PUNGGAWA
SOCIAL INQUIRY
Punggawa Social Inquiry
Volume 1, Number 2, 2026
E-ISSN: 3164-015X
Open Access: punggawajournal.com/psi

Mental Health of Wives in Polygamous Marriages: A Qualitative Study

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Article Info
Article history:
Received Aug 2th, 2026
Revised Aug 8th, 2026
Accepted Aug 13th, 2026

Keyword:
Coping Strategies; Mental health; Polygamy; Psychological stress; Wife.

ABSTRACT
Polygamous marriage brings about structural changes in family life that can affect a wife's psychological well-being. This study aims to uncover the reasons why wives remain in and accept polygamy, identify the sources of psychological stress they experience, and describe the coping strategies employed to maintain mental health. A qualitative phenomenological approach was used. The study involved five wives from polygamous families with diverse backgrounds. Data were collected through in-depth interviews and observations. The results indicate that meeting economic needs was not a dominant source of stress. Psychological stress was more closely linked to jealousy, internal struggles regarding self-esteem and identity, and negative perceptions from the social environment. Internally, stress manifested as self-doubt, feelings of powerlessness, and anxiety. To cope with these conditions, the informants developed strategies involving spirituality, cognitive reframing, self-strengthening through knowledge and positive activities, communication, and social support. Spirituality served as a primary foundation in the process of accepting and finding meaning in the polygamous experience. The study demonstrates that, in the context of polygamy, mental health is defined by a wife's ability to manage emotions, find meaning, adapt, and maintain personal functioning amidst the complexities of family life.

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INTRODUCTION

Polygamy is a form of marriage in which a man has more than one wife at the same time (Zeitzen, 2020). This phenomenon is not merely a domestic practice within a particular culture or religion, but rather a complex social reality rooted in the intersection of tradition (Sa'adah et al., 2015), religious interpretation, and patriarchal structures (Hasan et al., 2022). In Indonesia, polygamy is recognized to a limited extent within a strict legal framework. Nurlaelawati (2020) argues that the state seeks to strike a balance between recognizing religious law and protecting women's rights through Law No. 1 of 1974 on Marriage and the Compilation of Islamic Law in the Republic of Indonesia (KHI). Legally, polygamy in Indonesia is not an absolute right for a husband but rather an exceptional circumstance requiring the consent of the lawful wife through the courts, subject to specific conditions. Among these conditions are a guarantee of fair treatment and the husband's financial capacity. Additionally, there must be evidence that the wife is unable to fulfill her obligations. Family well-being remains the primary focus of these regulations. However, in practice, fairness is often an abstract concept that is difficult to measure objectively.

Family well-being can be achieved, in part, through the fulfillment of the wife's psychological well-being (Iqbal, 2020). In polygamous families, fairness and certainty play a major role in the psychological well-being of the wife (Kurniawan, 2022). Meanwhile, uncertainty regarding time, financial support, or even abstract matters such as affection will create anxiety that undermines a wife's sense of security.

The Psychological Dynamics of a Wives in Polygamous Marriages

Empirical data show that mental health dynamics become more complex for wives in polygamous marriages compared to monogamous marriages or previous marital phases (Asyura & Herawati, 2022). The shift in family structure from a husband-wife pair to a polygamous family has a significant impact on mutual trust and affection within the family. It also requires complex adaptation for all family members, especially for the wives and the husband (Safitri & Maghfiroh, 2026). A wife who was initially the only one in her husband's heart and mind suddenly has to negotiate that space with the presence of another wife.

The presence of a wife in a polygamous family results in complex roles. In addition to the primary roles of managing the household and raising children—as is typical for wives—she also plays a role in maintaining intimacy with her husband amid the division of time, and sometimes faces the additional role of managing interactions with other wives, which requires a high degree of emotional intelligence to avoid conflict (Arifin et al., 2024).

