

Staying Into Religious Boundaries and Bearing Polygamy: Understanding Jealousy, Marital Satisfaction, and Mental Health among Muslim Women

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Abstract

In Islamic culture, women are bound to accept more than one and up to four marriages of their husbands and this sharing may appear as a threat to them. The present study aimed to examine the jealousy, marital satisfaction, and mental health in a purposive sample of 192 women in polygamous marriages (first and second wives) with an age range of first wives 25-60 ($M = 40.30$, $SD = 7.86$) and second wives 18-40 ($M = 26.60$, $SD = 7.41$). The sample was drawn from Punjab. It was Correlational research with a cross-sectional design. Revised Dyadic Adjustment Scale¹ and Mental Health Inventory² along with the newly developed indigenous Jealousy Scale for polygamous women³ were used as measures. Results revealed men's injustice and biased behavior toward their multiple wives cause jealousy and poor marital satisfaction in polygamous women which deteriorate their mental health. Findings showed that poor marital satisfaction mediated between jealousy and mental health



(Psychological well-being and psychological distress). After controlling the poor marital satisfaction, jealousy significantly negatively predicted Mental Health (Psychological well-being) and positively predicted psychological distress but reduces the value which indicates partial mediation. The Implications of the findings were discussed for family settings, family therapists, and law advisors in the Pakistani socio-cultural context and wherever polygamy is allowed in the world. The study is also implemented to seek the original teachings and true picture of Islamic perspectives about polygamy.

Keywords: Jealousy, Marital Satisfaction, and Mental Health, Polygamous women

Introduction

Marriage is a process where two people join together and decide to spend their whole life together. The nature of romantic relationships and emotions changed throughout marital relationships. Although no marriage is free from conflicts interruption of the third person always remains a threat and source of jealousy. Neither men nor women want to share their partner to other but man to be a part of Islamic culture has this liberty over women to share their love, affection, and attention to other women while living in marital relationship. Hence, polygamy has been observed as a common practice in the Islamic culture and few other communities.⁴Polygamy has been permitted to almost eighty-three percent of human societies across the world. In Muslim communities, polygamous marriages are more prevalent because they are associated with a religious doctrine mentioned in the Holy Quran "a man may marry up to four wives" and polygamy is a way of fair and legal relationship which protects the families from contracting sexually transmitted diseases and possible deviation to the illegal sexual association. There is only one Quranic passage (Surah 4: An-Nisa': 2-3) in which specific reference is made to polygyny as a social institution and permission to marry more than

one wife is given under highly exceptional circumstances and with extremely stringent conditions.⁵No doubt, one has to face certain challenges in polygamous marriages but women experience more emotional and psychological problems while living in polygamous marriages. The discriminative behavior and unequal treatment of the husbands, polygamy badly affected the psychological and social functioning of polygamous families and women find it difficult to share their partner. At times, they may not overtly oppose polygamy because it is allowed by religion but may covertly perceive a threat to their valuable relationship and in response experience, certain emotional and psychological changes and issues such as rivalry, marital jealousy, poor marital satisfaction, unhealthy competition, lack of trust, etc. sometimes such emotions arise as a protective reaction but can be destructive for the person herself and others as well.⁶

Jealousy is the most common emotional reaction observed in polygamous marriages. The multidimensional theory of jealousy is based upon three components as cognitive, emotional, and behavioral comprising several theoretical frameworks.⁷Jealousy and the threat to loss loved one highly impact marital satisfaction which is a state of overall happiness and satisfaction in couples. Poor relationship satisfaction and commitment lead to the unhealthy psychological and mental health of couples. Dynamic goal theories of marital satisfaction claim that goal is very significant and if not fulfilled psychological wellbeing can be upset. This theory claims to attain the marital goals particularly the priorities of both husband and wife is very significant in marital satisfaction.⁸Besides jealousy and low marital satisfaction, another observable impact of polygamous marriage is the mental health of women. An individual's mental health is significantly influenced by many psychological and physical needs which are fulfilled in a successful marriage. It enhances marital understanding, adjustment, and satisfaction. Satisfaction in a relationship naturally can lead to the promotion of their mental health. The couples' mutual understanding, mental and psychological

