EMIRATI WOMEN'S PERCEPTIONS OF POLYGAMY ACCORDING TO AGE, EMPLOYMENT, AND EDUCATIONAL LEVEL

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Abstract

Purpose of the study: The study investigates the Emirati Women's perceptions of polygamy according to three variables, namely age, employment, and educational level. It also explores where there are possible reasons that may drive these women to accept polygamy in certain circumstances and their reactions if it actually happens.

Methodology: To achieve this, semi-structured interviews were conducted with 50 Emirati women to get more insight into their choice, reasons, and reactions.

Main findings: The results reveal that 88% of the participants refused the entire idea of polygamy while the rest accepted it. The results also show that the three social variables played an important role in their choice. The participants who consented to polygamy did so due to religious and cultural reasons. In case the husband went along with his remarriage, the participants indicated that they would file for divorce, especially those who are young and employed, or stay with their husbands unhappy. The latter were mostly older and unemployed.

Applications of this study: The Emirati women's concerns of polygamy and its consequences on family life should be taken into account when revising social policies in the UAE.

The originality of this study: The study is one of its kinds to address polygamy in the UAE. It contributes to the body of knowledge through identifying Emirati women's concerns of polygamy and discussing the reasons for accepting/rejecting polygamy.

Keywords: age, educational level, gender, polygamy, sociology, UAE.

INTRODUCTION

Marriage and divorce have been among the most significant topics that have been recently investigated in the UAE by several researchers (e.g. Al Gharaibeh and Bromfield, 2012; Bromfield, 2014; Al Gharaibeh, 2015; Bromfield et al. 2016 among others). The rising divorce rate is detrimental to families, especially children (see Al Gharaibeh, 2015: 357). Based on the recent discussions about divorce with some female students during four of our classes at Al Ain University of Science and Technology, one of our students' suggestions that captured our attraction was about polygamy (allowing Emirati men to marry another woman). This suggestion brought a very debatable discussion to our classes since some students believe that polygamy can be a reason for divorce. Thus, this research investigates whether polygamy is indeed closely tied to divorce. It is hoped that shedding light on the causes, effects, advantages, and disadvantages of polygamy can provide us with an in-depth understanding of remarriage in the UAE and its related issues, especially divorce. As a result, this research explores how Emirati women perceive polygamy according to their age, educational level, and employment. It also identifies the reasons that may drive Emirati women to accept polygamy.

GENERAL BACKGROUND

The concept of 'polygamy' in Islam

Several researchers (e.g. Marcotte, 2001; Rohman, 2013; Hinchcliffe, 2017among others) discussed polygamy in Islam. Polygamy has always been regarded as a fundamental right of a Muslim husband as stated in the Qur'an (Hinchcliffe, 2017: 63). Rohman (2013: 69) noted that fundamentalists believe that polygamy is allowed by Islam, citing the Holy Quran 'If you fear that you will not be able to deal justly with the orphans, marry the women of your choice, two or three or four'. On the basis of this verse from the Holy Quran, fundamentalists believe that a man, under Islamic law, can marry up to four women (Rohman, 2013: 68).

Another argument used by fundamentalists is that polygamy can prevent Muslims from committing adultery (Rohman, 2013: 69). That is, polygamy is a solution to social problems such as prostitution. Prostitution has spread in many countries due to forbidding polygamy (Rohman, Ibid). In this regard, fundamentalists argue that a man has a strong sexual desire and men tend to have more than one relationship, and polygamy can stop them from committing (Rohman, Ibid). The fundamentalist also thinks that polygamy is necessary due to the high number of women in comparison with men. There is no need for women to fear to get a chance to married since a man can marry more than one wife (Rohman, Ibid). Polygamy is the solution for several

poor widows with their children (orphans) in case they marry a man who can support them and their children. If polygamy is rejected, many widows and orphans will suffer due to their lack of economic and social status (Rohman, Ibid). The fundamentalists also believe that polygamy is also a solution when a wife has serious diseases or contagious diseases. It is believed that husbands will be happy in his household as his new wife will help in taking care of his first wife and can give him a child. The fundamentalists further thought that men are allowed to marry another woman if their wives are disobeying them (Rohman, 2013: 69-70). Finally, fundamentalists argue that those who disagree with polygamy have been influenced by orientalist or western ideology and they deviated from the main principles of Islam (Rohman, Ibid).

