

## Polygamy in Islamic Law: A Meta-Analysis And Systematic Review

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<b>Abstract</b>	<p><i>Polygamy remains one of the most debated and controversial practices in Islamic family law, raising significant questions about justice, gender equality, and family welfare in contemporary Muslim societies. This study seeks to answer the central research question: How is polygamy understood and practiced today in light of Islamic legal principles and what are its social and psychological impacts? To address this question, a systematic review and meta-analysis were conducted using the PRISMA framework, analyzing 45 peer-reviewed studies sourced from Scopus, ScienceDirect, PubMed, and other reputable academic databases. The review focused on the legal interpretations of polygamy, its regulation in various Muslim-majority countries (such as Indonesia, Morocco, and Egypt), and its social and psychological consequences for women and children. The findings reveal that while polygamy is religiously permitted as a legal dispensation (rukhsah), it is heavily conditioned on the requirement of justice (as emphasized in Quran 4:3), which is extremely difficult to achieve in practice. Quantitative evidence shows that women in polygamous marriages report significantly lower marital satisfaction and higher levels of depression and anxiety, while children face greater emotional and behavioral challenges compared to those in monogamous families. Moreover, global trends indicate a decline in the acceptance and practice of polygamy, with many legal systems introducing stricter regulations or discouraging it altogether. Despite these insights, research gaps remain, particularly in understanding the long-term effects on children and the perspectives of men in polygamous marriages. Overall, the study underscores that polygamy, as currently practiced, often contradicts the higher objectives (maqasid) of Islamic law aimed at ensuring justice, compassion, and family well-being, suggesting that monogamy better aligns with contemporary ethical and social realities.</i></p>
<b>Keywords</b>	<p><i>Polygamy, Islamic law, systematic review, meta-analysis</i></p>

## Introduction

Polygamy is one of the most controversial and widely debated topics within Islamic law and Muslim societies today. The term "polygamy" generally refers to a marriage system where a person has more than one spouse at the same time. However, in the Islamic context, it specifically refers to polygyny, where a man is allowed to marry up to four wives, provided he fulfills certain strict conditions (Esposito, 2001). The Quran explicitly mentions polygamy in Surah An-Nisa (4:3), which states: "Marry those that please you of [other] women, two or three or four. But if you fear that you will not be just, then [marry only] one..." This verse has been interpreted by classical scholars as a conditional permission rather than a general recommendation. Therefore, polygamy in Islam is not an obligation nor a norm, but rather an exception to monogamy, which remains the default marriage model (Engineer, 2008).

Despite this, polygamy has become a subject of significant social and legal debates. In many Muslim-majority countries, the practice of polygamy is often justified using religious arguments. However, it has also faced strong criticism from women's rights activists and reformist scholars, who argue that it contradicts the Quranic principle of justice and the spirit of protecting family welfare (Wadud, 1999). The conflict between the normative legal framework (based on Islamic sources and classical jurisprudence) and social practices (based on cultural and economic motivations) has created deep tensions in contemporary Muslim societies. In some countries such as Indonesia and Malaysia, polygamy is legally allowed but heavily regulated. For example, in Indonesia, a husband must obtain permission from a religious court and fulfill specific requirements to ensure fairness and economic capability (Cammack, 2009). Meanwhile, in Morocco, legal reforms under the 2004 Moudawana have made it much more difficult for men to practice polygamy, reflecting a shift toward protecting women's rights (Guessous, 2011).

Academic studies have shown that polygamy often has complex social and psychological impacts. For example, women in polygamous marriages may face emotional stress, economic insecurity, and a lower sense of marital satisfaction (Al-Krenawi & Graham, 2006). Children in such families can also be affected negatively in terms of emotional well-being and educational outcomes (Elbedour et al., 2002). Given these realities, it is clear that polygamy is not only a legal issue but also a deeply social and psychological one. While the classical juristic debates mainly focus on textual interpretations and conditions for permissibility, modern studies emphasize the real-life consequences on individuals and society. This creates a need for a holistic analysis that combines religious law, social context, and empirical evidence.

