The Luo co-wives of Kenya: Using Resistance Resources to Achieve an Empowered Quality of Life

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1.1. Background

Health is an abstract, hazy and contested concept that means different things to different people thereby making it difficult to provide precise definitions. One of the most persistent confusion between definitions of health has been whether to focus on wellness or on the absence of disease (1). This lack of clarity led the World Health Organization (WHO) to redefine health as not only the absence of disease but also as a state of complete physical, mental, social and spiritual well-being (2). While this definition has often been criticized for its utopian nature, it extends the boundaries of health beyond the absence of disease to include positive wellbeing and firmly acknowledges the multidimensional and holistic nature of health (1). It also opens up a wider avenue for discussion into what constitutes health, which was previously limited when the traditional biomedical orientation was used. Indeed, a subsequent analysis of the nature and underlying causes of morbidity by Lalonde (3), led to the conclusion that the traditional approach to health issues was woefully inadequate.

The subject of health is commonly conceptualized as consisting of two dimensions: (i) negative - illness or disease; and (ii) positive - wellbeing (4). However, the meaning of 'health' can be interpreted in multiple ways. The way in which individuals, for example, interpret the meaning of their own health is a personal experience because health is subjective and its interpretation is relative to the environment and culture in which people live (5). Health has also been seen as a means towards positive living and wellness (1) as it acts both as a resource for everyday life, and a positive concept emphasizing social and personal resources, as well as physical capacities (6). This has led scholars to deduce that being healthy, or not, relies heavily on the way we view the world – a factor that affects our ability to manage tension and stress (7), thus determining the achievement of a fulfilling state of wellbeing.

Researchers have found out that an individual's worldview is not the only determining factor to a fulfilling state of wellbeing. There is ample evidence to suggest that subjective wellbeing is influenced by the cultural context within which an

individual operates (see 4). The dictionary of anthropology defines culture as "*that complex whole which includes knowledge, belief, art, morals, law, custom, and any other capabilities and habits acquired by man as a member of society*" (8, p. 98). One of the widely documented cultural practices is polygamy, still practiced in various cultures around the world. Anthropologists classify polygamy into two categories - polyandry and polygyny. Polyandry is a form of plural marriage allowing a woman to have more than one man at the same time while polygyny is a form of plural marriage that permits a man to have more than one wife at one time (8). For the purposes of this thesis, I shall be using the term 'polygamy' to refer to 'polygyny', unless stated otherwise.

Polygamy in sub-Saharan Africa is not only a type of marriage but also a value system (9). It has its roots in the economic aspects of power balance, with wealthy men being documented to have had a higher propensity of mating with multiple wives (10). Several theories have been advanced on why polygamy was, and still is, desirable, including; high male mortality during wars, prestige, post-partum sex taboos, older men controlling access to women, for women to gain reproductive advantage in high-pathogen areas and because of the cheap labour offered by wives and children (9, 11). Polygamy, however, is not entirely beneficial. Studies conducted in different countries have shown that polygamy can lead to unhappiness, loneliness, and lack of intimacy with the spouse (12). It has also been documented to result into co-wife jealousy, competition, and unequal distribution of household and emotional resources (13, 14). This negativity has been shown to heighten acrimony between co-wives and between the children of the different wives (15). Furthermore, polygamy has been associated with mental illness among women and children (16, 17), with women in polygamous families having more mental health problems than their counterparts in monogamous families (18). Polygamy has also been associated with rise in sexually transmitted infections due to multiple sexual partners and reduced contraceptive use (19).

1.2.   Objectives

The purpose of this qualitative study is to investigate the generalized resistance resources applied by the Luo co-wives of Nyanza Province, Kenya in their bid to

improve their quality of life. The focus will be on the co-wives' lived experiences, health challenges faced and the coping skills employed in their day-to-day activities. The general objective of this study is to explore the health challenges that Luo co-wives are predisposed to, with a view of understanding how they cope with those challenges.

1.2.1.   Specific objectives

a) Explore the health challenges faced by the Luo co-wives;
b) Investigate the resistance resources employed by the Luo co-wives towards coping; and
c) Explore the relationship between state of wellbeing and empowerment among the Luo co-wives.

THE LUO

2.1. Background

The Luo, a Nilotic speaking people, are the fourth largest ethnic group in Kenya (20). They occupy the areas of South and Central Nyanza around the Kavirondo Gulf of Lake Victoria in the Western part of the country. The Kenyan Luo are part of an extensive migration of *Lwoo* speaking people who moved from their original Sudan homeland into Uganda and Kenya (21). From linguistic evidence, writes Ocholla-Ayayo, the term "*Joluo*" comes from the word "*Jolupo*" which means fishermen, or "*Luw dhok*", "come after cattle" (22). The Luo, therefore, are both fishermen and cattle keepers as they previously lived along the Nile valley.

2.2. Marriage

Polygamy is still a prevalent practice among the Luo. Although statistics indicate that polygamy is on the decline in Kenya, with a national prevalence rate of 13%, among the Luo, almost one out of every four marriages are polygamous (23). Why then is the Luo polygamy rate higher than the national average? To answer this question, it is important to understand the Luo customary marriage pattern.

Traditionally, courtship and marriage among the Luo are intimately connected with the custom of making love to girls in the bachelors' dormitory, or *simba*. According to Evans-Pritchard, a male youth arranges with a girl to visit him at night where he will play with her and entertain her throughout the night. The boy can have intercourse with her but must not penetrate her – that is regarded as shameful (21). Virginity was highly regarded among the Luo. Upon marriage, any girl who was found without hymen was publicly ridiculed and shamed. According to Ocholla-Ayayo (22), *"this (broken virginity) remains a stigma with the girl all her life and will be thrown at her by her co-wives anytime they quarrel."* (p. 143)

There is (now a common) form of marriage called *por*, which is marriage by elopement. This happens where a man brings a girl to the *simba* where he sexually

penetrates her. She remains in his home, a sure sign that the woman regards herself as a wife. Or a man and his sweetheart run to a far away place and cohabit there. In such cases, the girl's family may try to make her return to them, but if she refuses to do so they regularize the union by accepting some cattle from her lover, though he does not pay as many cattle as he would have done had the marriage been negotiated in the usual manner (21). If a man married in this manner before sending cattle to the girl's home, it meant that either the boy's parents had not enough cattle for bride wealth or there was something they wanted to cover up by making the girl a woman before it was discovered (22). In the same breath, *"a girl married today by Christian rites is sometimes referred to disparagingly as a dhako ma por (wife who eloped) because she cooks in her husband's home immediately after her wedding"* (21, p. 133). *Por* was, and still is, the most despised and ridiculed form of marriage among the Luo (21, 22). It was believed that a girl who had eloped is always guilty of something and her co-wives would always point it out to her whenever there was a quarrel (22).

The normal, and most preferred, form of Luo marriage is called *meko* - where a girl would be offered a 'forced escort' to the groom's home after marriage negotiations are complete (21, 22). Even though the Luo have greater freedom in choosing a spouse today than in the past, a large number of their marriages still are arranged (24). Culturally, a young man wishing to marry will ask a *Jagam* to find a wife for him. The *Jagam* has been referred to, by anthropologists, as the 'go-between' (22), the 'negotiator' (21), the 'intermediary' (24) or the 'matchmaker' (25). The *Jagam* is usually a 'father's sister,' a 'father's sister's son,' or a 'mother's brother,' all of whom reside in communities other than that of the bridegroom; or the *Jagam* may be a 'brother's wife' who has links to her natal community. This *Jagam* will approach the girl and her parents. If they are agreeable, the *Jagam* will then arrange a meeting between the prospective bride and groom to begin the marriage negotiation process (24).

The importance of the *Jagam* cannot be overstated. In all customary Luo marriages, both parties cannot carry it through without the *Jagam* who is responsible for clearing up any doubts and allegations of antisocial behaviour, forbidden relationships or illness that may prevent the success of that marriage. The *Jagam* also acts as a witness who must record in his/her memory all the ceremonies, all the number of cattle and

sheep and goats slaughtered during those numerous ceremonies, and also the number of cattle and their colour, sizes, shape of their horns, which are given as bride wealth. The *Jagam* is therefore considered as chief witness in the future negotiations should a separation or divorce be necessary, and a return of the bride wealth demanded (22).

2.3. Residence

The Luo have a segmentary system of patrilineages (21). Individual homesteads in the community are distributed in lineage neighbourhoods so that the settlement pattern shows a rough correspondence to the genealogy. A woman, on marriage, moves into her husband's father's home. After a period of some years the husband will establish his own independent homestead near that of his father. Domestic life takes place in patrilocal extended family homesteads with each wife and her children occupying a separate house (24).

The basic Luo polygamous homestead comprises of the first wife, *Mikayi*, whose house is at the centre back and is called *Od-Mikayi*, the second wife whose house is at the right hand side of *Mikayi* is called *Nyachira* and her house is *Od-Nyachira*, and a third wife whose house is on the left hand side of *Mikayi* is *Reru* and her house is called *Od-Reru*. Women married after the first three wives are called *Nyi-udi*, which means the daughters of the house to which they are attached (22). Such household units are the basis for inheritance and for future segmentation.

It is important to note that Luo co-wives have an order of seniority. When a person who was a polygamist and had many children died, the elder son of the first wife, if mature, was left in charge of the homestead. The first wife was given the largest share of the inheritance and the last married wife got the least. This order of seniority is strictly followed in the division and inheritance of land, in the marriage of their children, in determining who shall take over the lineage leadership and so on (22).

3.1. Research background

The subject of polygamy has drawn increasing attention from scholars and laypersons alike. Across cultures, attitudes towards polygamy vary from complete acceptance to total condemnation (26). Polygamous marriages are common in Africa, Asia, the Middle East and Oceania, and are also known to occur in Europe and North America (Altman & Ginat, 1996 in 27). Polygamy is very prevalent in sub-Saharan Africa (SSA). As of 2005, the United Nations (UN) found that 28 countries in this region had polygamy rates of more than 10 percent (28) and there is evidence to suggest that SSA countries with a high degree of polygamy are the poorest in the world (29). Still, polygamy legally co-exists with monogamy - and even in countries where it is illegal, it is practiced in specific ethnic and religious communities (26, 30).

There is evidence to show that polygamy rates are positively associated with rural residence, older age and low educational attainment (CPS/MS, 2007 in 31). This can be attributed, in part, to the little exposure to western culture hence retaining the bulk of the hitherto traditional mode of cultural operation. Across cultures, many explanations have been advanced for the practice of polygamy – mainly involving sexual necessity, demographic and economic factors (see 32). Although global polygamy rates have been dropping, that drop does not necessarily reflect the outright rejection of polygamy as a socially acceptable and desirable marriage form. In those contemporary societies where the polygamy rate has dropped, there is a disjunction between social norm and behaviour which is indicative of a society in transition (32). That significant drop in polygamy numbers has also been attributed to the negative psychosocial effects touching on the health and wellbeing of the husband/father, children and the co-wives (18, 33, 34).

Much of the large body of research on polygamy in SSA focuses on the socio-cultural correlates and on the demographic and economic implications of polygamy (see 28). Most conclusions on the functions of polygamy have been conducted from an ethnographic viewpoint, often with a horizontal analysis of the various tenets. Little attention has been given to the situation of the co-wives in polygamous marriages

especially in regards to their state of wellness, or lack of it thereof. Also, little research or theory exists on the life experiences of and coping mechanisms adopted by co-wives in polygamous marriages.

Previous studies have looked into the experiences of co-wives in polygamous marriages. One of such studies is by Tabi *et al.,* (12) conducted in Ghana, which investigated co-wives' experiences in polygamy and their ways of coping. It draws its findings from three key thematic areas in polygamy: infertility, co-wives' relationships, and coping mechanisms. However, the study analyses co-wife coping from a reproductive health perspective with little reference to entrenched cultural beliefs, norms, attitudes and practices. The study is also subjective since it does not include men's and/or community's views in the polygamy debate. Furthermore, its sample is broad for it includes secret lovers and mistresses as co-wives, women who are not recognized by the legal wives of the men in the study.

Perhaps a study that aptly, and comprehensively, captures the experiences of Luo co-wives is the one conducted by Potash (24) among a rural Luo community in South Nyanza, Kenya between 1973 and 1975. This was an eight-month ethnographic study that collected life histories from 45 women and 14 men in addition to a household census, which was undertaken in two of the four lineage neighbourhoods. Being an anthropological study, it captured the interpersonal relationships among Luo co-wives with a broad emphasis on the underlying reasons for the few divorce incidences among Luo households. The main strength of the study is that it draws its findings from women both in monogamous and polygamous families. However, the study is more cultural than contemporary as the data was gathered from a rural community whose way of life still involved adherence to the traditional cultural patterns upon which much of the findings were derived. Moreover, this study is relatively old with regards to the changing cultural trends and is only reliable while making reference to the said time period.

These previous studies have contributed, to a large extent, to the understanding of the goings-on in polygamous households particularly regarding the impact on co-wives' relationships and ill health. However, no study has been able to capture the resistance resources co-wives draw upon to keep them in a positive frame of mind, which

translates into a healthy wellbeing and higher quality of life. The relationship between polygamy and the health of co-wives is the key focus of this thesis.

