

## Conference Paper

# Polygamy As a Form of Marriage: Based on Sociological Research

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**Abstract**

Polygamy as a form of marriage is, as a rule, more common in Arab and Muslim countries than in Russia. The desire of modern Russian men to commit polygamy can be interpreted as a consequence of the improvement in their material condition, which makes possible to support two or more wives and their children, while at the same time not taking into consideration the moral side of the issue that it is necessary to devote the same amount of time to all wives, to solve family problems if necessary, and to raise children. Despite the fact that the Quran says that it is better to take divorced and single mothers as the second and the third wives to support them, modern men are not guided by moral and religious principles, but rather by the desire to have a younger wife. This article presents the results of sociological research, both quantitative and qualitative. As a quantitative study, we conducted a pilot survey of Muslim women in the Republic of Tatarstan, which revealed some trends in the socialization of Muslims in Russian society. Further, a number of qualitative studies were conducted in order to study the Muslim environment in more depth: in-depth interviews with Russian Muslim women, as well as semi-structured interviews with imams of mosques. The results of the research made it possible to create a typology of polygamous families: — a Man with a good financial situation, in some cases having a high status in society, which can allow him to support several wives and their children, creates a marriage with several wives. In this type, family members are not always practicing Muslims, most often they are ethnic Muslims. — Male migrants, more often coming from CIS countries, less often from Arab countries, leave their wives and children, come to work in Russia and create new families. However, for such wives from Russia, there is no guarantee that the husband will not leave for his homeland and will not return. — A man who belongs to non-traditional religious movements, where it is possible without observing the necessary conditions to conduct the nikah rite with a woman from the same "group" that shares his "religious" views, including without notification, permission of the first wife. More often, this is a man who does not have the financial ability to support several wives.

**Keywords:** polygamy, polygamous family, Muslim women, Muslim, Islam

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## 1. Introduction

In recent decades, it is increasingly possible to find men entering into second and subsequent marriages without dissolving the previous ones, i.e. polygamous marriages. This, on the one hand, contradicts Russian law, which States that "marriages between persons of whom at least one person is in another marriage are prohibited" [3] (Article 14. Family Code the Russian Federation "the Circumstances impeding marriage"). On the other hand, it is allowed according to the Muslim canons: "... take as your wife such women that you will like-two, three or four..." [20]. At the same time, the Quran stipulates that "if you are afraid that you will be unfair to them [wives] in the division of [property, time, material and physical goods], then take one wife or slaves that your right hand owns. Thus, avoid evil and be closer to the pious" [20]. This phenomenon is more common for religiously active Muslims who follow Sharia, which includes Tatars. Historically, among the Muslim population of Russia, especially in the Volga region, it is not common to create polygamous families; monogamous marriages were more often created. For example, according to the metrical books of the Tatars, polygamy is not actually recorded. Rather, we should talk about "bigamy". As a rule, the second wife was taken by the husband if the first was ill or infertile and subject to her mandatory consent. Also, a second wife was taken if the older brother died. Then the younger one, through marriage, assumed the obligation to support the older one's family [7].

The desire of modern men to polygamy can be interpreted as an improvement in the material condition, thanks to which it is possible to support two or more wives, respectively, and their children, forgetting about the moral side, that it is necessary to devote the same amount of time to all wives, solve problems if necessary, and raise children. Despite the fact that the Quran says that it is better to take divorced, single mothers as second or third wives to help them, modern men are guided not by moral and religious principles, but rather by the desire to have a younger wife.

## 2. Methodology and Methods

There are different views of scientists on polygamy, which, according to Sofia Kasymova, can be reduced to three main [8]: firstly, Islamic theologians are characterized by the legitimization of polygamy, which derive it from objective socio-historical circumstances [15, 18]. Secondly, we can distinguish the opinions of representatives of feminist movements that link the causes of polygamy with the existing Patriarchal system based on gender discrimination of women [1, 9, 19]. Thirdly, combining the opinions of historians,

ethnographers, anthropologists, psychologists, sociologists, lawyers, and others, we can say that the reasons for the spread of polygamy are related to the conditions imposed on the individual by the social environment [5, 12, 14, 16, 21].

