

Haileybury MUN

Research report



GA3: Social, Humanitarian and Cultural

The question of polygamy

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Introduction

Initially, it may seem that polygamy is a personal choice, in which the state (or the UN) should not intervene - although it contravenes most Christian doctrines, that's not something that we should be concerned with. However, while this is a valid argument, it has to be recognized that there are serious issues for women and women's health when polygyny (see below) is practiced. There is an inherent gender inequality in a polygamous family, which is then reflected in the culture of that society as a whole. Delegates should decide whether polygamy should be allowed based on the arguments of religious freedom/personal choice, or gender inequality/morality.

Definitions

Polygamy – the practice or custom of having more than one wife or husband at the same time

Polygyny – a man taking two or more wives

Polyandry – a woman taking two or more husbands

Statistics

- 'According to the information I have helped to collect in the Womanstats database, women in polygynous communities get married younger, have more children, have higher rates of HIV infection than men, sustain more domestic violence, succumb to more female genital mutilation and sex trafficking, and are more likely to die in childbirth. Their life expectancy is also shorter than that of their monogamous sisters. In addition, their children, both boys and girls, are less likely to receive both primary and secondary education.' – Rose McDermott, professor of political science at Brown university in the Wall Street Journal 2011
- Today, most countries which endorse polygamy are countries with a Muslim majority or a sizeable Muslim minority. Under Islamic marital jurisprudence, a man can take up to four wives, so long as he treats them all equally. While it is true that Islam permits polygyny, it does not require or impose it: marriage can only occur by mutual consent, and a bride can stipulate that her husband-to-be not take a second wife. Monogamy is by far the norm in Muslim societies, as most men cannot afford to maintain more than one family, and many of those who can would rather do without the trouble. Even so, polygyny remains very common across much of West Africa.
- Polygamy is illegal or criminalized across Europe and the Americas, in China, Australia, and other countries. Despite this, there are many instances of polygamy in the West, especially within immigrant communities and certain religious groups like the Fundamentalist Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints (FLDS Church) and other Mormon fundamentalists.
- Polygamy is practiced in all of the 20 most unstable countries on the Fragile States Index.

Bibliography

- <https://ifstudies.org/blog/the-problems-with-polygamy>
- <https://www.psychologytoday.com/gb/blog/hide-and-seek/201801/the-pros-and-cons-polygamy>