

# POLYGYNOUS MARRIAGE IN THE MIDDLE EAST: STORIES OF SUCCESS AND FAILURES<sup>1</sup>

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**Qualitative data were collected from interviews with 100 Bedouin-Arab husbands, wives, children, and some extended family members of polygynous families in the Negev of Israel. Respondents were selected on the basis of self-reported levels of family functioning. Distinct contrasts were found between familial relationships in high functioning families and low functioning families. Differences occurred between husbands of low and high functioning families regarding reasons for a second marriage, how the marriage was received, and relationships with wives and their children. Such constructs can help enrich anthropological theory and improve professional psychosocial intervention. (Bedouin-Arab, family functioning, Middle East, polygynous families)**

Economic and social modernization in Arab Muslim society has made polygyny much less economically worthwhile and sustainable than it was in the past. Nevertheless, the practice of polygyny remains prevalent and is largely accepted among the Bedouin-Arabs in the Negev, Israel, including the young and educated (Al-Krenawi and Graham 2004, 2006). There are no accurate data regarding the scope of the phenomenon within Israel or the Gaza Strip and West Bank, but estimates of lay people place the prevalence of polygyny at approximately 20 percent of all marriages (Al-Krenawi and Slonim-Nevo 2002).

Factors characteristic of the practice of polygyny within other cultural groups also exist for the Bedouin-Arab in the Negev. The socio-cultural perception of the Bedouin-Arab, for example, holds that the larger the social unit, the greater its power, influence, and honor. This perception, similar to that of other cultures supporting polygyny, could be one of the explanations for the prevalence of this practice: marrying many wives enhances the chance of having many sons, thus increasing the number of members in the family unit and amplifying one's honor and influence (Al-Krenawi 1998, 2000, 2001). In such cases, the social and psychological implications of polygyny are associated with power and prestige, and these factors may trump the economic disadvantages of supporting multiple households (Kressel 1976).

Another explanation for polygyny is embodied in religious practices and beliefs within Islam (Koran, Sura 4, ch. 3). However, Islam allows polygyny only under certain conditions: a man may not have more than four wives at any given time; he must have the appropriate economic resources to provide adequately for more than

one woman; and he should pay attention and care for all women equally (Al-Krenawi and Graham 2000; Abu-Baker 1992; Abdel-Ghany 1988). An additional explanation for polygyny is related to the phenomenon of exchange marriage, which occurs when two men marry each other's sisters. When one of them marries a second wife, the other is pressured to marry another wife as well in order to balance the honor and power in the family (Al-Krenawi and Graham 2001b). Other circumstances that prompt polygyny are a woman's sterility, an inability to bear male offspring, and mental or physical illness (Al-Krenawi and Graham 2001a). Chamie (1986:65–66) claims that "women prefer to marry as additional wives rather than remain childless, divorced, or as widows." Since divorce can be a traumatic event for women in particular, often involving the loss of children, status, and social and economic well-being (Al-Krenawi and Graham 1998), polygyny may be viewed as a helpful proxy to the deeply problematic prospect of divorce. Widowhood, in the case of a bereaved brother, also can serve as a catalyst for taking a second wife, for when a man dies, his widow retains his property and his children. By marrying the widow, the brother of the deceased retains the family's properties (H'ondt 1976).

Polygynous wives may live together in the same house, or each may reside with her own children in a separate household. A "senior wife" is defined as any wife who is followed by an additional wife in the marriage. A "junior wife" is the most recent wife joining the marriage (Chaleby 1985). In many societies, senior wives have higher status. They may have control over the other wives, entitlement to privileges not shared with other wives, and may wield considerable influence over the husband (Broude 1994). In Bedouin-Arab society of the Negev, however, the first wife typically has lower status than the second wife (Al-Krenawi, Graham, and Al-Krenawi 1997) and her husband may even surprise her by marrying an additional wife without telling her in advance (Al-Krenawi and Graham 1999; Topouzis 1985). The first marriage is usually performed while the couple is young, in a match arranged by the parents that stems from considerations of class and power relations within the family and the extended family (Al-Haj 1987; El-Islam and Abu-Dagga 1992). Marriage to a second wife, in contrast, is in many cases a result of free choice due to love or as a manifestation of independence. In these cases, junior wives enjoy preferential status compared to first wives in regard to economic resources, social support, or the husband's attention (Al-Krenawi and Graham 1999). Ultimately, the relationships between husband, wives, and the children, whether estranged or intimately entwined, determine the level of family functioning and, as is argued here, are a leading determinant of both positive and negative effects of the polygynous relationship on family members (Al-Krenawi and Graham 2006, 2004, 2001b; Al-Krenawi, Graham, and Ben-Shimol-Jakbson 2006; Al-Krenawi, Graham, and Izzeldin 2001).

