

THE CASE OF FIRST WIFE IN POLYGAMY

DESCRIPTION OF AN ARAB CULTURE-SPECIFIC CONDITION

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SUMMARY: Polygamy and the case of first wife in Arab culture

Polygamy and the condition of first wife were investigated by study of a sample of 100 women ; half of them were first wives in polygynous marriages and the other half were a control group . Assuming that the first wife reacts to remarriage of the husband in certain pattern which is amenable to investigation and description , the subjects were collected by ‘ snowball ‘ technique and studied using brief interview , demographic sheet and the General Health Questionnaire (GHQ) .

The findings of this study revealed the first wives in polygynous marriage tend to have certain demographic characteristics e.g. relatively older age than controls, lower education , higher number of children and mostly being housewives . The initial reactions of the first wives to remarriage of the husband took the form of severe symptoms and sharp actions . Acceptance and adaptation to the new situation gradually takes place after 6 months in the average . Physical , psychological and social consequences continue to manifest for long time in polygynously married first wives . Certain symptoms were either spontaneously reported or observed through GHQ application , the most frequent of them were the somatic complaints e.g. pain , psychological symptoms e.g. anxiety and irritability and mixed e.g. tiredness .

The findings of this study suggested the proposal of an Arab Culture specific condition in women described as ‘ first wife syndrome ‘ . This new native category of psychiatric disorders which has no Western equivalent is justified by the almost constant pattern of reaction of Arabic women to polygamy based on findings of this study . Further research in this area and other relevant cultural studies had been recommended.

ملخص: الزواج المتعدد وحالة الزوجة الاولى في الثقافة العربية

يهتم الطب النفسي عبر الثقافات Transcultural بالظواهر النفسية وعلاقتها بالخلفية الثقافية في ثقافات العالم المختلفة، وفي الثقافة العربية Arab culture كما في غيرها خصوصيات تتميز بها تجعل الحالات النفسية تختلف مظاهرها في المجتمعات العربية عنها في بلاد الشرق والغرب الأخرى، وكذلك يند البناين والاختلاف بين الحالات النفسية من مجتمع عربي محلي إلى آخر، وهناك الاضطرابات النفسية التي ترتبط بالثقافة Culture-bound disorders، وحالات أخرى توصف بأنها مخصصة لثقافة معينة Culture-specific، والحالات المرضية النفسية التي تقوم بوصفها هنا هي نموذج لمثل هذه الحالات التي يمكن ملاحظتها والعرف عليها في الثقافة العربية دون أن نجد مقابل يماثلها تماماً في النموذج الغربي Western model الذي لجده في المراجع والأدبيات الخاصة بالطب النفسي، ولذلك فقد تروصف هذه الحالة المرضية الجديدة التي أطلق عليها "متلازمة الزوجة الأولى First wife syndrome" بعد وصفها في سياق هذه الدراسة.

■ Introduction:

Polygamy seems to be one of the special of interest and a distinguished feature in the study of Arab Culture in relation to psychosocial patterns. Very few serious studies exist about psychiatric implications of polygamy , but a lot of sentimental , picturesque and romantic prose has , in the Arab and Orientalist tradition , been written about polygyny in Islam and Middle East.For the Arabs , a great bulk of “second-hand” information on polygamy is available , however one must be cautious when handling these information .

The importance of the systemic psychiatric study of this

subject comes from the fact that polygamy is a well known feature of marriage pattern which is approved by Islamic Sharia laws in Arab Countries.At the same time,there is an impression of the existence of assumed psychiatric,in addition to social,implications on women who are,at any time,married polygynously or involved in polygamy.There is literature that points at the psychiatric and social implications of polygamy in some societies in Africa (Dorjahn 1988),certain Christian groups i.e.Mormen (Logue 1985) , Latin and North America(Smith and Kunz 1976),some Islamic countries e.g.Turkey(Behar 1991),and in Arab Culture in different Arab countries(Huzyyin 1981,El-kholi 1971,Chamie 1986).

■ Polygamy In Arab And Islamic Culture :

Generally, polygamy is a well known and recognized practice from social, legal and religious aspects in most of Arab and Islamic Communities . Most of the Western observers , however , are fascinated by the stories of ' Harem ' and other related mysteries , and in the best of instances , looked upon polygamy as an exciting local curiosity . As to the Arab writers, there are multiple opinions and numerous impressionistic accounts about social and religious aspects of polygamy. Here is a summary of facts and views of the subject in Arab and Islamic Culture.

Marriage with up to four wives is, in principle, permitted by Islamic Sharia Law. According to Islamic Rules, it can be understood from statements of the holy Quraan * that getting married to more than one wife is, inspire of being allowed, justified only if man can manage that on an equal basis between wives . According to the ' Sonna ' (teachings of Prophet Mohammed) , the man who married polygynously have to divide equally his care and time his two , three of four wives , in addition to spending equal amounts of his income on each of them . Some other Islamic Rules regulate the practice of polygyny e.g. man is not allowed to get married to the sister of his present wife, nor to her mother or her aunt. Referring to Islamic Rules , the polygynous man have to spend one night with each of his wives alternatively on equal basis , and in case of traveling he should accompany one of them alternatively (Holy Quraan and ' Sonna ' teachings references) .