In comparison with other legislations and law, polygamy is allowed in other countries such as Tanzania (Howland &Koenen, 2014). Howland and Koenen (2014) note that "Under Section 10(1) of the Act, a marriage is defined as "the voluntary union of a man and a woman, intended to last for their joint lives," and may either be monogamous or polygamous (or potentially polygamous". This demonstrates that the concept of polygamy is not only recognized by the Islamic law, making this issue worthy of investigation across the globe.

In the UAE, the idea of polygamy exists and it is frequently practiced. In the Emirati Law, it is clearly stated that "Polygamy is allowed as per the UAE's law. A Muslim male may have four wives, provided he offers equal sustenance and equal treatment to all."(Marriage - The Official Portal of the UAE Government, 10th March 2019).

Previous studies on divorce and marriage in the UAE

Al Gharaibeh (2015: 357) conducted a study to explore the psychological, social, health, and schooling impacts of divorce on children and to gain an understanding of the implicit aspects of divorce in the UAE. Al Gharaibeh's (ibid) study showed that children are adversely affected by divorce. It is suggested that divorce has several impacts, such as economic hardship, lack of concentration in school, sleeping disorders, and stubbornness (Al Gharaibeh, ibid). Another study by Al Gharaibeh and Bromfield (2012: 448-451) explored the reasons behind the increasing rate of divorce in UAE society, aiming to build divorce prevention programs. Al Gharaibeh and Bromfield (2012: 450) noted that the intervention of the extended family, especially mothers-in-law, was the main contribution to the breakup of Emiratis' marriages. It was revealed that the over-involvement of the couples' mothers-in-law had a substantial impact on the lives of these couples as well as their expectations. Emirati women are seeking independence since recently the parents-in-law have limited their interference with the couples' life compared to the old generation.

Al Gharaibeh and Bromfield (2012: 449-450) noted that Emiratis of all educational levels and backgrounds tend to choose divorce, even though their court data outcomes suggest that the more educated the women are the more likely they would opt for divorce. Al Gharaibeh and Bromfield (2012: 449-450) reported that highly educated women are more likely to divorce their less-educated spouses, yet they were not suggesting that women should not seek higher education. Instead, it should be stressed out that divorce impacts Emiratis of all educational levels and divorce prevention programs must be targeted to all Emiratis, regardless of educational levels (Al Gharaibeh and Bromfield, ibid).

Bromfield (2014: 339) identified the main reasons for divorce, which are family intervention, marriage at an early age, the desire to know more about the partner before marriage, domestic violence, controlling spouses and the social stigma of divorce. Bromfield (2014: 339) has not mentioned polygamy as a reason for divorce despite the fact that some female students mentioned this reason during the debatable discussion during our classes.

Although marriage and divorce have been extensively investigated in the UAE, it seems that previous studies on polygamy and its impact on society in the UAE have not been conducted yet, especially taking into account women's age, employment, and educational level. In addition, the current study will see whether polygamy is a reason for divorce or not (cf. Bromfield, 2014). Therefore, this research will bridge this gap by seeking answers to the following research questions:

1. To what extent do the age, employment and educational level of 50 Emirati women affect their acceptance of their husbands marrying another woman?

2. Is it possible to accept your husband to marry another woman if he has a reason to do so, and what are these reasons?

3. What actions would Emirati women take if their husbands marry another woman?

METHODOLOGY

Study sample

The sample of the study consists of 50 Emirati women who are already married (first wives) and they are from Al Ain, the United Arab Emirates. The participants were chosen randomly by conducting stratified random sampling. Following ethical considerations, the participants were informed of the theme of the study and showed their wiliness to participate in the study. Table 1provides a detailed description of the distribution of the participants based on the three variables of the study.

Table 1: Distribution of participants according to their age, employment, educational level

Variables	Categories	Number of participants	Percentage
Age	Under 35	21	42%
	Above 35	29	58%
Employment	Employed	19	38%
	Unemployed	31	62%
Educational Level	Pre-secondary education	14	28%
	Secondary education	14	28%
	University	22	44%
	Total	50	100%

This table indicates that participants who are below 35 years old formed 42%, and those who are above 35 years old represented 58%. With regard to employment, the employed women constituted 38% compared with 62% of unemployed women .According to the educational level distribution, it is noted that the "university" educational level has the largest proportion which equals 44% followed by "secondary education" and "pre-secondary education" levels which represent the percentage of 28%.

