

Breaking the Silence

Lived Reality of
2500 Indian Muslim Women
in Polygamous Marriages

Dr. Noorjehan Safia Niaz
Zakia Soman



INDIA • SINGAPORE • MALAYSIA



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Foreword

Musawah is a global movement for equality and justice in the Muslim family that advances human rights for women living in Muslim contexts. We bring together NGOs, activists, scholars, legal experts, policymakers, and changemakers from around the world to champion justice and equality in laws, policies and practices.

Musawah calls for family relationships in Muslim societies to be grounded in Qur'anic values such as love and compassion (*mawaddah wa rahmah*), serenity (*sakinah*), dignity (*karamah*) and consultation and mutual consent (*tashawur wa taradi*). However, advocates of women's rights continue to experience challenges and opposition in reforming unequal provisions due to the deep belief that laws are divine and unchangeable.

In addressing the various challenges and opposition, we use a holistic framework (Musawah Framework for Action) that integrates Islamic teachings, universal human rights, national constitutional guarantees of equality, and the lived realities of women and men. The teachings of the Qur'an, the objectives of the Shari'ah, universal human rights standards, fundamental rights and constitutional guarantees, and the realities of our lives in the twenty-first century, all demand that relations between Muslim women and men in both the private and the public spheres be governed by principles and practices that uphold equality, fairness and justice.

According to the Musawah Framework for Action, equality in the family is necessary because many aspects of our current Muslim family laws and practices are unjust and do not respond to the lives and experiences of Muslim families and individuals.

Although India is a Muslim-minority context, the 2011 Indian census states the population of Muslims is approximately 172 million or 14.2% of the country's population, the sheer size of which outnumbers most Muslim-majority countries in the world. Therefore, the need for codified comprehensive Muslim family laws cannot be understated. The latest study on polygamy undertaken by Bharatiya Muslim Mahila Andolan (BMMA) will provide updated insights on the practice of polygamy following two previous surveys that were done in 2015 and 2018, and the extent of its impact on women and children of polygamous marriages. Due to their close relationship with the realities on the ground, BMMA is advocating for key Government institutions such as the judiciary and especially lawmakers to pass a legislation banning the practice of polygamy.

It is a worthy reminder that the Qur'an sets limitations on polygamy, including the requirement to marry only one wife if husbands are unable to uphold equality in a polygamous marriage. Surah an-Nisa' 4:3 states that men can marry two, three, or four women, importantly it also states: 'however, if you fear that you will not uphold equality, marry one woman or what your right hands possess. This will bring you closer to not committing grave injustice'.

Syirin Junisiya

Senior Regional Programme Officer-Asia

Musawah

Acknowledgment

This study is not a study which will be confined to the 4 walls of a library. It is a study that has got heartrending stories happening within the 4 walls of a home. Those 4 walls that contain in itself the sadness and anger, the resentment and the fears of women who have faced the indignity and violence of polygamy. This study will contribute to legislation which will provide much needed legal relief to Muslim women.

And hence the brave voices of 2500 women who took part in this study deserve a big round of applause and a heartfelt acknowledgement of their faith in their own contribution to change their own destiny and the destiny of countless others.

22 women from amongst these 2500 allowed us to delve deep into their lives through in-depth case studies. Their faith in the study and the people who approached them for it is acknowledged. They are too caught up in their own problems to understand what role their stories can potentially play in bringing in the much-needed reforms in the Muslim family law in India.

All BMMA state leaders worked swiftly through the 6 months of the study, reaching out to the victims through lanes of their cities and towns and villages. Reaching out to the victim through the piercing gaze of their family members, especially the men, was not easy. Women wanted to speak, to share, to report and they did it valiantly, defying family pressures. Our state leaders gave them that confidence. Their long-standing association with the community held them in good stead in the study. A big hug of solidarity to Qazi Nishat Hussein, Qazi Zubeda Khatoon, Qazi Nasreen, Noorjehan Diwan, Qazi Jeibunnisa R, Niyazmeen Dahiya and Rahima Khatoon. A very special mention of Lia Caldeira for organizing the base data.

All good intentions need equally good moral support and not to forget financial support. Musawah has not only been a great support in financing this project but much more importantly has provided the knowledge base for this study.

BMMA has had a long association with Musawah through which as activists we have been able to provide a strong socio-legal-spiritual base to our activism. We know activism needs deep understanding, information, knowledge and wisdom that is provided by Musawah scholars who through their tireless

work provide a much-needed religious and human rights context to our work. Their scholarship is put to use by us to forward our arguments for change. We thank Musawah for this beautiful combination of activism and scholarship where we are equal partners in addressing deep misogyny in our societies and to give a push to growth and transformation in Muslim societies.

We thank our long-standing publishers, Notion Press, for their professional methods of working and allowing a smooth publishing process.

Preface

Lack of Reforms in Muslim Personal Law in India

Indian Muslim women continue to be denied justice and equality in marriage and family nearly eight decades after India's independence. Reform in Muslim Family Law has been long overdue but neither the community leaders nor those in government seem to care. Muslim women are entitled to legal protection and safeguards similar to women from Hindu and Christian communities in India but they remain discriminated against. Thanks to the stranglehold of patriarchal conservatism coupled with politics, Muslim women are denied Quranic as well as constitutional rights in matters such as marriage, divorce, polygamy, guardianship, succession and inheritance. India requires a range of laws under a Muslim Code similar to the historic Hindu Code Bill which had led to affirmative laws for women's equality in family.

Historically, most communities in the sub-continent have been male dominated and averse to reform in family laws. Nehru and Ambedkar championed the Uniform Civil Code (UCC) in order to enable female citizens to become equal in our misogynist conservative society. However, at the time, UCC was viewed as an onslaught on our ancient civilization and culture by members of the Constituent Assembly. It was opposed by all across faiths and ideologies. The steadfast opposition to the move compelled Nehru to drop the idea of UCC. He finally partially succeeded in 1952 to introduce the Hindu Code bills in Parliament even as the opposition from conservatives continued. This success was partial because it excluded Muslim women. Eventually Hindu Marriage Act, Hindu Succession Act and a few other laws were passed by the parliament in 1955-56. These laws sought to unify and regulate diverse practices within Hinduism to enable protection for women in family matters.

Unfortunately, for Indian Muslims, a Muslim Code leading to codified personal laws remains a distant dream. The conservative Ulemas or scholars have never allowed any possibility of reform; even mentioning reform is blasphemous as we learnt the hard way in the course of our work as Bhartiya Muslim Mahila Andolan (BMMA).¹ They invariably raise the bogey of "Islam in danger" and "Shariat in danger" whenever voices demanding gender justice are raised. This was witnessed repeatedly during the women-led struggle against instant triple talaq. They keep parroting the line "Islam gave rights to women 1400 years ago" but vehemently oppose any move towards translating these rights

¹ <https://www.ipsnews.net/2021/12/safia-niaz-zakia-soman-bonded-change-trajectory-muslim-women-india/>

into reality. This has also resulted in a common misunderstanding in vast sections of the community about personal laws being above board and that the question of reform must not arise. It is therefore left to the women themselves to take up their demands for gender just family laws.

Is it Shariat?

Indian Muslims are still governed by the Shariat Application Act, 1937 which is highly inadequate and of little practical use for women in their lives. It merely states that Indian Muslims will be governed by Shariat [Islamic law] in family matters. It is silent on important aspects such as age of marriage, procedure of divorce, guardianship and custody of children, practices such as halala and polygamy, inheritance and women's share in property and so on. It is silent on the mandatory affirmative traditions such as consent, *mehr* or dower and *nikahnama* or marital contract. In the absence of documented provisions and clear-cut guidelines, misinterpretations abound. The word of a conservative ulema or scholar becomes law and dominates practices in marriage and family. This gives rise to arbitrary and misogynistic norms and practices such as unilateral talaq/divorce, halala, child marriages and polygamy. It results in outright violation of rights of thousands of women despite Quranic injunctions of gender justice and constitutional promise of gender equality. Moreover, it gives precedence to males over females in decision making within the family and community. It is easy for a husband to divorce his wife without any consultation with her. Contrary to this, ground reality tells us that most women find it very difficult to exercise their right to Khula or to initiate and obtain divorce from the husband. A woman is left at the mercy of arbitrary practices in the absence of legal mechanisms that can protect her rights.

Prior to 2014, reform in Muslim personal law could not happen thanks to the politics of secularism. The Shah Bano episode of 1985-86 is a dark chapter in Indian history. There can hardly be any possibilities of reform under the BJP rule in a climate of religious polarization. Although the Centre supported abolition of triple talaq there is already heightened politicization of the UCC which appears to have been reduced to being a weapon against minorities. Politicians and political parties lack commitment to women's equality except a handful of progressive members of parliament.

In August 2017, a Constitutional bench of the Supreme Court declared instant triple talaq or talaq-e-bidat illegal.² This was a huge milestone for Muslim women seeking justice in family. It has led to the incidence of triple talaq drastically going down. Simultaneously it has led to men resorting to yet another unilateral method of divorcing their wives [talaq-e-hasan] without any efforts towards much needed dialogue or for reconciliation. The law of 2019 [Muslim Women (Protection of Rights on Marriage)] does not provide for a just and fair divorce although it punishes husbands indulging in instant triple talaq. The solution lies in comprehensive reform in Muslim personal law.

2 <https://www.firstpost.com/explainers/history-today-supreme-court-declared-triple-talaq-unconstitutional-13926492.html>

Need to Abolish Polygamy

Muslim women remain trapped between patriarchy within the community and communal politics in the larger context. The voices of reform that arose in the last two decades such as the women-led movement against triple talaq cannot survive in an atmosphere of hate, religious polarization and aggravated communalism. On the other hand, little can be expected from the conservative Ulemas as far as women's equality is concerned. Under the circumstances, BMMA continues in its mission for attaining gender justice for Muslim women and for equal citizenship.

We have been conducting public meetings, workshops and programs for building consciousness about women's rights in religion as well as the Indian constitution. We have conducted ground level studies on various issues relevant in lives of women including a pilot study on polygamy. The women we spoke to urged for a legal abolition of polygamy as they found the practice was inhuman and unbearable for women. Our pilot survey indicated that being in a polygamous marriage causes tremendous emotional trauma to the woman apart from economic and other hardships. It affects the woman's sense of self respect, self-esteem and dignity as a human being. The issue is compounded by educational and economic deprivation as they are in no position to raise their voice and demand fair treatment. An overwhelming number of women told us that they felt a sense of betrayal, loss of dignity and loss of self-respect when the husband remarried.

Quran Does Not Encourage Polygamy

We at the BMMA are firmly of the view that polygamy or taking of more than one wife by a man is strictly prohibited by the Quran in today's context and it should be legally banned forthwith. Some Indian Muslims suffer from the misplaced belief that a Muslim man can marry four times and it is legally permitted by the Quran. Very few know that this is not true! The Quran gives a man permission for more than one marriage under strict conditions, but nowhere is a man encouraged to marry a second time. In fact, there is a clear preference that he marry only once. The Quran sets limitations on Polygamy.³

According to the Quran (4:2, 4:3, 4:127, 4:129) a Muslim man cannot freely marry a second time while the first wife is alive. He has to be able to fulfill certain elaborate conditions if he wants to marry again. The woman he wants to marry has to be a widow or an orphan. The second marriage can occur only under specific circumstances if there is an emergency or crisis in society which has left a large number of women widowed and children orphaned. Even so, he has to treat both wives equally and justly. He has to be able to provide for both the wives equally in social and material terms. If he is able to do all this somehow, then he has to be able to love both his wives equally which, the Quran says, he simply cannot do despite his best intentions. Therefore, the Quran says,

3 <https://www.musawah.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/04/Policy-Brief-3-Ending-Polygamy.pdf>

marry only once (4:2, 4:3, 4:127, 4:129)! These verses completely rule out second marriage and therefore one can say definitively that the Quran doesn't encourage polygamy.⁴

Interestingly, both the conservative ulema and the Hindutva politicians propagate the belief that polygamy is permitted in Islam. There can be no room for polygamy in present times. A few lawyers and activists say why bring up the question at all in times of religious polarization and Muslim bashing? Women's human rights, autonomy and dignity are non-negotiable as per Indian constitution as well as International Human Rights Law. There can be no room for defense of this inhuman practice under the garb of Muslim law providing recognition and therefore maintenance to all four wives vis-a-vis Hindu law which refuses to recognize a second wife. It thereby leaves a Hindu woman in pitiable condition, we are told. But then, the sole purpose of a woman's life is not just to be "maintained" by a vagrant husband. Such a reasoning can hardly be an excuse for allowing a grave injustice to persist and an abhorrent practice to continue in the name of religious sanction. In today's context the focus should be on education, empowerment and economic autonomy of girls and women. They cannot be expected to live as wife No 1 or 2 or 3 under emotional trauma and suffering.

Yet another argument in defense of polygamy is made as follows: But where is the incidence of polygamy amongst Muslims being higher than Hindus? They cite some government data from the 1970s to suggest that incidence of polygamy amongst Hindus is a notch higher than amongst Muslims. True, no updated data exists. But a Hindu man indulging in polygamy commits a crime punishable under section 495 of Code of Criminal Procedure (CrPC) by a seven-year jail term. A Hindu man cannot have a second wife legally. This anomaly needs to be addressed and a Muslim man indulging in polygamy must be prevented by law.

Past Work of BMMA

BMMA has been in the forefront of demanding a comprehensively codified Muslim family law since 2007. To that end we held over 400 consultations across the country over 8 years and came up with a draft of a comprehensive law. This draft has been sent to the central government time and again for it to turn it into a codified legislation.

In 2016 we filed a Public Interest Litigation (PIL) to challenge the practice of triple divorce, polygamy and halala⁵ marriage. The Supreme Court, in its supreme wisdom, picked up only the issue of triple divorce and passed a judgment making it legally invalid. It ignored the accompanying issue of polygamy

4 While Surah an-Nisa' 4:3 in the Quran states that men can marry two, three, or four women, it goes on to clarify: 'however, if you fear that you will not uphold equality, marry one woman or what your right hands possess. This will bring you closer to not committing grave injustice'. Moreover, Surah an-Nisa' 4:129 says, 'You are never able to be fair and just as between women, even if it is your ardent desire', therefore encouraging men to marry not more than one.

5 Halala is an UnIslamic practice in which a woman, after being divorced by her husband, has to marry another man, consummate the marriage, and get divorced again in order to be able to remarry her former husband.

and halala. So, while we got a law against triple divorce based on the Supreme Court judgment, we still await a judgement from the Court on polygamy and halala.

While we await action on the draft law, we have been also advocating for piecemeal legislation to address some or the other aspect of the Muslim family law. We have been advocating for bringing the Muslim community within the ambit of BNS 86/494 IPC, a provision against polygamy as well as to bring the Muslim community, unambiguously, within the ambit of the Prohibition of Child Marriage Act, 2006.

Previous Studies

In the pilot study, Status of Women in Polygamous Marriage and Need for Legal Protection, 2018,⁶ BMMA spoke to Muslim women who had polygamous husbands. The study showed the following:

- Over 50% women suffer from mental trauma such as depression, self-blaming, suicidal tendencies
- 84% women feel that polygamy should be made illegal
- 73% women feel that husbands indulging in polygamy should be punished
- 41% women moved to their parent's house after the husband remarried
- 47% did not get monthly maintenance from their husband after he got married
- 41% of the husbands do not live with her anymore
- 42% of the women were told to adjust because it is allowed in Shariat
- 35% of the husbands gave the reason that they fell in love with someone else
- 72% women learnt about husband's second marriage through family or external sources like neighbours or friends.

In another study, Seeking Justice Within Family, 2015,⁷ an overwhelming 4320 out of 5000 women i.e. 91.7% have given their verdict against polygamy saying that a Muslim man should not be allowed to have another wife in the subsistence of the first marriage. On being probed further 72.9%, i.e. 3434 women think that polygamy should not be allowed irrespective of the consent from the first wife. 2959 women think that polygamy should not be allowed irrespective if the first wife's illness and 2983 women do not agree that polygamy should be allowed irrespective of the first wife's inability to conceive. 2949 women disagree that the husband's second marriage be allowed even with widows.

On being asked if men should be allowed multiple marriages to balance out the sex ratio, 83.4%, i.e., 3929 women do not agree that the husband should be given the permission for second marriage irrespective of the ratio of women to men. In all four instances of the researchers playing the devil's

⁶ <https://ashanatrust.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/10/Views-of-Muslim-Women-on-Polygamy.pdf>

⁷ <https://wunrn.com/wp-content/uploads/BMMA-Seeking-Justice-Final.pdf>

advocate, on an average more than 3000 women of the 4710 respondents do not want their husband to enter into a second marriage while the first marriage is intact.

In another study, *What Muslim Women Want*, conducted in the districts of Ahmednagar, Amravati, Aurangabad, Jalgoan, Nashik, Palghar, Panvel, Pune, Raigad, Satara, Solapur and Thane in Maharashtra, BMMA interviewed 505 Muslim women in 24 villages of which 402 women were homemakers.

Out of those 505 Muslim women, 484 said Muslim man should not be allowed to marry another woman when already married. 438 women said that even if first wife permits the man should not be allowed more than one marriage. 311 women said even if wife is suffering from deadly disease, man should not be allowed more than one marriage. 324 women said that even if wife is unable to conceive, man should not be allowed more than one marriage. 398 women said that the man should not be allowed to re-marry even if the prospective second wife is a widow. 471 women said a man should not be given permission for second marriage even if the population of women is more than men.

What more evidence do we need when study after study reveals the desire of Muslim women to be rid of polygamy. It is indeed the responsibility of the state to pay heed to these desires. All three studies done by BMMA point towards outlawing polygamy for Muslim women in India.

Present Study

At the national meeting of our volunteers held in Mumbai on May 2025 it was decided to reach out to women in polygamous marriages and to understand their emotional, social and economic condition. When we pondered over the idea, we were also mindful of the Islamophobia faced by the community. The places of worship of the community are being vandalised, festivals are turning into nightmares and social fabric is getting unstitched by the day. In such times to continue to talk of family law reforms itself is a feat.

We were also aware that much also changed in the last 7 years since our last pilot study on polygamy, especially the Covid pandemic which broke the back of the marginalized communities, including Muslims.

We also ruminated over the response of the larger community as the study gets published. We have always been expected to give up our demand for legal rights when the larger community faces communal backlash. Any discussion around issues of family law are shunned in the larger 'interest' of the community. Muslim women are always expected to think about the repercussions of their demand on the wellbeing of the community. But the community prefers to keep quiet and allow this discrimination to flourish in the name of religion and it seldom thinks for the betterment of the Muslim women. The community in its psyche has still not considered Muslim women as the 'community'. As if what happens to her has nothing to do with what happens to the community. This insulation of

the community to the issues of Muslim women has led to a situation where in the 79th year of our independence we still do not have legal protection for Muslim women within the family. If by 2037, Muslim women do not get a codified family law then it will be a century of unprotected family life for Muslim women. This should not just alarm us but push us towards a solution where Muslim women's rights within family are protected.