In Islamic culture, polygamy should be regarded as a selection which, if appropriately resorted to, may help reducing marital discord and solving conflicts and problems of the involved individuals and families. Following Islamic principles and adhering to the rules regulating polygamy can minimize or completely eliminate the side effects of this practice. Moreover, polygamy , from the Islamic point of view , can be a way of achieving and enjoying a healthy balanced marital life leading to promotion of physical , social , spiritual and mental health (El-Azayem and Hedayat 1994) .

Polygamy in Arab Culture is, contrary to the wide spread opinion, of low incidence, however this low proportion of polygynous unions does not, with time, tend to disappear. Although marriage with up to four wives is permitted by Islamic law, the predominant form in most of Arab communities is undoubtedly bigamy (Chamie 1986). There are some reasons to believe that the low incidence of polygamy in Arab communities is far from being a new development. There is quite a lot of circumstantial and qualitative evidence in the form of memories, travelogues, novels and other literary sources to show that the phenomenon of polygamy, although a fundamentally accepted part of the basic marriage pattern, was and still meeting increasing disapproval and strong opposition in many Arab Societies. (Al-Sherbing 1996) .

The official data available estimate the frequency of polygamy in some Arab countries to be still lower than that mentioned in Mormons or in some African communities (Smith and Kunz 1976). Taking the percentage of the polygynously married men , it was 4% in Egypt (1960) , 7.5% in Iraq (1957) , 4.3 % in Syria (1960) , and still supposedly higher figures in Gulf Area where polygamy is more accepted among nomad and rural societies (Chamie 1986) .

When we mention the figure of 4% of men polygynously married in Egypt; this means that around more than 8% of married women are, at one time, involved in polygamy . The predominant form of polygamy in Arab countries is bigamy ,

relatively few number of men have three wives , and still fewer are those who have four .

Informal polygamy is an atypical family structure which is available, but no reliable statistical figures could be found about its incidence or prevalence in Arab societies . This pattern of marriage was described in other cultures as well (Rivett and Street 1993) .

* From the Holy Quraan :

"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 . That will be more suitable to prevent you from doing injustice "Surat An-Nisa " .

■ Psychosocial Aspects Of Polygamy :

Areas to be explored in reviewing the social and psychological aspects of polygamy in Arab Culture include the possible reasons for remarriage, determinants of polygamy and its problems, reactions and outcomes in relation to psychosocial life .

The reasons of polygamy being still thriving in some Arab communities, mainly the Gulf and other parts of Arabian Peninsula, are related to the culturally approved function of women as just to get married and produce children (El-Islam 1982, El-Kholi 1982). If we turn, first to women going into polygynous marriages, it seems that unmarried women, spinsters, and those from nomad and farmer cultures are more involved in polygynous unions (Behar 1991, Bates 1973). Two categories of men seem slightly more involved in polygynous unions than the others; men with strong religious connection or having an occupation in religious related area (Sheikh , Motawa ' , Mulla or Emam) , and high rank officials of the society (Chamie 1986) . When the first wife is childless or ill, and in special situations such as death of the brother who leaves a widow and children , the second marriage looks justified and more accepted in Arab Culture . Islamic religion and wealth are viewed by some observers to be the main determinants of the incidence of polygyny in Arab and Islamic Culture (Behar 1991). Other observers have the opinion that men should almost always prefer polygyny, and dynamic tension between female and male interest may result in polygamy which emerge because women also prefer it as evidenced by female competition for the more attractive and wealthiest husbands (Gaulin and Boster 1990, Schlegel and Eloul 1987). The surveys which were conducted in the 1970's in some Arab cities (Cairo, Damscus) seem to indicate that education and socio-cultural status are inversely related to multiple marriages (Huzayyin 1981) , but other study points out that the relationship is not as simple (Chamie 1986) .

The results and outcome of polygamy together with the problems which may arise following the husband getting remarried are predicted, together with the anticipatory reactions from the side of the first wife as well. The second marriage represents, in most of the instances, a major crisis mainly affecting the first wife caused by distress which reflect mourning over the death of the relationship or continued anger and hostility toward the partner and the new wife. Emotional reactions , legal issues , economic or financial troubles , disturbed social relationship and series of psychological upsets are among the list of expected troubles , rather than intended solutions , which may arise as a result of resistance of the first wife to the new situation following remarriage of the spouse . (Darwish 1989 , Al-Issa 1990)

Here , in this study , information about the subject of

polygamy in Arab Culture are collected and handled as to explore and investigate the hypothesis of the effects of polygamy on the psychological state of the first wife . The symptoms which are frequently seen in Arabic women when the man gets married to a new wife may be adequate to establish the need of a new diagnosis. Assessment of these symptoms and comparison of their incidence and frequency in controls from the same culture can help identification and description of an Arab Culture-bound psychiatric condition.

Similar reactions indicating stress in first wives described in women in African Societies (Mulder 1992), and in the Arab culture in the Gulf (Darwish 1989), and Algeria (Al-Issa 1990) .

