

# Polygamy: Uncovering the effect of patriarchal ideology on gender-biased interpretation



## Authors:

Hamka Hasan<sup>1</sup>   
 Asep S. Jahar<sup>2</sup>   
 Nasaruddin Umar<sup>3</sup>   
 Irwan Abdullah<sup>4</sup> 

## Affiliations:

<sup>1</sup>Faculty of Islamic Studies,  
Islamic State University  
Syarif Hidayatullah Jakarta,  
Tangerang Selatan, Indonesia

<sup>2</sup>Department of Law, Faculty  
of Syariah and Law, Islamic  
State University, Syarif  
Hidayatullah Jakarta,  
Tangerang Selatan,  
Indonesia

<sup>3</sup>Department of Quran and  
Tafsir Science, Faculty of  
Ushuluddin, Islamic State  
University, Syarif Hidayatullah  
Jakarta, Tangerang Selatan,  
Indonesia

<sup>4</sup>Department of  
Anthropology, Faculty of  
Cultural Sciences, Gadjah  
Mada University,  
Yogyakarta, Indonesia

## Corresponding author:

Hamka Hasan,  
hamkahasan@uinjkt.ac.id

## Dates:

Received: 29 July 2022

Accepted: 26 Aug. 2022

Published: 20 Dec. 2022

## How to cite this article:

Hasan, H., Jahar, A.S.,  
Umar, N. & Abdullah, I.,  
2022, 'Polygamy 'Polygamy:  
Uncovering the effect of  
patriarchal ideology on  
gender-biased  
interpretation', *HTS  
Teologiese Studies/  
Theological Studies*  
78(4), a7970. [https://doi.  
org/10.4102/hts.v78i4.7970](https://doi.org/10.4102/hts.v78i4.7970)

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Polygamy, which was practiced without limitations in the past, had been restricted to four wives after the arrival of Islam in the Arabian Peninsula. However, some scholars have different views on this issue, supposedly influenced by the literal and cultural background of patriarchal tradition on treating women as the object of polygamy. This article attempts to examine the construction of patriarchal interpretation in a gender-biased interpretation, its factors and its implications. This study adopts a qualitative approach and employs a content analysis approach. Interviews with relevant scholars are also used to explore in-depth information regarding this subject. The object of research is based on a full set (30 juz/ chapters) of 11 books of *tafsir* written in Indonesia. These books are *Tafsir Al-Furqan*, *Tafsir Quran*, *Adz-Dzikra: Terjemah dan Tafsir al-Quran*, *Al-Quran dan Terjemahnya*, *Tafsir Quran Karim*, *Tafsir al-Azhar*, *Tafsir Rahmat*, *Tafsir al-Quran al-Majid an-Nur*, *Tafsir al-Mishbah*, *Al-Quran and its Exegesis of the Department of Religion*, and *Tafsir al-Hijri*. This study found that women have been exploited through polygamy practices. Our findings show that biased gender interpretation, especially because of the patriarchal mindset, brought a greater impact on the Quranic interpretation. This study suggested that reinterpretation towards Quranic verses particularly dealing with gender issues needs to be strengthened in accordance with justice and humanistic values.

**Contribution:** This article offered two approaches for the study of the Quran in order to establish gender equality and justice in marriage practice. Firstly, the adaptive and humanistic interpretations of the Quran need to be strengthened and should raise common consciousness in Muslim society. Secondly, there is a need to study the Quran in an integrative, holistic and hermeneutical understanding of the Quranic text. This method can explore the deepest meaning of the Quran so it can rise gender-sensitive, humanist and moderate interpretations.

**Keywords:** polygamy; ideology; patriarchy; interpretation (*tafsir*); gender.

## Introduction

Quranic studies in the early period depicted women as sexual objects through the authorisation of polygamy (Razi 2015a) that led to certain forms of violence (Dozan 2021), particularly in verbal forms (Al Momani, Migdadi & Rabab'a 2018). Some of the reasons used to authorise polygamy are infertility and the inability of a wife to fulfil her sexual obligations. The two reasons mentioned have dominated the interpretation of the Quran in the early days to the present, as can be seen in the study of Zaman (2020) and acknowledged by Ismail (2017), Razi (2015b) and Shukri and Owoyemi (2014). It has also been practised by Muslim scholars (Smith 2014) and has been reinforced by local customary law (Platt 2017). These studies showed that wives have been the object of sexual and reproductive goals. Once these aspects are not fulfilled, wives rather than husbands become the target of injustice and gender-biased treatment by referring to the Quranic verses through patriarchal and textual interpretations.