Recently, various political and religious figures have raised the issue of legalizing polygamy in Russia, who see such positive trends as improving the demographic situation and reducing the number of extramarital relationships, etc. The Head of the Spiritual Directorate of Muslims of the Russian Federation, Sheikh Ravil Gainutdin, stated that it is advisable to legalize polygamy in the Muslim regions of the country, stipulating that Russia is a secular state and Federal laws are in force throughout the territory, which are the same for all. In an interview with Russia-24 TV channel [13], Ravil Gainutdin also said: "how many non-Muslim men who have not two or three wives in Russian society? (...) Therefore, here you can put on the scales — or have 40 mistresses and not bear any responsibility, and several abandoned children, or have two legitimate wives and be responsible both to the law and to Islam" [6]. Mufti of Moscow Ildar Alyautdinov believes that "the legalization of polygamy will solve a number of social problems caused by a significant preponderance of the number of women relative to men" [17]. On the one hand, we can agree about the excess of the total number of women over men. According to Rosstat data for 2019, the total number of women is 78.7 million, men-68.1 million, respectively, the difference is 10.6 million. However, it is worth noting that the number of young women (up to 34 years) is less than men. (See the Table 1 for details.) Then these proportions begin to gradually equalize, and after 60–65 years, the number of women begins to prevail by 1.5 times, over 70 years — by 2 times. That is, there is no significant preponderance of young men and women, only by the age of 60 the difference begins to be felt. As one of the Internet publications wrote about the proposal of the mufti of Moscow on polygamy: "... pensioners really do not have enough free men. But is the mufti of Moscow so worried about single grandmothers?"[10]

The sociological study results conducted in 2014 in the North Caucasus republics, led by gender researcher, sociologist Irina Kosterina, showed that in the Republics of Dagestan and Ingushetia, every 20th marriage is polygamous, in Kabardino-Balkaria — every twelfth, in the Republic of Chechnya — every sixth [11].

From 2017 to 2019, the staff of the center for Islamic studies of the Academy of Sciences of the Republic of Tatarstan, with the participation of the author of the article, conducted a number of quantitative and qualitative studies. At the first stage in 2017, a pilot study (questionnaire) was conducted, where 440 practicing Muslim women of the Republic of Tatarstan were interviewed. The surveys were conducted in the places most visited by Muslim women — mosques, madrassas, and Halal cafes.

TABLE 1: The number of women per 1000 men of the corresponding age group in Russia [4].

Age	Number, people as of August 30, 2019
0–4	945
5–9	948
10–14	954
15–19	956
20–24	961
25–29	960
30–34	992
35–39	1021
40–44	1073
45–49	1091
50–54	1152
55–59	1241
60–64	1402
65–69	1601
70 and elder	2343

In the second stage for the interpretation of the quantitative data conducted a qualitative study: 1) to study the life strategies of Muslims in 2018–19yy. conducted 25 in-depth interviews with practicing Muslim women from the Russian regions (towns and districts of the Republics of Tatarstan, Dagestan, Chechnya, Ivanovo region); 2) to study the experience of imams with parishioners in 2019, conducted 15 semi-structured interviews with imams of mosques of the Russian Federation (Sakhalin oblast, Khabarovsk Krai, Republic of Crimea, Ingushetia, Dagestan, Astrakhan oblast).

### 3. Results

The results of our survey has revealed that the majority (52.4 per cent) attitude to polygamy is negative, one third (30.3%) — neutral, 17.3% are positive. This suggests that despite the religious injunction, Muslim women are not ready to share their husbands with other wives. Islamic feminists openly declare their negative attitude to polygamy and the oppression of their rights in this family form [2]. Islamic feminism is a characteristic of urban Muslim women, rather than rural ones. When correlating respondents by place of residence, it was found that rural women are more tolerant of polygamy than urban Muslim women (19.3% vs. 16.7%). Accordingly, the negative attitude to polygamy among urban respondents is higher than among rural respondents (53.5% vs. 48.4%).

The results of in-depth interviews with practicing Muslim women have confirmed the indicators of quantitative research. Most Muslim women do everything to prevent

their husbands from taking a second wife. In some cases, there are disputes between spouses about polygamy: "the Husband is not against the second wife. I tell him, knowing his character: you still can not treat the same, will still be there.... In these moments, there are disputes" (woman, 33 years old). " This is a sore point. In religion, this is not the case, I agree, but some points I do not agree with my husband — at the expense of the second wife, for example" (woman, 25 years old).