■ Hypothesis :

Field study of special areas of interest in Arab Communities in relation to psychiatry can highlight some aspects in the Arab culture relationship with mental conditions.

Polygamy is a condition which is little known outside the Arab culture. Relevance of demographic data to the phenomenon of polygamy could be confirmed. Systemic psychiatric study of polygamy through concentration on reactions of the first wife can reveal a specific psychiatric condition amenable for investigation and description. This pattern of reaction of first wives which is culture-specific in Arabic women is related to cultural factors and psychiatric implications of polygamy in Arab Culture.

There are special areas of interest in Arab Communities which can be studied in relation to Psychiatry to highlight some aspects of the relationship between Arab Culture and mental conditions. Here is an attempt made to study one of the areas of interest in Arab Culture. Hopefully the findings of this study can illuminate the influence of Arab Culture on Psychiatric conditions and succeed in examining the mentioned hypotheses. Psychiatric implications of Polygamy in Arab Culture through concentration on study of its effects mainly on the first wife (Hypothesis a, b).

■ Methodology:

- The Sample:

One hundred Arabic women participated in the study of polygamy were distributed as follows :

- Fifty ladies who are involved in polygynous marriages; each of them being the first wife of a man who remarried to a new wife, are the subjects of the study group.
- Fifty ladies who are monogamously married were selected randomly as a 'control group' .

Recruitment of subjects who were studied as the first wives was by the 'snowball' technique. Personal contact had been used by the help of some local social workers, psychologists and other sources of referral.

Additional participants were identified by these contacts and were invited to be studied.

- The Instruments:

1. **General Health Questionnaire (GHQ)** : This is an Arabic version of the scaled version of GHQ , which is a widely used instrument for the screening of psychiatric symptoms in the community and in primary care practice(Goldberg 1979).It has been translated and used in a number of countries including Kuwait where this study has been conducted(El-Islam et al

1986).The 28-Item version of GHQ is composed of 4 scales, each of them contains 7 symptoms covering somatic, anxiety, social dysfunction and depressive symptomatology.Symptoms are scored 0 if never experienced or experienced no more than usual, and as 1 if slightly or definitely experienced by the subject out of keeping with what is usual by her.

2. **The Demographic Data And Information Sheet** : A demographic data sheet was distributed along with the GHQ to the members of the study group of the sample (B) which include the ladies involved in Polygamy.This sheet contained demographic variables which may influence the subject condition such as age,education,occupation etc..Other information such as length of marriage and number of children was also assessed.

The factors relevant to marriage and polygamy were assessed through some simple inquiries added to the demographic data sheet. The main items include the length of marriage prior to remarriage of the husband and the existence of severe marital conflicts during that period. The view of the first wife to the remarriage of here husband, and her explanation of the reason for that, together with her opinion of the husband were asked for. The sheet includes inquiries about the initial reaction of the first wife remarriage of the husband and the reported recent difficulties she faced.

■ The Procedure :

The women who were studied for the influence of polygamy (The 50 ladies who were first wives) were contacted through several means of communication. These ladies who are the subject of the study were identified using the 'snowball' technique (an unfolding process which was defined as the selection of relevant subjects through referrals from other subjects (Babbie 1982). The subjects are then reached personally and the following procedures were carried out :

The nature and purpose of the study were simply and clearly explained to each subject.

The subjects were assured that the obtained data would be handled with confidentiality.

Their consent was essential after they were informed that the process is confidential and risk free , and only the investigator would have access to the data collected (giving the name was optional and it was possible to replace it by a code or a pseudonym e.g. ' Um-Ahmed ' which means ' the mother of Ahmed ').

Standardized psychiatric interview, constructed for the purpose of this study took 15-20 minutes, although it was often prologend by subjects who wanted the opportunity to discuss their problems. Some of the cases were referred for physical and laboratory examinations when needed.

Demographic data sheet which contains personal information and inquiries about marital issues was completed by the subjects after the interview.

Subjects were then asked to complete the Arabic version of the 28 item General Health Questionnaire (GHQ).

The control group which included 50 subjects (monogamously married ladies) were asked to complete the GHQ, and their personal demographic information data were collected as well .

■ **Statistical Analysis**

The hypothesis concerning the influence of polygamy was tested by comparison of the study group whose subjects are first wives involved in polygynous marriages with the control group of monogamously married ladies on the variables under investigation. Statistical analysis and the differences between the two groups in demographic data and GHQ score were carried out using Chi-square contingency tables and other methods of discriminate analysis.

■ **Results**

Results of the Study of impact of polygamy on the first wife which was conducted using a sample of the subjects involved in polygynous marriages as the first wife (50 cases) and a control group of ordinary wives in monogamous marriages (N:50) were as follows :

Age: The age of the study group and controls is represented in the following table.

Table (1)

Sample	Age Range	Mean	SD
Study Group	23-52	36.36	7.782
Control Group	18-49	26.34	8.289

Age of study group (first wife , N = 50) , and control group (N = 50) .
- The mean age of the study group is higher than that of the controls.

