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**THE LIVED EXPERIENCES OF WOMEN PRACTICING POLYGAMY
IN SOUTH AFRICA: A PHENOMENOLOGICAL STUDY**

BY

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DECLARATION

I, Ayanda P. Simelane, declare that this research report was composed by myself. Any contributions and citations from other authors are explicitly stated and referenced respectfully in the report. This work has not been previously submitted for any other degree or professional qualification. The sole purpose of submission of this research report is for partial fulfilment of requirements of the Clinical Psychology Master's Degree in the School of Applied Human Sciences, University of KwaZulu-Natal, Howard College.



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ABSTRACT

In South Africa, polygamy has become increasingly prevalent across both urban and rural areas, practiced by various cultural and religious communities. The study explored the lived experiences of women in polygamous marriages. The aim was to understand the personal experiences of women in polygamous marriages in a society with the majority of women in monogamous marriages. Four women in polygamous marriages were invited to participate in the study and were interviewed. A phenomenological design was used to conduct the study and to understand the participants' experiences of being a part of a polygamous family. The social construction theory was employed as a theoretical framework to underpin this study. The findings of this study revealed that the demographics of participants in a polygamous marriage are an important factor in determining whether a participant will marry into a polygamous marriage. The majority of the participants reported that they did not know that their husbands were practising polygamy before marriage. In addition to this, family background history was also found to be an important factor in this study, as most participants in the study revealed that they came from families that practiced polygamy. The psychosocial impact of polygamy was found to be experienced by the majority of participants in this study. Several health risks were also experienced by participants in this study. Participants of this study applied several coping skills to overcome the challenges that came with being in a polygamous marriage. Other experiences that the study found were limited economic support, the ill intentions of some participants entering the polygamous marriage, chores not equally shared, jealousy, an inability to bear children, and some reported issues of loneliness.

Keywords: Health risks, social construction, phenomenology, polygamy, psychosocial impact, wives.

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CHAPTER ONE INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background

Polygamy is a controversial practice in most parts of the world. Polygamy is defined as a marital system where a man or woman marries more than one partner at the same time (Hamdan et al., 2009). Polygyny is a system of marriage where a man has more than one wife at the same time (Al-Krenawi & Slonim-Nevo, 2008). The term polygamy is now used as a general term to refer to what is generally known as polygyny. Certain cultures and traditions have kept this practice alive in different societies around the world, including South Africa. Despite the controversy around this practice, there are positive and negative outcomes that are associated with the practice of polygamy. In the past few years, the phenomenon of polygamy has received much attention in the medical research field on issues such as HIV and AIDS (Mabaso, Sokhela, et al., 2018). Some studies have discussed the negative impact on children and adolescents from polygamous families and the lack of happiness in polygamous relationships (Al-Sharfi et al., 2016).

In the statistics report of 2009, it is recorded that about 30 000 South African men are actively practising polygamy. While this is a small number compared to civil union marriages, these numbers only prove that the practice in South Africa is not just a myth or an outdated practice but a reality for several men, women and children born into polygamous relationships.

The introduction of Christianity and the introduction of colonial authorities destabilised certain cultural practices including polygamy (Mwambene & Mwambene, 2017). It is also argued that before the colonial regime polygamy formed an integral part of many African people and serving as a cornerstone to many societal challenges such as divorce, infertility, and women related illnesses (Muthengi, 1995). During that period, it was deemed as an instrument that was created to protect women from living a life of being single, as this was considered shameful and associated with witchcraft and other forms of evil practices (Phaswana, 2005). These assumptions did not cease with time, in the current day some cultures and people still defend polygamy based on these assumptions. Subsequently, the practice of polygamy still remains legal in many African countries including South Africa.

The modern feminist movements which aim to empower women argue that polygamy only serves the interest of men and disadvantages women and, thus, the practice should be abolished

(Mwambene & Mwambene, 2017). In South Africa, polygamy has become extremely publicised by receiving media attention, with contribution from the former president of South Africa Jacob Zuma. The former president has practiced polygamy since 1973 and has been married to three wives at the same time. Other prominent African characters who are in polygamous relationships include the late King of the AmaZulu tribe, King Zwelithini KaBhekuzulu Zulu, King Mswati III of Swaziland who has 14 wives, and the former president of Kenya who has two wives.

Polygamy arguably contradicts the concept of equality in marriage because only a man is deemed to have more power by virtue of his legal right and cultural rights allowing him to have many wives and women not allowed to have other partners but him. Additionally, the man dictates duties, roles and accommodation for his wives. Thus, polygamy can be said to be discriminatory towards women and only favours men (Mwambene & Mwambene, 2017). International human rights bodies have come out to say that countries that openly practice polygamy ought to ensure that women in polygamous marriages receive benefits and protection that are equal to monogamous type of marriages (Mwambene & Mwambene, 2017). There has also been an increase in reality television programmes showcasing the practice of polygamy, which is broadcasted by international and national television channels (McGinnis, 2012; Zungu, 2019).

The practice of polygamy remains a choice for all who practice it. Thus, the debate of whether the practice is harmful or not harmful may be unproductive and is beyond the scope of this research project. It is however known that engaging in a polygamous relationship brings about several problems which range from conflict between co-wives over the husband's attention and affection. Other problems which exist in polygamous relationships may surface from the current research project. Fundamentally, a starting point when understanding the phenomenon of polygamy begins by applying the cultural lens since polygamy is essentially a cultural phenomenon. The critical factor to understand would be to determine whether the rights of women in polygamous marriages are acknowledged and protected. Thus, a phenomenological study was better suited to understand some of the feelings, experiences and narratives of participants.

1.2 Rationale

There are numerous studies conducted on polygamy internationally and nationally (Al-Krenawi, 2014; Mkhize & Zondi, 2011). Some of the studies focused on polygamy in the

Islamic community and how the phenomenon is understood in the community. Other studies have focused on the psychological issues of individuals in polygamous relationships while others have researched the constitutional difficulties associated with the practice (Hasan et al., 2022; Kassaw & Shumye, 2021; McGinnis, 2012).

Other researchers, such as Mbiti (1975); Okorie (1995) and Baab (1962), researched the historical background of polygamy in Africa and they provided depth on the genesis of the practice by looking at the biblical context and content to understand the practice of polygamy.

Despite the majority of the world adopting western norms, specifically, monogamy, the religion, culture and societal norms within communities that practice polygamy are some of the reasons why the practice has withstood time and criticism, and even gained popularity. Some of the well-known reasons that are commonly stated as reasons why polygamy exists include, but are not limited to, care for widows, men's sexual satisfaction, labour, additional children, and financial security (Stollenwerk, 2008).

Activists, such as feminist movements, have criticised culture as a vehicle which continue to oppress and discriminate against women (Pato, 2010). Feminists believe that monogamy may lead to women subordination, exploitation, and gender inequality, which are some of the issues feminists fight against (Zungu, 2019). Seligson and McCants (2022) stated that polygamy is an unequal marriage in whichever form one deems to understand it formal or informal, legal or illegal, as it affords only a man the right to marry again and deprives a woman the same. Despite the differing views in the literature, there is a need to understand the phenomenon from those who live and practice it. Therefore, the following are the objectives of the current study.

1.3 Study Objectives

The objective of the current study is to explore the personal experiences of women who live in societies where monogamous marriages are prominent, yet they themselves are in a polygamous marriage.

Specific objectives:

- To understand the challenges faced by women who are married in polygamous marriages, including social, emotional, and relational difficulties.
- To investigate the psychological and physical impacts associated with being a woman in a polygamous marriage, examining both the stressors and coping mechanisms involved.

- To explore any potential benefits of being a woman married in a polygamous marriage, identifying positive aspects or advantages that may arise from this marital arrangement.

1.4 Research Questions

1. What are the salient experiences associated with adopting a polygamous lifestyle?
2. What impact does culture place on marital responsibilities to be undertaken by a female spouse in a polygamous family system?
3. Are there beliefs, ideas experiences that have informed a decision of being in a polygamous relationship?

1.5 Overview of the Study

The current research report comprises five chapters. Chapter one is an introduction to the study which provides the rationale of the study, the study objectives and questions to be answered. Chapter two reviews the literature, chapter three discusses the method applied to the research. The analysis and the results are presented in chapter four. Finally, chapter five provides the discussion section, the limitations, the implications of the study and the conclusion.

CHAPTER TWO LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Introduction

There are diverse views in the current available literature regarding the phenomenon of polygamy. Some researchers highlight the negative effects of polygamous family systems, while others have observed the positives of the practice. This chapter will review the literature with the aim of highlighting what previous research has been conducted on the subject of polygamy, to highlight the gaps that exists by drawing from different sources of literature that are recent and old, but significant enough to contribute to understanding experiences of women in polygamous marriages. Some important sources that will be reviewed include Mbiti (1975); Okorie (1995); Baab (1962); Grossbard (1980;1976); Altman and Ginat (1997); Atwood and Safer (1997); Endler and Parker (1990); Gadamer (1975); Moller and Welch (1990) and Maillu (1988).

In the following section, I review some of the issues that are pertinent to the practice of polygamy. These issues include the background and the literature on the subject of polygamy; the impact of the practice on children; the experiences of wives and husbands; and the geographical understandings of polygamy in Africa, America, and the Middle East. The section concludes by discussing the phenomenon in the 21st century, how it has evolved and what contributed to changes in the practice.

2.2 Background

Polygamy is a global phenomenon. In the current study, polygamy refers to polygyny which is a type of marriage which allows for a man to marry more than one woman at a time. There are limited studies stating the prevalence of polygamy globally. Approximately 2% of the world's population practises polygamy (Shaiful Bahari et al., 2021). While the practice percentage is minuscule, approximately 70%–83% of human societies permit the practice (Berkowitz, 2006; Coult & Habenstein, 1965). According to Jacoby and Ochs (1995), there exists a “polygamy belt”, which is an area between Senegal and Tanzania where more than one-third of married women are in polygamous marriages. In this polygamy belt, 47% of Senegalese women and a quarter of Tanzanian women are in polygamous unions. The Democratic and Health Survey states that 11%, 27% and 53% of marriages in Ivory coast, Zimbabwe and Guinea were in fact polygamous (as cited in Damtie et al., 2021).

O'Leary et al. (2003) stated that, in Zimbabwe, about 14% of married women reported that they were in polygamous marriages. In South Africa, there are limited studies providing figures on the prevalence of the practice of polygamy in the country. According to a study published in *BMC Women's Health Journal*, three provinces, Mpumalanga, Limpopo and KwaZulu-Natal, have the highest prevalence of women who reported that they were in a polygamous relationship (Mabaso et al., 2018). These provinces are known to practice various African traditions, including polygamy, and, hence, the prominence of the practice in each of these provinces (Mabaso et al., 2018). Tsonga, Swati, and Zulu cultures have strong representation in Limpopo, Mpumalanga and KwaZulu-Natal provinces respectively. These are known to be cultures in South Africa that mostly practice polygamy (Mabaso et al., 2018).

It is important to note that in South Africa, the practice of polygamy is a legal and regulated practice supported by the Recognition of Customary Marriages Act 120 of 1998 (RCMA). This Act was finalised and came into effect on 15th November 2000. It is said that the effect of this law changed marriages in South Africa (Maithufi & Moloi., 2000). The law provides equal protection for people married under customary law, including polygamous marriages, with those married under civil marriage law (Maithufi & Moloi, 2000). This change provided comfort to many families that had previously been unrecognised by the legal system as they were in customary and/or polygamous marriages. Therefore, polygamous marriages were regarded to be in contravention of public policy before the year 2000 because only monogamous marriages were recognised under the Civil Union Act, which also criminalised polygamy (Maithufi & Bekker, 2002).

There are several other factors beyond the legal aspects surrounding the practice of polygamy. Choosing a polygamous marriage creates a complex family system for all parties in the family specifically women and children. The practice of polygamy has been extensively studied and critiqued in different contexts and by many scholars in different disciplines. Theological studies argue that when studying the phenomenon of polygamy, it is worth highlighting the background and offering a detailed timeline which underscores the existence of this practice as far back as Christian biblical texts (Aguboshim, 2022). Biblical texts mention the existence of polygamy in its scriptures by quoting several patriarchs such as Abraham, Jacob and Solomon who had more than one wife (Aguboshim, 2022). Another important factor that this study considered was that this practice is present internationally. In some contexts, the practice is a cultural practice and, in others, it is seen as a religious practice or simply a lifestyle practice.

The permissibility of polygamy remains a contested topic, with some arguing that the practice is a symbolic and cultural act, and others arguing against it because they view it as an act that disadvantages women. This section will examine the practice, extending it beyond psychology to include theological, anthropological, and sociological literature.

2.3 Demographics

This section will focus on the socio-demographics of women, such as their age, educational background and financial standing, in polygamous marriages as they are important markers of some of the varying effects that are known to impact women in polygamous marriages (Mabaso et al., 2018). Hayase and Liaw (1997) conducted a study in sub-Saharan countries, that emphasised the prevalence of polygamy and mentioned that it differs significantly in different countries due to various socio-demographic factors, such as age, education and financial standing. A study by Grossbard (1976) showed that the more educated the first wife is, the fewer wives in total her husband will have. Another study stated that while a woman's education background is likely to decrease her likelihood of being in a polygamous marriage, other factors, such as age and wealth, are also critical to consider (Mkhize & Zondi, 2015). According to a study conducted in KwaZulu-Natal, women's educational and financial status do not lessen their chances of being in a polygamous marriage because they still practice their culture which promotes polygamy (Mkhize & Zondi, 2011).

2.4 Polygamy in America

In the United States of America (USA), polygamy is prohibited in most states. However, this has not prevented Mormons from practising polygamy. The Mormon religion dates back to the 1800s. The Islamic community in the USA also practice polygamy. The practice is considered to be an integral part of these two religions and it has been passed down through generations (Ward, 2004).

The Mormon church was founded by Joseph Smith who claimed he had received a revelation from God stating that worthy men of the church should take multiple wives. His message was understood as God's way of spreading His word. Smith himself started taking multiple wives four years after receiving a revelation from God. According to Ward (2004), Smith had a total of 33 wives in his lifetime. The premise of God's message was to emphasise the importance of the law of marriage and its importance to faith.

In the current day, the practice of polygamy is illegal in all 50 USA states (Harrison, 2023). However, in February 2020 the state of Utah, where the Mormon church originates, and which

has a strong membership, recently changed the legislation of polygamy and punishment for consensual polygamy (Mohrman, 2021).

According to Faucon (2014), 150 000 polygamists are in America, who practise on the periphery and the margins of society. Despite it being criminalised in the country, it continues to thrive in religious communities, especially the Mormon and Muslim communities (Faucon, 2014). The logic behind criminalising polygamy in the USA is to protect women and children. However, regardless of it being banned, many women still show a willingness to become a second wife, or to partake in the practice of polygamy (Faucon, 2014).

The USA government has implemented a series of laws against polygamy dating back to the 1800s (Ward, 2004). These laws were predominantly focused on the Act itself and some laws were aimed at the practices of the Mormon church which promoted polygamy. The debate around the constitution and the freedom to exercise First Amendment rights has been a debate between those who practised polygamy and the USA courts (Ward, 2004). The First Amendment of the USA Bill of Rights states that the individual has a right to:

express ideas through speech and the press, to assemble or gather with a group to protest or for other reasons, and to ask the government to fix problems. It also protects the right to religious beliefs and practices. It prevents the government from creating or favouring a religion (National Archives, 2023).