3.2. Co-wives' health

Polygamy has long been associated with family stress and mental illness among women. A greater prevalence of mental health disorders have been found among women in polygamous than monogamous marriages (35), a strong indication that an additional wife translates to an unhealthy household. It has also been found that the life satisfaction of co-wives is often influenced by the wife order. Depending on the community, the older or younger wives may attest to greater happiness (18). Studies have noted a number of psychosocial problems in polygamous family structures, among them their somatic complaints among senior wives (36, 37). Research reveals that senior wives who have poor life satisfaction often see themselves as having failed to meet the standards of a successful wife set by their husband and community, and those who are perceived as old by their husbands often have low self-esteem (35). Additionally, many societies assign a higher status to senior wives: they may have power over the other wives, enjoy special privileges within the family, and, in some societies, arrange and consent to the husband's next marriage (Altman & Ginat, 1996 in 27). However, this status is mostly seen as a prestigious and a ceremonial one. There is evidence to suggest that in several societies where polygamy occurs, second and subsequent wives often experience favoured status with respect to economic resources, social support and attention (27). In such instances, women whose husbands remarry bear the heaviest psychological burden, which heavily affects their relationship with the newly married co-wife and the husband. For instance, Al-Krenawi (33) noted that senior wives whose husbands remarried have a lower self esteem than that of the junior wives. This view is shared by Ozkan *et al*. (27) who found that when a man takes a second wife, the senior wife may be perceived as unable to fulfil her normal spousal obligations.

For the senior wife, the transition from a monogamous to a polygamous family structure can be a traumatic change which triggers reactions similar to those that follow divorce, such as mourning and low self-esteem (33). This is, largely, because the first marriage is usually arranged but the second is usually associated with love and there is a greater propensity towards choice (37). There have been inferences

made to the effect that choosing a second wife with whom the husband has fallen in love with, is a much more threatening prospect to the senior wife than one based on cultural obligation. The higher rate of mental health problems for the senior wives, therefore, could be explained as a result of this particularly striking finding (27). The senior wife's predicaments are made worse if she is found to be infertile or when her children cannot survive. In some societies, childless women are viewed as useless, disgraced and believed to be punished by God (38). This view extends to women with deceased children as well as women who are infertile (12). Therefore, co-wives who witness their husbands marry additional wives without understanding the real reasons behind the husband's decision can be said to suffer mental health problems, often in silence. In their study of Bedouin-Arab polygamous marriages, for example, Al-Krenawi *et al.*, (26) found that senior wives reported somatic complaints such as anxiety, breathlessness, insomnia and fatigue.

Senior wives whose husbands re-marry have been shown to harbour negative feelings towards their new co-wives. Most of them liken the addition of new wives to 'legalized adultery' (30). First wives, and their children, who had previously enjoyed all of their husbands' and fathers' time and money, are forced to share these resources with the usually unwelcome new wife and any children she might bring to the household. This situation has been shown to result into co-wife jealousy, competition and unequal distribution of household and emotional resources, creating acrimony between co-wives and between the children of different wives (24, 27, 30, 35). This jealousy and competition among co-wives can be justified. For instance, Potash's (24) study found that the pressure to adjust to a marriage falls primarily on the woman. In her study, the women revealed that in order to cope well within the household, they *"must please their husbands, avoid complaining too much, and not be too stubborn''* (24, p. 384). Here, submitting to the husband can be seen as one way of attracting his attention and favours amidst the competition from fellow co-wives. However, Potash warns that this must not be construed to mean that women conform automatically to their husbands' wishes. Often, jealousy among co-wives stems from the concern that the husband does not share his love and resources equally among them (13). This pits the co-wives against each other (39) as they jostle for attention from the man. Among the Luo, jealousy has been found to be a rooted concept among co-wives who refer to one another as '*nyieka*' or 'my partner in jealousy' (24). Further, Potash found that

"most Luo believe that jealousy among co-wives is endemic and largely unavoidable" (24, p. 384). From the findings, it can be concluded that Luo co-wives operate in a permanent state of jealousy, which results in conflict if their competitive intentions are not positively ventilated.

3.3. Children's health

In addition to studies documenting the detrimental effects of polygamy on the health of co-wives, scholars have also identified polygamy as a risk factor for negative child health outcomes. Al-Krenawi *et al.*, (26) found that offspring of the first wife had *"inadequate and/or dysfunctional exposure to their father"* (p. 453) which possibly contributed to the poorer scholastic achievement and increased behavioural problems detected in this group of children (30). A case can be advanced, therefore, that co-wives are solely responsible for the upbringing of their children and will do anything to see them through. Among the Luo, this emotional pull of co-wives towards their children not only acts to keep a woman from leaving her husband, but also, in the case of separation, draws her back to her husband's home (40). Children's health and overall state of wellbeing, therefore, can be said to be one of the reasons why Luo co-wives find it necessary to continue living in polygamous marriages, however difficult and tumultuous it may be.

Another explanation why co-wives would consider staying in their marriages can be found in the Luo customary law. Traditionally, children and married women belong to the father's side of the family. Divorce and separation were not encouraged (41), and was unknown except at the early stages of marriage ceremonies and negotiations (22). Moreover, seeking divorce among the Luo is always a costly affair since it is not always easy to return bride wealth, partly because half of the gifts are distributed among agnatic lineages (22). Luo women, married under such customary arrangements, therefore, have less chances of pulling out considering the fact that they will lose their children, return the (sometimes untraceable) bride wealth, and destroy the kinship ties that had existed between the two families prior to the divorce. It has been hypothesized that these economic disadvantages against and cultural biases towards women could generate a sense of powerlessness and perceived dependency of women (and children) on men (41).

3.4. Co-wife empowerment

Scholars have often addressed the topic of women empowerment in general, and not in parts. Specific studies on co-wife empowerment, therefore, are few and far between. Polygamy is not only detrimental to the health of co-wives; it locks them in a 'disempowerment cycle', too. Historically, polygamy has been associated with patrilineal, patrilocal, gerontocratic, pronatalist agrarian societies that limit women's access to land, inheritance, support from natal kin and sources of formalized power (Goody, 1973; White & Button, 1988; in 31). According to Caldwell (42), polygamous men and their lineages have always looked at women as more of child bearers than material wealth creators, what Bove & Valeggia (31) aptly puts as *"wealth in people"* not *"wealth in things"* (p. 22). In this regard, and from a power balance perspective, polygamy places women largely under the authority of their husbands for access to key resources and support during childbearing and other life events (Adams & Castle, 1994 in 31). Most women in polygamous societies are unemployed and thus are economically dependent on their husbands for support and upkeep. Scholars have advanced that most women agree to be co-wives because they cannot support themselves through work, hence they feel pressurized to marry into a polygamous family as a solution to their economic needs (43). On the contrary, polygamy has also been shown to lead to family dissolution. For example, men may leave their senior wives and their children in order to live with their later wives and their children. In these cases, the father may not participate in the upbringing of all his children, the abandoned household often suffers economic distress, and parental conflict is most likely to ensue (43).

The abandonment or neglect of co-wives by their husbands has its roots in traditional African society. According to Longwe (44), women's discrimination in Africa can largely be attributed to

> *"The inculcation and acceptance of gender discrimination at an early age, where girls are socialised to believe that public decision-making positions should properly be occupied by men, and boys are socialised into believing that girls may legitimately be excluded"* (p. 26).

This patriarchal culture is increasingly rooted as boys and girls grow up whereby the society expects the woman to be more of a homemaker who takes care of the family while this frees the man to scale up the ladder of socioeconomic and political success.

To reverse this trend, there have been consistent advocacy campaigns to empower women, especially from developing countries, in order to reduce gender inequalities, and improve their socioeconomic conditions (45). While the reasons for any particular woman's powerlessness (or power) are many and varied (46), the common factor is that, as women, they are all constrained by the *"norms, beliefs, customs and values through which societies differentiate between women and men that are acquired very early in life"* (47, p. 22). Whenever these normative barriers are broken, it has been proven that, there is always an increase in the quality of life. For real empowerment to occur, however, there is need for the co-wife to identify (through exploration and consciousness-raising) the available resources in and around her immediate environment that have the potential of contributing to her raised level of empowerment. According to Mosedale (46), there are four aspects which seem to be generally accepted in the literature on women's empowerment: (i) to be empowered, one must first be disempowered; (ii) empowerment cannot be bestowed by a third party; (iii) empowerment decisions must be made by individuals themselves; and (iv) empowerment is an on-going process, rather than a product (46, p. 244). These four aspects are very crucial in our next stage where we shall be discussing the salutogenesis theoretical framework, and its relationship to the co-wives' overall state of wellbeing.

The theoretical framework used in this study combines elements from the salutogenesis theoretical framework and the empowerment conceptual framework. These theories postulate that the more individuals take control of their environment, the more they are likely to move towards a positive state of wellness.

4.1. The Salutogenesis Theory

The salutogenesis theory was advanced by Antonovsky - an American-Israeli medical sociologist - a term he derived from the interviews of Israeli women with experiences from the concentration camps of the Second World War who in spite of this stayed healthy (48). He engaged in extensive primary research as well as diligent interdisciplinary dialogue with practitioners of clinical psychology, social/community psychology and clinical medicine to demonstrate that the dominant pathogenic view of health/absence of disease was woefully inadequate (49).

Salutogenesis (derived from the Latin *salut,* 'good', often with reference to health, and the Greek word *genesis,* origins (50)) considers the quest for wellness as a continuum - with negative health and positive health at both ends. Antonovsky referred to this as the *"health ease/dis-ease continuum"* (51, p. xii). While pathogenesis seeks to understand why people get sick and enter into a disease category, a salutogenic orientation seeks to understand the origins of health by posing the question: *"why are people located towards the positive end of the continuum, or why do they move towards this end, whatever their location at any given time?"* (51, p. xii). In this regard, it can be said that the theory of salutogenesis hinges on the proposition that *"it is more important to focus on people's resources and capacity to create health than the classic focus on risks, ill health, and disease"* (52, p. 440). Salutogenesis, therefore, is a stress resource orientated concept, which focuses on resources, maintains and improves the movement towards health. It gives the answer as to why people, despite stressful situations and hardships, thrive. The theory can be applied at the individual, group, and the societal level (52).

At the individual level, the salutogenic model is based on the premise that the co-wife's life situation is replete with certain predisposing factors that are individually

peculiar. As discussed in chapter 2, there are internal and external forces which exposes the co-wife to stress and difficulties that are integral elements of her existence (53). This situation is unavoidable because human beings are flawed and therefore susceptible to acute or chronic disease, injury, problems, and degradation unless they actively pursue a course of action geared towards causing health (54). How do they, therefore, manage their inability to control their life? The answer lies in two terms formulated by Antonovsky; namely the sense of coherence (SoC) and the generalized resistance resources (GRRs).

According to the Ottawa Charter, health promotion is the process of enabling the individual to increase control over and to improve their health (6). Co-wives living an active and productive life can be said to have mastered the art of coping in their immediate environment. The ability to manage stress is crucial as this provides not only adjustment to stress but also a flexibility and ability to identify and use the GRRs at their disposal (55). Generalized resistance resources refer to *"any phenomena that is effective in combating a wide variety of stressors"* (51, p. xii). They can be in the form of money, ego strength, cultural stability, and social support, among others (see Fig. 1). These resources assist the co-wives in making sense out of the countless stressors that they are constantly bombarded with. The GRRs, therefore, provide the co-wives with sets of meaningful and coherent life experiences. When confronted with such repeated experiences, they generate, over time, a strong SoC (51).

The SoC, on the other hand, is a *"generalized orientation towards the world which perceives it, on a continuum, as comprehensible, manageable and meaningful"* (56, p. 15). The strength of one's SoC, proposed Antonovsky, is significant in facilitating the movement towards health. This is because an individual with a strong SoC will be motivated to cope (meaningfulness), understand the challenges faced (comprehensibility), and believe that resources to cope are available (manageability) (56). The theory of salutogenesis is summarized in Figure 1.
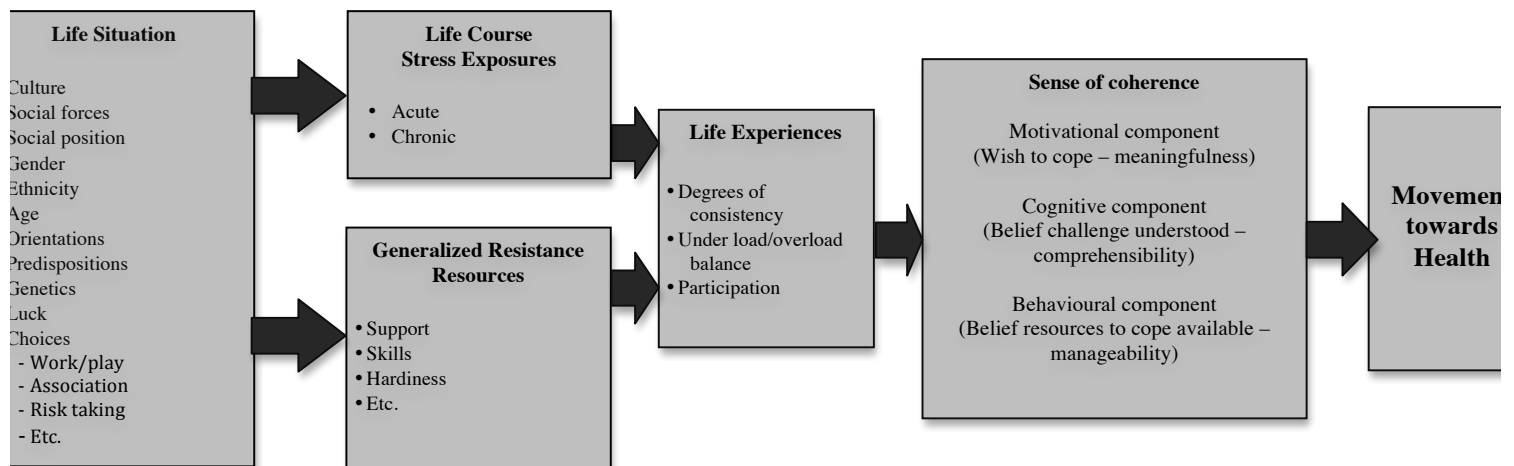
Fig 1. The Salutogenesis theoretical framework, as developed by Mittelmark (57), based on Antonovsky (56)

From the table above, it can be seen that Antonovsky does not view health as a dichotomous variable but as a continuum, striving to explain what makes a person move towards the health-end of the continuum and thus increase his/her SoC, hence promote coping (58). The focus is on the story of the person rather than the diagnosis, and the person's interaction within the environment; which is the source of both stressors and resistance resources. The theory emphasizes the use of potential and existing resistance resources and does not only focus on minimizing risk factors, but also emphasizes active adaptation as the ideal in treatment (51).