Studies related to the relationship between gender and Quran have been conducted by many researchers, which can be classified into four categories: Firstly, the extenuation of misinterpretation in understanding the Quran (Abdelgelil et al. 2019; Aziz, Abdullah & Prasojo 2020; Fathy et al. 2018; Izadi 2020); secondly, the role of women in the process of writing and collecting Quran in the early days of Islam (Geissinger 2017; Khan 2014); thirdly, regional studies related to women using the living-Quran approach (Chaudhary 2011; Huq 2008; Kusmana 2019; Masoud, Jamal & Nugent 2016) and fourthly, interdisciplinary studies related to the psychological role of Quran on women (Irmawati et al. 2020; Madavifar,

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Yadollahpour & Hasanzadeh 2017; Sahmeddini et al. 2014). Existing studies such as above were only limited to refining the Quranic interpretation as indicated by the first and second groups of the above studies. On the contrary, the third and fourth categories tended to confirm the right role of women as conveyed by the Quran. Therefore, the above studies have certain limitations which are ignoring factors that lead to the birth of gender-biased interpretation and the long-term implications of such interpretation.

This article aims at responding to the shortcomings of the previous studies which did not explain the reasons behind the misinterpretation of the Quran on women and the dangers caused by this type of interpretation. This article specifically answers three questions: (1) What is the construction of thought used by certain interpretations that exploit women's bodies through the authorisation of polygamy resulted from patriarchal ideology? (2) What are the factors influencing the ideology resulted in gender-biased interpretation? (3) What are the implications of such interpretation? The discussions on the three questions are explicated by showing evidence and arguments that can be used to draw a conclusion.

This article argues that Quranic interpretation that exploits women's bodies is caused by the patriarchal ideology of the interpreter, their social environment and their culture, and the majority of them are male. The interpreter's ideology that tends to be gender-biased is the result of a Quranic understanding that is not gender-just. Differences in the interpretation of gender issues in the Quran could be influenced by politics, ideology, and the social and academic background of the *mufassir*. The interpretation of the Quran which is mostly from men results in an interpretation from their perspective. These factors can be clearly seen in the early studies of the Quran.

## Patriarchal ideology, polygamy and gender bias

### Patriarchal ideology

Patriarchal ideology often leads to gender-based violence and repressive cultural and religious practices that victimise women (Fakunmoju et al. 2021), particularly in polygamous cases (Boulos 2021). This ideology tends to deprive women of their basic rights while leaving men to dominate every aspect of life. Men determine women's fates assuming that women are men's subordinate and given limited roles in society (Ntiwunka & Iyanda 2017). To some extent, this type of ideology has negatively impacted women's position in society. They could not contribute to national development (Obasola 2013). To counterbalance the aforementioned symptoms, an appropriate strategy is needed. The strategy should be able to denounce the type of ideology, which only upholds patriarchy and promotes false flexibility (Gálvez, Tirado & Alcaraz 2021). Also, to develop a new paradigm in the narrative of men's roles in society, such as those in other religious and cultural doctrines (Meyer 2018).

Patriarchal ideology has infiltrated the entire order of human life and influenced their mindset and behaviour. This ideology has damaged the competitive order in achieving a tolerant world of work because one's success is measured through patriarchal ideology (Gálvez et al. 2021). Atanga (2021) found that this ideology can weaken women in the world of education, which has been dominated by men. This also happens in a patriarchal culture where women have experienced modernisation through higher education. Men are still considered the leaders of the family (Wang & Kassam 2016). In certain cases, such as rape, women are no longer seen as victims. On the contrary, in a non-patriarchal culture, women are seen as victims so that their rights are protected by law (Fakunmoju et al. 2021). The above reality can be nullified by inflaming the symbol of feminism through language (Atanga 2021) and gender sensitivity.

### Polygamy

In certain cultures, women (whose husbands are polygamists) do not blame their husbands or the religious text interpretation that supports polygamy. Instead, they blame the patriarchal culture of their ethnic group. In this instance, religion is not the absolute part of the conflict (Yoshizawa & Kusaka 2020). Furthermore, this is also strengthened by religious understanding spread in certain communities that polygamy is a common practice. In overseeing the issue of polygamy, a state often fails to see polygamy as a form of cross-sectional discrimination. Polygamy is only portrayed as a cultural problem. Therefore, the state treats polygamy primarily as a threat to demographic and other controversial interests. In turn, addressing the interests is prioritised over the rights of polygamy's victims and child protection (Boulos 2021).

Some of the consequences resulting from polygamy include eliminating the rights of wives and children because a polygamous husband tends to not register his second wife to the state upon various considerations (Platt 2017). Thus, polygamy has caused the violation of women's right involved in it (Boulos 2021). Moreover, polygamy has caused the collapse of wives and children to be perceived as victims (Susanti & Mas'udah 2020).