There is a study arguing that the practice of polygamy in the Mormon church may be part of the church exercising their religious rights (Witte, 2009) but the constitution of the USA only supports beliefs and not practices; polygamy is not part of the practices that are protected by the constitution (Ward, 2004). Court litigations and cases have been going on regarding polygamy in the USA for more than a century. The Mormon church claims that the practice is a prophecy that was given to their founder by God and, thus, they are not allowed to abandon the teachings of the church.

The USA government enacted legislation against polygamy in 1862. This was after the Church of Jesus Christ and the political players and other relevant military stakeholders had been disputing the concept of polygamy for several years (Faucon, 2016). Although polygamy is illegal in America, those who are part of this religion and practicing it, do so in private. Their religion is far more important to them than the law of America. This shows that polygamy is

strongly attached to religion in America and Mormons and Muslims would rather adhere to their religion than the law of the country in which they reside.

The phenomenon of polygamy is a widespread issue which affects many societies including Western nations. It is evident from the aforementioned section that the major western countries, such as the USA, also grapple to place polygamous families within their society. The section highlights that the USA has been in strong disagreement with the fundamentalist church since the 1800s. Globally, the concept has been seen to affect women equally, and has been placed as a cultural and/or religious concept. Regardless of the rationale behind it, it remains contested societally and constitutionally.

2.5 Polygamy in the Middle East

The term Middle East is a term that is commonly used to geographically define the areas from Morocco through Afghanistan (Keddie, 1973).-The Middle East houses the majority of the Muslim community. The practice of polygamy in the Middle East tend to be very high due to the patriarchal community rules, strong family ties, and community value systems (Al-Krenawi, 2014). The practice is also associated with culture, religion, power, and sovereignty.

Polygamy has shown a notable decline in the Middle East because of the rising number of educated women, which has destabilised the context and concept of patriarchy in many Arabic communities (Al-Krenawi, 2014). The driving force of Muslim communities practising polygamy in the Middle East is also around religion. The Islamic holy book provides a passage that implies polygamy for men is a permitted phenomenon (Liversage, 2019). The Islamic Sharia rule permits men to marry a maximum of four wives at any given time, under conditions such as infertility, the ill health of the first wife, and also where the number of single women and widows far exceeds that of men (Al-Krenawi, 2014; Al-Shamsi & Fulcher, 2005; Rehman, 2007). A man practising polygamy should ensure fairness and equitable distribution of support amongst his wives. The Holy Book (Quran) of Islam further states that if a man practises polygamy, he will go to heaven (Imanjaya, 2009). The current wives play a significant role by providing consent to the husband to take another wife and declare that they are cared for by the man (Naseer et al, 2021).

Literature argues against polygamy in the Muslim community, highlighting issues of patriarchy, isolation of women and economic factors. Economic factors in polygamy remain a common factor internationally. Further to this, women's roles in marriage, in particular across cultures, religion, and in society in general, have been part of the discourse often categorising

women either as good or bad women (Epstein & Stanton, 2010). A full discussion on women and polygamy follows later in this chapter; however, it is a point well argued in literature that women's health risks are higher in polygamous marriages, including psychological problems and other reproductive health issues globally including the Middle East (Epstein & Stanton, 2010; Vacchelli, 2020).

2.6 Polygamy in Africa

Polygamy in Africa takes a different form when compared to other parts of the world such as the Middle East and America. According to one study, polygamy is mostly found in West and Central African countries (Shaiful Bahari et al., 2021). In Africa, the practice is grounded in cultural beliefs. Historically, in many African cultures, an ideal social organisation and an aspiration of many men was the creation of a large family which is complex and headed by powerful polygamous men. Even though this was the ideal, most men were unable to achieve this and some remained unmarried. In the early 1800s, the benefit of polygamy was mostly limited to men with power; this handful included “chiefs”, and a few who were only able to take up to two wives (Delius & Glaser, 2004).

In the African culture, marriage is an institution for procreation and the absence of children makes the marriage incomplete. Hence, most polygamous men will mention reasons for having more children as a core factor in the practice of polygamy. The history of polygamy in Africa includes the arrival of Christian missionaries. Most articles mention that the missionaries opposed polygamy and introduced Western education to Africans. Most African practices were unrecognised and many African people abandoned the practice (Becker, 2022; Senokoane, 2023). The main reason that missionaries removed polygamy was that they deemed it as a destruction of Christianity. During the missionary period, the Africans who resisted polygamy were also not keen to join other missionary activities, such as education. African people saw education as a tool that was presented for the destruction of their cultural belief systems (Becker, 2022).

This section highlighted that the concept of marriage in the context of Africa is connected to history, culture and certain beliefs which puts emphasis on procreation and emphasised that a marriage without children is no marriage (Kisembo et al., 1998, Fenske, 2012). This is one of many reasons which argues that polygamy protects women who are unable to have children, as the African rule states that within a year a woman must give the family children (Katampu,

2021). If a woman is unable to bear children a man is permitted to have children with other women.

2.7 Impact on Children

Literature focuses on the impact on children raised in polygamous families and found that the family structure is important for children and adolescents' development and well-being (Bzostek & Berger, 2017). About 25% of women are in polygamous marriages in sub-Saharan Africa, which suggests that there are many children under the age of 14 years who have been born in a polygamous family structure (Arthi & Fenske, 2018). The numbers also suggest that many of the children may be exposed to possible adverse consequences of being raised within a polygamous union.

Another concern is that polygamous families in rural areas may experience difficulties and limitations in the distribution of resources such as nutrition, health care and education to children (Arthi & Fenske, 2018). Smith-Greenaway and Trinitapoli (2014) suggested that children from polygamous families suffer health disadvantages because the family resources need to be shared with a large number of children within the family and, thus, the resources are limited. The child mortality rate is impacted by the stretching of resources in these polygamous families (Smith-Greenaway & Trinitapoli, 2014).

Other research studies highlighted the importance of healthy parent-child relationships. Elbedour et al. (2007) stated that a polygamous family life creates several negative effects on a child, such as a weak attachment between mother and child. The impact transcends beyond just attachment, but also underscores the risk of developmental disorders and psychological unavailability (Al-Sharfi et al., 2016). There are also indirect issues that affect children from this type of union. According to Thobejane and Flora (2014), the rivalry between wives may have a damaging impact on children.

There are differing views when it comes to children and polygamy. Some of the common views are that children often become victims of psychological issues (Gunawan, 2021). Studies have compared children raised in polygamous families to those in monogamous ones. Some of the issues mentioned are that children from polygamous families present with mental health issues, social problems, and scholastic difficulties (Al-Sharfi et al., 2016).

There are, however, contrasting views in the literature. For example, a study conducted in Israel on scholastic achievement and the type of family system found that the type of marriage may not have an impact on the child's scholastic achievements. The study found that children were

affected equally, regardless of the nature of the family system (Elbedour et al., 2000). In essence, the study asserted that the type of family may not have an impact on children.

Therefore, we see that children may be negatively affected when they are raised in polygamous families due to lack of resources such as healthcare, food and attention from their parents. However, literature suggests that children can do well in polygamous families and this could be when they have enough resources to share between them, such as food, which helps them concentrate and do well in school.

2.8 Polygamy and Women

Studies on women who practise polygamy found that women in polygamous marriages experience a myriad of negative problems, such as physical abuse from their husband, loneliness and self-esteem issues. Subsequently, the quality of life for these women tends to be lower than women in monogamous marriages (Hassouneh-Phillips, 2001). In other studies, the practice of polygamy is perceived to be in contravention of women's rights; it promotes the subordination of women and conflicts with ideals of gender equality (Mwambene & Mwambene, 2017). According to Mwambene and Mwambene (2017), the practice of polygamy has the potential to expose women to negative health issues such as sexually transmitted infections (STIs) and even mental health issues, such as depression and anxiety.

In spite of all the aforementioned, another study stated that some women are open to the idea of a polygamous marriage should an opportunity prevail (Thobejane & Flora, 2014). Some African literature suggests that, historically, the practice of polygamy was seen as an integral part of the African society to ensure a continuation of the population and culture. The practice was also seen as a refuge for women who were unable to bear children and to protect them against certain forms of humiliation (Afisi & Taiwo, 2010).

After the incorporation of the RCMA in South Africa, many looked at the Act as signifying the recognition of indigenous laws, cultural practices, and beliefs. The recognition of indigenous laws brought comfort to many who believed in and practised them. There are, however, opposing views in the case of polygamy. The feminist movement deems the practice unfair to women, arguing that culture may be used to justify the practice (Pato, 2010). Psychological issues have been reported from first wives. These problems include mood disorders, anxiety, psychosis and, in some instances, suicidal behaviours (Kassaw & Shumye, 2021).

The section has provided literature on the psychological aspects of being a woman in a polygamous marriage. Some of these psychological factors have been observed in several

studies. Women endure a myriad of psychological problem which have a potential of causing significant mental health problems.

2.9 Experiences of Men

The literature on men and polygamy is limited. This could be because men are initiators of the practice and, thus, are not largely affected by it. Furthermore, the concept of polygamy is not new for men as it dates back to biblical texts. In most instances, the practice favoured men or rather was largely practised by men. This is not to say polyandry, women with multiple husbands at the same time, does or did not exist. Women having more than one husband is a practice that exists and still exists in some parts of the world such as Nepal (Levine & Silk, 1997). The practice is, however, in the minority when compared to polygamy practiced by men.

The law in South Africa permits only men to practice polygamy. A belief in many South African communities is that men who practice polygamy gain societal respect and enjoy more privileges compared to monogamous men (Nasimiyya Wasilte, 2005). The notion that polygamy increases the status and class of men is still a common belief today. Some articles state that the practice is attached to better economic standing and can be seen as a privilege rather than a norm whereby men get prestige and power (Mavhinha, 2010; Moller and Welch, 1990).

In a study conducted in Nigeria, five reasons were found to be the drivers of why men in that country would consider having polygamous marriages (Al-Krenawi, 2014). The study mentioned that first men generally want to have many children and for that reason, one wife may not be able to fulfil this objective alone. The second reason is that polygamy is a good indicator of high social status, which boosts a man's ego. The third reason was that a man's status is elevated whenever he takes more than one wife in the community. The fourth reason was that having many wives increases the number of people in the family, and this can assist in farming and other household responsibilities. The fifth reason is the need for the sexual satisfaction a man enjoys when he has more than one wife (Al-Krenawi, 2014).

According to Altman and Ginat (1997: 90), a definition of the economic phenomenon of men and polygamy is as follows:

... because families are often holistic economic units, with men, women and children engaged in fishing, agriculture, animal husbandry, or trade, the more hands the better. Wives are central to the economic viability of families in

traditional cultures because they often do a great deal of the work, and they bear children, who also contribute to a family's pool (Altman & Ginat, 1997, p. 90).

Other articles continue to state that if a wife is not able to offer a husband access to sexual intercourse, then the husband is allowed or justified in looking for pleasure from other women (Maillu, 1988, p. 9). The concept of sexual pleasure has been a common phenomenon where matters of polygamy and men are concerned. Many other reasons have been offered as permission for men to take additional wives, including the illness of a wife. According to Baloyi (2013), in the case of a long illness of a wife, the man's family may encourage him to take a second wife to give the first wife space and time to recover from her illness.

Contrary to popular belief that men benefit from polygamous marriages, literature claims that men also suffer from this type of marriage as it brings challenges and creates an unmanageable family (Al-Krenawi & Kimberley, 2016). Further, some men in this type of marriage find themselves experiencing a sense of guilt if they are unable to meet their purpose, such as religion, providing for their children, or managing the emotional aspect that polygamy brings to the family (Al-Krenawi & Kimberley, 2016). Men in religions such as Mormon church often find themselves leaving their communities to avoid taking up multiple wives which is often regarded as religious responsibilities in these communities (Al-Krenawi & Kimberly, 2016).

To summarise this section, men, in general, have become the central factor in polygamous marriages. There is a body of literature which discuss men and polygamy (Galieva, 2021; Dantie et al., 2021). These include the constitutionality of the practice and the opposing views which place men in patriarchal position compared to women. The notion of inequality also remains an important argument in some studies some arguing that polygamy discriminates against the rights of women. The suffering of men in a polygamous marriage has also been detailed and stated as men also suffer from managing a very large family. Be that as it may, men continue to be the main beneficiaries in polygamous marriages and benefit from the rights and permission of marrying more women (Hasan et al., 2022).

2.10 Polygamy in the 21st Century

The 21st century has seen a robust change in societal norms and practices regarding the rights of women and children. There have been several laws introduced that are against the oppression of women and children. There are movements promoting equality and fighting against unfair

gender differences. The moral stance of these changes argues for the equality of spouses in polygamous marriages.

The practice of polygamy has evolved over the years in different contexts, cultures, and in its general meaning. In the 21st century, the meaning has changed significantly from the previously known justifications of the practice. These changes have been heightened by many factors such as public media and lifestyle television shows of those who practice polygamy. To some extent, the evolution of the practice could be due to being no clear guidelines for the practice.

As stated by Wunderink (cited in Baloyi, 2013 p 164), Isabel Phiri, a theology professor at the University of KwaZulu-Natal expressed concerns when she reported that “polygamy, which was a practice of rich men with land and money to support a large family, is now practised by middle-class and poor men”. This concern was voiced in a comment by Isabel Phiri after the election of President Zuma, who is a well-known South African former president and polygamist (Baloyi, 2013). The reason for this is because of the financial needs of women and children in polygamous families. As mentioned, children need money for healthcare, food and education and when poor men start practising polygamy, the basic needs of their children are not sufficiently met because resources are spread thinly across the polygamous family.

A review of the literature has demonstrated the debate that surrounds the practice of polygamy in different contexts. There appears to be a consensus in the African context highlighting the historical understanding of the practice. Furthermore, biblical discourse highlights the existence of the practice from different key characters. It is, however, still not clear what the experiences of the key people practising polygamy are in terms of cultural influences, psychological effects, and impacts. This research attempted to delve into the experiences of women who are in polygamous marriages and study their psychological and cultural experiences. This research study aimed to understand these experiences from a phenomenological viewpoint to find a clear understanding of polygamy directly from those who are experiencing it.

2.11 Theoretical Framework

2.11.1 Introduction

A theoretical framework is a set of theories that helps us understand the phenomenon under investigation. This current study used social construction and phenomenology as theoretical frameworks underpinning this current research in order to understand the experiences of

women in polygamous marriages. Pilarska (2021) stated that both social constructivism and phenomenological research are deeply humanistic approaches and apply a respectful approach to participants. Both theories are interactive in nature and consider psychological, social, and cultural realities (Pilarska, 2021). Both theoretical frameworks focus on peoples' realities: phenomenology focuses on ensuring the experiential qualities of participants are explored through research and social construction helps make sense of how some of the ideas/behaviours are socially constructed.

Pilarska (2021) stated that social constructivism is focused on multiple, competing, and holistic realities. In fact, social construction states that there are no universal truths. Understanding people using social construction, a researcher should exercise a deeper level of exploration and intensive understanding of the phenomenon (Pilarska, 2021). Therefore, to understand people, the researcher should first have a deep understanding of the building blocks of social realities and cultural realities and a phenomenological framework can be used to facilitate this goal (Pilarska, 2021). Phenomenology explores multiple realities using a respectful approach and manner to understand the lived experiences of people.

