

Polygamy: A Methodological Analysis of Hadith Studies

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Abstract:

Polygamy, as a marital system, has a long history that differs across cultures. Before the advent of Islam, polygamy was practiced by various ethnic groups, including the Hebrew and Arab peoples during the Jahiliyah period. In addition, there were also "Salafiyun" ethnic groups, now represented by countries such as Russia, Latvia, the Czech Republic, and Yugoslavia, as well as parts of Germany and England. The practice of polygyny in the Jahiliyah era, or before the time of Prophet Muhammad, was widespread and unrestricted in terms of the number of wives. During the time of Prophet Muhammad, Islam not only allowed monogamous marriages but also permitted polygyny with a maximum limit of four wives. In contrast, those who reject polygamy in Islamic law often argue that it conflicts with gender equality principles or serve as a protest against the practice of free sex. This study aims to explain the concept of polygyny in Islam, its historical evolution from era to era, and the establishment of polygamy during the time of Prophet Muhammad. It also explores the wisdom of Islamic law regarding polygyny and provides a comparison with the Western notion of free sex, which rejects polygyny due to gender equality concerns.

Keywords: polygamy, history, comparison of the Jahiliyah period, Western free sex, Islam

INTRODUCTION

The issue of polygyny stems from a cultural practice that has existed for thousands of years, long before the advent of Islam. The Qur'an was revealed during a time when the practice of polygyny was deeply rooted in society, especially during the Jahiliyyah period, when polygamous marriages were among the negative traditions that Islam sought to gradually eradicate. The gradual elimination of this practice is evident in the Prophet Muhammad's (PBUH) command to limit the number of wives to four, and to divorce any wives beyond this number. Additionally, Allah placed the responsibility on husbands to act justly toward their wives, and allowed a man to have only one wife if he feared he could not fulfill this justice. The Qur'an further emphasizes that being just between wives is extremely difficult and almost impossible.

The establishment of this Shari'ah law necessitates certain restrictions and criticisms regarding deviant polygamous practices. It can be stated that polygyny has no inherent connection to a person's religiosity, faith, piety, or obedience to Allah. What truly relates to one's Islam and faith is how well they treat those marginalized and oppressed by societal structures, such as women, and those who suffer from systemic violence. As the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) advised during

his Farewell Sermon (Hajj Wada'), all people are required to treat women with kindness, to honor, and to respect them.

The question of whether monogamy or polygyny better dignifies women should be left to the conscience of women themselves. Public opinion about polygyny is diverse; some agree with it, while others oppose it, especially women who feel disadvantaged by having to share their husband with others. This is often influenced by family economic situations that make polygyny impractical. Referencing a hadith narrated by Ahmad, at-Tirmidhi, Abu Dawud, and ad-Darimi:

إِنَّمَا النِّسَاءُ شَقَائِقُ الرِّجَالِ

“Women are the counterparts of men.”

However, we believe this hadith cannot be used as a legal argument or proof because it is ma'lul (flawed). The hadith is da'if (weak) due to the narrator 'Abdullah Al-'Umari. Scholars of Hadith criticism (Jarh and Ta'dil) have commented on this as follows:

- Yahya bin Sa'id weakened the hadith.
- Al-Khatib said that 'Abdullah Al-'Umari is weak in the eyes of hadith scholars.
- In the Khulashah, Imam Adh-Dhahabi stated that the scholars have concluded that 'Abdullah Al-'Umari cannot be relied upon as a narrator. After he expressed this, Adh-Dhahabi added that this hadith contains many errors and should not be used as evidence. However, if a reliable chain of transmission from his teacher is found, it could be considered hasan (good). As a result, Imam Muslim did not rely on it when narrated solely by 'Abdullah Al-'Umari, and instead treated it as maqrūn (associated). Al-Hafiz also considered the hadith to be weak, referring to it as dhaiifun 'aabidun.

Despite the weakness of this hadith, the phenomenon of polygyny remains a subject of both support and opposition in society. Those in favor defend it, while many, particularly women, oppose it, believing it is unfair to have to share a husband. Additionally, this issue is often affected by the economic reality that may make polygyny unsustainable.

This study seeks to address some of the following questions: What exactly does polygyny mean? What is the foundation of the hadith regarding this practice? What are the benefits of allowing polygyny in Islam? And how does the Islamic system of polygyny compare with the concept of free sex in Western societies?