### Gender bias

Gender-biased interpretation of the Holy Scriptures has grown and developed in Muslim society. Most Muslims believe that the existing interpretation of the Quran has been taken for granted and should not be questioned anymore. In fact, such interpretation is a perspective strongly held among scholars and influenced by human life experience. Quranic interpretation is the product of the human culture that might be applied in accordance with human values and reasons. There was indeed a precedence of revelation once a certain verse was revealed to the Prophet. Human interest and justice, in overall Quranic verses, remained as the objective of the Quran. Human relation, moreover, as found in marriage stands as the rational and human dimension. Therefore, Muslims are required to adopt many approaches to

understanding the Quran (Umar 2004). Several attempts have been made to interpret Quran towards gender equality. It understands and supports equal position between men and women in terms of existence, empowerment and participation in all areas of life, both domestic and public (Susanti & Mas'udah 2020). This is an important effort that should be undertaken assuming that women have been represented negatively in various types of texts through threatening actions that support masculine power and hegemony (Al Momani et al. 2018).

There is a strong connection between the interpretation of gender bias and polygamous behaviour. Polygamy activities that are contrary to religious values are perpetuated by the interpretation of gender bias (Syarif). In recent years, modern Qur'anic exegesis has developed a strategy that has spread throughout the Islamic world to relativise the ominous verses by establishing a distinction between meanings that apply on one side (universal, and bound by time and situational meaning) and certain verses on the other side (Khorchide 2019). Thus, another effort is needed to study feminist approaches to gender equality, as their interpretations differ from traditional interpretations (Wadud 2021), and the basis of how they shape the new Quranic hermeneutics towards contemporary development of gender equality and gender justice (Banu & Jamali 2019; Riyani & Ismail 2018). This leads us to conclude (and theorise) that Islamic tenets, as originally taken from the Quran, support gender equality and correct prejudiced judgements about gender (Koburtay & Abuhussein 2021).

## Research methods

### Research type and scope

This research applies a qualitative analysis by using a content analysis approach in examining Quranic verses referring to research conducted by Ali (2019), which explains that qualitative content analysis is a valid method for analysing texts and contents. This method systematically selects and studies the rules of Quranic interpretation. The analysis is devoted to investigate 11 books of *tafsir* (Quranic exegesis) published in Indonesia. Indonesian books of *tafsir* are chosen as the sample of this study in an attempt to seek the trends of interpretation made by Indonesian Quranic scholars. This effort also assumes, likely, that these have long been used by Indonesian Muslims as the main source of social and religious practices. In addition, Indonesia is chosen because of the fact that many books of *tafsir* have been published in Indonesia, some of which have become significant references for the study among Muslims. Technically, the obtained data are classified based on the reasons proposed by the book concerning gender-biased polygamy interpretation. Apart from that, this study also employs some other data from the internet concerning the implications of gender-biased interpretation because of the patriarchal ideology practised by religious experts. In addition, this research is also enriched with some interviews related to the factors leading to the birth of gender-biased interpretation as well as its implications.

## Research participants

This study involved four experts in the field of Quranic studies and gender, one expert in the field of law, two experts in the field of Islamic law and three people who have become victims of polygamy. The Quranic studies and gender experts were chosen because of their active engagement in the field of Quranic interpretation and academically sound ability in understanding gender equality-related verses of the Quran. The informants from statutory experts were selected because, to some extent, law has contributed to the occurrence of gender inequality in the society. Meanwhile, the selection of Islamic jurist informants is because of their expertise in understanding certain Islamic laws that tend to legitimise the marginalisation of women in Islam. All informants/resource persons involved in this research are well-known and academically sound experts in their respective fields. In addition, the informants from families who have become the victim of polygamy were included to prove the negative implications of polygamous practices carried out by their husbands or parents. The informant selection mechanism is based on Patton's opinion in determining informants or participants for qualitative research. In qualitative research, informants or participants are determined entirely by the researcher. In this sense, the sampling method is purposeful sampling. Participants or informants are chosen according to the strategies and objectives set by the researcher (Patton 2002).

## Guidelines for data collection

In the process of collecting data, interview guidelines were used as the basis of interview question formulation. The interview process used open-ended questions. It covered three data fields: Firstly, the form of gender-biased Quranic interpretation resulted from patriarchal ideology; secondly, factors that cause patriarchal ideology to form gender-biased interpretation and thirdly, the implications of gender-biased interpretation resulted from patriarchal ideology. In addition to interview guidelines, this study also uses a checklist to map the forms of gender-biased interpretation. This checklist is used to analyse the classifications' tendency. Both interview guidelines and checklist direct researchers to focus on the object of the research.