The theory further advances the idea that a person who copes well has a high SoC. Antonovsky defines SoC with three sub-dimensions that express: (i) *comprehensibility*, or the extent to which one has a pervasive, enduring, but dynamic feeling of confidence that the stimuli deriving from one's internal and external environments in the course of living are structured, predictable and explicable; (ii) *manageability*, or the extent to which resources are available to one to meet the demands posed by these stimuli; and (iii) *meaning*, the extent to which these demands are challenges, worthy of investment and engagement (51). It has been fronted that the 'meaning' component is the most important of the SoC concept because when individuals perceive at least some of life's problems and demands as worthy of commitment and engagement, they have a greater sense of meaningfulness, and

typically a greater sense of the other two components (comprehensibility and manageability) as well (58). On the other hand, the GRRs are biological, material and psychosocial factors that make it easier for people to perceive their lives as consistent, structured and understandable (48). The salutogenic framework, therefore, could serve as a stress-resisting resource, providing prerequisites for a good life (55).

Critics have faulted the salutogenesis theory for its generalized view of the world as either 'coherent' (copes) or 'incoherent' (fails to cope). Instead they point out that response to adversity should be viewed in the way an individual responds to a given specific stressor (50).

This study intends to examine the above theory of salutogenesis and its applicability in the life of a Luo co-wife. It specifically seeks to explore the general resistance resources employed by the Luo co-wives in their bid to cope with the adverse effects of the acrimonious polygamous environment, hence an enhanced state of wellbeing.

4.2. The Empowerment Concept

The term 'empowerment' has extensively been used to track the changes that people undergo to lead better lives. Different professions refer to empowerment in different perspectives and what constitutes empowerment still remains a debate in scholarly circles including health promotion. The absence of theory and definition in a health promotion context has contributed to empowerment being often discussed but not well quantified or measured (59). However, this has not deterred scholars from engaging in the disempowerment/empowerment debate. There have been references to the term 'empowerment' as a mechanism in which people gain mastery over their affairs (Rappaport, in 60). This notion of empowerment is intended to include both a psychological sense of personal control and concern with actual social influence, political power, and legal rights (60) which encompasses a common process of personal development, participation, consciousness raising and social action.

For empowerment to take place, there is a need for self-inspiration and consequent action from within. This power from within has also been referred to as individual, personal or psychological means of gaining (a sense of) control over one's life (59). The ultimate goal is to increase feelings of personal value and a sense of individual

control. Individual control is, partly, a consequence of the position of people in structural and social hierarchies and has been shown to have an influence on their health. As Laverack (5) succinctly explains, their inner sense of strength comes from the knowledge of their own ability to cope with and address the determinants of their health. The absence of this inner sense of strength often leads to individual powerlessness and ultimate disempowerment.

Powerlessness, whether imagined or real, is an individual concept that combines an attitude of self-blame, a feeling of alienation from resources for social influence, and an experience of disenfranchisement and economic vulnerability (Kieffer, in 5). Powerless individuals begin to accept aspects of their world that are self-destructive to their own health and well-being, thinking that these are unalterable features of what they take to be 'reality' (5). Many speak of empowerment in terms of involving people or allowing them to participate in decisions affecting their wellbeing. However, true empowerment requires that the disempowered not only participate in decision-making but actually make the decisions (61).

Scholars have periodically attempted to provide a set of indicators that could be used to gauge levels of women empowerment. Criteria such as class or caste, ethnicity, relative wealth, age, and family position have been used in the past to analyze women's power or lack of it (46). However, these empowerment indicators are only a handful in an infinite list and can only be applicable in context-specific cases.

In reference to co-wife empowerment, this study seeks to determine whether the Luo co-wife is empowered or not. The study will also go further and ascertain the extent to which the co-wives are (dis)empowered by making reference to specific socio-cultural indicators1 used by the co-wives to measure their level of (dis)empowerment.

4.3. Salutogenesis and Empowerment

The meaning of health can be interpreted in multiple ways based on an individual's personal experiences. Health is subjective and its interpretation is relative to the environment, and culture, in which people live (5). The World Health Organization (WHO) definition of health has become one of the most commonly used official interpretations in health promotion: 'Health is a state of complete physical, mental

and social wellbeing and not merely the absence of disease or infirmity' (62). Physical wellbeing is concerned with the healthy functioning of the body, biological normality, physical fitness and capacity to perform tasks. Social wellbeing includes interpersonal relationships as well as wider social issues such as marital satisfaction, employability, and community involvement. Mental wellbeing is the ability of a person to adapt to their environment and the society in which they function (63).

Community is often presented as the engine of health promotion, the vehicle of empowerment. Only in interacting with others do people gain those healthful characteristics essential to empowerment (64). The centrality of community to health promotion has both empowering and disempowering impacts. Yet health promotion and empowerment have been constantly criticized for *"proclaiming the community as the solution to all socio-political and economic health problems"* (64, p. 255). Indeed, it has been proven that individual or group and environmental factors affect a community partnership's ability to influence locally valued changes in the environment and related outcomes (65). This reinforces the assertion that real empowerment begins from within the individual with the community only playing a supporting role.

Empowerment, therefore, is about giving people control and mastery over their lives, the development of abilities and coping skills, and endowing them with the ability to work for active critical consciousness-raising (48). Empowerment has been documented to enhance individual competence and self-esteem. This in turn increases perceptions of personal control and has a direct effect on improving health outcomes (Wallerstein, in 5). Yet this empowerment process must begin with, and from, the individual (66) because it can not be bestowed on people, and that people can only empower themselves (67) to tackle the range of personal, economic and environmental determinants which determine their health status (5). Those determinants of health, according to Marmot & Wilkinson (68), comprise of, among others, social gradient, stress, work, unemployment, social support, food and transport.

The first step in the empowerment process is to understand the origin of, and the extent to which these determinants of health affect the empowerment of individuals. Antonovsky stated that disease and stress occur everywhere and all the time, and that chaos and stress are part of life and natural conditions (48). To gravitate towards a state of wellness, individuals need to take advantage of the GRRs at their disposal, and use them, in order to have a better chance of dealing with the challenges they face in life. Indeed, Salutogenesis is one among the many related theoretical frameworks that have been discussed under the 'Health Empowerment Model' designed by Jones & Meleis (69). The model evolved from several theoretical and interdisciplinary views of health for the purpose of promoting health in individuals who are exposed to ongoing stressful stimuli, and emerge stronger and healthier than before (70).

One of the specific objectives of this study is to explore the relationship between the state of wellbeing and empowerment among the Luo co-wives. As we have discussed in Chapter 2, the way people react to occurrences around them has a central impact on their overall state of wellbeing, since it greatly determines their ability to recognize the power that lies within them. Indeed, studies have found that however 'power' is measured, those with more power are healthier (Smith; Labonte; in 59). Therefore, co-wives looking to move towards the health end of the salutogenesis continuum must exploit the available general resistance resources in their environment and use them to empower themselves.

4.4. Research questions

In light of the above, this study sought to answer the following questions;

a) Why do Luo co-wives continue living in polygamous households despite the adverse health effects?

b) How do Luo co-wives cope with the challenging health environment in polygamous households?

c) What is relationship between empowerment status and quality of life among the Luo co-wives?

5.1. Study site

This study was conducted between June and September 2011 in Kibos, Miwani West sub-location, Kisumu County, Kenya. The site lies about 13kms from Kisumu city – Kenya's third largest town, by population, administration and governance. Kibos is a peri-urban area due to its close proximity to the city of Kisumu. Economic activities for the residents mostly involve casual employment in the nearby sugarcane plantations, industries, and domestic work in the homes of well-to-do employees. Other income generating activities include; selling second-hand clothes, charcoal burning, selling surplus farm produce, retail shops, while a majority of residents also relying on financial support from their children or spouses working in Kisumu or in major towns across the country.

5.2. Sampling strategy

One of the main ideas behind qualitative studies is to purposefully select participants, together with site, for the study. This means that the participants selected are the ones best suited to *"help the researcher understand the problem and the research question"* (71, p. 185). This study used the purposeful sampling procedure to identify the study site and recruit respondents. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with co-wives and community gatekeepers, and one focus group discussion with polygamous men.

5.2.1. Co-wife interviews

Semi-structured interviews were conducted with a total of sixteen (16) co-wives from eight (8) households. A purposive sampling was done based on diverse indicators; co-wife hierarchy and number, husband availability, residence (co-wives living together or apart), education level, and age.

   a) **Co-wife hierarchy/number** – As discussed in Chapter 2, Luo co-wives have an order of seniority, as seen in the arrangement of their houses and inheritance of property. The study sought to explore whether these

privileges confer salutogenic benefit, if any, to the senior wives as opposed to the junior co-wives. Emphasis was placed to strike a balance between households who had three wives and two wives in order to capture as diverse views as possible from as many indicators as the sample allowed. Out of the 8 households, 2 had 3 wives, while the rest had 2 each.

b) **Husband availability** – The study sought to capture views from co-wives whose husbands live far away from home (absentee husbands), living with husband (present husbands), and widowed co-wives (dead husbands). This was important in capturing any peculiar information relating to their coping that might add value to the study. Co-wives from 3 households were widowed (husband dead) while the remaining 5 households had husbands (all present).

c) **Residence** – Traditionally, co-wives were expected to live in the same compound surrounded by one fence. This is, however, changing. Co-wives are increasingly living in separate compounds – either by choice or husband's decision. This shift has a massive influence on the relationship between the co-wives, a factor this study intended to explore. A total of 5 households had co-wives living separately (including one household with 3 co-wives who had one of the co-wives living separately)

d) **Age -** On age, the ultimate goal of most marriages is to produce children. While men can marry women from the same or next generation, women cannot afford to wait a period, because they will lose their fecundity and therefore be essentially worthless to the opposite sex (29). According to the latest Kenya Demographic and Health Survey, half of all Kenyan women enter marriage before their 20th birthday (23). While there is no agreed age upon which women can be said to have mastered the art of coping, this study sought to explore the role played by age in the coping of Luo co-wives (regardless of hierarchy) by identifying peculiar age-related GRRs and coping strategies.

Still on age, this study also took into account the number of years a co-wife had been married into a polygamous household. It sought to find out whether there are any differences in coping between older co-wives and newer ones.

5.2.2. Community gatekeepers

In addition to interviewing co-wives, this study interviewed a total of three community gatekeepers. Community gatekeepers are the men and women charged with the responsibility of effecting norms, values and belief systems in the community. The three community gatekeepers interviewed were; a religious leader, a village elder and a medicine man. They were sampled after a consultative session with the community leaders in the site. The sampling criteria were based on experience (how long they stayed in the study site) and role (religious leader, government administrator, community counsellor, etc). The study sought to explore the community's perceptions towards co-wives, and its contribution towards co-wives' state of wellness.

5.2.3. Group discussion with men

This study also conducted a group discussion with a total of eight (8) polygamous men from the study site. The aim of the discussion was to have an in-depth understanding on the reasons that drive men to be polygamous, their perception towards their respective wives and their take on the acrimonious environment that their wives are in. This particular discussion was important because there was need to weigh the co-wives views against those of their husbands, and in the process have an objective analysis, hence a clear understanding of the situation in polygamous households.

5.3. Inclusion and exclusion criteria

Participants were recruited from a list of polygamous households drafted by the community elders. The sample was arrived at after several consultations with the community elders based on several factors, including - but not limited to; number of co-wives, co-wives' residence (living separately or in one compound), co-wives' age, presence /absence of husband, number of children and co-wives' economic activity.

This study was cognizant of the fact that many men may have one legally married wife and one or more informal unions with other women (12). In addition, the Luo still frequently practice the levirate where a brother of the deceased marries the widow ensuring lineage membership of any future children as well as the continued affiliation of existing children (72). However, this levirate has taken a more casual form with widows remarrying for convenience. During my study, I came across widows who have had informal unions with more than one man and men who had informal unions with several widows. Interestingly, most official wives of these men either do not know that their husbands have affairs outside marriage or are not bothered by them. It is because of these factors that this study chose to focus on men whose co-wives were officially recognized by the community and where co-wives knew the existence of one another.

5.4. Research design

This study adopted a qualitative research design. According to Green & Thorogood, the most basic ways of characterizing qualitative studies is to *"describe their aims as seeking answers to questions about the 'what', 'how' or 'why' of a phenomenon, rather than questions about 'how many' or 'how much'"* (73, p. 5). Qualitative studies, therefore, are often conducted in order to understand more about a phenomenon, rather than measure it (73). I chose a qualitative research design for this study because of the necessity to explore the Luo co-wives' way of life, generalized resistance resources employed and challenges faced in their day-to-day activities. This will help to understand how they cope with those challenges and gravitate towards a higher quality of life.

5.5. Researcher's role

The role of the researcher in a study is very crucial in strengthening or weakening the validity of the findings. According to Creswell (74), the researcher is required to clarify the biases that she/he brings to the study by creating an open and honest account that will resonate well with readers. In this study, there are various potential biases that the researcher was faced with.