METHOD

This study employs a qualitative research approach to explore the historical, religious, and sociocultural dimensions of polygyny in Islam, specifically through

the lens of Islamic texts, including the Qur'an and Hadith of Prophet Muhammad (PBUH), and to compare it with the practice of free sex in Western societies. The primary aim is to analyze the concept of polygyny as it is prescribed in Islamic teachings, while also assessing its impact on women's rights, dignity, and societal structures. The research methodology combines a literature review, historical analysis, and comparative study, incorporating Islamic primary sources—particularly Hadiths—to provide a comprehensive understanding of this issue.

The first stage of the methodology involves conducting an in-depth literature review, focusing on primary Islamic texts such as the Qur'an and the Hadiths of the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH). The Hadiths are particularly significant in this study, as they provide contextual details and guidance on the ethical and practical aspects of polygyny, as taught by the Prophet. Through examining authentic Hadith collections—such as those of Sahih Bukhari, Sahih Muslim, Abu Dawood, and others—the study explores the specific conditions under which polygyny is allowed in Islam, as well as the limits and moral guidelines set forth by the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH). This approach ensures that the interpretation of polygyny is grounded in both the Qur'anic revelation and the prophetic tradition.

Next, the study employs a historical analysis to examine the development of polygyny across different historical periods, starting with the pre-Islamic Jahiliyyah era, where polygyny was practiced freely, and continuing to its regulation in Islamic law. The research traces how the practice of polygyny was addressed by the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH), highlighting key Hadiths that provide insight into the limitations and responsibilities associated with polygamous marriages in Islam. By understanding these historical contexts, the study aims to illustrate how Islamic teachings sought to bring order and justice to a practice that was otherwise unregulated and potentially exploitative in pre-Islamic society.

In addition to the historical framework, the study employs a comparative analysis to juxtapose Islamic polygyny with the concept of free sex in Western societies. This comparison explores the fundamental differences in how both systems view marriage, gender roles, and sexual relations. By analyzing the ethical, legal, and social implications of polygyny as practiced in Islamic tradition—guided by the teachings of the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH)—the study contrasts these views with contemporary Western perspectives on sexual freedom and equality. This comparative method allows for a deeper understanding of how polygyny, as prescribed in Islam, is distinct from Western ideals of marriage and sexual autonomy.

Lastly, the study incorporates qualitative data analysis, synthesizing information from Hadiths, historical sources, and contemporary views on polygyny. This includes analyzing interviews, surveys, and case studies to understand current societal attitudes towards polygyny within Muslim communities and in Western societies. By integrating the teachings of the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) alongside modern-day perceptions, this study aims to provide a nuanced view of polygyny, highlighting both its religious justifications and its practical implications for women and society at large.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Understanding Polygamy

In the Indonesian language, polygyny refers to a marital system in which one party has or marries multiple opposite-sex partners simultaneously. Scholars distinguish the term for a man who has more than one wife as polygyny, derived from the Greek words *polus* (many) and *gune* (woman). On the other hand, when a woman has more than one husband, the term used is polyandry, derived from *polus* (many) and *andros* (man).

Thus, the correct term for a man who has more than one wife simultaneously is polygyny, not "poligami" in the literal sense. However, in everyday speech, the term polygamy is commonly used to refer to a man marrying multiple women at once, which is understood by the general public as polygyny.

History of Polygamy

The current opinions surrounding polygamy are largely influenced by religious teachings, one of the most notable being Islam. In fact, polygamy existed and was practiced as a cultural norm among various nations across the world, both in the East and the West, long before the advent of Islam. At that time, polygamy was practiced without any rules, limitations, or conditions. Some believe that polygamy was only introduced after Islam emerged and spread, but this view is incorrect. The truth is that polygamy had been known and practiced by human societies for thousands of years, even centuries, before the revelation of Islam, by various groups across the globe, including the Arab people, where Islam was later spread by the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH).

In pre-Islamic times, polygamy was already practiced by the Hindus, Persians, Arabs, Romans, Chinese, Jews, and many other cultures. The Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) limited polygamy to four wives. Before this limitation, many of his companions had more than four wives. Some even had five, ten, or more. For example, Qais bin al-Harith, who had eight wives before embracing Islam, reported: "I converted to Islam and had eight wives. I then came to the Prophet (PBUH) and told him, and he said, 'Choose four of them.'" A similar experience occurred with Ghailan bin Salamah al-Tsaqafi when he embraced Islam.

Several historical narrations indicate that tribal leaders of the time had dozens of wives, and some tribal chiefs had hundreds of wives. This is an undeniable historical fact. When Islam arrived, it did not immediately ban the practice of polygamy. However, polygamy as practiced at the time clearly conflicted with Islamic values of justice and equality before Allah (SWT). Islam did not abolish the custom outright but instead refined and regulated it.

