47 polygamous fathers and 46 monogamous fathers were employed. Also the majority of mothers in both groups were not employed; 43 mothers from polygamous families and 38 mothers from monogamous families were not employed. Polygamous families had lower incomes than monogamous families ($p < 0.02$).

Adolescents from polygamous families reported that their father was present in the home for fewer days (mean = 3.55 days, SD = 2.06) than those from monogamous families (mean = 6.41 days, SD = 1.39). This difference was statistically significant; $t(96) = 8.027, p < 0.001$.

Self-esteem, satisfaction with life, depression, bullying and victimization comparisons

A series of two-way between subjects analysis of variance tests were used to analyse the effect of family structure and gender on self-esteem, satisfaction with life, depression, bullying and victimization.

Self-Esteem: Figure 1 shows that mean scores for the adolescents from monogamous families were higher for Self- Esteem. A significant effect for family structure was found; $F(1, 94) = 8.097, p = .005$. The effect of gender was not significant and there was no significant interaction between family structure and gender.

Satisfaction with Life: Adolescents from monogamous families were more satisfied with life than adolescents from polygamous families (Figure 1); $F(1, 94) = 3.975, p < 0.05$. There was no significant difference between boys and girls and no significant interaction between family structure and gender.

Depression: Adolescents from polygamous families had higher depression scores than those from monogamous families; $F(1, 94) = 32.136, p < 0.001$ (see Figure 1). There was no significant difference between boys and girls and no significant interaction between family structure and gender.

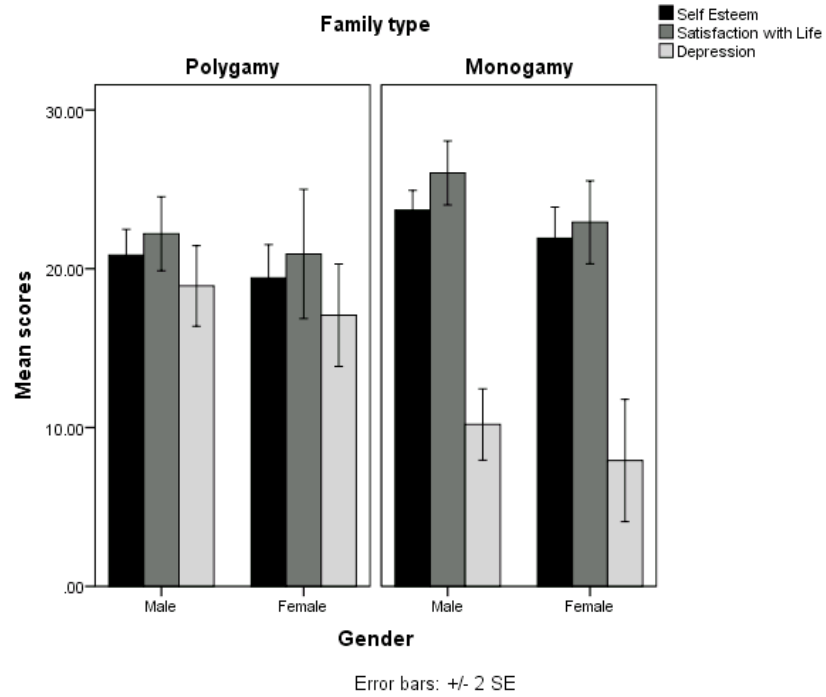


Figure 1: Mean scores for Self-Esteem, Satisfaction with Life and Depression for boys and girls from polygamous and monogamous families

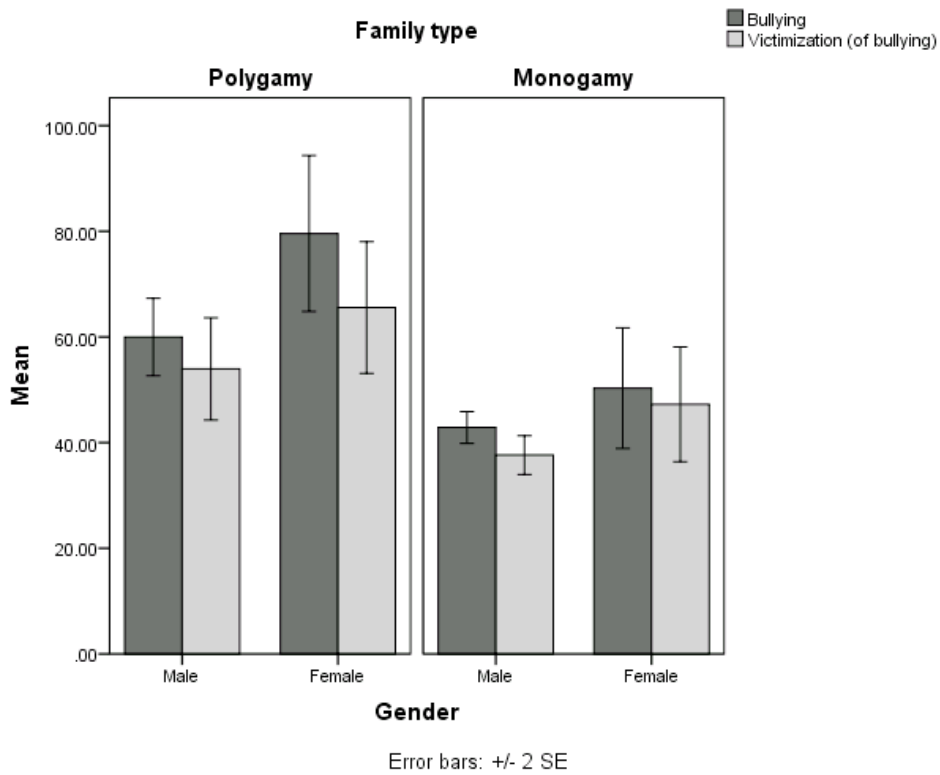


Figure 2: Mean scores for bullying and victimization for boys and girls in polygamous and monogamous families