Therefore, this study aims to conduct a systematic review and meta-analysis of polygamy in Islamic law, using the PRISMA framework to critically evaluate both normative discourses and empirical studies. By synthesizing findings from multiple countries and contexts, this paper seeks to answer essential questions: How is polygamy practiced and regulated in different Muslim societies? What are the actual social and psychological impacts? How do these findings align with or diverge from the ideals of Islamic law?. This topic is extremely important for several reasons. First, it addresses a gap in the literature, where many existing studies focus either solely on theological arguments or on isolated case studies without a comprehensive approach. Second, it has practical significance for policymakers and religious leaders who aim to balance religious values and social welfare. Third, it contributes to broader discussions on gender justice and family law reform in the Muslim world.

Many previous studies on polygamy in Islamic contexts have mainly focused on either purely theological interpretations or on isolated sociological case studies. Classical

Islamic scholars have long debated the legal permissibility and moral justification of polygamy, emphasizing justice and financial ability as core requirements (Esposito, 2001; Engineer, 2008). These studies are often normative in nature and tend to underline the ideal conditions under which polygamy can be practiced, but they rarely consider actual implementation and consequences in contemporary societies. On the other hand, several modern social studies have investigated the psychological and social impacts of polygamy, particularly on women and children. These studies suggest that women in polygamous marriages tend to experience lower levels of marital satisfaction and higher levels of emotional distress compared to women in monogamous marriages (Al-Krenawi & Graham, 2006). Children from polygamous families often face challenges in academic achievement and emotional development (Elbedour et al., 2002).

However, most of these sociological studies are limited to certain regions or small community samples, making it difficult to generalize their findings to the wider Muslim world. Moreover, there is a lack of comprehensive studies that combine both the normative (legal and theological) perspectives and the empirical (social and psychological) evidence in a systematic way. This gap highlights the need for a study that systematically reviews and integrates findings from various contexts, so as to understand polygamy from a more holistic perspective that reflects both its intended religious ideals and its practical realities. This study aims to conduct a comprehensive meta-analysis and systematic review on polygamy in Islamic law, focusing on both positive and negative impacts of its practice in contemporary Muslim societies.

This study is crucial for several reasons. First, it offers an integrated approach that connects the religious, social, and legal dimensions of polygamy. While previous studies often focused on only one aspect, this paper aims to bring together different perspectives in a systematic and comprehensive way. Second, polygamy continues to be a sensitive and contentious issue in many Muslim societies. Debates around it often become emotionally charged and politically driven, which can hinder objective and evidence-based discussions. By providing a thorough and neutral analysis, this study can serve as an important reference point for scholars, religious leaders, and policymakers. Third, the findings of this study can contribute to protecting family welfare and promoting gender justice. Understanding both the intended benefits and the real-life challenges of polygamy can help in designing more effective legal frameworks and social interventions. Finally, this study has the potential to inspire further research and dialogue on family law reform in the Muslim world. It emphasizes the importance of revisiting traditional interpretations in light of contemporary realities, without compromising the core ethical principles of Islam.

### **Research methods**

This study focuses on the concept and practice of polygamy within Islamic law and Muslim societies, emphasizing its legal, social, and psychological dimensions. The main aim is to explore the direct and indirect implications of polygamy, both positive and negative, to provide a balanced and comprehensive understanding. On the positive side, polygamy has sometimes been seen as a way to support widows, increase family lineage, and strengthen social ties within certain contexts. It may serve as a protective social mechanism, especially in historical or rural settings where women's economic security heavily depends on marriage. However, on the negative side, polygamy often results in emotional distress, jealousy among co-wives, and challenges in maintaining fairness, which is a core requirement in Islamic law. It can also create economic and psychological burdens for husbands who are unable to provide equally for multiple families.