Being mindful of the above, we took a decision to start a fresh study on polygamy. This new data will give a push to our campaign to demand appropriate legislation against polygamy. The objectives of the study were to assess the current situation of Muslim women with regards to polygamy, to assess the impact of polygamy on women's social, economic, mental and physical health, to assess the impact of polygamy on the children from such marriages and to finally utilize the data for further advocacy work and make polygamy legally invalid. Given the limited time frame, we decided to reach out to 2500 victims of polygamy across the states where BMMA is active; Delhi, Rajasthan, Gujarat, Maharashtra, Karnataka, Tamil Nadu and West Bengal. We also did 22 in depth case studies to capture the lived reality of victims of polygamy.

The study was conducted across seven states of India—Delhi, Gujarat, Karnataka, Maharashtra, Rajasthan, Tamil Nadu, and West Bengal—covering a total of 2,508 women respondents. Among them, 430 women were from Delhi, 283 from Gujarat, 351 from Karnataka, 292 from Maharashtra, 407 from Rajasthan, 374 from Tamil Nadu, and 370 from West Bengal. Of the total sample, 1,419 women were identified as first wives, while 1,089 were second wives, allowing for a comparative understanding of the two groups across regions. Within the first-wife category, Delhi accounted for the highest share (19%), followed by Karnataka (16%), Tamil Nadu (15%), and West Bengal (13%), with smaller but significant proportions from Rajasthan (11%), Maharashtra (11%), and Gujarat (10%). In contrast, among the second wives, the largest representation came from Rajasthan (18%), followed by West Bengal (16%), Delhi (15%), and Tamil Nadu (15%), with Gujarat (13%), Maharashtra (12%), and Karnataka (11%) making up the remainder. This broad geographic distribution reflects a balanced and diverse representation across northern, western, southern, and eastern regions of India, thereby strengthening the validity of the study's findings and offering a comprehensive overview of women's marital patterns and related socio-economic conditions.

As we present this study, we hope the community will rise up for itself to correct generations of neglect of this important issue of family law reform. We also hope that the state will respond to this demand of Muslim women for not just ending polygamy but also taking full efforts for a comprehensive overhaul of the Muslim family law.

Noorjehan Safia Niaz

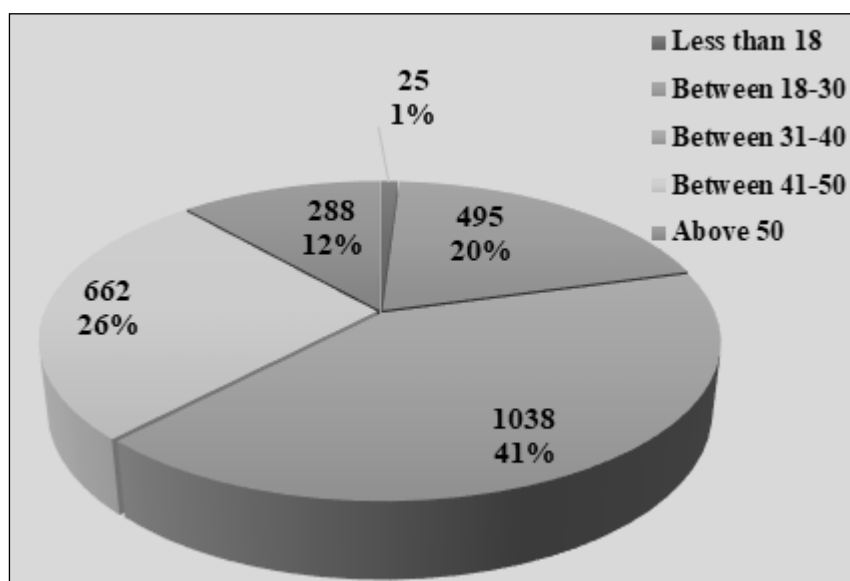
Zakia Soman

Co-Founder, Bharatiya Muslim Mahila Andolan

CHAPTER 01

Current Personal Data about the Respondents

Current Age of the Women



Out of the total 2508 women surveyed

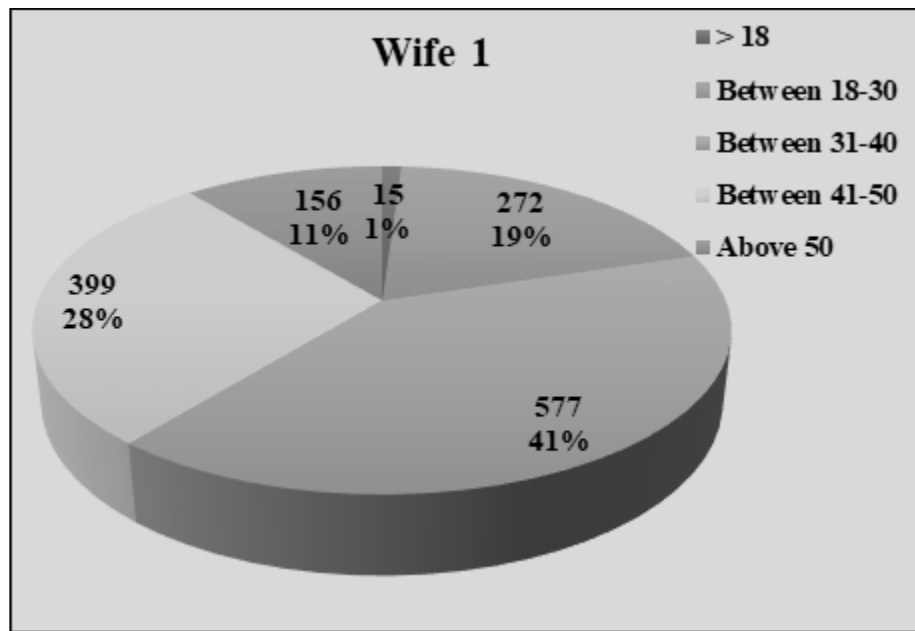
1038 women i.e. 41% were between 31-40 years

662 women i.e. 26% were between 41-50 years

495 women i.e. 20% were between the 18-30 years

288 women i.e. 12% were above 50 years

25 women i.e. 1% were below the age of 18 years



Out of 1419 first wife surveyed

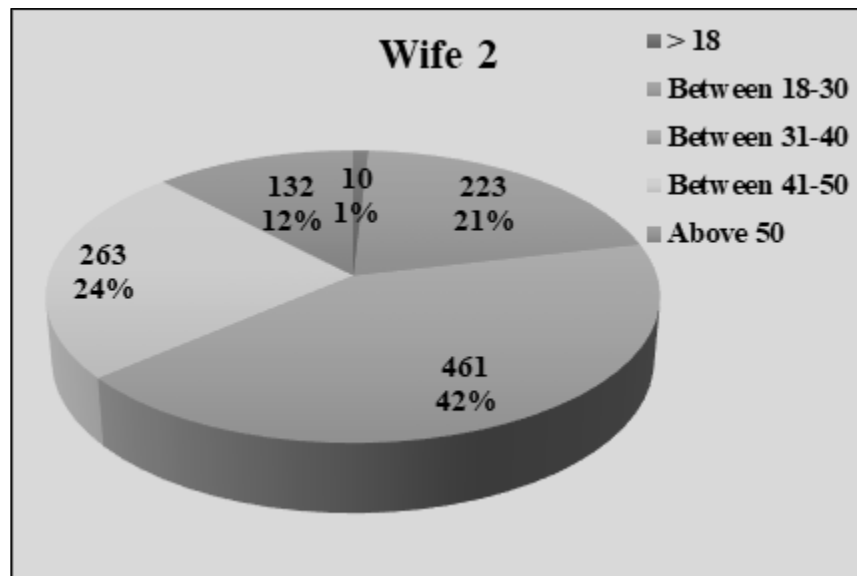
577 women i.e. 41% were between 31-40 years

399 women i.e. 28% were between 41-50 years

272 women i.e. 19% were between the 18-30 years

156 women i.e. 11% were above 50 years

15 women i.e. 1% were below the age of 18 years



Of the total 1089 second wife surveyed

461 women i.e. 42% were between 31-40 years

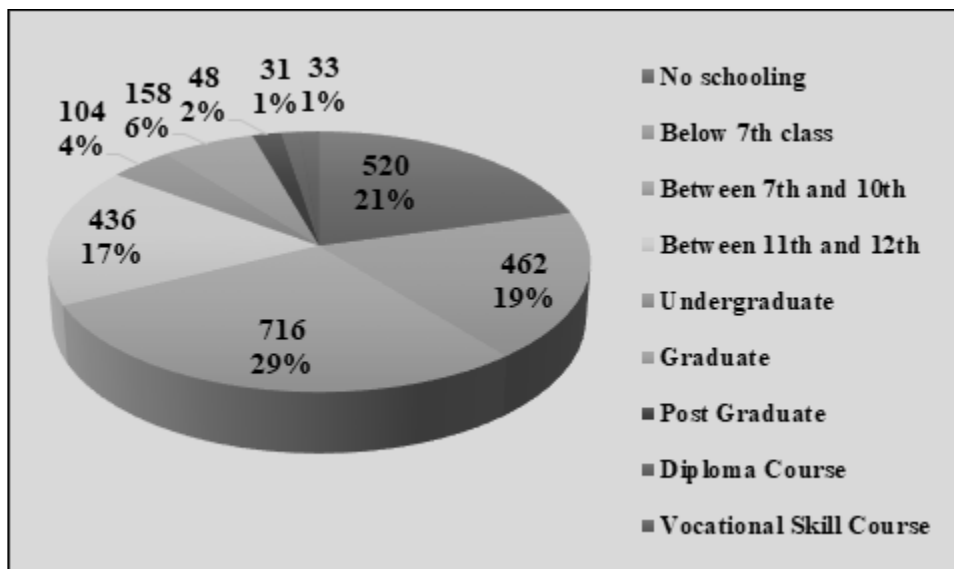
263 women i.e. 24% were between 41-50 years

223 women i.e. 20% were between the 18-30 years

132 women i.e. 12% were above 50 years

10 women i.e. 1% were below the age of 18 years

Current Education of the Women



Out of the total 2508 women surveyed

520 women i.e. 21% had no schooling

462 women i.e. 19% had education below Std 7th

716 women i.e. 29% educated between Std. 7th-10th

436 women i.e. 17% educated between Std 11th-12th

104 women i.e. 4% were undergraduate

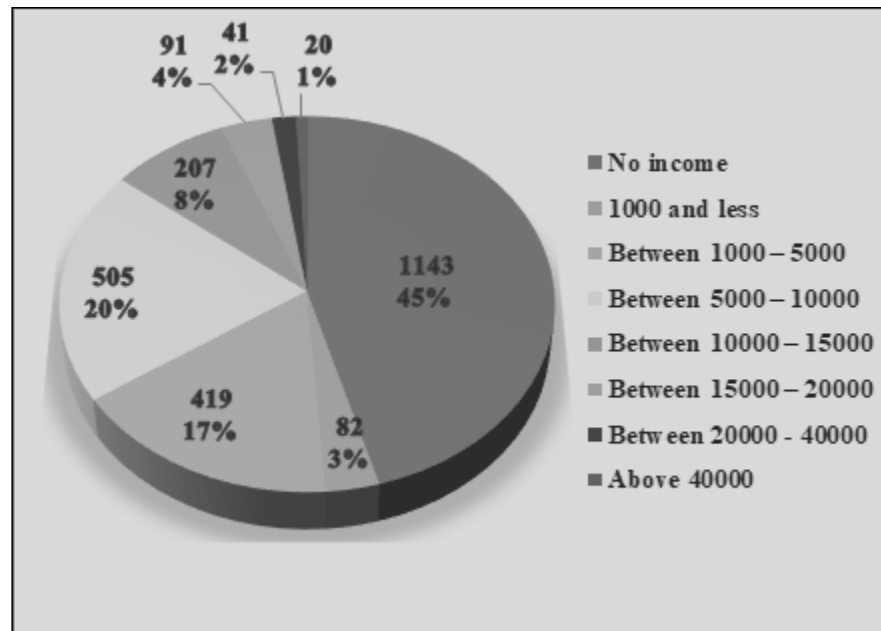
158 women i.e. 6% were graduate

48 women i.e. 2% were post graduate

31 women i.e. 1% pursued diploma

33 women i.e. 1% did vocational skill courses

Current Personal Monthly Income of the Women



Out of 2508 total women surveyed

1143 women i.e. 45% had no income

82 women i.e. 3% earned less than 1000/-

419 women i.e. 17% earned between 1000/- to 5000/-

505 women i.e. 20% earned between 5000/- to 10000/-

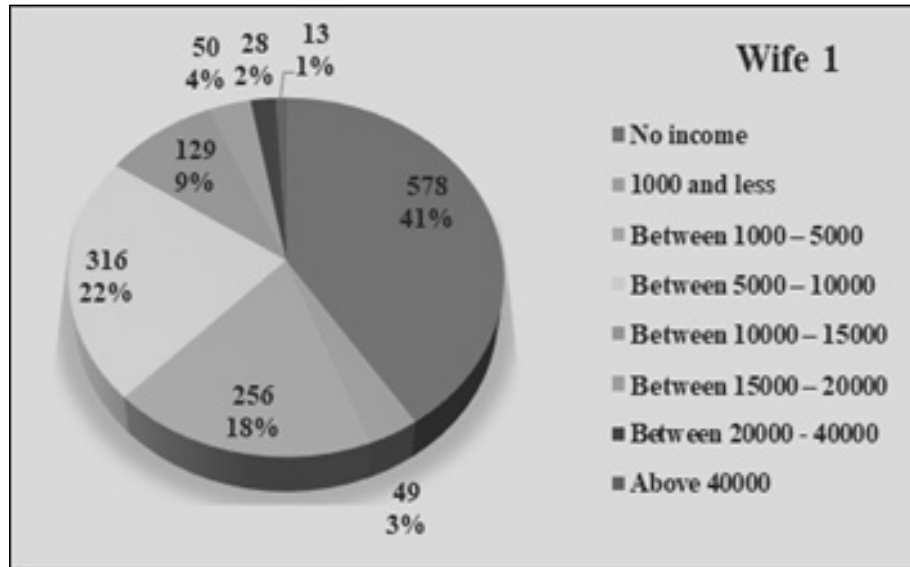
207 women i.e. 8% earned between 10000/- to 15000/-

91 women i.e. 4% earned between 15000/- to 20000/-

41 women i.e. 2% earned between 20000/- to 40000/-

20 women i.e. 1% earned over 40000/-

Out of the 1419 first wife surveyed



578 women i.e. 41% had no income at all

49 women i.e. 3% earned less than Rs.1000/-

256 women i.e. 18% earned between 1000/- to 5000/-

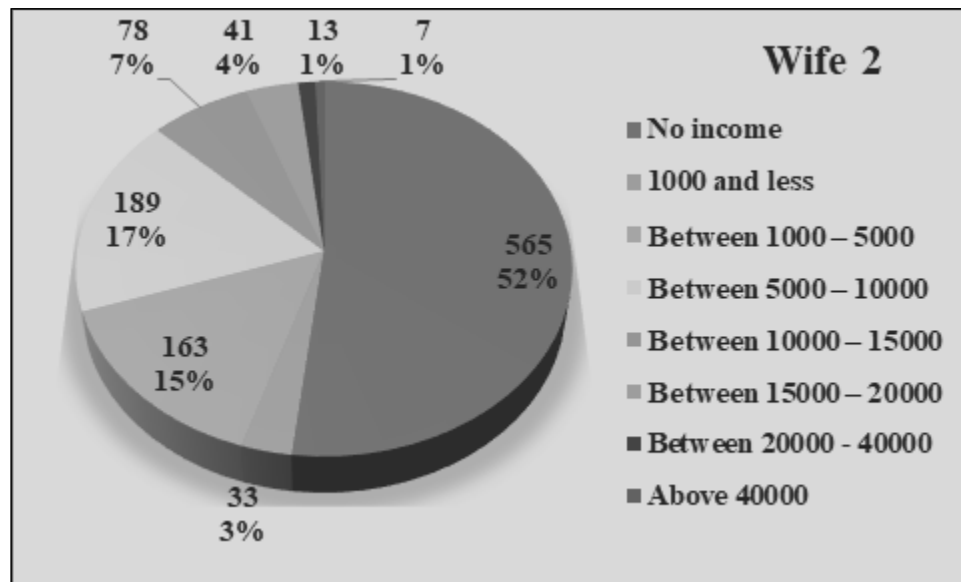
316 women i.e. 22% earned between 5000/- to 10000/-

129 women i.e. 9% earned between 10000/- to 15000/-

50 women i.e. 4% earned between 15000/- to 20000/-

28 women i.e. 2% earned between 20000/- to 40000/-

13 women i.e. 1% earned above 40000/-



Out of 1089 second wife surveyed

565 women i.e. 52% had no income

33 women i.e. 3% earned less than 1000/-

163 women i.e. 15% earned between 1000 to Rs.5000/-

189 women i.e. 17% earned between 5000/- to 10000/-

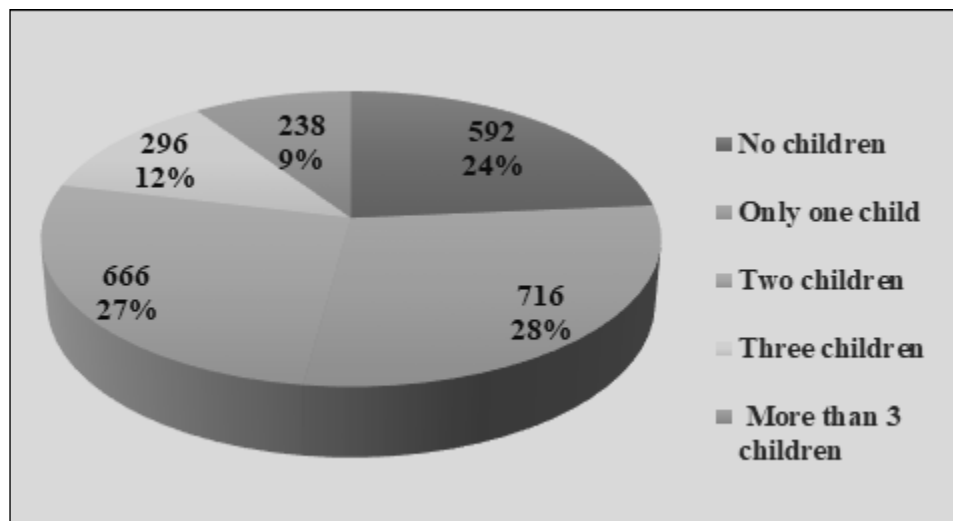
78 women i.e. 7% earned between 10000/- to 15000/-