The complexity of a wife's role in a polygamous family often presents various challenges, including:

Adaptation

The husband, the first wife, and the new wives will each experience changes in their roles within the household, in child-rearing, and in society (Della Thalita, 2020). The entry of a new person into the family structure—leading to the transition to a polygamous family—is a life change that requires adaptation. This also applies to families that have already practiced polygamy with the arrival of a new wife into an existing polygamous household.

This phenomenon is actually something that married couples already experience when they first get married. For example, a husband and wife must adapt to new lives and habits following the arrival of their partner, their partner's family, their new social status, and so on (Iqbal, 2020).

Wives begin actively adapting and accepting the situation as soon as their husbands announce their decision to practice polygamy. Adaptation that begins before the husband remarries generally leads to better self-acceptance on the wife's part, compared to adaptation that only begins after she learns her husband has remarried without her knowledge.

A failed or slow adaptation process within the new family structure will have an impact on the mental health of its members, particularly the wives (Safitri & Maghfiroh, 2026).

Jealousy

Jealousy is a normal emotion in marriage; however, in polygamous marriages, jealousy is no longer merely a common occurrence but rather a threat to a wife's sense of self and self-esteem (Al-Krenawi, 2013). Jealousy is directed not only toward the other wives but also toward the husband, who is perceived as having betrayed and broken the promises made at the beginning of the marriage (Kartono, 1992).

Deep-seated and unresolved jealousy can develop into serious affective disorders, including major depression and anxiety (Putri, 2025). This condition is exacerbated by feelings of competition, in which a wife feels she must constantly vie for her husband's attention, recognition, and material support. This competition creates an exhausting internal psychological dynamic that triggers outbursts of anger and hostility among the wives, ultimately undermining peace within the household—even when the wives do not live under the same roof.

Jealousy is a situational issue that will always be present in a polygamous marriage.

Pessimism or self-doubt

Furthermore, polygamy can lead to low self-esteem in wives, especially the first wife. When a wife is in a polygamous marriage, she often feels that she is no longer attractive to her husband, eventually leading her to compare her physical appearance, age, and the way she serves her husband with those of his other wives—particularly the more recent ones.

This triggers deep self-doubt and feelings of inferiority, as if the presence of a new wife were a verdict on the failure of wives in polygamous marriages to meet their husbands' needs (Azizah, 2020). Psychologically, the pressure to win this emotional competition forces the wives to remain in survival mode constantly (Bahari, 2021). This situation drains cognitive energy and makes it difficult to focus on self-actualization, as mental energy is consumed by the need to validate one's position within the family (Nurmayani et al., 2025).

Helplessness

Feelings of helplessness and loss of control are particularly common among first wives. The shift to a polygamous family structure leads wives to assume they will lose control over the future of their marriage, their economic resources, and their husband's time and attention (Fahmi, 2014). This loss of control is strongly correlated with an increased risk of anxiety and depression.

Communication

A husband's divided time is often accompanied by a decline in the quality of deep and intimate communication. In fact, information is often withheld or manipulated to avoid conflict between wives (Darmawati et al., 2021) (Suryandari & Yuliastina, 2019). It is this situation that causes anxiety in wives and leads to a deterioration in their psychological well-being.

Social Isolation and Discrimination

In a social context that tends to be dominated by monogamous marriage, wives in polygamous marriages are often stigmatized as weak because they are in a polygamous relationship, or—even more extremely—as homewreckers, which causes them to withdraw from social support networks (Putri & Rahmat, 2025).

Polygamy, Mental Health, and Psychological Impacts

As a result of the various challenges wives face in polygamous families, it is not uncommon for them to suffer from mental health issues. Feelings of despair arise from a sense of powerlessness and a loss of control over the direction of one's life and the husband's decisions. Unresolved physical and emotional exhaustion can trigger depression. Anxiety leads to excessive vigilance toward the husband and the actions of the other wives (Rahmanian et al., 2021).

In fact, in cases where polygamy occurs secretly and without the husband's consent or communication, it can lead to post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) in the wife involved in the polygamous relationship. Symptoms such as flashbacks of the betrayal, emotional numbness, and sleep disturbances are common in family counseling settings (Razak, 2020). It is important to understand that although polygamy is a legally and religiously permissible practice in some cultures, its impact on psychological well-being cannot be ignored. The mental health of wives is a crucial aspect because it affects the quality of child-rearing and the stability of society at large (Nurmayani et al., 2025).