Bullying: Adolescents from polygamous families reported higher mean sores for bullying than adolescents from monogamous families (see Figure 2); $F(1, 94) = 29.175, p < 0.001$. Also, girls had higher scores than boys; $F(1, 94) = 9.924, p = 0.002$. There was no significant interaction between family type and gender.

Victimization (of bullying): Participants from polygamous families reported more victimization than those from monogamous families; $F(1, 94) = 12.587, p < 0.001$ (see Figure 2). Girls had higher scores than boys $F(1, 94) = 4.722, p < 0.05$. There was no significant interaction between family structure and gender.

Discussion

The results of this study found that adolescents from polygamous families had poorer self-esteem, poorer satisfaction with life and higher scores on the depression scale than adolescents from monogamous families. Also, adolescents from polygamous families had higher rates of bullying behaviour and higher rates of being a victim of bullying than adolescents from monogamous families.

In this study, it was found that polygynous fathers were less educated than monogamous fathers and had lower incomes. Several previous studies showed similar findings. Previous research found that polygamous parents were less educated than monogamous parents and struggled more with economic difficulties which had negatively affected their family life (Al-Krenawi, Graham, & Al-Krenawi, 1997; Al-Krenawi, Graham & Slonim-Nevo, 2002; Al-Krenawi & Lightman, 2000; Al-Krenawi & Slonim-Nevo, 2008; Al-Shamsi & Fulcher, 2005). However, there was no significant difference for mothers in level of education which differs from the results of some previous researchers (Al-Krenawi et al, 1997; Al-Shamsi & Fulcher, 2005).

This study found that Saudi adolescents from polygamous families had poorer self esteem than those from monogamous families. Previous research has found inconsistent results for self-esteem; some researchers have found no statistically significant differences between adolescents from polygamous and monogamous families for self-esteem (Al-Krenawi & Slonim-Nevo, 2008). However, other researchers have found statistically significant differences. For example, Riaz (1996) claimed that adolescents from polygamous families reported lower scores for self esteem. Also Al-Krenwai et al (2002) found that adolescents from polygamous families suffered from negative beliefs toward themselves.

Scores on the depression scale were found to be lower for adolescents from polygamous families compared to those from monogamous families. Similar results were obtained by Al-Krenawi et al (2002) and Al-Krenawi et al (2008). However, Elbedour et al (2007) and Hamdan et al (2009) did not find significant differences between adolescents from polygamous and monogamous families. More research is needed to investigate these findings and whether other mediating variables affect self-esteem and depression differences.

Satisfaction with life was found to be poorer among adolescents from polygamous families and those from monogamous families. This supports previous research by Al-Krenawi et al (2006) who found that adolescents from polygamous families have

negative attitudes toward practicing polygamy as result of family conflicts and mental health problems.

This study is one of the first to compare rates of bullying among adolescents from polygamous and monogamous family structures. The results indicated that there are higher rates of bullying behavior and victimization (from bullying) among adolescents from polygamous families than those from monogamous families for both girls and boys. Interestingly, this study found that girls reported higher rates of bullying and victimization than boys. Also girls from polygamous families had the highest rates of bullying and victimization. Reasons for this result are not clear because the sample size for girls was quite small. This result needs to be replicated with a larger sample.

This is one of the first studies of the psychological effects of the polygamous family structure on Saudi adolescents. The results are similar to those from other cultural contexts, especially studies done in other Arab cultural contexts (Al-Krenawi, 2014). One of the strengths of this research is that standardised tests were used. The bullying and victimization questionnaire was designed for use by Arab students. The other tests used had previously been validated for use with Arabic or Middle Eastern samples. Also, the psychometric properties (internal consistency) of the instruments for this sample were tested and internal consistency was good. For tests designed in the English language, back-translation was used.

Limitations of this study are that the sample size was not large enough to investigate the effects of other mediating variables, such as family income, family size, family conflicts, and father absence. Elbedour et al (2002) stated that research on the effects of polygamy on children and adolescents tends to rely on family structure as a variable without taking into account other variables such as family relationships. Further research is needed to investigate the variables that might explain the negative outcomes for adolescents in polygamous families.

Conclusion

Monogamous and polygamous families in Saudi Arabia were found to have different parental education levels and income which may have an effect on adolescents. Also, fathers in polygamous families spent less time with their children than fathers in monogamous families. The polygynous family structure had a negative effect on the psychological well-being (self-esteem, satisfaction with life, depression) and behavior problems (bullying) of Saudi adolescents. Further research is needed to investigate the roles of several mediating variables on the polygamous families in Saudi society and other societies which practice polygamy.

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