Previous studies have demonstrated the importance of "perceived family functioning" in explaining poor adjustments of children, women, and men in Bedouin-Arab polygynous families when compared with monogamous families (see, e.g., Al-Krenawi, Slonim-Nevo, and Graham 2006). Research on polygyny within Bedouin

culture in the Negev has demonstrated that children from polygynous families manifest more mental health problems and social difficulties than their peers from monogamous families, and exhibit lower academic achievement and more problematic relationships with their fathers (Al-Krenawi and Graham 2006, 2004, 2001b; Al-Krenawi, Graham, and Ben-Shimol-Jakbson 2006; Al-Krenawi, Graham, and Izzeldin 2001; Al-Krenawi, Slonim-Nevo, and Graham 2006). Similarly, both men and women in polygynous families display more mental health problems than peers in monogamous families (Al-Krenawi and Graham 2004, 2006). However, studies have shown that the adjustment of children, mothers, and fathers is affected directly and indirectly by their perceived family functioning (Slonim-Nevo and Al-Krenawi 2006). Thus, polygyny itself may not be detrimental to family members' adjustment; and in cases where the family functions well, children's adjustment, as well as the adjustment of mothers and fathers, will not be impaired (Al-Krenawi and Slonim-Nevo 2002).

Little has been said regarding which patterns of relationships within the polygynous family may enable its members to function well, or which, in contrast, deteriorates their level of social and emotional well-being. In a previous study (Slonim-Nevo and Al-Krenawi 2006) of 10 polygynous families residing in a Bedouin-Arab town in the south of Israel, five members were interviewed in each family: first wife, second wife, the oldest child of the first wife, the oldest child of the second wife, and the husband. Five of the families were considered by the community and social work practitioners as high functioning families and five as low functioning families. The findings suggest that polygyny, even under the best circumstances, is painful, particularly to women and children. These findings echo other studies suggesting that the polygynous family structure is associated with various emotional difficulties (Adams and Mburugu 1994; Al-Krenawi, Slonim-Nevo, and Graham 2006; Kilbride and Kilbride 1990; Ware 1979; Wittrup 1990). Moreover, when members of the family do not succeed in overcoming their anger, jealousy, and pain, intergenerational suffering in the form of disengagement, emotional turmoil, fighting, and conflicts become prevalent.

Polygyny in both high functioning and low functioning families can be painful for wives. Research conducted in different countries has shown that polygyny can lead to co-wife jealousy, competition, unequal distribution of household and emotional resources (Adams and Mburugu 1994; Kilbride and Kilbride 1990; Wittrup 1990), and can generate acrimony between co-wives and between the children of the different wives (Al-Krenawi and Graham 1999; Ware 1979). Polygyny is also associated with mental illness among women and children (Al-Krenawi and Graham 2006, 2004). In Kuwait, Chaleby (1985, 1987) found a disproportionate number of women in polygynous marriages, particularly senior wives, among psychiatric outpatient and inpatient populations. A similar phenomenon has been observed in Nigeria (Makanjoula 1987), India (Haggi 1974), and in the Arab world (Al-Krenawi and Graham 2004, 2006; Chaleby 1985). Moreover, several studies carried out in different countries in the Middle East and Africa indicate that children of polygynous

families may display emotional, behavioral, and physical problems, negative self-image, lower school achievement, and greater difficulties in social adjustment than children of monogamous marriages (Al-Krenawi and Graham 2001b; Cherian 1990; Owuamanam 1984). Also, adolescents are less supportive of polygyny than adults (D'Hondt and Vandewiele 1980; Dorjahn 1988), objecting mainly to economic difficulties and communication problems between children of different wives.

