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## Psychological welfare of women in polygynous Muslim families in Likoni Sub-county, Kenya

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### Abstract

This study sought to investigate the psychological welfare of women in polygynous Muslim families in Likoni Sub-County. The Muslim community embraces polygyny as a form of marriage because it is allowed by the Islamic religion. As a result, polygyny is rampant among the Muslim community in Kenya. While the Islamic religion allows men to marry up to four wives, the impact of this on the welfare of women has not been studied. The study utilised data that was collected through a survey of wives in polygynous Muslim families and interviews with Muslim religious leaders in the study area. Clustered and snowball sampling techniques were used to select the sample of polygynous families. One Muslim religious leader was selected purposively from each of the four clusters. The survey data was examined using descriptive statistics, while the thematic content analysis technique was used to analyse the interview data. Results showed that women in polygynous unions suffer from psychological challenges such as loss of self-esteem and anxiety due to financial difficulties, conflicts with other wives, and reduced intimacy with husbands. Based on these findings, the study recommends that policymakers and practitioners should strengthen policies and interventions for addressing the psychological challenges of women.

**Key words:** Gender equality, policymakers, polygyny, psychological welfare, religious leaders.



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## INTRODUCTION

Despite significant progress towards gender equality in Sub-Saharan Africa (SSA), there still exist gender gaps that limit the social and economic empowerment of women. Ihalainen et al. (2020) show that women in the region are still disadvantaged because of the existing gender disparities. Several factors have been identified as key to the propagation of gender inequality. According to Pedavic et al. (2019), gender inequality is more persistent at the family level, and a focus on gender inequality at the macro level may not give a true reflection of gender inequality.

Families differ in structure as a result of different types of marriages. The most common types of marriages are monogamy, where one husband is married to one wife, and polygamy, which involves marrying multiple spouses. Polygyny is the most prevalent form of polygamy, which is defined as a man marrying multiple wives at the same time (Bahari et al., 2021). It is estimated that around 2 per cent of the global population live in polygynous families (Kramer, 2020). This marital structure continues to persist even in countries where it has been outlawed. For instance, in the United States of America, there are an estimated 150,000 people living in polygynous unions despite the illegal nature of this marital arrangement (Faucon, 2014).

Polygyny is still rampant in SSA despite the socioeconomic transformation of families in the region. According to Arthi and Fenske (2018), about 25 per cent of women in SSA are in polygynous marriages and about the same proportion of children are born in polygynous family setups. Much of the prevalence of polygyny in the region is attributed to social and cultural factors (Lawson et al., 2015). Religion is also one of the factors contributing to polygyny in the region. In particular, the Islamic marriage law and practices permit polygyny (Moosa, 2009). For instance, Islam permits polygyny as long as the husband treats all wives equitably (Arthi & Fenske, 2018). Hence, the interaction of religion and culture affects marriage and family structure, which may be sources of gender equality or inequality.

Polygyny is legal and almost practised in all regions in Kenya. It is accepted in almost all communities, and, in fact, it is practised regardless of people's religious

affiliation. In some Kenyan communities, polygyny is one of the most distinctive features of marriages. It is estimated that about 10 per cent of the married population in Kenya is polygamous (Kenya National Bureau of Statistics, 2023). However, it is argued that polygyny results in undesirable outcomes that negatively affect women. Family wealth in polygynous marriages is under the control of men (Whitehouse, 2023). The tendency of men neglecting one wife and her family leaves most women impoverished.

Polygyny is widespread in the coastal region but disproportionately distributed among counties (Magadi et al., 2020). Despite the level of modernity in Mombasa, polygyny is accepted as a form of marriage. At this point, it is important to note that research into gender appreciation of polygyny in the county and the entire coastal region is missing. Therefore, the impact of polygyny on the psychological wellbeing of wives is not well explained in the existing literature. This study, therefore, links a small but developing body of knowledge examining the impact of polygyny and resource distribution on Muslim women.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

Polygyny has also been linked with the psychological wellbeing of women. In their study involving a sample of 108 women in polygynous marriages in Turkey, Yilmaz and Tamam (2018) found that first wives in polygynous unions had significantly higher depression scores than women in polygynous unions. However, there was no significant difference in the depressive scores between junior wives and wives in monogamous marriages. These findings imply that polygyny has a negative influence on the psychological welfare of senior wives. Al-Krenawi and Maymon (2015) also found that women in polygynous unions in Syria had significantly lower self-esteem, life satisfaction, and mental health than their counterparts in monogamous marriages. According to Ryff (1989), self-esteem/acceptance is one of the six dimensions of psychological welfare. Other dimensions include autonomy, positive relations with others, environmental mastery, personal growth, and a sense of purpose in life.