Upon the revelation of verses concerning polygamy, the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) implemented significant reforms, according to the guidance provided in these verses. First, the number of wives was limited to four, as there had been no restrictions on the number of wives before Islam. One narration regarding this restriction is from Naufal Ibn Mu'awiyah, who said: "When I converted to Islam, I had five wives. The Messenger of Allah said: 'Divorce one and keep the four.'"

Second, Islam set strict requirements for those wishing to practice polygamy, namely the ability to act justly among the wives. The conditions for permissible polygamy are very stringent, and it is almost certain that no one can fully meet them. This indicates that Islam sought to regulate polygamy by imposing strict rules that prevent men from acting arbitrarily toward their wives, as had been the case before.

From the explanation above, it is clear that polygamy is not inherently part of Islamic teachings. Rather, Islam regulates polygamy by setting strict limits and requirements: a maximum of four wives and the condition of treating them fairly. Islam provides a framework that controls polygamy, ensuring it is not practiced arbitrarily or without justice.

Reasons for Polygamy

The original concept of marriage is a union between one husband and one wife, while polygamy is not the norm but rather an exceptional or unnatural practice that occurs under certain circumstances. The justification for polygamy lies in the presence of a legitimate, reasonable cause. These reasons must be justifiable within the norms of society. For a husband to consider polygamy, there must be a practical and realistic reason, which will later serve as the basis for determining whether he is fit to take on multiple wives.

In the interpretation of al-Maraghi, it is stated that the reasons or conditions under which polygamy is permissible include: (1) the inability to have children and continue the lineage, (2) when the first wife suffers from a chronic illness that prevents her from fulfilling her duties as a wife, (3) when the husband has a high sexual drive that cannot be satisfied by one wife, and (4) when there is a disproportionate number of women to men due to war or other social crises. These reasons must be rooted in genuine, logical causes, and not based on personal whims or desires.

Criteria and Requirements for a Man to Practice Polygyny

No More Than Four Wives at One Time

As stated in the Qur'an, Surah An-Nisa (4:3), and supported by several Hadiths, a man is not allowed to have more than four wives at the same time. However, if one

of his wives passes away, he may marry again. Allah SWT, who knows what is best for His servants, also knows why He permits a man to marry more than one wife but limits it to only four. The Islamic law that limits polygyny to a maximum of four is based on Allah's perfect knowledge of His creation and their capacity to act justly.

A Muslim man cannot have more than four wives. If a man fears that he cannot be just in his treatment of multiple wives, it is better for him to have only one. The same applies to a man who has two wives and cannot treat them justly if he marries another; in this case, the two wives should suffice. Similarly, a man with three wives, who fears that he cannot be just if he marries a fourth, should remain with his three wives. If a man already has four wives, he is not allowed to marry again, even if he believes he can treat them all justly. This is because the noble law of Islam has set the maximum limit for polygyny at four.

Ability to Practice Polygyny

A Muslim man who does not have the capacity to practice polygyny is prohibited from doing so, as it would lead to injustice toward his wives and children, and Allah has forbidden all forms of injustice. The "capacity" referred to here involves having sufficient wealth, physical health, and psychological stability.

A man who does not have the financial means to support two wives should remain with one wife, as this is better and more appropriate. A man who hastily enters into polygyny without the financial ability to provide for his wives and children will inevitably commit injustice against them. Financial capability is a key criterion for permitting polygyny.

A Muslim man must be physically healthy so that he can work and provide for his wife. A man who is physically healthy can fulfill both the material and emotional needs of his wife. Physical health also ties into sexual capability. A man who suffers from sexual dysfunction, such as impotence, is prohibited from practicing polygyny. The wisdom of marriage and polygyny includes the preservation of honor and chastity. If a man cannot fulfill his wife's emotional and physical needs, it would violate her natural rights and lead to injustice.

Linguistic Study (Meaning of 'Adl and al-Qisth)

In the paradigm of Islamic jurisprudence (usul fiqh), the law regarding polygyny can be explained by first exploring several key words in Surah An-Nisa (4:3), such as *fankihu* and *al-'adlu*. The word *fankihu*, in the science of usul fiqh, is an imperative verb, meaning "then marry." According to the majority of scholars in fiqh and tafsir, the general rule for "imperative words" in the Qur'an implies a legal obligation and requirement unless there is evidence suggesting otherwise.

Thus, the imperative verb in the Qur'an leads to two legal implications: First, if the command is not accompanied by other contextual evidence (qara'in), the legal implication is obligation (wajib). Second, if the command is followed by qara'in, the implication is that the action is permissible (mubah). Since *fankihu* is an imperative verb with the condition of fulfilling the requirement of justice (adil), the legal ruling for polygyny, according to the word *fankihu*, is permissibility (mubah).