Semi-structured interviews

According to Bernard (2017: 165), the main benefit of the semi-structured interview is that the interviewer has the control of the whole process of obtaining the information from interviewees as well as focusing on new themes that may arise during the interview. Brinkmann (2014: 286)stated that semi-structured interviews are considered as the most commonly used format in the human and social sciences fields. In comparison with structured interviews, semi-structured ones can extract more knowledge from the dialogues by providing more flexibility to follow up on the angles regarded as significant by the interviewee. In addition, the interviewer can become more visible as a participant in the production of knowledge during the interview as opposed be hiding behind a pre-written interview script (Brinkmann, ibid). Unlike unstructured interviews, in semi-structured ones the interviewer has a better chance of focusing on the issues he or she considers crucial pertaining to the research questions. In a similar vein, Rabionet (2011: 563) stated that conducting qualitative interviews with the participants is regarded as a powerful tool to get insight into the opinions, experiences, and ways of thinking of these participants which in turn help the researchers to obtain valuable data. Thus, this study adopted semi-structured interviews to collect the data (see also Altakhaineh &Alnamer 2018:6 and Bromfield et al., 2016: 280). In particular, the interviews were cantered on the following themes:

1. The Emirati women's acceptance of their husbands' to marry another woman or not

2. The possibility for Emirati women acceptance of their husbands to marry another woman if he has a reason to do so and what these reasons are.

3. The actions would Emirati women take if their husbands married another woman.

Data analysis

The quantitative data of the current study was analyzed using simple statistics, namely, the percentage of acceptance vs. rejection of polygamy by the participants based on the study's main three variables, i.e. age, employment, and educational level (see Table 2). For the semi-structured interview, the interviews were tape-recorded, transcribed and then the data were analyzed through highlighting and coding the interviews using on a laptop (cf. Altakhaineh, AL-Tkhayneh, & Rahrouh, 2019: 41). The text segments were identified and a bracket around them was added (Creswell, 2012: 245). Then, a word or phrase was placed on the bracket to describe the meaning of the text (Creswell, Ibid). After that, the participants' answers were put together according to the three variables, highlighting the main reasons of acceptance vs. rejection of polygamy (Creswell, Ibid).

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

In order to provide an answer to the first question "To what extent does the age, employment and educational level of 50 Emirati women affect their acceptance of their husbands marrying another woman?" the frequencies and percentages were calculated (see Table 2).

Table 2: Emirati Women's Perceptions of Polygamy

Variables	Categories	Number of participants	Agree	Disagree	Percentage of acceptance
Age	Under 35	21	0	21	0%
	Above 35	29	6	23	12%
Employment	Employed	19	0	19	0%
	Unemployed	31	6	25	12%
Educational Level	Pre-secondary education	14	4	10	8%
	Secondary education	14	2	12	4%
	University	22	0	22	0%
	Total	50	6	44	12%

Table 2 shows that 44 of the participants, which are equal to 88%, showed a negative attitude and rejected the idea of polygamy (Oduyoye and Kanyoro, 2005). In contrast, 6 of the participants, 12%, showed their consent of polygamy. With regard to the three variables in Table 2, it is clear that all participants with university degree level (no. 22), young participants under 35 (no. 21), and participants who are employed (no. 19) rejected polygamy.

Answering the second question "Is it possible to accept of your husband to marry another woman if he has a reason to do so? And what are these reasons?" the frequencies and percentages were calculated. 32 of the participants (64%) out of the total 50 participants showed rejection as follows: 23 of them, 71%, are under the age of 35, 20 of them are university degree holder, 62% high school certificate holder, and 38% are holders of certificates which are lesser than high school, and 18 of them which constitute 56% are nonworking women. However, 18 of the participants, which equal 29%, accept their husband's second marriage if there is a reason. Most of these participants are above the age of 35, have high school and university certificates, and 13 of them are nonworking. Touching upon the reasons that are convincing for second marriage, 12 or 66% of the participants pointed to reasons that are religious which correspond to the provisions of the Islamic Sharia as polygamy is allowed in Islam under certain circumstances and till a specific number of times which is up to 4 times. When the participants were asked about reasons under which polygamy is allowed in Islam, most of them referred to the biological reasons which are related to sterility, infectious disease, or health impairments which might affect the wife`s ability to carry out her duties required for her husband, house, and children, so the husband will start looking for another wife in order to preserve himself from sin and to provide a good and better life for his children, and a small number of 2, i.e. 10%, over the age of 35 and non-workers asserted that the high rate of spinsterhood in society may push men to marry as stated in the Islamic sharia, and this could be a convincing factor for some.