A priori, it is assumed that most men have a positive attitude to polygamy. However, among women there are those who do not mind becoming a second or subsequent wife. Among the respondents to the in-depth interview, several Muslim women were second wives. One of them described her life in a polygamous family on the positive side, the other on the negative side. In the first case, in addition to the reservation that she did not see her husband for six months, since the husband lived abroad for 6 months with his first wife, then came to Russia, where he also lived with her (second wife) for six months, in general, such a life was arranged: "we live with my parents. My husband has 2 families. One in [one of the Middle East countries], and we are here. He lives here and there for six months. He has a Russian Muslim woman there" (woman, 39 years old). In this case, the husband worked as an Imam in Russia, earned money from Majlises (memorial rite), conducted religious rites, and went back to live with his first wife on the money earned in Russia. As a minus, she said that relations with her husband's relatives who live in another country are bad, they support the first wife more: "Because he took her there, and now his family is there to take care of her. He, when here, his relatives call: come on, come on, there are children growing up, the son is already big, you need to look after him... She turned out first, and she is already there, she has already become her own, and people worry about her all the time. When it's here, it's always being pulled. His brothers help there in his absence some things... And there is still such that the woman does not go to the store, but the son helps. On larger issues, the brothers help to solve, and still, his sisters, when he is here all the time pull... the only thing is that it turns out there more, because there are relatives all the time and on the content and everything. And here there is no one to put in a word for me. But Alhamdulillah, okay, as is so is" (woman, 39 years old).

Despite the fact that the Quran has a warning that "You can never treat all wives equally, even if you wanted to. You should not show excessive propensity to one and moderate this propensity, so that there is a woman like either a virgin or a husband's wife", there are cases of marrying several wives in Tatarstan. However, the mentality of our people is such that men can not physically treat all their wives the same, as the imams of mosques also claim: "for example, I bought the first wife a fur coat, and I have

to buy the second wife a fur coat, thus, our men are not ready to do it. Our men are not ready to spend one day there, another here, ” (man, Imam, 48 years).

As negative cases, we can give an example when a girl, getting married, did not know that she would be a second wife, or on the contrary, the first wife does not know that the husband took a second wife and lives in two families. ”We have created our own business. Then somehow it expanded. And the Tatars have a saying: ”If a Russian gets rich, then builds a Church, and a Tatar gets rich-gets married”. His adultery went under the cover of a second wife. But without my consent. [...] She was a wanton woman, from the circle of my mother-in-law, whose reputation was hidden from me. Because her grandmother and my mother-in-law were on good terms. She came to see me, too. And I was always told: ” be close to her”. And her mom died early, and her dad’s in jail and everything. And I accepted it out of respect for my elders. And at the end, it turned out that she is the second wife of her husband. I was already pregnant with my 4th son when I found out about it. He (Imam) constantly gave Fitna: temporary marriages, you can read nicknames with anyone. You have enough money, you can’t support your family, you need it, you don’t need it, it’s all here” (woman, 46 years old). It often happens that after such ceremonies the wedding it turns out that the man already has one or two wives. Unfortunately, there are many cases when, when getting married, a girl does not even assume that she is a second or third wife, the future spouse ”did not consider it necessary to notify”. And only after carrying out nikah it becomes clear about the presence of the first wife: ” — just divorced one girl, forced to divorce. He didn’t say he was married, thus, he took her as his wife. — Did you get a second wife? — Third! She went on vacation, comes with a wedding ring. I say, tell me about this man. I say you’re not his first wife. She: why am I not? I say, you’re not the first wife. I immediately call him. He’s coming. I say: you are married... I’m calling my mother. I say, do you know that you are a grandmother? She was in shock....One wife has 2 children, and the second is pregnant.” (man, Imam, 48 years old). Muslim women are not immune from such cases. Since the performance of a religious rite-nikah in the database can not be viewed (as in the database of the registry Office, for example), thus, there is no guarantee that when married, the girl will not be the second, third or even fourth wife. In connection with such frequent cases, some imams to guarantee the seriousness of the intention to create a family ask the newlyweds to first register their marriage in the registry office and only then come to the mosque for the wedding ceremony: ”we, for example, read nicknames only if there is a seal from the registry Office, a stamp in the passport. Someone may even be annoyed by this” (man, Imam, 37 years old). ”The Imam in the mosque where I work usually tells the newlyweds: do you love her? He says: Yes. — Are you ready to

live with her all your life?" — Yes. — You should go to the registry office and register the marriage, then I'll read you a nickname. But as a rule, they leave and do not return" (a man, assistant to the Imam, 33 years old).