Marital Status: All cases of the sample were married, either being the first wife in polygamous marriage in the study group , or the only wife in monogamous marriage . The exception was only two cases that were divorced at the time of investigation. Each of these 2 cases was also the first wife and they asked for divorce after few years of remarriage of the spouse.

Education : The level of education in the study group and the control group is shown as follows :

Table (2)

Education Level	Study No.	Group %	Control No.	Group %
1. Illiterate	9	18	2	4
2. 1 ry School	12	24	9	18
3. 2 ry School	22	44	10	20
4. University Graduated	7	14	28	56
5. Postgraduate	-	-	1	2
Total	50	100	50	100

Education in the sample members of Study group (50) , and Control group (50) .

- The great majority (more than 80%) of the study group of the first wives in polygamous marriage were noted to have educational levels lower than the University degrees .
- More than half the control group women were University graduated.

Occupation : The occupation of the sample members is distributed as shown in the following table :

Table (3)

Occupation Level	Study No.	Group %	Control No.	Group %
Housewife	28	54	11	22
Employed*	22	44	31	62
Student	-	-	8	16
Total	50	100	50	100

Occupation in the sample members of Study group (50), and Control group (50).

- Job includes mainly clerk and official works (Government is the main employer).
- Housewives represent more than half of the Study group (first wife) and less than quarter of the Control group .

Number of Children: The number of children born by wives in the Study group and those of the Control group will represent as follows :

Table (4)

No. of Children	Study No.	Group %	Control No.	Group %
1.	3	6	5	10
2.	6	12	8	16
3.	11	22	13	26
4.	9	18	11	22
5.	8	16	7	14
6.	5	10	3	6
7.	3	6	1	2
8.	2	4	1	2
9.	2	4	1	2
10.	1	2	-	-

Frequencies of No. of children of sample members of Study group (50) and Control group (50).

- The mean for the Study group is 3.56, and for the Control group is 2.62. This means that women in the study group (first wives) tend to have more children than controls.

Difference in demographic data between Study group (first wife) and Control group concerning some variables is represented in the following table :

Table (5)

Demographic Variables	Study group N = 50	Control group N = 50	X2	DF	P
Median age	36.36	26.36	20.80404	1	0.00001
Lower education	43 (86 %)	21 (42 %)	13.21835	1	0.00028
Housewives	28 (54 %)	11 (22 %)	1.42227	1	0.03296
No. of Children (mean)	3.56	2.62	13.39396	1	0.00024

Difference in some demographic variables between Study group (first wife, N= 50), and Control group (N = 50) .

- The Study group (first wife) tended to be older in age in comparison with the controls. Level of education was comparatively lower in the Study group. Housewives dominate in the Study group and represented as much as more

than double their existence in Control group. Number of children tended to be significantly higher in subjects of Study group than the controls.

Data about the (first wife) :

The data collected by demographic sheet and the inquiries about polygamy and remarriage are summarized in the following points :

- Length of marriage in the group of 'first wife 'involved in polygamous marriage ranged from 2-36 years (mean - 13.5 years).
- The years of marriage passed before second marriage took place ranged from 2-36 years from the first marriage (mean = 8.7 years). About 50% marriage occurred before completing 7 years of marriage.
- A relatively smaller number of cases (first wife) reported the existence of severe marital conflicts prior to remarriage of the husband, only 14 cases (28%).
- The reasons for remarriage of the husband as viewed and reported by the first wife were :
 - * About one third of cases (17 or 34 %) reported that they don't know why the spouse remarried to a new wife.
 - * Some explained the remarriage of the husband as being a caprice to search for more sexual satisfaction.
 - * Others attributed it to the existing marital conflicts, and the husband wanted to punish the old wife by remarriage.
 - * Some wives attributed remarriage of the husband to the influence of his family, mainly mother-in-law who suggest this idea as revenge against the first wife.
 - * Fewer cases mentioned that they themselves (the first wives) were responsible for the remarriage of their husbands in some way. Two cases reported that they were childless; one other case reported that she was late to get pregnant; another mentioned that he remarried to have a male child after she had 4 girls, and some others reported that their men remarried to have more children.
- Attitudes of the first wives to their husbands after remarriage to a new wife were generally negative as noted in their responses to inquiry about their opinion of the husband. The great majority described them as selfish, womanly, irresponsible, careless or evasive. Only a few cases mentioned that their husbands are religious and good despite their remarriage.
- The reaction of the first wife to remarriage of the husband as reported by the sample cases can be summarized in the following points :
 - * Initially, the wife when informed or discovered for the first time that her husband got married to a new wife, reacted severely to the situation. The initial reaction took the form of surprise, nervous breakdown, outburst of anger, hysterical behaviors or tearful episodes.
 - * The action taken by the first wife in the initial phase was frequently leaving the house and going to her family home, asking for immediate divorce, or showing signs of severe illness to be transferred for emergency treatment in the hospital.
 - * The severity and duration of this initial reaction differ from one case to another. Generally, acceptance of the new situation with gradual adaptation took place in the majority of cases after 6 months of the event. Residual effects continued in the form of physical, psychological

and social consequences as shown in the study of the sample of first wives.