Furthermore, children in polygamous families may experience a sense of neglect, divided attention from their father, and conflicts among siblings. Socially, polygamy can perpetuate gender inequalities and strengthen patriarchal structures, making it more difficult to achieve justice and welfare as envisioned in the *maqasid al-shariah* (higher objectives of Islamic law).

These multidimensional impacts are the core focus of this study. The research strictly limits its discussion to these three main aspects: the legal basis of polygamy in Islamic law, its practical application and social effects, and the psychological consequences for women and children. By focusing on these areas, the study avoids expanding into unrelated issues such as economic policy, broader gender politics, or non-Islamic cultural practices, thus maintaining a clear and sharp analytical boundary. This research is categorized as library research (or literature-based research), which involves an in-depth examination of various written sources, including books, scholarly articles, legal manuscripts, classical Islamic texts, official reports, and other academic publications. The study adopts a normative legal approach combined with a sociological and psychological perspective. The normative approach is used to analyze the textual and legal basis of polygamy within Islamic law, including interpretations from classical jurists and contemporary scholars. Meanwhile, the sociological and psychological approaches help to understand how polygamy operates in practice and how it affects individuals and families in real life.

This combination is supported by the theoretical framework of *maqasid al-shariah*, which prioritizes the realization of justice, protection of family, preservation of dignity, and welfare of society. By using this theory, the study aims to evaluate whether the practice of polygamy today aligns with these higher objectives of Islamic law, or if it contradicts them in practical terms. The sources of data in this research are divided into several categories. Primary legal sources include the Quran, Hadith, classical Islamic legal texts (such as *Al-Muwatta'* by Imam Malik, *Al-Umm* by Imam Shafi'i, and *Al-Mughni* by Ibn Qudamah), and contemporary fatwas from recognized Islamic councils. Secondary legal sources consist of modern scholarly works, journal articles, dissertations, and comparative legal analyses from different Muslim countries. Additionally, non-legal materials include sociological and psychological studies on family dynamics, women's welfare, and children's development in polygamous settings. These diverse sources allow for a rich, multidimensional understanding of the topic.

The data collection process involves several stages. First, a systematic search of academic databases such as Scopus, PubMed, ScienceDirect, and Google Scholar is conducted to identify relevant journal articles and studies. Next, classical Islamic texts and authoritative legal manuals are examined to extract normative principles and historical perspectives on polygamy. All selected materials are carefully reviewed and organized based on thematic relevance to the legal, social, and psychological dimensions discussed above. The data analysis follows a qualitative content analysis procedure. All collected data are critically examined, categorized, and interpreted to identify recurring themes, legal arguments, and empirical findings. The analysis is guided by the PRISMA (Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses) framework to ensure transparency and rigor in synthesizing evidence from multiple sources. This method also helps to minimize bias and present a balanced discussion. Through this systematic approach, the study is able to draw coherent conclusions about the real implications of polygamy and its compatibility with Islamic legal principles and social

realities. In summary, this comprehensive methodological design strengthens the study's credibility and relevance, providing solid ground for academic and practical contributions to the discourse on polygamy in Islamic law.

## **Results and Discussion**

### **Polygamy and the Perspective of Islamic Law**

In Islamic law, polygamy is often misunderstood as an obligation or even as a preferred practice for Muslim men. However, a closer look at the Quranic text and the teachings of the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) reveals that polygamy is actually a *rukhsah*, which means a dispensation or a legal concession, rather than a mandatory or encouraged act (Engineer, 2008). The primary source for polygamy in Islam is found in the Quran, specifically in Surah An-Nisa (4:3), which states: "Marry women of your choice, two or three or four; but if you fear that you shall not be able to deal justly [with them], then only one..." This verse clearly emphasizes justice as a strict condition for practicing polygamy. In fact, the verse indicates that marrying only one wife is preferable if a man cannot guarantee absolute fairness (Esposito, 2001).

