

SEGAL

Family Foundation

# POLYGAMY AND DEVELOPMENT

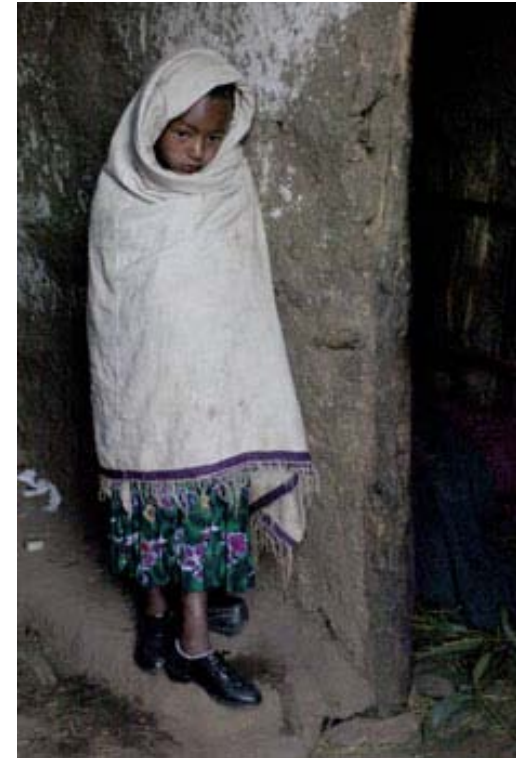
# WHAT ARE THE REASONS BEHIND HIGH FERTILITY RATES IN SUB-SAHARAN AFRICA?

Causes of high fertility are many and interrelated:

- Limited access to **education**
- Limited access to **contraception**
- Women's lack of **reproductive rights**
- High incidence of **early marriage**

Opponents of **early marriage** cite numerous challenges but very little is said or done about one of the primary factors: **Polygamy**

More women in polygamous societies will be married and have kids than in monogamous societies. However, these women in polygamous marriages tend to have less children. The effects counterbalance each other, making the effect of polygyny on fertility rates difficult to ascertain.



# POLYGAMY: HISTORICAL PRACTICE UNDERMINING DEVELOPMENT

*Polygamy.* The practice of having more than one husband or wife



## Perceived Advantages

- Large families are considered a sign of prestige and continuation of lineage<sup>2</sup>
- Children may be seen as assets – units of labor and forms of social security<sup>3</sup>
- With multiple wives, a man has more children and thus spreads his “empire”<sup>4</sup>
- Lower infidelity (debatable!)<sup>5</sup>
- If a woman is sick (i.e. HIV+), the larger the family, the less likely her child will be left vulnerable (large kinship networks)<sup>6</sup>

Sources: <sup>2,3</sup> Workshop on Prospects for Fertility Decline in High Fertility Countries, Population Division, Dept. of Economic and Social Affairs, UN Secretariat (July, 2001)

<sup>4-6</sup> Factors on Polygamy in Sub-Saharan Africa: Findings Based on the Demographic and Health Surveys,  
By: Yasuko Hayase, Kao-Lee Liaw

# POLYGAMY AND RELIGION

## HINDUISM

- Polygamy was practiced in many sections of Hindu society in ancient times
- Post-Vedic periods, polygamy declined in Hinduism-> now immoral although it is still practiced in certain parts of Tibet, Nepal, and China
- Marriage laws in India forbid polygamy for Hindus, Jains, Buddhists, and Sikhs
- Many Muslim men in India practice polygamy and are allowed since they are governed under Sharia law

## BUDDHISM

- In Buddhism, marriage is a secular affair that monks do not participate in (except in certain sects)
- Buddhist scripture can be found to treat polygamy unfavorably, leading some to believe that it is not approved or tolerated but it does occur in many countries
- Polygamy was legal in Thailand until 1935-> it is still legally recognized in Sri Lanka, Tibet, Bhutan, Ladakh, and other parts of the Indian subcontinent

## JUDAISM

### **Biblical:**

- Plural marriages were accepted during times of famine, widowhood, or female infertility
- The Torah's central text has regulations on the practice of polygamy such as it shouldn't diminish the status of the first wife

### **■ Modern Day:**

- Polygamy is uncommon, especially among European Jews
- It still does occur in some non-European Jewish communities (Yemen, Kurdistan, and Iran)
- Israel has made polygamy illegal - provisions were instituted to allow those who were in existing polygamous relationships to be able to continue practicing legally

# POLYGAMY AND RELIGION

## CHRISTIANITY

- Although Polygamy was accepted in Ancient times (accepted in the Old Testament), Christianity believes that marriage is a sacred communion of one man and one woman
- In Sub-Saharan Africa, there has been conflict between Christian Churches insistence on monogamy and traditional polygamy