- The first wives reported the difficulties they faced after remarriage of their husbands. They could be summarized in the following points :

- * Psychological e.g.tension, sleep disorders, low self esteem, lack of satisfaction and feelings of jealousy, injustice and frustration. The commonest spontaneously reported symptoms are mentioned later.
- * Physical problems e.g.multiple persistent somatic complaints such as fatigue (tiredness), headache, Abdominal pain, backache, which poorly responded to treatment, and overconcern with their health.
- * Social and economic difficulties e.g.lack of interest of the husband in the first wife , unfair distribution of the husband's time and income between both wives by giving more to the new one , the burden of care for children in not effectively taken by the father , and repeated problems and conflicts between both wives .

Symptoms: The spontaneously reported symptoms by cases of the study group (first wife) which include somatic, psychological and mixed symptoms were recorded during the interview . The frequency of the commonest symptoms was represented in the following table :

Table (6)

Symptom	N	%
Fatigue (tiredness)	34	68
Headache	28	54
Breathlessness	25	50
Abdominal pain	18	36
Backache	18	36
Anxiety	23	46
Irritability	11	22
Depression	3	6

The frequency of symptoms reported by members of the Study group (first wife).

- The rule was complaining of multiple symptoms and somatic symptoms (e.g.pains) were more common than psychological symptoms (e.g.anxiety) and mixed (e.g.tiredness).

General Health Questionnaire (GHQ) Symptoms: The symptoms reported by the subjects on the GHQ showed difference between the Study group (first wife) and the Control group . This difference is represented in the following table :

Table (7)

Symptom	GHQ SCORE %				X2	DF	P (Sig.)
	Study Group		Control Group				
	High	Lower	High	Lower			
Somatic	70	30	26	74	19.4847	1	0.00001
Anxiety	72	28	8	92	36.967	1	0.00000
Social dysfunction	56	44	38	62	5.47264	1	0.01932
Depression	58	42	38	62	3.34849	1	0.06727
Total	68	32	12	88	16.3185	1	0.00005

Score of sample cases on the GHQ (The lower score is 8 or less on the total; the high is more than 8). Scores on the scales of Somatization and anxiety showed significantly higher symptoms in the study group (first wife) than in control group.

■ Discussion

Reviewing results of this study, and analyzing its findings can highlight the problem of polygamy from the psychiatric point of view. Very few serious studies exist and the surveys which were conducted in Arab Culture are small and not very homogenous, in addition to being not comparable with our data in this study for methodological reasons. Before discussing the findings of this study there are some observations that deserve mentioning. First is that polygamy, although fundamentally accepted part of the basic marriage pattern, is meeting increasing disapproval and even opposition in some Arab Communities. In the law of some Arab countries (e.g. Tunisia) the woman has the right to forbid her husband from taking a second wife. The legislator attempted, probably under strong public opinion pressure, to create obstacles to polygynous unions in some other Arab communities without departing from the basic framework of Islamic Sharia Law. In some Arab Communities, special permission from the judge is requested in order to marry polygynously which seems as if the legislator accepted it half-heartedly in case of female sterility or chronic illness.

Turning now to data in the results of this research, the socio demographic data of the sample showed discrepancy between the study group (first wife in polygynous marriages) and the control group members who are wives in monogamous marriages. The mean age of the study group tended to be higher than that of the controls. The difference was statistically significant. This finding confirms that of Behar (1989) in Istanbul. This has been explained by the fact that women going into polygynous marriage as wife number two do so at the same time or slightly later than monogamous ones. Men marry their second wives after several years of the first. So, it is expected that age difference exists between the first wife in polygynous marriage who married early and the monogamous women.

Regarding to other demographic variables i.e. education, occupation and number of children, it has been noted that significant differences exist between the study group (first wife) and the controls. The women who are first wives in polygynous marriages were of relatively lower educational levels, most of them housewives and generally had more children than the controls.

These data conform with some studies made in Arab culture which indicate that education and socio-cultural status are inversely related to multiple marriages (Huzayyin 1981). Chamie (1986), however, pointed out that the relationship is not as simple.

The length of marriage in the study group (first wife) ranged from 2 to 36 years (mean: 13.5), and the time passed in monogamous before the man married the second wife ranged from 2 to 36 (mean: 8.7) in this study. It has been found that by the end of the 6th-year of marriage more than 50% of the second marriages take place as shown in the results of study of this sample.

These findings confirm those of Behar (1991) in Istanbul. It has been mentioned that polygynous men marry their second wives on the average 8.5 years after the first, by which time these men are around 40, and the age difference with the second wife is much higher than that with the first.

Evident marital discord and conflicts prior to the man remarriage were not reported by the great majority of the first wives in the sample. The areas of trouble in marriage included poor communication between partners, inappropriate ways of solving disputes, different attitudes towards child bearing and

child rearing, bad relations with the in-laws and the handling of finances. Although there is impression that sexual dissatisfaction is involved in many cases leading to marital maladjustment, women of our sample never disclose that because of cultural constraints.

The reasons for second marriage as viewed by the first wives in this sample were noted to be mainly attributed to the man's wish to have a new wife, however some ladies reported that they are themselves blamed for remarriage or their husbands, and others claimed that they don't know the reasons.