## Research procedure

Research procedure in this study refers to the procedure that has been carried out by Miswar et al. (2022) to explore the concept of Ashura using a qualitative research method that combines text studies and informant explanations through interviews. Technically, this study first explores the texts of the Quran and then deepens them through interviews with experts in certain fields about the theme being studied. The research was conducted over a period of six months (from July to December 2021). It identifies the explanation of various types of interpretations upon Surah an-Nisa/4:3. This stage is carried out to find certain forms of interpretation that are gender-biased. Following that, based on the theme being

researched, the researcher determines capable informants in the field of Quranic exegesis and gender studies as well as experts in the field of Islamic law. The informants are expected to provide an explanation of the factors and implications of the patriarchal ideology interpretation on the Quran. Apart from that, the researcher also identifies a number of Islamic preachers (often appearing on television) who practice polygamy against the teachings of Islam. This information is considered important to prove that the implications of patriarchal ideology interpretation can result in polygamy practices that are contradictory to Quranic values, which in turn will incur violence against women. The three stages are carried out to assert the research findings.

## Data analysis

The map of gender-biased interpretation and interview results were classified thematically to obtain clear categorisation of forms, factors and implications of gender-biased interpretation. The data were analysed in three stages: data restatement, data description and data interpretation. The restatement was carried out to show the pattern and trend of the data regarding the construction of gender-biased

interpretation. Meanwhile, the descriptive process was carried out to show the factors that cause the occurrence of gender-biased interpretation. The interpretation process was carried out by delving into the interview result from both the experts and the polygamy victims who have become the basic implications of gender-biased interpretations. The three forms of analysis refer to the research of Qudsy, Abdullah and Pabbajah (2021) which has successfully described the main problems discussed in the research.

## Gender bias in the books of *tafsir* published in Indonesian

The interpretation's explanation with the content analysis approach in Table 1 shows that the interpreters generally allow polygamy because the wife cannot serve her husband sexually and the wife is infertile. The husband can do polygamy if he has excessive sexual desire and can act equally between wives. However, textually, this reason is not found in the Qur'an and Hadith. The measure for justice is also unclear. Therefore, the real reason of the interpreter is influenced by patriarchal culture and ideology which consider women as subordinate to men. This is in line with the views of Yoshizawa

**TABLE 1:** Construction of interpretation resulted from patriarchal ideology in the 11 books of *tafsir* published in Indonesian.

No.	Permission of polygamy	Books of <i>tafsir</i>	Reasons for biased gender interpretation
1	Polygamy is permitted on the condition of husbands' fair treatment towards their wives.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>Tafsir Al-Furqan</i>, by Hassan (1956)</li> <li>• <i>Tafsir Quran</i>, by Hamidy and Fachruddin (1959)</li> <li>• <i>Adz-Dzikra</i>, Translation and <i>Tafsir</i> of the Quran, by Surin (1991)</li> <li>• <i>Al-Quran and its translation</i> (Indonesian); Ministry of Hajj, Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. Released in Indonesia (2000)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• And marry other women who are not orphans, as many times as you like: once two, or once three, or once four. However, in your marriage with those women who are not orphans, if you feel that you cannot treat them justly, then do not marry but one person.</li> <li>• If a person does not feel right during his marriage with an orphan girl, he may marry other women up to four. However, if he feels that he cannot do justice between the wives, one is enough.</li> <li>• Allah allows more than one wife (polygamy). However, it is limited to a maximum of four wives, provided that the husbands are able to act fairly between all wives, in terms of eating, drinking, housing, visiting shifts and some other material matters. As for being just emotionally such as love, the husband is not obliged to do so because it is beyond his capacity.</li> <li>• Being fair and just in this verse is providing fair treatment for the wives in terms of clothing, housing, visiting turn and other biological necessities.</li> </ul>
2	Polygamy is allowed when the number of women decreases because of war or other causes on the condition of fair treatment from the husbands.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>Tafsir Quran Karim</i>, by Yunus (1988)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• In this verse, it is clear that it is permissible for you (husband) to marry two, three or four women under a very strict condition, namely being just and fair towards the women, either for their living allowances or their schedule of visit. However, if you are worried that it will not be fair, then you should only have one wife. The insight (the secret) is that men at the time (the era of Prophet Muhammad) were fewer in number than women because many have died in battle. Likewise, in countries where there have been wars, there are fewer men than women.</li> </ul>
3	Polygamy is permeable when the wife is unable to serve her husband mentally because of illness or infertility.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>Tafsir al-Azhar</i>, by Hamka (1982)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Polygamy does not need to be done if a wife is able to meet the needs of a husband. However, it is permitted if there are indeed shortcomings from the wife, such as being unable to serve her husband mentally because of illness, or the wife cannot become pregnant because of infertility.</li> </ul>
4	Polygamy is allowed as an emergency choice when the wife is infertile, affected by a disease that makes her impossible to carry out her duties as a wife.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>Tafsir Rahmat</i>, by Bakri (1984)</li> <li>• <i>Tafsir al-Quran al-Majid an-Nur</i>, by Al-Shiddiq (1995)</li> <li>• <i>Tafsir al-Mishbah</i>, by Shihab (2006)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Polygamy is like an emergency door that can only be opened if danger exists. Ideally, it should be monogamy as it is clearly stated in the verse 'fawahidah'. However, there should be an emergency door in case of greater danger and catastrophe occurred. Just like an emergency exit in a hotel which was created in case of fire.</li> <li>• The permissibility of having multiple wives is very limited. It is permissible on an emergency basis for people who are truthful and will act fairly, and far from cheating.</li> <li>• The permissibility of polygamy is like a small door or emergency door that can only be taken by those who really need it under a very strict condition. The emergency door mentioned is an infertile wife, affected by a disease that makes her impossible carrying out her duties as a wife.</li> </ul>
5	Polygamy is allowed when a person has no offspring from the current marriage, a quick menopause wife and an unbalanced ratio between men and women.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>Al-Quran and its Tafsir</i>, by the Indonesian Islamic University Team (1995)</li> </ul>	<p>Reasons for allowing someone to be polygamous:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. The wife is infertile (according to the doctor's examination).</li> <li>2. The wife is having a very long period of menstruation because of unfavorable physical condition.</li> <li>3. In a war circumstance where the number of women is greater than that of men.</li> </ol>
6	Polygamy is permissible for noble purposes such as increasing the dignity of women.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>Tafsir al-Hijri</i>, by Haffuiddin (2000)</li> </ul>	<p>Polygamy aims at:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Educating people to share their feelings and realise the values of solidarity in both family matter and social life.</li> <li>2. Realising the attitude of <i>ta'awun</i> (giving assistance to others) in good deeds.</li> <li>3. Avoiding sexual deviations and severe psychological effects for unmarried women where an unequal ratio between men and women exists.</li> </ol>

