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Unseen and Unheard: The Silent Suffering of Women in Sacred Contexts

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Abstract

This case study examines the psychological and socio-cultural dimensions of polygamous marriage through the lived experiences of Sarah,[1] a professional woman who became a second wife. It explores the intersection of Malay cultural norms, religious interpretations, and narcissistic abuse within a polygamous marital structure. The case highlights how deeply ingrained gender expectations and religious justifications contribute to the normalisation of coercive control, financial manipulation, and emotional neglect. Despite the Islamic emphasis on justice and fairness in polygamy, the misapplication of these principles allowed for systemic abuse, leaving Sarah in a state of psychological distress, self-harm, and emotional exhaustion. Her experience demonstrates how polygamy, when practiced without ethical considerations, exacerbates power imbalances and emotional suffering among wives. This study underscores the urgent need for cultural and legal reforms to ensure women's rights are protected, as well as increased awareness of psychological abuse in polygamous marriages. The findings emphasise the importance of education, community

support, and policy interventions in addressing gender-based violence and mental health consequences in such relationships. © 2025 Informa UK Limited, trading as Taylor & Francis Group.

Author keywords

culture; gender; narcissism; Polygamy; psychological distress; religion

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Abstract

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