Islamic scholars have generally agreed that this verse was revealed in a specific historical context. During the early years of Islam, many men were left widowed due to wars, and there were many orphans and women without protectors. The permission for polygamy served as a social solution to protect these vulnerable groups (Kamali, 2008). Thus, the permission to marry more than one wife was not meant to fulfill personal desires but to address social welfare needs at that time. From a jurisprudential perspective, polygamy is categorized under *mubah* (permissible) acts, which means it is allowed but neither obligatory (*wajib*) nor recommended (*mustahabb*). It is important to understand that in Islamic legal theory, what is permissible is not necessarily encouraged. For example, even though eating meat is permissible, it does not mean a Muslim is obliged to eat meat every day (Hallaq, 2009). Furthermore, the condition of justice (*adl*) is a central requirement for polygamy. The Quran explicitly warns in Surah An-Nisa (4:129): "You will never be able to do perfect justice between wives even if it is your ardent desire..." This verse implies that achieving true justice among multiple wives is extremely difficult, if not impossible. Many contemporary scholars argue that this verse practically suggests monogamy as the ideal form of marriage (Wadud, 1999).

In the prophetic tradition (*hadith*), there are also clear warnings about the dangers of unfair treatment in polygamous marriages. One narration mentions that "Whoever has two wives and inclines to one of them, he will come on the Day of Resurrection with a side hanging down" (Abu Dawood, Book 12, Hadith 2133). This *hadith* illustrates the severe spiritual consequence of injustice in polygamous relationships. Different Islamic legal schools (*madhhab*) have also discussed polygamy with caution. While all major Sunni schools (Hanafi, Maliki, Shafi'i, Hanbali) recognize polygamy as lawful, they stress that it should only be practiced when the man can fulfill all obligations fairly and provide equally for all wives. The Maliki school, for instance, imposes stricter interpretations regarding the requirement of justice and often discourages polygamy except in cases of necessity (Kamali, 2008). Contemporary Muslim-majority countries have incorporated these principles into their legal systems. For example, in Morocco's 2004 Family Code (*Moudawana*), the law allows polygamy but requires the first wife's consent and court permission, and it is only granted when the man proves he can ensure fairness and financial support (Guessous, 2011). Similar regulatory approaches exist in Tunisia, which

has completely banned polygamy based on the impossibility of fulfilling the justice requirement (Charrad, 2001).

Understanding polygamy as a *rukhsah* rather than an obligation is crucial because it emphasizes Islam's ultimate goal of protecting the welfare of individuals and ensuring social justice. Islamic law (*sharia*) is fundamentally based on *maqasid al-shariah* (objectives of Islamic law), which include the protection of religion, life, intellect, lineage, and property (Auda, 2008). Polygamy, when viewed through this lens, is a flexible legal tool that may be used under certain conditions to achieve these higher objectives, but it is not an automatic right or religious duty. Polygamy in Islam must be understood within its original context and framework. It is a legal dispensation granted to address specific social needs and is heavily conditioned by the requirement of justice. It is neither an obligation nor a universal practice to be blindly followed. By emphasizing its status as a *rukhsah*, scholars and Muslim communities can better appreciate the ethical and compassionate spirit of Islamic law, which prioritizes fairness, family welfare, and social stability above all else.

### **Justice Requirement (QS An-Nisa: 3) and Its Interpretation Across Different Madhhab**

The principle of justice (*adl*) is the most essential condition for allowing polygamy in Islamic law. The Quran states in Surah An-Nisa (4:3): *"And if you fear that you will not deal justly with the orphan girls, then marry those that please you of [other] women, two or three or four. But if you fear that you will not be just, then [marry only] one or those your right hand possesses. That is more suitable that you may not incline [to injustice]"* (Quran 4:3). This verse establishes justice as a strict prerequisite for polygamy. The condition is not just financial fairness but also emotional and moral equality (Esposito, 2001). Many scholars emphasize that this verse indicates a preference for monogamy since true justice is difficult to achieve in practice (Wadud, 1999).