and Kusaka who found that polygamous women do not blame their partners or the interpretation of religious texts as the cause of polygamy, but instead often blame the patriarchal culture of their ethnic group (Yoshizawa & Kusaka 2020). The presence of almost all men as interpreters and the presence of only a few women strengthen this culture and ideology as a factor. These two things become elements that add to the rise of a gender bias interpretation.

## Factors enabling the birth of patriarchal ideology in the gender-biased interpretation

The factors enabling the birth of patriarchal ideology in gender-biased Quranic interpretation are given in Table 2.

Table 2 shows six factors that influence gender-biased interpretation towards certain texts related to polygamy. These factors were identified from experts' statements including literal interpretation of Quranic text, the expansion of the patriarchal Islamic empire to Europe, Central Asia and other areas, such as the dominance of male interpreters, a misunderstanding upon certain interpretation, patriarchal

**TABLE 2:** Six factors enabling the birth of patriarchal ideology in gender-biased Quranic interpretation.

No.	Factor	Expert
1	The literal interpretation of the Quran	Interview with SH on 03 August 2021
2	The expansion of the patriarchal Islamic empire to Europe and Central Asia has strengthened the culture of gender-biased interpretation	Interview with SH on 03 August 2021
3	The dominance of male interpreters	Interview with SH on 03 August 2021
4	Misunderstanding upon interpretation	Interview with ZS on 04 August 2021
5	The patriarchal culture of a society	Interview with MG on 10 August 2021
6	The patriarchal culture that intersects with religion and legislation	Interview with DA on 15 August 2021

