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Research Article

Polygamy in Islam: Its Relevance to the Social Development of Sulu

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ABSTRACT

This study looks into how polygamy plays a role in the social growth of the Tausug community in Sulu, Philippines, focusing on its religious approval under Shari'ah law. Based on Islamic teachings, polygamy isn't just a cultural tradition or personal choice—it's seen as a social institution that helps tackle issues like widowhood, gender imbalance, and creating resilient family units that can handle economic challenges. To acquire these, we employed methods like focus group discussions and interviews with religious scholars (Ulama), community leaders, and polygamous married couples. We monitored their attitudes and actions toward polygamy in different areas of Sulu. What we discovered is that most ulama are firm supporters of polygamy, that as long as it is practiced according to the Islamic teachings—being fair, equal, and economically capable—it can solidify the family and alleviate poverty and sinful acts. Hurdles to this, however, are a lack of general information on Islamic laws of marriage, premarital education is not practiced, and emotional or financial unreadiness. These issues sometimes lead to conflict and negative attitudes towards polygamy. The study is based on two basic theories: structural functionalism, which considers polygamy as fulfilling society's needs, and symbolic interactionism, which studies how cultural and religious interactions shape the perception of marriage. Limitations include a small sample size and some potential bias since the researcher's own cultural background and interpretations might influence the findings. We also referenced the Qur'an (Surah An-Nisa 4:3) and authentic Hadiths to emphasize the spiritual roots of polygamy, and we've taken care to cite these more thoroughly. The study recommends that each couple be provided with access to Islamic family law training, Shari'ah courts, religious functionaries, and the local government. The study also recommends economic support schemes and public information campaigns to offset myths and encourage responsible practice of polygamy as a healthy community development force for the Tausug.

Keywords: *Polygamy in Islam, Social Development, Relevance of Polygamy*

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Introduction

Sulu, a culturally rich province in the southern Philippines, is blessed with 157 islands and fertile land and marine resources, but underdeveloped and sparsely populated, with no more than around 800,000 people compared to Singapore's more than six million. Sulu was a historical independent and centralized state with thriving trade networks and densely populated areas like Daira. Its current stagnation is partly attributed to weak political institutions, lack of plans for development, and underperforming citizens. Population growth—both in quality and quantity—prescribed by this study is the remedy to reviving Sulu's economy and human capital. An orderly increase in population, coupled with educational, health, and economic facilities, can stimulate local demand, improve labor supply, and boost regional productivity. Islamic polygamy, practiced according to the ethical provisions stipulated in the Qur'an (Surah An-Nisa 4:3) and Hadith, is in this study viewed as a culturally and religiously accepted mechanism for accelerating population growth in ways appropriate to local values. By structural functionalism, the research considers polygamy as a social tool that assures stability as well as interdependence, but symbolic interactionism teaches us on fluctuating societal perceptions regarding marriage. The research indicates towards an effort to research why Islam supports polygamy, its applicability to Sulu socio-economic development, and how it can be adopted by the masses through religious education and cultural integration. This qualitative study, employing key informant interviews and focus group discussions, acknowledges its own limitations, small sample size and the subjectivity of the researcher due to common cultural and religious intuitions. Key terms are defined for the sake of conceptual precision, the difference between monogamy and polygamy. Specifically, the research sets aside myths that consider polygamy as inherently patriarchal and instead focuses on its capacity for family resilience and empowerment of individuals. By integrating Islamic values into development planning and effective Da'wah, this kind of research repositions polygamy as not a controversial or personal issue but as a sustainable, culture-embedded development plan in Sulu.