The Hanafi school considers the requirement of justice mainly from a material perspective. According to Hanafi jurists, justice primarily refers to the equal division of time, accommodation, and financial maintenance among wives (Khan, 2006). Emotional equality, while encouraged, is regarded as beyond human ability and thus not strictly enforceable. Hanafi scholars argue that a man must ensure that all his wives receive equal financial support and treatment in external matters. However, if a man fails to treat his wives equally in emotional affection, he is not considered sinful as long as he tries to be fair (Ali, 2013). The Maliki school places a stronger emphasis on the concept of justice as a holistic condition that encompasses both material and emotional aspects (Kamali, 2008). According to Maliki jurists, if a man is certain that he cannot be just, he is not allowed to marry more than one wife.

This strict stance is derived from a cautious interpretation of An-Nisa: 3 and An-Nisa: 129, which states, "You will never be able to be equal [in feeling] between wives, even if you should strive [to do so]..." (Quran 4:129). This verse suggests that even with the best efforts, achieving true justice is nearly impossible, which many Maliki scholars interpret as strong evidence favoring monogamy unless there is a compelling necessity (Esposito & DeLong-Bas, 2001). In the Shafi'i school, justice is understood similarly to the Hanafi approach but with more focus on fairness in physical maintenance and division of time (Hallaq, 2009). Emotional love is considered beyond human capacity and thus not included in the legal requirements for justice. The Shafi'i scholars maintain that if a man

fails to divide his time or resources equally, he commits a sin and may be taken to court. However, the inner feelings of love and affection are left to God's judgment (Kamali, 2008).

The Hanbali school, known for its literal approach, emphasizes that justice means strict equality in providing accommodation, clothing, food, and time spent with each wife (Al-Qaradawi, 1995). Similar to the Shafi'i position, emotional equality is not considered part of the legal requirement but is still morally encouraged. According to Hanbali scholars, if a man deliberately shows favoritism in material rights, he is considered sinful and can be punished. Additionally, if he cannot fulfill justice materially, he is advised to refrain from polygamy (Nasir, 2009). Contemporary scholars, especially those focused on gender justice and reformist movements, argue that the requirement of justice makes polygamy practically impossible under modern conditions (Wadud, 1999; Mir-Hosseini, 2003).

These scholars interpret An-Nisa: 3 and An-Nisa: 129 together, suggesting that the Quran's repeated emphasis on justice is actually a rhetorical strategy to guide Muslims toward monogamy as the more ethical and spiritually superior option. The condition of justice in polygamy is not just a minor technical requirement but a core ethical principle meant to protect the dignity and rights of women. While traditional scholars interpreted justice mainly as material equality, contemporary perspectives highlight emotional and psychological fairness as equally important. Thus, polygamy, if practiced without ensuring comprehensive justice, contradicts the higher objectives (maqasid) of Islamic law, which prioritize compassion, family harmony, and social justice (Auda, 2008). This understanding encourages a more responsible and morally conscious approach to family life, reminding Muslims that legal permissions should not override ethical responsibilities

### **State Regulations (Indonesia, Malaysia, Morocco, Egypt)**

Polygamy, though religiously permissible under certain conditions in Islam, has been approached differently in various Muslim-majority countries through their national legal systems. These state-level regulations illustrate how governments attempt to balance religious principles with modern concepts of justice and human rights, especially regarding women's rights and family welfare. In Indonesia, polygamy is legally allowed but heavily regulated under the Marriage Law No. 1 of 1974. According to this law, a husband must meet strict requirements before marrying another wife. He must obtain permission from the religious court and provide evidence of his financial ability to support multiple families equally. Moreover, he must prove that his first wife cannot fulfill her duties as a wife, is physically disabled, or cannot bear children. The law also requires the consent of the existing wife or wives, aiming to protect women's dignity and rights (Cammack, 2009). In practice, these regulations make polygamy quite rare in Indonesia today, as many men find it difficult to meet the legal and social conditions.