Between Faith, Pain, and Common Sense

One of the most common coping mechanisms among wives in polygamous marriages in Indonesia is the strengthening of spirituality (Kurniawan, 2022). Within an Islamic framework, this strengthening generally does not come as a single moment of enlightenment, but rather through the internalization of values that are already familiar to Muslims, such as patience in facing trials, sincerity in accepting what cannot be changed, and tawakal—or entrusting the outcome to Allah after having done one's utmost. These values are often understood merely as a form of resignation. However, in psychological studies, patience and acceptance are increasingly viewed as active processes of reinterpreting suffering, rather than simply a mindset of giving in to circumstances.

For example, a psychotherapy model based on ikhlas developed to help individuals manage their mental health (Fitri, Shofiah, & Rajab, 2023), or Qur'an-based spiritual education that places life's trials within a broader framework of meaning, rather than viewing them merely as punishment (Ruslan, Bunyamin, & Achruh, 2022) (Taufik et al., 2022). Recent findings among first wives in polygamous marriages even suggest that spirituality can serve as the primary foundation of resilience. The suffering they experience does not simply disappear, but is transformed into strength through efforts to draw closer to God. These efforts guide the wife through a long process toward acceptance, independence, and psychological well-being (Salsabila & Khoiriyasdien, 2026).

Highlighting the dimension of spirituality does not mean using religion as a justification for wives to submit to injustice in the name of obedience, or treating Islamic teachings as an absolute justification for polygamy. Patience and sincerity, in their deeper psychological sense, are active and demanding psychological processes—not merely a momentary surrender.

Various research studies on polygamy in Indonesia—viewed from a psychological perspective—often focus only on the psychological dynamics and coping strategies of wives. There is still very little research that delves deeply into how wives negotiate their feelings and thoughts amid the dynamics of a polygamous family.

This study does not intend to judge or legitimize polygamy. Rather, it aims to explore the subjective experiences of women as they manage their emotions and pressures, and find hope amid complex circumstances. Thus, the primary objective of this study is to thoroughly explore the reasons why wives persevere and accept polygamy, the main sources that trigger the psychological dynamics and pressures experienced by these wives, and the coping strategies they employ to maintain their mental health.

Mental health in this context does not mean the absence of suffering experienced by wives in polygamous marriages, but rather the ability to continue functioning and find meaning in the midst of their polygamous marriages. Many wives ultimately find ways to cope through strengthening their spirituality (Kurniawan, 2022), self-actualization (Anggraeni, 2008), economic independence (Nurmayani et al., 2025), or support from fellow wives within this unique dynamic (Sholihin & Koentjoro, 2023).

RESEARCH METHODS

To examine the psychological realities of wives in polygamous families, this study employs a qualitative phenomenological approach. The choice of the phenomenological approach is based on the need to unravel the meaning behind the informants' life experiences, in which each event is viewed as a structured form of individual consciousness rather than merely a series of coincidental occurrences.

The analysis of phenomena in this study is not limited to a purely textual understanding but aims to explore the depth of meaning experienced by the informants. This aligns with Herdiansyah's (2011) assertion that the phenomenological approach focuses on the meaning of concepts or phenomena of lived experience grounded in individual consciousness. Referring to Sugiyono's (2013) perspective, the phenomenological method is designed to map, study, and interpret unique phenomena through the individual's direct personal perspectives, paradigms, and beliefs. Through a phenomenological qualitative descriptive framework, the researcher hopes to uncover the inner processes and trajectories of subjective experiences that shape the dynamics of mental health among wives in polygamous marriages.

The informants in this study were selected intentionally using purposive sampling to ensure that the selected subjects met the criteria and had the experience relevant to the study's objectives. The primary data collection strategy involved in-depth interviews and unstructured observation to capture emotional responses in a natural setting.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Studies on polygamy do not merely focus on normative debates regarding its permissibility or otherwise, but also encompass various important psychological dimensions that warrant examination. This is particularly true in the lived experiences of women in polygamous marriages, who, as wives, must share living spaces and roles with other women.