2.11.2 Phenomenological Theoretical Framework

Edmund Husserl, a German philosopher, is known to be the father of descriptive phenomenology (Wojnar & Swanson, 2007). Edmund Hursell's philosophy was based on concepts of consciousness, lifeworld, bracketing, and phenomenological attitude (Larkin et al., 2021; Creely, 2018). He stated that a phenomenon ought to be understood and interpreted as the person experienced it in their consciousness (Creely, 2018). He believed that consciousness was part of all human experiences (Shorey & Ng, 2002). He further believed that people's life experiences are all kept in their consciousness and humans are able to access these experiences through reflections (Shorey & Ng, 2002).

Phenomenology is a philosophy and a research method. The philosophical nature of phenomenology is discussed in this section and the research methodology component is discussed under the method chapter. According to Vagle (2018, p. 11-12), "phenomenology is an encounter, a way of living and craft". This philosophy was a response to research ideas about the meaning of people's experiences and how they understood the world. Thus, it is a study of how people interpret, understand, and perceive the world through the senses and how their interpretations can shape their experiences (Berggren, 2014; Layder, 1996).

According to Giorgi and Giorgi (2008), a phenomenon is interpreted and understood by how an individual perceives and understands the world in terms of language and social relations. People make sense of everyday observations and they engage in activities after which they form general ideas and statements to explain these experiences (Larsen & Adu, 2021). Phenomenology is a combination of an individual's rationality and observations. It is methodical, systematic, critical, self-correcting and progressive in its development (Wertz, 2015). The goal of the theory is to understand what has been called consciousness and lived experiences and clarify the meaning of these words (Wertz, 2015).

2.11.3 Social Constructivism

Social constructivism has its roots from the work of Mannheim's philosophical assumptions and was later adopted by many theorists including the Soviet psychologist Lev Vygotsky (1896–1934) (Galbin, 2014; Berger & Luckman, 1967). Social constructionism is a theory often used in the social sciences field to explain phenomena such as gender, sexuality and marriage, to name a few (Galbin, 2014). The reason for this is because, according to social constructionism, people learn through social interactions and by the help of others, which is usually in group settings (Galbin, 2014). The foundation of social constructionism is that the knowledge an individual has about a phenomenon is not a duplicate of an objective reality but rather by the individual's mind selecting pertinent information, for the individual, from the environment, to make sense of their experiences (Galbin, 2014).

Processing new knowledge according to social constructionism is done through construction, storage, and retrieval (Berger & Luckman, 2023). Construction is the process of building an understanding of a new concept by drawing on multiple different pieces of knowledge (Berger & Luckman, 2023). For women in polygamous marriages they would draw knowledge from observing polygamy from their family members as well as knowledge from seeing other family members in monogamous marriages (Atwood & Seifer, 1997). Additionally, the media is filled with examples of what a marriage should look like, which is traditionally monogamous.

Storage is the mental process of putting new information into memory (Berger & Luckman, 2023). Women who grew up in polygamous families or witnessed polygamous marriages within their families stored information from what they witnessed. These could be bad or good memories that are stored. Women in polygamous marriages store memories of experiences of being in and witnessing monogamous marriages (Atwood & Seifer, 1997).

Retrieval is when an individual finds and uses the information they have stored in their memory (Berger & Luckman, 2023). Women in polygamous marriages would use the information they have stored from witnessing polygamous marriages to help cope in their polygamous marriages (Atwood & Seifer, 1997).

Therefore, social constructionism believes that marriage is a social construct rather than it being something towards which humans naturally gravitate (Atwood & Seifer, 1997). Marriage is constructed and learnt by humans and, thus, social constructionism provides a theoretical framework for understanding how people construct different practices and view marriage (Atwood & Seifer, 1997).

2.12 Overview of the Chapter

The literature has highlighted some of the known facts around polygamy. There are however several myths that exists around the topic of polygamy such as the notion stating that polygamy is an African practice. When in fact, the literature shows, that the practice is an old practice which exists in many parts of the world.

Modern polygamy is seen as newsworthy and as reality television material that has occupied South African and international television. The face of polygamy has shifted from cultural practice to modern day practice which is largely seen as a choice rather than an obligation serving only men.

This current study interacted with women who practice polygamy in South Africa in order to understand their experiences of being in a marriage as complex as polygamy. A phenomenological and social constructionism theoretical approach underpinned the current study to access their experiences of being a woman in a polygamous marriage.

CHAPTER THREE METHODOLOGY

3.1 Introduction

This chapter describes the methodology used in this study. It includes a selection of participants, the size of the sample, the relevant inclusion and exclusion strategies, and the instruments used to collect data. Furthermore, the process that was followed in the collection of data is described, and finally, the critical ethical issues that are relevant to research are discussed.

This research used an interpretative research paradigm to analyse the data. Interpretivists believe there is no one truth about the nature of reality. Cohen et al. (2007) stated that the phenomenon must be understood using the lenses or the worldview of the participant rather than that of the researcher. To understand the lived experiences of women in polygamous marriages, a phenomenological approach was employed in this study. Phenomenological inquiry forms part of the qualitative research method. Phenomenological researchers are concerned with how people live their ordinary lives and attempt to explain the psychological and social aspects of the phenomenon within the worldview of the people studied. Other methodological approaches, such as narrative research and grounded theory, were considered for this study; however, each was ultimately deemed unsuitable due to specific limitations. The narrative approach, with its emphasis on the detailed exploration of participants' stories and lived experiences, provides a deep, nuanced understanding by constructing a comprehensive narrative from individual accounts. While this method is rigorous and was initially considered, the focus on capturing experiences at a single point in time, coupled with time constraints, rendered it impractical for the current study. Similarly, grounded theory was also a strong fit for this study, given its potential to develop a substantive theory grounded in the data. However, the time required to develop a robust theory was a significant consideration. Grounded theory will be more suitable for future studies where time constraints are less of a concern.

3.2 Phenomenological Research Paradigm

Phenomenological research is credited to the work of Edmund Husserl; it gained popularity in the later part of the nineteenth century. This approach falls under the umbrella of the qualitative research paradigm. It is used in research for studies focusing on phenomena such as family issues, parenting, cultural attitudes and other unique familial matters (Creswell & Creswell, 2005). Husserl's earlier work emphasised that phenomenological studies are to clarify the meaning of the world. The phenomenological approach as stated previously is both a

philosophy and a research paradigm. According to Gill (2020) and Jackson et al. (2018), two different types of approaches in phenomenological research exist: a descriptive branch (Husserl, 1859–1938), and an interpretive branch (Heidegger, 1889–1976). According to Husserl, individuals are connected in many ways and as is everything in the world (Vagle, 2018). His focus was to study the meaning of individuals' everyday lives and to extract meaning from their lives.

Heidegger, in contrast, proposed a different ontological approach which addresses the nature of what is being (Gill, 2020). He proposed that an individual's understanding of the world is associated with their interpretation of the world. Groenewald (2004) stated that phenomenology as a research practice became prominent in the 1970s. In the phenomenological approach, the lived experiences of individuals which is the ways people live are used to define universal structures (De Chesnay, 2014).

The current study adopted descriptive phenomenology as the research paradigm because this research was concerned with gaining insight into the lived experiences of women in polygamous marriages. Descriptive phenomenology states that a phenomenon ought to be described rather than explained or be investigated of its causal origin (Lee et al, 2014). Descriptive phenomenology is interested in learning and understanding human experiences about the phenomenon directly as it manifests naturally (Matua & Van Der Wal, 2015). Several studies have been conducted to understand the phenomenon of polygamy internationally and locally, descriptive phenomenology allowed for the participants to illuminate of this poorly understood aspects of the experiences of women in polygamous marriages.

3.3 Participant Selection

The study followed a strict selection strategy using snowballing sampling (Given, 2008). Snowballing sampling is common in qualitative research methodology and is often used by researchers to access hidden participants. The process of snowballing commences by identifying key “gatekeepers”, well-situated people who may know or live with potential participants (Babbie, 2020; Crabtree & Miller, 1992). After potential participants were identified, the researcher requested them to refer participants who met the selection criteria. Snowball sampling was particularly well-suited for this study due to the difficulty in identifying women in polygamous marriages, who are often considered a hidden or hard-to-reach population. This method allowed for the effective identification and recruitment of participants through referrals from existing contacts within this community.

3.3.1 The Selection Criteria

In order to participate in the study women had to be in a polygamous marriage with more than one living wife for a minimum period of 6 months and/or above. It was a selection requirement that the marriage had to be active, this meant that there should be a relationship that existed between the woman participant and the husband. Finally, women from all race groups and consenting ages living within the borders of the Republic of South Africa were eligible to take part in this study.

Women who were divorced from a polygamous marriage, or who were in an inactive marriage for more than six months, with no communication or relationship with the husband, were excluded from the study. A total of nine women were approached and underwent screening to access if they met the selection criteria for the study. Four participants declined on the basis of fearing for their privacy even after confidentiality was explained they still felt uncomfortable about being recorded. One participant did not meet the study's inclusion criteria on grounds that she was married in a civil union and had left the matrimonial household for over a period of 6 months.

Four participants, all whom were over the age of 18 years, married under the RCMA, and actively practising a polygamous lifestyle, were included in the study. The Act allows for polygamous marriages to be recognised in South Africa. The small sample size was consistent with qualitative research traditions and recommended in phenomenological inquiry (Creswell & Creswell, 2005; Vagle, 2018). According to Alase (2017), the size of a sample in a phenomenological study can be between 2 and 25 participants. In qualitative research, a small sample is often used to obtain rich and detailed data from longer interviews with the participants (Patton, 1990).

A total of four women between the ages of 18 and 50 participated in the study, the majority of whom were in their 40s. This section discusses the settings that influenced this research, method, and demographics of the participants. The broader focus of the study sought to tease out pertinent factors (culture, psychological impact) in women practicing polygamy. The chapter will thus relate the findings of the key areas. In this chapter, the participant's voice will speak louder to emphasise the themes. Furthermore, a discussion of the key themes will be provided later in the report.

3.3.2 Demographics Characteristics of Participants

The participants who took part in the current study were four married women in polygamous families. The mean age of the participants was 43 years ranging from 40 to 49 years. Their average marriage duration was 13.5 years ranging from 10 to 16 years. Concerning the number of co-wives, two of the women had two co-wives, one had three co-wives, and the last had six co-wives in their marriages. Of the four participants, two were formally employed, and one was self-employed in a small-scale business while one was unemployed and regarded herself as a housewife. One of the participants studied until matric (secondary school) but did not complete her matric, one completed secondary school and acquired a post-secondary certificate, while two had a junior degree plus a post-graduate degree as shown in (Table 3.1). All women had children except one who could not bear children due to problems of infertility. All participants considered themselves as of Christian faith.

3.3.2.1 Tebogo Wife 1

Tebogo reported that she is a professional working wife. She holds a university degree. Tebogo reported that she does not have a prior relationship with polygamy hence she struggled to understand when her husband proposed it. She reported that she has children and loved them very much. The conversation with Tebogo took place in the evening as she is a working wife. This was the only time that she was comfortable with as she could not invite me to her work place during the day to share her personal matters. She appeared guarded in the beginning of the conversation. She was embarrassed to state some of the information and needed continuous assurance that the information will be kept confidential. In some aspects of the conversation she was open and able to share but on questions that were pertaining to her husband she was closed and needed constant probing. She carried herself confidently and well spoken. Tebogo appeared to be in denial or somewhat denying any psychological problems and at times contradicted herself by mentioning the impact of the women who were coming in to their lives but later leaving the polygamous marriage. She often mentioned that her emotional state was “ok” as she continuously mentioned that the choice of polygamy was not hers but that of her husband and she had no other option but to respect and support her husbands’ wishes. She appeared to have had no choice in the matter but to accept the wishes of her partner. Tebogo mentioned several challenges in her marriage but later rationalised them as being “chosen” to walk the journey of polygamy.

3.3.2.2 Paulinah Wife 2

Paulinah is a woman, employed as a civil servant. She holds a post graduate qualification. During the interview she was on the alert not to be heard talking about this matter. She was often requesting to be excused during the interview to go check outside her door. She seemed excited to take part in the study, however was perceived to be superficial at the beginning of the conversation. After several probes Paulinah became comfortable and trusted the space. She reported that she had been with her husband for over 10 years, during this period she had been aware of another woman in her husband's life. She shared that she and her now husband had problems before their marriage which led them to pause the relationship. She was sharing the process of a break she seemed to find it difficult to express it, my conclusion was that this was a difficult period in her life and was difficult for her to share. She shared that she has had an emotional journey in the marriage particularly with the unequal treatment they receive as wives from the husband. She reported that she came from a family that practiced polygamy but did not want it for herself.

3.3.2.3 Lebo Wife 3

Lebo is a stay at home mom by choice. She reported that she has a post-secondary certificate and has been previously employed. She reported she was a stay at home mother who is completely provided for by her husband financially. Lebo was friendly and frank about her experiences. My impression of her was that she treated the space as safe and as a much needed engagement. She was the opposite of Tebogo who was guarded and protective of her husband. Lebo offered details without any probing and expressed her emotions truthfully during the interview. Lebo came across as despondent and emotionally unwell about her situation. During the course of the interview Lebo became emotional as she was sharing some of her unhappiness in her marriage. Some of her emotional issues were around the fact that she met her husband first but her husband decided to marry the other co-wife first than her. She however became resistant when asked whether she had considered psychological services. Lebo mentioned that in polygamous situations one had to be strong and accept the situation as is.

3.3.2.4 Maki Wife 4

Securing an appointment with Maki was challenging as she is working for herself in a small scale business sector. She explained to me that the reason why she had been cancelling were that her business required that she is always available. She reported that she has a high school education and did not achieve her matric. She reported that she came from a family which

practiced polygamy hence she does not really have a problem with it. She was expressive and open towards the interview. She was self-aware and outspoken about her marriage which was quite impressive. She regarded herself as a hardworking mother for her children since her husband was not fully supportive and decided to take the step to start a business that would sustain her and her children. Maki has suffered emotionally and physically in her marriage journey but her resilience and her commitment to the course kept her loyal to her marriage.

Table 3.1: Demographic characteristics

Demographic characteristics	Category	n = 4	Percentage (%)
Age	40 - 45 years	3	75%
	46 - 49 years	1	25%
Level of education	Secondary school	1	25%
	Post-secondary certificate	1	25%
	University/Post-graduate degree	2	50%
Employment	Yes	2	50%
	No	1	25%
	Self-employed	1	25%
Number of co-wives	<2	2	50%
	3 – 4	1	25%
	5 – 6	1	25%
Years in marriage	7- 10 years	1	25%
	11 - 15 years	2	50%
	16 and over	1	25%

3.4 Research Setting

In qualitative research it is important to understand the context in which the phenomenon or participants are situated. According to Snowden et al. (2014) context is just not a backdrop but it is an environment, an atmosphere, which include participants' narratives and a collection of forces that affect participants' experiences in a subtle and unsubtle manner.