The issue of autonomy was captured in the study by and Chort (2019), which found that women in polygynous unions had higher savings tendencies because they view financial savings as a means of achieving autonomy.

Cudeville et al. (2017) also observed that women in polygynous unions were more likely to engage in off-farm employment in order to increase their autonomy. On the other hand, Lawson et al. (2015) note that it is low women autonomy that leads to polygyny rather than the other way round. When a woman has little autonomy, she has little say in her marriage placement, making her vulnerable to polygyny. Women with high autonomy only join polygynous unions out of their own will. The relationship between polygyny and the positive relationship with others dimension of psychological welfare was also captured in the study by Tabi et al. (2010), who found that women in polygynous unions in Ghana were characterised by unhappiness, a sense of competition, loneliness, lack of intimacy, and jealousy. These traits tend to adversely affect the social functioning. There are few empirical studies examining the link between polygyny and other dimensions of psychological welfare identified by Ryff (environmental mastery, personal growth, and a sense of purpose).

Further, empirical studies have focused on the health-related effect of polygyny on women. Daradkeh et al. (2006) estimated the effect of a number of factors associated with mental disorders among women in Jordan and found that post-marital status and marriage structures were important determinants of women's mental health. For instance, being the second wife had a deleterious effect on women's mental health. For Abbo et al. (2008), polygyny was an important correlate of psychological distress among women in Uganda. In mixed methods analysis of polygyny, Bove et al. (2014) found that polygynous married women had limited access to paid medical treatment. The low access of polygynous wives to medical treatment was attributed to, among many other factors, men's emotional and material bias in the allocation of resources and unequal health and fertility among the women. Besides attributing health-related problems among women to polygyny, Bove et al. (2014) seemed to underscore the effect of resource distribution on wives' health.

The study by Ebrahim and Atteraya (2021) found an association between polygyny and the emotional abuse of women in Ethiopia. Data collected revealed that women in polygynous unions were 1.82 times more likely to experience emotional abuse by their husbands than their counterparts in monogamous marriages. However, there was no significant difference in the

exposure to physical and sexual violence between polygynous women and those in monogamous unions. On the other hand, Jansen and Agadjanian (2020) found that senior wives in polygynous unions in Mozambique were more likely to experience higher rates of violence than junior wives and wives in monogamous marriages. The findings suggest that polygyny not only subjects women to psychological abuse but also to physical violence and that senior wives are more vulnerable. The current study sought to establish whether this is the case in Muslim polygynous families in Likoni Sub-County.

### METHODOLOGY

A mixed-method research approach, which combines both quantitative and qualitative approaches, was adopted in this study. It was undertaken in Likoni Sub-County in Mombasa County of Kenya. Likoni is the southern terminus of the Likoni ferry. The areas covered within Likoni Sub-County included Bofu, Shikadabu, Likoni, Timbwani and Mtongwe wards (Kenya National Bureau of Statistics, 2019). This Sub County is densely populated with about 166,008 people. This location was selected because it has high rates of polygyny. According to the Kenya Demographic and Health Survey 2014, 13.6 per cent of women in the region were in polygynous families as compared to 11 per cent in the Kenyan general population (Kenya National Bureau of Statistics, 2023).

The population of interest comprised polygyny practising Muslim families in Likoni Sub-county, whose population size is unknown. The study targeted women married in these families because it was presumed that they were best placed to provide information regarding their psychological welfare. The study also targeted Muslim religious leaders in the study area because they are close to the community and, thus, are likely to be privy to information regarding the experiences of women in polygynous unions.

The study made use of Clustered and snowball sampling techniques to select a sample of polygynous families. Snowball sampling was used to identify 10 women living in polygynous families in each of the four wards in Likoni Sub-County (Timbwani, Likoni, Mtongwe, and Shika Adabu). This translated to a total sample size of 40 women. Four Muslim religious figures were chosen using the purposeful sampling approach: one leader per ward. Criteria that were considered during

selection include the number of years that the leader has served in the community, availability, and willingness to participate.