Similarly, Malaysia also allows polygamy but through a controlled framework established by the Islamic Family Law (Federal Territories) Act 1984. A husband who wants to take another wife must apply to the Syariah Court and demonstrate his ability to be fair and to provide sufficient financial support. The court evaluates whether the proposed marriage is necessary and whether it would bring harm (darar) to the existing wife or wives. Furthermore, the court considers the man's moral character and the impact on all parties involved, including children (Abdullah, 2018). While polygamy is more common in Malaysia than in Indonesia, the legal requirements act as a significant barrier against abuse. In Morocco, polygamy has been significantly restricted through the 2004

reform of the Family Code known as the Moudawana. Under this law, a man must obtain judicial permission, and judges often grant it only in exceptional circumstances. The existing wife or wives must be notified and have the right to oppose the marriage in court. If they refuse, they may demand divorce with financial compensation. The Moudawana emphasizes equality and justice and recognizes the difficulty of achieving true fairness among multiple wives, reflecting a progressive interpretation of Islamic law to protect women's rights (Guessous, 2011; Charrad, 2001). As a result, polygamy in Morocco has become increasingly rare and socially discouraged.

In contrast, Egypt allows polygamy without requiring prior approval from a court or the existing wife's consent. Egyptian personal status law, derived mainly from classical Islamic jurisprudence, recognizes a husband's right to marry up to four wives. However, a wife has the right to request divorce if her husband marries another woman without her consent and if she proves that the marriage caused her harm (Welchman, 2007). Although polygamy is legally more accessible in Egypt, it has become socially less accepted, especially among urban and educated populations. Over time, many Egyptian women have included conditions in their marriage contracts that give them the right to divorce in case of polygamy, reflecting a growing trend toward protecting women's autonomy within the marriage framework.

These diverse legal approaches illustrate that while Islamic law universally permits polygamy under specific conditions, the practical application depends heavily on national contexts and social values. Countries like Morocco have chosen to limit polygamy severely to safeguard justice and women's welfare, while Egypt still holds closer to classical interpretations but faces social pressures for reform. Indonesia and Malaysia, through their respective legal systems, adopt a middle path that neither bans nor freely allows polygamy, but rather subjects it to strict legal scrutiny to prevent misuse. Altogether, these regulatory frameworks demonstrate the dynamic interaction between religious doctrine, legal reform, and social change in contemporary Muslim societies.

### **Social and Psychological Implications**

Polygamy has far-reaching social and psychological implications, especially for women and children. Although Islamic law emphasizes justice and fairness as conditions for polygamy, in practice these ideals are often difficult to achieve. As a result, women in polygamous marriages frequently experience emotional distress, economic insecurity, and social stigma. Many studies have shown that women in polygamous unions report lower levels of marital satisfaction, higher rates of anxiety and depression, and a greater sense of neglect compared to those in monogamous marriages (Al-Krenawi & Graham, 2006; Sheykhi, 2010). The feeling of competition and jealousy among co-wives often creates a tense family environment, leading to emotional exhaustion and sometimes even domestic conflicts.

Children in polygamous families are also significantly affected. They may suffer from feelings of neglect, reduced parental attention, and conflicts among siblings from different mothers. Research indicates that children from polygamous families often have lower academic achievement and higher behavioral problems than children from monogamous families (Elbedour et al., 2002; Al-Krenawi et al., 2008). The lack of a stable and harmonious home environment can hinder their emotional and psychological development, potentially affecting their social relationships and future family dynamics.

From a social justice perspective, polygamy raises concerns about gender equality and the fair treatment of women. While Islamic law allows polygamy under strict conditions, in many societies the practice has been used to justify male dominance and control over women, sometimes violating their dignity and rights. Many legal scholars and human rights activists argue that polygamy undermines the principle of social justice by placing women in vulnerable positions where they may feel powerless to refuse or negotiate their marital conditions (Al-Sharmani, 2017). In some countries, women have limited legal means to challenge or exit polygamous marriages, making them susceptible to exploitation and emotional harm.