The study was based in the south of Durban, in the community of Harding, KwaZulu-Natal province. The study accessed participants from a community group of women married in polygamous marriages. The group members meet in person and in several social media platforms. The group is carefully monitored to only accept women who are married under the RCMA. Women also have to be recognised as women in polygamous marriages before they could participate in the group activities. Due to the social media platform, the group now attracts women based outside of the province of KwaZulu-Natal.

3.5 Data Collection

The premise of the Husserlian phenomenological approach is that, to capture the lived experiences of the participants, the researcher ought to listen and capture, without bias, the narratives of the participants on a one-to-one basis (Barrow, 2000). Semi-structured interviews are often used in social science research to elicit people's realities (Zhang & Wildemuth, 2009). They are a source of rich data when conducting phenomenological research (Barrow, 2000; Vagle, 2018). The researcher used open ended type of questions to yield answers that were broader and rich and to allow participants to freely share their experiences. Data were collected using online platforms, specifically Zoom and Microsoft Teams, due to health considerations highlighted by the COVID-19 pandemic. Conducting interviews online ensured the safety of both the researcher and participants. Each interview lasted between 1 hour and 1 hour and 30 minutes.

3.5.1 Semi-Structured Interviews

In a semi-structured interview, the interviewer brings to the discussion no hypotheses and no theoretical framework in mind, exposing the researcher to unanticipated themes in the data and realities of participants (Zhang & Wildemuth, 2009). The process involves active listening, interacting, and observations to capture the participants' presentation of reality (Wojnar & Swanson, 2007). Semi-structured interviews are designed to source subjective responses from the participant about a particular phenomenon they have experienced. Participants may respond in a manner comfortable to them and the researcher may probe for further clarity (McIntosh & Morse, 2015).

3.6 Instruments

3.6.1 Interview Schedule

Before commencing with the interview process and asking questions as tabulated in the interview guide the researcher began by giving background to the study and its purpose and also allowed the participant to process the information. The researcher began by asking the participant to provide them with a brief background of who they are. This question was asked for purposes of building rapport with the participant and to provide a space that was comfortable and also to lower the participants' anxiety toward the process. To collect data from the participants, a semi-structured interview schedule was developed by the researcher with assistance from her supervisor (Appendix A). All questions were open-ended to allow the participant to freely give an account of their lived experiences in a polygamous marriage. The

guide contained fifteen questions informed by literature on polygamy. The questions were pre-planned and approved by the research ethics committee. The researcher probed for more information and clarity where necessary.

3.6.2 Consent Form

Informed consent is the bond of trust and the integral part to any research involving human subjects (Mandal & Parija, 2014). A consent form (Appendix B) was reviewed with the participant before commencing the process to protect the participants well-being throughout the research process (Mandal & Parija, 2014). Each participant was requested to read and sign consent for participation in the study and requested to provide the researcher permission of recording the interview process. This also ensured that participants participated freely in the study and understood the nature of the study.

3.6.3 Demographic Information Sheet

A demographic information sheet (Appendix C) was used to record the basic details of the participants such as date of marriage, number of children, age of the participant and whether they were the first, second, or third wife in their polygamous marriage.

3.7 Data Analysis

The interviews were recorded with the consent of the participants. All audio recordings were transcribed verbatim and translated into the English language where necessary. Data was analysed using Colaizzi's (1973) method of data analysis (as cited in De Chesnay, 2014). Transcripts were reviewed by the researcher and interviews were coded following phenomenological analysis. The analysis involved multiple readings of transcripts by researcher to identify recurring themes and a master codebook was initiated. The researcher then revised the version of the codebook according to emerging themes. The codebook was reviewed, and the themes were redefined over several readings and processing until a final codebook was developed and the definition of all themes emerged. New themes that emerged during this process were defined and added to the final codebook.

The four transcripts were coded by the researcher of the study and compared for inter-coder reliability. An external research assistant was invited for purposes of intercoder reliability. The research assistance holds a clinical psychology degree and a research master's degree. All confidentiality was discussed with the research assistant. A consensus was reached on the final codebook by two researchers. Transcripts were re-coded whenever a new theme emerged or when a theme was redefined and final conclusion was reached.

In phenomenology there are four steps in analysing data in descriptive phenomenological enquiry i.e. bracketing, analysing, intuition, and describing. Bracketing is critical to ensure trustworthiness and rigour in the data. The process of bracketing involves a researcher putting in abeyance all known realities about the phenomenon and other beliefs (Chan et al., 2013). The process of bracketing ought to be an ongoing concept and not only during the data analysis stage to keep issues of biases observed at all stages of the research. The process includes keeping a personal diary for reflection and journaling emotions, feelings and perceptions (Vagle, 2018). A journal was kept throughout the process of this study to ensure that the researcher reflections are documented at all times.

Following this was the reading of transcripts, reflections about the transcripts, and acknowledging any biases from both the participant and the researcher. The analysing stage adopted Colaizzi's (1973) method of data analysis (as cited in De Chesnay, 2014). This method is common in analysing phenomenological research data and involves 7 stages. The researcher began by reading the transcripts and the descriptors of the participant's understanding of the phenomenon. Acquiring a feeling of the participants' sense of their experiences. The process involved grouping statements together into 'meaning units'. After grouping the statements, the elimination of hidden meanings and formulation of the meaning of statements was conducted. Furthermore, the researcher began to categorise and cluster similar themes together. This stage of clustering confirms consistency between the emerging findings and the participants' stories. The process of integrating findings was conducted by comparing topics for consistency and combining themes for conceptual meaning. Towards the end of the process it was important to conduct validation. Validation is whereby the researcher returns the data to the participant to ask how the descriptions reflect their personal experiences. This process was done telephonically by discussing themes with the relevant participants. To conclude the process, the researcher integrated feedback from the participants with the final description of the phenomenon.

The process of intuition involves making sense of the phenomenon from the participant's point of view. This process involves listening and recording thoughts in the journal, reflections, and consulting with another phenomenological researcher. This process was critical in making this research trustworthy and rigorous. It also ensured that the researcher takes into consideration all four steps in trustworthiness process. The final stage of the data analysis was the describing stage which basically is the stage of presenting the mode of the structure of the phenomenon.

3.8 Trustworthiness

The concept of trustworthiness is important in qualitative studies including phenomenological studies. Trustworthiness is basically a process which ensures that all the necessary components of ensuring that a high standard is maintained during the research in order to ensure that the results yielded from the study are trustworthy because the rigour, confidence in the quality of the data collected, the process of interpretation and methods were correctly followed (Connelly, 2016). All participants were selected following strict inclusion and exclusion criteria to source rich and relevant data. The study followed the known concept of ‘less is more’ which is common in phenomenological studies; therefore, after a rigorous selection process, only four participants were invited to participate in the current study (Miller & Minton, 2016). There are several steps mentioned in the literature that verify the quality of a phenomenological study. The work of Guba and Lincoln (1989) is still relevant in understanding trustworthiness in interpretive research. The book discussed the four pertinent areas discussed in the following section.

3.8.1 Credibility

Credibility of the study is understood as the intersection of the researcher’s understanding of the concept and the participant’s understanding of the phenomenon under study; Collier-Reed et al. (2009) call this the “*truth value*”. Credibility is known as internal validity in qualitative studies. The researcher of this study did not commence the study before formal ethical considerations were completed. All relevant documentations were provided to participants to assure them the “*truth value*” of the study.

To achieve credibility, three methods of research activities were used as stated in Guba and Lincoln (1989). The techniques mentioned are persistent observation where and if appropriate, triangulation of data, peer debriefing, member checking and a reflective diary (Connelly, 2016). A research journal was consistently used for reflective practice during interviews, and the researcher dedicated substantial time with each participant to gather rich, in-depth data. This approach was instrumental in enhancing the trustworthiness of the study by ensuring thorough and reflective engagement with the participants.

3.8.2 Dependability

The process of dependability refers to data stability over time and over the conditions of the study (Polit & Beck, 2014). This process of dependability is known as reliability in quantitative studies. The process involves keeping an audit trail of process logs, researcher notes and

maintaining peer briefing process with colleagues or other relevant researchers (Connelly, 2016). The researcher in this study kept a journal to take notes of the process and to note all activities that happened in the process of conducting the study. The journal also was relevant to note the process of contacting participants, their preferred times and also reminder notes of what to observe during the interviews.

3.8.3 Transferability

Transferability refers to the nature of applicability of the research findings to other contexts where the study may be useful and to people in other setting beyond the setting of the study (Polit & Beck, 2014). This process is also known as external validity where there can be generalisability. It is often argued that in qualitative studies generalisability is often not possible because of the small sample size, and it is difficult to demonstrate that the findings are applicable to other contexts (Shenton, 2004). Guba and Lincoln (1989) state that if the researcher provides sufficient contextual information of the process and fieldwork of the research study, this will help the reader to make transfer (Shenton, 2004). All participant interviews were conducted online due to health caution that have been heightened due to COVID-19. Further details will be provided of the context of sampling process under sampling section.

3.8.4 Confirmability

The concept of confirmability is known as objectivity in qualitative research (Morrow, 2007). Objectivity means the use of tools that are not dependant on human skill and perception (Shenton, 2004). Shenton (2004) stated that regardless of the fact that the tools are designed by humans, researcher bias should be acknowledged. Additionally, the findings of the study should be the experiences of the participants and not the characteristics and preferences of the researcher (Shenton, 2004). Confirmability was acknowledged in this study by the research as a journal of reflections was kept throughout the process of the study.

3.9 Author Reflexivity Section

Colaizzi (1973) stated that a researcher's self-reflection is the first step of the research process. Here, preconceived biases, past knowledge, and presuppositions should be brought into awareness and separated from the participants' descriptions of the phenomenon. The researcher needs to stay open to what the participant is sharing while recognising their own biases in the process (Gadamer, 1975). This then required the researcher to be flexible, shifting back and

forth staying aware of their own assumptions and at the same time looking at the participants' experiences using a fresh lens (Wertz, 2015).

As a woman with limited exposure to the practice of polygamy, conducting a study of the experiences of married women in polygamous marriages, it was required that I embody contradictory attitudes of being scientifically removed from, open to, and aware of my own biases, while also interacting with participants and their own experiences (Finlay, 2008). I stayed consciously aware of not falling prey to the concept called navel gazing. This meant that I avoided being preoccupied with my own emotions about the experiences of the participants. It is true that the concept of polygamy is still taboo in certain parts of the world and still contested in many forms.

I entered in this study because I grappled with the idea to understand how a woman could share a husband and acknowledge them as family. As much as the phenomenon of polygamy is largely growing popularity in South Africa, certain concepts about it are still difficult to process for me, as a married woman. Since polygamy was a concept that I knew about but I had not been exposed to in my family and my immediate community. I approached some of my difficulties with a neutral starting point and where needed I used my journal to reflect on the experiences and emotions during the process of the study. There were points where I shared my struggles with my participants such as living in the same house with a co-wife. It was important for me to inform my participants when a concept was difficult for me to understand. I approached such difficult concepts with utmost respect so that the participant understood where I was finding difficulties and not following with the process. When participants explained the difficult concepts to me, I thanked them for explaining and I informed them that the concept was now understood by me. I maintained openness and honesty with participants regarding the unique nature of their chosen form of marriage. I clearly communicated that some aspects of their perspectives on marriage were challenging for me to process. I provided examples to illustrate that my reactions were not driven by judgment or confusion, but rather by a genuine interest in learning from their experiences. This approach was intended to foster a space of mutual understanding and respect, allowing me to gain valuable insights into diverse approaches to marriage and life.

I have learnt that polygamous families are private and careful to share information pertaining to their families. Thus, it was very difficult to get participants to take part in the current study. I grew to understand that there are valid reasons to this privacy and careful nature. I understood that when participants share about their experiences they may indirectly share about

interactions about other family members. Therefore, anonymity and confidentiality were important for the current study. Some women lost interest after being told that the conversations were going to be recorded. I reflected that the decision of taking part in the study was enormous to them and also reflected that in polygamous families being in a private space was an integral part. I have learnt also to understand that to some participant and just in polygamous families but in general being recorder was a difficult commitment.

3.10 Ethical Considerations

This study commenced after an official written ethical clearance certificate was obtained from the University of KwaZulu-Natal. The Ethical Clearance Certificate formed part of the research pack that was handed to each participant. The research pack consisted of:

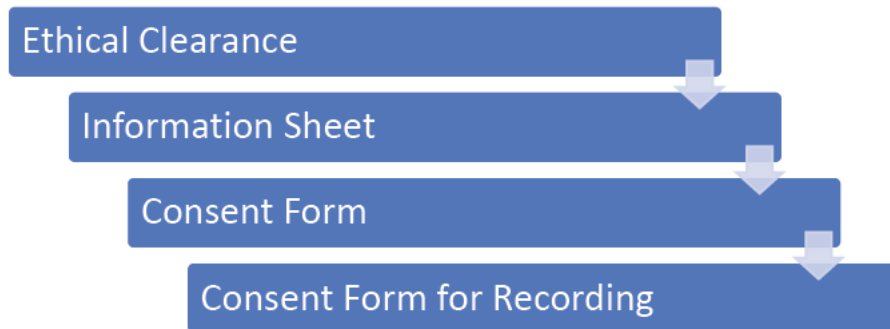


Figure 3.1: Research package

All participants were contacted via the gatekeeper. The gatekeeper in the study was the leader of a support group for women in polygamous marriages. The group has a Facebook group, and a WhatsApp group and women occasionally meet for social events. A request to access participants was sent to the gatekeeper before contacting the participants directly. All study information was written in English because it is the default language in South Africa. Participants were informed that they could withdraw from the study at any point if they began to feel uncomfortable or no longer wanted to be a part of the study for any reason. Informed consent forms, along with the complete research information packet, were sent to participants via email. Prior to the interviews, participants were asked for their consent to record the sessions. The gatekeeper received a stipend and reimbursement for travel expenses. Additionally, all participants were informed about available counseling services should they wish to discuss any aspects of their marriages.

3.11 Storage of Research Data

The concept of anonymity and confidentiality was crucial to all participants in the current study. Participants were informed during the consenting stage of the study that all identifying information would be kept confidential and would be kept in a password-locked computer behind a locked cabinet. Participants were also informed that the data will be kept in the possession of the researcher and the University of KwaZulu-Natal for the period of five years. The recordings were deleted immediately after the transcription process was completed in order

to keep the demographic information of the participants anonymous and safe. The research supervisor kept all transcribed interviews in a locked cabinet.

3.12 Overview of the Chapter

Chapter three discussed the methodology followed in this study, the setting of the study, and the instruments used to collect data. It also discussed the process followed for data analysis. It was important that the researcher provide a reflection section so the chapter also contains the author's reflexivity section. The chapter provides a detailed section which discusses the process followed for ethical considerations of this study. Finally, the chapter provides the ethical process followed to store data of the participants.

Chapter four of this research will discuss the findings of the study and tabulate all relevant themes that emerged in the analysis of data.

CHAPTER FOUR FINDINGS

4.1 Introduction

The purpose of this study was to explore the experiences of women in polygamous marriages. The theoretical foundation used was the phenomenological approach, which is one of the philosophies used in phenomenological studies. The study further used the social constructionist theory to underpin the study and understand the lived experiences of women married in polygamous marriages. Chapter four presents a discussion of the findings gained from the semi-structured interviews conducted with the women, in which they discussed their lived experiences of polygamy and the role that polygamy plays in their well-being, and families.

