

Polygamy and Educational Attainment of Children in a Rural Community in Rivers State, Nigeria

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Abstract

This study examined polygamy and educational attainment of children in Khana Local Government Area of Rivers State, Nigeria. The objective of the study was to explain the relationship between polygamy and educational attainment of children. The study made use of descriptive research design. A structured questionnaire was used to raise data for the study with a reliability index of 0.98. A sample size of 500 respondents was used which was determined through purposive sampling technique. Data were presented in frequency distribution tables and analyzed through the aid of percentage and Pearson Product Moment correlation coefficient set at 0.05 level of significance. The study disclosed that there existed a significant relationship between polygamy and educational attainment of children in Khana Local Government Area of Rivers State, Nigeria. The causes were inadequate funding of children's education by their families and the challenges of unfriendly environment they were faced with at their homes which were not supportive to their educational pursuit. The outcomes were poor academic performance and school dropout, among others. The study recommended that only men with the right financial ability should practice polygamy. The study also stated that family planning should be practiced by polygamous families in order to have family size that can be well handled in terms of children's education.

Keywords: children, educational attainment, polygamous family, polygamy

Introduction

Polygamy is a practice in which a person is married to more than one person at the same time, most commonly a man to several wives. Polygamy is often based on traditional and cultural practices or religious beliefs. According to the Government of Canada (2023), the term "polygamy" can refer to the simultaneous union of either a husband or wife to multiple spouses. The Government of Canada stated that as a general term, polygamy, therefore, includes the practices of bigamy, polyandry and polygyny. Bigamy means the practice of marrying someone while still legally married to someone else. In Nigeria, bigamy is illegal as section 370 of the Criminal Code Act in Nigeria states that any person when, having a husband or wife living, marries in any case in which such marriage is void by reason of its taking place during the life of such husband or wife is guilty of a felony and is liable to imprisonment for seven years.

Polyandry is seen as polygamy in which a woman has more than one husband. Polyandry is not practiced in Nigeria. It is, however, practiced in India, Kenya, China and Nepal. Polygyny is polygamy in which a man has more than one wife. Polygyny has got two types “Sororal” and “non-sororal”. Sororal polygyny involves a relationship where at least two biological sisters are married to the same man. While “non Sororal” polygyny occurs when a man marries multiple unrelated women. Between the two types of polygyny that exist, the one that is practiced in Nigeria is the “non-sororal” type because of cultural and religious reasons.

Among the reasons given by Ferguson and Whittemore (2023) why polygamy is practiced by people include polygamy may occur in societies where there are more women than men, causing an imbalance. Communities have also been known to practice polygamy when the first wife cannot bear children, for economic benefit to the household with another earner, and/or for taboo cultural reasons surrounding women’s menstruation, pregnancy, and lactation time periods and allowing for men to still have sexual relations with other wives at the aforementioned times. Polygamous practices also occur in certain religious groups, like fundamentalist church of Latter Day Saints (FLDS); small numbers of Muslims are also known to practice polygamy.

The same reasons that have been stated above why polygamy is practiced in some places in the world are the same reasons why polygamy is practiced among others especially in Nigeria. As pointed out by Gbeneneh et al. (2023), traditionally, most African societies have practiced a custom of polygamy. The custom, as posited by Pwesigye (2002) allows a man to marry as many wives as he can support.