Yet, certain conditions enable members of the family to function well. Among them are acceptance of polygyny as God's wish and/or destiny, perceived equal allocation of resources among the dependent polygynous families by the husband, avoidance of minor conflicts and disagreements, maintaining an attitude of respect towards the co-wife, and allowing open communication among all siblings and among children and the other mother.

## METHODS

### *Sample*

The present study is a continuation of previous work on patterns of relationships in polygynous families. Participants were identified as members of high functioning and low functioning families, which was determined through assessment with standardized measures of the psychosocial functioning of the children in the families. The sample size consisted of 1,000 children of the first wives of polygynous families and 1,000 children from monogamous families. All children were attending junior high-school (grades 7 through 9) in the Negev. Some were located in Bedouin-Arab towns such as Rahat, Lekiya, Hura, Kseifa, and Segev-Shalom, and some in unrecognized villages<sup>2</sup> such as Abu-Krinat, Al-Sayed, Al-Hawashla, Abu-Kaff, and Al-Asem. After removing siblings from the list at random, making every child the sole representative of a family, SPSS software was used to create a list of 380 participants, of which 352 participated in the study (the others were disqualified for various reasons). Of these 352 individuals, 174 were from monogamous families and 178 from polygynous families.

Then, 315 mothers and 306 fathers of adolescents participating in the study were interviewed and responded to questionnaires, measuring perceived family functioning (Family Assessment Device [FAD]: Epstein et al. 1983); self-esteem (Rosenberg 1979); mental health (Brief Symptom Inventory: Canetti et al. 1994); peer relationships (Hudson 1982); father-child relationships and mother-child relationships (Hudson 1982); academic achievement; absences from school; fights with teachers, friends, siblings, a parent; fights with father's other wives; and smoking. A standardized score was calculated for each measure, and a mean standardized score was then calculated from the scores of all measures. The mean standardized score profiled each child on the domains of psychosocial functioning: perceived family functioning, self esteem, mental health, peer relationships, relationships with parents, academic achievement, and engagement in risky behavior.

In order to make sure of a match between the child's profile and his/her family's level of functioning, we excluded the rare cases in which children were excelling and their families were functioning poorly, and vice versa. Thus, the 15 children with the most negative standardized scores and correspondingly negative FAD scores were identified as representative of the lowest functioning families. An additional 15 children with the most positive standardized scores and correspondingly positive FAD scores were chosen as representing the highest functioning families. Out of these 30 families, five of the highest functioning and five of the lowest functioning families were interviewed, according to their willingness to participate.

### *Data Collection*

Ten members were interviewed from each family for a total of 100 interviews: the husband, first wife, second wife, third wife (if applicable), children of all wives, and additional relatives upon recommendation of the wives as being cognizant of family affairs and capable of providing detailed answers.

In-depth, semi-structured interviews were conducted in Arabic by a trained social worker and were carried out in a private place to insure no influence or participation of other family or community members. Topics included: parenting style, emotional care, marital relations, relations within the extended family, relationships between the wives, relationships among siblings of different mothers, relationships between wives and children of other wives, use of leisure time, handling family finances, and degree of religiosity.

### *Data Analysis*

Data were transcribed and analyzed using qualitative methods. Analytic induction and constant comparison strategies were used to detect patterns of behavior, interactions, strategies, and resources in the family associated with success or failure. This process allowed eliciting common themes and developing typologies (Ben-David and Lavee 1994; Goetz and LeCompte 1984; Moon et al. 1990). The researchers read all the transcribed material to identify common themes. The themes were coded and data were searched for similar phenomena to identify behavioral and interaction patterns. All interviews were compared with one another and data were translated into working hypotheses that were refined continuously until all instances of contradictions, similarities, and differences were explained. Thus, hypotheses were modified during this process to accommodate new circumstances not encountered in the study population.