To begin with, I come from a polygamous family setup. My father has three wives. I, therefore, had the potential of viewing the co-wives in the same way as I view my stepmothers; a factor that has the potential of greatly affecting the validity of the study results. To minimize such an occurrence, I employed the research aspect of peer debriefing, which involves *"locating a person (peer debriefer) who reviews and asks questions about the study so that the account resonates with people other than the researcher"* (74, p. 192). In this study, the debriefers were my two supervisors.

The researcher took the insider role during the data collection process. I am a native Luo speaker able to read, write and converse fluently in the native Luo linguistic dialect and non-verbal codes. This enabled me to carry out the research without an assistant, or translator. It made it easy for my respondents to connect with me thereby reducing suspicion, apathy and mistrust; and encouraging openness, honesty and truthfulness in the course of the data collection process.

In studies of this nature, there is always a niggling worry about how open and honest the co-wives would be in disclosing sensitive information related (mostly) to their personal lives, to a man. Indeed, issues pertaining to sensitivity and confidentiality of the co-wives' responses had been anticipated in a study of this nature. To encourage openness among the co-wives, the researcher took necessary steps to assure the co-wives of their anonymity to and protection of the data during the entire period of this study. In addition, I started all co-wives' interviews by introducing the content of the interview after which I proceeded to ask whether they were comfortable being interviewed by a man. All the co-wives were comfortable with me interviewing them. This can be credited, to a large extent, to the introductory meetings I had with the local community leaders and the one-on-one pre-introductory 'appointment-booking' sessions I had with sampled co-wives. Before I began to conduct the co-wife interviews – and due to the nature of this study - I was advised by the community gatekeepers to visit the households in the sample frame and have a casual chat with the co-wives. This was an ice-breaking initiative meant to allay any fears the co-wives may have as well as calming their nerves in preparation for the main interview. It is during the introductory sessions that I also made appointments with the co-wives for the real interview dates. This can explain why the co-wives were very receptive to the study.

5.6. Data collection

This study used narrative interviews during the data collection process. This is because narrative interviews *"centre on the stories the subjects tell, (and) on the plots and structures of their accounts"* (75, p.153). This study gathered data using separate semi-structured interview guides, for co-wives and the community gatekeepers in order to capture the specific thematic areas this study expects to explore. Tape recorders were used during interviews to capture the voices of the respondents as this *"frees the interviewer to concentrate on the topic and the dynamics of the interview"* (75, p.179). Notes were taken during interviews, to stress on the emerging thematic areas as well as document the respondents' non-verbal communication that might have been missed by the voice recorders.

For the co-wives, the study sought to understand the factors responsible for their marriage in a polygamous family setup, the inherent GRRs employed, challenges faced, and how they cope. The community gatekeepers, on the other hand, acted as key informants who helped the study with understanding the prevailing norms, beliefs, and attitudes bestowed upon women in polygamous families, the structures put in place to help with the coping, and the response of the women to such structures.

Observations were used, in addition to interviews, to capture the "out of interview" moments that were crucial to the understanding of the context, and content of interviews. Field notes were taken during the entire period and emphasis was placed on occurrences directly related to the study topic.

5.7. Data management

Tape recorders were used to capture discussions during interviews. Field notes were taken to document observations made after which they were entered into a computer Word processor for analysis and storage. The recordings were manually transcribed and harmonized with the notes, to ensure accuracy and reliability, after which they were stored in a Word format, and backed up in separate password protected drives to prevent loss of, and restrict access to the raw and processed data.

5.8. Data analysis

Data collected from this study were manually analyzed using thematic content analysis method that involves analyzing the contents of the data to categorize the recurrent or common 'themes' (73). Coding for this study was "data driven" (75, p. 202) meaning the codes were developed after reading through the data collected from the field. The main aim of doing this was to develop categories that capture the actions and experience studied. Commonly occurring themes were identified and analyzed based on the context on a case-by-case basis. This was not for the generalizing of the case, but for understanding the complexity of the case.

At the end of each day, notes and recordings were transcribed and entered into a Word file for storage. This was done to minimize data loss and prevent backlog. During the analysis stage, the researcher read through every script, highlighting the prominent study themes.

5.9. Validity, reliability and generalizability

5.9.1. Validity

According to Creswell (74), researchers are required to convey the steps they will take in their studies to check for the accuracy and credibility of their findings. Validity is based on *"determining whether the findings are accurate from the standpoint of the researcher, the participants, or the readers of an account"* (Creswell & Miller 2000, in (74, p. 191).

In this study, the researcher used thick, rich descriptions to convey the findings by providing a detailed description of the setting and offer an in-depth discussion of the shared experiences. This will transport the readers to the setting making the results more realistic and richer. In addition, the study employed the 'member checking' technique to determine the accuracy of the findings by *"taking the study themes back to the participants and determining whether the participants feel they are accurate"* (74, p. 191). This was done after every interview where there was a brief recap of

everything discussed whereupon the participant was allowed to ask questions and/or give their views on the interview.

The researcher spent a prolonged time (twelve weeks) in the field in order to develop an in-depth understanding of the phenomenon under study, convey details about the site and people in order to lend credibility to their accounts (74) and build rapport with the participants.

5.9.2. Reliability

To ensure that their approaches are consistent and reliable, qualitative researchers need to document as many steps of their procedures as possible (Yin, 2003 in (74). The researcher crosschecked transcripts to ensure they do not contain obvious mistakes made during transcriptions as well as develop thematic codes for the study findings while constantly comparing the data with the codes to ensure consistency in the study results. Moreover, observation of strict ethical guidelines, constant reference to the study objectives, and meticulous transcription and storage of data were undertaken during the data collection process.

5.9.3. Generalizability

Results from this study may not be applicable in environments outside the study site in which the data were collected. This is because GRRs and coping strategies are dependent on circumstances, resources and structures that are present in that specific environment. However, with the widening of the sample characteristics, results from this study have the potential of being used as a pointer to better understand the subject in other environments with similar, or near similar characteristics.

5.10. Quality assurance

There was translation and back-translation of the data collection tools to and from the local language, making sure that responses received were based on the intended meaning of the questions asked. Tape recorders were used during interviews to capture the responses, with the consent of the participants. In addition, notes were taken to highlight key points arising from the interviews based on the study themes. The tapes were transcribed and stored safely for ease of reference. Transcriptions

were done as soon as an interview was over in order to capture the crucial non-verbal communication codes, in addition to including every detail of the interview.

Being a native *Dholuo* speaker, I was able to fit in very quickly as I understand the culture and the linguistic verbal and non-verbal codes. This greatly helped in the process of observation of verbal and non-verbal communication that was relevant to this study. Furthermore, I crosschecked with my participants on the credibility of the findings before I concluded the data collection process.

5.11.   Ethical Considerations
5.11.1. Informed consent

The study sought the informed consent of participants prior to commencing data collection. Participants were asked to consent to be interviewed as stipulated in the informed consent form, which I have attached to the thesis, in addition to authorizing their voices to be captured on tape. This was done after briefing them about the study, and the consequences of participating in it. Furthermore, the researcher sought consent from the husbands of the co-wives before any co-wife interview began. This is because in the Luo culture, anyone who enters a Luo homestead, without prior knowledge of the head of the home, must make his intentions known before talking to anyone. The husbands are in this case the point of entry into the various homes where I was to conduct my interviews with the co-wives. Additionally, after the research permit had been granted and contacts made, the researcher contacted the local government administrator (the chief? Sub-chief?) as a point of entry into the community.

5.11.2. Data and ethics

According to Kvale & Brinkmann (75), some interviews have painful memories of respondents captured on tape during interviews. Respondents were assured of their anonymity during data storage, analysis and presentation. Instead of entering data using their names, the study assigned specific codes for all the respondents. It is these codes that have been used while referring to the respondents. Moreover, data from this study will be destroyed after a period of two years from the time of data collection period (i.e. October 2013) as stipulated by the Norwegian Data Ethics committee.

5.12.   Study challenges

This study had the potential of raising awareness of the other co-wives – other than the first wife, towards the fact that they are cultural subordinates, a factor that may have led to 'ganging up' against cultural norms thus weakening the already existing familial ties. To minimize such an occurrence, co-wives were led to focus on how they are coping with such cultural differences on the balance of power by narrating their experiences. This was intended to make them focus on the challenges in a positive manner.

A central theme in all fieldwork is the fieldworker-respondent relationship. This is a pivotal issue because it is generally believed that these relationships determine the reliability of the data gathered (76). The study was sensitive to the local practices of power relations within and without the polygamous households. Before conducting any interview, heads of households (customarily men) were approached first to consent to the interview, in cases where the interviews were conducted in homesteads. In addition, the study sought consent from each individual participant.

Another significant factor in the power equation is gender. Being a man, there were fears that problems would arise while interviewing women, especially while involving the disclosure of sensitive information. To bridge this gender gap, the researcher acquainted each co-wife with the interview guide before asking her whether she was comfortable being interviewed by a man – me. Surprisingly, all the co-wives agreed to be interviewed by the researcher. This can be partly attributed to the reconnaissance visits made by the researcher to the various homes with the help of the village elder – which reduced suspicion and encouraged them to be open; since they had got used to seeing me in the field.

Once the permits were in order, the next hurdle I faced was in the mobilization process. Residents in the study site are mostly casual labourers in the nearby sugar plantations and industries. Each day of the week, they wake up early morning to go to work and return late in the evening. This meant that the only day I could comfortably

find them was on Sundays after their routine church sessions. To capitalize on the one-day-a-week data collection process, I drew a timetable – with the help of the village elder who was advising me – detailing how I was to cover all the respondents with the little time available. Together with the village elder, we made prior visits to each and every sampled respondent; booking appointments with them and asking them to avail themselves in view of the timetable developed. This initiative produced an excellent turnout rate and in cases where respondents were not available in the first round of interviews, there were callbacks to reschedule – which were very successful. The idea of having a community leader throughout the entire study period is the reason why I managed to finish the data collection process with two weeks to spare.

Key to codes used in this section;

H – Household

C - Co-wife

R – Respondent (FGD)

CGK – Community Gatekeeper

6.1. INDIVIDUAL INTERVIEWS WITH CO-WIVES

6.1.1. Health challenges faced by the Luo co-wives

In order understand how co-wives cope in their marriages, it is important to trace how they came to be in such a situation. As has been highlighted in the literature review, co-wives married out of love are happier than those married out of customary obligations. Co-wives were asked whether they felt coerced into marriage or did so out of love and free will. There are those who were forced into marriage upon discovering they were going to be co-wives:

> "*When my elder sister heard that my husband already had a wife, she escaped and disappeared to Nairobi to live with one of our relatives; that's when my father called me to convince me to get married to my husband [as compensation]. I tried to resist but I was overpowered.*" (H1C2)

There are those co-wives admitted to making a conscious decision having been given the chance to decide whether they wanted to be co-wives or not.

> "*This man came and tried to convince me to marry him. I told him my reservations on getting married to a polygamous man and he told me that not all men are the same. So I said that I may refuse and maybe this man was a good man and we will live well. So I decided to accept to get married to him.*" (H2C2)

"I tried asking him why he needed another wife yet he already had two. He told me there was a reason why. Then I asked him if at all there would be no issues around my coming in. He told me that marriage is about understanding [one another] and that there would be no issues because he would treat me just the same way as his other wives. After convincing me, I agreed marry him." (H1C3)

However, this should not be construed to mean that the co-wives were prepared to live with a polygamous man. As we shall see later, this assurance by the husbands only acted to prepare the way for the marriage but did little to help the women settle in as co-wives. Most men went against their word, which led the women to regret why they made a choice to enter into such marriages in the first place.

Some co-wives were lucky to have known their husbands' backgrounds due to the close proximity while they were growing up:

"Yes, I knew the background of my husband's family because we had been neighbours at home and so I knew one, two, three things about him and his family." (H1C1)

Majority of these co-wives who had prior interaction with their would-be husbands were married as first wives. While first wives did not enter into the marriage as co-wives, they had a bigger role to play in their husbands' acquisition of a subsequent wife, as we shall see in the discussion section.

Key to the determination of a co-wife's sense of happiness or sadness is the role of the *Jagam* – the mediator. This study encountered many co-wives whose marriages were arranged by either a close friend or relative. Even in these arranged marriages, there are co-wives who were neither consulted nor showed interest in wanting to get married, but the *Jagam* thought it wise to begin marriage negotiations without the co-wives' approval.

"A relative who used to live close here arranged my marriage. When he heard that this man was looking for a second wife, he brought him to me." (H4C2)

However, there are co-wives who actively participated in the process of wife‽ identification and were involved right from the beginning.

> *"My uncle arranged my marriage. Firstly we talked with my uncle and the man who came with my husband. We made an agreement then informed my father who agreed to let me be married. My husband then came home and paid bridewealth – with twenty five heads of cattle."* (H1C1)

> *"I just met with him one day when I was coming these sides. Then we discussed (about being married) and agreed that I come back. Then I came back to see him and his family. Then I went back to our home and he came there after one month is when my father released me to officially marry him. I left our home with my father's and mother's consent."* (H1C3)

There are co-wives who were directly involved in choosing the husband they wanted to be with. However, these co-wives married under circumstances that restricted their choice of husband. In this category, there are those who had already been made pregnant by their would-be husband:

> "*I met my husband when I was still in school. In fact the reason why I married him was because he made me pregnant while I was still in school so I had to quit school and be his wife.*" (H6C1)

> *"I used to live with a relative around here and my [now dead] husband used to be a community doctor. Then he came and requested me to come and help the first wife as a househelp. But he impregnated me and demanded that I marry him. The first wife at first objected to this but the man eventually decided to marry me and that's how I became his wife."* (H5C2)

There are also those who agreed to be co-wives because they had children in their previous marriages and were only looking for a husband to complete the family picture:

"I can say I am feeling good about my life right now. If you compare my life with my first husband, I can say it is better now." (H3C2)

6.1.2. Relationship between co-wives

The relationship between co-wives determines whether they will harmoniously live together in the same compound or antagonize one another, which has a huge bearing on their psychosocial wellbeing. The study sought to know how the co-wives relate to each other as they go about their activities in and out of the home. There are those co-wives who chose whom to relate to depending on their attitude and actions.