Semi-structured questionnaires were used to collect data from the women. The researcher administered the questionnaire to overcome possible language barriers. It captured information on the basic socio-demographics (age, number of children, education, rank within the polygynous union, and household resource endowment). It also collected information regarding the psychological welfare of the women. Semi-structured interviews were also conducted with Muslim religious leaders in the study area.

The questionnaire and interview guide were subjected to expert review with the view of establishing that the instrument measures themes of interest. Face validity checks evaluated the items captured in the instrument and check whether they match the conceptual domain of the research concept. Credibility checks by experts also enhanced the quality of the instrument. The reliability of

the questionnaire was enhanced through the pilot test of the questionnaire. The pre-testing of the survey instrument covered a sample size of about 30 people who share characteristics that are almost similar to the target sample.

Questionnaire data was coded and placed into the Statistical Package for Social Sciences version 25, where it was analysed using inferential and descriptive statistics. Qualitative data collected through interviews was analysed using the thematic content analysis technique.

**RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS**

**Respondents Demographic Profile**

The demographic profile of respondents was assessed, including their age, education level, occupation, number of biological children, number of children who were staying in the household at the time of the study, and the position of the respondents among the wives. Table 1 summarises the results of demographic factors that were measured on a continuous scale.

**Table 1: Respondents Demographic Profile**

Demographic Trait	Mean	Minimum	Maximum
Age	41.53 years	22 years	62 years
Biological Children	3.38 children	0	7
Children living with the respondents	2.75 children	0	11

Results in Table 1 show that the average age of the women who were involved in the study was 41.53 years. This implies that most of the women in polygynous unions in Likoni County are middle-aged. This result could imply that the practice may be on a decline. The result is consistent with the study by Oh et al. (2017), which also found that polygyny was on a decline across the globe due to factors such as increasing education levels, reduction in wealth inequality, and socioeconomic changes. However, current results indicate that the sample was quite diverse in terms of age, with the oldest respondents being 62 years old and the youngest being 22 years.

On average, the sampled women had 3.38 biological children, which is similar to the national fertility rate of 3.4 children per woman, as captured in the 2022 Kenya Demographic and Health Survey (Kenya National Bureau of Statistics, 2023). This implies that the fertility

rate of women in polygynous unions in Likoni Sub-County is not different from the fertility rate of women in other family structures. However, the sample was also diverse in terms of fertility, as there were some respondents who did not have any child while there were others who had as many as 7 children.

On the other hand, results showed that respondents were living with an average of 2.75 children at the time of the study. This mean is lower than the mean value for the number of biological children. It could imply that in some of the sampled households, some biological children had moved out of the household for unspecified reasons. There were households where no child was present, while there were others with as many as 11 children present. Table 2 presents the results of demographic variables that were measured on a discrete scale.

**Table 2: Respondents Demographic Profile**

Demographic Trait	Categories	Frequency	Per cent
<b>Highest Education Level</b>	No education	3	7.5
	Religious education	2	5.0
	Primary	14	35.0
	Secondary	14	35.0
	Vocational	6	15.0
	Bachelor degree	1	2.5
<b>Primary occupation</b>	Domestic chores	9	22.5
	Salaried employment	7	17.5
	Wage labour	3	7.5
	Self-employment	17	42.5
	Retired	4	10.0
<b>Position among the wife</b>	1 <sup>st</sup> Wife	16	40.0
	2 <sup>nd</sup> Wife	17	42.5
	3 <sup>rd</sup> Wife	5	12.5
	4 <sup>th</sup> Wife	2	5.0

Results in Table 2 show that 35 per cent of the respondents had a primary level of education while another 35 per cent had a secondary level. The results also show that over 82.5 per cent of the respondents had not gone past the secondary education level. This finding is congruent with the study by Mabaso et al. (2018), which found that women in polygynous unions were less likely to have tertiary education when compared to their counterparts in monogamous unions.

Regarding occupation, the largest proportion of the respondents (42.5%) were self-employed, while 17.5 per cent were in salaried employment and 7.5 per cent were in waged labour. These results imply that more than two-thirds (67.5%) of women in polygynous unions in Likoni Sub-County are engaged in some form of income-generating activities. Consequently, these women are not completely dependent on their husbands economically. The largest proportion of the respondents

(42.5%) were second wives, 40 per cent were first wives, 12.5 per cent were 3<sup>rd</sup> wives, and 5 per cent were fourth wives.