Based on this research design and analysis, the findings are presented here in four categories: the husband's perspective, the wives' perspective, the children's perspective, and the extended families' perspective.

*The Husband's Perspective.* Husbands in this study gave reasons for undertaking a second marriage, and described their relationship with their wives and children and their post-marriage reactions upon taking a multiple wife. Regarding reasons for a second marriage, the husbands from both high functioning and low functioning families had similar perspectives about their motivation to marry another wife. Social pressure is the most common reason. Among husbands from high functioning families, this pressure is sometimes associated with the expectation for many sons. Other reasons are an attempt to resist illegitimate sexual temptation, the socio-religious legitimacy of the custom, and strengthening the family. Another explanation offered mostly, but not exclusively, by husbands is the belief that marriage to only one woman would result in the wife dominating the husband and that an additional wife is necessary to control the first wife. One husband from a high functioning family described some of these reasons:

Our society demands, "marry, marry, marry" and they influenced me and we married. It was completely unnecessary . . . pressure. Here and there they said her family doesn't breed children and so she's like them; so we said, "let's correct it," and we made another mistake.

Polygynous husbands from high functioning families usually attained their first wife's consent to take a second wife, and included them in the prenuptial preparations. Some respondents said this was to respect their wives and treat them equally, according to God's order, and that the first wife should be afforded preferential "symbolic" respect in accordance with her position as first wife. Many respondents attributed the success of their families to this and to their wives' acceptance of the situation. These men also are involved with their children, investing in their education and giving attention to their emotional needs. As one respondent remarked:

I don't differentiate between [my wives]. Whatever I buy here I buy there, I sleep here, I sleep there. When I go on a trip, I take them both, even to the market I take them both, but I give [the senior wife] respect. When they go in the car with me, the [senior] one sits in the front seat. When there are guests, . . . the [junior] one helps with the cooking and baking. I give the [senior] one the symbolic respect. . . . It's the same [with the second wife]. I respect women, not like those who belittle them. A good woman is a joy in life. The woman is the man's other half and he can't do without them. God blessed me with these two women, they're like angels. They accept one another, [which is] good for us all.

Husbands of low functioning families disclosed that they may or may not have shared their plans to marry with their first wife, but it appears that more often than not, little attention was paid to the first wife's feelings or needs. In some cases, the husband made his plans and even finalized the marriage without his first wife's awareness. In others, the husband informed the first wife, but they did not go through the transition together.

After remarriage, husbands from low functioning families claimed they treated their wives equally, but their stories lack the detail present in the stories of husbands from high functioning families. They also fail to mention respect for

their wives. It is as though these husbands recognize the significance of giving equal treatment, as prescribed by their religious edicts, but they do not provide evidence that they are able to do so.

A similar contrast exists between the descriptions of husbands from high functioning families and husbands from low functioning families with regard to relationships with their children. While the former are involved with their children, the latter hardly mention them, and when they do, comments are most often limited to general statements and seldom depict any particular knowledge or treatment of them. In other words, husbands from high functioning families tend to express being more engaged with members of their families than husbands from low functioning families, both on an emotional and an instrumental level. For example, one husband in a high functioning family said:

I have ten children in school. I look after them. The weakest child got an average of 83. That's the minimum. Three got awards for excellence at school. Some are first in their class. I look after the children, supply them with conditions of love and caring. Look at this girl; her brother is the same age. There's no difference between them. Just as she is being coddled now, so is he. That's the way it is with me. There's no difference. . . . The upbringing is very important.

In contrast, two husbands of low functioning families had little regard for the individuality of their children. One respondent stated,

I have a common divan; I sit in it and everyone comes to me. There's no difference between this or that child. They're all the same.

Another similarly stated:

I'm not in the mood for children. Each one is with his mother and she takes care of him. When they're small I can't stand their noise. . . . Today they're grown and they come to me and we sit together.