"I relate more with the third wife than the second wife. Because when she was married here, she came with a lot of respect for me as the first wife." (H6C1)

"You cannot be in good terms will all of them. You know once you are many co-wives there must be one that you like more than the other. The reason why I have to like one more than the other is because when I talk to that one she is understanding and is quick to come to my help." (H1C1)

This revelation is very critical with regards to the discussion of resistance resources that co-wives employ in order to cope. By choosing which co-wife to relate to, co-wives here exhibit their inherent sense of self-consciousness and democratic choice to associate with those whom are directly responsible for their positive sense of wellbeing, hence a higher quality of life.

Not much, however, can be said of good relations between co-wives. The findings have numerous stories of co-wives plotting sinister acts against fellow co-wives all in a bid to win favours from the husband and to prove that they are the ones who are loved the most:

"When I was away she used to make my children suffer. She even poisoned my children, not once not twice, because she was jealous that my children were doing well academically compared to her children and that they might be taken to school and hers left behind." (H3C1*)*

Such cases of co-wives harbouring malevolent intentions towards fellow co-wives points to a deeply divided home with a less authoritative household head. It also portrays a lack of collective trust and common understanding among co-wives especially in the absence of a shared sense of identity.

6.1.3. Causes of acrimony among co-wives

The study also explored the drivers of co-wife acrimony as a major contributing factor towards decrease in the quality of life among co-wives. Majority of co-wives interviewed admitted to having burning negative perceptions towards their fellow co-wives but always waited for a perfect opportunity to vent out their frustrations:

> *"What usually brings acrimony are children. Sometimes your child has angered your co-wife's child and when you try to arbitrate the co-wife too comes in and the issue is blown out of proportion thereby raising the levels of animosity. She will start saying how you [the co-wife] undermines and disrespects her so it is usually difficult."* (H2C1)

> *"Sometimes the co-wives see me as the evil one, sometimes they see me as someone stupid because [according to them] I let my husband marry other women and that's why they have now taken charge of my husband."* (H1C1)

The study also found out that co-wives constantly live in a state of suspicion and blame each other for the predicaments that befall them:

> *"Then there was another one [co-wife] who ran away because six of her children died because of that problem I had told you earlier about children dying in my husband's lineage. Her family came and took her away saying that I was the one killing her children."* (H1C1)

There is also the perception among the first wives that second or third wives came in to interfere with their marriages and that they were not prepared to watch as their co-wives made their lives miserable. Most co-wives complained of the husband expressing open favouritism to one co-wife in the form of building her an iron-sheet roofed house while the other lives in a grass-thatched one, financing the

secondary/tertiary education of children of the favoured co-wife while leaving the children of the other co-wife at home – some of whom may have outscored their favoured step-siblings in school, giving/sending the favoured co-wife money for household upkeep while ignoring the other co-wife – who most of the time is forced to borrow money and foodstuff from neighbours to clothe, feed and take her children to school. I also noted that most of the co-wives who complained about this were the first wives. According to most of the first wives, their husbands married a second wife because the first wives were seen as *"old, nagging and boring"*. When asked about this, most polygamous husbands agreed that they tend to favour the younger co-wives because the younger co-wives are *"new, young and insecure"* compared to the first wives who are well conversant with their surrounding and hence best suited to adapt. This has led the first wives to refer to the other co-wives as "prostitutes" and "home wreckers"

> *"The first wife sees her co-wives as the ones who came in to destabilize the family. So if you don't want to live a life of regrets, don't be married to a man who already has a wife."* (H6C3)

> *"If I can go back to being a girl, I can only agree to be the first wife so that another wife finds me and not me going to another person's husband. Because if I was to be married as a second or third wife, I will be the one going to destroy other people's marriages."* (H1C1)

Some co-wives attributed co-wife acrimony to a weak husband who has lost control of his home. According to them, husbands should be the uniting force in the home and whenever they fail to do so, there is bound to be antagonism among the co-wives:

> *"Jealousy between us exists because you know what we are both fighting for [the husband] is still alive so there is bound to be jealousy. The cause of this jealousy is the man because this man has a tendency of favouring one wife sometimes spending too much time in the first house."* (H3C2)

"You find that he favours one wife over the others. He frequently goes to that house. Even when it comes to spending the night, you will find that he tends to spend too many nights in one house and the others he just goes once." (H1C2)

6.1.4. Solutions to co-wife acrimony

Co-wives were asked about their thoughts on solutions to acrimony that exists among them. There was a considerable mention of living separately with co-wives having separate homesteads on separate pieces of land. According to them, this would limit the interactions among them and go a long way in easing the tensions brought about by constant interactions:

"The way I see it, the husband should build separate homes for the co-wives if he has sufficient land. That way there will be peace among the co-wives. This will prevent the co-wives from confronting each other now that they are in separate compounds. But when they share the same compound, then there will be no peace in that home, there will be war every time." (H2C2)

Others mentioned the need for the man to be strong and fair in the manner he treats and relates to his wives. He should not be seen to be favouring one co-wife over another, as this will heighten suspicion:

"Take for instance in my family here. My dead husband used to share the co-wives' secrets with every other co-wife. This created antagonisms between us co-wives and that is partly the reason why we had to live separately." (H5C2)

"You must have a strong husband who has the whole home under his control. The husband must not be seen to be favouring one wife over the other. When this does not happen, co-wives will compete for attention from him and this is the source of the jealousy." (H6C3)

"Another problem with polygamy is that if the husband is not strong enough, he will be influenced to lean towards one house. So this is the house that all the (man's) wealth will be going to while abandoning the other wives leaving them to fend for themselves (source of livelihood). So, since I agreed to live

with this man, I have no choice but to stay in this family because there is nothing much I can do." (H1C1)

"I even advised him to develop a schedule where he would spend the night in all the houses on an equal basis. I also told him that he should always distribute everything equally when he comes with things from outside." (H1C2)

During this study, one of the co-wives told me how a fellow co-wife killed her lactating dairy cow because *"only one house was enjoying the milk"*. When I asked her whether she had taken the matter to the husband for arbitration, she responded by saying that the husband is so weak to solve most household matters. Besides, he always takes sides in support of the younger co-wife who killed her cow. The co-wife felt helpless and deserted with no one to help her, a situation which encouraged her co-wife to take advantage of her. As a result of that incident, the two co-wives at the centre of the controversy never see eye-to-eye, despite the futile attempts by the husband to reconcile them – although they still live in the same compound

Some study participants noted that the number of co-wives mattered in dispute resolution:

"My personal opinion is that polygamy is better when there are only two wives involved. Because if they are in constant agreement, it can be a very good thing but if the two co-wives disagree, a wise husband will be neutral and that will leave the man getting loved by both wives (because he will be the unifying factor). But when he marries more than two wives its like a child's play." (H1C1)

6.1.5. Resistance resources among co-wives
6.1.5.1. Spiritual intervention

Despite the challenges co-wives face in living alongside one another, the study sought to identify what still keeps them in the homes and makes them want to continue living. Co-wives mentioned the religious aspect of coping with their stressors. They

attributed their resolve to having faith in God to help them sort out their problems and their belief that things will be better someday:

"When I wake up every morning and find that I am alive and well, I pray to God to keep opening ways for me and give me wisdom to continue moving on." (H4C2)

"There are a lot of interferences (by other co-wives) going around. However, when you are saved (spiritual salvation) like me the salvation in you makes you not to focus on the bad things that happen at home. The salvation in you keeps you moving on." (H1C1)

Some co-wives attributed their strong coping skills to their children whom they are proud of and would not want to suffer like they previously did:

"It is these children. I want them to have a firm foundation, a place where they call home. I don't want them to suffer like I did. I have struggled with my children so much that I cannot leave them to suffer for themselves. When they do well in life, I am very happy." (H6C2)

6.1.5.2. Economic freedom

Yet other co-wives appreciated the fact that their husbands had empowered them to look for sources of income without interfering with them. This made them to have the freedom to decide how to acquire and use their money:

"What motivates me to stay on is the fact that our husband has given us the freedom to go and look for sources of income whenever we want. There are no restrictions as long as we go and acquire the money in a legitimate and honest manner." (H3C2)

6.1.5.3.   The *Jagam*

Some wives relied on the 'go-betweens' whenever they felt the going was tough and wanted to run away:

> *"What made me stay with my husband was my husband's father (father-in-law) who sat me down and told me not to worry about anything. He told me that these things [troubles I was facing] were common everywhere and that I should just persevere and stay with my husband. He even assured me that he would talk to my father to come and take me back to our home in case I could not stay with my husband any more."* (H1C2)

However, not all co-wives admitted to having coping skills to deal with their respective life situations. There were others who noted that they were still married to the man because they had no choice:

> *"No one would allow me to go back home after I am married. There was even an instance when one of my sisters went back to my parents and she was forced to return because according to my father and brothers, a girl who is married should not even have time to come back to her home."* (H5C1)

> *"What makes me to continue living here is the fact that there is nowhere I can go. My father and mother are still alive but they too have children and my father is also a polygamist and not even capable of taking care of my siblings well."* (H5C2)

6.1.6.   Social position

Among the Luo ethnic community, the first wife is usually seen as the second in command after the husband. Most decisions often go through her. The study sought to know the perception of co-wives on this matter and whether, and how, it affected their relationship with the first wife. There were those co-wives who recognized the power that first wife wields but quickly pointed out that she only actualizes this power when the husband has died:

"My co-wife is justified in having power because this is her home with her husband but she will only actualize that power after the death of the husband but when the husband is still alive she doesn't have that power. However, I must always lay low whenever she talks to me because she is my elder here in the home." (H3C2)

Other co-wives strongly supported the first wives' superiority based on the fact that she is the one who has been by the man's side for a long time:

"The first wife is the person who has stood with the man through his ups and downs, and cannot tolerate co-wives who come later after seeing that the man is well off. She won't allow that kind of a woman to be close to her husband." *(H4C2)*

Asked about their superiority, first wives fully supported the idea of them being the heads of the other wives and that they would do anything to maintain that position:

"The first wife is the owner of the homestead. If the first wife decides to kill the other wives, she will do that because culture bestows upon her some powers that her co-wives do not have. Everything that happens in this home must pass through the first wife." (H6C1)

"I do not want to be a slave to a fellow woman so when I was approached to allow my husband marry a second wife I agreed because it was up to the second wife to agree to come and suffer." (H1C1)

6.1.7.   How can the co-wife's quality of life be enhanced?
6.1.7.1.   Be the senior wife

Based on their experiences with being co-wives, the study sought to know what advise the co-wives would give to girls who are intending to be married as subsequent wives. There are those who would only advise someone to be a co-wife if they were going to be married as first wives:

"What I can tell her is that being a co-wife is very difficult. It is only good when you are the first. I would advice her not to because some co-wives are so troublesome. If she wants peace, she should not allow herself to be married as a co-wife." (H4C1)

Other women would only agree to be co-wives on condition that they are the first wives, a clear indication that first wives are more valued in the society than the others:

"If I were to go back to be being a girl, I would only be a co-wife if I were the first wife. When you are the first wife, you are the strength of your home and other co-wives cannot scare you." (H4C1)

6.1.8. Live harmoniously with fellow co-wives

Some of the women noted that they would not discourage young women from being married as co-wives but would advise them on how to live harmoniously with their fellow co-wives:

"I will tell her to love the co-wife, the co-wife's children and be keen on the husband and never allow him to be close to her more than the other co-wives. This will build a cordial relationship between you as co-wives and you will live well." (H2C1)

This call by co-wives to live harmoniously among one another was mostly made by widowed co-wives (whose husbands are dead). All the widowed co-wives I talked to mentioned the fact that they felt closer now than when their husband was still alive, and that there is need for them to be united because whoever they used to run to was now no more;

"When I am sick, the first person to come and help me out is my co-wife. But when you and your co-wife are not in a cordial relationship, she will not be obliged to help you. So you and your co-wife must be in good terms to help one another." (H4C1)

"When our husband died, she kept on telling villagers not to help me and that I would run away and go back to our home because of hunger... now she is the one who comes here and talks well with me. She was surprised when I stayed. Now we live well and in good terms." (H5C2)

6.1.9. Patience

Other women would advice would-be co-wives to be patient and courageous because their problems will reduce with time:

"Being a co-wife comes with very many responsibilities and you have to be patient and strong. Not someone who starts fighting whenever you hear something that displeases you. That is not advisable and you will be beaten [by your husband] if that happens. Even when your husband does something wrong, you have to treat him like a child and continue doing good eventually he will tire and you will live happily together" (H1C1)

6.1.10. Avoid being a co-wife, if you can

Co-wives were also asked if they would reconsider being co-wives now that they have had an experience. There were those who categorically refused to consider being a co-wife as they narrated their regrets:

"I wouldn't consider that. There is nothing good I have seen by being a co-wife. I have seen my children go through the hard times without the support of my husband or anyone. It has been a struggle." (H6C2)

"Before I got married, my mother advised me against marrying somebody who already had a wife. I wish I listened to her. Soon after getting married, she came with an admission letter from the school (secondary). I still regret not listening to her. Right now I would have been a medical doctor had I gone to school." (H6C3)

"I will tell her to look for her own husband. There are a lot of issues in a polygamous family that she should not even contemplate going to be married

by somebody's husband. That will mean that you are looking for unnecessary trouble." (H1C2)