41 women i.e. 4% earned between 15000/- to 20000/-

13 women i.e. 1% earned between 20000/- to 40000/-

7 women i.e. 1% earned more than 40000/-

Number of Children



Out of 2508 women surveyed

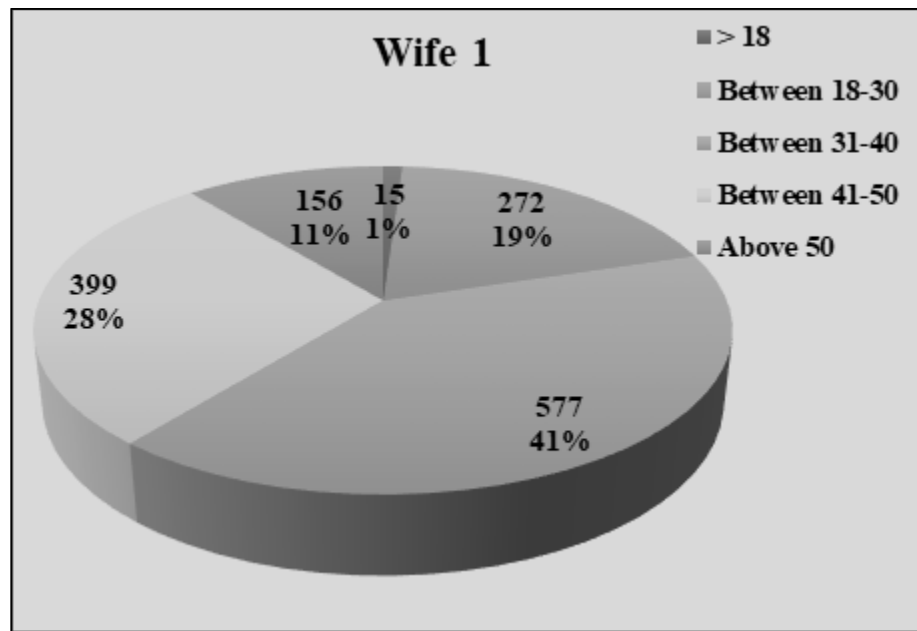
592 women i.e. 24% had no children

716 women i.e. 28% had only one child

666 women i.e. 27% had two children

296 women i.e. 12% had three children

238 women i.e. 9% had more than three children



Out of 1419 first wife surveyed

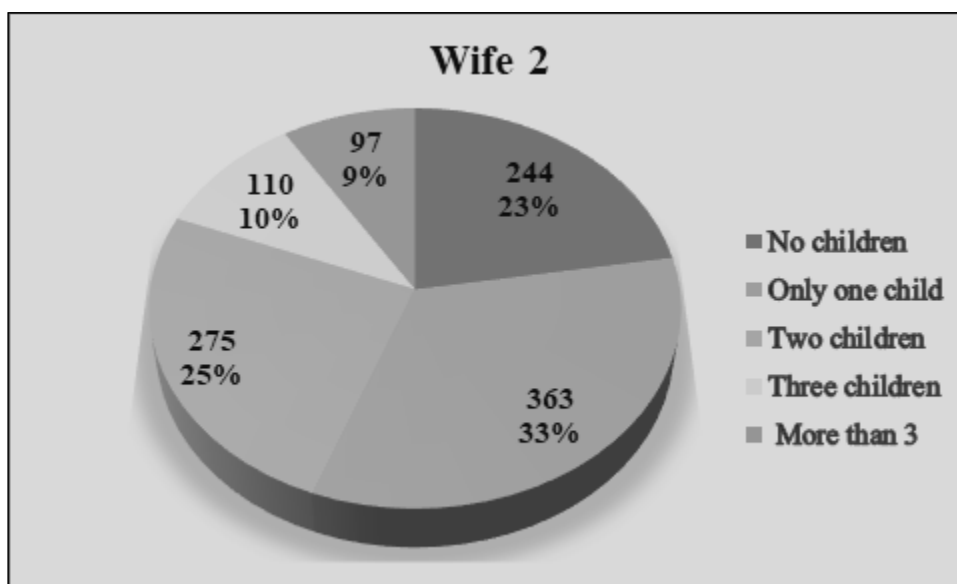
348 women i.e. 24% had no children

353 women i.e. 25% had only one child

391 women i.e. 28% had two children

186 women i.e. 13% had three children

141 women i.e. 10% had more than three children



Out of 1089 second wife surveyed

244 women i.e. 23% had no children

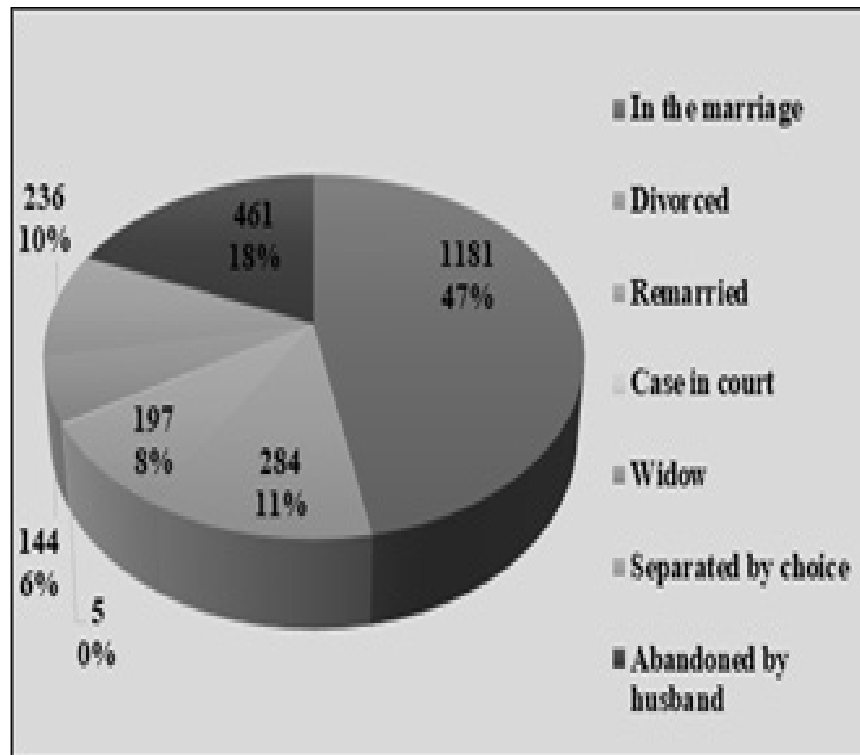
363 women i.e. 33% had only one child

275 women i.e. 25% had two children,

110 women i.e. 10% had three children

97 women i.e. 9% had more than three children.

Marital Status of the Women



Out of 2508 women surveyed

1181 women i.e. 47% were still in the same marriage

461 women i.e. 18% had been abandoned by their husband

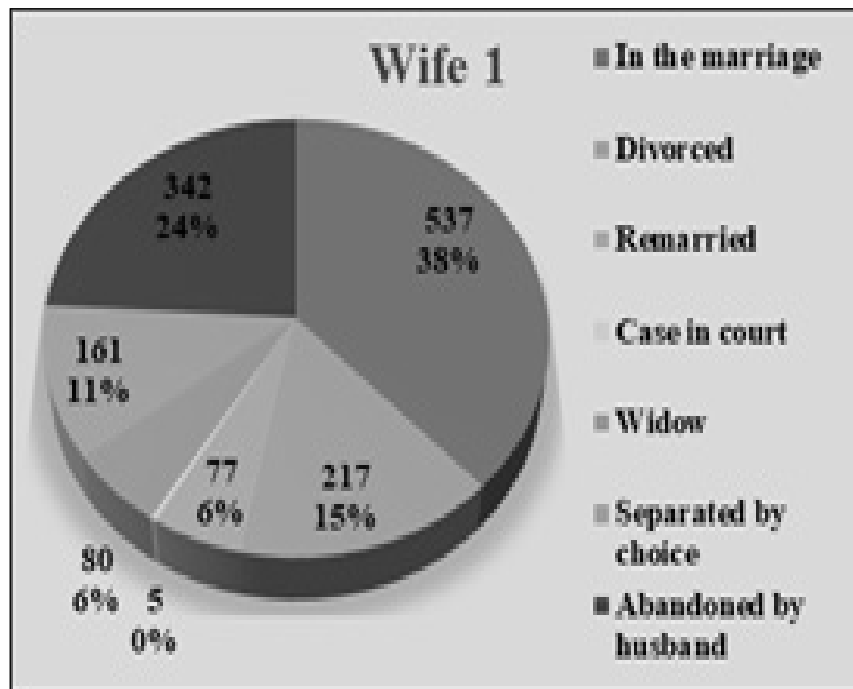
284 women i.e. 11% were divorcees

236 women i.e. 10 % had separated from husband

197 women i.e. 8% had remarried

144 women i.e. 6% were widow

5 cases of divorce were pending in the court



Out of 1419 first wife surveyed

537 women i.e. 38% were still in the same marriage

342 women i.e. 24% had been abandoned by their husband

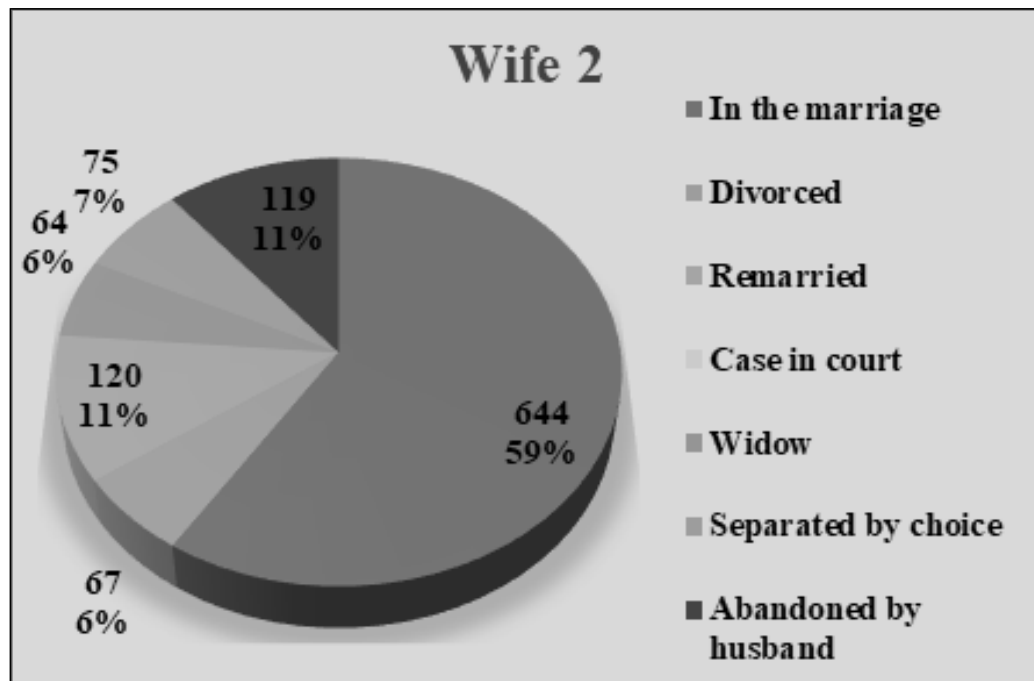
217 women i.e. 15% were divorcees

161 women i.e. 11% had separated from their husband

80 women i.e. 6% were widow

77 women i.e. 6 % had remarried

5 cases of divorce were pending in the court



Out of 1089 second wife surveyed

644 women i.e. 59% were still in the same marriage

120 women i.e. 11% remarried this husband after being divorced or widowed

119 women i.e. 11% had been abandoned by their husband

75 women i.e. 7% had separated from their husband

67 women i.e. 6% of the women were divorced

64 women i.e. 6% were widow

No second wife went to the court

Analysis

Current Age of the Respondents [2508]

- The largest group is women aged 31–40 years (41%).
- The second largest is 41–50 years (26%).
- Only 1% of respondents were below 18 years, indicating minimal participation from minors.
- Women below 30 years make up 21%, while those above 40 years constitute 38%.

Current Age of First Wife [1419]

- The majority of first wives (41%) fall in the 31–40 years age group.
- The next largest group (28%) is 41–50 years.
- Only 1% were below 18 years.
- Two-thirds (69%) of first wives were above 30 years, showing that most were in mature age brackets.

Current Age of Second Wife [1089]

- The largest group (42%) of second wives were aged 31–40 years, similar to the trend among first wives.
- Nearly one-fourth (24%) were 41–50 years old.
- 20% were between 18–30 years, showing a notable presence of younger women in second marriages.
- 1% were below 18 years.
- 78% of second wives were above 30 years, slightly higher than the 69% among first wives.

To summarize

- The overall age profiles of first and second wives were similar.
- Slightly higher proportion of women aged 18–30 among second wives may hint at a preference for younger partners in subsequent marriages.
- Majority in both groups were between 31–50 years.
- Only 1% in both groups below 18 year, reflecting not enough participation of minors in the study.

Current Education of Women

40% (520 + 462) of the women surveyed had no formal schooling or education below Std. 7. This shows a significant gap in basic education access, especially at the primary level.

The largest group (29%) studied between Std. 7–10, indicating that basic literacy and early secondary education were somewhat more accessible. However, dropout rates seem high after secondary school, given the decline in higher education levels.

17% reached higher secondary education — suggesting that only a minority transition beyond basic schooling.

Only 13% (104 + 158 + 48 = 310 women) had any college-level education. Within this 4% were undergraduate, 6% were graduate and 2% were postgraduate.

This indicates a limited presence of women with advanced qualifications, which may affect employment opportunities and decision-making power.

Only 2% (1% diploma + 1% vocational) pursued professional or vocational courses, showing low technical skill development among women surveyed.

To summarize:

- Majority (59%) of the women had education at or below secondary level (Std. 10).
- Higher education remains limited, with only 1 in 8 women (13%) reaching college or beyond.
- Vocational/technical training is minimal, indicating a need for targeted skill-development programs.
- The data reflects educational inequality, which likely intersects with factors such as age, income and marital status.

Current Personal Income of Women [2508]

45% (1143 women) reported having no personal income, indicating that nearly half of the women were economically dependent — likely on husbands or family members. This reflects limited access to economic opportunities and possible gendered barriers to employment.

Among those who do earn, 40% ($82 + 419 + 505 = 1006$ women) earn below 10,000 per month. This shows that even among working women, most had low or irregular income, possibly from informal or part-time work.

8% earn between 10,000–15,000, and 4% earn between 15,000–20,000. These women may represent small business owners, skilled workers or women in stable employment — but they remain a minority (12%).

Only 3% ($41 + 20$) earn more than 20,000 per month. This reflects very limited representation in professional, managerial or high-paying roles.

The income distribution is heavily skewed toward the lower end, showing economic vulnerability among the majority of women surveyed. The small upper-income segment (3%) highlights a sharp disparity in women's earning power.

To summarize

- Nearly half (45%) of all women surveyed had no income, underscoring the economic dependence of women.
- Two-thirds (65%) earn ₹5,000 or less per month, suggesting that most were in low-paying or informal sectors.

- Only 3% earn above ₹20,000 — a clear sign of limited access to high-income or formal employment.
- The data highlights a strong need for:
 1. Economic empowerment programs
 2. Skill-building and entrepreneurship support
 3. Access to fair and formal employment opportunities for women

A striking 52% of second wives had no income, compared to 41% of first wives. This indicates greater financial dependence among second wives. The gap suggests that second wives may have had less economic stability or fewer work opportunities. Both groups had similar proportions of women earning at the lowest levels, showing widespread economic vulnerability. First wives: 21% (49 + 256). Second wives: 18% (33 + 163)

A larger proportion of first wives fall in this bracket (5,000–15,000). They were more likely to have had some stable or regular income sources, possibly due to longer duration in marriage or more established household roles. First wives: 31% (316 + 129)/second wives: 24% (189 + 78)

Both groups had limited representation in higher earning categories (above 15000/-) highlighting systemic barriers to women's access to high-income opportunities. First wives: 7% (50 + 28 + 13), second wives: 6% (41 + 13 + 7)

First wives were generally better placed economically — a greater share of them earn and more were in moderate to higher income brackets.

To summarize

- Second wives were more financially dependent, with over half having no income.
- First wives had slightly better income security, possibly due to longer marital duration, older age or greater social acceptance.
- Both groups show limited participation in higher-paying jobs, reflecting structural inequalities in education, skill access and economic mobility.
- Economic vulnerability is a common thread, but it is sharper for second wives, who may face compounded social and financial disadvantages.

Number of Children

A majority — 79% (592 + 716 + 666 = 1,974 women) had two or fewer children. This reflects a strong trend toward smaller families, possibly due to greater awareness of family planning, education or economic considerations.

24% of the women had no children, a significant proportion. This could include unmarried, recently married or separated/divorced women or those facing fertility issues or choosing not to have children. It indicates diversity in family situations among respondents.

The majority of families had 1–2 children, which aligns with modern urban reproductive patterns and changing socio-economic priorities.

21% ($296 + 238 = 534$ women) had three or more children, suggesting that traditional family structures still exist in a portion of the sample. This may correlate with lower education and income levels, as larger family sizes were often linked to economic vulnerability and limited access to contraception.

To summarize

- Smaller families dominate, nearly 4 out of 5 women had two or fewer children.
- One-fourth of women (24%) had no children, reflecting diverse marital and reproductive statuses.
- Larger families (9% with 3+ children) were now the minority, indicating a shift toward controlled family sizes.
- These patterns likely align with education, income, and urbanization trends seen in your other data — e.g., women with higher education or income may be more likely to have fewer children.

Both first and second wives show a predominantly small family pattern, with the majority having two or fewer children: first wives: 77% ($24\% + 25\% + 28\%$), second wives: 81% ($23\% + 33\% + 25\%$). This indicates a clear preference or reality of smaller families among both groups.

The proportion of women with no children is nearly identical in both groups — suggesting that fertility or marital duration may not be the major differentiator here. first wives: 24%, second wives: 23%

Second wives (33%) were more likely to have only one child compared to first wives (25%). This could reflect that second marriages were often newer or shorter in duration, giving less time for childbearing. It might also indicate that second wives tend to have younger or fewer children, especially if husbands already had children from previous marriages.

Both show similar patterns i.e. two-child family, but slightly higher among first wives — possibly reflecting more established family life and longer marital duration. first wives: 28%, second wives: 25%

Larger families were more common among first wives, again consistent with longer marital tenure and earlier family formation. first wives: 23% ($13\% + 10\%$), second wives: 19% ($10\% + 9\%$)

To Summarize

- Smaller family sizes dominate among both first and second wives — over three-fourths had two or fewer children.
- Second wives were more likely to have only one child, likely reflecting newer marriages or age differences.
- First wives had slightly larger families, consistent with longer-term marriages and greater stability.
- Childlessness is similar (about one-fourth) across both groups, indicating that fertility patterns were not significantly different between them.
- The overall trend — across both groups — shows a shift toward smaller, controlled family sizes, aligning with broader social and economic trends.