Similar contrasts were found between husbands from high functioning families and those from low functioning families in the husbands' sentiments following the second marriage. While most of the husbands in low functioning families are likely to perceive their decision to take another wife as unfortunate, the husbands in high functioning families are likely to be satisfied with their family lives. Even so, the majority of husbands, whether from high or low functioning families, will not recommend polygyny to their children. Their reasons include financial and emotional hardships, particularly the difficulty of raising and educating many children and the experience of dealing with the wives.

*The Wives' Perspective.* Our research makes distinctions between the first wives of high functioning families and those of low functioning families. There is pain with both, but those of the first group tend to accept their fate and collaborate with the new family additions, even finding advantages in their situation. Wives in the second

group tend to be angry and hostile, maintaining distance from subsequent wives and their offspring. One expression of this distance is in the total abstinence of the first wife in low functioning families to mention the second wife's name, at best, and at worst, to employ derogatory language to describe her. In contrast, the wives in high functioning families tend to view their relationships with other wives as amicable or even close, and to accept their children as their own. They typically call the second wife their friend or sister, rather than their *dura* (a connotation for trouble). For example, one wife from a high functioning family stated:

When I knew he was considering [Name], I encouraged him and went with him to her parents, and I bought her the gold. . . . It's a blessing from God. She came like a sister and not like a *dura*. I don't remember her ever once insulting me like women do. She came and accepted her fate and my fate.

Husbands of high functioning families tended to share their decisions to marry again with their wives, support them throughout the wedding process, and treat them equally thereafter. In contrast, the husbands in low functioning families were likely to surprise their wives with their decision or ignore their feelings about it, abandon them during the wedding, and neglect their needs thereafter. The differences between first wives in high functioning families and those in low functioning families can be based on the degree of acceptance of the second marriage, the role of the first wife in sharing the decision to marry a second wife, the degree of perceived equal treatment by the husband and sharing resources between wives, and the strength of the relationship with the second wife. One wife from a high functioning family captured some of these themes, stating:

Between us there has never been a problem. We were never so cross we didn't speak. There's mutual respect. Sometimes there are quarrels between the children; that always happens and it doesn't matter which, my children or hers, and then their father is the one to punish them. Sometimes we don't tell him. He returns from work exhausted and we don't burden him.

In contrast, a first wife from a low functioning family described:

In the beginning there were problems, but when they saw I am strong they tried not to provoke me. [My husband and his wife] brought it on themselves. . . . There's a *hudna* (ceasefire) now. . . . Her family gave their word she wouldn't talk with me at all and if she does, they'll take care of it. Since then, each is on her own. It's better that way.

There are different implications for the second wife in low functioning families. The main contrast relates to the relationship with the first wife. Second wives in high functioning families are apt to acknowledge the first wives' status as senior and primary. They tend to ignore minor issues and disagreements and forge co-operative relationships. In fact, most of the second wives describe the first wives as "sisters" and the two families as being united. In contrast, second wives of low functioning families are likely to form tense, competitive, and even hateful relationships with their counterparts. A co-wife from a low functioning family stated:



I hate her . . . She's a strong woman. She's from Gaza and brought all their personality. She's strong. Nobody in the village likes her. None of the neighbors can stand her. She's dirty and always talks only about herself.

*The Children's Perspective.* Apparent differences were found between children of high functioning families and their counterparts from low functioning families. The first group described warm relationships with parents and siblings; the second group typically described distant relationships with biological parents, and disconnected or tense relationships with the other mother and her children. Notably, both groups plan to live in monogamous families when they grow up. Illustrating some of these themes, one respondent, whose mother is the first wife of a high functioning family, said:

[My father and I] are good friends. I love him very much. I don't feel that he's like those hard fathers. Sometimes he plays soccer with us. He also plays cards in the evening and sometimes I beat him. I enjoy the relationship with him. [Mother is] the same. Mother worries about us. She does whatever I ask for me. She cooks the food I like even if she's already cooked something else. I love her.