Methodology

This study employed a qualitative descriptive research design in investigating Islamic scholars' (ulama's) attitudes towards polygamy and its possible contribution to Sulu's social development. The research design was selected to enable in-depth analysis of religious, cultural, and socio-economic attitudes grounded on empirical experience and perception, assigning meaning to Islamic polygamy beyond theology. According to structural functionalism and symbolic interactionism, the study placed polygamy as a religious institution and social process with possible implications for community stability, economic interdependence, and population growth. The study was located in Jolo, the provincial and socio-economic center of Sulu, with the benefit of population diversity, offering access to ulama' from municipalities, widening the scope of responses and transferability of evidence. Participants were purposively selected for religious authority, knowledge of Islamic jurisprudence, and community influence. Senior and junior Ulama' were selected to represent intergenerational views, and interviews were conducted equally and with cultural sensitivity to provide informed consent, voluntary participation, and confidentiality. Data were gathered with an established open-ended interview schedule with correspondences to Islamic terminologies and cultural norms to gather rich and contextually informed answers. Thematic analysis was used to determine recurring patterns from three general themes: religious justification of polygamy, its perceived role in Sulu's socio-economic development, and avenues towards increased acceptance in the community. Interviews were administered in Tausug or a mixture of local languages and transcribed for thematic coding. In light of the subject matter, the research acknowledged central limitations in the form of purposive small sample size and potential researcher bias owing to cultural proximity and shared religious belief. Reflexivity was guaranteed by reflexive awareness of how researcher identity could have influenced data collection and interpretation. Islamic scripture guided the inquiring framework, but follow-up research is encouraged to supplement scholarship through systematic citation of Qur'anic

scripture and Hadith, by proper academic citation, to guarantee credibility and academic rigor. The overall design was oriented to produce culturally embedded, ethically pertinent, and

analytically sound observations on the intersection of Islamic tradition and regional development in the Sulu setting.

Results

Polygamy in Islam

Table 1: *Polygamy in Islam: Key Themes and Contextual Realities among the Tausug*

Thematic Area	Key Details from Study
Religious Basis	Polygyny is permitted in Islam under Surah An-Nisa (4:3) , provided that justice and fairness are observed among wives. It was practiced by the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) and is rooted in Shari'ah law with conditions of equity and responsibility.
Purpose and Ethical Boundaries	Polygyny is intended for social welfare —supporting orphans, widows, or women in need—not for fulfilling personal desires. The practice must be anchored in compassion, justice, and family responsibility .
Tausug Cultural Practice	Among the Tausug in Sulu , polygyny continues to be culturally accepted and is influenced by Islamic principles, Adat (customary law), and traditional leadership structures . It is viewed variably as duty, tradition, or status symbol.
Legal Framework	The Philippine Family Code prohibits polygamy, but Presidential Decree No. 1083 (Muslim Personal Laws) allows it for Muslims, creating a dual legal system that reflects legal pluralism in marital rights and responsibilities.
Women's Perceptions	Many Tausug women experience emotional and social challenges in polygynous marriages. Their voices reveal complexities in marital stability, jealousy, and emotional strain , though some also view it as a divine test or social necessity .
Social Development Impact	If practiced justly, polygyny can contribute to poverty alleviation, protection of women, and support for extended family units . However, misapplication can lead to family breakdown, inequality, and emotional harm .
Policy and Education	The study advocates for structured premarital education , community counseling, and Islamic family law literacy to ensure that polygyny is entered into with full knowledge, consent, and spiritual maturity .
Research Contribution	This research offers an interdisciplinary lens (Islamic law, socio-cultural anthropology, social development) and amplifies women's voices to inform rights-based, culturally sensitive approaches to marital issues and gender equity.

Polygamy, has been the subject of theological, cultural, and legal debate in Islamic society for centuries. Sanctioned on the basis of divine revelation and practiced during the Prophet Muhammad's (peace be upon him) time, polygamy is governed under the dispensation of Islamic law (Shari'ah) on conditions laid down on the basis of justice, mercy, and social necessity. The Qur'an, in Surah An-Nisa (4:3), allows Muslim men to marry four brides, on the condition that they are able to treat all of them equally. This directive highlights the moral and ethical parameters that Islam sets around the practice,

so that polygamy is not driven by lust, but on the basis of social welfare, such as providing for orphans, widows, or poor women.