4.2 Pseudonyms

All names used in the quotations are pseudonyms but the ages of the participants are true.

4.3 Themes

The researchers read through all the transcribed and translated data to identify common themes. The seven major themes identified were (1) knowledge about polygamy and its cultural impact, (2) history of polygamy, (3) psychosocial impact of women in polygamous families, (4) health risks associated with polygamous families, (5) women's coping and survival skills in polygamy, (6) relationships amongst co-wives, (7) and other challenges. The following figure depicts the themes in this current study.



Figure 4.1: Themes

4.3.1 Knowledge about Husbands' Preference for Polygamy and Its Cultural Impact

This theme was generated from a question that asked whether participants knew prior to the marriage whether their husbands believed in polygamy or not. This question was also intended to understand the participants' cultural backgrounds and whether it had an influence in choosing their type of marriage.

Knowledge about polygamy in this study meant knowing that the husband practised and believed in polygamous marriage. Some participants in this study reported that they did not know that their partners were polygamists and others cited that their partners introduced the idea of polygamy as a joke. Others stated that they assumed their partner did not practice polygamy because of their religious belief which did not permit the practice.

They reported amazement after they learnt that their partners were in fact polygamist, regardless of their religious beliefs, which did not permit the practice of polygamy.

"No, I didn't know, and you would never have thought because he was a born-again Christian guy who went to these churches and he had a position of leadership at church and you wouldn't have associated him with that..." (Tebogo, 41 years old)

Another participant reported that the topic of polygamy was not new to both her and her partner as it was often occupied their conversations in passing or as a joke or a topic that brought laughter to them. The participant stated that she did not take these jokes as serious and that polygamy would later become their reality.

“He was saying it in passing you see, and I told myself that he is joking. He would say that his father had 3 wives. So, I used to laugh about it, and he would say when he gets married, he will marry the both of us with so and so, I would laugh I didn’t believe it, I thought he was playing...” (Paulinah, 49 years old)

Participants did not factor in the cultural aspect that permitted their husbands to marry a polygamous type of marriage. While they knew that culturally and legally polygamy may eventually turn into reality, they still saw it as a far-fetched reality. Another participant reported that her partner often talked about it in passing and she would dismiss the topic but the husband kept on bringing the topic up as a subject during conversations until it became a topic that required engagement and attention.

“I was working remotely at that time. I was not living at home, I’m sure it was over the conversations we had through WhatsApp, and he tested the waters about saying “how would you feel about polygamy” and obviously for me it was something I’ve never heard before and I was never in that space to think about it, so it was like “hell no” type of response. And then over time the topic was deep and deep and strong and that was at a point where we started discussing it in detail, I wanted to know more what he actually wanted to do.” (Tebogo, 41 years old)

Another participant reported that her situation was different; she expected marriage from her husband, but he decided to marry another woman first. When she thought their relationship was over, her now-husband reappeared in her life asking for them to rebuild the relationship. She reported that when he spoke to her after the breakup, he proposed polygamy. She reported that she agreed to also marry him, but she reported that she agreed just as “pay back” to the first wife.

“Actually, I was supposed to be first wife ... I was aware that we were competing with the first wife. My husband promised me that he will come and pay lobola (South African cultural practice of marriage negotiations where a man pay the family of the bride either in cows or in cash for her hand in marriage), we did all processes of lobola negotiations, everything but all of a sudden, I heard that he went to the first wife’s family and started the lobola process and married her, we broke up and then after 3 months we had broken up he came back to speak to me, we spoke about it ... because I loved him, I went back to him but my returning was basically to do a pay back to tell you the truth.” (Paulinah, 49 years old)

A participant had been informed by a community member that her husband was practicing polygamy. She reported that she was told about this well before the marriage negotiations took place but the love of her husband was important to her, so she proceeded to become a member of her husband’s family.

“It was the first time we had seen each other, as I heard from another customer who was a person from his village, she said my child, this man is married and has polygamy, don’t. That time I was in love ... (laughs)... I was in love. I just ignored what she had said I didn’t even pay attention to it.” (Maki, 42 years old)

She reported that even though she did not know about polygamy she suspected that he may be a married man seeing his age and when he initially approached her she remembered him telling her that he was a polygamist.

“He will not be this old and not be married. Because he told me when he approached me and said I have polygamy, I am married.” (Maki, 42 years old)

Another participant reported that her relationship with her husband had no indicators that it may one day end up in polygamy. She reported that all was well for a long while and, as a result, polygamy was not in her thoughts:

“Everything was fine like we were a couple, and no one thought that these people will end up in polygamy. And then as time went on maybe after 5 years being in a relationship with him, he never mentioned anything about polygamy that I would one day be in polygamy.” (Lebo, 40 years old)

Overall, the participants in this study did not know that their husbands were practising polygamy or had intentions of taking the approach of polygamy. They learned about their husband’s beliefs of polygamy well into the relationship. A husband mentioned that polygamy was a family practice, where he mentioned that his father had more than one wife, when he introduced the topic to his wife. Culture, however, did not seem to be emphasised as the core reason for a husband to take multiple wives.

4.3.2 History with Polygamy

A history of polygamy means being born into a polygamous family or having experienced polygamy from an immediate family or distant members. Of the four participants, two reported that they had a history of polygamy from their families but they emphasised that their history of polygamy within their own family did not influence them to accept their current marriages. They reported significant differences from the polygamy they understood and practiced by their parents or other members of their family. They highlighted that, to some extent, they knew of polygamous unions which were fair and characterised by love. They reported opposite characteristics from their own polygamous unions.

“... we have polygamist at home, my father married 2 wives, my mother is the oldest and then there is a second one so you see, how everything is done differs, polygamous marriages are not the same, in our family when it is the end of the year my father calls all his wives and gives them money for groceries, if he decides to offer R2000 one side he will offer R2000 to the other side, or R1500 this side, and a R1500 that side like that ... You see in my current marriage, things are not the same my sister, it’s not like other polygamist who goes with their wives to do grocery shopping, and each wife takes a trolley and puts everything they need inside, then they go, and the man pays, here there is no such, everyone sees for herself.” (Maki, 42 years old)

Another participant reported that her experience with polygamy was with a distant family member. She reported that, from her conversations with her co-wife, she understood that polygamy was an emotional journey. She also reported that from the conversations with other family relatives, she learnt how the women were experiencing strain from being in a marriage with more than one wife.

“I really didn’t like it. I remember one of my brother but from an extended family ... when he married the second wife ... I thought to myself that, okay this lady was number one, but he married the other lady first so now she is number two ... then I asked her ... girl how did it happen because I thought that things were coming together ... she said it’s not a child’s play I don’t want to lie, I then started asking, what’s happening? She said ... it’s difficult here (in polygamy) ... she would come to me from her hometown, take me out and tell me that, it’s not a nice things are difficult ... so I had that in mind.”

(Paulinah, 49 years old)

One participant reported that she also had an existing family background of polygamy from her family members but believed that the current polygamy and her father’s family design were different. They were different in a sense that the father’s polygamy had more positive aspects when compared to her current polygamous marriage and so the participant believed that being in the current marriage is a new experience to them.

Others believed that, while they came from a background of polygamy, this did not influence them to take part in a polygamous marriage. Their choosing to be in a polygamous family was their own personal choice and not because they came from a background of polygamy.

“Polygamy at home has nothing to do with acceptance. The polygamy that I am practicing now was just my decision, not that I took it because of the polygamy at home but the things that made me find everything easy, I think was my background from home because this environment is not new to me.” (Lebo, 40 years old)

Some participants acknowledged that, whilst their father’s polygamy did not influence their decisions of being in a polygamous marriage, it had, however, made the process in their marriages easier to understand since the polygamous environment is not unknown to them.

Others did not have any background of polygamy prior to being married to a polygamist but they knew that the practice existed in their community. The knowledge of its existence was acknowledged by other participants who did not have any background of polygamy. Those who mentioned no family background believed that they lacked first hand reference to the practice.

“I had no relationship at all. Well, I knew it existed but I didn’t have any first-hand experience personally and I did not have anyone who lived that particular life, as a result of that I felt alone, I didn’t have anyone to call and ask for advice, that here is a man saying this ... and what I was supposed to do about that type of thing ... it was just me.” (Tebogo, 41 years old)

Families who did not have any background of polygamy and those who were religious (Christian) who did not permit polygamy, discouraged participants from entering a polygamous marriage, stating lack of knowledge of the processes in a polygamous marriage.

“Whuu! They (family) were against it, they were against my love I don’t want to lie ... Unfortunately, at home there is no one. My parents passed away, and my uncle is the only one left. His church does not acknowledge polygamy, he doesn’t like polygamy. It was difficult I don’t even know how many times the lobola negotiation date was postponed, he said he doesn’t like it and needs time to thoroughly think about it.”
(Paulinah, 49 years old)

Overall, participants who had a background of polygamy in their childhood home believed their own polygamous marriage with their husbands was not same as the one they knew from home. The ones who had no family background believed that having an experience would be beneficial in their polygamous journey. Having a family background provided some participants with some point of reference. Some mentioned disappointments and unmet expectation from how they knew polygamy to have been to how they were themselves experiencing it.

4.3.3 Psychosocial Impact of Women in Polygamous Marriage

The experiences of participants in their polygamous marriage came with psychological challenges and some day to day struggles that were associated with being a woman in polygamous marriage. Participants expressed having negative emotions and experiences, such as loneliness, jealousy, poor marital satisfaction, unhealthy competitive environment, lack of trust, anger, decline of emotional well-being, low self-esteem, unhappiness, conflict, frustration and disappointment, difficulty in acceptance of being in a polygamous marriage, sharing pain with others, and severe health problems within the marriage.

“Polygamy doesn’t take away the fact that you are still human, you like other people, you hurt, you get angry sometimes, you get sad you feel insecure about yourself at times, all those things that exist with just anyone still exist also in myself. However, I can say that ever since my husband introduced me to this polygamy thing ... I know no peace, I know no happiness, I can’t sleep at night, I would be lying.” (Tebogo, 41 years old)

Participants mentioned their painful experiences of being in a polygamous marriage. Some expressed that being in a polygamous marriage does not take away a person’s emotions and feelings. Some expressed feelings of hurt, while others expressed that their trust levels had declined.

“As much as I trust him but ... yes, emotionally I want to say this ... As much as I love him and trust him there is that element inside me which cannot forget what he did to me, you see. My trust is not like before. Yeah, he betrayed me because he should have told me that this was the situation. He should have communicated with me that, I am going to get married again, do this, this, and that.” (Paulinah, 49 years old)

Honesty was also mentioned as lacking in some husbands. Betrayal was also mentioned as a feeling that developed after participants were told of the existence of a co-wife.

“The one, he got married to doesn’t know that he has unborn children she was also not told, and truthfulness is something that our husband doesn’t have.” (Lebo, 40 years old)

One participant mentioned that her husband does not treat the wives fairly or equally. She reported that some things are done for the first wife and not offered to her in the same manner. It is a common experience, based on the literature, that discriminative behaviour of the husbands and the unequal treatment of wives causes several mental health issues in polygamous families.

“Lies of a man, he doesn’t do things, when he does something for the first wife, don’t they say that in polygamy when you do something for the first wife you must do the same for the other wife ... No, not at my house my goodness.” (Paulinah, 49 years old)

Some of the participants reported that no peace exists between the wives and they live a life of pretence in order to get along. It was mentioned that some husbands do not treat their wives the same. Some participants mentioned that they also are not allowed to have a voice in the marriage.

“When someone else enters, there was no peace, there was always noise ... and what used to happen previously was, the first wife had a tendency of creating stories and tell our husband ...then our husband would come fighting without hearing other people’s side of the story.” (Paulinah, 49 years old)

In other families, husbands were able to attempt to help solve the conflict in the family when the wife was having difficulties. Some of the solutions may not have been ideal solutions; the husbands followed a similar pattern of not hearing the other and taking a one sided decision.

Another participant had problems with step children (children that the husband had with another wife). A participant mentioned that she struggled to forge a healthy relationship with her step children and they struggled to accept her as member of the family. She reported that when she sought advice from other wives about the behaviour of her step children they were unable help her or offer her guidance. She reported that only her husband was able to come

with a practical resolution of how she can have a solution to her disagreements with her step children.

“I also started telling them (other wives) that I have a problem of children at home ... I told them (other wives) about this matter. They said no it is beyond their power I should tell the father of the house about this problem because I can’t handle it. They said no, there is nothing we can do to help you, so I went to our husband and told him. He decided that he will kick out the older one who was a problem from his yard, because it is his house, this house was built by him, two bulls don’t live in the same yard. He took the girl out because she couldn’t stay at home, he asked her if she could please leave ... I can’t kick my wife out because of your issues, you are a child here at home, you must listen to me, my voice is the only voice that must be listened to.” (Maki, 42 years old)

A participant cited that her husband has had several other potential women with whom he has had relationships but most of these relationships ended up not materialising into a formal marriage. She reported that she often got attached to these ladies since her husband would often mention that he was preparing to make them co-wives. She reported that she felt disappointed and frustrated in the end when her husband decided against the marriage and moved on to the other woman and the same happened.

“A major challenge was seeing him trying to build something and then at the end it did not materialise ... So, you find that there is this person you will bring on board doing everything important ... you embrace this person and welcome them as an additional member of the family and give her a position in the family, you even get along with the person and then things don’t work out between them. Now you have to start all over again, so I think that was my major frustration that I will open up my heart and my home to someone and end up being disappointed.” (Tebogo, 41 years old)

Some participants mentioned that in their marriage they often fought for positions. Others believed that they should have been regarded as first wives since they were first in meeting their husbands.

“I find myself caught up in the middle between wife one and wife two because they clash a lot fighting over being position one. Wife two is still saying that this is my position.” (Lebo, 40 years old)

Overall, the participants reported several psychologically-related problems stemming from loneliness caused by husbands’ absence and low trust level resulting from betrayal from not being told that the man was planning to become a polygamist. Other participants reported that some of their problems came from stepchildren. Finally, participants in this study reported rivalry amongst wives over a position of being a first wife. Also, children experienced a debilitating relationship with their father as a result of the introduction of the new wife in the family.

4.3.4 Health Risks Associated with Polygamous Marriage

The study explored the implications of the vulnerability of polygamous women towards illness and other health issues. Polygamy permits a multiplication of sexual partners and correlates with low rates of condom use and poor communication between spouses.

A participant reported that she discovered that she was infected with the human immunodeficiency virus (HIV) while in the marriage and the husband’s response towards her illness and infection was not what she had expected. She also suspected that her husband other wives were aware of their HIV positive status but did not disclose it. Her husband’s first wife had died of illness that was not disclosed but in her explanation she suspected that the illness may have been related or connected to the virus.

“Ay, it was difficult because at the time I was sick. I had just found out that I am HIV positive ... after he also just found out and he said I must not tell other co-wives that I am HIV positive, I must keep quiet ... He was already taking them (ARVs) from the pharmacy and didn’t want to be seen in public, he still collected his pills from the pharmacy ...” (Maki, 42 years old)

She shared that she felt obligated to disclose her status to the other wives since they shared a sexual partner. She was instrumental in the health care treatment of the rest of the family and a catalyst for change in her polygamous family. She decided to make other wives aware of the health issues that were ignored in the family. She shared that she called other co-wives and informed them about her status and spoke to them about her journey of being diagnosed and the help she had received. She said that she knew that her sharing of her experience may empower them also to start them also seeking help.