**TABLE 3:** A high number of problematic polygamy practices displayed by religious figures.

No.	Name/profile	Impacts of polygamy	Links
1	UAI/famous preacher	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The husband died leaving three wives. The third wife was not registered as the beneficiary.</li> <li>The three wives were in conflict after the husband died.</li> </ul>	<a href="https://tasikmalaya.pikiran-rakyat.com/entertainment/pr-062651066/ketuk-palu-penetapan-ahli-waris-istri-ketiga-ustaz-arifin-ilham-tak-dapat-jatah-kenapa">https://tasikmalaya.pikiran-rakyat.com/entertainment/pr-062651066/ketuk-palu-penetapan-ahli-waris-istri-ketiga-ustaz-arifin-ilham-tak-dapat-jatah-kenapa</a> <a href="https://www.pikiran-rakyat.com/entertainment/pr-012436793/dituding-berebut-harta-istri-kedua-ustaz-arifin-ilham-dilaporkan-keluarga-alvin-faiz-ke-polisi">https://www.pikiran-rakyat.com/entertainment/pr-012436793/dituding-berebut-harta-istri-kedua-ustaz-arifin-ilham-dilaporkan-keluarga-alvin-faiz-ke-polisi</a>
2	UIH/famous preacher	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The husband has secretly been married to a second wife for seven years. When the first wife found out that her husband was married to another woman, her family got angry and filed a divorce.</li> </ul>	<a href="https://www.liputan6.com/showbiz/read/2886887/ustaz-ahmad-alhabsyi-7-tahun-poligami-tanpa-sepengetahuan-istri">https://www.liputan6.com/showbiz/read/2886887/ustaz-ahmad-alhabsyi-7-tahun-poligami-tanpa-sepengetahuan-istri</a>
3	UAG/famous preacher	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The husband married a second wife with the consent of the first wife. However, after certain time and condition, the first wife asked for a divorce because she could not stand the life of a polygamous husband. Later, they reconciled, but filed for a divorce again.</li> </ul>	<a href="https://jabar.tribunnews.com/2021/04/01/luka-batin-tehninih-setelah-aa-gym-poligami-pada-2006-sempat-kunjungi-psikolog-alami-kekecewaan">https://jabar.tribunnews.com/2021/04/01/luka-batin-tehninih-setelah-aa-gym-poligami-pada-2006-sempat-kunjungi-psikolog-alami-kekecewaan</a>
4	UZM/ulema (Muslim scholars and community leaders)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The husband met a woman and married the woman (as a second wife). Following that, his first wife protested and asked for a divorce.</li> </ul>	-
5	UIB/famous preacher	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Eight years after her husband's death, the first wife announced that her husband has been practising polygamy and married three wives. She admitted that the information concerning her husband's polygamy was not shared during his life because he was afraid of losing his fans and his job.</li> <li>The first wife's reason for announcing the information was that she was afraid that the children of his husband's three wives would marry each other, as this is prohibited by Islam.</li> </ul>	<a href="https://pangandaran.pikiran-rakyat.com/entertainment/pr-101942796/adik-uje-soal-umi-pipik-yang-bongkar-poligami-sang-kakak-anggap-kita-gak-denger-kita-gak-tahu?page=2">https://pangandaran.pikiran-rakyat.com/entertainment/pr-101942796/adik-uje-soal-umi-pipik-yang-bongkar-poligami-sang-kakak-anggap-kita-gak-denger-kita-gak-tahu?page=2</a> <a href="https://www.tribunnews.com/seleb/2021/05/24/alasan-umi-pipik-ungkap-poligami-almrhum-uje-kisah-asmara-anak-gadisnya-jadi-pertimbangan">https://www.tribunnews.com/seleb/2021/05/24/alasan-umi-pipik-ungkap-poligami-almrhum-uje-kisah-asmara-anak-gadisnya-jadi-pertimbangan</a>
6	OP/preachers/religious singer	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The wife was disappointed that her husband had secretly married another woman (as a second wife) who was quite close to her family. The second wife has been married to her husband for 17 years and has six children.</li> </ul>	<a href="https://www.fimela.com/entertainment/read/3414192/kronologi-opick-poligami-dari-istri-kedua-ke-istri-ketiga">https://www.fimela.com/entertainment/read/3414192/kronologi-opick-poligami-dari-istri-kedua-ke-istri-ketiga</a>
7	UA/famous preacher	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The husband was married to another woman without a legitimate record. The marriage was not acknowledged by his first wife. After four years of polygamy, the second wife was divorced only through 'BBM (Black Berry Message)'. </li> </ul>	<a href="https://hot.detik.com/celeb/d-3066801/bongkar-poligami-ustad-aswan-bagaimana-hubungan-rp-dengan-pipik">https://hot.detik.com/celeb/d-3066801/bongkar-poligami-ustad-aswan-bagaimana-hubungan-rp-dengan-pipik</a>

culture of Arab society as the place where Qur'an was revealed, and patriarchal culture in religion and legislation. All of the factors contribute significantly to the gender-biased interpretation towards polygamy-related Quranic verses.

## The implications of gender-biased patriarchal interpretation

The impact of polygamy on women, as found in Table 3, shows that there are victims for women and children. Some of the cases of victimised woman are described as follows:

1. The practice of polygamy does not carry justice for wives but makes them victims. In other words, polygamy is practised more for biological needs.
2. The family conditions of polygamous wives experience pressure or injustice, both against their wives and their children.
3. Family conditions are not harmonious because of conflicts between polygamous wives.

This study found several explanations in the context of the interpretation and practice of polygamy. In terms of interpretation, verses that contain the theme of polygamy tend to be interpreted in an unclear way and can lead to gender bias. Aspects of justice, for example, are seen in the finance, treatment and turn between the wives. This is very subjective and causes injustice. In addition, in practice, polygamy shows real social and psychological problems. For polygamous women, it appears that they are treated more as a biological need. Moreover, women and children are under psychological pressure.