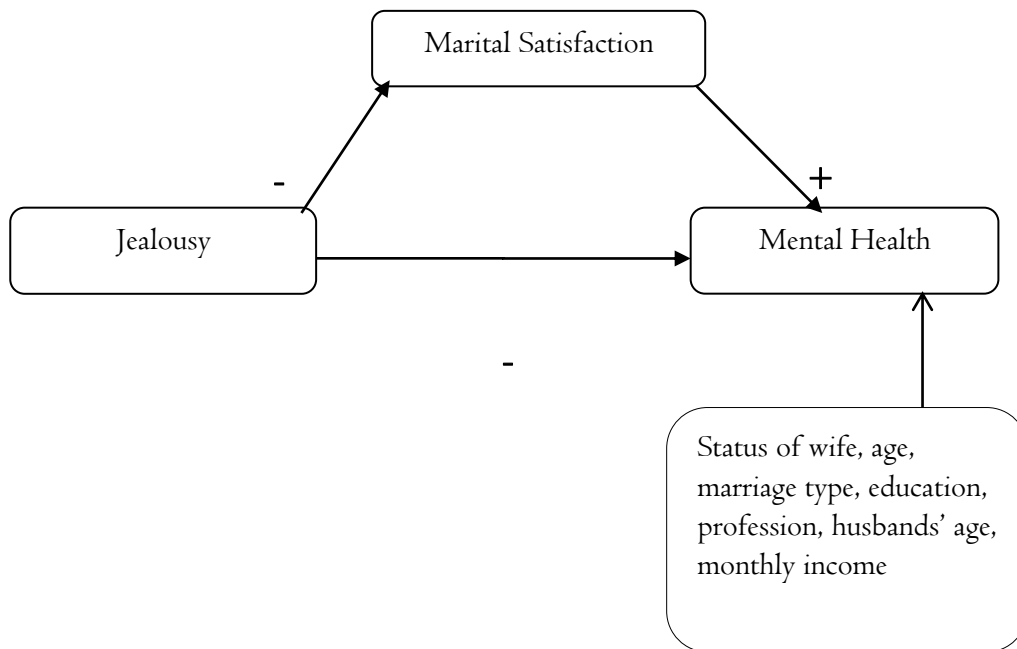
health particularly in women also minimizes the factor of jealousy towards their life partners.⁹

In Polygynous marriages, in the beginning, men entertain their relationship but a time comes when they are unable to maintain equality and balance in the requirements among the multiple wives. The majority of Muslims have accepted the official polygamy but in many other cultures, polygamy is considered far from the original context. The injustice practice by the husbands in polygamy has been observed as a significant factor in qualitative and quantitative literature which led to co-wife jealousy, poor marital satisfaction, poor mental health, maladjustment, competition, and many other psychological problems. Tabi (2010) observed a significant relationship in marital satisfaction, jealousy, and aggression rate among the first and second wives. Sahana and Ganth (2016) explored the positive relationship between immature ego defenses, and jealousy while the negative relationship between closeness and romantic jealousy. Relationship closeness and immature defense style were found to be the best predictor of jealousy. In numerous qualitative studies on polygamous women, Hassouneh-Phillips (2001) observed spousal abuse by men on their wives in American Muslim families. The new or second wife was considered as a distressing experience due to the discriminatory behavior of their husbands for the first wives and their children. The first wives also suffered economic, physical, and sexual abuse. The injustice in the husband's emotional feelings, sexual attention, and affection cause jealousy. Co-wife conflicts can also lead to loneliness, unhappiness, and lack of intimacy with the spouse.¹⁰¹¹ Literature also suggested the women who perceived themselves as old also reported poor relationships with their husbands, high loneliness, and low self-esteem. They expressed significantly higher jealousy, poorer mental health, psychological distress, phobias, higher levels of somatoform, and many other psychological problems than the women with monogamous marriages.¹² Hence, considering the sensitivity of this issue there is a dire need to address and understand these issues of