The term *adil* (عدل) in Surah An-Nisa (4:3) refers to fairness in the rights of wives, which includes tangible aspects like housing, food, clothing, time spent with them, and other needs.

It is important to emphasize that the concept of fairness here does not require equal distribution in every case. For instance, if a husband provides a monthly allowance of one million rupiahs to his first wife, he is not obliged to give the same amount to his second wife. This is because fairness is related to the situation, condition, and needs of each wife. If the first wife has two children and the second wife has none, the allowance for both wives need not be the same. In this case, the husband may give more to the first wife, considering her circumstances. This reasoning also applies to other situations.

Meanwhile, the concept of fairness in Surah An-Nisa (4:129) is often cited by some opponents of polygyny to argue that it is impossible for a man to be just toward his wives. They claim that the permission for polygyny in Surah An-Nisa (4:3) is abrogated (mansukh) by Surah An-Nisa (4:129). They argue that while Allah permits polygyny if justice can be maintained, this condition is impossible to fulfill. This view is incorrect. The fairness mentioned in Surah An-Nisa (4:129) refers specifically to fairness in the emotions or feelings a husband has toward his wives, which is inherently difficult or impossible to achieve. Scholars agree that the justice in question is related to emotional feelings or love, which a man cannot fully control.

Thus, Allah SWT clearly states that humans cannot be just in matters of the heart, but He also challenges (provides the means for) humans to be just in all other aspects, such as in material provisions, protection, and the fulfilling of needs. This is one of the key measures for practicing polygyny: the ability to be just in providing financial support, protection, and fulfilling the economic needs of the family.

Polygyny from a Social and Cultural Perspective

From a social and cultural anthropology perspective, the phenomenon of polygyny is dominant in societies that follow a patrilineal system. In more advanced societies with higher socio-economic status, polygyny tends to be more common, or there is a higher occurrence of serial monogamy, where divorce happens frequently. However, this does not mean that traditional societies rarely practice polygyny. In traditional societies, the social status and power of men determine

the number of wives they have. Many parents are even willing to offer their daughters to be married by powerful men, even if these men already have wives, in order to attain higher social status. This seems to also happen in modern societies, although the practice may differ, as marriages often occur secretly or under the table.

Factors That Pioneered Polygyny

The "pioneering factors" here refer to the reasons or factors that influenced the acceptance of polygyny in the past and present, as well as the reasons for its rejection in the present day.

Factors for the Acceptance of Polygyny in the Past

Undoubtedly, the main factor for the acceptance of polygyny in the past was the religious and intellectual understanding of women, which was very strong, along with the teachings of the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH), which were prioritized over personal desires that rejected it.

One of the key pioneers of the spirit of polygyny is the Hadith directly addressed to Ibn Abbas:

From Sa'id bin Jubair, he said: Ibn Abbas (RA) said to me: "Have you married?" I replied, "No." Ibn Abbas said, "Marry, for the best of this nation are those with the most wives."

Although this Hadith was directed at Ibn Abbas, its meaning is general, indicating that the best people are those who have more wives, and implying that the best women are those who are willing to be in a polygynous marriage.

The acceptance of polygyny also became more prevalent following the Battle of Uhud. As is well known, due to the carelessness and lack of discipline among the Muslim forces in that battle, they suffered a devastating defeat. Many Muslim soldiers were martyred on the battlefield. As a result, the number of widows and orphans in the Muslim community dramatically increased. The responsibility of caring for these orphans was transferred to their guardians. Not all orphans were wealthy, as some inherited significant amounts of wealth from their deceased parents.

In these circumstances, some guardians of orphans developed malicious intentions. In some cases, guardians married the orphan girls, especially if they were beautiful, while preventing others from marrying them, even when other men showed interest. The guardians' motives for marrying the orphans were often driven by a desire to retain the wealth of the orphan within their own family, thereby preventing it from being passed to someone else. As a result, the true

purpose of marriage was not fulfilled. Many orphans were married off by their guardians, but their marital rights, such as the dowry and maintenance, were not given to them. Some even had their wealth taken by their husbands to support other wives beyond reasonable limits. The majority of exegesis scholars agree that the revelation of a particular verse was in response to the actions of guardians who were unjust toward orphans under their care.

Factors for the Acceptance of Polygyny in the Present Day

Looking at the present day, there are still some women who accept polygyny. In addition to the knowledge that women had in past eras, several factors contribute to the acceptance of polygyny today, including:

1. **Material Factors (Economic Factors and Popularity)**

The most dominant factor in modern times is material or economic reasons, and sometimes, popularity. In urban areas, economic reasons and the desire for status are often the primary reasons why some women agree to polygyny, while the consequences are seen as secondary.