## ROMAN CATHOLIC CHURCH

- The Roman Catholic Church condemns polygamy
- The illegality of polygamy in certain areas creates confliction

## MORMONISM

- Joseph Smith, a Mormon, claimed to have received a revelation in 1831 specifically commanding the practice of polygamy
- Mormons have been practicing polygamy since the late 1900's and have even immigrated out of the US, where legislation on anti-polygamy were being enforced, to continue their practice elsewhere

## ISLAM

- Polygamy is legal with the limitation of 4 wives per husband (at any one time)
- The Qur'an states that men who choose to partake in the practice of polygamy must treat their wives justly
- The laws concerning polygamy differ greatly throught the Islamic world
- According to traditional Islamic law, each wife must be entitled to her own property , assets, and dowry
- Today, polygamy is mainly found in Saudi Arabia, West and East Africa (encouraged in Sudan)

# POLYGAMY IN AFRICAN COUNTRIES



## KENYA

Polygamy is widespread in Kenya- the most prominent individual being the Akuku Danger who married over 100 wives

## NIGERIA

Polygamy is recognized under civil law and, in northern states, polygamy is equivalent to monogamous relationships.

## SOUTH AFRICA

Traditionalists commonly practice polygamy. The president, Jacob Zuma, is also openly in favor of plural marriages. He has a total of 29 children and four previous wives.

## NORTH SUDAN

The President, Omar Hassen al-Bashir, encourages polygamy in order to increase Sudan's population.

## SENEGAL

Almost half of the population (47%) participate in polygamy. Men can have as many wives as he would like but, due to Islamic rule, they usually limit themselves to four. In rural areas, polygamy seems to be more prominent in order to have children help out on the farm. Since mortality rates are high, couples tend to have a couple to ensure some survive.

“Although at the aggregate level, polygamy certainly contributes to larger family sizes, research has demonstrated that Senegalese women in polygamous unions have on average a lower number of children than their counterparts in monogamous marriages. Michel Garenne and Etienne van de Walle (1989), studying the Serer of central Senegal, explain these differentials by the fact that women in polygamous marriage exhibit lower than average frequency of sexual intercourse because a polygamous "husband has to distribute his sexual activity between his wives." Also, polygamous husbands are on average older and thus less fertile than monogamous men. It has been shown, however, that lower fertility of polygamous marriages may be due to infertility problems encountered by first wives. Ndiaye (1985) argues that monogamous husbands are often obliged to marry a second wife when the first wife is infertile.” [Polygamy Senegal](#)

# POLYGAMY IN OTHER PARTS OF THE WORLD

## CHINA

Ever since the Han Dynasty, it has been unlawful for Chinese men to have multiple wives. In China, Polygamy is considered a by-product of the tradition of emphasis on the procreation and continuity of the father's family name. Although it is 'illegal', it isn't always enforced. Today, polygamy is only usually seen in southwest China among Chinese minorities such as Tibetans.

## HONG KONG

On October 31<sup>st</sup>, 1971, polygamy was banned. Some businessmen have concubines across the border in mainland China but concubines do not have the legal or social status of wives.

They have a traditional saying, "Wife is not as good as a concubine, concubine is not as good as prostitute, prostitute is not as good as a secret affair, secret affair is not as good as the affair you want but can't get".

## SOUTH ASIA

Polygamy is permitted under Islamic law and, therefore, plural marriages are present amongst some Muslims in South Asia.

Polygamy is illegal in India for Hindus and other religious groups under the Hindu marriage Act.

Plural marriages are generally rare in urban areas and among the cosmopolitan middle classes.

## THAILAND

King Rama VI outlawed polygamy but before it was expected that wealthy or upper-class Thai men to have multiple wives. Women were seen more as secondary, as slaves even. Today, polygamy is no longer legal or accepted. However, the practice of having "minor wives" continues, these wives are hidden in secrecy from the "primary wives". Most Thai women object to this practice and it is a cause of divorce.

# POLYGAMY AND HIV/AIDS

## **Sub-Saharan Africa (2009):**

- There are 22,500,000 people living with HIV/AIDS
- 5% of adults (15-49yrs) carry the infection
- 12,100,000 women living with HIV/AIDS
- 2,300,000 men living with HIV/AIDS
- 1,300,000 AIDS deaths
- 14,800,000 Orphans due to AIDS

**As seen above, women are more exposed to HIV/AIDS by almost 10 million**

- Research shows that women may be more susceptible due to Polygamy (man exposing disease to multiple wives)
- Statistically, in countries Sub-Saharan countries where 25% of the population have HIV/AIDS, at least one member in a polygamous relationship is bound to carry the infection thus spreading it to all the others