Marital Status of Women

Marital Status	Total (n=2508)	% Total	1 st Wife (n=1419)	% 1 st Wife	2 nd Wife (n=1089)	% 2 nd Wife
Still in the same marriage	1181	47%	537	38%	644	59%
Abandoned by husband	461	18%	342	24%	119	11%
Divorced	284	11%	217	15%	67	6%
Separated	236	10%	161	11%	75	7%
Remarried	197	8%	77	6%	120	11%
Widow	144	6%	80	6%	64	6%
Divorce case pending in court	5	<1%	5	<1%	0	0%

High Marital Instability: Less than half (47%) of all women were still in the same marriage, indicating that more than half (53%) had faced some form of marital breakdown — abandonment, divorce, separation, widowhood or remarriage.

Abandonment and Divorce Are Major Issues: 18% abandoned and 11% divorced show a significant pattern of marital desertion, suggesting deep gendered insecurity and lack of legal recourse in marital relationships. Combined, nearly one in three women (29%) has been either abandoned or divorced.

First Wives Face Greater Marital Breakdown: Only 38% of first wives remain in their marriage. A large proportion — 24% abandoned, 15% divorced, and 11% separated — indicates that half of the first wives (50%) experienced marital dissolution. This highlights the vulnerability of first wives after the husband’s second marriage, where abandonment and neglect are prevalent.

Second Wives Show Relative Stability — But Mixed Realities. A higher 59% of second wives remain in their marriage. However, 11% of second wives were already remarried to the same husband after being divorced or widowed, indicating complex marital histories. Still, 11% abandoned, 7% separated, and 6% divorced reflect instability even in subsequent marriages.

Widowhood Equal Across Groups: Around 6% in both groups were widows, showing no major difference between first and second wives regarding loss of spouse.

Court Intervention is Minimal: Only 5 cases (<1%) were pending in court, underscoring the lack of legal awareness or access to justice among these women. Most marital issues appear to be resolved informally or left unresolved.

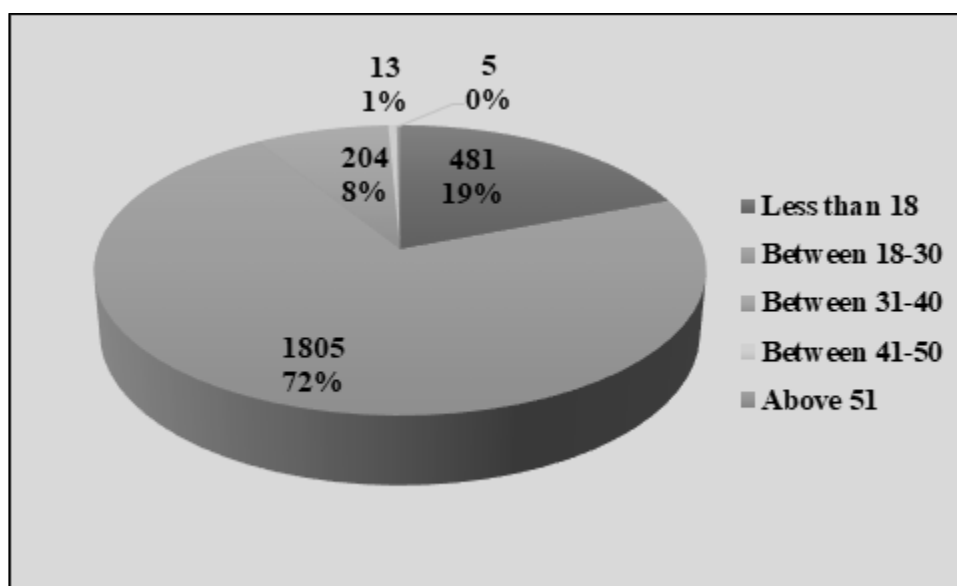
To Summarize

- Marital instability is significant: Less than half of all women were still in the same marriage.
- First wives were more adversely affected, with higher rates of abandonment, divorce and separation.
- Second wives appear more “stable”, but this could be due to newer marriages or the recentness of union rather than actual long-term stability.
- Remarriage remains low overall, especially for first wives, showing social and cultural barriers to women re-entering marriage.
- Minimal court cases highlight gaps in legal recourse and limited access to justice for women in broken marriages.

CHAPTER 02

Personal Data at the Time of Marriage

Age at the time of Marriage



Out of 2508 women surveyed

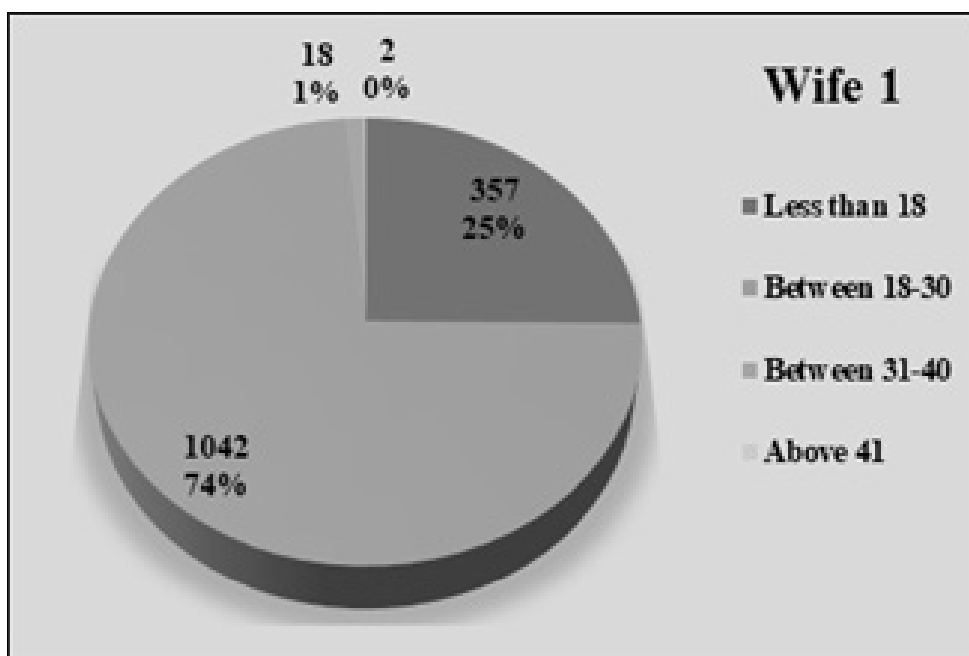
481 women i.e. 19% were married below 18 years

1805 women i.e. 72% were married between ages 18-30

204 women i.e. 8% married between ages of 31- 40

13 women remarried above age of 40

Out of which 5 women were married above age of 50



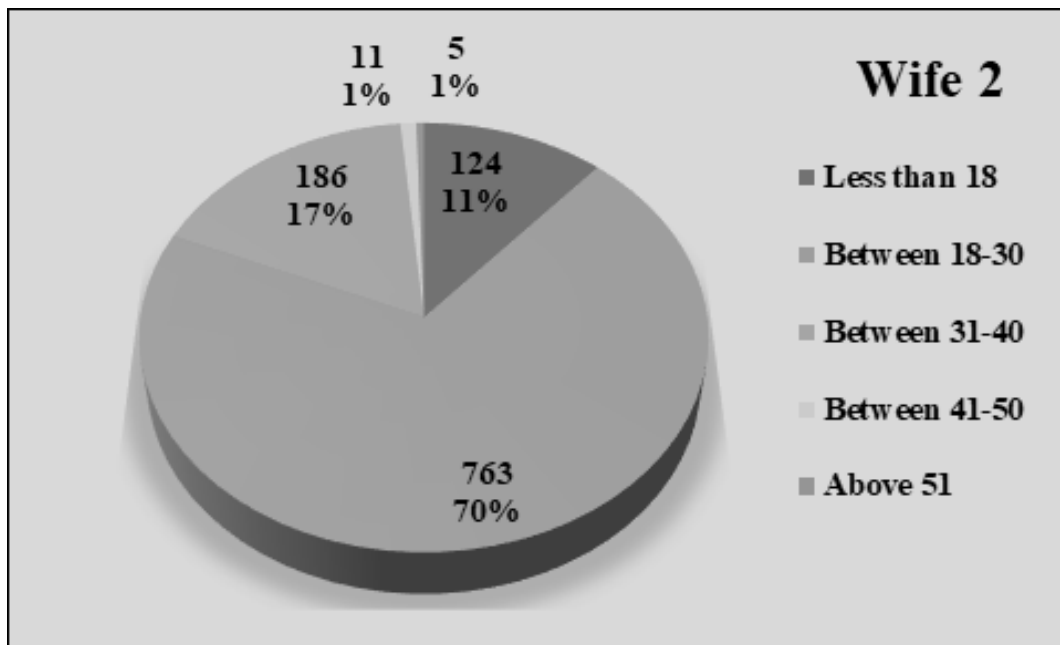
Of the 1419 first wife surveyed

357 women i.e. 25% married before the age of 18 years

1042 women i.e. 74% married between ages 18-30

18 women i.e. 1% married between ages 31-40

2 women were married above the age of 40



Out of 1089 second wife surveyed

124 women i.e. 11% were married below 18 years

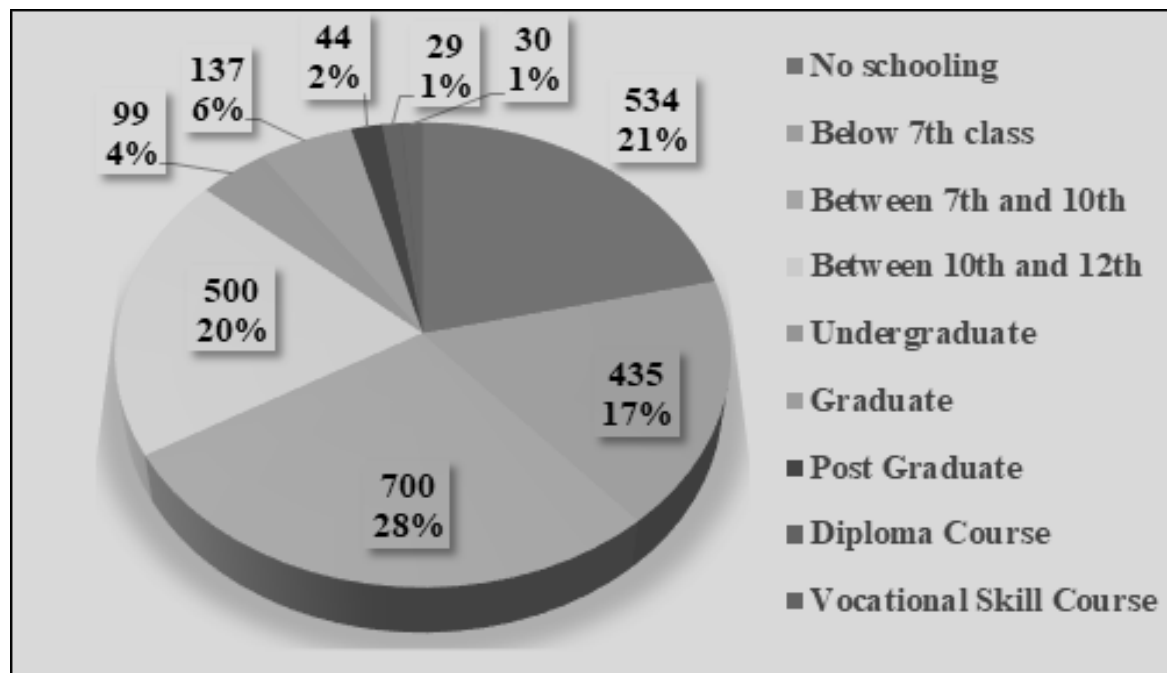
763 women i.e. 70% were married between ages 18-30

186 women i.e. 17% were married between ages 31-40

11 women i.e. 1% were married between ages 41-50

5 women i.e. 1% married above the age of 50

Education at the Time of Marriage



Out of the total 2508 women surveyed

534 women i.e. 21% had no schooling

435 women i.e. 17 % had education below Std 7th

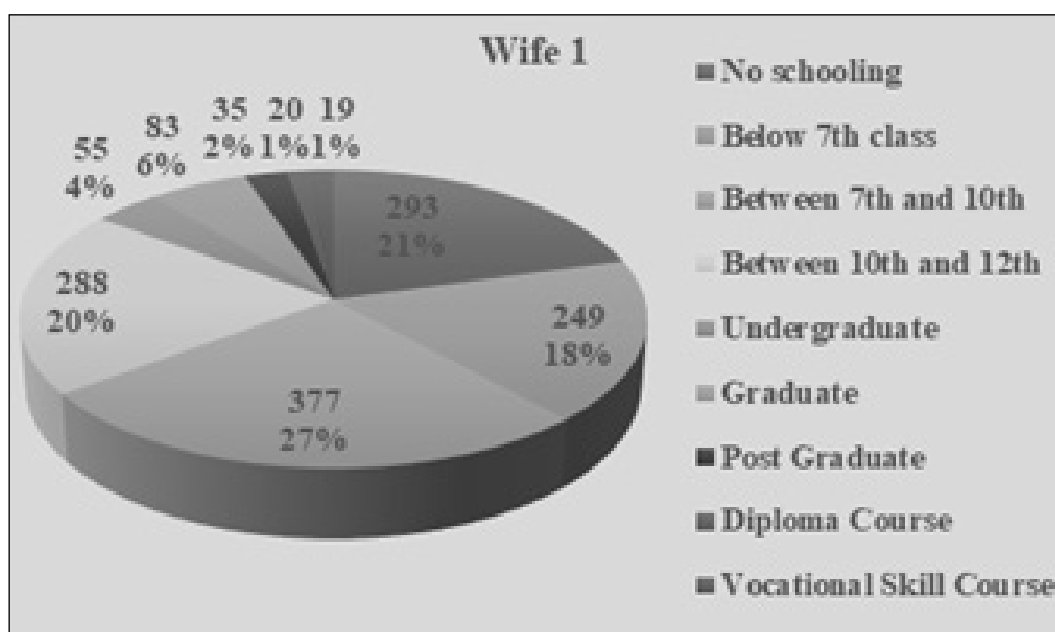
700 women i.e. 28% educated between Std 7th-10th

500 women i.e. 20 % educated between Std 11th-12th

99 women 4% undergraduate

137 women i.e. 6% were graduate

44 women i.e. 2% were post graduate 30 and 29 women i.e. 1% each pursued diploma



Out of the 1419 first wife surveyed

291 women i.e. 21% had no schooling

272 women i.e. 19% had education below Std 7th

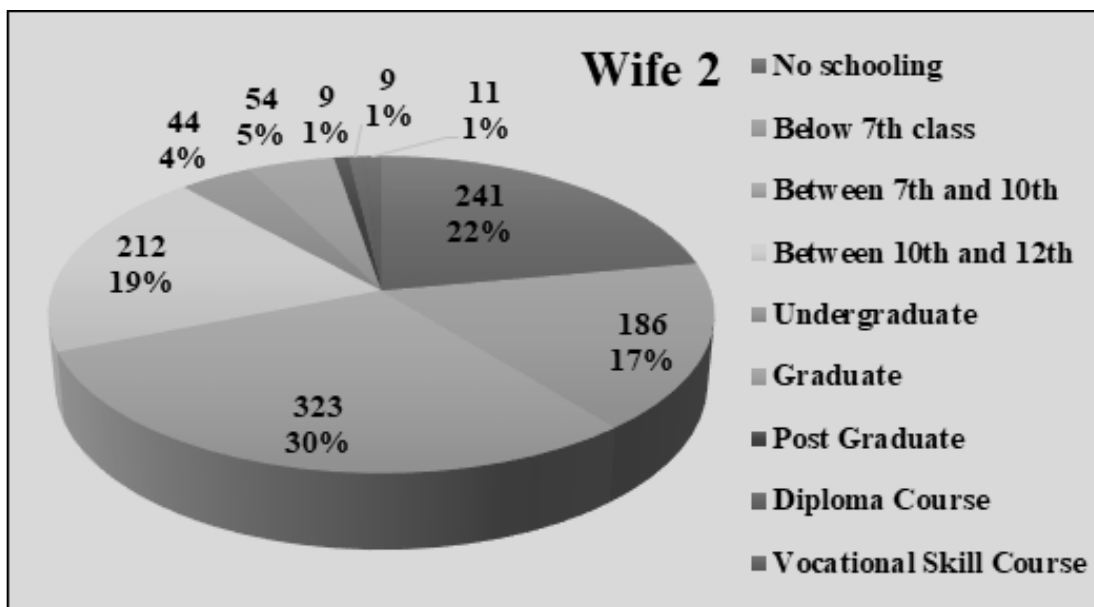
402 women i.e. 28% educated between Std 7th-10th

224 women i.e. 16% had education between 11th- 12th

57 women i.e. 4% were under graduate

95 women i.e. 7% were graduate

1% each, 36 women were post graduate, 22 women pursued diploma & 20 women did vocational skills courses.



Out of the 1089 second wife surveyed

229 women i.e. 21% had no schooling

190 women i.e. 17% had education below Std 7th

314 women i.e. 29% educated between Std 7th-10th

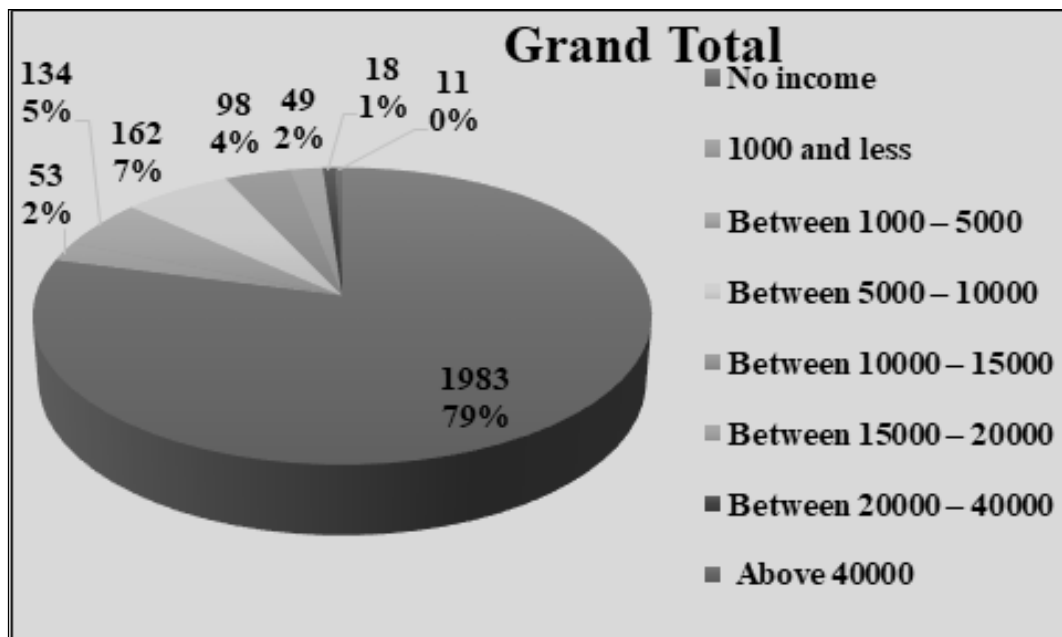
212 women i.e. 19% educated between Std 11th -12th

47 women i.e. 4% were under graduates

63 women i.e. 6% were graduates

1% each, 12 women were post graduate, 9 women pursued diploma & 13 women did vocational skills courses.