polygamous women, irrespectively of their religious, cultural, social, and also economic background. The ratio of polygamy is higher since the last few years in Pakistan's martial culture. The Muslim Family Laws Ordinance, 1961 also permitted Pakistani men polygamy. Maintenance of equality is also necessary for all possession among wives to avoid all the factors which might deteriorate the psychological health of the women. Therefore, the purpose of this study is to uncover the psychological impacts of polygamous marriage on women. ¹³Based on theoretical background and previous literature a theoretical model (see figure I) depicts the direct and indirect role of marital satisfaction between jealousy and mental Health

Figure I.

Proposed Model of Jealousy, Marital Satisfaction, and Mental Health among Muslim Women Living in Polygamous Marriage.



Objectives of the Research

- To measure the direct and indirect effect of lower and higher marital satisfaction between jealousy and the mental health of women in polygamous marriages.

Hypotheses

H1: Jealousy and marital satisfaction are likely to have a negative relationship with the mental health of women in polygamous marriages.

H2: There is likely to be a positive relationship between marital satisfaction and the mental health of women in polygamous marriages.

H3: Marital satisfaction is likely to mediate between jealousy and the mental health of women in polygamous marriages.

Methodology

Sample

Correlational research with the cross-sectional design was used to explore the relationship between jealousy, marital satisfaction, and the mental health of women in a polygamous marriage. The sample was comprised of 212 polygamous women (1st wife= 102 and 2nd wives= 90) by using a snowball sampling strategy. The first wives with an age range of 25-60 ($M = 40.30$, $SD = 7.86$) and second wives 18-40 ($M = 26.60$, $SD = 7.41$) with a minimum experience of one year of polygamy were included. 32.4% of first wives having a love marriage and 67.6% have arranged marriage type. On the other hand, 92.2% 2nd wives indulged in legal relationships with love marriage and 7.8% with arrange marriage. 81.4% of first wives' profession was housewives while 18.6% were working women. While 63.3% of second wives were housewives and 36.7% were working.

Measures

Jealousy Scale for Wives (JSW). The Jealousy was measured by an indigenously developed tool as the Jealousy Scale for Polygamous Women (Naseer & Malik), which consisted of 54 items having five dimensions of jealousy, emotional, insecure, behavioral, anxious, and possessive jealousy. The scale is rated on a 4-point Likert scale as range 0-3. The Cronbach's

alpha reliability of the overall scale is .93 and its subscale has .96, .92, .87, .95 and .85. In the current study, Cronbach's alpha coefficient of overall scale and its subscales showed respectively .96, .96, .87, .80, .80, and .73.

The Revised Dyadic Adjustment Scale (Busby et al., 1995). The translated version of The Revised Dyadic Adjustment Scale (RDAS) was used to measure marital satisfaction. It contains 14 items. It measures a total of seven dimensions by covering three main domains as Consensus, Satisfaction in the relationship, and Cohesion. The scale has 5 and 6 response categories. The overall reliability of this scale is .90 and its subscales have .89, .82, and .83 reliability. In the current study Cronbach's alpha coefficient was .78, .62, .68, and .91.

Mental Health Inventory (Veit & Ware, 1983). Urdu version of Mental Health Inventory translated by Khan, Hanif, and Tariq, composed of 38 items was used. It consisted of two subscales. Psychological Distress comprised of 22 items and Psychological Well-being consisting of 16 items. The scale was rated on a 6-point rating scale ranging from 1 to 6. Mental Health Inventory showed overall adequate reliability and strong internal consistencies ranging from .83 to .96. In the current study, Cronbach's alpha coefficient was .72, .96, and .96 reliability respectively.

Procedure

Permission was taken from all the concerned authorities to collect the data, from the authors for measures as well as from the translators to use the translated versions. A consent form was also presented to the 212 participants for taking voluntary participation and understanding of the study. The participants who were agreed included in the study. Privacy and confidentiality of the participants and data were maintained. The participants were not awarded any compensation. The response rate of the study was 91%.