Also, in the view of Itoro and Akpan (2011), in Nigeria, polygamy under civil law is not recognized. However, 12 out of the 36 states in Nigeria have identified themselves with polygamous marriages as being equivalent to monogamous marriages. According to Nigeria Family Code (2014), the states that have recognized polygamy are all found in the northern part of the country. They include Bauchi, Borno, Gombe, Jigawa, Kaduna, Kano, Katsina, Kebbi, Niger, Sokoto, Yobe and Zamfara. In some Nigerian traditions such as the one practiced in Khana Local Government Area of Rivers State, the size of a man’s family shows the size of his wealth (Gbeneneh, et al., 2023). Continuing, Gbeneneh et al. (2023) said marrying more than one wife equals having more children which translates to having more hands to work on farmlands and more monetary return. The situation of polygamy as practiced in Khana Local Government Area today appears to be on a downward slide probability because of the harsh economic reality or the impact of Christianity on the populace who are predominantly Christians. Even if the number of people that are going into polygamy now seems to be on the decline, the truth remains that there are so many polygamous families today in Khana Local Government Area with their members struggling for survival like members of some monogamous families.

Globally, 29% of the population practice polygamy (Gbeneneh, et al., 2023). However, polygamy is technically illegal in the United States, although it is not a crime to practice it in states like Utah (Arangua, 2022). Polygamy is not legal in most countries or at least not officially recognized (Gbeneneh, et al., 2023). Arangua (2022) said that polygamy is legal in some other observed countries like sub-Saharan African 11% of the population live in polygamous homes. As stated by Arangua (2022), in Burkina Faso, 24% of Christians live in polygamous homes. While the Christian religion tends to be against polygamy, the Islamic religion encourages its practice (Gbeneneh et al., 2023).

Over the years, many educational authorities have developed interest to understand the reasons for the downward trend in educational achievement of children which has been attributed to the background of children depending on the type of family where they have

been raised (Li & Qiu, 2018) Obemeate (1971) and Daramola (1994) posited that the factors affecting children's education include family type, psychological conditions in the family, availability of equal opportunities, social climate and level of proper care that exists in families they come from. Polygamy has been cited as a possible contributor to Africa's low savings rates, widespread incidence of HIV, high levels of child mortality and poor educational performance of children (Uwaifo, 2008). As stated by Buhari (2021), children from polygamous family have not fared better in their educational performance because of the issue raised above which range from lack of adequate instructional materials. Continuing, Buhari (2021), stated that polygamous family is usually associated with conflict which affects the educational performance of the child at school; and that a child whose parents are always involved in one quarrel or the other may not have rest of mind towards his/her academic pursuit. Again Chikwature and Oyedele (2016) explained that polygamy cannot be practical without being financially alright; adding that it was discovered that in most polygamous homes, the educational requirements of children are not met due to lack of funds. The implications of this are:

1. Lack of proper school uniform.
2. Lack of books and other basic necessities and in the process of making ends meet, the children are always involved in too much work which makes it impossible for serious academic work. Similarly, parents are engaged in different business leaving their children without being supervised, motivated and cared for. Amare et al. (2021) observed that food is a problem in some polygamous homes which has negative effects on mental development of children. Such affected children are not expected to perform very well in the school hours.

Also, the impact of polygamy on children drop out of school has been studied. Most girls from polygamous homes are withdrawn from school at the tender age and they are given to husbands. Similarly, Britwum and Aidoo (2022) stated that the moral decadence of the society today may be as a result of the inability of polygamous parents to give their children adequate financial support for academic excellence, adding that some polygamous families may not give their children the educational materials they need due to lack of funds. This condition may result in poor feeding and general maintenance of the family members suffering. Again, most girls from polygamous homes are withdrawn from school at tender age and they are given to husbands. Some girls who would have loved to go to school are frustrated by the problem of unavailability of fund in the polygamous homes (Johanna, 2022). This leads to the eventual dropout of girls from school.