Income at the Time of Marriage



Out of 2508 total women surveyed

1983 women i.e. 79 % had no income

53 women i.e. 2% earned less than 1000/-

134 women i.e. 5% between 1000 – 5000

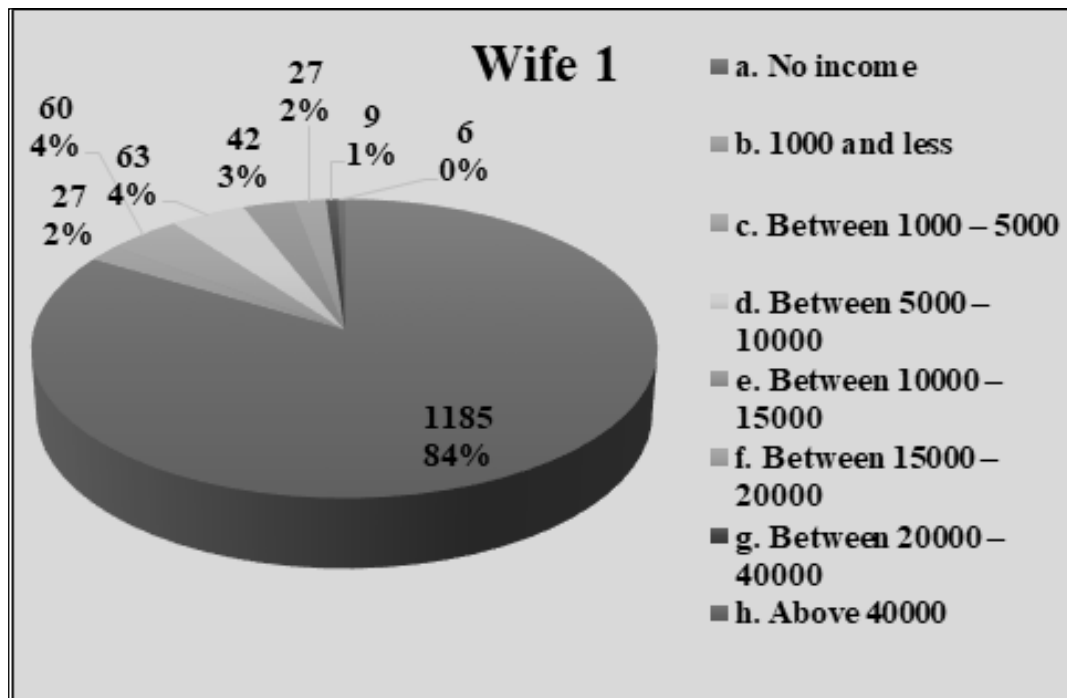
162 women i.e. 7% earned between 5000/-10000/-

98 women i.e. 4% earned between 10000/-to15000/-

49 women i.e.2% earned between 15000/- to 20000/-

18 women i.e. 1% earned over 20000/-

11 women earned above 40000



Of the 1419 first wife surveyed

1185 women i.e. 84 % had no income at all

27 women i.e. 2% had income less than 1000/-

60 women 4% earned between 1000/- to 5000/-

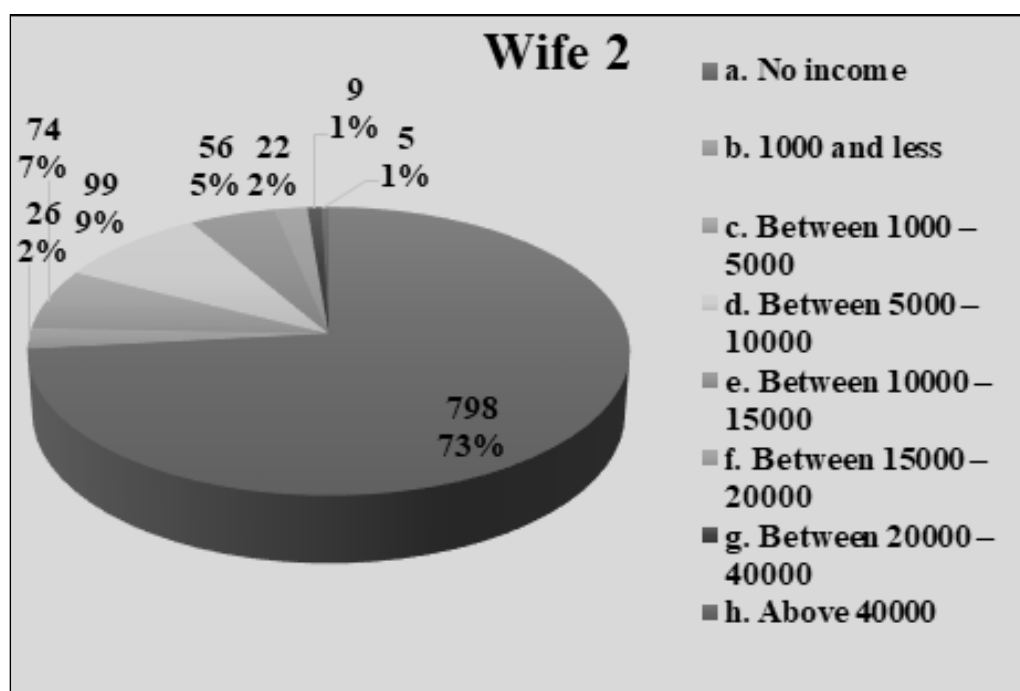
63 women 4% earned between 5000/- to 10000/-

42 women 3% earned between 10000/- to 15000/-

27 women 2% earned between 15000/- to 20000/-

9 women 1% earned between 20000/- to 40000/-

6 women earned above 40000/-



Out of 1089 second wife surveyed

798 women i.e. 73 % had no income

26 women i.e. 2% earned less than 1000/-

74 women i.e. 7% earned between 1000/- to 5000/-

99 women i.e. 9% earned between 5000/- to 10000/-

56 women i.e. 5% earned between 10000/- to 15000/-

22 women i.e. 2% earned between 15000/- to 20000/-

9 women i.e. 1% earned between 20000/- to 40000/-

5 women earned above 40000/-

Analysis

Age of Marriage

Majority (72%) married between 18–30 years, reflecting the typical adult marriage age. 19% married before 18, indicating child marriages still occur. Very few (0.5%) married above 40 years.

Higher proportion (25%) married before 18, suggesting first marriages are more prone to early marriage. Nearly three-fourths (74%) married at legal/adult age (18–30 years). Very few first wives married above 30 (1%) or 40 (<1%).

Only 11% of second wives married before 18, lower than first wives. 70% married at 18–30 years, similar to first wives. Higher proportion (17%) married between 31–40 years, reflecting that second marriages often occur later in life, typically after the first marriage of the husband. Few married after 40 (2%).

To Summarize

- Early marriage is more common among first wives (25%) than second wives (11%).
- Second wives tend to marry later (31–40 years) — 17% vs. only 1% for first wives — reflecting remarriage dynamics.
- Majority in both groups marry as adults (18–30 years), showing alignment with legal and social norms.
- Marriages after 40 are very rare, but slightly more common among second wives.

Education At The Time Of Marriage

Education Level	Total (n=2508)	% Total	1 st Wife (n=1419)	% 1 st Wife	2 nd Wife (n=1089)	% 2 nd Wife
No Schooling	534	21%	291	21%	229	21%
Below Std 7 th	435	17%	272	19%	190	17%
Std 7 th – 10 th	700	28%	402	28%	314	29%
Std 11 th – 12 th	500	20%	224	16%	212	19%
Undergraduate	99	4%	57	4%	47	4%
Graduate	137	6%	95	7%	63	6%
Post Graduate	44	2%	36	1%	12	1%
Diploma	30	1%	22	1%	9	1%
Vocational / Skill Training	29	1%	20	1%	13	1%

Low Educational Attainment Overall: A large majority (66%) of women had education levels up to 10th standard or below at the time of marriage. This suggests early marriage and limited educational access, particularly among women in polygamous marriages. A significant 21% have not gone to school at all.

Secondary Education Moderately Represented: 20% completed Std 11th–12th, indicating a moderate segment who had exposure to higher secondary education but did not progress to college.

Higher Education Levels Very Low: Only 12% of women reached undergraduate or higher levels (graduate, postgraduate, diploma, vocational). This indicates that very few women enter marriage

with higher education, which may influence their negotiating power, decision-making and economic independence within marriage.

Comparison Between First and Second Wives

The education pattern is similar between both groups:

- No schooling: equal at 21%.
- Below Std 7th: slightly higher among first wives (19%) vs. second wives (17%).
- Std 11–12th: slightly higher among second wives (19%) vs. first wives (16%).

This may suggest that second wives tend to be marginally better educated at the time of marriage, possibly reflecting changing educational opportunities over time or men choosing somewhat more educated partners for later marriages.

Gender and Educational Disadvantage

The data underscores that education for women remains a neglected area, especially in communities where polygamy is practiced. Early marriage, poverty, and patriarchal norms likely contribute to low female educational attainment.

Vocational and Skill Training Marginal: Only 1% each had vocational or skill-based education; pointing to limited avenues for employment or self-reliance among these women.

The low education level of women, coupled with early marriage, can perpetuate economic dependency and social vulnerability. Women with lesser education are often less aware of their legal and marital rights, making them more susceptible to marital instability and acceptance of polygamy.

Second wives are marginally better educated than first wives, hinting at gradual improvement in access to schooling over time — but higher education remains largely out of reach.

To Summarize

- Early marriages are concentrated among women with lower education, which may reinforce gender inequality. Two-thirds of women entered marriage with education below secondary level, reflecting early marriage, gendered educational neglect and social inequality.
- Secondary education (Std 7–12) is relatively common, but higher education completion before marriage is rare.
- There is a significant opportunity for programs promoting education retention among girls, which could delay marriage age and improve economic and social outcomes.

Income At the Time of Marriage

79% of women had no income at the time of marriage, highlighting economic dependence from the outset of marriage. Only small fractions (less than 15%) had any substantial earnings before marriage.

Even higher proportion (84%) of first wives had no income at marriage. Very few had moderate or high income, indicating economic dependence starts early, especially for first wives.

73% of second wives had no income, slightly lower than first wives. Higher proportions are seen in 1000–10,000 range (16%), suggesting second wives may have had slightly more earning opportunities before marriage.

To Summarize

1. Economic dependence is extremely high at the time of marriage: most women started married life with no income.
2. Second wives tend to have slightly higher pre-marriage income than first wives, particularly in the 1,000–10,000 range, possibly reflecting older age at marriage or prior work experience.
3. Very few women had high incomes (>20,000), showing that financial independence is rare at the start of marriage.
4. These patterns align with trends in education at marriage: lower education correlates with no or minimal income at marriage.

Looking at age of marriage, education and economic dependency the following is observed:

Women married below 18 years were the most disadvantaged — over 85% had no income and nearly 40% had not studied beyond the 7th standard.

Women married between 18–30 years, though slightly better off, still showed limited education and income, reflecting persistent barriers to education and economic participation even among those who married at a legally permissible age.

Women who married later (31–40 years) were notably better educated — 30% were graduates or above — and more economically independent, with 40% reporting some income.

This cross-pattern confirms a cumulative disadvantage: the younger the woman at marriage, the lower her education and earning potential, leading to early-life dependency and reduced autonomy within marriage.

CHAPTER 03

Rights at the Time of Marriage

Mehr (Value in Rs.)

Out of 2508 total women surveyed

First Wife [1419]

61.4% did not receive mehr

13.9 % received 786/- as mehr

21% received less than 5000/-

14.7% received between 5000/- to 10000/-

10.7% received between 10000/- to 20000/-

7.2% received between 20000/- to 40000/-

4.2% received more than 40000/-

Second Wife [1089]

32% of the second wives did not receive

16.9% received Rs. 786/- as mehr

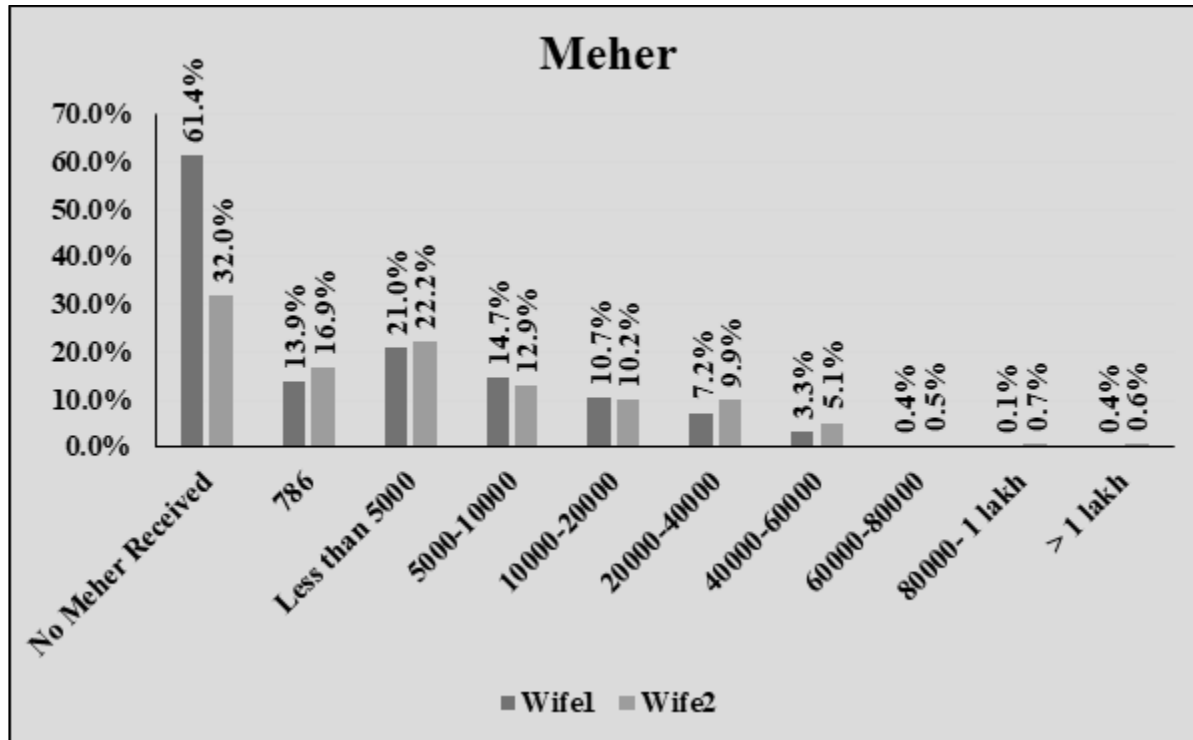
22.2% received less than Rs. 5000/-

12.9% received between 5000/- to 10000/-

10.2% between 10000 to 20000/-

9.9% received between 20000/- to 40000/-

6.9% received more than 40000/-



Analysis

Mehr Received

93% of the 2508 respondents did not receive any mehr or dower at all. Mehr is a condition of marriage in Islam, that is how important it is. It is a provision for the financial security of women at the time of marriage. In India where arranged marriages are a norm, having a good amount of money at the time of marriage is a big support and security to women who move into a stranger's house, sometimes far away from her maternal home. Mehr payment is a joke in India. Mehr is mostly symbolic; it is not enough. The amounts given also do not serve the purpose for which they are meant. Either women do not receive it or they get it reluctantly at the time of divorce. At the time of widowhood she is forced to forgive mehr which the dead husband owes her.

Mehr Amounts

30.5% of 2508 respondents received Rs. 786/- as mehr amount. Rs. 5000/- seems to be the favourite. 43.2% received Rs. 5000/- and 27.6% received amounts between Rs. 5000/- and 10,000/-. The slightly lucky ones, 11% received Rs. 40,000 and above.

If we compare the amounts received by the first and the second wife, 61.4% of the first wife did not receive mehr whereas 32% of second wife did not receive the mehr. Was the second wife bribed into the marriage by actually getting a mehr, never mind if it was meagre. 22.2% received less than Rs. 5000/-

6.9% of the second wife got more than Rs. 40,000 compared to 4.2% of the first wife. Does the second wife tend to gain more? Only a small fraction received substantial Mehr which is more than 20,000 i.e. 11.4%. 13.9% received ₹786, a very nominal amount, and 21% received less than ₹5,000. This suggests cultural or economic practices where Mehr is symbolic rather than substantial. High Mehr, more than 40,000 is rare (4.2%), likely reserved for well-off households or special circumstances.

What does it mean for women? It means that financial security of women is limited, as Mehr is often unpaid or nominal, leaving first wives economically vulnerable. The high proportion with no Mehr may affect widowhood, divorce, or widow support, particularly in households with multiple wives.

32% of second wives received no Mehr, compared to 61.4% of first wives. This indicates second wives are more likely to receive at least some Mehr, possibly due to formalized arrangements in subsequent marriages.