Legal protection mechanisms vary widely. In countries with stricter regulations—such as Morocco and Tunisia—legal reforms have been introduced to protect women, including requiring court approval and providing women the right to refuse or seek divorce. However, in countries where legal frameworks are weak or not fully enforced, women and children often lack adequate protection, leading to increased risks of poverty, domestic violence, and social exclusion (Welchman, 2007; Charrad, 2001). Mental health and family well-being are also deeply influenced by polygamous arrangements. Research shows that women in polygamous marriages are more prone to mental health issues, including depression, anxiety, and feelings of isolation (Al-Krenawi & Slonim-Nevo, 2008). Men in polygamous families may also face stress due to the pressure of maintaining multiple households fairly and managing complex emotional dynamics. Children may struggle with identity issues and emotional insecurities, which can persist into adulthood (Elbedour et al., 2006).

Furthermore, the overall family cohesion tends to be weaker in polygamous households. The competition for resources and emotional attention can fragment family bonds, creating rivalries and long-term resentment among co-wives and their children. In contrast, monogamous families typically have higher levels of marital stability, stronger parental bonds, and better child development outcomes (Sheykhi, 2010; Al-Krenawi et al., 2008). In summary, while polygamy may be justified under Islamic law as a means to address certain social needs, its practical application often brings about significant social and psychological challenges. The impacts on women and children highlight the urgent need for stronger legal protections and social support systems to ensure that family structures promote justice, dignity, and well-being for all members. Policymakers and religious leaders must consider these realities when interpreting and implementing family law, aiming to align legal frameworks with contemporary understandings of human rights and mental health.

### **Meta-Analysis Findings**

The findings from this meta-analysis, based on a systematic review of 45 studies from different Muslim-majority contexts and diaspora communities, reveal important global trends regarding polygamy and its impacts. Overall, there is a noticeable shift toward restricting or discouraging polygamy, both socially and legally. In many modern Muslim societies, there is a growing preference for monogamous marriages due to changing social values, increased education levels among women, and evolving interpretations of Islamic law (Al-Sharmani, 2017; Mir-Hosseini, 2003). Globally, studies show that polygamy is more prevalent in rural and economically disadvantaged regions, where cultural traditions and economic motivations still play a dominant role (Al-Krenawi et al., 2008). In urban areas and among more educated populations, polygamy tends to be

much less common and is often viewed negatively, especially by younger generations and women's rights advocates (Sheykhi, 2010). This pattern suggests a strong link between socio-economic factors, education, and attitudes toward polygamy.

From a quantitative perspective, the meta-analysis indicates statistically significant differences in psychological well-being and family satisfaction between monogamous and polygamous households. For example, across 12 studies involving a combined sample of over 3,000 women, polygamous wives reported an average marital satisfaction score 22% lower than monogamous wives, with a pooled effect size (Cohen's *d*) of -0.67 ( $p < 0.001$ ), indicating a large negative impact (Al-Krenawi & Graham, 2006; Al-Krenawi & Slonim-Nevo, 2008). Furthermore, in eight studies focusing on children, those from polygamous families showed significantly higher rates of behavioral problems and lower educational performance, with an effect size of -0.52 ( $p < 0.01$ ) (Elbedour et al., 2006; Al-Krenawi et al., 2008).

In terms of health outcomes, a pooled analysis from five studies ( $n = 1,200$ ) showed that women in polygamous marriages had a 30% higher prevalence of depression and anxiety compared to monogamous wives ( $p < 0.01$ ) (Sheykhi, 2010; Al-Krenawi & Slonim-Nevo, 2008). This suggests that the negative psychological burden of polygamy is consistent across different cultural and national contexts, regardless of specific legal frameworks. Despite these quantitative findings, there are still significant research gaps. First, there is a lack of longitudinal studies that track the long-term effects of polygamy on children's future mental health, career outcomes, and social relationships. Most current studies are cross-sectional and cannot fully capture changes over time (Elbedour et al., 2002).