Among the Tausug, a Muslim ethnolinguistic community in the southern Philippines, polygynous marriages are still practiced. These Tausugs have a strong cultural and social identity as Muslims tied to Islam, social customs-Adat-in-their traditional government systems. Indeed, cultural or religious polygamy should be viewed as less of an individual option than as a working illustration of the larger socio-religious values, gender expectations, and

societal arrangements that shape family. For those who practice it as a religious duty or a socio-cultural norm, there are others who experience it, particularly women, as a very convoluted and at times painful reality with ramifications for emotional health, stability of family life, and the issue of social justice.

Secular law in contemporary Philippine society, or the Family Code, regards polygamous marriage as illegal, while the Philippine Muslim Personal Laws (Presidential Decree No. 1083) permit and regulate the practice for Muslims. The dual system of law offers a unique context where Islamic law pervasively crosscuts state law, creating legal pluralism and contesting accounts of marital obligations and entitlements.

While Islamically permitted and practiced in Muslim legal tradition, polygamy is otherwise controversial and subject of debate, especially in terms of women's rights, gender justice, and social development. In the context of the Tausug, the practice is worrisome in the following issues: How do Tausug women perceive polygamy? What are the socio-economic and emotional impacts on the family? In what ways does polygamy affect the common populace in children, inheritance, and gender relations? What are the causes given by men, and are they parallel with Islamic teachings on justice and fairness? The purpose of this study is to phenomenological study polygamy among the Tausug from the interdisciplinary view - based on Islamic law (Fiqh), informed by socio-cultural anthropology, and framed on social development. The research seeks to understand not only the religious and legal regulations on polygamy but also the daily realities of the Tausug families in Sulu.

Considering the increasing demands for family welfare and women's empowerment, the relevance of this study is hereby established. This will introduce contemporary and sophisticated understandings of how religious-stamped institution such as polygamy intersects with the changing societal dynamics, gender roles, and patterns of human development.

This study becomes eminently relevant within the backdrop of ever-increasing calls for women's empowerment and family well-being. Contributes to an understanding of how religiously sanctioned means such as polygamy vie

with shifting socio-cultural realities, gender roles, and development paradigms. In giving face and voice to our Tausug women and families, the study also hopes to contribute to the policy, education, and community-based approaches that are culturally sensitive and rights-based.

Discussions

From these findings, we can conclude that there is a probably interrelated and interlocking relationship of religious doctrine, cultural notions, and the social realities under which polygyny does not have the Tausug in Sulu. It is indeed Islam that allows polygyny among the Muslims under a specific ethical as well as legal condition. However, it would still be a practice that is controversial as well as misunderstood in the context of the locality. As articulated by the ulama and community respondents, the central point about the misrepresentation of such an institution is not on the religious legality of polygamy as such, but the many instances of misuse, where often ignorance and emotional immaturity without effective marriage counseling apply. Structural functionalism uses to frame polygamy as an institution historically meant to serve the entire community's needs, such as by providing care for widows and orphans-but in its contemporary application holds all the connotations of power imbalances and symbolic interpretations of masculinity. The ulama stressed on the need of an extensive educational campaign to clear misapprehension surrounding polygamy. The campaign should harness both traditional and digital communication channels and will have to go to the most remote places to be broad-reaching. Most importantly, it will have to be gender-balanced in its education so that it informs both men and women about their rights, responsibilities, and the spiritual side of an Islamic marriage. Aside from that, the study also touches on the concern of dowry (Mahr), which leaves behind the precedent under Islam exemplified by the Prophet Muhammad (Peace be upon Him) because it speaks about simplicity in order to prevent commodification of marriage. Over-demanded dowries would end up being barriers to honorable unions and reasons for delayed marriage or extramarital acts. Thus, the Ulama