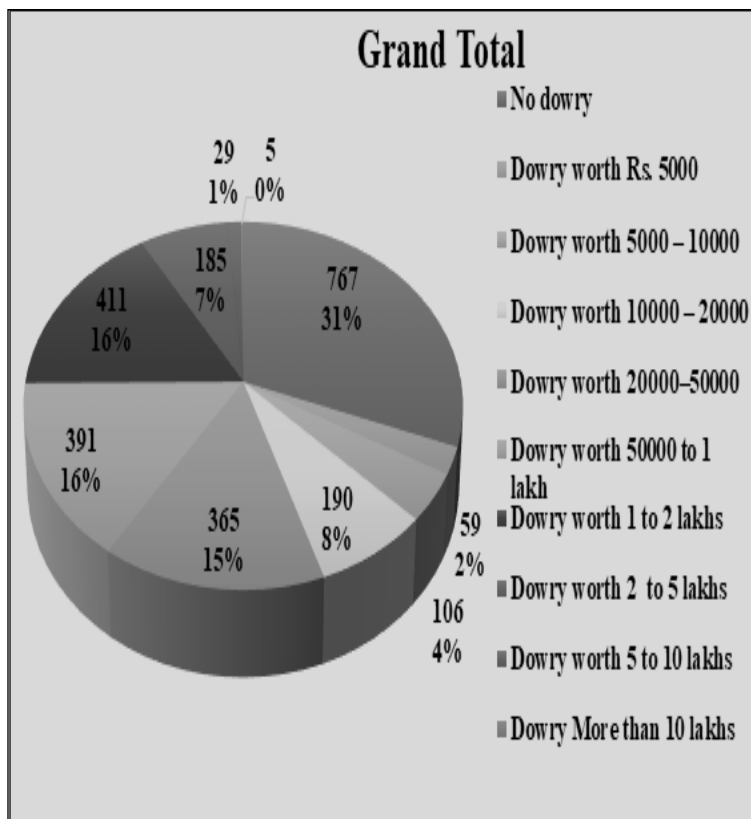
Mehr – First Wife / Second Wife

- Nominal Mehr (₹786): 16.9% — slightly higher than first wives' 13.9%.
- Low Mehr (<5,000): 22% — still a significant proportion, indicating symbolic rather than substantial payment.
- Moderate to high Mehr (5,000–40,000): 33% — slightly higher than first wives, suggesting better financial settlements in some cases.
- High Mehr (>40,000): 6.9% — slightly higher than first wives' 4.2%.

Second wives generally receive more Mehr than first wives. While the majority still receive low amounts, second wives may have slightly better financial security, possibly because second marriages often involve explicit financial agreements.

First wives are disproportionately disadvantaged, with over 60% receiving nothing. High-value Mehr is rare in both groups, showing systemic financial vulnerability of women in marital settlements.

Dowry Given



Value in Rs.

Out of 2508 total women surveyed

767 women i.e. 31% did not give dowry at all.

355 women i.e. 14% gave dowry below 20000/-

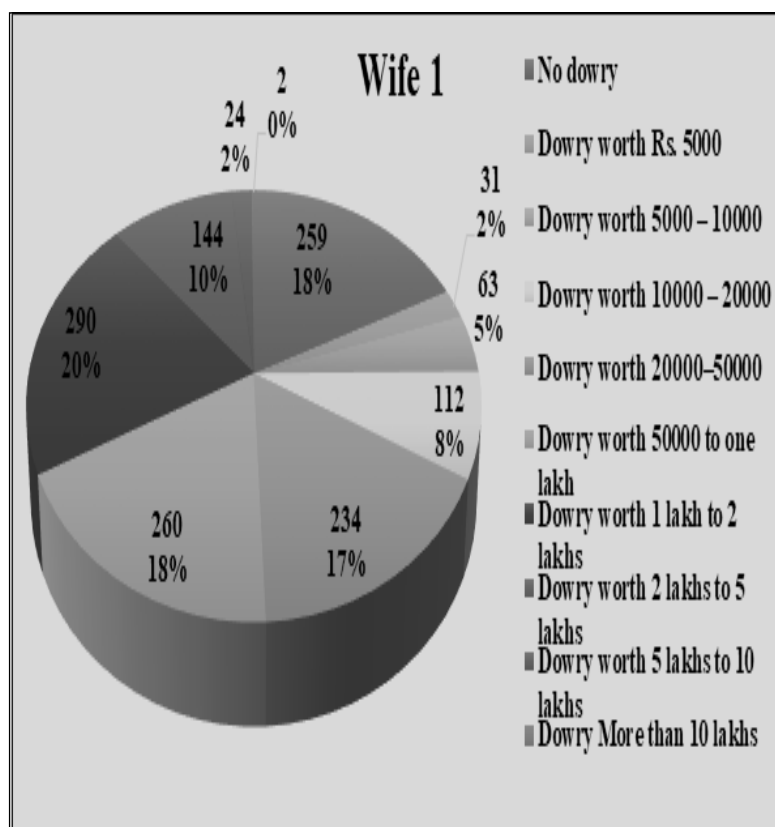
365 women i.e. 15% gave dowry between 20000/-50000/-

391 women i.e. 16% gave dowry between 50000 to 1 lakh

411 women i.e. 16% gave dowry between 1lakh to 2 lakh

185 women i.e.7% gave dowry between 5 lakh to 10 lakhs

34 women i.e. 3% gave dowry over 10 lakh



Out of 1419 first wife surveyed

259 women i.e. 18% did not give dowry at all.

206 women i.e. 15% gave dowry below 20000/-

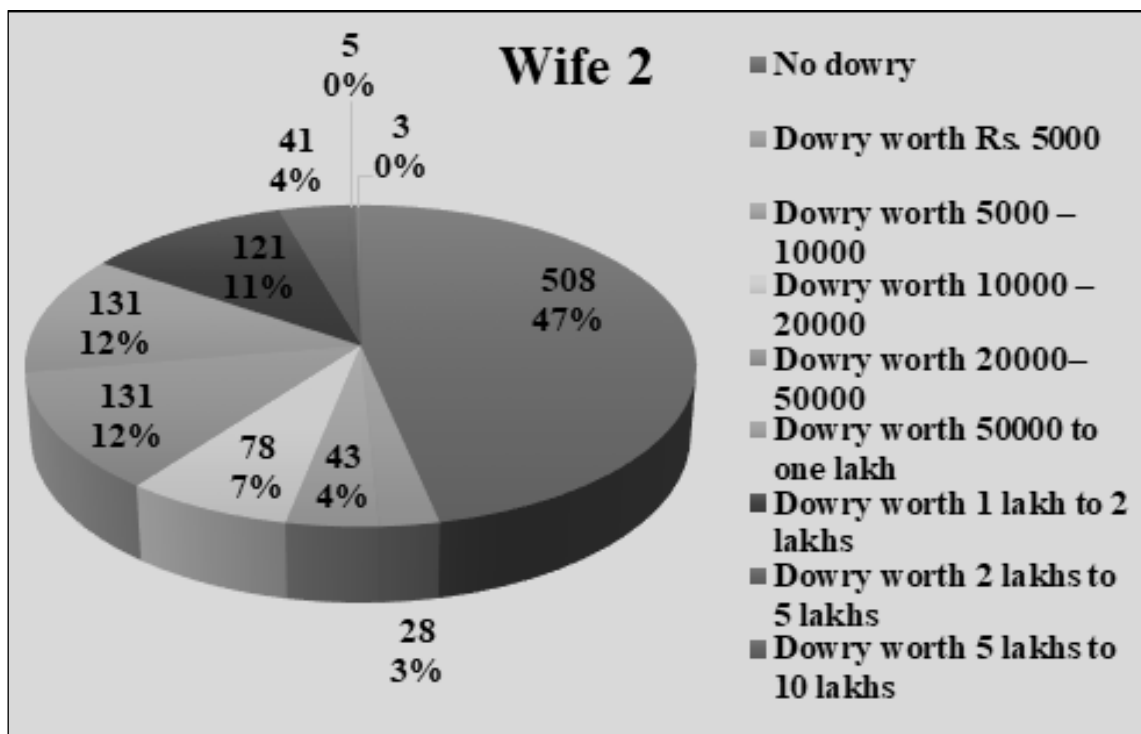
234 women i.e.17% gave dowry between 20000/-50000/-

260 women i.e. 18% gave dowry between 50000 to 1 lakh

290 women i.e. 29% gave dowry between 1lakh to 2 lakh

144 women i.e.10% gave dowry 5 lakh to 10 lakhs

26 women i.e. 2% gave dowry over 10 lakh only.



Out of the 1089 second wife surveyed

508 women i.e. 47% did not give dowry at all

149 women i.e. 14% gave dowry below Rs.20000/-

131 women i.e.12% gave dowry between 20000/-50000/-

131 women i.e. 12% gave dowry between 50000 to 1 lakh

121 women i.e. 11% of the women have a dowry Rs.1lakh to Rs.2 lakh,

41 women i.e. 4% gave dowry between 2 lakh to 5 lakhs

8 women gave dowry over Rs.10 lakh

Analysis

32% of the 2508 respondents paid dowry worth Rs. 50,000 to Rs. 2 lakh. Significantly 31% did not give dowry at all. 18% of the first wife did not give dowry and 47% of the second wife did not give dowry. Are we to say that the second wife gains here by not paying the dowry?

2%, 26 first wives gave over Rs. 10 lakh as dowry compared to just 8 second wives.

While 47% of the first wives have given dowry between Rs. 50000 to Rs. 2 lakh, only 23% of second wives have given a similar amount.

If we compare data of mehr, the second wife not only gets mehr but also does not get to pay the dowry.

Majority (69%) gave some form of dowry, with moderate dowries (50,000–2,00,000) being most common (32%).

High dowries (>5 lakh) are relatively rare (10%).

93% of the total respondents did not receive mehr but a significantly high number of respondents have 69% have given dowry. The practice of dowry is so rooted in the culture that it is not able to allow women to access the empowering provision of mehr. The Muslim community, steeped in patriarchy like all others, do not give advantage of mehr to women. Men use multiple marriages to also garner dowry. It is for the family to make easy money. We do have a stringent law against dowry but it remains to be seen how many Muslims access this law and more importantly how many get justice, given the famous delays in the judicial processes. For all our attachment to the Muslim identity, women and women's rights enshrined in the Quran and Shariah are easily forgotten. Not even in the name of Islam are women given their rights ensured by the religion.

First Wives:

- Only 18% of the first wives did not give dowry, most gave moderate to high dowry.
- Highest proportion (29%) gave 1–2 lakh, showing that first marriages often involve significant dowry transfers.
- High-value dowries (>5 lakh) are less common but still notable (12%).

Second Wives:

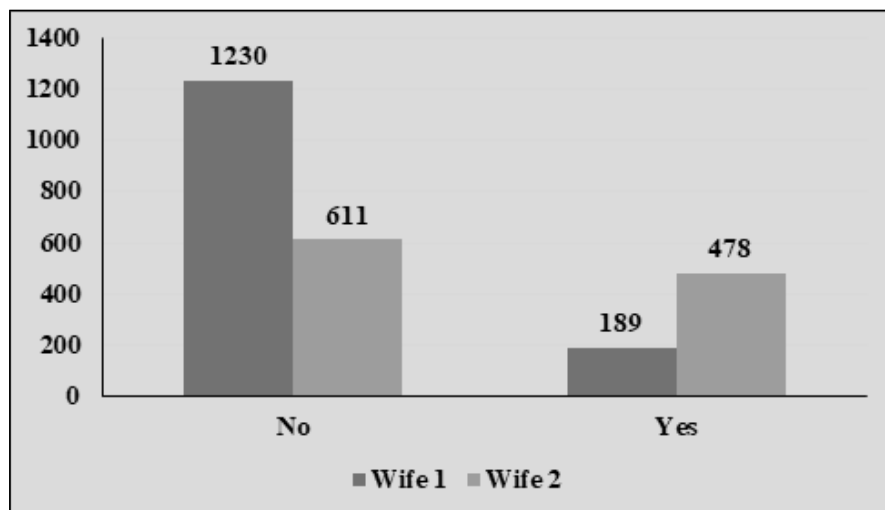
- Almost half (47%) did not give any dowry, significantly higher than first wives.
- Majority of second wives give small or moderate dowry (<1 lakh).
- High dowries (>2 lakh) are very rare (5%), reflecting less financial pressure or shorter marital negotiations in second marriages.

Key Takeaways

- First wives typically give higher dowry than second wives — especially in the 1–2 lakh range, showing greater financial demands in first marriages.
- Second wives are much more likely to give no dowry (47%), reflecting lower societal or familial pressure in subsequent marriages.
- High-value dowries are uncommon for both groups, but first wives bear most of the financial burden.
- This shows a clear economic disparity and burden on first marriages, while second marriages often involve smaller or symbolic dowry.

Autonomy in Choosing the Partner

Groom of Choice



Out of the 2508 women surveyed

73% of the women shared that the groom was not of their choice

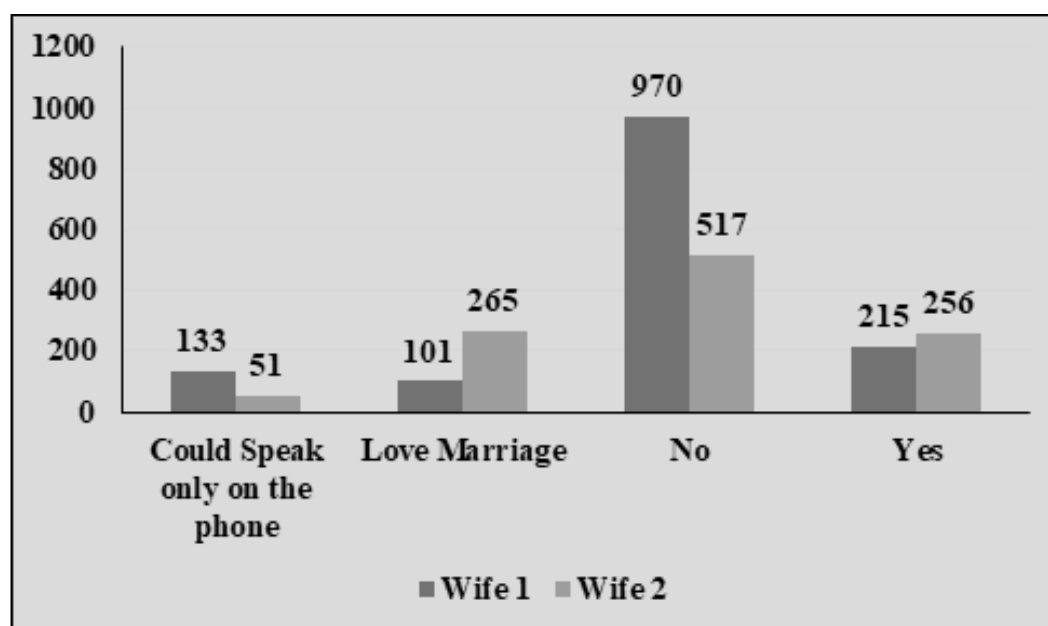
- ✓ 1st wife – 1230 i.e. 87%
- ✓ 2nd wife - 611 i.e. 56%

27% i.e. 667 women said that the groom was of their choice

Of the 667 women 478 were the second wife

- Majority (73%) of women did not have a choice in their marriage, indicating that arranged marriages dominate, consistent with traditional norms.
- Only 27% had a love marriage, suggesting limited autonomy for women in spouse selection.
- First wives: Almost all (1,230 out of 141 i.e. 87%) had no choice, reflecting traditional arranged marriages in first unions. Only 13% had love marriages.
- Second wives: Majority who had a choice (478 out of 1089, i.e. 44%) are second wives, indicating that second marriages are more likely to be love or chosen marriages.
- This suggests that women entering second marriages may exercise more agency, possibly due to experience, age, or social factors.

Arranged marriages dominate, especially for first wives. Second wives are more likely to have chosen their spouse, showing greater autonomy in remarriage. Only a minority of first marriages are love marriages, reflecting cultural norms and limited choice in initial unions.



Meeting the Future Husband

Out of 2508 total women surveyed

1487 women i.e. 59% did not meet the boy before marriage

471 women i.e. 19% met the boy before marriage

265 women i.e. 15% said that theirs was a love marriage

Remaining 7% women said they spoke to the groom on the phone

Analysis

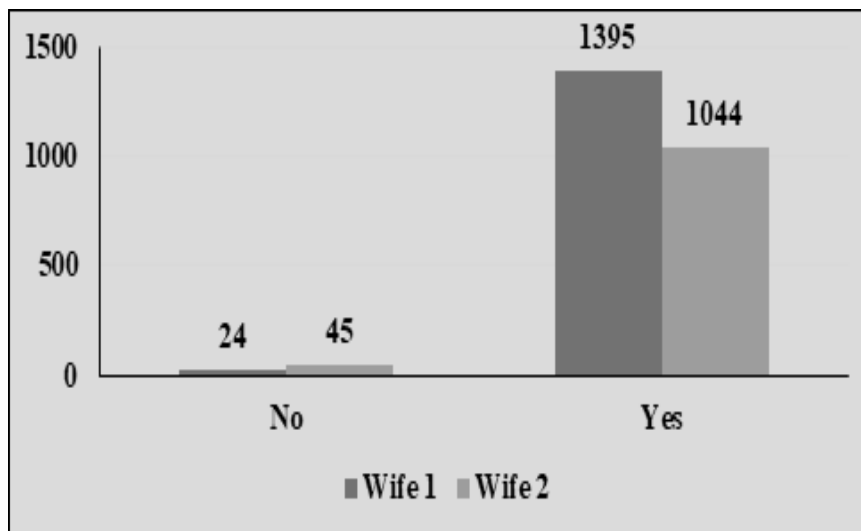
As expected, given the tradition in India, a vast majority did not meet the groom before marriage. 59% of women did not meet the boy before marriage, indicating traditional arranged marriage norms with limited pre-marital interaction.

19% met the boy, showing that a significant minority had face-to-face interaction before marriage. 7% spoke only on the phone, suggesting partial interaction in arranged setups.

15% were love marriages, meaning these women already knew their partners. Together with those who met or spoke to the groom, 41% of women had some familiarity with the groom before marriage.

Women in love marriages or who met the groom before marriage constitute a minority (41%), highlighting limited autonomy in spouse selection and interaction before marriage.

Consent at the Time of Marriage



Out of 2508 total women surveyed

2439 [1395+1044] women i.e. 97% were asked for consent by the Qazi

69 [24+45] women i.e. 3 % were not asked consent by the Qazi

Analysis

Overwhelming majority (97% of first and second wives) were asked for consent. This indicates that the formal Islamic procedure of asking for consent was largely followed.

Even in arranged marriages, the Qazi typically seeks verbal agreement from the bride, ensuring religious compliance. Very few women (3%) were not asked. This is a small minority, but it highlights rare cases where consent might have been overlooked, which could have legal or social implications.

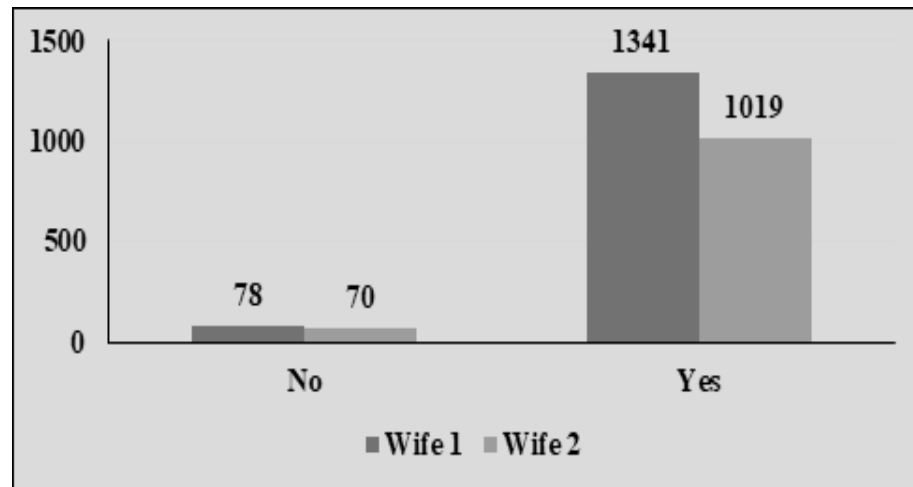
Religious procedure for consent is largely respected (97%), even in situations where the bride may have had limited choice of groom. Consent does not necessarily indicate autonomy, as many women may still be pressured into saying “Qabool Hai” despite limited freedom in choosing a spouse.