Results

Pearson product-moment correlation was carried out to assess the relationship between demographic variables, jealousy, marital satisfaction, and mental health of polygamous women. Initially relationship of demographic variables was assessed. Status of wife (1st or 2nd) was negatively related with emotional jealousy ($r = -.41$, $p < .001$), insecure ($r = -.32$, $p < .001$), behavioral ($r = -.22$, $p < .001$), anxious ($r = -.13$, $p < .001$) and possessive jealousy ($r = -.21$, $p < .001$) while positively related with marital satisfaction ($r = .18$, $p < .01$), negatively related with psychological well-being ($r = -.28$, $p < .001$) and psychological distress ($r = -.31$, $p < .001$). Age of the participants was positively related with emotional jealousy ($r = .27$, $p < .001$) and anxious jealousy ($r = .18$, $p < .01$), negatively related with psychological well-being ($r = -.17$, $p < .05$) and positively related with psychological distress ($r = .19$, $p < .01$). Education of the participants was negatively related with emotional jealousy ($r = -.29$, $p < .001$), insecure ($r = -.13$, $p < .05$) and behavioral jealousy ($r = -.14$, $p < .05$), positively related with marital satisfaction ($r = .16$, $p < .05$), psychological well-being ($r = .20$, $p < .01$) and negatively related with psychological distress ($r = -.17$, $p < .05$). Profession of the participants was negatively related with emotional ($r = -.51$, $p < .001$), insecure ($r = -.38$, $p < .001$), behavioral ($r = -.29$, $p < .001$), anxious ($r = -.17$, $p < .05$) and possessive jealousy ($r = -.18$, $p < .01$). It was positively related with marital satisfaction ($r = .29$, $p < .001$), psychological well-being ($r = .38$, $p < .001$) and negatively related with psychological distress ($r = -.35$, $p < .001$).

The findings of Table I showed that jealousy (emotional, insecure, behavioral, and possessive) has a negative significant relationship with marital satisfaction. While Jealousy (emotional, insecure, behavioral, anxious, and possessive) has a significant positive relationship with psychological distress. Marital satisfaction was negatively related with psychological well-being and positively related with psychological distress. Psychological well-being was negatively related with psychological distress.

Table I

Inter-Correlation of jealousy, Marital Satisfaction and Mental Health of Women in Polygamous Women (N=192)

Variables	EJ	IJ	BJ	AJ	PJ	MS	PWB	PD
EJ	-	.57***	.69***	.38***	.04	-.59***	-.75***	.72***
IJ		-	.52***	.23***	-.59***	-.57***	-.48***	.55***
BJ			-	.40***	-.57***	-.49***	-.68***	.51***
AJ				-	-.40***	-.03	-.45***	.18**
PJ					-	-.53***	-.47***	.49***
MS						-	.55***	-.66***
PWB							-	-.67***
PD								-

Note. EJ= Emotional Jealousy, IJ= Insecure Jealousy, BJ= Behavioral Jealousy, AJ=Anxious Jealousy, PJ= Possessive Jealousy, MS= Marital Satisfaction, PWB=Psychological Well-Being, PD= Psychological Distress.* $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$.

In Table 2, Analysis 1 revealed that 38% variance has explained by model as $F(5, 186) = 34.31$, $p < .001$. Status of wives and Jealousy significantly negatively predicted marital satisfaction of the polygamous women. Results of Analysis 2 (Step 1) reveals that status, jealousy (IV), and marital satisfaction (M) accounted for 35 % of the variance in the psychological well-being of polygamous women as $F(5, 186) = 43.52$, $p < .001$. Status, jealousy (IV), and marital satisfaction (M) are significant predictors of the psychological well-being of polygamous women. The results of Analysis 2 (Step 2) show that 33% variance in psychological well-being is explained by marital satisfaction as $F(6, 185) = 43.53$, $p < .001$. After controlling the effects of lower marital satisfaction (the Mediator) jealousy significantly

predicts but reduces the prediction of psychological well-being which indicates partial mediation.