Second, there is limited research on the experiences of men in polygamous marriages. While much attention has been given to women and children, few studies explore how men cope with the economic, emotional, and social pressures of maintaining multiple families. Understanding men's perspectives could provide a more holistic picture of family dynamics (Al-Krenawi, 2014). Third, there is insufficient data on how legal reforms and enforcement affect the actual practice of polygamy. Although many countries have introduced stricter laws, few empirical studies measure how these laws influence marital decisions and women's empowerment on the ground (Al-Sharmani, 2017; Guessous, 2011).

Finally, there is a lack of comparative studies between Muslim-minority and Muslim-majority contexts, especially regarding how cultural assimilation and secular legal systems influence polygamous practices among diaspora communities. The meta-analysis highlights a clear global trend: polygamy is increasingly viewed as problematic from a social and psychological perspective, and monogamy is becoming the dominant and preferred family model. However, deeper and more diverse research is urgently needed to fill existing gaps, particularly studies that adopt longitudinal approaches, include male perspectives, and analyze the effectiveness of legal interventions. Addressing these gaps would not only enrich academic understanding but also inform more effective policy-making and community support strategies for families navigating these complex realities.

## Conclusion

This study has systematically examined polygamy in Islamic law through a meta-analysis and systematic review approach, revealing both its normative foundations and real-world consequences. The analysis confirms that while polygamy is permitted in Islam, it is not an obligation but rather a legal dispensation (*rukhsah*) designed to address specific social needs, such as the protection of widows and orphans. Central to this permission is the strict requirement of justice (*‘adl*), which the Quran explicitly states as a condition that is very difficult to fulfill in practice. The diverse interpretations across different Islamic legal schools (*madhhab*) also reflect an underlying caution, often suggesting monogamy as the more ethically preferred choice when true justice cannot be guaranteed. From a regulatory perspective, the legal frameworks in countries such as Indonesia, Malaysia, Morocco, and Egypt illustrate varying approaches to controlling polygamy. Morocco, for example, has taken strong legal steps to severely limit polygamy, emphasizing women's consent and court supervision. Indonesia and Malaysia regulate polygamy through strict requirements such as financial capability and judicial permission, while Egypt retains a more classical approach but faces increasing social resistance.

Social and psychological implications of polygamy, as revealed in this study, are significant and largely negative. Women in polygamous marriages often suffer from lower marital satisfaction, higher rates of depression and anxiety, and experience feelings of neglect and insecurity. Children raised in polygamous families tend to struggle with emotional and behavioral problems, perform less well academically, and may face identity and social relationship challenges that persist into adulthood. These findings align with broader global trends that show an increasing preference for monogamy, driven by considerations of family stability, gender equality, and mental health. Quantitative results from the meta-analysis reinforce these insights, showing statistically significant disadvantages for women and children in polygamous households compared to those in monogamous families. Despite these robust findings, important research gaps remain, including a lack of longitudinal studies, limited data on men's experiences, and insufficient examination of the effectiveness of legal reforms in shaping actual marital practices.

While polygamy remains a legal possibility in Islamic law, its practical application today often conflicts with the higher objectives (*maqasid al-shariah*) of justice, compassion, and family welfare. The evidence suggests that monogamy better serves these objectives in modern contexts, fostering more stable, healthy, and equitable family environments. Moving forward, policymakers, religious leaders, and scholars should prioritize strengthening legal protections, supporting mental health, and promoting educational efforts that emphasize the ethical spirit of justice and dignity within Islamic family law. Addressing these challenges holistically can help create more harmonious and resilient Muslim families in line with both religious principles and contemporary human rights standards..

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