While nearly all women were asked for consent, this does not necessarily reflect true autonomy, especially for first wives, who may have limited choice of groom or social pressure.

Second wives, who often are older or entering a remarriage by choice, may experience more genuine autonomy, even though the formal consent rate is the same. They may exercise more real choice in marriage, even though the Qazi asks consent at the same high rate for both groups.

First marriages remain constrained by tradition and familial influence, meaning formal consent may not equal real agency.

Nikaahnama



Signing the Nikaahnama

Out of 2508 total women surveyed

2360 women i.e. 94% signed on their nikaahnama.

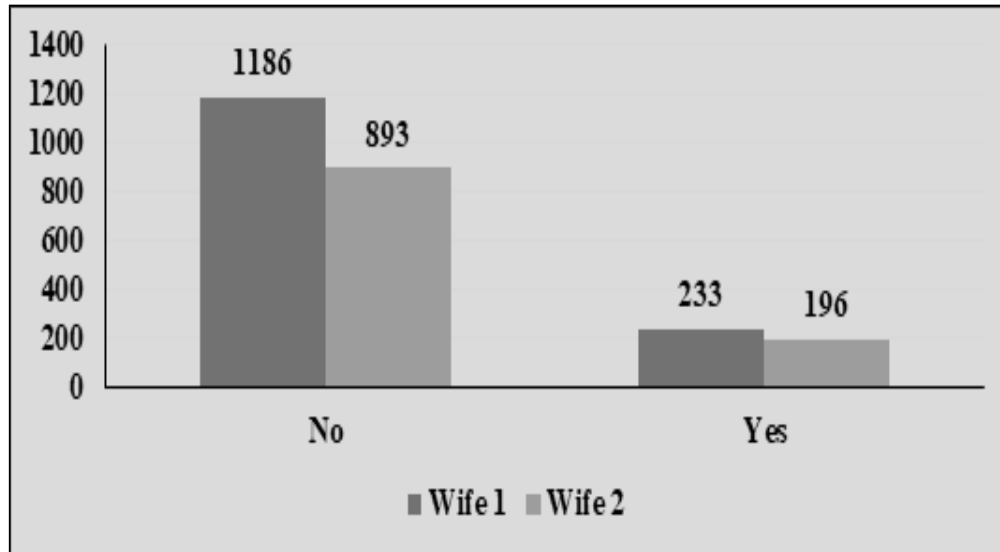
6% of the women i.e. 148 did not sign the nikaahnama

Analysis

Majority signed (94%) which indicates that most women formally acknowledged the marriage in the Nikaahnama, which is legally and religiously significant in Islamic marriages. Small minority did not sign (6%). These cases may reflect illiteracy, lack of awareness, or social/familial pressure. Not signing the Nikaahnama can have implications for legal rights, including Mehr and divorce claims.

Both first and second wives signed the Nikaahnama at the same rate (94%), indicating that the formal marriage procedure is consistently followed. Signing the Nikaahnama is essential for legal and religious recognition, so this high compliance is positive.

Reading of the Nikaahnama



Out of 2508 total women surveyed

2079 women i.e. 83% have not read the nikaahnama

429 women i.e. 17% have read the nikaahnama

1186 first wives have not read the nikaahnama

893 second wives have not read the nikaahnama

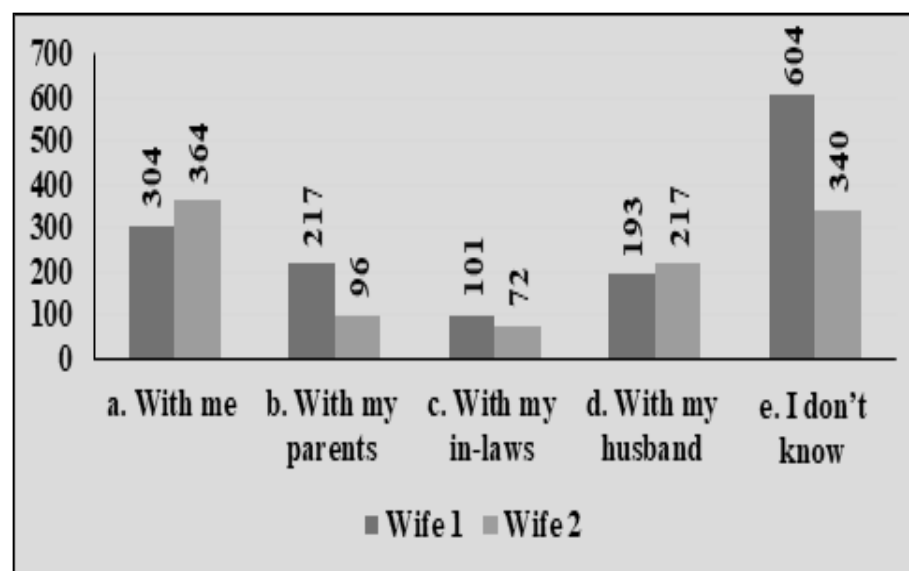
Analysis

Majority (83%) have not read the Nikaahnama, indicating low literacy, lack of awareness, or limited access to their own marriage document. Only 17% of women have read it, suggesting limited understanding of rights and obligations contained in the Nikaahnama.

Both first and second wives largely have not read the Nikaahnama, with slightly higher illiteracy or non-reading among first wives (84%). This suggests that second wives may have marginally higher literacy or involvement in the marriage process, possibly due to age, experience, or prior marriages.

Majority of women are unaware of the contents of their marriage contract, which could limit their ability to enforce rights such as Mehr or divorce provisions. Second wives are slightly more likely to have read it, reflecting slightly higher autonomy or literacy. Programs to increase awareness and understanding of Nikaahnama could significantly improve women's agency and legal security.

Nikaahnama Location



Out of 2508 total women surveyed

944 women i.e. 38% are not aware where their nikaahnama is right now.

Out of the remaining 62% women:

668 women i.e. 27% said the nikaahnama was with them

410 women i.e. 16% said it was with their husband

486 women i.e. 19% said it was either with the parents or the in-laws.

Out of the 1419 first wife surveyed

304 wives say it is with them

217 say it is with their parents

101 say it is with their inlaws

193 say it is with their husband

604 say they don't know where it is

Out of the 1089 second wife surveyed

364 wives say it is with them

96 say it is with their parents

72 say it is with inlaws

217 say it is with husband

340 say they don't know where it is

Analysis

38% of women do not know where their Nikaahnama is, showing a large gap in awareness and control over their marital documentation.

Only 27% have the Nikaahnama with them, indicating limited direct access to this important legal document.

A combined 35% have it with husband or relatives, which could affect autonomy and legal leverage.

Second wives have slightly more control over their Nikaahnama. 33% of second wives have it with themselves, compared to 21% of first wives. This suggests higher autonomy, possibly due to experience or asserting rights in remarriage.

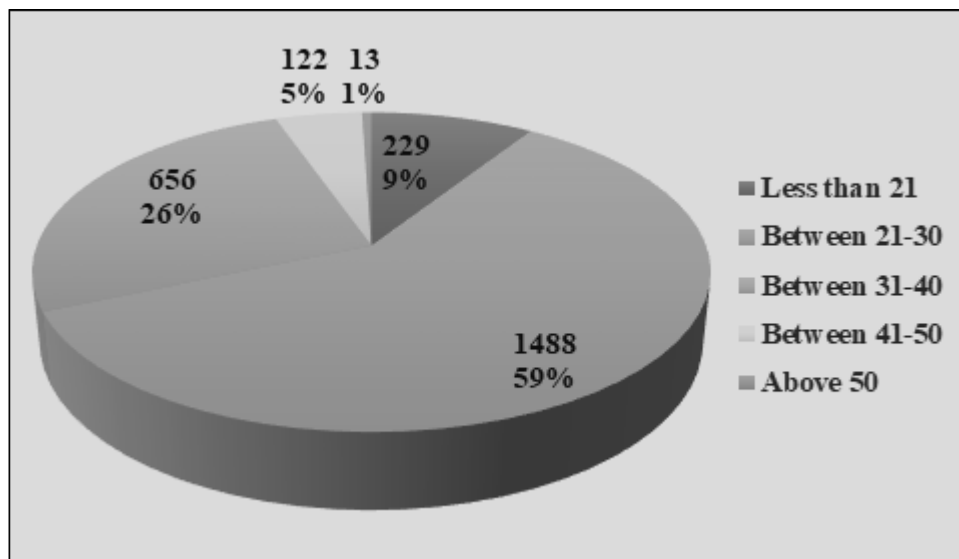
High proportion was unaware among first wives. 43% of first wives don't know where the Nikaahnama is, compared to 31% of second wives. This indicates that first marriages may involve less information sharing and autonomy. A significant number of women (husband: 14–20%; parents/in-laws: 7–15%) do not have direct possession, which may limit ability to enforce legal or marital rights.

Awareness and possession of the Nikaahnama are low overall, especially among first wives. Second wives have relatively higher awareness and control, suggesting marginally better agency in remarriage situations. Programs to educate women about the importance and custody of their Nikaahnama could strengthen legal security and empowerment.

CHAPTER 04

Current Personal Data about the Husband

Age at time of Marriage

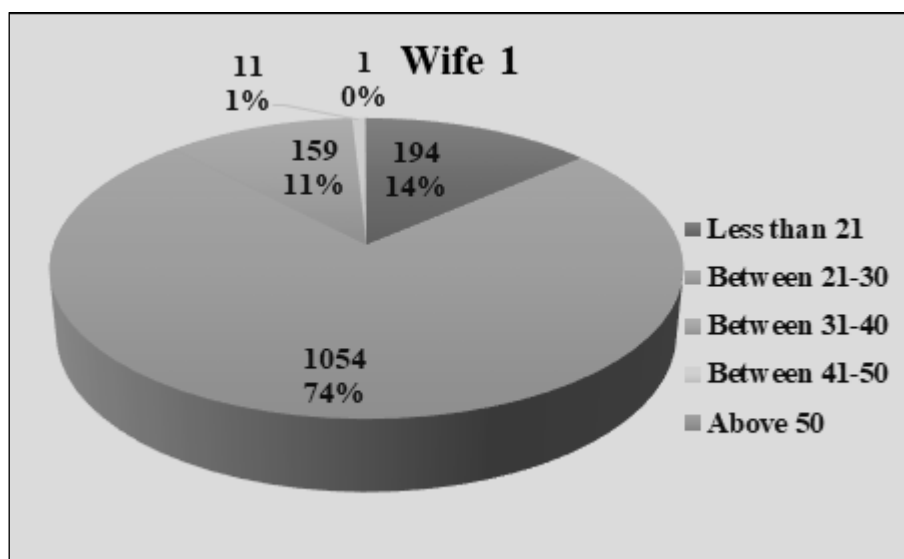


299 husbands i.e. 9% were married below 21 years

1488 husbands i.e. 59% were married between 21-30 years

656 husbands i.e. 26% were married between of 31-40 years

135 husbands i.e. 6% were above 41 years



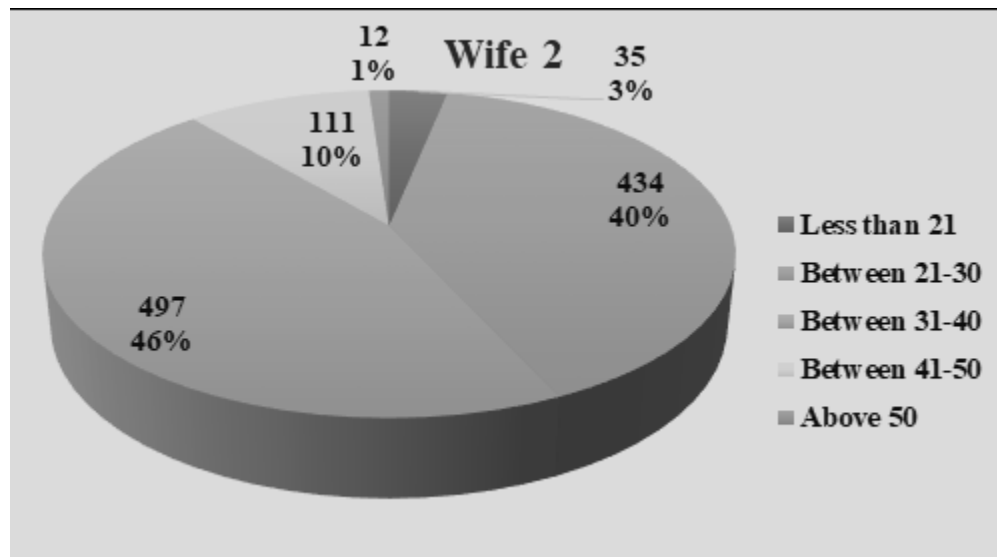
Out of the 1419 first wife surveyed

194 husbands i.e. 14% were married below 21 years

1089 husbands i.e. 74% were between 21-30 years

159 husbands i.e. 11% married between 31-40 years

12 husbands i.e. 1% married above 41 years



Out of the 1089 second wife surveyed

35 husbands i.e. 3% were married below 21 years

434 husbands i.e. 40% were married between 21-30 years

497 husbands i.e. 46% were married between 31-40 years

111 husbands i.e. 10% were above 41 years

Analysis

Age at the Time of Marriage

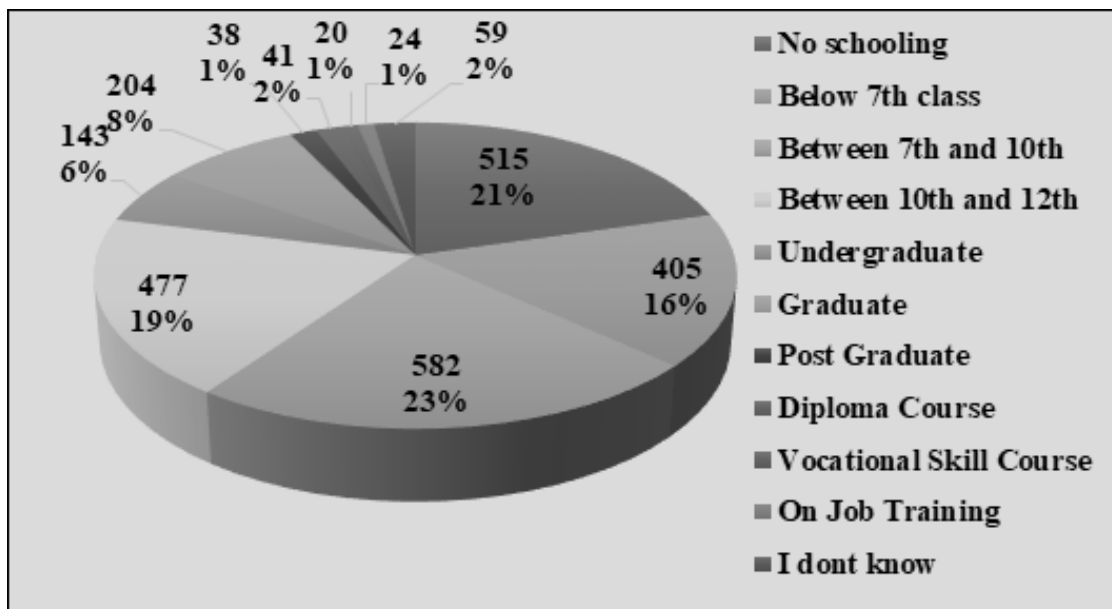
Majority of husbands (59%) were 21–30 years old, a typical age range for first marriages. Only a small proportion were very young, which is less than 21 years or older than 40.

Most husbands (74%) were 21–30 years old, reflecting typical age alignment in first marriages. Very few husbands were older than 40 (1%), indicating first marriages mostly involve younger men.

A larger proportion of husbands were older (31–40 years: 46%; above 41: 10%) in second marriages. Only 3% were below 21 years, and 40% were 21–30 years. This suggests second marriages often involve older husbands, possibly due to remarriage after divorce or widowhood.

First marriages involve younger husbands (21–30 years) predominantly. Second marriages involve older husbands (31–40 and above), reflecting age differences and remarriage patterns. This may indicate greater age disparity in second marriages, which could have social and economic implications.