**Psychological Welfare of Women in Polygynous Muslim Families**

The study analysed psychological welfare by assessing the respondents’ marital satisfaction as well as their life satisfaction.

**Marital Satisfaction of Women in Polygynous Muslim Families**

Respondents were presented with five statements regarding their marriage and asked to indicate their level of agreement with each on a seven-point scale: 1=Strongly disagree, 2=Disagree, 3=Slightly disagree, 4=Neither agree nor disagree, 5=Slightly agree, 6=Agree 7=Strongly agree. Table 3 summarises the findings:

**Table 3: Respondents Marital Satisfaction**

SN	Statement	N	Mean
1	In most ways, my polygynous marriage life is close to my ideal.	40	3.70
2	The conditions of my life in polygynous marriage are excellent.	40	3.68
3	I am satisfied with my polygynous marriage.	40	4.05
4	So far, I have gotten the important things I wanted in life.	40	4.60
5	If I could live my life over, I would not move out of polygynous marriage.	40	4.68

<b>Marital Satisfaction aggregate score</b>	<b>40</b>	<b>4.14</b>
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Results in Table 3 illustrate that respondents, on average, neither agreed nor disagreed with the first three statements in the scale. This implies that the majority of the women living in polygynous unions are indeterminate on whether their marriage life is close to ideal, whether the condition of their life in polygynous marriages is excellent, or whether they are satisfied with their polygynous unions. The neither agree nor disagree response may imply that the respondents are satisfied with some aspects of their polygynous union and dissatisfied with other aspects.

On the other hand, respondents slightly agreed with the statements 4 and 5. This implies that, on average, women in polygynous Muslim families in Likoni have gotten the important things they wanted in life and that they would choose to be in a polygynous union if they could live their lives over. The aggregate score was 4.14, which indicates that based on the five statements, respondents are neither satisfied nor dissatisfied with the polygynous unions. The respondents are indifferent towards their marriages. The findings challenge an earlier study by Al-Krenawi and Maymon (2015), who found that women in polygynous unions in Syria had significantly lower life satisfaction than their counterparts in monogamous marriages. This implies that satisfaction with polygynous union is largely dependent on the context. Qualitative results from the interview also suggest that women in polygynous unions experience some dissatisfaction due to factors like favouritism, lack of adequate affection from the husband, conflict between wives, financial difficulties, and low self-esteem.

*(1) Some women suffer right from the beginning; shock of additional wives and question themselves. This results to self-esteem issues. Love and wife favouritism causes other wives to suffer psychologically, (Interviewee 1, 2022).*

*(2) Women are psychologically tortured due to limited affection, sharing of status or losing status, and financial difficulties. First wives are more impacted. Second wives also fight for authority and affection, (Interviewee 2, 2022).*

*(3) Depression is prone to occur due to constant thoughts of her life that she sacrificed. Low self-esteem and feeling of neglect or uselessness, (Interviewee 3, 2022).*

*(4) There is an increase in non-communicable diseases such as high blood pressure, heart disease and depression. This is a result of the failure of most marriages to follow the fundamental Shariah of polygamy (Interviewee 4, 2022).*

These excerpts from the interview suggest that most women in polygynous unions suffer psychologically and are likely to exhibit low marital satisfaction. This implies that most of the questionnaire respondents may have ticked the neither agree nor disagree option because it was the most socially acceptable position. As Latkins et al. (2017) explained, one of the downsides of self-reported data is that it is prone to social desirability bias, where respondents give answers that project a positive image of themselves or that match society's expectations. Another issue that emerges from this is that first wives are disproportionately affected by psychological challenges. The excerpt suggests that first wives experience more psychological impairment because at the time they are getting married, most are usually not aware that their marriages will eventually turn out to be polygynous. Additional analyses were therefore conducted to examine other factors that influence the psychological wellbeing of women in polygynous Muslim families. The One Way ANOVA test was conducted to examine the effect of wives education level, occupation, and wife order/ rank on marital satisfaction as an indicator of psychological wellbeing. Table 4 presents the findings.