Results of Analysis 2 (Step 1) reveals that jealousy (IV) and marital satisfaction (M) accounted for 39 % of the variance in psychological distress of polygamous women as $F(5,186) = 48.04, p < .001$. Jealousy (IV) and marital satisfaction (M) are significant predictors of the psychological distress of polygamous women. The results of Analysis 2 (Step 2) show that 35% variance in psychological distress is explained by marital satisfaction as $F(6, 185) = 48.35, p < .001$. After controlling the effects of marital satisfaction (the Mediator) jealousy significantly predicts but reduces the prediction of psychological distress which indicates partial mediation. The Sobel z test was also run to check the indirect effect which is also significant.

Table 2

Hierarchical Multiple Regression (Mediation) Analysis of Jealousy, and Marital Satisfaction as Predictors of Mental Health (Psychological Well-Being and Psychological-distress).

MS		PWB				PD							
(M)		(DV)				(DV)							
D.E		DE		IE		TE		DE		IE		TE	
P	ΔR^2	β	ΔR^2	β	ΔR^2	β	β	ΔR^2	β	ΔR^2	β	β	
	.38***		.35***		.33***		.68***	.39***		.35***			
Stat		-.16*		-.16*		-.12*	-.28*		.07		.02	.09	
Age		-.02		-.07		-.07	-.14		.08		.08	.16	
Edu		-.04		.03		.03	-.06		-.05		-.08	-.13	
Pro		-.06		-.04		-.04	-.08		.04		.02	.06	
JL		-.47***		-		-	-		.38***		.28***	.66***	
				.46***		.39***	.85***						

MS

.55***

-
.22***

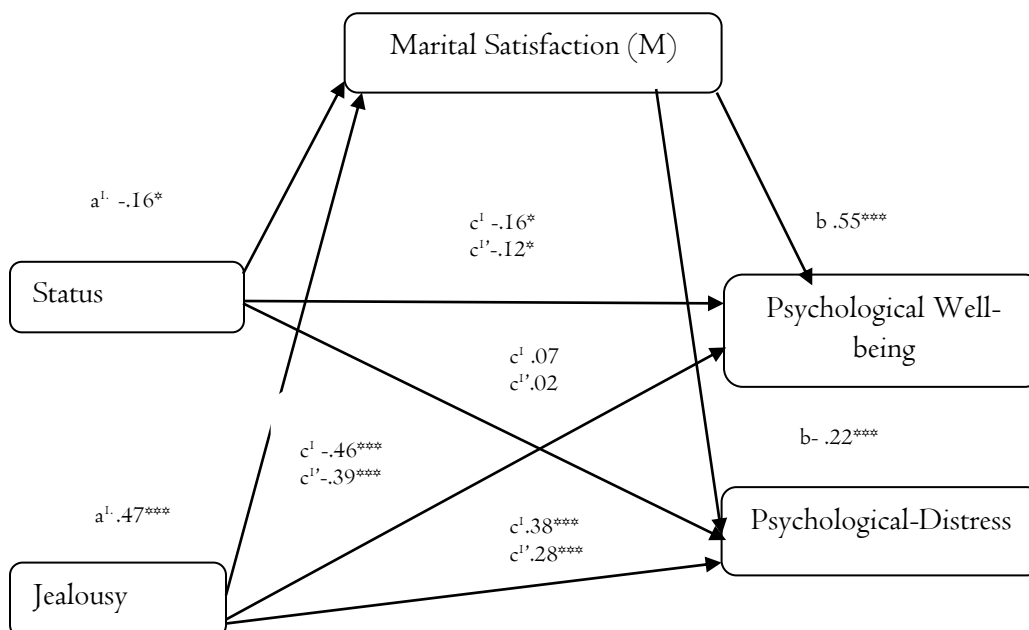
N

192

Note. MS= marital satisfaction, M= mediator, PWB= psychological well-being, DV= dependent variable, PD= psychological distress, P= predictor, stat= status, Edu= education, Pro= profession, JL= jealousy, * $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$

Figure.1

Model depicting the mediating role of Marital Satisfaction between Jealousy and Mental Health (Psychological Well-Being and Psychological-Distress).