Reviewing the literature, marital problem is one of 13 conditions listed in DSM III-R and described as states that are the focus of attention or treatment but are not attributable to mental disorder. When a person presents with marital problems, the marital and sexual history are essential for purpose of diagnosis. To discuss and understand the reasons of polygamy in Arab Culture we argue that it sometimes seems as a last resort to solve marital problems which is used by husbands as an alternative to divorce. Polygamy is socially and religiously accepted while divorce is not much desired in Arab Culture. This can be understood in the light of gender roles in most of Arab societies where man has the position of unchallenged authority and women are unassertive.

There are several reasons mentioned in studies of polygamy in different cultures. Ecology, economy, kinship and warfare were mentioned together with further factors as causes for polygamy in cross cultural studies (White and Burton 1988), (Naden and Naden 1991). The relationship between polygamy and divorce has been studied as there are similarities between both conditions in some aspects (Gage and Anastasia 1992). The findings of this study may not be enough to tell all the causes of polygamy in Arab Culture as the investigation is directed mainly to the sample of first wives and their views about the reasons of remarriage of their husbands. There could be multiple social, cultural, economic and religious factors working together behind the phenomenon of polygamy in Arab Culture. (Weisfeld 1990)

Reaction of first wife: As far as noted in results of this study, certain pattern of reaction by the first wives had been reported and observed frequently when their husbands marry to new wives. This pattern is described as follows:

- Initial severe reaction of the first wife when informed about new divorce. In polygamy, the situation of remarriage of the husband represents a major crisis and distress to the first wife. The reaction of the first wife may reflect mourning over the death of previous monogamous marital relationship or continued anger and hostility towards the husband. This reaction may also represent anticipation of difficulties in adapting to a new life style after polygamy being a single head-of-household, losing 'full time' daily contact with the partner, or living on a substantially reduced income. Studies indicate that the process of recovery from divorce takes about 2 years, while acceptance and adaptation to the situation of polygamy in this study occur within 6 months. Another point of comparison of divorce with polygamy is that the rate of divorce in Arab Societies is much higher, about 10 times as much as the rate of polygamy.

The difficulties reported by first wives in the sample included psychological (e.g. lack of satisfaction, feelings of jealousy and frustration), physical (multiple somatic complaints) and social together with economic problems. These difficulties and problems are considered to be the outcome of exposure to stress as a result of polygamy. Negative attitudes toward the

husband are noted in this study of first wives, however some of the sample cases show neutral or ambivalent attitudes.

The explanation of psychological effects of polygamy on the first wife in similar in some aspects to that of psychic divorce where love object is given up and grief reaction about the death of the relationship occurs. Physical symptoms are explained as an expression of emotional pressure for manipulation by the first wives to gain emotional and social support. The economic problems arise as a result of division of the property and income between both of the two wives (or more 3 or 4) and their children. The great majority of first wives report lesser interest of the husband in them after remarriage, and unfair distribution of his time and income between the first and new wives. This represents an additional suffering of the first wife which seems to be inevitable. The change in the social network of the first wife after remarriage of the husband, and being practicably in some instances the single parent of children are additional sources of stress in cases of polygamy. (Al-Issa 1990)

Psychiatric symptoms in first Wives: The spontaneously reported symptoms by first wives in the sample of this study include Somatic (e.g. pains and breathlessness), psychological (e.g. Anxiety and irritability) and mixed symptoms (e.g. tiredness)

The scores on the General Health Questionnaire (GHQ) in the sample are showing significantly higher symptoms (mainly somatization and anxiety) in the first wives than in controls.

In Arab Culture, women tend to express their emotions in terms of physical illness. This explains the preponderance of Somatic Symptoms whether spontaneously reported or as shown in scores of GHQ of the sample. These findings conform with previous studies about Somatization in Arabic women (Racy 1980, El-Islam 1978). Somatization or advertising physical symptoms together with emotional upset may be explained also by the wish of first wives in their hard life experience to manipulate the situation to their best social advantages. (El-Islam 1990 , Mulder 1992)

Somatic and emotional symptoms can also be viewed as means for getting social support and sympathy or others. Furthermore, there is impression that illness behavior of first wives may enable them to challenge the authority of their husbands as the culture accorded them to get married polygynously but they are not supposed to make the wives sick (Krieger 1989).

An unexpected finding has emerged from this study so far. There is constant pattern suggesting response by depression to such stressful life situation as that experienced by first wives in polygamy marriage in Arab Culture. The findings of this study show that depression is rarely spontaneously reported by cases in the sample, and there is no significant difference in the extent to which first wives and controls acknowledge depression on GHQ. Also, social dysfunction is not significantly higher in the sample of first wives than controls. This may point to the fact that Arabic women react to stress of such life experiences by somatization and anxiety more than by other patterns. This conforms in some aspects with some previous studies in Arab Culture (Krieger 1989, El-Islam 1982, Racy 1980). Psychosexual problems are not listed, although there is impression of their existence, because women in Arab culture never report such symptoms and doctors are reluctant to explore this area owing to cultural constraints. (Bhugra and de Silra 1993).