The verses used above tend to be motivated by the interests and cultural influences that strengthen society. The patriarchal

culture, for example, is the reason women remain as an object and obey as part of the goal of polygamy. State regulations governing marriage seek how gender justice in society can be realised. On the contrary, state regulations also aim at how social order in society can be realised properly, especially the protection of civic values for the community.

Thus, the practice of polygamy carried out by the preacher above is contrary to religious values and Indonesian Law. Such as the following explanation: (1) They practice polygamy against the guidance of religious values. The explanation of polygamy in the Quran is stated within the framework of empowering women and orphans. Seven preachers did it to the girls, not to widows or orphans. (2) The condition of the seven preachers' families experienced problems because the relationship between his wives was not harmonious, even the relationship between each wife was in a fight. This is contrary to religious orders to build a harmonious family and treat wives and families in a *ma'ruf* (good) way. (3) All of those seven preachers' wives are not registered legally at the civil registration office, so they are considered a violation of Marriage Law No. 1 of 1974 and the Indonesian Ministry of Religion's Kompilasi Hukum Islam (KHI). (4) As a result of their unregistered marriage with their wives, making these wives and their children did not inherit from their husbands fathers. With this explanation, it can be understood that the seven preachers practise polygamy not based on the guidance of the Quran and the Prophet's Hadith, even against them. It is also contrary to the Marriage Law No. 1 of 1974 and KHI of the Ministry of Religion of the Republic of Indonesia, which are in line with the views of Nina Nurmila. Their actions in polygamy are only based on a patriarchal culture and ideology that place women as inferior beings under men. They proclaim themselves as figures who have high social status in the community and feel they know the most about religion. With this status, they easily influence women and their families who will be polygamous.

## Challenging the gender equality interpretation in *tafsir* (Quranic exegesis)

This study shows that the explanation of polygamy in the Indonesian *tafsir* tends to be patriarchal, resulting in a gender-biased interpretation. The biased interpretation stated that polygamy is permissible when the wife is infertile and is not able to carry out her sexual obligations. Some of the factors that influence the patriarchal interpretation include literal understanding of the Quran, an assumption that regards women as second beings to men, the influence of Arab's culture in understanding the Quran and regional differences of the *mufassir* (interpreter). One of the implications of this biased interpretation is the high level of polygamy practised by religious figures. This phenomenon violates the basic values of the Quran in building a family. In some cases, it resulted in violence against their wives and children.

Gender-biased interpretation resulted from patriarchal ideology (Mashhour 2017) indicates that religious values contained in the

Quranic text cannot be internalised to carry out religious teachings properly and correctly because this kind of *tafsir* will increase gender-biased interpretation (Abu Zaid 2004). Instead of doing polygamy for religious reasons, the religious text is used as a justification to do polygamy resulted in the distortion of religious texts (Boulos 2021). The perpetrators of polygamy ignore the noble purpose of the revelation of the Quran as a guide for humans to develop a humanist and tolerant social order (Platt 2017). Meanwhile, the main purpose of marriage is supposedly to form a happy family with full of serenity, love and affection (Kholik 2017). In Quranic terminology, this goal is represented by the terms *Sakinah* (peaceful), *marwaddah* (love) and *rahmat* (compassion) between husband, wife and children (Shihab 2006). Thus, polygamy resulted from patriarchal interpretation is contradictory to the main purpose of the revelation and marriage enactment.

The absence of religious values internalisation in people's lives triggers the rebirth of the *jahiliyah* (ignorance) tradition in modern life where women are seen as a second social class under the subordination of men. Prior to the modern era, it was easy for men to practise polygamy on the basis of certain religious texts without considering other deep aspects of the sacred text, such as the noble goal of the revelation mentioned earlier. In the end, women will be forced to accept polygamy because of religious guidance wrapped inherently in patriarchal ideology. On the contrary, the values of Quranic teachings have erased the tradition of polygamy because it is contradictory to the main goal of forming a family, namely building a harmonious family as stated in the QS. Ar-Rum/30:21 and the unattainable justice in polygamy as stated in QS. An-Nisa/4:129 (Mulia 2007). Husbands should imitate the Prophet Muhammad's marriage. He was monogamous with Khadijah for 25 years. His polygamous life was only 8 years. Thus, the prophet's long monogamous period should be the main reference. Even, the Prophet did not allow his daughter (Fatimah) to marry a polygamous husband. Therefore, Ali bin Abi Thalib (Fatimah's husband) did not do so (Quraish Shihab 2002).