The reverse side of the Imam's refusal to perform the nikah rite without a stamp in the passport is that those who want to perform the so-called religious rite of marriage for their own selfish purposes (for using a woman for a while, without having serious intentions), eventually turn to pseudo-Islamic preachers: "Here you have not read the nikah without a stamp in the passport, it goes to some Hizb [Approx. a member of the banned Russian terrorist organization Hizb ut-Tahrir al-Islami] will read. And then it turns out that my wife gave birth at 16, and she said that she was 20 years old. Or he leaves a pregnant woman, leaving her without material security" (man, Imam, 39 years old).

Recently, due to the spread of pseudo-Islamic trends, there is a trend such as the creation of secret marriages, when the Imam conducts nikah without observing all the conditions of this rite — the presence of witnesses and the consent of parents (Trustee), mahr, etc. "Here is a 17-year-old girl who says that she is 20 years old, and she is not yet of age and goes to give birth there, immediately a telephone message comes to the authorities. Here you refused to read them nikah, tell them that they are still young, have not reached the age of majority or without a representative, they came, without which nikah is considered not valid. And he leaves and reads nikah at some hizbiyah or Salaf" (husband., Imam, 37 years old). Reading nikah through social networks (Skype, WhatsApp) is very popular: " — in general, he remarried. He met her on the Internet, and she was there on the phone, on a conference call, and held nicknames there. "Didn't you know that he remarried?" — Yes, he put me in front of the fact in three months. And he did not want to tell me about it. When he told me about it, my world collapsed. And then he explained to me that two years ago he decided that he would take a second wife" (woman, 36 years old).

Not all imams support polygamy in the form that modern Muslims represent: "we must be realistic, we do not live in Eastern countries. But at the same time I agree with this, when a girl is divorced, there is no chance of getting married, if I am even more willing to support her, the child becomes a father, in this case I do not resist. That is, in this case, the woman has the right to have her own happiness, and the child someone to call his father... and if this girl has never been married, why should she be a second wife? Let him try to create a normal family." (male, Imam, 48 years old).

Before reading the nicknames for such marriages, some imams, firstly, talk to the future groom, and explain all the subtleties of life in a polygamous marriage: "when you start to really explain to them what difficulties... not only the honeymoon, and then you

need to live. When you start explaining all the nuances, in my opinion, 99% men change their opinion” (male, Imam, 48 years old).

## 4. Conclusions

Thus, according to the results of our research, polygamous families in Russia can be divided into several types:

1. A man with a good financial position, in some cases having a high status in society, which can afford to support several wives and their children, creates a marriage with several wives. In this type, family members are not always practicing Muslims, most often they are ethnic Muslims. There are cases when more affluent men want to take their mistresses as second wives, but this is opposed by their wives.
2. Male migrants, more often coming from CIS countries (Tajikistan, Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan), less often from Arab countries (Jordan, Egypt), leaving their wives and children, come to work in Russia and create new families. However, for such wives from Russia, there is no guarantee that the husband will not go back to his homeland and will back.
3. A man who belongs to non-traditional religious movements, where it is possible without observing the necessary conditions to conduct the nikah rite with a woman from the same "group" that shares his "religious" views, including without notification, permission of the first wife. More often, this is a man who does not have the financial ability to support several wives.

From an economic point of view, nikah does not provide any legal guarantees for a woman if a man decides to leave the family and stops supporting his wife and children. To ensure legal guarantees, it is necessary to conduct not only religious rites, but also to register the marriage in the civil registry office (Civil registration). If only the nikah ceremony is performed, it is more appropriate for a woman to regulate relations through civil contracts, receipts and other documents, which is a guarantee in case of divorce, and death of a spouse, etc.

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