As a way of ameliorating the impact of polygamy on both women and children, Bahari et al (2021) opined that the agencies involved in polygamous practices should broaden and enhance their understanding of the correct practice of polygamy. They added that polygamy should be recognized as a particular risk factor for developing social problems in children, thus, with proper education to the families, more attention to the children's emotional and social needs is required to avoid this situation. Similarly, Thliza and Nuhu (2017) stated that in order to prevent girls dropping from school, the government should make effort to provide the basic needs for children to pursue their education in northern Nigeria towards creating scenario whereby there would be low level of illiteracy, hawking in the street and main roads. Although, the problem of school dropout is not only a problem of northern part of Nigeria, it is a problem that affects other parts of the country as well. For a society to continue through time, it must transmit its value, attitude, behavior patterns, accumulated knowledge and skills, to each of the educational system of a society broadly concerned. All this is achieved through education which Fafunwa (1979) defined as the aggregate of all the process by which a child or adult develops the abilities, attitudes and other forms of behaviors which are of possible value to the society in which he lives, that is to say, it is a process of

disseminating knowledge either to engineer social control or to guarantee national direction of the society or both. No doubt, education makes all individual useful to himself as well as others. However, in Khana Local Government Area of River State, it appeared that polygamy had affected adversely the educational attainment of children; hence this study was conceived to investigate polygamy and educational attainment of children in Khana Local Government Area of Rivers State, Nigeria.

Statement of the Problem

In Khana Local Area, observation has shown that most polygamists do not have the resources to fend for their large families. These men, some among them, abandoned their older wives and their children to fend for themselves. How can a woman who does not have a reliable source of income other than peasant farming ensure good and qualitative education for her children that she can hardly feed while her husband's attention is on the other wife or wives? The affected children are seen struggling through schools, sometimes, without notebooks not to talk about textbooks. In order to make ends meet, these children accompany their mothers to their farms at the expense of their education at times. There is absolutely no way children who are not regular in school can do well like their counterparts who are always there.

Evidence abound in the Local Government Area where a reasonable number of children from polygamous families cannot take their educational pursuit beyond the boundaries of Primary and secondary schools due to lack of funding. The effect of this is that a sizeable portion of the population of the area is not properly educated and therefore ill-equipped to face the challenges of life. This situation might have contributed to the high level of insecurity which the Local Government Area was known for in the recent past. Remember the popular saying, "An ideal mind is the Devil's workshop".

It was based on the foregoing that this work was put in place to investigate polygamy and educational attainment of children in Khana Local Government Area of Rivers State, Nigeria.

Research Question

What is the relationship between polygamy and educational attainment of children in Khana Local Government Area of Rivers State, Nigeria?

Research Hypothesis

There is no significant relationship between polygamy and educational attainment of children in Khana Local Government Area of Rivers State, Nigeria.

Methodology

Descriptive research design was adopted for this study.

Sample size: A sample size of 500 respondents was used for the study which was determined through purposive sampling technique. The respondents were made up of members of polygamous families who were 18years and above in the Local Government Area

A structured questionnaire constituted instrument for data collection. The research instrument had a reliability index of 0.98 which was determined through test-retest using Pearson Product Moment correlation coefficient.

The data collected were analyzed with the aid of percentage and Pearson Product Moment correlation co-efficient. Data for the study were arranged in frequency distribution tables. The testing of hypothesis was set at 0.05 level of significance.

Result

Personal data of respondents indicated that 50 (19%) respondents were within the age range of 18-28 years; 120 (25%) respondents were within the age range of 29-39 years. 180 (36%) respondents were within 40-50 years while 100 (20%) respondents were within 51-61 years, and 62 years and above had 50 (10%) respondents. Educational status of the respondents showed that 60(12%) respondents had First School Leaving Certificate, 200 (40%) respondents had WASC/GCE/NECO/ SSCE, 40 (8%) respondents had Diploma and 200 (40%) respondents had Degree. The marital status of the respondents indicated that 125 (25%) respondents were single, 350(70%) respondents were married, 25 (5%) respondents were either widow or widower, and divorced recorded no respondent. Occupational status of the respondents showed that 120 (24%) were farmers, 125 (25%) were traders, 85 (17%) were civil servants and 45 (9%) respondents were for other occupations.