“So, the wives and my husband stood up after seeing me sick and almost dying from my illness Then they went to check themselves and they found that they were already positive.” (Maki, 42 years old)

A participant also shared her illness journey that she mentioned was also related to the fact that she was in polygamous marriage. She mentioned that because of the many challenges that she had experienced she ended up being ill and admitted into hospital.

“There was a time whereby I fell at work I was then rushed to hospital my BP (blood pressure) was very high and with Jesus’s mercy the doctor said I was supposed to have been hit by ... by stroke ...” (Paulinah, 49 years old)

She reported that her hypertension had escalated because of the pressure and stresses of being in a polygamous marriage. She reported that her illness made her reflect more about her situation and find better ways to help herself live better as a woman in a polygamous marriage.

“Waking up at a hospital made me realise that you know what, I am going to die here, and I am the one who chose this life either I leave the marriage, or I stay. I decided to stay and then told myself that you know what I am removing this from my heart so that I can live ...” (Paulinah, 49 years old)

The difficulties related to polygamy are threatening to the health of some of the wives. Health issues are treated in a reactive approach and proactive means of preventions are still difficult to implement. The participant reported that the hardships associated with polygamy overwhelmed her to the level of being hospitalised for hypertension. She reported that her

doctor told her that her blood pressure levels were high enough to have caused her a stroke had she not have looked for health assistance.

4.3.5 Women's Coping and Survival Skills in Polygamy

The findings suggest that polygamy is painful, particularly for the wives. However, there are many ways and techniques that enable women in polygamous families to function and cope better in their polygamous marriages. Some of the coping mechanisms that participants used were (1) the process of *acceptance* of polygamy as God's wish or destiny for them and (2) accepting the unequal allocation of resources among wives by the husband. One participant reported that (3) living away from other wives may also be a buffer, *avoidance* of "minor" conflicts and disagreements and is helpful in living a manageable polygamous life. The other participant mentioned that (4) maintaining an *attitude of respect* toward the other wife/wives, and (5) allowing *open communication* among all co-wives and children is important and can help in coping and managing the polygamous family. Participants also mentioned that (6) finding people to *talk* to about challenges also helped them to cope. Being in (7) *love* with the husband was also seen and mentioned to be a buffer to many challenges that may come with polygamy.

"You see, polygamy requires you to accept. You see if you don't accept it and instead pretend, I don't see you surviving in it. You need to accept it, to admit that okay I have accepted it isn't it, but this is my life ... I've accepted also that I am a product of polygamy." (Lebo, 40 years old)

Other participants mentioned communication as their way of coping with conflicts with co-wives. She reported that she believed in discussing matters and in finding solutions for issues.

"Oh, you see when I'm not here my sister I am at work when I am out, I am happy, talking to different people you see that is nice, we just have conversations." (Maki, 42 years old)

Participants coped better when problems were communicated and dealt with accordingly. They mentioned that they felt a sense of relief after speaking to other co-wives. They mentioned that this made them feel not alone in the struggles that they were experiencing.

“Yeah, so as a family, we now living a life where we are very communicative, we go out together, there are things we do, there are things he does that when we meet, we discuss them. You’d find that you told yourself that he was doing that to you alone. When you’ve gathered with others that’s when you find that no man, I’m not the only one who has this problem, all of us, all of us are going through the same page.” (Lebo, 40 years old)

Humility and mutual respect was pointed out as a way of coping and this was a helpful mechanism that helped some participants. Lebo also mentioned that respect is an integral component in a polygamous family because when one respects, one will receive respect back. The participants mentioned the concept of humility and as a piece of advice to those considering polygamy.

“It is just being humble all the time but when you are humble and respect the other person, she will not always do the same, but all in all, it is just being humble.”
(Paulinah, 49 years old)

One participant reported that deciding to be in a polygamous relationship should be driven by reasons of love rather than other factors such as money. She stated that love helps the relationship withstand all other challenges that come with a polygamous marriage. They mentioned that it was their way of coping and recommended that those who considered polygamy should only do so because of love rather than being attracted by materialistic things or money

“So, you see when you go into polygamy you must go in because you love the person not because you saw money, that no he has money, go in because you love him so that you will be able to withstand everything.” (Lebo, 40 years old)

Overall, acceptance, love, respect, humility and communication were some of the ways of coping women used to go through painful times that often are experienced in polygamous marriages. Women mentioned that accepting that their marriage was polygamous in nature helped them overcome psychological challenges. They also mentioned that talking about

experiences to other co-wives was another way of understanding that their experiences were not only unique to them but other co-wives also shared similar experiences.

4.3.6 Relationships Amongst Co-Wives and Children

The participants mentioned that there are moments in the relationship with co-wives when a lack of unity and genuineness is in the family union. They cited that the relationship with co-wives was not always smooth and it had taken them time to build a relationship and see one another as a family unit. Some mentioned that the relationship between them as co-wives is sometimes pretentious and regarded it as merely tolerating others.

“Mhmm, it’s not right we are pretending mhmm, no ... I’m phrasing it wrong we just tolerate each other yeah ... because you will never find us maybe walking together, maybe going for shopping.” (Paulinah, 49 years old)

While some families have not found a way of working together as co-wives, other families reported that the process of building a relationship amongst them as wives has been long and difficult but report that they have been able to reach a level of co-existence as wives.

“Polygamy doesn’t happen overnight; it took us a while for us to get along.” (Lebo, 40 years old)

While other participants reported that they eventually found ways of relating and co-existing as co-wives, others reported that there had been conflicts and some instances of others being derogatory about their co-wives to their husband.

“The first wife used to create stories and then our husband would just come to fight without being willing to hear my side of the story.” (Paulinah, 49 years old)

Although there may not be a genuine relationship amongst the co-wives, participants did mention that mutual care about each other’s children does exist.

*“You see, yes, even if she is not around for example this year, I was staying with her child **after** he was expelled out from one of the school, he was at a boarding school.”*
(Paulinah, 49 years old)

The participants felt that their husband plays a critical part in creating a harmonious environment amongst them as wives. Another participant mentioned that the husband's transparency in terms of his intentions about his family and the development of a consistent family life is an important factor in building relationships between them as co-wives.

“So, I think what helped us with the process is that when everything kicked off I sat him down and said to him, I’ll support in this thing you want to do but I need you to be open, honest and transparent with me.” (Tebogo, 41 years old)

A good relationship is the responsibility of all people involved in the polygamy family. One participant stated that it becomes challenging when one of them does not cooperate and does not acknowledge other co-wives in the union.

“When we go out to ceremonies the first wife will want to leave with her husband. I don’t have a problem with that I go inside my car and leave alone.” (Paulinah, 49 years old)

Overall, the participants of this study have developed their own coping strategies to live better within the structures of their challenging marriages. The participants mentioned challenges such as first wife problems, neglect and conflict. In contrast to all these challenges, the women in this study reported that there are positives such as mutual respect, communication, humility and putting love first and marrying for the right reasons.

The relationship among wives has been mentioned to take a long process to build, with some wives mentioning that it does not exist in their family, while others mentioning that it was a relationship they learnt to understand and find ways to tolerate. Some wives have worked on the relationship so much that they have become a strength to one another.

4.3.7 Other Challenges in the Polygamy Marriage

The participants mentioned several challenges that exist within the polygamous relationship. Almost all participants mentioned their share of challenging experiences some mentioned financial and economic issues, infertility issues, jealousy, ill-intentions and taunting behaviour, favouritism within their relationship. Other challenges reported by participants were the unequal distribution of chores in the family, children not understanding the polygamous family structure and loneliness.

4.3.7.1 Economic Support

The participants reported that finances in polygamy are a challenge. A participant reported that her husband does not financially support her. She reported that he only buys a bag of maize meal and nothing else after that. She reported that, as a result of this, she has to work hard to put bread on the table and to provide for herself and her children.

“The problem is, as I said I am working, I am feeding myself because he buys a bag of mielie (maize) meal and then puts it there. He doesn’t buy anything else.” (Maki, 42 years old)

Another participant reported that, while her husband does buy food, he does not exercise fairness amongst them as wives. She reported that there are clear differences in the way he provides for them. She stated that what is done for one household is often not done for the other household.

“When you buy bread from the other side, you have to buy it this side ...” (Paulinah, 49 years old)

Another participant reported that in her marriage the inequality is visible so much that vacations are not the same. Some wives get better vacations than others. She further explained that even with the vehicle they are driving they are not the same nor in the similar price or brand range. She reported that she has asked her husband about these striking inequalities of the resources and she has not gotten any satisfying responses. She says these inequalities annoy her so much that she cannot help but to question the inequalities in the marriage.

“... you can see that okay he favours the first wife in most cases, like all the time. There was a time in a year where you find that we didn’t go on a vacation but the first wife ... there is no way she won’t go to vacation. So, you may wonder if there is anything else that he is hiding from us about the side of the first wife, and you ask yourself why he favours her so much. You see that bothers me and I ask myself why he favours her, but when you ask him about that, he denies it, it becomes as if you are a complaining person you don’t appreciate. Is there an agreement that we don’t know about ... that he agreed upon that she will always be the best in everything because even the cars we

drive are not the same, they are not the same and that's also an issue and most of the time when you start talking to him, you will see the answer ... it is always that it's because she is the first wife, it pisses me off. It doesn't make sense, yes she is the first wife but at the end of the day we are all wives one thing brought us to this house ... what is it, what is that the first wife has that makes her to be different.” (Lebo, 40 years old)

Another participant was concerned about women who are interested in becoming part of her family. She stated that these women are mostly interested in financial gains and not the marriage itself. The participant reported that her husband has had to end several relationships due to the fact that women come in with the intention of gaining from the husband financially and this becomes a challenge for her.

“There will be a woman who will come with intentions of wanting a man but not interested with being in a polygamy ... someone who will come with an idea that there is money besides the polygamy ... often for them it's about what they can get.” (Tebogo, 41 years old)

The challenge of finances in polygamy was critical in most families. It differed only based on the social class of each family. However, a common factor in all families was the unfair allocation of resources. Some complained about a husband who favoured the first wife and others complained about a husband who is not providing fully for them as wives so much that some families have had meetings to discuss the dissatisfaction of the lack of resources provided by their husband to them.

4.3.7.2 Infertility

Infertility was a theme that was important in this research study. It was not a common theme to most women; however, it was a notable theme that one participant mentioned as her challenge in her marriage. She reported that she has not had a child in the marriage. She reported that all her pregnancies do not make it to full term.

“The most painful thing in polygamy is not being able to bear children because even the elder wife, she used to say that kids must not come to me, she was throwing remarks saying a person must bear her children.” (Paulinah, 49 years old)

She reported that the challenge of not being able to bear children in a polygamous marriage becomes more challenging when the other wife or wives have children in the marriage. She explained that this problem becomes even more painful when the family asks her about children and, when they learn that she does not have any, they say she is not taking the marriage seriously.

“If you don’t have a child at in the marriage there is nothing as painful as that, I would say I think it’s maybe better when you are the first wife ... I mean when you are the only wife your husband will support you ... for me it becomes more difficult when there are ceremonies, when they call the other wife and say so and so’s mother and when it comes to calling me they call me by my name...you see?! Some of the painful remarks are ... you haven’t given birth ... you are not serious.” (Paulinah, 49 years old)

She reported that she believed things would be better if there was no other wife to be compared to or if she was in a monogamous family type of marriage because she believed that the husband could support her about not having children unlike in a polygamous family in which someone is always compared with another.

4.3.7.3 Jealousy

Challenges of jealousy in polygamy have been discussed in the literature extensively. The findings of the study show that it is common that wives become jealous about one another for several reasons such as being protective of their own space, their husbands’ attention, resources, status of the wife (whether they are the first, second or third wife etc.).

“Yes, I believe there are people who are jealous and it comes in various degrees as well.” (Tebogo, 41 years old)

Tebogo also referred to jealousy as a protective mechanism which varies from one person to the other and from one relationship to another. A wife reported that she believed that she is not a jealous wife as she is a confident and content person about her husband’s love.

4.3.7.4 Chores Not Equally Shared

The challenge of inequality in polygamous marriage comes in different contexts and displays. A participant mentioned that, whenever they attend larger family gathering where wives have to take responsibilities of handling chores for the family, chores are normally unequally distributed.

“If there is an event and I arrive late ... There will be noise ... When I arrive, I must start from scratch even though the other wife is there.” (Paulinah, 49 years old)

She reported that she often gets words coming to her whenever she arrives late for the event since she is expected to be the one handling all the responsibilities of the entire event.

4.3.7.5 Children Do Not Understand Polygamy

Children in polygamous marriages have also been discussed at length in literature (Shaiful Bahari et al., 2021) as suffering from psychological challenges including the father not always being present at home. The husband often has to rotate between the households and spend time with his other wives. This type of rotation often has a bearing on children as they grow up not knowing why their father is often away from home. One wife mentioned that children often get confused about polygamy.

“I worry about my children because right now I see that they are growing up, will they be able to cope with the situation that their father does not live here and lives in a certain house.” (Lebo, 40 years old)

She reported that their husband often spends most of his time at the main house with the first wife. She reported that she has expressed her concerns about the husband being at the first wife's house and not equally distributing the time to the rest of the families.

4.3.7.6 Loneliness

One participant reported that polygamy is challenging in a way that it brings about feelings of loneliness in a person. She reported that as she matures and finds herself identity as a woman, she becomes more and more aware of her body, her needs and generally herself. She reported that she has communicated these changes to her husband about how she feels alone and in need of him whenever he is absent.

“I told him 40 just changed my body and just strangely demanded a man ...” (Lebo, 40 years old)

She reported that her husband’s absence has an impact on her well-being as a woman. She also reported that she has expressed these needs to her husband and also found ways to navigate around this challenge.

“I am a woman and I told myself that I won’t allow something called stress to bother me. I can sit down with him and order “sex toys” (objects used for sexual pleasure) and say this one, this one ... but you know the toy doesn’t really replace him because it is a toy not a man.” (Lebo, 40 years old)

The participant explained that being alone and needing a husband who was not available causes feelings of loneliness. The participant also escalated the absence and linked it to issues of not being sexually satisfied as a woman since the husband is often away and has to attend to other families and other wives.

4.4 Overview of the Chapter

This chapter tabulated the findings of this study from the four participants of this study. A total of seven themes were identified which were relevant to answer the research questions.

In the following chapter, the themes will be discussed in detail. The participants highlighted their experiences, relationship with polygamy, their coping ways, and several other challenges they encountered in their polygamous marriages.

CHAPTER FIVE DISCUSSION

5.1 Introduction

The main objective of this study was to explore the personal experiences of women in polygamous marriages. The study focused on understanding the significant experiences of wives adopting a polygamous lifestyle. Furthermore, the study sought to understand the impact culture placed on marital responsibilities undertaken by women choosing a polygamous type of marriage. Finally, this study sought to answer whether there are any beliefs, ideas and experiences that inform women's decision to be married in a polygamous marriage.