The study of gender interpretation tends to ignore patriarchal ideology as one of the important elements contributing to the birth of gender-biased interpretation. Various studies show that the problems faced in the gender-biased interpretation are based on the method of textual interpretation and misinterpretation (Aziz et al. 2020) and the background of *mufassir* (Abukari 2014; Hassen 2012; Saeed 2013). The inferiority of women in the previous interpretation has shifted to a type of interpretation that respects women. This type of interpretation resulted from the improvement of cultural, social and economic status of women in the 20th century, even though several Quranic verses are potentially understood differently and tend to conflict with the 20th-century emerging concept mentioned above (Izadi 2020). On the contrary, some interpreters do not comprehensively reflect the Quranic verses and think that Quran has usurped women's rights (Abdelgelil et al. 2019), and they understand that Quran has restricted women from being active in public spaces, even though several verses

recognise women's role in various social aspects (Fathy et al. 2018). The last mentioned studies do not consider the influence of patriarchal ideology as the contributing factor of gender-biased interpretation's occurrence.

To face the danger induced by gender-biased interpretation, a series of action plans are needed to make the momentum of widespread interpretation as the stepping stone to propose non-patriarchal interpretation. There are, at least, three directions of the action plan that can be formulated: Firstly, revealing gender discourses in the Quran requires not only a historical understanding of its text but also an integrative and holistic understanding of its text (Darzi, Ahmadvand & Nushi 2021); secondly, generating evidence that non-patriarchal interpretation can basically create a more gender equality interpretation, as evidenced by Hassan that non-patriarchal reading upon 33 Quranic verses proves that God created women and men as equals (Hassan 2019) and thirdly, reinterpreting Quran to explore the inner meaning contained in the verses (Adam 2016) by carrying out non-patriarchal and gender awareness interpretation (Khalidi 2022). The widespread patriarchal attitude towards the role of women in public life can be improved by offering a progressive reinterpretation of Islamic scriptures (Masoud et al. 2016). By doing so, a broad-minded reading and thorough understanding of the Quran can achieve its deeper spiritual teachings (Lamrabet 2018).

## Conclusion

For some reasons, polygamy that is rising in the Muslim community is contradictory to the teaching of the Quran. This phenomenon is a mere result of patriarchal ideology wrapped in religious teachings. The practice of polygamy carried out by community and religious leaders is not in accordance with the explanation of various Quranic verse such as QS. An-Nisa/4:3 that associates polygamy with empowering widows and orphans. Instead, men are looking for girls who are wealthy and are abandoning their first wives. Some reasons used to support polygamy, such as the inability of wives to give birth or the incapability of wives to provide sexual needs, are not found in the Quran or the practice of the Prophet. The data show that the rising polygamy is because of patriarchal ideology-based interpretation on religion which tends to support the rise of gender-biased interpretation. In some cases, severe consequences of polygamy occur such as violence against the wife and children either physically, verbally or psychologically.

This study finds that patriarchal ideology has reproduced gender-biased interpretation that exploits women's sexuality as the reason for polygamy. The academic background of the *mufassir* (interpreter) and their social background have also influenced their gender-biased interpretation. Yet, the *tafsir* puts forward the reasons for allowing polygamy such as the incapability of a wife to fulfil her sexual role and her inability to give birth. However, both reasons are a mere form of sexual exploitation upon women disguised as religious interpretation. As a result,

women are increasingly marginalised and their private and social rights are imprisoned. This condition will affect the sustainability of the community because the equality of men and women has disappeared.

This research is limited to the works of *tafsir* (Quranic exegesis) written in 30 complete *juz* (Quranic term of chapter), totalling 11 books of *tafsir*. Therefore, it is impossible to capture a thorough thoughts of the *mufassir* (interpreter). Several interpretations written thematically for certain cases have not been the object of this research. In addition, this study only captures a small number of polygamy cases that use religion as the legal argument. Further research can be carried out with a wider object of study to examine the interpretations that have not been included in this study. Moreover, involving more types of polygamy cases could also be included in this future study.

## Acknowledgements

### Competing interests

The authors declare that they have no financial or personal relationships that may have inappropriately influenced them in writing this article.

### Authors' contribution

N.U. and H.H. conceptualised the study. A.S.J. contributed to the methodology. I.A. contributed to the formal analysis, review and editing. All authors have read and agreed to the final version of the manuscript.

### Ethical considerations

This article followed all ethical standards for research.

### Funding information

This research received no specific grant from any funding agency in the public, commercial or not-for-profit sectors.

### Data availability

Data sharing is not applicable to this article as no new data were created or analysed in this study.

### Disclaimer

The views and opinions expressed in this article are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the official policy or position of any affiliated agency of the authors.

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