A wife who lacks financial resources may allow herself to be involved in a polygynous marriage to improve her economic situation. Moreover, a wife who agrees to polygyny for economic reasons may view it as a better option than being a mistress without clear status.

For example, in the entertainment industry, many celebrities hide their status as a second wife. These marriages are often conducted secretly (*sirri*). Such situations typically come to light in the media after divorces occur among these couples.

2. **Polygyny for Status**

Some women accept polygyny because it raises their social status. For instance, a woman who marries a religious scholar (*kyai*) becomes known as "Nyai" (a term for the wife of a religious leader). Similarly, if a woman marries a doctor, she will be referred to as the wife or mother of a doctor, and if she marries a general, she will be known as the wife or mother of a general. The higher the status of the husband, the higher the status the wife will assume.

3. **Physical/Sexual Attraction**

Another reason some women accept polygyny is due to physical or sexual attraction. For some women, the sexual aspect of marriage may be seen as more important and valuable than material wealth, no matter how great.

4. **Love and Emotion**

Finally, some women accept polygyny for reasons of love. As the saying goes, "love is blind," and this applies to anyone, even those in polygynous marriages. When both partners are in love and share mutual affection, they may be willing to do anything for each other, including accepting a man who already has other wives.

Factors Behind the Rejection of Polygamy in Modern Times

Among the factors that contribute to the rejection of polygamy are:

First, misunderstanding of the Quranic verses. One of the statements against polygamy is, "It is impossible for husbands to be just among their wives when practicing polygamy," citing the verse, "If you fear that you will not be just, then marry only one." Also, the verse that states, "And you will never be able to be just between your wives, even if you desire to do so."

However, what is meant by "And you will never be able to be just" in this verse is that it is impossible to be just in matters of love, inclinations of the heart, and intimacy. This is something beyond human capacity, except by God's will. It is widely agreed upon among Muslims that it is impossible to equally distribute love, attraction, and intimacy among wives, as evidenced by the fact that Aisha, may Allah be pleased with her, was more loved by the Prophet Muhammad than his other wives. As for the external aspects such as housing, financial support, and nights spent with each wife, it is obligatory for a husband with multiple wives to act justly. This is the view of scholars such as Sheikh al-Islam Ibn Taymiyyah, Imam Nawawi, and Ibn Hajar.

Some people interpret "justice" in the context of polygamy as referring to love. One individual expressed this view by saying, "Justice in wealth might be possible, but justice in the heart? That's just a theory." This sentiment illustrates a rejection of polygamy.

Additionally, polygamy is often seen as a form of disrespect toward women. This perception is shared by several individuals who have stated that polygamy degrades women. One person argued that, for any reason, polygamy should not be practiced because it tends to give men more power over women, particularly in household decision-making.

Third, there are claims that polygamy threatens marital stability (leading to frequent arguments). Such statements are mistaken, as disputes among wives are natural because jealousy is part of their nature. To address this, it depends on the husbands to manage household affairs, be just to their wives, take responsibility for the family, and trust in Allah's will. In reality, even in monogamous marriages (with one wife), disputes and conflicts often arise, and sometimes more so. Thus, this is not a valid reason to reject polygamy.

CONCLUSION

Polygamy is an Islamic law that is permitted, practiced by the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH), the companions, scholars, and Muslims up until today. Polygamy is allowed under very strict conditions, namely that the husband must be just. The

justice referred to here is not justice in love, feelings, or affection, but in the distribution of wealth, protection, and other material aspects. Meeting the qualitative requirements of justice is challenging, and often difficult to fulfill due to various limitations. There are severe consequences from Allah if a person neglects their duties by failing to uphold the rights of their wives in polygamous marriages. If a person cannot be just, then it is enough to have only one wife.

The positive and negative impacts of polygamy are relative, as it is also possible for those in monogamous marriages (with only one wife) to face negative consequences if they fail to be just with their single wife.

Furthermore, there has been a shift in values regarding the understanding of polygamy, from a time when it was not problematic to now, where it is controversial. This shift has led to significant debate between those who support and those who oppose polygamy. Supporters base their stance on knowledge, understanding of the Quranic verses, faith, and conviction in Allah's command, which was exemplified by the Prophet Muhammad. They believe that every command from Allah brings benefit in both this world and the hereafter. On the other hand, opponents are often concerned about material issues, taboos, feeling uneasy, or uncomfortable about sharing a husband.

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