

JULY - AUGUST
2026 VOL. 16

CENTRIS E-BULLETIN

The official bulletin of CENTRIS, IIUM



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CENTRIS E-bulletin is published bimonthly (bimestrial).



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CONFLICT RELATED TO POLYGAMY

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INTRODUCTION

Polygamy is the practice of having two or more wives or husbands at the same time. In Islam, a man is allowed to marry more than one wife, on the condition that he is able to treat his wives equally. It is important to highlight the topic of polygamy in terms of its effects on today's family context. The practice of polygamy can have an impact on women's mental health. Research shows that women in polygamous relationships experience significantly higher levels of psychological distress compared to those in monogamous marriages. For example, this can trigger severe emotional disturbance in a woman, which, in its chronic form, can lead to jealousy, depression, anxiety, and low self-esteem.

Other than that, polygamy can also affect child development and well-being. Children may feel that they or their mothers are being marginalized by their father in a highly competitive environment for his time, attention, and emotional involvement. For instance, when a child watches and waits for their father to leave their mother's house to visit another wife, the child may believe that they are not important enough for their father to stay at home with them. As a result, children may exhibit negative externalising behaviours, including conduct problems and emotional and behavioural disorders that adversely affect their development and well-being.

ISLAMIC PERSPECTIVE

While Islam permits polygamy, it is not a license to take as many wives as one likes. The practice of having more than one husband or wife is strictly regulated by certain divine boundaries. There are many Qur'anic verses and hadiths that discuss the issue of polygamy. As Allah states in the Qur'an regarding the absolute condition of justice in polygamy in Surah An-Nisa' verse 3:

وَأِنْ خِفْتُمْ أَلَّا تُقْسِطُوا فِي الْيَتَامَىٰ فَانكِحُوا مَا
طَابَ لَكُمْ مِّنَ النِّسَاءِ مَثْنَىٰ وَثُلَاثَ وَرُبْعَ فَإِنْ
خِفْتُمْ أَلَّا تَعْدِلُوا فَوَاحِدَةً أَوْ مَا مَلَكَتْ أَيْمَانُكُمْ
ذَلِكَ أَذْنَىٰ أَلَّا تَعْدِلُوا

“If you fear you might fail to give orphan women their due rights if you were to marry them, then marry other women of your choice two, three, or four. But if you are afraid you will fail to maintain justice, then content yourselves with one or those bondwomen in your possession. This way you are less likely to commit injustice.”

According to Tafsir Ibn Kathir, in this verse, Allah highlights that if you fear that you will not be able to maintain justice between your wives by marrying more than one, then marry only one wife or be content with female captives, for it is not obligatory to treat them equally rather, it is recommended. Therefore, if one does so, it is good, and if not, there is no harm upon him. The classical and contemporary jurists or *fuqaha'* across the major legal schools have established legal rulings to demonstrate how Islamic jurisprudence (*fiqh*) can prevent or address conflicts while allowing polygamy in today's marriage context.

This Qur'anic verse aligns with the legal maxim stating that a command following a prohibition implies permissibility (*ibāḥah*). In this context, the Qur'anic command to marry multiple women functions as a permissible concession because it immediately follows a stern warning against committing injustice towards orphan girls.

This interpretation is firmly anchored in the classical commentaries of early exegetes such as Ibn 'Abbās, Sa'īd ibn Jubayr, 'Ikrimah, and Mujāhid. Ultimately, the core *maqṣad* (higher objective) behind limiting the maximum number of wives to four is to protect women from the inevitable oppression, abuse, and neglect that could occur if a man took on more dependents than he could realistically support.

However, Islamic law dictates that this permission is strictly conditional upon the absolute maintenance of justice in order to prevent domestic conflict and protect the rights of each spouse. Jurisprudence outlines non-negotiable requirements for the husband.

First, he must provide a separate residence of equal quality for each wife, as forcing co-wives to share a home is legally prohibited. Second, he is financially obligated to provide equal maintenance for each household.

Finally, he must exercise complete fairness in his daily interactions, ensuring that his time, companionship, and overall treatment are distributed equally across all relationships.

CONTEMPORARY CHALLENGES

In contemporary society, cases involving polygamous marriages are increasingly gaining public attention through social media and online platforms. Meanwhile, polygamy also faces several challenges.

One of the biggest challenges is emotional conflict and jealousy. This may occur between wives and husbands. In particular, the first wife may feel betrayed because her husband chooses to marry someone else. Many wives struggle with feelings of jealousy, sadness, and unfair treatment if their husbands fail to balance their attention equally. This problem may lead to major arguments, broken trust, and mental stress within the family. For example, in modern society, some wives expose their marital conflicts publicly after discovering their husbands' second marriages.

Secondly, this can also impact the children, as the problem involves communication issues between children and their father, who has a second wife. Communication is the act or process of using words, sounds, signs, or behaviour to express thoughts and feelings to another person.

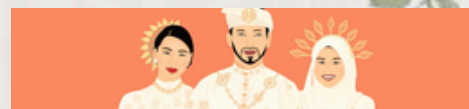
Usually, if a father has a second wife, the child may experience issues such as communication breakdown and emotional distance between the father and the child. The child often spends more time with their mother and siblings and does not have enough opportunities to spend time with their father because he has commitments to his second family.