**Table 4: Education, Occupation, Wife Order and Marital Satisfaction**

Factor	Food Expenditure per Month		F (df)	P
	N	Mean		
<b>Education</b>			1.140(3, 36)	.346
No formal education	5	3.88		

Primary	14	4.00		
Secondary	14	4.07		
Tertiary	7	4.74		
<b>Occupation</b>			1.255(4, 35)	.306
Domestic chores	9	4.04		
Salaried employment	7	4.86		
Wage labour	3	4.20		
Self-employment	17	3.91		
Retired	4	4.05		
<b>Wife Order</b>			0.707(3, 36)	.554
1 <sup>st</sup>	16	3.93		
2 <sup>nd</sup>	17	4.38		
3 <sup>rd</sup>	5	3.92		
4 <sup>th</sup>	2	4.40		

Results in Table 4 show that wives' education level ( $F=1.140, p=.346$ ), occupation ( $F=1.255, p=.306$ ) and order/rank ( $F=0.707, p=.554$ ) do not have a statistically significant influence on marital satisfaction of women living in polygynous Muslim families. These results imply that education level, occupation and wife order do not have a notable impact on the psychological wellbeing of women in polygynous Muslim families.

The findings are inconsistent with Al-Krenawi and Maymon (2015), who found that senior wives tend to have lower marital satisfaction than younger wives. The Pearson correlation test was employed to investigate the link between wives' age, number of biological children, number of children currently living in the household, and marital satisfaction. Table 5 presents the findings:

**Table 5: Age, Biological Children, Children in Household and Marital Satisfaction**

Factor	Statistics	Aggregation marital satisfaction
Age	Pearson Correlation	.098
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.546
	N	40
Number of Biological Children	Pearson Correlation	-.213
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.187
	N	40
Number of Children Currently Living with Respondent	Pearson Correlation	-.302
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.058
	N	40

Results in Table 5 also show that wives' age ( $r=0.098, p=.546$ ), number of biological children ( $r=-0.213, p=.187$ ), and number of children currently living with the wife ( $r=0.302, p=.058$ ) have no significant effect on marital satisfaction of women in polygynous Muslim families.

**Life Satisfaction of Women in Polygynous Muslim Families**

Another indicator that was used to measure psychological wellbeing of women in polygynous Muslim families in Likoni was life satisfaction. Respondents were given a set of 10 statements and asked to indicate their level of agreement with each on a four-point scale: 1= strongly disagree, 2= disagree, 3= agree, and (4) strongly agree. Table 6 presents the results.

**Table 6: Respondents Life Satisfaction**

SN	Statement	N	Mean
1	On the whole, I am satisfied with myself.	40	2.80
2	At times I think I am no good at all.	40	2.48
3	I feel that I have a number of good qualities.	40	3.10
4	I am able to do things as well as most other people.	40	2.78
5	I feel I do not have much to be proud of.	40	2.30
6	I certainly feel useless at times	40	2.37
7	I feel that I'm a person of worth, at least on an equal plane with others.	40	2.80
8	I wish I could have more respect for myself.	40	2.28
9	All in all, I am inclined to feel that I am a failure.	40	1.98
10	I take a positive attitude toward myself.	40	3.30
	<b>Life satisfaction aggregate score</b>	<b>40</b>	<b>2.84</b>

Results in Table 6 show that respondents, on average, agreed with statements 1, 3, 4, 7, and 10. These questions were positively worded to indicate a high level of life satisfaction. Therefore, the respondents' agreement with these statements indicates they are generally satisfied with their lives. On the other hand, respondents disagreed with statements 2, 5, 6, 8, and 9. These were negatively worded questions that signify dissatisfaction with life. Therefore, respondents' disagreement with these statements also indicates that they are generally content with their lives. The negatively worded questions (2, 5, 6, 8, and 9) were

reverse-coded, and an aggregate life satisfaction score was computed to show the overall life satisfaction of the respondents. The life satisfaction aggregate score was 2.84, which, when rounded off to the nearest whole number, becomes 3 out of a possible highest score of 4. This score implies that the majority of the women in polygynous Muslim families in Likoni have high levels of life satisfaction. The ANOVA test was carried out to examine whether wives' life satisfaction is associated with the education level, occupation, or order/ rank among the wives. The results of the analysis are presented in Table 7.