Like any marriage, polygamy entails ethical responsibilities—often more demanding than those in monogamous unions—as specifically outlined in Islamic Sharia guidelines and Indonesian marriage laws. When practiced according to established principles, polygamy can foster the well-being of all parties involved (Arifin et al., 2024), rather than solely satisfying the biological needs of the husband.

The difference between polygamous and monogamous marriages does not lie in the types of emotions that arise, but rather in their intensity and complexity. Field findings in this study indicate that the issues faced by wives in polygamous families are, in principle, no different in nature from those in monogamous families in general—for example, matters of fairness, communication, and a sense of security. What sets them apart is the number of parties involved. Consequently, the complexity of each issue is multiplied, as noted by Arifin et al. (2024) in their study.

The informants in this study consist of five wives from polygamous families with diverse social and environmental backgrounds. Furthermore, the variation in the duration of their marriages and their respective statuses within the family—whether as the first wife or a co-wife—offers a rich perspective.

Tabel 1. Key Informants

Informant	*Status*	*Family*	*Age*	*Activity*	*Duration of Marriage*	*Duration of Polygamy*	*Children*

1	First Wife	A	55 years	Self-employed	22 years	20 years	Yes
2	First Wife	B	47 years	Housewife	24 years	4 years	Yes
3	First Wife	C	39 years	Housewife	17 years	2 years	Yes
4	Second Wife	B	42 years	Housewife	6 years	6 years	-
5	Fourth Wife	D	48 years	Self-employed	25 years	10 years	Yes

The commonalities in background reported by the wives in polygamous marriages in this study include husbands whose financial circumstances are more than sufficient to meet the family's needs, separate residences for each wife, and a scheduled division of time among the wives.

All informants stated that their physical and material needs, as well as those of their children, were well provided for by their husbands. The fulfillment of basic rights—including clothing, food, shelter, and access to education and healthcare—indicates that there are no significant obstacles related to financial well-being within the household dynamics. This finding aligns with Razak's (2020) perspective that mental health is influenced by various social, economic, and environmental factors, as well as individual and relational conditions; thus, adequate economic conditions do not automatically eliminate the risk of psychological stress. In particular, Informants 1 and 5 mentioned that they had no economic problems because they had their own income.

This consistent provision of material support is an important initial finding, as it indicates that the mental health dynamics experienced by wives in polygamous marriages do not stem from economic deprivation, but are triggered by more complex psychological and emotional factors.

Another equally important finding from this study is the similarity in the initial stages leading up to the practice of polygamy. In all cases, the husbands openly sought their wives' permission beforehand. Although all informants confirmed that such a request for permission was made, there were differing dynamics in the process of reaching an agreement. Three husbands were willing to wait until their wives had truly given their full consent and acceptance, but there was one case in which the husband treated the request for permission merely as a formality and proceeded with the marriage even though his wife was not yet ready for polygamy. Differences in how husbands sought permission ultimately played a decisive role in the wives' self-acceptance and had a direct impact on their mental health while living in a polygamous marriage, as shown in the studies by Efendi (2018) and Abror (2016).

Factors Triggering Psychological Stress for Wives in Polygamous Families

Wives in polygamous marriages face multiple layers of psychological stress, stemming from their relationships with their husbands, their relationships with other wives, and their internal struggles. These layers of stress are not limited to the domestic and personal spheres but also extend to the social sphere.

Based on an analysis of field data, a pattern has emerged showing that wives in polygamous marriages are not passive acceptors of their fate but rather actively develop strategies to maintain their mental health and well-being. More specifically, the primary sources triggering the psychological dynamics and pressures experienced by these wives can be categorized into the following four areas:

1. **Husband: Fairness and Inequality**

   Fairness is a matter of great concern for all the polygamous families in this study. This is evidenced by the allocation of time and material resources, the scheduling of accompanying the husband to outside activities, and other efforts regarding tangible, outward aspects. However, all informants acknowledge that it is impossible for a husband to achieve perfect fairness, particularly regarding internal, emotional matters.