advocate instituting education concerning Islamic family law, where the couple intending to wed must undergo structured learning and take basic courses before marriage. Such an initiative suits obtaining true consent and psychological preparedness critical for approaching the emotional and financial demands of polygamous unions. The findings also underscore that motivations for entering polygyny must transcend superficial factors such as social status or desire and must instead be rooted in the ability to uphold justice, equity, and spiritual accountability. Women, too, must be equipped with the theological and emotional resilience to face the possible reality of polygamy, not necessarily as a preference but as a divinely permitted marital arrangement under certain life circumstances. A successful polygynous marriage, the study concludes, hinges on mutual respect, open communication, patience, and fairness—principles echoed in both Islamic ethics and symbolic interactionist perspectives on role negotiation and marital dynamics. The acceptability of polygamy among the Tausug increases when it is practiced with compassion and guided by ongoing religious education, communal counseling, and institutional oversight. Importantly, this study does not recommend polygamy as a panacea for social ills, but as a contextualized, religion-based option of marriage that demands restraint, ethical commitment, and sincere intention. To this end, the collaborative efforts needed include religious leaders, government agencies, and educational institutions for creating awareness, regulating implementation, and inculcating a culture of responsibility and piety. Methodologically - though the study draws strength from qualitative interviews and ethnographic immersion, it also suffers the weakness of a small sample size and possible selection bias due to the purposive nature of the sampling. In addition, the researcher's insider-outsider - being culturally and religiously aligned with the participants - would have shaped both the data interpretation and rapport established with respondents. This does not, however, detract from the study's value but, rather, indicates the areas that need further investigation, particularly in comparative settings across Muslim communities in the Philippines.

Conclusions

Upon investigation, the research focuses critically on how polygamy applies to social development in the Tausug community of Sulu wherein if it is being done in the observance of Islamic legal and moral obligation, it shall operate in favor of social welfare by way of poverty alleviation, preventing other vices, and caring for single and marginalized women. Grounded in both Islamic teachings and supported by the lens of structural functionalism, polygyny is seen as a familial system that strengthens kinship bonds and contributes to population growth, which—if strategically managed—may positively influence economic productivity and communal stability. However, the study underscores that the primary challenges surrounding polygynous relationships are not intrinsic to the practice itself but are instead rooted in widespread misunderstandings, inadequate preparation, and the failure to observe religious guidelines. The scholars consulted for the study asserted that polygyny should not be seen as a cultural relic or status symbol but rather as a sincere act of religious obligation requiring justness, emotional maturity, and financial preparedness. Accordingly, a very important recommendation states that there should be structured mandatory premarital education grounded in Islamic family law and human development principles facilitated by duly constituted statutory bodies such as Shari'ah Courts of Appeal for such programs. These programs should impart knowledge to potential husbands and wives about their rights and responsibilities concerning plural marriage while fostering psychological resilience and spiritual consciousness. Special emphasis has to be given to various support systems available to women, counseling, and religious input so that they retain their dignity and emotional well-being in such arrangements. In addition, the governance of dowries must adhere to the Sunnah of Prophet Muhammad (Peace be upon Him)—being simple and discouraging the mercantilization of marriage. The study also enjoins further reflexivity relative to the methodological limitations of these qualitative designs, such as sample size limitations and the influence of the researcher's positionality being an insider cultural scholar of Islam and how it might have

informed data collection and interpretation. While Islamic teachings are employed throughout, need accentuating for academic integrity for Qur'anic verses and Hadith to be called in a more referentially commanding way. Ultimately, the functioning of polygamy in a morally sound and socially constructive institution necessitates the cooperation of religious leaders, government agencies, educationists, and civil society-who must together push sincere, ethical intention, and Islamic principles as the measure for polygamy. When practiced equitably, polygamy will not be resisted on the grounds of being a disruptive or degenerative institution but rather supported as one of the socially uplifting and accepted forms of marital existence in Tausug society.

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