Thirdly, this is a very common challenge, which is financial problems. At the early stage of a second marriage, the husband may feel that he can provide fairly for both families, but in the long term, the husband may not be able to afford supporting multiple families equally, especially when the number of children increases. Financial problems in polygamous marriages may lead to conflicts regarding household expenses, children's needs, and the husband's responsibilities towards each family. When financial support is not provided properly or is distributed unfairly, it may affect family harmony.

SOLUTIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Islam permits polygamy only when the husband can practise justice and fairness among his wives. The husband must provide equal financial maintenance (*nafaqah*), a fair division of time and attention, and respectful treatment towards all wives. Failure to maintain justice may lead to oppression and family conflict, which contradicts the objectives of Shariah in preserving harmony and well-being within the family.

As also highlighted earlier in the introduction, with reference to Surah al-Nisa verse 3, the requirement of justice is a fundamental condition in polygamous marriage, emphasizing that a man should marry only one wife if he fears that he cannot be fair. This solution reflects the *Maqasid al-Shariah* principle of protecting family stability and emotional well-being.



Other than that, the husband should show compassion, patience, and emotional support towards the first wife, especially when she experiences injustice and emotional harm. Islam recognizes human emotions and encourages spouses to interact with kindness and mercy. An example from the *Sunnah* shows that Sayyidatina Aisyah once felt jealousy towards Sayyidatina Khadijah. The Prophet Muhammad responded with patience and reassurance while highlighting Ummul Mukminin Khadijah's great virtues and contributions to Islam. This demonstrates that even within a polygamous household, the Prophet managed emotional situations with fairness and emotional understanding.

Lastly, in situations where conflict becomes serious, both spouses are encouraged to seek mediation or counselling (*sulh*) from family elders, Islamic counsellors, or religious authorities. Mediation can help both parties communicate effectively, reach mutual understanding, and reduce emotional tension in accordance with Islamic teachings. In Surah An-Nisa verse 35:

وَإِنْ خِفْتُمْ شِقَاقَ بَيْنِهِمَا فَابْعَثُوا
حَكَمًا مِّنْ أَهْلِهِ وَحَكَمًا مِّنْ أَهْلِهَا إِنْ
يُرِيدَا إِصْلَاحًا يُوَفِّقِ اللَّهُ بَيْنَهُمَا إِنَّ
اللَّهَ كَانَ عَلِيمًا خَبِيرًا

These solutions support reconciliations and help preserve family unity and social harmony.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, although Islam permits polygamy, it is strictly regulated by the principles of justice, fairness, and compassion to ensure the protection of all family members. The *Qur'an* and *Sunnah* clearly emphasize that a husband must fulfil both financial and emotional responsibilities equally among his wives while also preserving harmony and emotional well-being within the household. Conflicts related to polygamy often arise when these responsibilities are neglected, leading to emotional distress and instability among wives. Therefore, Islamic teachings provide practical solutions such as fair treatment, emotional support, and mediation to address marital conflicts wisely. Ultimately, the practice of polygamy in Islam is not merely a personal right but a serious responsibility that must align with *Maqasid al-Shariah* in preserving justice and social harmony.

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This article is part of the Synergized Academic with Student Activities (SAA) initiative.

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CONFLICT RELATED TO POLYGAMY

THE ISSUE

Lack of Justice Between Wives

- Husband treat wives unfairly (time, financial support, emotional attention)

Emotional and Mental Stress

- First wife may feel betrayed, insecure, depressed.

Neglect of Children

- Children may feel less loved or ignored.
- Affected on their education, behaviour and emotional wellbeing

RELEVANT QURANIC VERSE

فَإِنْ كُنْتُمْ لَا تَسْتَطِيعُونَ عِلْقَ الْوَدْعَةِ فَافْتَرِقُوا بِخَوْفٍ وَدَعْوَةٍ مَعَكُمْ وَتِلْكَ
وَرُبَّعٌ فَإِنْ خِفْتُمْ أَلَّا تَعْدِلُوا فَوَاحِدَةً أَوْ مَا مَلَكَتْ
أَيْمَانُكُمْ

(Surah An-Nisa 4:3)

- Islam allows polygamy with some conditions
- Justice and Fairness are essential
- Conflict might happen if husband fails to be fair

THE FIQH PRINCIPLE

"Harm Must Be Eliminated" (الضرر يزال)

- **Rights have limits:** A husband's permissible right to marry again cannot be exercised if it inflicts verified emotional, financial, or psychological harm on his current family.
- **Prevention over benefit:** In Islamic law, preventing damage to an existing family takes absolute priority over pursuing a new marriage.

MAQASID AL-SHARIAH

1. Protecting the Family Unit (حفظ النسل)

- The stability and peace of the existing household must be safeguarded.
- Expanding a family should never come at the cost of destroying its current foundation.

2. Protecting Well-Being & Justice (حفظ النفس)

- Islam strictly forbids oppression (Dhulm).
- Emotional trauma and neglect are valid harms. If a husband cannot guarantee absolute fairness ('Adl), the Quran commands him to remain monogamous: "But if you fear that you will not be just, then marry only one." (4:3)

SOLUTIONS

1. Ensuring Justice Between Wives (العدل بين الزوجات)

- Husband must ensure equal financial maintenance (النفقة), fair division of time and attention, respectful treatment toward all wives.

2. Emotional Support and Compassion Toward the First Wife

- Example: The Prophet ﷺ treated his wives with gentleness, fairness and emotional care, demonstrating that emotional wellbeing is part of Islamic family ethics.

3. Seeking Mediation or Counselling (الصلح)

- Mediation or Counselling can help both parties reach understanding and reduce emotional tension.