   "...that inclination is bound to exist..." (Informant 1)

   "...achieving absolute fairness is impossible." (Informant 1)

   "As for the heart, matters of the heart, I wouldn't know." (Informant 2)

   Under specific circumstances, some informants' perceptions of fairness shift. For instance, when an informant is angry or annoyed with her husband, she may perceive him as treating her unfairly. Yet, once the emotion subsides, is brought under control, or is vented elsewhere, the wife often feels regret for having held that perception of her husband.

2. **Other Wives: Jealousy and Competition**

The structure of polygamy inevitably leads to competition among wives as they vie for their husband's attention, recognition, and resources. This competition fuels jealousy, anger, and even hostility, which severely disrupts family harmony. The first wife is often the most vulnerable to comparing herself with newer wives, which leads to feelings of inferiority and low self-esteem.

"...there was turmoil in the family, it lasted a long time, for about 6 years." (Informant 5)

Informants 3 and 5 admitted to feeling jealous of the other wives. Although there is a strong religious foundation, the informants' human nature still gives rise to feelings of jealousy that can become a source of psychological stress if not managed properly. Similarly, regarding perceptions of fairness, jealousy tends to arise more frequently when a wife is going through a difficult time or is overwhelmed by negative emotions.

3. The Self: Self-Esteem and Identity

At a personal level, a husband's decision to enter into a polygamous marriage is often interpreted by the wife as a reflection of her own inadequacies. It is as if her presence—whether physically, emotionally, or in terms of her role—is insufficient for her husband. This interpretation erodes self-esteem and fosters pessimism and a sense of powerlessness; worse still, it breeds compounded anxiety regarding her status as a wife and the future of her children.

"...actually, deep down, a woman really doesn't want her husband to practice polygamy or share him with someone else." (Informant 1)

Meanwhile, Informant 1 experienced an internal struggle regarding identity. The informant revealed the internal pressure placed on her ego and identity as a woman before ultimately resigning herself to religious understanding. This represented a conflict between a woman's innate nature and religious obedience.

"That night, I couldn't sleep, so I turned to performing the night prayer; I prayed with all my heart while weeping..." (Informant 5)

Disturbances in psychological well-being were evident in the form of difficulty sleeping, crying, and anxiety when facing the reality of a polygamous marriage. Informant 5 revealed that she had been unable to sleep and had cried while seeking guidance from God. This situation indicates that the experience of living in a polygamous marriage is not only processed cognitively but also disrupts the informant's emotional and psychological well-being. This is consistent with the study conducted by Bahari et al. (2021), in which such disturbances in peace of mind also indicated an internal struggle as the informants tried to accept the reality of their marriages.

The findings regarding the crisis of self-esteem experienced by polygamous wives in this study were not static but rather fluctuating. It intensified during periods of mental exhaustion and subsided when they felt secure.

4. Social Environment: Sideways Glances

Psychological stress does not stem solely from within oneself or one's family. It also arises from the informants' social environment—including their wives, neighbors, and friends—and, in particular, from the extended family. Perceptions such as a woman who has stolen another woman's husband, or a wife who is seen as weak because she is perceived as unable to meet her husband's needs, and—in even more extreme cases—a woman who is no longer desired by her husband.

All informants experienced this condition, with varying intensity, frequency, and sources. The most memorable experiences—which had a significant impact on their mental health—were reported by Informants 3 and 4. These experiences spanned several years. Informant 3 was not accepted by her husband's family, while Informant 4 faced cynical treatment from her parents, even though they had given their blessing for her to become a wife in a polygamous marriage.

"Never mind the religious arguments; the bottom line is that your husband is going through a second puberty." (Quote from a family member of Informant 3's husband)

"…hoping to set a good example for the surrounding community regarding a beautiful form of polygamy." (Informant 4)

This is implicitly evident in Informant 3's hope, aware of the negative stigma surrounding polygamy in society, she feels a need to prove otherwise.