In contrast, the eldest son from the first wife of a low functioning family describes estranged relationships with much of his family, stating:

I have no contact with [my father's other wife]. . . . I haven't spoken with her since I was a child. Once she turned father against me. He beat me wrongly. She lied and claimed I'd thrown stones at her shed and that wasn't true. Father beat me with a pipe and it hurt me and it hurt me more because she was wrong. Since then, I hate her and for me, she doesn't exist. I don't see her and my wife isn't in contact with her either. . . . [My relationship with my siblings is] ordinary. Today we're grown up and we get along. There's mutual respect between us. They respect me as the eldest brother.

*The Extended Families' Perspective.* Members of extended families were interviewed with a view to comparing their stories with those of the families that had been identified as high or low functioning. However, many of these interviewees chose to tell their own stories rather than comment on those of others. Consequently, it was not possible to attribute findings on the degree of a family's functionality. For example, a first wife's daughter-in-law may have told about her own family of origin, rather than shared impressions about her husband's family, or a husband's brother may have shared memories from their childhood, so these families could not be designated high functioning or low functioning. Even so, some themes which emerged from the stories are worth noting.

For example, extended family members shared insight into their perceptions of the reasons for a second marriage, characteristics of family life, attitudes towards polygyny, and the relationship of education and polygyny. Findings related to reasons for taking on a second marriage from these participants are consistent with the responses provided by the husbands. As one respondent stated:

For twenty years I live with him as if we were on a honeymoon. I bore him nine sons and four daughters. We had a large herd that I cared for on my own. He loved me very much, but the people

wouldn't leave us alone and always asked him "How long is this foreigner going to control you? Marry another one and be a man." He gave in and took one of his children's age. I couldn't accept it and . . . I chased him out of my life.

This respondent group identified the high functioning polygynous family as cohesive, "like one family," and living in mutual respect. The husband is perceived to be honest, fair, and respectful of his wives and children. He treats them equally, in accordance with the religious edict. He works hard to support his family and satisfy his wives' needs, invests in his children and spends time with them. Wives are generally perceived to be wise, calm, and quiet, accepting of their fate. Second wives do not demand too much, are level-headed, and are good friends with the first wife. They "want to live," and so they co-operate with one another. In these families, wives are not sent back to their parents to "calm down" before being returned to their husband's home. A sister-in-law of one of the wives interviewed described some of these conditions:

There's no difference between the first or second wife. I see how he treats both of them with respect, with no difference. He really doesn't show any favoritism. I see. I'm there all the time and I see. He's an honest man and doesn't like to arouse disputes between his wives; believe me, in families that have problems, it's all because of the man. He tends to take sides with one of his wives, he isn't honest, and no one keeps quiet, and that's why there are problems. . . . He gives each her dessert, satisfies them both, and there's no reason they should fight among themselves. Here, they live like sisters.

In contrast, low functioning polygynous family life is often characterized as disconnected. Fathers are typically either cut off or distant from their children as a result of the conflict between the parents. The disconnect most often occurs between the father and his first wife and her children. Where fathers are not cut off but distant, mothers attempt to serve as a go-between. Siblings are often distant from one another because their mothers do not get along. Some accounts described relations between siblings as cohesive, but others negated them. Relationships with the extended family suffer as well, as extended family members keep away from those who function poorly. Relationships between members of one wife's extended family and the other wife are often poor. For example, one wife said of her husband's extended family:

I keep a distance. They have a lot of problems. [My husband] doesn't like it either. He wants us to keep away. . . . Most of the time I'm at home with my children, even though they're here just across from our house. It's a strange family; always shouting, always crying, always complaining.

Extended family members expressed widespread opposition to the practice of polygyny. Polygyny is perceived to be difficult for everyone. It deprives women and children of their rights; husbands are torn between homes and bear a heavy financial burden; wives suffer from loneliness and experience jealousy, anger, and pain. Children, who see their father only intermittently as he passes from home to home, suffer from the tension that prevails between mothers. Even if the husband attempts to take

care of all wives and children equally, some interviewees maintain that at best, only limited material or instrumental aid is feasible to so many dependents, and that an equal distribution of love is not possible. At worst, the senior wife is often neglected in favor of the new wife and her children, causing emotional distress and even poverty. Competition between the wives over emotional support and material resources often results in an atmosphere of anger and contention, detrimental to the children's emotional and scholastic development, and may even result in domestic violence.