This chapter discusses the findings of the study along with the existing literature on the experiences of women in polygamous marriages. To extract the meaning of the themes and evaluate them, the phenomenological theoretical framework was employed. The phenomenological theoretical approach gives attention to an individual's personal and communal life. Phenomenology, common in research in the fields of social science and psychology, is as a framework that seeks to study a phenomenon at a deeper level of consciousness, and concurrently explores the nature of human lived experiences (Qutoshi, 2018).

The study also employed social constructionism to understand the experiences of women in polygamous marriages. As stated by Gergen and Gergen (2003), social constructionism is concerned with the processes and explanation by which people understand, describe and account for the world. People learn and are taught by their culture and society and this knowledge informs their lifestyles and future behaviours (Augustine, 2002).

The chapter will further discuss the seven themes that emerged in the analysis of data: (1) knowledge about polygamy and cultural impact, (2) the family background and history of the wife in polygamy, (3) the psychosocial impact of being a woman in a polygamous marriage, (4) health risks related to being in a polygamous marriage, (5) women's coping skills in a polygamous marriage, (6) the relationship among co-wives and children, and (7) other challenges mentioned by women related to polygamy.

5.2 Knowledge about Husband Preference of Polygamy and the Cultural Impact

This theme recognised women's choices and urgency. The findings revealed that most women may not have had full knowledge of their husbands' choices in regard to a type of preferred marriage but yet women decided to continue living within a polygamous structure. The study

also revealed that women's identities and choices are diverse. Even when options to opt out of a polygamous structure prevailed, some still chose this type of marriage. The decision of opting to stay after learning that there are other wives in the marital structure can be viewed as a commitment that, in some cases, led to a painful and distressing journey. It involved grappling with many aspects of a marriage and understanding how the marriage would be implemented in terms of the time spent with the husband, financial responsibilities, and other domestic responsibilities.

Regardless of the reasons, the majority of the participants in the current study stated that they did not know that their husbands were polygamists or preferred being in a polygamous marriage but still chose to remain in the polygamous institution. One wife stated that the news came only months into the marriage. Another wife stated that she heard from a member of the community that her husband was a polygamist but still chose to pursue a relationship with her husband. One participant reported that she was informed by her husband who already was married at the time to his first wife; she reported that she had no knowledge of this as she understood that she was the only woman in his life.

These findings are consistent with Al-Shamsi & Fulcher (2005) stating that some women in their study learned after seeing a second wife and some learnt from a family member. The findings in this study are also consistent with a study conducted in the United Arab Emirates where wives mentioned that they were not informed by the husband of another wife (Al-Shamsi & Fulcher, 2005). The study stated that most wives did not know their husbands were marrying again (Al-Shamsi & Fulcher, 2005). Another study stated that first wives accepted polygamy only if the husband informed them prior to marrying the second woman (Abdu Salaam, 1997), which was not found in the current study.

The women's understanding of their role in a marital union in this context reveals that love and marriage is a socially constructed process (Beall & Sternberg, 1995). This suggests that men and women's approaches, actions, and thinking towards marriage differ in some cases due to the social construction of gendered roles, i.e., masculinity and femininity. Social constructionism states that gender is present in all social processes and part of the human everyday life. Men often are initiators of marriage and, because of this reason, they often have more power in the marital processes. Their gender differences to that of women create several inequalities.

The women in this study admitted that they were not informed explicitly by their husbands of polygamy being a future reality and they found themselves being in a union that they did not anticipate. The fact that women let their husbands get away with subduing them may be indicative of gender disparities. This phenomenon may be understood as women placing their husbands wants and desires before their own and may also be interpreted as compromising their individual wellbeing. Societal norms should not be ruled out of this discussion as it has some influence in this regard, some cultures normalise the notion of women being submissive and obeying their husbands (Thobejane & Flora, 2014). Contrary to how one may understand this submissive behaviour, for most women in this study entering in a polygamous marriage did not diminish their autonomy but enhanced their desired family lifestyle. Women in this study exercised their individual choices of being part of a polygamous structure despite the challenges known about polygamy. In consequence, participants embraced the positive side of polygamy and the benefits that came with such a marriage. Some of the benefits that the wives in this study claimed are also in line with the literature. Some wives mentioned that they embraced the idea that they could have access to companionship and socialising with other co-wives, they would share the household load, and that they could get assistance with childcare from the other co-wives (Sinai & Peleg, 2021).

5.3 The Family Background History of Polygamy of the Wife

Dermott and Fowler (2020) stated that family is a socially constructed phenomenon created by an interaction of a group of people who as a group define meanings of their social relationship. The traditional definition of family is that family is defined by blood relations, but modern researchers use social construction theory to define family. Cultural norms and institutions form a significant part of family; this includes extended family and social networks (Sanner et al., 2020).

Two participants in the current study reported having a history of polygamy in their family. However, some reported that the polygamy they knew and understood from home was not the same as the polygamy they were currently experiencing in their marriages. Those who had a background in polygamy reported that their marriages were far different to the polygamy they understood and knew from their parents. The views ranged from women believing their parents' polygamy was fairer and better and far different in treatment when compared to their current marriages. Other women believed their marriages were not comparable to their parent's polygamous unions because they felt that their current polygamous marriage was not meeting their expectations; the wives were not being treated fairly, and they had to provide for their

own households. The participants were not asked their opinion on the impact and the experiences of their background with polygamy on their current polygamous marriages. However, the literature states that there are countless effects of growing up in a polygamous family, such as children from polygamous families experience higher incidents of family conflict, violence, and other family disruptions when compared to children from monogamous families (Al-Krenawi, 1998; Elbedour et al., 2000).

Some participants stated that their families were against them being in a polygamous marriage because of the family's religious beliefs which were against polygamy. One participant reported that her uncle delayed the process of *lobola* negotiations with her current husband stating religious beliefs which were opposing polygamy. Some religions are still against the concept of polygamy and continue to embrace monogamy as the only type of union between a man and a woman. According to Ojong and Muthuki (2010:14), religion is at the centre of how people make personal choices and a determinant of people's attitudes in life towards various topics.

Applying social constructionism to the findings, women who grew up in polygamous families perhaps constructed ideas of how their polygamous marriage would be based on what they had seen. They had stored the experiences of what they saw of their families' polygamous marriages. They had good memories of their family members being treated well and looked after by their husbands. However, the participants' experience in their own polygamous marriages was different in that they had to provide for themselves or they received worse treatment than their co-wives. Thus, they had to use other coping mechanisms which they did not necessarily learn from witnessing polygamous marriages but rather from cases of people who were in similar situations or who had similar problems (Berger & Luckman, 2023).

5.4 Psychosocial Impact of Women in Polygamy

In general, relationship problems impact women more than men. Papp (2003) stated that marriage is rather a buffer against psychological issues for men but has the opposite effect in women. Barut and Mohamud (2023) found that women in polygamous marriages presented with more psychosocial problems when compared to those in monogamous families. Brooks (2017) stated that men also suffer from psychological-related problems, such as alcoholism, and this problem is associated with being in a polygamous marriage.

This current study researched women in polygamous marriages and their psychosocial experiences. There are several studies supporting the notion that women are improperly treated

and suffer from different psychosocial problems in polygamous marriages when compared to monogamous types of marriages (Al-Krenawi, 2014; Shaiful Bahari 2021). Al-Krenawi's (2014) study shared a myriad of psychological-related problems that polygamous wives faced, such as anger, frustration and disappointment, conflict, and low self-esteem-related problems.

The women in the current study mentioned that being in a polygamous marriage has many struggles. Some wives reported betrayal as one of the experiences that they experienced in the marriage when the husband took another wife. The current study is consistent with a previous studies conducted in the province of KwaZulu-Natal stating that polygamous marriages bring unhappiness and bitterness (Mkhize & Zondi, 2011).

One wife in the current study reported multiple problems in her marriage which included contracting illness, lack of financial support, and a difficult relationship among the co-wives. The results in the current study are consistent with other studies that reported that as the number of wives increased, challenges such as emotional, economic, and self-esteem-related issues also increased (Kassaw & Shumye, 2021). Jack (1991) stated that women with psychological problems, such as depression, experience this because of a divided self; they are outwardly conforming and compliant, but inwardly they are experiencing a secret self who is enraged, resentful and silenced. Furthermore, women who experienced psychological issues of depression keep themselves from expressing how they feel their anger. Those around them often do not understand the source of their behaviour (Jack, 1991). Women tend to do this out of fear of reprisal or being isolated and not necessarily because they are being passive and dependent. Women reported having a limited voice in the family. The husbands often used favouritism and the wives were unable to have constructive engagement to share their frustrations freely.

5.5 Health Risks

Social constructionists define the conceptual distinction between illness and disease as an important factor in understanding the social construction of illness. The distinction is that the medical model defines diseases as universal and invariant to time and place, whereas the constructionist approach asserts that the meaning and experiences of illness are shaped by cultural and social systems (Conrad & Barker, 2010). Furthermore, the cultural lens of understanding illness points out that it may have metaphoric connotations (Conrad and Barker, 2010). Some known metaphoric meanings include 'evil' associations of certain illnesses, and

this is largely due to the fact that mental illness cannot be separated from an individual's social and cultural context (Agbayani-Siewert et al., 1999).

Concerns about mental health problems and general illnesses were reported in the current study. Health problems ranged from minor to serious types of illnesses. One wife reported that she contracted a serious illness in her marriage. She reported an illness that was prolonged. She reported that she did not know how and where she contracted HIV from but after contracting it she felt an obligation to inform her co-wives about her status. She reported that informing her co-wives was a moral obligation that she felt the need to perform.

Mswela (2009) stated that women in polygamous relationships are at high risk of being infected with HIV because of the many factors that disempower women. These factors include gender inequality, male dominance in the relationship, intimate partner violence, and economic and cultural factors (Mswela, 2009). Gender inequality was suggested by most participants in this study where women complained about not having a space where they could freely share their concerns. One participant who contracted a serious virus (HIV) was discouraged to openly disclose to the other co-wives about her illness.

Adamu et al. (2021) found evidence showing that women from polygamous marriages present with somatic symptoms. A wife in this study reported that she suffered from severe headaches as a result of the painful experiences associated with polygamy. Another study which compared women from monogamous families and polygamous families found that women from polygamous families had higher incidences of somatisation when compared to women from monogamous families (Al-Krenawi, 2001).

5.6 Women's Coping Skills in Polygamy

The women in this study mentioned the ways they coped with the demands and situations that come with being in a polygamous marriage. These coping skills are defined as a process of mobilising thoughts and behavioural strategies that assist the individual to manage internal and external stressful situations (Algorani & Gupta., 2023; Folkman & Lazarus, 1980).

A participant of this current study used her belief in order to rationalise her challenges with polygamy; she mentioned the relief that she felt knowing the whereabouts of her husband. She reported that she coped better with her marriage only because she knew her husband's whereabouts unlike in a monogamous marriage where husbands may deliberately disappear and not inform their wives of their whereabouts. She further stated that because of this she preferred the polygamous type of marriage.

Sinai and Peleg (2021) conducted an exploratory study to understand the coping mechanisms of women in polygamous marriages. The women in their research used several coping mechanisms such as talking to family and friends, using their economic resources, and education. Other women used '*respect for others*' as a way of coping. The study reported that women believed that if they offered respect to the other co-wives, they would receive respect in return. Respect in this study was noted as a coping mechanism for participants. Some participants reported that they also used humility to cope with their marriage life and this helped them overcome many challenges.

Women in general tend to use coping strategies in order to manage or change their reaction to emotional challenges. Men may be more problem focused on their coping (Endler & Parker, 1990). Studies show that these differences in coping between men and women may account for the higher prevalence of women experiencing psychological problems such as depression and anxiety (Matud, 2004; Mazure & Maciejewski, 2003).

Social constructionism defines marriage as a social construct. That is, how people marry or commit to each other is constructed by differing socio-historical contexts as well as underlying social dynamics (e.g., power and gender dynamics). Thus, social constructionism argues that marriage cannot be understood and viewed as a static entity; it evolves and to understand it, one must understand its origin (Aniciete & Soloski, 2011). Therefore, polygamy makes more sense than monogamy because one person committing to only one person goes against the evolutionary nature of humans (Atwood & Seifer, 1997). This is evident in cases where women opt for a polygamous type of marriage and learn how to cope in such an environment and deal with the difficulties that come from being in polygamous marriages (Berger & Luckman, 2023).

5.7 Relationship Amongst Co-Wives

According to Sudakov and Wilreker (2005), the arrival of a new co-wife in a family is bound to evoke feelings of anger, sadness, and a feeling of loss within a current wife. These feelings may be expressed through different behaviours such as complaints of favouritism, limited access to the husband, and complaints of being sexually deprived (Sudakov & Wilreker, 2005).

The wives in this current study complained about co-wives. A wife reported that the first and second wife contest for the position of being the first wife in the family. Another wife stated that when she arrived in the family she was not received well by the other wives. One participant admitted that the relationship between her and her co-wife is that of pretences and

not genuine familyhood. Another participant stated that she decided to have a conversation with her husband to discuss how she wanted to be treated and she believed the conversation with her husband improved the relations between her and her co-wives.

5.8 Other Challenges in Polygamy Relationship

The participants in this study reported several other challenges which will be discussed in the following section. The challenges mentioned in this current study reveal that a polygamous type of marriage has its share of hardships and difficulties. One participant mentioned the ill intentions of some wives joining the polygamous family. She further stated that some of these intentions range from reasons of financial gains to many other selfish intentions, such as self-development, that do not take into consideration the union as whole.

A study conducted in Indonesia reported that some second wives enter a polygamous marriage for income benefits, and this has a negative financial impact on the first wife and her children as the income resources are too limited amongst the wives (Nurmila, 2016). The study further stated that additional wives deprive the first wives of the husband's income leading to the family having additional economic burdens (Nurmila, 2016).

A lack of support from the husband has been reported in this study as one of the challenges faced by wives. The challenge of limited resources is linked closely to financial benefits, and it has been cited in the literature stating that husbands' resources tend to be stretched amongst wives and, as a result, women may experience inequality and children's well-being may also be affected in the process (Al-Krenawi & Graham, 2006).

Experiences of jealousy were also reported in this current study, with wives stating that some wives were unable to handle the process of polygamy due to jealousy. According to Naseer et al. (2021), jealousy was an emotional difficulty in their study conducted in Pakistan. Jealousy is a common phenomenon either in polygamous marriages or monogamous marriages. Naseer et al. (2021) stated that the concept of polygamy can be either viewed in a positive perspective or negative perspective. When individuals' express jealousy with intentions to secure their relationship it may be viewed as positive, but extreme expression is negative especially in polygamous marriages (Naseer et al., 2021). The definition of jealousy states that it is a response to a threat of a loss from a rivalry to a romantic relationship; it is noted to be positive if it is directed at helping an individual maintain their relationship but negative if it leads to conflict, confrontations and the perpetration of abuse of any nature (Abudulai et al., 2022).

The inability to conceive was mentioned by one participant as a challenge in her marriage. The problem of infertility in marriage is prevalent in all cultures and in all types of marriages. A study conducted in Indonesia reported that 41.3% of the participants believed that infertility was an acceptable reason for polygamy (Harzif et al., 2019). Another study on infertility, which was conducted in Nigeria, discovered that infertility may induce polygamy because a family with a problem of infertility may resort to converting polygamy to have children in the family (Anyanwu, 2020). In this study, a participant who reported that the husband left to marry another person prior to marrying her reported other challenges of infertility which could be a reason to induced polygamy as the couple ended their relationship and the man went on to marry another woman as a first wife and then later reconciled with the participant.