6.1.11. Community perceptions

Co-wives were asked the general perception of community members towards polygamy. There are some community members who see polygamy as very convenient and desirable to the men:

> *"They say that a polygamous man feels very good. During meal times, all the women cook different foods and bring them to one table and so the man is spoilt for choice. For this reason, they think that polygamous men are always eating to their fill they even come to ask them to help them get extra wives so that they too can feel good like them."* (H1C2)

Some community members also prefer polygamy because of the prestige attached to having children:

> *"They even say that if they get one wife to give them four children and another also four children, they will be rich in children… (laughs). They think that having children is a source of wealth."* (H1C2)

6.2. GROUP DISCUSSION WITH POLYGAMOUS MEN

6.2.1. Reasons for polygamy

The study also sought to gather the views of polygamous men on how they interact with their wives. They were first asked why they chose to marry more than one wife. Most of them attributed their polygamous status to their first wives:

> *"The first wife was lazy at performing household chores such as washing clothes and cooking, and was most of the time tough-headed and didn't listen to me. The only medicine to that was to marry another wife because domestic violence would not solve the issues."* (R2)

"My first wife was too troublesome and difficult to relate with. So I thought about it [the solution] and decided to marry another wife to bring harmony and peace at home." (R6)

"Another reason is that the Luo valued the boy child more than the girl child. There was, and still is, a feeling that if you don't give birth to a boy, your genealogy will end. So a woman must continue to give birth until she gives birth to a boy or else a man will be forced to marry another wife to get the elusive boy child in order to safeguard his lineage. Girls would be married off and will go away from you leaving you with no one at home." (R2)

"The first wife was proving difficult to handle and she constantly threatened to run away from home and so I chose to marry another one to make her settle down because she knew that even if she left, another one will be around to take over from her" (R1)

Some admitted to being polygamous in order to gain recognition in the village and to acquire a new, if not higher, status:

"There are many instances where monogamous men have been ridiculed by polygamous men and sometimes not even allowed to talk in the presence of polygamous men. This is because there is opinion out there that polygamous men are more responsible due to their ability to maintain many women and feed many children as compared to their monogamous counterparts." (R5)

"A polygamous man is always the best arbitrator and administrator. This is because he has dealt with many issues among his many children and wives and so he can be trusted to take charge of a larger group of people." (R7)

6.2.2. Views on co-wife acrimony

The study also sought to explore the views of the polygamous men towards co-wife acrimony, its causes and the remedial measures they put in place to avert it, if any. There was a general agreement that favouritism by the men was a key determinant of

the nature and extent of co-wife acrimony. Women hate men who share sensitive information regarding them with their co-wives:

> *"Women hate men who gossip about them with other women least of all their co-wives. They feel insecure and lose trust for such men and when that man is her husband, you know she will not take it lightly."* (R2)

> *"A polygamous man should not gossip with his wives. If there is an issue that has the potential of causing a controversy between the wives, a responsible polygamist should bring them together and solve the issue amicably."* (R5)

There was a general feeling that a polygamous man should firmly be in control of his homestead. Those polygamists who allow their wives to quarrel in their presence were regarded as weak and not fit to be polygamists:

> *"A polygamist should be strong in order not to be overwhelmed. Polygamists who allow their wives to fight are those who aren't mature and not ready to be polygamists."* (R1)

6.2.3. Did you consult your first-wife before you married the second?

The study sought to know whether there was dialogue with the first wife before the second wife was married or the decision was made unilaterally by the man. Some men said that the decision to marry a second wife was done after consultations with their parents in order to further the family's lineage:

> *"My father advised me to be polygamous because of my lineage. I was the only son in our family and so I was advised by my father to break that jinx and be a polygamist so that I extend the lineage and not be like my father and those before him."* (R3)

Yet others admitted to marrying a second wife to assist the first in the family duties including looking after the home and children when one was away:

"I wanted to be a religious leader before I became polygamous. However, one day when I came home from work in the evening, I found my 1ˢᵗ wife had abandoned my children and they were crawling in the dark to the neighbouring home to seek for safety. I was so agitated and wanted to beat my wife. However, I calmed down and decided that the only way to end the suffering of my kids is to marry another wife." (R6)

6.2.4. The Children Factor

One of the reasons for co-wife confrontation is the child. The number and age of children determines whether, and how, they interact amongst themselves. Men were asked what they consider when deciding the number of children they wanted to have with each wife:

"Having children is left to God. God is the one who plans how many children we should have." (R4)

"Before your wife has other children, take care of the first wife's children, take them to school so that they can get jobs. That way, you can rely on those children to take care of their siblings who are still coming up and relieve you of the burden of parenthood and paying school fees." (R3)

"Its advisable to teach the children to love one another regardless of which mother they belong to. This will see the kids take care of each other. It is like training the children to be better and more responsible parents in future by forgetting their differences and working together." (R1)

6.2.5. Co-wives living separately

During the data collection period, it is notable that some co-wives were living in separate compounds yet they were still married to the same man. The men had the following to say:

"No woman agrees with her co-wife. The jealousy among the two does not allow them to see eye-to-eye and when attempts at making them peaceful sometimes do not materialize, the only way to make peace among them is to

take one wife to a separate compound where she will not be in confrontation with the other one." (R5)

"[Traditionally] the first wife is always the first one to start farming activities before she paves way for her co-wives. This makes the other wives her subordinates and forces them to bow down to anything the first wife says because the first wife can frustrate the co-wives and they might die of hunger due to farming late. If they have separate compounds, then they operate autonomously, hence no quarrels." (R1)

6.3. In-depth interviews with community gatekeepers

6.3.1. The village elder

The village elder is the government representative charged with effecting law and order at the village level. Her job description involves;

"I resolve disputes among the villagers. Mostly they involve less criminal acts like domestic violence. However, if there is a case where blood has been shed, I usually hand over to my seniors and the police." (CGK 1)

There was need to ascertain how the village elder benefits from her position and whether she, as a government representative, was on the government's payroll. This was crucial because it would determine how effective and non-partisan she is while discharging justice to rich and poor villagers alike.

"There is no formal payment process. We are usually told that the government shall pay us but that hasn't come yet. However, I usually get paid indirectly through the cases that we solve when the petitioners and the accused pay fines to facilitate the dispute resolution process." (CGK 1)

The village elder was asked about her opinions on polygamy. This was necessary because it would shape how she handled cases involving co-wives and their husbands:

"Polygamy is both good and bad. I was born in a polygamous family and sometimes I used to see whenever my mother was sick, her co-wife would help in her household chores like fetching water for her and cooking for us. The bad side was that sometimes we could go hungry but the other house had food and my father would not allow my other mother to give us food despite the fact that they had it." (CGK 1)

With that background in mind, she was asked about the strategy she uses to solve disputes involving co-wives and their husbands:

"When they come, I first listen to the man then ask the wife what might be the problem. In fact I usually call all the involved parties together when I talk to them. That way, you can know all the underlying issues from both sides without being partisan. However, after talking to them all, I will secretly call the husband to admonish him against favouring one wife over the other. Because it's the husband to bring the co-wives together since women will always be jealous." (CGK 1)

I also sought to know the community's perception towards polygamous families in this area. I asked her this question for two reasons. One, she is an authority who interacts with both polygamous and monogamous families alike and will be better placed to give a fair assessment on the same. Two, the same question had been asked of the men and the co-wives, and I was curious to know whether I would get the same answer or something new to add onto my findings.

"The community sees what is going on here but they will not tell you whenever you are going wrong because they are afraid they will be accused of involving themselves in other people's affairs. You will only hear them talk about it after the person is dead or when he/she is about to die." (CGK 1)

6.3.2. The religious Leader – Voice of Salvation church

The study sought to know how close the religious leader is with his congregation. This was important because it determined how he responds to the spiritual needs of his church members.

> *"[When members have problems] they can come to my house, or I visit them in their houses depending on the nature of the problem. If the problem is a domestic issue, I often go to their homes"* (CGK 2)

Most mainstream churches do not encourage polygamy according to the Biblical teachings. This study sought to know whether the spiritual leader had any history of polygamy and his personal views of polygamy:

> *"I was born and lived in a polygamous family but I am a monogamous man. I cannot say polygamy is good or bad but the goodness or badness of polygamy will be seen from the way the man of the home maintains his position among his wives. Where I used to live, I didn't see any bad side of polygamy because my father treated all his wives equally."* (CGK 2)

The study also sought to know whether the church discriminates against polygamous members:

> *"No. We are only interested in their hearts. Once they are born again (receive spiritual salvation), we wholeheartedly accept them in the church and at our level."* (CGK 2)

But…

> *" A polygamous man is not allowed to occupy some leadership positions in the church like being a pastor because the church doesn't trust polygamous men because they are not entirely righteous. The man must agree to remain with one wife, which is always not possible because we don't encourage divorce in the church."* (CGK 2)

And what does the Bible say about polygamy?

"If you came to the church after marrying more than one wife, the bible doesn't tell you to divorce the others and remain with one wife. We are only interested in your soul. If you are righteous in your state of polygamy then the church accepts you as a member. But if you married another wife after joining the church, then that is wrong according to the bible. That is like prostitution." (CGK 2)

Why don't you trust polygamous men with leadership positions in the church?

"The bible says that God created man and after creation He removed only one rib to make one wife. And once you have two wives, there is no place in the bible where God removed two ribs to create two women. So once you have married more than one wife, you totally run parallel to the word of God." (CGK 2)

The study sought to understand the church's perception towards the co-wives in relation to its monogamy rule. This was important in ascertaining whether the church treated the first wives in a special way as opposed to the other co-wives, as this might have a consequence on state of wellbeing of the co-wives.

"God created one woman for one man and when another woman comes in, she doesn't get counted as the husband's wife in fact she is a prostitute because the first wife had plucked the man's rib. So the first wife is the man's legitimate wife, other women are just thieves who came to steal the first wife's man away." (CGK 2)

From the discussion with the spiritual leader, it was clear that the church's message on monogamy was not being taken seriously because the study site still had members of the congregation going ahead and marrying more than one wife. I sought to ask him why this was the case.

"Firstly, some think [our message of monogamy] is a waste of time. Secondly, even Jesus Christ had a problem in his hometown of Jerusalem. People disregarded his advice because they questioned his background as a carpenter's son. It is the same case here; these people don't listen to me because they know my parents and family but outside we have converted a lot of people." (CGK 2)

6.3.3. The Medicine man

a) Role in the community

Just like majority of residents in the study site, the medicine man was born far away but was resettled in the study site after they were displaced by flash floods. That was in 1970. He has no formal training in medicine, as his late grandfather handed down the skills to him. He treats ailments ranging from snakebites, water-borne diseases, fever and those related to broken cultural traditions (among the Luo, when you break a set of cultural traditions, it is believed that a curse befalls you). Most of the drugs he uses are extracted from plants growing in nearby bushes:

"I usually get these herbs in the forests around here. In fact, I have a natural forest close to my neighbourhood, which I guard against being exploited just to preserve my herbs. I usually go to get the herbs after a patient has come to me with an ailment however, for snakebites I have already made anti-venom that I keep in the house because of the urgency of treating snakebites." (CGK 3)

b) Association with polygamy

The study sought to know whether the medicine man had a prior experience living in a polygamous environment and if he had, how it influenced both his personal and professional choices in life:

"No, my father had one wife and I am married to one wife too. I don't discriminate any of my patients whether they come from polygamous families or not. All you want is to treat them and make them well and that is your satisfaction as a service provider." (CGK 3)

c) Interaction with co-wives

The study sought to know whether the medicine man has had interactions with co-wives and what kind of ailments they commonly report to him. This was integral in understanding, from a medical perspective, the health challenges of co-wives and how they are addressed when they seek help:

> *"I have seen co-wives go out to witchdoctors to look for medicine that will give them unfair advantage over the other co-wives. But I don't deal with those."* (CGK 3)

d) Common ailments

The study sought to know the common illnesses being reported by the members of the community for treatment and medical care. This was important in gauging whether marriage-related 'diseases' are a common occurrence and how the medicine man handled them in his case.

> *"There are a number of children-related illnesses. Among the adults, most ailments are those that are occasioned by breaking cultural taboos mostly regarding to marriage. Some of these cases are delicate and it requires utmost care whenever prescribing a cure."* (CGK 3)

It is important to note that illnesses occasioned by the breakdown of cultural taboos cannot be treated by conventional means – in a health facility. This is why the medicine man comes in handy because he diagnoses these illnesses from a cultural perspective. With these results in mind, there is need to turn attention to the discussion section where we shall put the findings into perspective in line with the study objectives and thematic areas.

Based on the study objectives, the study has established the existence of a connection between co-wives' health and the challenges they go through in order to cope with the highs and lows of everyday life. Different co-wives gave different stumbling blocks to their attainment of a healthy wellbeing. Much of it can be traced from the way they were married, with many admitting that it was never their freewill to enter into a marriage contract with their current husbands. Now that they have been married and settled in, there are a number of resistant resources that the co-wives have employed to cope with adversity and the hope of leading a healthy life. Then there is the relationship between co-wives' state of wellbeing and level of (dis)empowerment. As has been noted, the co-wives have engaged themselves in various socio-economic activities in order to raise their standards of living. Those who have none have put mechanisms in place to guarantee them a steady source of income, like relying on their respective husbands or calling on their children for help. Let us now look at these thematic areas one after the other.