Coping Strategies of Wives in Polygamous Marriages: Spirituality, Self-Actualization, and Collective Support

Fulfilling one's role in a polygamous marriage presents complex psychological dynamics, thereby requiring continuous adaptability. Based on field findings, the efforts of wives to maintain their mental health heavily depend on a combination of spiritual strength, cognitive awareness, and the family support system.

1. **Spirituality as the Foundation of Cognitive Reframing**

Research findings indicate that the primary coping strategies employed by the wives in this study are rooted in spiritual values. This is clearly reflected in all informants, who interpret polygamy as God's predestined will—established long before humanity was created—as well as a path of worship to seek God's pleasure.

"Because it is Allah's decree that must be accepted; this decree has existed for fifty thousand years before the advent of humankind" (Informant 3)

"The point is, don't think of polygamy as sharing a husband anymore; change that mindset—reframe it as a form of obedience to Allah's sharia, a path to earning rewards." (Informant 1)

"…I always keep praying, asking Allah for guidance…" (Informant 5)

This profound interpretation is a tangible manifestation of spirituality-based cognitive reframing. As stated by Kurniawan (2024), shifting the center of happiness from created beings—in this case, the husband—to God is the key to mental health. When a wife's self-worth is no longer determined solely by her husband's validation but rather by her obedience to Allah, excessive emotional dependence can be reduced.

In psychological literature, this strategy is known as spiritual coping, in which religious beliefs serve as a powerful buffer against stress. Through this mechanism, the human emotion of jealousy—which the informants acknowledged they still frequently experience—does not develop into disruptive and destructive psychological distress, but can instead be managed through patience and sincerity.

2. **Strengthening Oneself Through Knowledge and Busy Activities**

The spiritual strategies mentioned above do not stand alone but are linked to efforts at self-actualization beyond domestic roles (Anggraeni, 2008). For example, the mental preparation undertaken by Informant 3 before entering into a polygamous marriage was pursued through two complementary paths: seeking guidance through prayer and actively seeking knowledge about polygamous marriage before actually entering into it. This effort can be interpreted as a fairly mature form of cognitive coping, while also aligning with Islam's encouragement for women to continually seek knowledge so as not to be preoccupied with prejudices and emotions that tend to be negative.

"Strengthen yourself by studying the Quran, reading books, and listening to religious lectures…" (Informant 3)

This step is in line with Islam's encouragement for women to continually seek knowledge. Wives who engage in positive pursuits—whether in education, career, da'wah, or other self-development activities—demonstrate greater mental resilience (Iqbal, 2020) (Kartono, 1992). Such activities provide wives with a sense of autonomy that prevents them from becoming trapped in obsessive thoughts about their husband's interactions with other women. By continuing to learn and build a comprehensive understanding of the original purpose of her marriage, a wife can maintain her emotional independence in the midst of situations she cannot fully control. Conversely, without self-actualization and a sense of meaningful gratitude, a person becomes more vulnerable to getting trapped in a cycle of anger and despair (Taufik et al., 2022).

3. Collective Coping: Social Support Among Women in Similar Situations

The mental health of a wife in a polygamous marriage is not solely a private matter but is also shaped by the support of her immediate family. Informant 3 attributes the sense of peace and happiness she feels to the collective efforts built with her family. Her proactive approach to communicating with her husband's first wife—even before the marriage took place—fostered a relationship that felt more like sisterhood than competition. This was also observed in Informant 4, who views the other wives in her polygamous family as sisters with whom she can share her experiences and who serve as allies in her struggles. Although this perception stems from Informant 4's past experience of longing for a sister in her life, this phenomenon was also documented by Sholihin and Koentjoro (2023) in their research.

Minor family issues can be resolved through open communication. The husbands of informants 1, 2, 3, and 4 have made it a habit to provide clarification or explanations whenever their wives express concerns, and they regularly offer each other advice for the greater good. Additionally, mutual discussion and shared agreements serve as strategies for these husbands to ensure that a sense of fairness remains alive within their polygamous families (Kurniawan, 2022).