Those who argue against polygyny are uncertain about how to respond to it. Some cite education and time as the solution. Others feel helpless and hope that change will come from without. A few express ambivalence, and that they are powerless to produce change. While they recognize the harmful aspects of the practice and say they would choose differently, they cannot see how it is possible to contest the powerful forces of the society. In a community in which the woman's role is to be married and a mother, polygyny may be preferable to remaining single, despite the hardships that accompany it. Perhaps, they say, it is better to learn how to live with it.

I hate this business. It's like a demon from the sky on every woman. In our tribe it's accepted and even desirable, but we young women don't want it. It's hard for me to imagine sharing the man I love most with another woman. It shocks me to even think about it. . . . God forbid. No, my husband is different. He's a teacher. He has a different mind. He laughs at those who take more than one wife. He also loves me. My fear isn't of him, it's of his parents. . . .

The trouble is there's nothing to be done. We [women] have no power. The men are the ones who decide and act. . . . Marriage to more than one woman badly harms all women, including those who are not involved. As a woman, I often feel humiliated when I hear my sister's husband curse her or my father-in-law spits on his young wife in front of all his wives. It's very humiliating. After all, she is a woman like me and if she could help it, she wouldn't agree to take a man who has two wives and fifteen children. . . . I can influence my husband . . . but at the level of the tribe, I can't do a thing.

Miriam, mother of a second wife, believes change will come on its own:

They said a good man is he who has two and three [wives]. It's also in our religion; it's accepted. But today everything has changed. Living is expensive. It's hard to open two homes and support two families. It's hard and I hope this phenomenon ends. Today's young people oppose it and prefer one wife. In a few years, it'll disappear.

## DISCUSSION

While scholars in the past thought that a desire to increase the strength of the lineae with the addition of male offspring was a primary motivation for the practice of polygyny (Brestchneider 1995; Kressel 1996; Kilbride and Kilbride 1990), this study found that social pressure is the primary motivator. It is expressed through a demand to bear additional sons, religious tradition, or the fear that marriage to only one woman allows her to dominate her husband, which encourages taking another wife in order to control the first one. But while some first wives suggest that their

husbands take another wife, for the most part men marry second and third wives because they are under pressure to do so.

The ability of members of polygynous families to function well is related to several variety factors, including accepting polygyny as God's wish and/or fate, equal allocation of resources among polygynous nuclear families, avoidance of minor conflicts and disagreements, seeking solutions for problems within the family, maintaining an attitude of respect towards each wife, viewing the blended family as one, and allowing open communication and emotional ties among all members. Nevertheless, polygyny in both high functioning and low functioning families has negative consequences for all involved, so it is not surprising that many, including husbands, oppose it.

Economic, educational, health, and emotional arguments are given in favor of monogamous unions and fewer children. These arguments seem to reflect the growing exposure to and influence of a Western way of living. It appears that individual needs are now in opposition with the demands of Bedouin society. Caught in the midst of a conflict between such different ways of life, many Bedouins express a desire that the change to end polygyny come from without, as they feel unable to affect it themselves.

The present study, based on in-depth interviews of a sample of Bedouin families in Israel, in which the respondents report on their experiences, makes an important contribution to our understanding of relationships within Bedouin-Arab polygynous families. Some findings of this study relate to the conflict between social pressures on men to form a polygynous family and the wishes of individuals to avoid polygyny. Male respondents expressed the desire that their children avoid polygyny and its associated strains. Beside the emotional pain associated with jealousy, economic and educational standards can no longer be met with too many children. How during a period of tremendous change Bedouin cope with the tensions between a tradition that favors polygyny and the Western ideal of individual choice is a promising direction for future anthropological research.

#### NOTES

1. The data for this study were gathered under a research project funded by the Israel Science Foundation, Grant no. 882/04.
2. An "unrecognized" village is one not recognized as an official village by the Israeli Government and thereby lacks basic necessities, including water and electricity.

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