7.1. Health challenges

7.1.1. Mental health

One of the many factors that create acrimony among co-wives is competition for resources. This is because women living in areas of higher prevalence of polygamy often experience limited resources, stemming in part from the husband's commensurately stretched resources (Al-Krenawi & Graham, 1999; in 18). This competition for resources has been shown to result in confrontation between the co-wives, which can be fatal. Take for example that co-wife whose lactating cow was killed by her fellow co-wife because *"only one house was enjoying the milk"*. It demonstrates the extent to which co-wives are willing to go in order to 'even the scores' and gain the upper hand in resource allocation and distribution within the family. That incident has since created a dangerous enmity between those two co-wives who never see eye-to-eye, despite the futile attempts by the husband to reconcile them – although they still live in the same compound. These negative

manifestations of jealousy among co-wives have the potential of leading to the breakdown of peace enjoyed within the homestead thereby breaking the (at least nominal) bonds holding the polygamous family together.

Co-wife jealousy is not only limited to Luo marriages. Problems of human relationships abound in any society, and the Luo are no exception. Potash's (24) study noted a belief that jealousy among co-wives is endemic and largely unavoidable although a good husband can minimize overt conflict by giving equal treatment and attention to his wives. The co-wives in my study shared this view. Most co-wives believed that if their husbands would treat them equally without showing open preferences to a particular co-wife, then their chances of feuding would be greatly minimized, even eliminated. However, polygamous husbands in this study attributed co-wife jealousy to "natural deep-seated differences" among women, a situation that is exacerbated by sharing a husband. According to the polygamous husbands, women are always jealous of one another, regardless of whether they share a commonality or not. All this negativity is inflated whenever women share a husband, a situation that heightens the negative competition, sowing seeds of discord and hate among the co-wives and children. According to the polygamous husbands, their wives are always paranoid whenever they spend time with the other, always thinking that the husband is sharing her secrets with the other wife. This environment of suspicion among co-wives has the potential of taking a calamitous life of its own, as we saw earlier with the lactating cow. The husbands admit that only when they are defeated in bringing the co-wives into an amicable resolution do they resort to measures such as allowing them to live in separate compounds among others.

A co-wife feels jealous about another when she feels deprived of rewards and benefits the husband gives to the other co-wife. Some literature has fronted the argument that jealousy among co-wives may result more from a desire for material goods and less from a sense of emotional abandonment (39). This is an interesting finding that should be explored in further research. In a bid to ascertain the role husbands play in antagonizing the co-wives, this study found out that co-wives whose husbands are dead have a weakened sense of jealousy and tend to be more supportive towards one another. According such co-wives, the death of a husband robs the wife of the first line of defence in the home and it leaves the co-wives vulnerable. As a result, co-

wives realize that the husband they used to depend upon is no more and that they have to be in good terms in order to survive in the home especially in times of calamities like sickness. This newfound friendship among widowed co-wives can be adduced to support the notion that husbands are the chief source of co-wife animosity in polygamous homesteads.

7.1.2. Social health

The ability of a co-wife to utilize the individual and community networks around her greatly affects her state of health. No one wants to be alone. Often, the perception that we are loved or supported is important to our health status. Indeed, it is beneficial to see ourselves as embedded in a mutually supportive social network (Cohen & Syme, 1985 in 77). Social support may have an effect on health in at least two ways. Higher levels of social support may either impact health directly, or it may help to decrease stress. In either case, social support may help to increase positive emotions such as hope, confidence, or a feeling of security (77).

The study also found that social relationships among the co-wives could be made or broken by the husband. Co-wives narrated how husbands failed to consult them in crucial decisions such as marrying an additional wife, resource allocation in the home, children's education, among others. Most co-wives complained that husbands expressed open favouritism to a specific co-wife. Such favours come in the form of building the favoured co-wife an iron-sheet roofed house while the other lives in a grass-thatched one, financing the secondary/tertiary education of children of the favoured co-wife while leaving the children of the other co-wife at home – some of whom may have outscored their favoured step-siblings in school, giving/sending the favoured co-wife money for household upkeep while ignoring the other co-wife – who most of the time is forced to borrow money and foodstuff from neighbours to clothe, feed and take her children to school. According to most of the first wives, one of the reasons why their husbands marry a second wife is because the first wives are seen as *"old, nagging and boring"*. When asked about this, most polygamous husbands agreed that they tend to favour the younger co-wives because the younger co-wives are *"new, young and insecure"* compared to the first wives who are well conversant with their surrounding and hence best suited to adapt. This open show of favouritism has created an environment of suspicion and vendetta with most first

wives seeing the newly married wives as *"prostitutes"* and *"home wreckers"* – terms that are associated with women who come into the family to plunder, destroy and leave in ruins.

Interestingly, this sense of arrested social interaction within the family is not reflected at the community level. Co-wives and polygamous men were highly rated by other community members. When asked how the community perceives co-wives and polygamous men, both co-wives and polygamous men agreed that they are the envy of many community members most of whom are monogamous. This is because community members admire the perceived sense of unity and organization of polygamous families especially during social functions - funerals, marriage ceremonies, among others. However, these views were gathered from the co-wives and polygamous men themselves who might have a higher tendency of justifying their marital position especially when weighed against those of the outside community. When I asked the village elder on the community's perception towards polygamous families, she revealed that most community members see a lot of things going wrong in polygamous homes but are not able to help out for fear of being accused of involving themselves in other people's marital affairs. It is only when the person is dead or about to die, do you hear community members speak about these problems (in polygamous households) often in hushed tones. As such, polygamous men and their co-wives live in a false world of reverence by thinking that community members envy them for their prosperity and status. However, it can be argued that this can be seen as one of the resistance resources that polygamous men and co-wives employ to attract positivity in their lives hence coping.

7.2. Coping with stressors

7.2.1. Belief in the supernatural

As has been discussed earlier, a Luo co-wife requires a great deal of mental and physical willpower to overcome the challenges that comes with being a co-wife. This study sought to understand whether Luo co-wives manage to cope despite the documented adversities they are facing, and if so, how do they do it.

The ability of a Luo co-wife to cope with the challenges she faces depends on two factors; (i) the identification of relevant resistances resources around her, and (ii) the utilization of these resistance resources towards the greater good, i.e. using them to cope with her internal and external environment. Generalised resistance resources (GRRs) are very important to a co-wife because, according to Antonovsky (56), they provide life experiences that promote a strong sense of coherence (SoC). One of the components of the SoC is manageability. Manageability, Lothe (78) explains, suggests that the person feels that he/she is able to handle problems either through his/her own resources, expert help, or help from a legitimate authority like God. Most co-wives mentioned their deep-rooted belief in God as one of the ways of drawing inner strength towards coping with the challenges they faced. According to them, whenever they faced a difficulty, one of the first actions they took was to seek divine intervention. They would either kneel down in their houses and *"talk to God"*, through prayer, to provide a way out or they would seek guidance from their spiritual leader (usually a Church elder) who would in turn offer them valuable spiritual advice and/or pray for them.

According to Løgstrup (78), religious faith manifests itself in relation to powerlessness, linked to a perception of no escape. One does not need proof to have faith. Faith in this case, therefore, seems to be an important dimension of hope without which the bearer would have nothing more other than to see life as unworthy and meaningless. Most Luo co-wives, in my study, see the church as one of the places where they run to seek refuge in times of need. Such refuge comes in the form of spiritual nourishment where the church elder refers to Biblical teachings on how to stand firm in the face of adversity. This belief in an unseen supernatural power who *"helps us in times of need"* goes a long way in strengthening their resolve to live on with the hope that things will be better someday. Co-wives who are active church members attributed their association with the church to the special treatment they are accorded – especially widows and the poor. Most co-wives I interviewed had left their churches to join the Christian Believers Fellowship (CBF). This Church is the latest in a list of churches that have come into the area to seek converts. They woo followers by enrolling them into sustainable economic activities e.g. buying them farm tools and implements for those who want to venture into agriculture, enrols orphaned and vulnerable children to schools and pays for their schools fees until they attain the age

of 18 years, among other initiatives that are geared towards easing the burden off the shoulders of church members. As a result, co-wives – most of whom their husbands are either deceased, absent or financially weak, have decamped to the CBF in search of both spiritual and financial security.

The acceptance of polygamous men and co-wives into the mainstream Church has been a subject of controversy. Most Christian churches in postcolonial Africa either banned, or severely restricted the participation of polygamous church members. Indeed, Christianity is founded on the one-man-one-wife principle. However, there is evidence to show that missionaries who came to Africa to spread Christianity tolerated polygamists. They argued that *"whatever the status of polygamy in church canons, divorce was clearly forbidden"* (79, p. 170). This meant that the African convert could not discard his wives hence retaining his polygamy status. One of the community gatekeepers who is a religious leader (of another local church) shared the same principle. His point was that the church should be a place where people seek solace whenever they are in despair, and denying them that opportunity based on their marital background is unfair. However, he noted that there are leadership positions in the church that polygamists are not, and cannot, be allowed to hold. He related this to the fact that if a polygamous man was put in charge of a pastorate position, there was a high likelihood that the person would infiltrate their polygamous ideologies in the church, which were against the Biblical teachings of monogamy.

7.2.2. Joy in children

One of the most powerful resources that the Luo co-wives banked on was children. As Antonovsky (80) found out among the Israeli soldiers in Vietnam, *"a person who has someone who cares for him is likely to more adequately resolve tension than one who does not…simply knowing that this care is available to one increases one's strength"* (80, p. 542). In many African countries, governments lack the resources to provide adequately for elderly people, and as a consequence, they rely on care and support provided by their children. The absence of children profoundly affects social security in old age (81). Parents are always keen to bring out the best in their children knowing that they might need their support especially in old age. This parent-child reciprocity was aptly captured during my study as one of the resistance resources that enables the

Luo co-wives to cope with stress. Co-wives mentioned their children as one of their greatest pillars of strength. Most of them reported being happy with seeing their children do well in school and at the workplace saying that it was as a result of them taking care of their children well. As discussed in the previous sections of this manuscript, co-wives are always in a constant state of competition – on whose child is the cleverest in school, most prosperous in life and so on. This competition has forced the co-wives to provide the best for their children in a bid to prove who is the best parent. By focusing on the development of their children, co-wives released some of the pressures they faced from the acrimonious competition from fellow co-wives. The positive development of their children not only promises them help in old age but also increased their sense of self-esteem and belongingness. In addition to supporting their parents financially, this study also found out that children offered emotional support to their mothers in times of loneliness and grief. Co-wives mentioned that it brought them tremendous joy when they saw their children happy as well as rejuvenating them to continue with the caring. The answer to this compact association between mothers and their children can be found in another study in Zimbabwe, which established that women desired children because they provided them with emotional security, which they did not experience in their relationships with their partners (husband) due to disempowerment (Runganga, Sundby, Aggleton, 2001; in 81).

7.2.3.   The *Jagam*

One of the most peculiar resistance resources among the Luo co-wives is the *Jagam*. A Luo intending to marry was duty bound to establish the existence of kinship relations, inheritable diseases, deviant and harmful socio-cultural practices in the partner's bloodline. If confirmed, the marriage would be called off and the partners advised to look elsewhere. The *Jagam*, therefore, was crucial in cementing the relationship between the two parties before and after marriage.

The role of *Jagam* has constantly been questioned in today's marriages involving the Luo – with specific reference to changing marital patterns. As Kenya rapidly industrializes, rural-urban migration has become the norm. This has redefined the mode of interaction of marriage partners due to the ever- increasing one-on-one interaction by potential couples; a factor that has led to the role of marriage intermediaries being overlooked. However, this study found out that the role of the

Jagam still exists in Luo marriages although the approach and execution is different from the culturally recognized form. When asked on how they first met and eventually married, almost every co-wife tells the same story. Most co-wives either lived with a brother, a cousin, an aunt, an uncle or a sister before they got married. These close relatives acted as the intermediaries or *Jagams* and were directly or indirectly involved in the marriage negotiations by 'connecting' the marriage partners, arranging their meetings, providing a venue for the negotiations – usually in their houses, and even acting as a point of reference whenever the negotiations broke down, among other facilitation modes. It is these new generation *Jagams* that the co-wives first ran to for emotional support in turbulent times before they sort help elsewhere.

The intermediary role of the *Jagam* among married couples, therefore, can be seen as very important whenever a marriage is in turmoil and an objective voice needed. In the same vein, this study found out that most co-wives who had had problems at some point in their marriages had consulted the respective *Jagams* on how to handle the said situation. This is a strong indication that co-wives regard *Jagams* as one of their foremost resistance resources whenever they are going through challenges in their marriages. These consultations ranges from the consultative *"how do I deal with the inherent co-wife acrimony"* to the decisive *"should I leave my husband or not?"* To most of the co-wives, the *Jagam* is like a personal confidant and a marriage counsellor whom they run to especially when they are experiencing difficult times in their marriages. The feeling that they have someone, who helps them in times of need, made them happy, boosted their morale and enhanced their purpose in life.

7.3. Are the co-wives empowered or not?

The reason why I have began this sub-section with a question is because we have seen how the co-wives manage to draw upon several resistance resources to help them cope. However, there is need to view the resources as a means towards coping and not an end in themselves. This is because the resistance resources are operational within the context of empowerment and there is need to interrogate the study findings and see whether the resistance resources employed by the co-wives actually empowered them, and if so, to what level.

During my discussion with polygamous men, various reasons for marrying more than one wife came up. Most men married a second wife because either the first wife could not give birth to a boy, was lazy at performing household chores, too antagonistic to listen to the man's views, constantly threatening to leave the man, while others married a second wife because the first wife could not keep up with the man's sexual desires. Marrying a second wife, according to the men, would bring some semblance of harmony into the home and raise the level of competition among the co-wives. It is this level of competition that has been the source of conflicts between co-wives and one that has been underlined by the social position that a co-wife commands in the marriage.