**Table 7: Education, Occupation, Wife Order and Life Satisfaction**

Factor	Food Expenditure per Month		F (df)	P
	N	Mean		
<b>Education</b>			1.918(3,36)	.144
No formal education	5	2.72		
Primary	14	2.74		
Secondary	14	2.84		
Tertiary	7	3.10		
<b>Occupation</b>			1.436(4,35)	.243
Domestic chores	9	2.72		
Salaried employment	7	3.07		
Wage labour	3	2.73		
Self-employment	17	2.78		
Retired	4	3.00		
<b>Wife Order</b>			1.709(3,36)	.182
1 <sup>st</sup>	16	2.79		
2 <sup>nd</sup>	17	2.96		

3 <sup>rd</sup>	5	2.62		
4 <sup>th</sup>	2	2.65		

Table 7 shows that education ( $F=1.918, p=.144$ ), occupation ( $F=1.436, p=.243$ ), and wife order ( $F=1.709, p=.182$ ) do not have a significant effect on the life satisfaction levels of women living in polygynous Muslim families. This implies that these demographic variables do not have a notable impact on the

psychological wellbeing of women in the polygynous Muslim families. The Pearson correlation test was employed to investigate the link between wives' age, number of biological children, and number of children currently living in the household and life satisfaction. Table 8 presents the findings:

**Table 8: Age, Biological Children, Children in Household and Life Satisfaction**

Factors	Statistics	Aggregate life satisfaction
Age	Pearson Correlation	.171
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.292
	N	40
Number of Biological Children	Pearson Correlation	.114
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.485
	N	40
Number of Children Currently Living with Respondent	Pearson Correlation	-.121
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.456
	N	40

Results in Table 8 also indicate that age ( $r=0.171, p=.292$ ), number of biological children ( $r=0.114, p=.485$ ), and number of children currently living with the wife ( $r=-0.121, p=.456$ ) are not statistically associated with the level of life satisfaction among women living in polygynous Muslim families in Likoni. The findings imply that these factors do not have a meaningful impact on the psychological wellbeing of the women.

**CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

**Conclusions:** This study purposed to investigate the psychological welfare of women in polygynous Muslim families in Likoni Sub-County in Mombasa County, Kenya. Two indicators were used to measure psychological wellbeing. The first indicator is marital satisfaction. Results showed that respondents were indifferent when queried regarding their level of marital satisfaction. However, qualitative data collected from the interview indicate lower levels of marital satisfaction among the women. Several themes emerged from the interview portraying issues that diminish the marital satisfaction of women in polygynous Muslim families in Likoni. These issues include struggle for resources among the wives, shock among first wives at the

introduction of a second wife, diminished self-esteem due to the introduction of the second wife, wife favouritism, financial difficulties, loss of status in the community, and conflicts between wives.

The study by Al-Krenawi and Graham (2006) also found that Bedouin-Arab women in polygynous unions exhibited higher levels of psychological distress, had more family functioning problems, and lower marital satisfaction. Current findings are also congruent with Mengistu et al. (2022), who found that women in polygynous unions in Ethiopia experienced a myriad of psychological challenges, including emotional distress, mistrust, anger, emptiness, loneliness, and lack of intimacy with their husbands. Current findings further revealed that marital satisfaction of the women was not significantly associated with demographic variables such as the women's age, education level, occupation, wife order/ rank, or number of children.

The second indicator was life satisfaction. Results showed that the majority of the women in polygynous Muslim families in Likoni have high levels of life satisfaction. Most of the respondents affirmed that they are happy with themselves and that they get most of the

things that other married women get. Life satisfaction was also not significantly associated with any of the women's demographic variables, such as age, education level, occupation, and number of children.

Based on the findings, the study concludes that the majority of the women have low levels of marital satisfaction. Most women are dealing with a myriad of marital challenges, including financial difficulties, loss of self-esteem, reduced love and intimacy from the husband, conflicts between the wives, and emotional distress. However, the women have high levels of life satisfaction. This implies that most of the women have learned to cope with their marital situation and to find joy in other areas of their lives.

**Recommendations:** These results highlight key gender issues arising from polygyny and how these issues affect Muslim women's health and social development. The results may form crucial input in matrimonial legislation. It may enable the government to take

necessary measures to protect Muslim women's psychological wellbeing. In addition, the findings create a case for social organisations to develop interventions for assisting women in polygynous unions to overcome psychological challenges that they experience in their marriages. The interventions may entail forming social networks where the women can meet other women who are experiencing similar challenges, share experiences, learn from each other, and deliberate on plausible solutions.

Further, this study provides a strong foundation for future research and establishes an open dialogue on addressing the plight of women among polygyny-practising Muslims. Future studies should replicate this study in rural Muslim setups, such as the North Eastern parts of Kenya. This will enable readers to compare the experiences of women in rural areas with those of urban women. It will also support the generalisation of study findings.

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