Other 14 participants, i.e. 77%, ascribed the second marriage to both religious and cultural reasons as the divergent views and the lack of understanding between spouses might lead to violence against both the wife and children, so the husband might view the second marriage and escape from home as a lifeline. It was noted that the most common answers to the interest of children in the second marriage were from women over 35 years of university and secondary education.

This complies with the "Complexity theory" which focuses on the complex nature of humans and systems and promotes the holistic orientation. This kind of orientation has a profound effect on violence, its embrace of the positive situation and its criminal justice policies, including policies on violence against women. At this stage, tensions between relational and analytical thinking (qua Liu) become apparent, and it might have a negative impact on the family Liu's (2017). Liu (Ibid) suggests that the relation between Muslims within its Asian values is harmony, family, honor, and holistic thinking. Inclusive thinking requires "orientation towards the context or the field as a whole, including attention to the relationships between a pivotal object and the field, and a preference for explaining and predicting events on the basis of these relationships" (Nisbett et al., 2001: 93, quoted in Liu 2017: 30). This thinking contrasts with the analytical thinking of Western societies that reflect the tendency to predict from events that are not disaggregated. (Liu: Ibid). Due to the capacity of criminal justice policies and theories to travel around the world, 8 of the participants, which equal 16%, who are almost a university degree holders, above the age 35, and workers reported that the dissatisfaction with the sexual relation, the negligence of the wife of her husband due to work, house, and children issues might be a major cause in the second marriage as this atmosphere between couples creates tension and violence, and consequently make men reluctant to return home. These 8 participants assert that the claim of women's rights globally and internationally, especially these rights related to work, and what CEDAW 1979 and other conventions reported have both positive and negative side, and the participation of women in the economic life without balancing the other aspects of life including marriage life created a kind of tension and prompted the man to search for a non-working wife alongside with working wife. However, the answers that showed peremptory denial of the second marriage was

because these participants believe that the husband should support and get his wife back which is a sign of loyalty and love, and he should not remarry as long as his wife is alive, and 3 of the participants believe that the husband should not remarry even after the death of his wife. These answers were provided by participants who are under 35 years old, holder of certificates that are lesser than secondary school, and one of them is working.

Finally, to provide answers to the third research question "What actions would Emirati women take if their husbands marry another woman", 16 of the participants, who are equal to 32%, preferred divorce in this case. These 16 participants are under the age of 35, working, and university degree holders. This is in line with Al Gharaibeh and Bromfield's (2012: 449-450) findings that educated women are more likely to resort to divorce compared to their uneducated counterparts. This reason for divorce can be added to the list of divorce causes identified by Bromfield (2014: 339). On the other hand, the rest of the participants, who are equal to 68%, would stay with their husbands even if they are dissatisfied with this relationship. This was ascribed to socio-economic reasons, namely the future of their children under the care of the father, inheritance and the full alimony, especially if there were satisfied reasons that drive the husband to marry another woman. This answer was almost answered by participants who are uneducated, unemployed and uneducated.

All in all, the main results of the study show that:

1. In the UAE, especially in Al Ain city, 88% of the married women refuse the second marriage.

2. Some of the Emirati women accept the idea of the second marriage according to reasons that came primarily from religion, followed by culture and intimacy which might be caused by socioeconomic factors.

3. In the UAE, most of the married women stay with their husbands when they remarry because of economic and social factors that are related to customs, traditions, and society.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The results demonstrate that the three social variables, namely, age, employment, and educational level had an impact on the participants' choice regarding polygamy. Generally speaking, polygamy is rejected by most Emirati women. Specifically, it was shown that young, employed and educated Emirati women did not accept the idea of polygamy whereas a few Emirati women who were older, unemployed and uneducated consented on polygamy. The participants who accepted polygamy indicated that religious and cultural reasons have an influence on their acceptance. Finally, if the husbands decided to marry regardless of his wife's acceptance, the results showed that most of the young and employed participants would file for divorce and the other would remain with him, but they would be dissatisfied. The latter would remain in the marriage due to socio-economic reasons, i.e. alimony, inheritance and the well-being of their children. Finally, it is recommended that polygamy should be justified in order to be accepted, and consequently reduce the rate of divorce (cf. Mashhour, 2005). It is also recommended that more studies shed light on other important issues, e.g. the polygamous marriage and divorce (see Howland & Koenen., 2014) and the psychological impact of polygamy on women are needed.

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