Note a^1 = path a direct relationship between status, Jealousy (IV), and Marital Satisfaction (mediator). b = direct relationship between Marital Satisfaction (mediator) and Mental Health (Psychological Well-Being and Psychological-Distress) (DV). c^1 = direct relationship of status, Jealousy (IV), and Mental Health (Psychological Well-Being) (DV), $c^{1'}$ = the relationship of Status and

Jealousy with Mental Health (Psychological Well-Being and Psychological-Distress) (DV) after controlling Marital Satisfaction.

Discussion

The study highlighted the original picture of polygamy which is proposed in religious doctrine. If the men are unable to follow the true teachings of Islam, they cannot maintain justice and equality among multiple wives at one time, and this leads to marital dissatisfaction, jealousy, and poor mental health among polygamous women.¹⁴ As the findings are consistent that jealousy has a positive connection with psychological distress while a negative relationship with psychological well-being. Jealousy also has a negative link with marital satisfaction while marital satisfaction has a positive link with psychological well-being and a negative correlation with psychological distress. This indicates when men do not sustain balance in all possessions these factors are provoked. The findings also revealed that marital satisfaction mediated the relationship between jealousy and mental health (psychological well-being and psychological distress). The feelings of jealousy often deteriorate the marital relationship and cause marital conflicts, emotional distress, and psychological health issues which cause lower marital satisfaction and lead to poor psychological well-being. In such cases, marital satisfaction can reduce mental health issues while jealousy triggering psychological distress and minimizing psychological well-being. The current findings in terms of polygamous women are in line with the previous theories as jealousy is related to relationship satisfaction and the psychological health of both partners directly and indirectly.¹⁵ Dynamic Goal Theory of Marital Satisfaction also presented that when marital needs and goals are fulfilled of the couples' marital satisfactions become high which increases their psychological well-being while when goals are not reached, psychological wellbeing can be hampered and the marital couples become psychologically distressed. As indirect effect marital satisfaction significantly positively predicting psychological well-being and negatively predicting psychological distress. It

revealed when the women of polygamous marriages were satisfied in their marital relationship it increased mental health. In the Pakistani Muslim culture, the current study on polygamous women revealed a higher level of jealousy badly impacted the marital satisfaction and mental health of women. The discrimination by the husbands and in-laws with the multiple wives causes co-wife jealousy, marital dissatisfaction, and poor mental health, competition, and many other psychological problems. In different countries findings remained consistent with the current study that polygamy can lead to unhappiness, loneliness, and lack of intimacy with the spouse. ¹⁶Furthermore, polygamy has been associated with mental illness among women and children. Women in polygamous families having more mental health problems than their counterparts in monogamous families. ¹⁷With this concern, the current study was conducted in Pakistani culture where religion allows a man to marry four women at one time. The findings supported the existed body of literature that women of polygamous marriages face many problems as jealousy, low marital satisfaction, and poor mental health due to injustice practices by their husbands.

Recommendations

Cross-sectional studies should be conducted by taking the diverse population of polygamous women from different provinces or countries including more than two wives. Additionally, polygamous husbands and children should also include in the study to evaluate the impact of polygamy in their lives. Longitudinal studies should be conducted to seek whether the studied variable (mental health) remains stable or change with time in polygamous women.

Conclusion and Implications

Current research revealed the direct and indirect role of jealousy on mental health (psychological well-being and psychological distress) through marital satisfaction of women in polygamous women. The study has important implications in home settings, a call for health professional practice, and

provides considerations to public policy, social service personnel, and family advisors to maintain a balanced and healthy polygamous family structure by enhancing public awareness for the sake of women's wellbeing. The government should take some strategies and lawmakers should take strict compliances to implement the true teachings of Islam and then allow the men to have multiple wives. It would be a fruitful step both for the females and also for the children who are suffering several emotional, behavioral, and financial problems due to men's family structures where they only remember the half part of the verse and forget the rest of the teachings of Islam.

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