■ Case Study

First wife in Polygamy : (The case of Um Ahmed)

Um Ahmed (Um Ahmed is a pseudonym , means the mother of Ahmed , her oldest son .) is a 36 year-old , married lady , housewife, educated upto secondary school and have five children . She is the first wife of Abu Ahmed (the father of Ahmed) who works as a merchant and is also her first cousin. She was first seen when she presented in the psychiatric clinic complaining mainly of being 'upset'. Although she did not mention except some somatic symptoms such as headache, chest felt tight, generalized body aches and fatigue, she looked at this time miserable and frustrated. In the first visit she did not talk much about her complaint, but during tearful episodes she expressed her feelings of irritability and oppression (dega). This first visit was not the beginning of the story of Um Ahmed which was collected and followed up over 2 years. It seemed that she first presented during a stormy period in her marriage. She was just informed that her husband got married to a new younger wife after 15 years of marriage. She was seen repeatedly after this initial presentation, and that provided an opportunity for deliberate case study, collecting history information, observation, interviewing, management and follow up.

History taking from Um Ahmed in subsequent interviews revealed that she was married before her 19th birthday. Her marriage was unhappy from the beginning as she reported. The marriage was arranged by her mother, father-in-law and the relatives against her will; although she confessed to her mother her love to another one of their relatives. An informant companion who came with her in the first visit reported that the husband of Um Ahmed was bad and he was the reason of her illness. She reported that she was occasionally exposed to physical violence from her husband who was 8 years older than her.

At the time of marriage he was working as a clerk in a Ministry (Government is the main employer here) , then he moved to be self employed in business with much improvement in his income . She complained that her husband used to be most of the time outside the house , either in his work during the day time or with his friends in 'Diwania ' (the place for gathering of friends) till late at night . She also complained that he used to be 'nervous 'and she tolerated much of his yelling insults and beating her and the children. When I interviewed the husband he looked calm but complained that his wife is spending money in a way he considered extravagant. He expressed being bored with the demands and responsibilities of his wife but she insisted she bought only necessities and mentioned that he was away from the house and did not recognize the needs of the children. It had been noted that was disparity in intelligence and social skills between the spouses ; her husband was not as intelligent as her

Past history of previous medical treatment for occasional joint pain by general doctor was mentioned by Um Ahmed, and she was treated by some analgesics and antirheumatic tablets. Her attitude towards the present complaint was noted to be that she attributed it to emotional reasons causing physical illness. One doctor told her that her illness was originated from emotional stress, and she repeated this statement frequently.

Family history showed that her father who died before she got married was also married to a previous wife before his marriage to her mother i.e. she was the daughter of the second wife. Both wives (her mother and the previous wife) lived in the same house though in a separate place for each of them with her children. As far as she could recall there were some conflicts

between her mother , who got married after the death of her father , and the old wife . She had half siblings from both parents.

Um Ahmed was almost satisfied by her role as a wife and a mother of five children, three of them males and two were females. She was the centre of many social relationships and widely accepted by here relatives and neighbors. She demonstrated admirable skills in fulfilling all aspects of her social role as housewife, mother, relative and friend despite the occasional martial discord which she used not to disclose it. This situation which continued for about 15 years of marriage was suddenly changed when she was informed that her husband got married to a young educated unmarried lady who was one of his work colleagues. She was shocked in the beginning as she never expected that her husband could do that, and when she faced him he did not deny. She decided to leave the house during the initial time of anger, but some of her friends asked her to stay with her children. A reaction in the form of nervous breakdown took place and she was transferred for treatment in the emergency department in the nearest general hospital. This episode tended to recur several times in the following days and finally the general doctors advised that she must be seen by psychiatrist. She resisted at first and argued that she is not 'crazy 'but agreed on request of some of her friends to visit the psychiatric clinic.

Mental state assessment showed signs of high distress in Um Ahmed when seen for the first time as she looked tense, irritable and easily going to tearful episodes. Multiple symptoms were reported, most were physical e.g. headache, chest oppression with chest felt tight (Dega and Katma), joint pains and generalized body aches. Sleep pattern was disturbed with insomnia, and interrupted sleep with nightmares reported. She used to concentrate on being ill and upset together with expression of anger and protest. Mood showed fluctuations with anxiety and depressive coloring, and ideas of preoccupation with her health, children and future were frequently expressed.

In subsequent interviews during the follow up over two years, the condition of Um Ahmed showed change in the main features. She complained only of multiple Somatic Symptoms and talked much about investigations and medical treatment. She looked as if accepting the new situation after only a few months of remarriage of her husband to the new wife. Instead of anger which was expressed in quarrels with the husband and the new wife, she started to ask only for her share in his income to care for her children. After one year she looked more adapted to the situation .However, she continued to mention bodily complaints and attribute it to emotional upset and the difficulties in relationship with her husband because he was discriminating between her and the new wife as she reported. During the course of follow up of Um Ahmed over two years, she was physically examined several times and too many investigations performed, most of it to satisfy her as no significant medical problem existed.