Among the Luo, the house of the senior wife, *Mikayi*, occupies a space directly opposite the gate, *Rangach*. From the position of her door, all the village houses have their frame of reference. The houses are always arranged in the order of seniority. This order of seniority is strictly followed in the division and inheritance of land, in the marriage of their children, in determining who shall take over the lineage leadership and so on (22), and was very evident in the responses I got from the co-wives during the study. First wives whom I talked to justified their superior position by claiming to be the legitimate wives. Second and third wives were mostly looked down upon as opportunists with terms such as 'prostitute' and 'home wrecker' commonly used. Asked what was their view, most second and third wives surprisingly agreed that the first wife should be accorded maximum respect, dignity and honour. According to them, it is the first wife who has lived with the man, seen him change from a boy to a man and is the best placed person to know the husband's weaknesses, strengths and secrets. They observed that were they to go back to being girls, they would have chosen to be the first wife and be highly regarded.

Some second and third wives, however, blamed the first wife for the predicaments that they were facing. One of the co-wives even ran away after claiming that the first wife was responsible for the death of her six children. According to Al-Krenawi (35), first wives always suffer from low self-esteem and marital dissatisfaction whenever their husbands marry an additional wife. This decline in self-esteem is caused by the lingering worry that their husbands perceive them as old, and that they have failed to meet their husbands' and communities' expectations of successful wives. Moreover,

frequent, and often intense, competition and jealousy between the co-wives could exacerbate marital tensions. During my study, most first wives expressed their frustrations with their husbands for marrying additional wives often without their consent. This brings an emotional burden to the affected women as they blame themselves for being responsible even without knowing what they did wrong that warranted their husbands remarriage. The situation is made worse by the husband's preference to the newly married co-wife by diverting resources and preferring to spend more nights in the new house compared to the first wife's.

During my study, I noted that some co-wives were living in separate compounds each with its own gate. On exploration, co-wives attributed this to the tensions and acrimony between them that had gone overboard making it no longer tenable to live together in one compound. Co-wives going separate ways can be seen to be the epitome of unmanageable tensions that threatens to tear down the very fabric of a polygamous family. In my discussion with the men, most of them admitted that there is nothing a man can do to prevent a woman who wants to live in her own compound; adding that before a man decides to let his co-wives live in separate compounds, he must have exhausted all the avenues for dialogue and reconciliation. All this means that the second or third wives who cannot play second fiddle to the first wife now have the option of demanding for an opportunity to live separately from the first wife. Indeed, co-wives (other than the first wife) who had parted ways and were now living in different compounds expressed their joy of finally having 'a peace of mind' which they could not get when they used to live in one compound. Having a compound of one's own gives them the freedom and authority to run their household affairs without reference to the first wife who is culturally the head of the co-wives living in one compound. This newfound independence can be said to have a direct effect on the rise of co-wife satisfaction, happiness and consequently positive sense of wellbeing.

7.4. What has this study yielded?

After presenting the results and discussing the findings, there is need to ask whether this study has achieved the various objectives it set out to find. Our results have shown that Luo co-wives go through monumental challenges at the cultural, economic and psychological levels. All these stumbling blocks have a huge bearing on the co-wife's overall state of health by affecting their ability to have a settled frame of mind.

The results have also revealed that most of these challenges the co-wives go through were brought about as a result of a forced choice of marriage partner or lack of preparedness to be a co-wife; a situation that made them come into the marriage at a disadvantaged position with a lesser influence on their marital destiny, hence the emotional pileup and the subsequent state of ill-health. To offset this disadvantage, this study found that co-wives are forced to bank on several resistance resources in order to keep themselves afloat as they strive to reach the overall state of wellbeing and consequently improve their quality of life.

This study has also revealed that the Luo co-wives draw upon a wide array of generalised resistance resources in their quest towards coping with adversities in life. The most commonly mentioned resistance resource is the reliance on a supernatural power (in this case, God) to save them in times of socio-economic distress. This divine intervention has been made easier by the fact that most of these co-wives belong to churches whose religious leaders are so supportive especially towards widowed co-wives. Religion, they say, offers them solace by lessening their earthly burdens, drowns their sorrows and gives them a much needed emotional and spiritual lift, enough to put them on course towards achieving an improved state of healthy wellbeing.

Perhaps the most revealing of discoveries has been the relationship between the overall state of wellness and empowerment among the Luo co-wives. In this objective, this study set out to explore whether the Luo co-wives are empowered or disempowered, and in each case, what are the indicators that can be used to gauge the levels of empowerment and/or disempowerment for this particular set of co-wives. After scrutinizing the responses of the co-wives, I came up with a simple chart that is reflective of the state of empowerment, or disempowerment among the Luo co-wives under this study.

Chart 1: Luo co-wife empowerment indicators

Indicator	Level of co-wife empowerment		
	Less	More	Most
Employment Status	Unemployed	Casual	Permanent
Residence	Same compound	████████	Separate compounds
Hierarchy	3rd wife	2nd wife	1st wife
Age of 1st child	Under 18 yrs	18-24 yrs	25+ yrs
Food Security	Rely on husband	Hand-to-mouth	Food reserves
Highest level of education	Illiterate	Primary	Post primary
Husband's availability	Dead	Absentee	Present

The above chart provides a comprehensive summary of the findings of this study with regards to the empowerment status of the Luo co-wives. It ranks co-wife empowerment on different levels in relation to various empowerment indicators. For instance, a Luo co-wife who is unemployed, resides in the same compound with her co-wives, is the last in co-wife order, has a first child below 18 years of age, rely on husband for food, is illiterate and is widowed; can be said to be the most disempowered of all the Luo co-wife categories.

What this chart tells us, essentially, is that once a woman decides to be married as a co-wife, she automatically enters into a complex (dis)empowerment web that is greatly determined by forces playing out within her new polygamous home. To begin with, she surrenders her independent sense of judgement to her husband and her senior co-wives. This is because decision-making within the household is culturally rested upon the head (husband) and, in his absence, the senior co-wife – a factor that greatly determines how such a co-wife will cope with the new environment and maintain a stable sense of wellbeing. According to the chart, there are grounds to believe that the more a co-wife lives in a polygamous household, the higher the rise in her empowerment status. However, that greatly hinges on the choices she makes while living in the household. For instance, if a co-wife was jobless at the time of marriage and took up employment opportunities thereafter, her economic sense of security will go up which will lead to an increase in her quality of life because she can

now afford the basic needs necessary to live a comfortable life – if all the other factors were to be held constant.

Perhaps the major finding of this study can be found in the relationship between the generalized resistance resources and the empowerment status of the Luo co-wives. We have already seen that the more a co-wife copes in her new polygamous environment, the higher her chances of improving on her quality of life. This is mostly attributed to the utilization of the generalized resistance resources available in her immediate environment. Take for example the case of first children. Most of the co-wives mentioned that they derive joy in seeing their children succeed in life and get employed. Co-wives who have lived long enough in polygamous households and seen their children through school have a raised level of empowerment when these children come back to help take their siblings to school, and also support their parents economically. In such a case, the co-wives use these children as a source of socio-economic security particularly in old age when they are not able to work anymore. It can be said, therefore, that a generalized resistance resource if well identified and utilized, can act as a strong driver towards an elevated level of empowerment and a consequent higher quality of life.

There has been debate on whether the WHO holistic definition of health as 'a state of complete physical, mental and social well-being and not merely the absence of disease or infirmity' (6) can actually be achieved. According to Chamberlain, et. al., (82), *"the challenge is how to advance a multifactorial situation so that one determinant does not lag so far behind that it hinders the progress of other areas"* *(82, p. 78)*. This challenge becomes even tougher when the individuals involved are women from developing countries. Luo co-wives' health and health-seeking behaviors result from a complex matrix. Education, finances, co-wife order, and husband availability shape a co-wife's capacity to seek out and ultimately acquire necessary resistance resources that will propel them to greater sense of coherence and ultimately and elevated sense of wellbeing. Therefore, the above empowerment chart can be used as a blueprint towards understanding the Luo co-wives' way of life with a view of empowering them holistically.

8.   CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The overarching discovery of this study is that polygamy should be viewed with a different lens. The world over, there have been an increasing decline in polygamy rates mostly attributed to its negative health effects on the family. This study has highlighted the great challenges co-wives go through in order to achieve a desirable state of wellbeing. However, there are success stories, too. We have seen co-wives making the best out of a worse situation by tapping into available resistance resources in a bid to cope with the adversities and in effect boosting their chances of living healthy lives. This is the positive angle of polygamy that this study aims to add onto the existing body of research.

At the global level, polygamy has been associated with age-old patriarchal practices of wife control and disempowerment and has been seen to be detrimental to the co-wives. This has been the case due to the cultural recognition of women as child-bearers and home keepers, and men as providers, which have led to calls demanding for the abolishment of polygamy in its entirety. This study has shown that co-wife dependency on the husband becomes a disempowering factor when men begin to take sides in resource distribution by openly favouring one wife over another. It has also been shown that co-wives can work together to limit the effects of husband dependency by focusing on what unites them instead of what divides them, as demonstrated by the widowed co-wives who decided to forget their differences and started supporting one another.

This study takes the view that when co-wives are empowered, there is little reliance on the husband for socio-economic survival, a factor that greatly reduces the competition for household resources thereby creating a harmonious environment for the co-wives, the husband and their children. However, the difficult part is how to empower the co-wives without destabilizing the socio-cultural norms, traditions, beliefs and values that laid the foundation for the practice of polygamy. As we have seen in this study, any initiative aimed at empowering the co-wife must involve the

husband – the overall household head – as the Luo culture dictates. This is because the husband is the custodian of all the family resources and involving him in co-wife empowerment respects the cultural foundation upon which the polygamous family was built as well as uniting the family towards a common empowerment purpose. It is a win-win-situation for the co-wives, the husband and their children. Moreover, polygamy is still prestigious as was seen in the perception of monogamous members of the community who still see some positives in polygamous unions; strength in numbers, co-wives are not lonely, diversity in sources of help especially from working children of different co-wives. These are attributes that outside members of the community are jealous about, and which co-wives could use to their advantage hence boost their sense of self-esteem leading to positivity in life.

The traditional role of the co-wife in childbearing and housekeeping is slowly changing. Traditionally, the husband was the sole provider of material resources mostly inherited from the family lineage as per the prevailing cultural norms. Men were the custodians of property acquired before and after marriage. However, this is slowly changing. Co-wives in this study expressed willingness and desire to contribute to the economic fortunes of the family especially in circumstances where the husband's source of income was not sufficient enough to provide for the household needs and children's education. Most co-wives in this study took up employment opportunities either in industries, farms, schools, homes, and churches, close to the study site. Those who were not in formal employment undertook self-employment e.g, charcoal burning and selling, operating small-scale businesses, trading in surplus subsistence farm produce, among other ways of raising income. However, most co-wives admitted that they engaged in economic activities after consulting with their husbands. This enabled them to go about their activities without antagonizing their husbands. It goes to show that when the husband and his wives are in constant communication with each other, cases of negative energy in the home are immensely reduced and positive living enhanced. It lends credence to the co-wives' assertion that when the husband is firmly in control of the homestead, cases of co-wife acrimony considerably reduces, a factor that improves the co-wife's quality of life.

A co-wife will feel jealous towards another when she feels deprived of rewards and benefits the husband accords to the other co-wife. Some literature have fronted the argument that jealousy among co-wives may result more from a desire for material goods and less from a sense of emotional abandonment (39). While this might be the case for my study too, several co-wives also attributed their jealousy specifically to emotional abandonment. They were particularly concerned with husbands who spend their nights in one house many times than they do in another. This behaviour among husbands raised suspicions among maligned co-wives who blamed themselves for not serving the husband well. According to the disgruntled co-wives, such emotional favours often lead to skewed resource allocation and distribution by husbands to his wives. They claim that the co-wife whose house the husband spends more nights has a better chance at influencing the husband to favour her. However, based on this observation alone, it would be premature to make conclusions on which between emotional abandonment and material support precedes the other when it comes to co-wife jealousy and the resultant acrimony between them. This is an interesting finding that should be further explored in future studies of this nature.

A critical study group not covered by this study is women in monogamous unions. As has been discussed, one of the biggest demoralizing factors to a woman is her being replaced by a younger co-wife. It is a consequence that heavily weighs down on her self-esteem while severely affecting her social and psychological health. This is worse in cases where husbands do not consult their wives while making decisions to marry a subsequent wife. It leaves the first wife with rooted feelings of resentment and jealousy towards the additional wife. As revealed by the medicine man in this study, there are co-wives in the study site who sought help from witchdoctors in order to gain advantage over fellow co-wives. A similar study from Mali by Sangeetha Madhavan (39) also noted that women are ready to go to extra lengths to discourage their husbands from marrying a subsequent wife including resorting to covert methods such as black magic to chase away fellow co-wives. Interviewing women in monogamous marriages would have added another angle to my study with regards to understanding their actions in restricting their husbands from adding another wife. This is a striking perspective that I would want to pursue in future studies of this kind.

Perhaps this study's contribution to the understanding of co-wife empowerment is the construction of the empowerment indicator chart for Luo co-wives. The chart is based on the findings from this study and is a fair reflection of the various levels of empowerment of the Luo co-wife. The major undoing of the chart is the unavailability of a scoring system whereby a co-wife can tabulate her scores and use the resultant figure to determine whether she falls below average, average or above average in empowerment terms. I designed it to act as an empowerment scale and also to give co-wives some food for thought based on the study results. It is something I shall be willing to pursue and expand in future, given a chance.

In conclusion, progress in human development has a direct correlation on improvements on the healthy wellbeing of individuals. The more empowered an individual is, the more healthy she will become. However, various social, cultural and economic stumbling blocks always stand in the way of achieving this optimal state of wellness. The same applies to the Luo co-wives who have to struggle to improve their quality of life against all odds - by utilizing available resistance resources towards coping with the adversity. As we have seen in the study findings, this struggle always has a happy ending when the co-wives begin to reap the benefits of their struggle.

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