Table 1: Polygamy and Educational Attainment of Children in Khana Local Government Area (N=500)

S/N	Item	N	Yes	No
1.	Is it true that polygamy is responsible for drop out of some children of polygamous families from school in Khana Local Government Area?	500	310(62%)	190(38%)
2.	Do you think polygamy has the ability to affect adversely the educational attainment of children from polygamous families in Khana Local Government Area?	500	415(83%)	85(17%)
3.	Do you think the problems faced by schoolchildren from polygamous families are capable of affecting their performance negatively in school?	500	387(77.4%)	113(22.6%)

Source: Author's Field Study, 2023

Table 1; item 1 indicated that 310(62%) respondents said that it is true that polygamy is responsible for dropout of some children from polygamous families from schools in Khana Local Government Area while 190 (38%) respondents said "No" to the question.

For item 2, majority of the respondents, 415 (83%) of them, said that they think polygamy has the ability to affect adversely the educational attainment of children from polygamous families in Khana Local Government Area, while 85 (17%) respondents said "No" to that.

For item 3 in Table 1, the question was asked "Do you think the problems faced by school children from polygamous families are capable of affecting their performance negatively in school?" Responding to the above question, 387 (77.4%) respondents said "Yes" to the question while 113 (22.6%) respondents said "No" to the question.

Table 2: Relationship between Polygamy and Educational attainment of children in Khana Local Government Area of Rivers State, Nigeria

Response	No of Respondents	(r)	Cal. Value	Table value	Comment
Yes	360	0.998	352.4	23.34	There is significant relationship
No	140				

At 0.05 level of significance

Table 2 above revealed that the r-value was 0.998, the calculated value was 352.14 and the Table value was 23.34. Therefore, since the calculated value was greater than the table value, the null hypothesis that stated; “There is no significant relationship between polygamy and educational attainment of children in Khana Local Government Area of Rivers State, Nigeria” was rejected for the alternative hypothesis which stated: “There is significant relationship between polygamy and educational attainment of children in Khana Local Government Area of Rivers State, Nigeria”.

Discussion

The result from the study showed that majority of the respondents 310 (62%) said that it is true that polygamy is responsible for dropout of some children from polygamous families from schools in Khana Local Government Area. This finding is in agreement with the position of Britwum and Aidoo (2022) who reported that most girls from polygamous homes are withdrawn from school at tender age and are given to husbands. Also, Britwum and Aidoo (2022) stated that the moral decadence of the society today may be as a result of the inability of polygamous parents to give their children adequate financial support for academic excellence, adding that some polygamous family may not give their children the educational materials they need due to lack of funds. This condition may no doubt result in poor feeding and poor general maintenance of the family members including schoolchildren. In the same vein, Johanna (2022) posited that most girls from polygamous homes are withdrawn from school at tender age and they are given to husbands even when some of them would have loved to go to school are frustrated by the problem of unavailability of funds in the polygamous homes.

Still considering polygamy and educational attainment of children in Khana Local Government Area of Rivers State, majority of the respondents 415 (83%) of them, said that they think polygamy has the ability to affect adversely the educational attainment of children from polygamous families in Khana Local Government Area. This finding collaborates the views of Buhari(2021) who said that children from polygamous family have not faired better in their educational performance because of Lack of adequate instructional materials coupled with the fact that polygamous family is usually associated with conflict which affects the educational performance of the child at school; adding that a child whose parents are always involved in one quarrel or the other may not have rest of mind towards his/her academic pursuit. It was discovered that in most polygamous homes the educational requirements of children are not met due to lack of fund, noting that polygamy cannot be practiced without being financially alright. Buttressing this finding, it was observed that Polygamy has been cited as a possible contributor to Africa’s low savings rates, widespread incidence of HIV, high levels of child mortality and poor educational performance of children.