■ Comment :

The case of Um Ahmed can be taken as a representative case of the influence of polygamy as a stressful event on the first wife initiating a psychological reaction. This case is far from being marginal to the local Arab Culture in the Gulf State of Kuwait. From 1982 to 1995 I have been in the Gulf region for intervals of time which allowed me to contact with local Arab Cultures there, to note the changes, and to interview a lot of cases over these periods. Coming from another Arab Culture in Egypt which has the same language and background , this

helped me understand and deal with people in different Arab Societies . Although changes in people's life and culture have taken place, such as luxury in oil Gulf countries, many facets of life endured. Among these were habits and beliefs about marriage and polygamy.

This case can illustrate some psychosocial aspects of marriage, gender role and polygamy in Arab Culture. In this case the subject married against her will when she was 19 , which reflects that early arranged marriage is the rule , and cousin marriage is an ordinarily preference pattern in this culture . Polygamy, though recognized by Islamic religion and socially accepted, is usually considered a difficult life experience which causes psychological reaction in the first wife. The reaction of first wife to polygamy is initially severe with acute psychological features which disappear by time passage to be replaced by acceptance within only a few months as in this case. (Mulder 1992)

In this case, the subject expressed the emotional pressure mostly by physical symptoms to gain emotional and social support. Advertising her physical symptoms are an illness behavior which enabled her to regain some of here self esteem after being affected by remarriage of the husband to a new wife. Somatization helped her also manipulate the situation of polygamy by challenging the authority accorded by the culture to the husband. This case represents the uses of being upset by Arabic women, in the situation of being involved in polygamy as a first wife, to manipulate this stress to their best social and psychological advantage.

■ Limitations of the Study :

The present investigation suffers from some limitations, which pertain to the instrumentation or to the subject pool. The instruments and diagnostic tools are mostly developed in the complex Western Societies and their feasibility and applicability when used in the simple third world societies (as in Arab Culture) is open to question . Another problem may arise due to lack of standardized methods to estimate cultural influences and to explain the information available when we try to correlate between social, psychological and cultural observations.

Subjects selected in this study limited the research because the samples were not representative of the entire Arab Culture. Many differences exist between local Arab communities as subjects in Egypt are expected to show specific features differ from those in the Gulf and from Arabs in the North Africa.

In spite of these limitations, such cultural studies are justified by the need to highlight the importance of broader understanding of the local belief systems and cultural differences of Arab Culture from the Western Model. The data analysis and results of the investigation suggest further research in different Arab Societies using suitable culturally sensitive instruments and appropriate samples.

■ Conclusion

The Case of First Wife

Description of an Arab Culture-specific Condition

Reviewing results of this study together with analysis and discussion of the findings, we can present here an account of a specific Arabic culture-bound condition or a 'first wife syndrome ' . This suggested psychiatric entity description is justified by the almost constant pattern of reaction of the first wife in polygamous marriages to the situation of remarriage of the husband to a new wife. The 'Scenario 'of consequence of events in cases of polygamy, and reactions of the first wives usually take the same

pattern in every occasion in Arab culture. Although generalization in such phenomenon is not absolute, the variations in reactions of first wives as observed in this study are only in some details.

Here is a summarized brief account on the main items of the suggested 'first wife syndrome' ; the description of a cultural-specific psychiatric entity related to Arab culture which has not been previously specified :

- This condition occurs in Arabic women involved in polygynous marriages as the first wives following remarriage of the husband to a new wife. These women tend to have certain demographic characteristics e.g. relatively older age, lower education, more children and mostly housewife.
- The initial reaction of the first wife which immediately follows her being informed of remarriage of the husband is severe in the form of nervous breakdown, emotional upset or outbursts of anger. The duration and severity of this initial reaction differ from one case to another in the way people differ in their reaction to stress.
- The actions taken by the first wife in response to this situation, in addition to manifesting signs of emotional and physical upset, include leaving the husband's house asking for immediate divorce and calling for emergency treatment. Negative attitude toward the husband and hostility toward the new wife always exist.
- After a lapse of time (average 6 months) , gradual adaptation usually takes place due to acceptance of the new situation . Residual effects continue to manifest in the form of physical, psychological and / or social consequences.

Psychopathology in first wives in Arab culture is characterized by preponderance of somatization which can be explained as an expression of emotional stress of the situation of polygamy in terms of bodily complaints. Multiple physical symptoms manifest together with psychological symptoms, mainly anxiety, and mixed symptoms e.g. tiredness. These symptoms are either spontaneously reported or admitted in response to inquiry, and usually tend to be long-term. The psychiatric symptoms in first wives are likely to be maintained and perpetuated by the problems and difficulties faced by them in form of psychological, economic and social pressure.

The previous items, which are based on the findings of this study, constitute the basic description of a native category of psychiatric disorders in Arab culture which has no Western equivalent. This condition which we suggested to label as 'first wife syndrome' can be considered an Arab Culture-specific psychiatric condition.

Other psychological aspects of polygamy in terms of concept of adding a wife, husband-wife and wife-wife relations, and adjustment to and by a new wife, living arrangements in plural families are amenable area recommended for further psychological study.

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