The combination of healthy communication and a sense of justice can foster resilience in Informant 3. For her, this experience serves as a kind of response to society's negative views on polygamy. Meanwhile, Informants 1, 2, and 4 wish to demonstrate to society that a polygamous marriage—when entered into with sincere intentions, mutual commitment, and shared goals—can bring happiness that positively impacts the wives' mental health (Fahmi, 2014).

The wives' success in maintaining their mental well-being lies in transferring positive emotions to their children. In Informant 3's polygamous family, the wives have special nicknames given to them by all their children. This is clear evidence that the wives' stable emotional regulation has a direct impact on the psychological well-being of children in polygamous families (Nurmayani, 2025).

Husband's Support as a Crucial Factor

One important point to emphasize regarding the series of strategies above is that their effectiveness is inextricably linked to a variable that lies beyond the wife's full control: the husband's attitude. Spiritual-based cognitive reframing, self-actualization, and assertive communication are strategies implemented by the wife individually, yet their success depends heavily on the extent to which the husband responds with support.

A husband who is emotionally supportive, open to communication, consistently upholds fairness, and does not become defensive when his wife expresses her emotional needs makes the wife's coping process relatively easier (Darmawati et al., 2021). Conversely, a husband who is indifferent, defensive, or closes off communication forces the wife not only to manage her own emotions but also to bear an additional burden due to the uncertainty that could otherwise be minimized by the husband's openness and fairness (Azizah, 2020).

In the polygamous family of Informant 1, for example, the husband brings his wives and children together through casual activities (games, trivia contests). The husband's efforts to be fair and maintain open communication with his wives instill a sense of peace in them. This demonstrates that mentally healthy polygamy requires far greater managerial and psychological commitment on the part of the husband than on the part of the wives.

CONCLUSION

This study shows that the psychological experiences of wives in polygamous marriages are complex and dynamic. Polygamy does not automatically cause psychological distress, but changes in the structure of family relationships require adaptation efforts that can create stress, especially when wives must renegotiate their sense of security, self-esteem, identity, and position within the family. For all five informants, meeting economic needs was not a dominant source of stress; thus, the psychological dynamics were more closely related to emotional, relational, and personal aspects.

The sources of psychological stress in this study were found to originate from four domains: the husband, other wives, the self, and the social environment. From the husband's perspective, issues of fairness—particularly fairness in the intangible, inner aspects that cannot be fully measured—are a source of anxiety. Regarding other wives, jealousy, competition, and the tendency to compare oneself with others can cause stress, although this is fluctuating and situational in nature. In the internal domain, stress is primarily related to self-esteem, identity, self-doubt, feelings of helplessness, and disturbances in psychological well-being. Meanwhile, the social environment also contributes to stress through stigma and negative perceptions toward women in polygamous marriages.

Despite facing various forms of stress, the informants did not adopt a passive stance. They actively developed coping strategies to maintain their functioning and mental health. These strategies are primarily carried out through spirituality, reframing their understanding of polygamy, self-empowerment through knowledge and positive activities, as well as social support and communication within the family. Spirituality serves as a crucial foundation in the process of cognitive reframing—that is, shifting the interpretation of polygamy from merely an experience of sharing a spouse to an expression of devotion and a quest for life's meaning.

Thus, for the informants, mental health does not equate to being entirely free from feelings of jealousy, sadness, disappointment, or psychological pressure. Instead, mental health manifests as the ability to manage emotions, gradually accept reality, find meaning, and maintain personal functioning amidst complex situations. This process does not rely solely on the wife's internal capabilities; it is also influenced by her husband's support—specifically through fairness, open communication, and emotional backing.

Overall, this study reveals that the experience of being a wife in a polygamous family is an ongoing process of psychological negotiation involving emotions, self-identity, religious values, marital relationships, and the realities of family life. Acceptance is not a state that emerges instantly; rather, it is the outcome of a gradual process of adaptation and the making of meaning.

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