Another challenge stated in this study was that chores were unequally shared amongst the wives. Some wives stated that when they attended family gatherings together, chores were not equally shared, and the wives did not work as a team. The same experience was observed in a study conducted in India where chores were not equally shared and the wives also did not get along (Naseer et al., 2021). One wife raised a concern that her children were growing up and she was worried that they were gradually beginning to ask questions about their family situation. Her main concern was that their father was not sharing the same household as them and this was concerning to her. She worried that her children might not understand their living arrangements.

The involvement of both parents in the child's development is important as stated in Cookston and Finlay (2006). One study conducted in the United Kingdom found that both a mother's and father's involvement was pertinent and crucial in a child's happiness, with the father having a stronger positive correlation (Allen & Daly, 2007). A study which was conducted to assess the dynamics of the parent-child relationship found that children from polygamous families stated their relationship with their fathers was poorer compared to children from monogamous families (Al-Krenawi et al., 2008). Another study conducted with polygamous families documented an association between the fathers' absenteeism and the children's vulnerability and risk of developing feelings of abandonment and grief (Elbedour et al., 2000).

This section concludes by discussing the challenge of loneliness in polygamous families. One wife shared that the absence of her husband for long periods has negative impacts on her emotional well-being as she often finds herself alone without a man for extended periods. She mentioned that other than her feelings of loneliness she found that she also felt her sexual needs as a woman were not being met. This finding is consistent with the findings of Naseer et al.

(2021), in which a wife also mentioned that she felt alone after the arrival of a new wife in the family

5.9 Critical Reflection of the Study

The study design is a framework that the researcher uses to collect and analyse data. This framework includes procedures which are scientific in nature. The design is an important process that determines the success of the study. This study applied a qualitative phenomenological approach. Phenomenological studies are descriptive in nature. This means that a researcher ought to be accurate in their description.

This study was focused in uncovering the experiences of women in polygamous marriages. The fundamental factor of the qualitative phenomenological approach is that a researcher set aside their assumptions and own prejudice. All the participants' experiences were captured as they described them. The findings of this current study highlight many negative factors of being a woman in a polygamous marriage. This is in line with many researchers who have placed polygamy as an institution which impacts on women's mental health, is controversial, misunderstood, inequalitarian and favours men (Shepard, 2013; Brooks, 2017).

The women in this current study stated their own experiences of being in a polygamous marriage. The women expressed their personal choices of being in a polygamous institution; women shared that there was very little influence of culture and socialisation contributing to their decisions of being in a polygamous marriage. The women in this study admitted polygamy was ultimately their choice and decision. This study sought to understand the phenomenon of polygamy from women's point of view as compared to other studies which focused on men (Profanter & Gate, 2009). The findings of this current study were reported from the women's perspectives and most findings of the study are in line with other studies of the experiences of women in polygamous marriages.

Women's socialisation plays a critical role in women being submissive to their husbands. Women in this current study alluded that they already had knowledge that their husbands were married to another woman but did not take into account that the process or the decision was a process that would eventually hurt both women (Mkhize & Zondi., 2015). This current study found also that women willingly entered in a polygamous marriage but they failed to foresee the future implications that were attached to the type of marriage that they chose. Mkhize and Zondi (2015) stated that most of the participants said they willingly consented to polygamy, this is consistent with the findings in this current study, women stated that they willingly

consented to polygamy. In contrast, Jonas (2012) mentioned that women consenting into polygamy is illusory and no consent at all. The women willingly consented into marriage but failed to foresee the family influences, societal influences and the general emotional process attached to it. Overall, the study understood and acknowledged women's choices and freedom of choice.

The study also considered that the practice of polygamy in South Africa is a legal practice supported by the Constitution of the country. Therefore, the legal nature of polygamy proves that it has gone through all vetting processes to be regarded socially acceptable and legally recognised. While the current study is not a legal study, it is worth noting that the process of the RCMA passed through many stages, including the important stage in which members of the public are invited to comment regarding the merits of that bill. The fact that the bill was ascended and signed as the RCMA means every citizen of the country had the opportunity to oppose the process should they have deemed it necessary. This means that, while there are some people that may have had opposing views towards polygamy, many were in favour of the practice including those who live and practice polygamy.

The study also acknowledged that the wives' love for their husband was the main contributing factor for women marrying into a polygamous marriage. The same is not true, unfortunately, for men. Polygamy for men is about many other aspects such as having more children and honouring the legacy of the family beyond just love. Further studies need to be conducted into the core influences that play a major role in women marrying into polygamy which still need to be understood.

5.10 Overview of the Chapter

This chapter discussed the seven themes that emerged from the findings of this research study. The chapter discussed the findings by comparing the findings of the current study to past studies and the relevant literature that supports the findings. The main themes discussed were knowledge about polygamy and cultural impact, the family background and history of the wife in polygamy, the psychosocial impact of being a woman in a polygamous marriage, health risks related to being in a polygamous marriage, women's coping skills in a polygamous marriage, the relationship among co-wives and children. Finally, the section discussed other challenges mentioned by the participants. The following chapter is the conclusion of this research which summarises the findings of the study and offers recommendations and limitations to this study.

CHAPTER SIX CONCLUSION

6.1 Introduction

This chapter concludes the study, giving a summary and its implications, limitations of the findings and the recommendations for future research. The findings of this study highlighted the experiences of women in polygamous marriages. The study's findings make valuable contributions to the experiences of women married in polygamous marriages.

6.2 Summary of the Findings

The study adopted a phenomenological research design to understand the experiences of women in polygamous marriages. A total of seven themes emerged showing the women's experiences in polygamous type of marriages. The themes discussed were (1) knowledge about polygamy and cultural impact, (2) the family background and history of the wife in polygamy, (3) the psychosocial impact of being a woman in a polygamous marriage, (4) health risks related to being in a polygamous marriage, (5) women's coping skills in a polygamous marriage, (6) the relationship among co-wives and children, and (7) other challenges mentioned by women related to polygamy. The women who participated in the current study provided insight into their experiences, challenges, and coping strategies for being married into a polygamous type of marriage. The main objective of the study was to understand the personal experience of a polygamous marriage in a society that has a majority of monogamous marriages.

The education level of a woman has been stated to be a determinant of whether a woman will be in a polygamous marriage. The majority of women in this study reported that they had a tertiary education. Literature stated that the more educated the senior wife is, the less likely it is that she will have co-wives. In contrast, other studies revealed that a woman's education does not have any regard as the women still choose to take part in polygamous marriages.

Women in the current study reported that they did not know before being in a relationship with their husbands that the husband believed in a polygamous type of marriage. It was only after they were married that they learned about the husband's preference for polygamy.

In this study, some women had a background history of polygamy. Most women reported that they came from families where polygamy was practised well, in the sense that the wives were treated fairly and provided for by their husbands.

Polygamy in the current study was associated with several psychological problems. Women reported psychological issues such as anger, conflict, frustration and self-esteem issues. Some women reported physical health problems such as contracting HIV and having ailments that escalated to other health problems such as hypertension.

There were several coping skills that women mentioned as beneficial to being in a polygamous marriage. Women reported that humility was important to live better in a polygamous marriage. They also reported that practising '*respect for others*' resulted in other people offering respect in return. Several other challenges were mentioned by women such as limited economic resources, inequality in sharing chores, jealousy, the impact on children and loneliness.

6.3 Recommendation

The findings in the current study show the need for future research studies to explore beyond the results of this current study. Further studies are recommended to sample wives from other races, cultures and religions to understand the experiences of women in a polygamous marriage. It is also recommended that future studies sample participants from other provinces in South Africa.

Understanding the experiences of first wives only is a recommendation for future research. The literature states that first wives suffer from challenges ranging from economic issues that are strained and stretched because of the introduction of a new wife and a new family.

Psychological interventions focused on polygamous families may benefit women and children from polygamous families.

6.4 Limitations

The study setting and sample of the study were in KwaZulu-Natal province only. This sample may not be a universal representation of the experiences of women in South Africa. It is recommended that caution should be applied when interpreting the results of this study and in generalising them to the other provinces of the country.

An underrepresentation of other African ethnic groups, races and age groups may exist because polygamous communities are hidden communities. Accessing these communities may be difficult and may take a long time.

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APPENDICES

Appendix A: Ethics Approval Letter



06 December 2022

Ayanda Purity Simelane (201511956)
School of Applied Human Sc
Howard College

Dear AP Simelane,

Protocol reference number: HSSREC/00004803/2022

Project title: The lived experiences of women practicing polygamy in South Africa: A phenomenological study
Degree: Masters

Approval Notification – Expedited Application

This letter serves to notify you that your application received on 20 September 2022 in connection with the above, was reviewed by the Humanities and Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee (HSSREC) and the protocol has been granted **FULL APPROVAL**.

Any alteration/s to the approved research protocol i.e. Questionnaire/Interview Schedule, Informed Consent Form, Title of the Project, Location of the Study, Research Approach and Methods must be reviewed and approved through the amendment/modification prior to its implementation. In case you have further queries, please quote the above reference number. PLEASE NOTE: Research data should be securely stored in the discipline/department for a period of 5 years.

This approval is valid until 06 December 2023.

To ensure uninterrupted approval of this study beyond the approval expiry date, a progress report must be submitted to the Research Office on the appropriate form 2 - 3 months before the expiry date. A close-out report to be submitted when study is finished.

HSSREC is registered with the South African National Research Ethics Council (REC-040414-040).

Yours sincerely,



Professor Dipane Hlalele (Chair)

/dd

Appendix B: Participant Consent Form

Date _____

INFORMED CONSENT

I _____ (Participant) have been informed about the study entitled *“The lived experiences of women practicing polygamy in South Africa: A Phenomenological Study”* conducted by (A Simelane).

I understand the purpose and procedures of the study. I have been given an opportunity to answer questions about the study and have had answers to my satisfaction.

I declare that my participation in this study is entirely voluntary and that I may withdraw at any time without affecting any of the benefits that I usually am entitled to. I have been informed about any available compensation or medical treatment if injury occurs to me as a result of study-related procedures.

If I have any further questions/concerns or queries related to the study I understand that I may contact the researcher at (A Simelane- [REDACTED] or [REDACTED]).

Signature of Participant _____

Signature of Researcher _____

Date Signed _____

If I have any questions or concerns about my rights as a study participant, or if I am concerned about an aspect of the study or the researchers then I may contact: -

HUMANITIES & SOCIAL SCIENCES RESEARCH ETHICS ADMINISTRATION

Research Office, Westville Campus

Govan Mbeki Building

Private Bag X 54001

Durban

4000

KwaZulu-Natal, SOUTH AFRICA

Tel: 27 31 2604557- Fax: 27 31 2604609

Email: HSSREC@ukzn.ac.za

Appendix C: Participant Demographic Form

DEMOGRAPHIC DETAILS

Demographic Information	
Name/ Code:	
State the category of wife (1 st , 2 nd , 3 rd , 4 th wife)	
How long are you married?	
Race:	
Age:	
Number of children:	
Religion:	
Employment/ Occupation:	
How often do you see your husband? (Daily, bi-weekly, weekly, bi-monthly, monthly, once in six months, once a year. State other)	

Appendix D: Participant Information Sheet

18 Sept 2022

Dear Sir/Madam

My name is Ayanda Simelane and I am a Masters student in Clinical Psychology at the University of KwaZulu Natal (Howard College). As part of my studies, I have to undertake a research project, and I am investigating, *"The lived experiences of women practicing polygamy in South Africa: A Phenomenological Study"*.

You are being invited to take part in an interview discussion, which will take place at a venue convenient to you. This activity will involve an interview which will be facilitated by a researcher (A Simelane). The interview will take around 60 – 90 minutes. You are also invited to complete a short demographic form attached in this research pack which will take approximately 10 minutes. I would also like to record the interview using a digital recording device.

There will be no direct benefits from participating in this study, and there are no disadvantages or penalties for not participating. You are welcomed to withdraw from this study at any time you deem necessary should you wish to do so. The interview will be private and confidential and you will not be asked to provide your name or any identifying information. The information you give to the researcher will be held confidentially and it will not be disclosed to any outside sources. You will be allocated a pseudonym (false name) to represent your participation in my final research report. If you experience any distress or discomfort, we may stop the interview or resume at another time convenient to you. If you need some support or counselling services following the interview, these are available free of charge (first 3 session) thereafter at a minimum cost at The University of KwaZulu Natal Psychology Clinic, (Howard College) Durban, South Africa.

If you have any questions afterwards about this research, feel free to contact me on the detail listed below. This study will be written up as a research report which will be available online through the university library website. If you wish to receive a summary of this report, I will be happy to send it to you upon request. If you have any queries, concerns or complaints regarding the ethical procedures of this study, you are welcome to contact the Humanities & Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee, contact details as follows:

HUMANITIES & SOCIAL SCIENCES RESEARCH ETHICS ADMINISTRATION

Research Office, Westville Campus

Govan Mbeki Building

Private Bag X 54001

Durban

4000

KwaZulu-Natal, SOUTH AFRICA

Tel: 27 31 2604557- Fax: 27 31 2604609

Email: HSSREC@ukzn.ac.za

Yours sincerely,

Ayanda Simelane, [REDACTED]

Or Prof Duncan Cartwright, Cartwrightd@ukzn.ac.za

Appendix E: Plagiarism Report

Ayanda Simelane Dissertation2024			
ORIGINALITY REPORT			
9%	8%	3%	3%
SIMILARITY INDEX	INTERNET SOURCES	PUBLICATIONS	STUDENT PAPERS
PRIMARY SOURCES			
1	researchspace.ukzn.ac.za Internet Source	1%	
2	pdxscholar.library.pdx.edu Internet Source	<1%	
3	www.researchgate.net Internet Source	<1%	
4	repository.up.ac.za Internet Source	<1%	
5	vital.seals.ac.za:8080 Internet Source	<1%	
6	www.researchsquare.com Internet Source	<1%	
7	core.ac.uk Internet Source	<1%	
8	scholarworks.waldenu.edu Internet Source	<1%	
9	Psychosocial Impact of Polygamy in the Middle East, 2014. Publication	<1%	

Appendix F: Editor's Certificate



13 March 2024

CERTIFICATE

Ayanda P. Simelane

Dear Ayanda

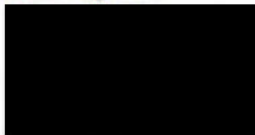
Thank you for using Impela Editing Services to edit your Master's dissertation entitled "THE LIVED EXPERIENCES OF WOMEN PRACTICING POLYGAMY IN SOUTH AFRICA: A PHENOMENOLOGICAL STUDY".

I have proofread for errors of grammar, punctuation, spelling, syntax and typing mistakes. I have formatted your work and checked the references according to APA 7th edition (this means checking the formatting).

PLEASE NOTE: Impela Editing accepts no fault if an author does not accept the corrections suggested or makes changes to a document after a certificate has been issued. The client may choose to accept none, some, or all of the editor's editorial changes and/or suggestions.

I wish you the very best in your submission.

Kind regards



Helen Bond (Bachelor of Arts, HDE)