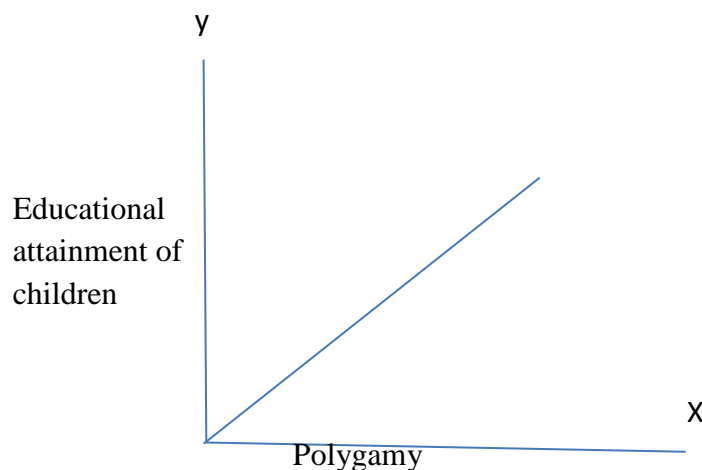
Also, finding of the study indicated that when the question: “Do you think the problems faced by school children from polygamous families are capable of affecting their

performance negatively in school” was asked, majority of the respondents, 387 (77.4%) out of 500 respondents said “Yes” to the question to agree with the opinion of Chikwature and Oyedele (2016) who noted that most polygamous homes cannot ensure the educational requirements of their children. The implications of this are:

1. Lack of proper school uniform.
2. Lack of books and other basic necessities and in the process of making ends meet, the children are always involved in too much work which makes it impossible for serious academic work. Also, parents are engaged in different business, leaving their children without being supervised, motivated and cared for.

Furthermore, when the only null hypothesis of the study which stated, “There is no significant relationship between polygamy and educational attainment of children in Khana Local Government Area of Rivers State, Nigeria” was tested, the calculated value of 352.14 was more than the Table value of 23.34 at 0.05 level of significance with r-value of 0.998 which resulted in the rejection of the null hypothesis while the alternative hypothesis which stated, “There is significant relationship between polygamy and educational attainment of children in Khana Local Government Area of Rivers State, Nigeria” was accepted. This finding is in line with the view of Chikwature and Oyedele (2016) who said that children from polygamous family have not faired better in their educational performance because of the family inability to provide adequate instructional materials coupled with poor funding. The literature that has been reviewed in this paper has clearly established the fact that too high relationship exists between polygamy and educational attainment of children. Therefore, in order not to compromise the educational attainment of children in the Local Government Area, would-be polygamists should consider if they have the financial muscle to take care of the responsibilities that come with polygamy as the education of their children cannot be made to suffer for anything else.

The positive linear correlation diagram showing that “There is significant relationship between polygamy and educational attainment of children in Khana Local Government Area of Rivers State, Nigeria”.



Conclusion

The finding of the study revealed too high relationship existing between polygamy and educational attainment of children in Khana Local Government Area of Rivers State, Nigeria.

The study also stated that some polygamists in the Local Government Area do not have enough money to fund adequately the education of their children. This situation has led to drop out of some children from school due the inability of their families to provide instructional materials and congenial atmosphere at home for academic work. Majority of the respondents said that polygamy has the ability to affect adversely the educational attainment of children from polygamous families. The outcome of this, the study indicated, is either poor academic performance or withdrawal from school. The situation the study acknowledged made some affected children from polygamous homes to be ill-prepared to face the challenges of life when they emerged as adult.

Recommendations

The study made the following recommendations:

1. Persons without the right financial strength should not go into polygamy as research as shown that polygamy is more expensive than monogamy.
2. Men who are determined to embrace polygamy for whatever reason should identify themselves with family planning in order not to have over bloated families whose responsibilities (educational needs) of their children they cannot handle adequately.
3. Governments at the three levels (Federal, States and Local Governments) in the country should endeavour to provide and sustain free and compulsory education from Primary to seconding levels so as to take care of the educational need of children who would have been withdrawn from schools on account of money.

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