Education at the Time of Marriage



Out of the 2508 women surveyed

515 husbands i.e. 21% had no schooling

405 husbands i.e. 16% were educated below Std 7th

582 husbands i.e. 23% were educated between Std 7th-10th

477 husbands i.e. 19% were educated between Std 10th-12th

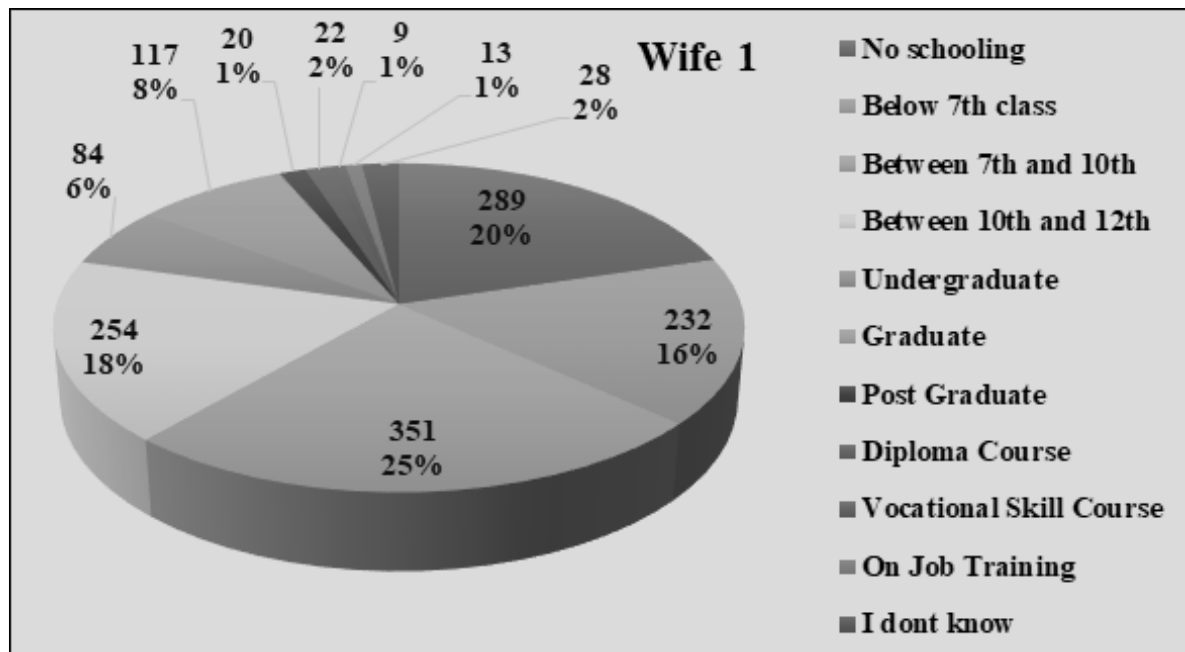
143 husbands i.e. 6% were undergraduate

204 husbands i.e. 8% were graduate

38 husbands i.e. 2% were post graduate

1% each either got a diploma, did vocational skill courses or got trained on job [20 and 24]

59 women i.e. 2% did not know their husbands' educational qualifications



Out of the 1419 first wife surveyed

289 husbands i.e. 20% had no schooling

232 husbands i.e. 16% were educated below Std 7th

351 husbands i.e. 25% were educated between Std 7th-10th

254 husbands i.e. 18% were educated between 10th-12th

84 husbands i.e. 6% were under graduate

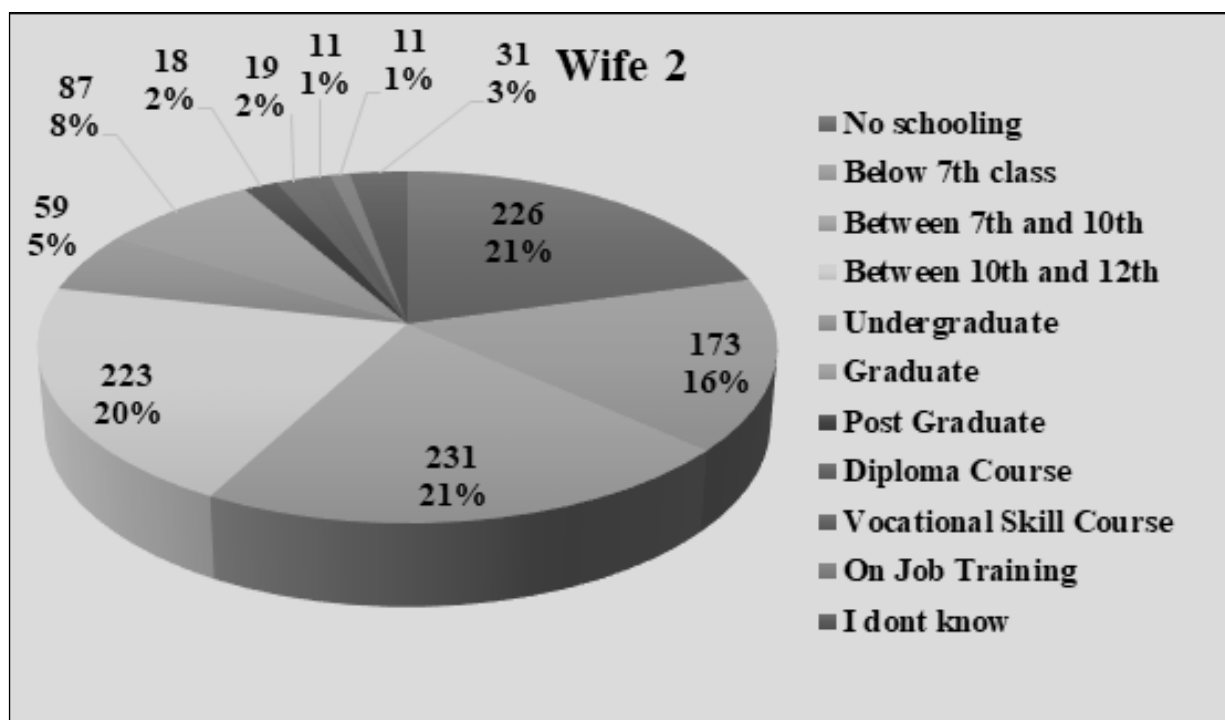
117 husbands i.e. 8% were graduate

20 husbands i.e. 1% were post graduate.

22 husbands i.e. 2% got diplomas

1% each did either a vocational skill course or were trained on job

28 women i.e. 2% did not know their husbands' educational qualification



Out of the 1089 second wife surveyed

226 husbands i.e. 21% had no schooling

173 husbands i.e. 16% had education below Std 7th

231 husbands i.e. 21% had education between Std 7th -10th

223 husbands i.e. 20% had education between Std 10th and 12th

59 husbands i.e. 5% were under graduate

87 husbands i.e. 8% husbands were graduate

2% husbands were post graduate.

19 husbands i.e. 2% diplomas

11 each i.e. 1% either did a vocational skill course or were trained on job

28 women i.e. 3% did not know their husbands' educational qualification

Education Level	Total (n=2508)	% Total	1 st Wife (n=1419)	% 1 st Wife	2 nd Wife (n=1089)	% 2 nd Wife
No Schooling	515	21%	289	20%	226	21%
Below Std 7 th	405	16%	232	16%	173	16%
Std 7 th – 10 th	582	23%	351	25%	231	21%
Std 10 th – 12 th	477	19%	254	18%	223	20%
Undergraduate	143	6%	84	6%	59	5%
Graduate	204	8%	117	8%	87	8%
Post Graduate	38	2%	20	1%	18	2%
Diploma	20	1%	22	2%	19	2%
Vocational / On-the-Job Training	24	1%	14 (approx.)	1%	11	1%
Don't Know Husband's Education	59	2%	28	2%	28	3%

A majority of husbands (60%) have education only up to 10th standard or below. This includes 21% with no schooling and 16% below Std 7th, suggesting widespread limited formal education among men in polygamous marriages.

Around 19% completed Std 10–12, showing some presence of secondary education but not enough to mark higher educational achievement.

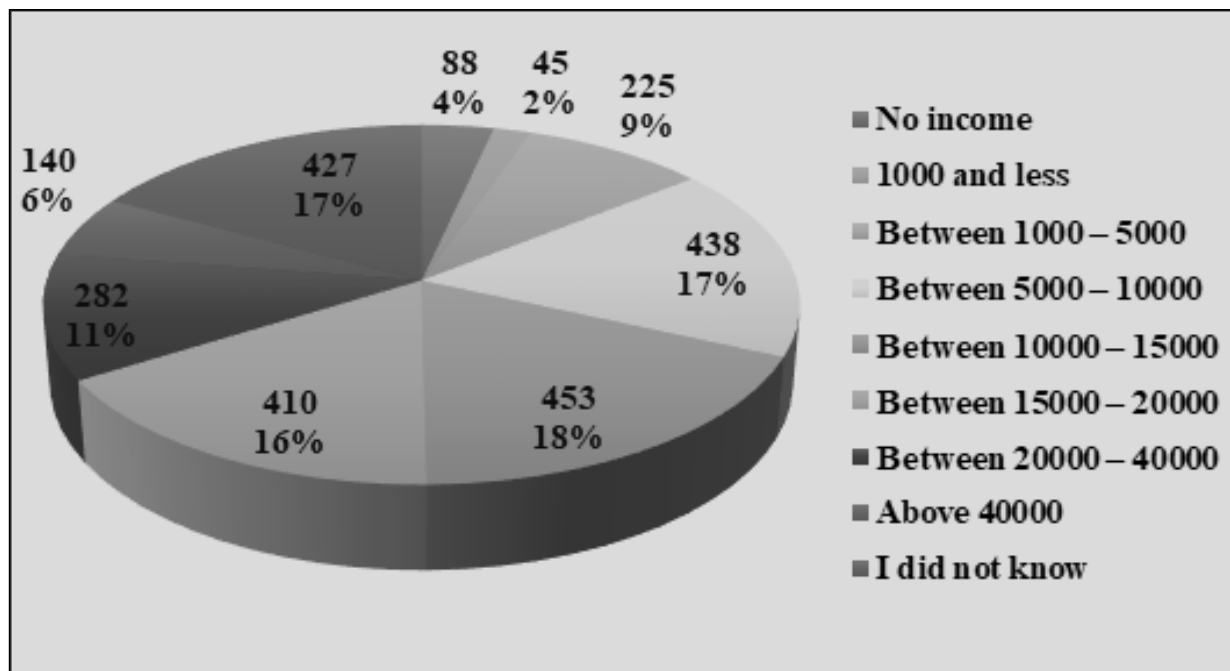
Only 16% of men attained undergraduate or higher degrees, indicating that polygamy cuts across lower-education groups predominantly.

The first wives' husbands are slightly more represented in the “Std 7th–10th” category (25%) compared to second wives' husbands (21%), implying that first marriages may occur earlier or with slightly better-educated men. The education gap between first and second wives' husbands is minimal, showing similar socio-educational backgrounds across both marriages.

About 2–3% of women did not know their husband's education — possibly due to communication gaps or secrecy in marital contexts, especially among second wives.

The data suggests a correlation between low male education levels and polygamous practices. Lower education often links to traditional gender norms, economic instability, and social acceptance of multiple marriages.

Income at the Time of Marriage



Out of the 2508 women surveyed

88 husbands i.e. 4% are without income

45 husbands i.e. 2% have income less than 1000/-

225 husbands i.e. 9% earned between 1000/- to 5000/-

438 husbands i.e. 17% earned between 5000/- to 10000/-

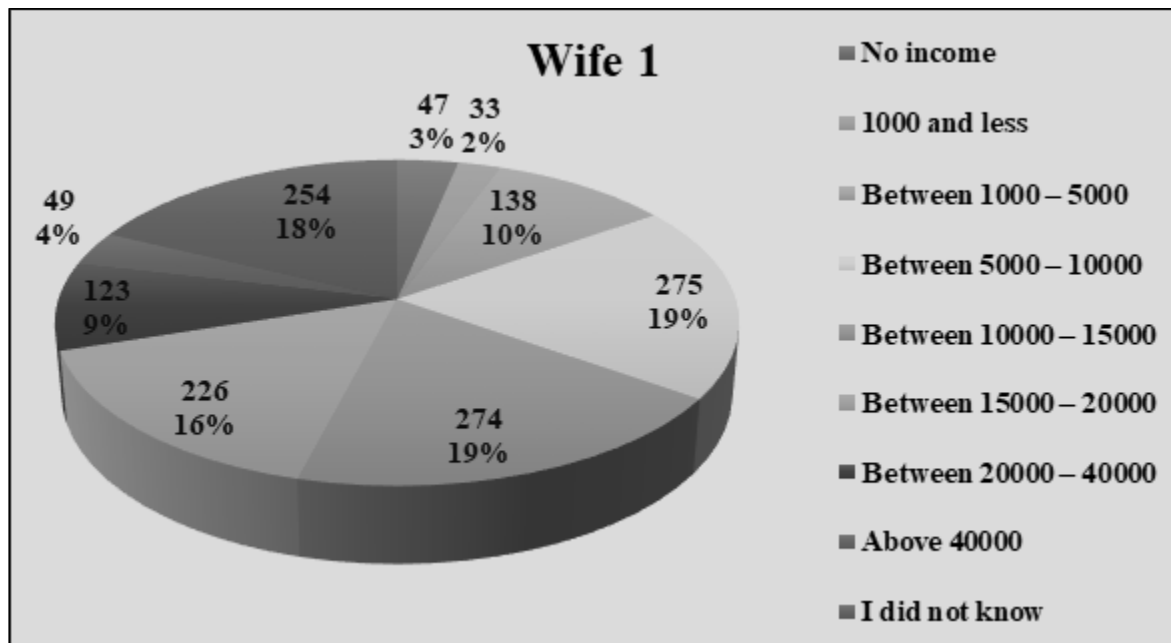
453 husbands i.e. 18% earned between 10000/- to 15000/-

410 husbands i.e. 16% earned between 15000/- to 20000/-

282 husbands i.e. 11% between 20000/- to 40000

140 husbands i.e. 6% are above 40000/-

427 wives i.e. 17% did not know their husband's income



Out of the 1419 first wife surveyed

47 husbands i.e. 3% had no income

33 husbands i.e. 2% have income less than 1000/-

138 husbands i.e. 10% earned between 1000/- to 5000/-,

275 husbands i.e. 19% earned between 5000/- to 10000/-

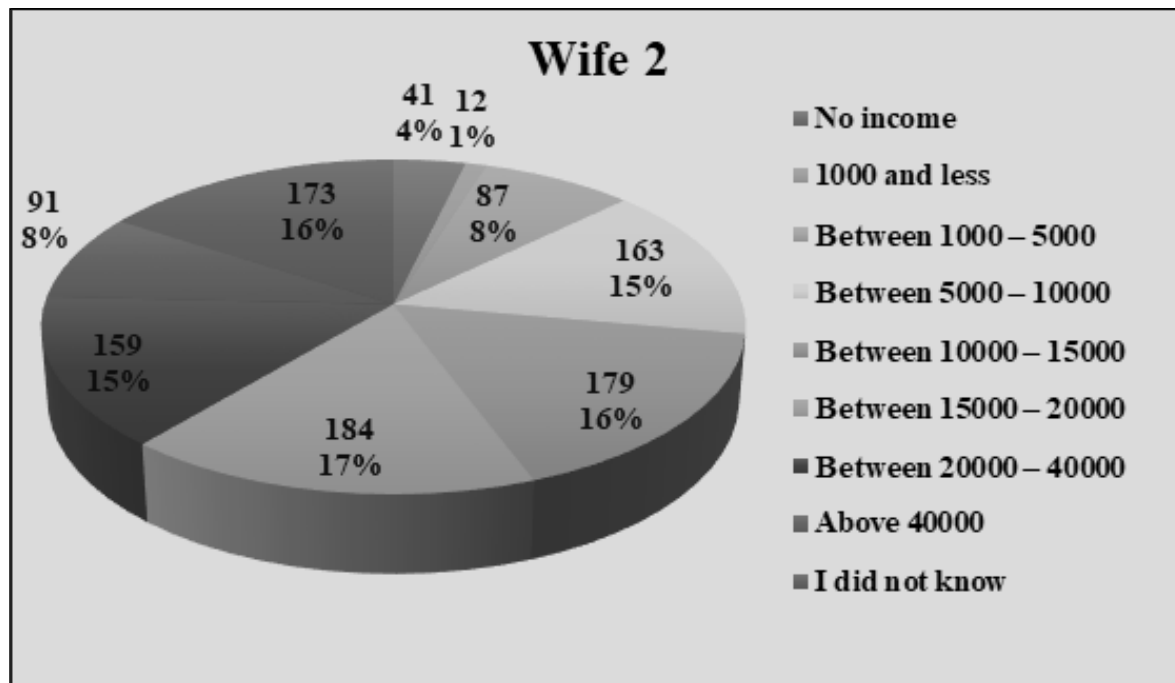
274 husbands i.e. 19% earned between 10000/- to 15000/-

226 husbands i.e. 16% earned between 15000/- to 20000/-

123 husbands i.e. 9% earned between 20000/- to 40000/-

49 husbands i.e. 4% earned above 40000/-

254 wives 18% did not know their husband's income



Out of the 1089 second wife surveyed

41 husbands i.e. 4% had no income

12 husbands i.e. 1% have income less than 1000/-

87 husbands i.e. 8% earned between 1000/- to 5000/-

163 husbands i.e. 15% earned between 5000/- to 10000/-

179 husbands i.e. 16% earned between 10000/- to 15000/-

184 husbands i.e. 17% earned between 15000/- to 20000/-

159 husbands i.e. 15% earned between 20000/- to 40000/-

91 husbands i.e. 8% earned over 40000/-

173 wives i.e. 16% did not know their husband's income

Income Bracket (₹ per month)	Total (n=2508)	% Total	1 st Wife (n=1419)	% 1 st Wife	2 nd Wife (n=1089)	% 2 nd Wife
No Income	88	4%	47	3%	41	4%
Less than ₹1,000	45	2%	33	2%	12	1%
₹1,000 – ₹5,000	225	9%	138	10%	87	8%
₹5,000 – ₹10,000	438	17%	275	19%	163	15%
₹10,000 – ₹15,000	453	18%	274	19%	179	16%
₹15,000 – ₹20,000	410	16%	226	16%	184	17%
₹20,000 – ₹40,000	282	11%	123	9%	159	15%
Above ₹40,000	140	6%	49	4%	91	8%
Don't Know Husband's Income	427	17%	254	18%	173	16%

Analysis

A majority of husbands (around 66%) had an income below ₹20,000 per month at the time of marriage. This reflects that polygamous marriages are most prevalent among lower-income groups.

6% (133 men) had income below 1,000 or no income at all — indicating marriages occurring even when men were financially unstable or dependent. Such marriages may rely on family support or informal work, suggesting economic vulnerability at the household level.

Around 34% of the husbands fell in this range 10,000–20,000 showing a slight upward mobility, but still within the lower-middle-class segment. These income levels likely correlate with daily wage, small business, or service sector jobs.

Only 17% of husbands earned ₹20,000 or above, highlighting limited participation of affluent men in polygamous marriages. However, among second wives, a slightly higher proportion (23%) belonged to the ₹20,000+ bracket, suggesting that some better-earning men contract second marriages.

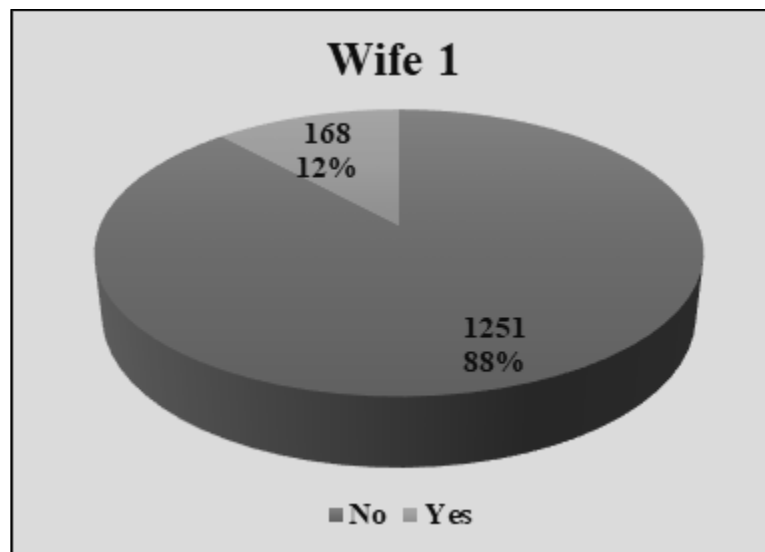
First wives were generally married to men with lower income ranges (5,000–15,000). Second wives show a slightly higher income distribution, particularly in the 20,000–40,000 and above 40,000 categories. This might imply that men remarry after financial improvement or use higher income to justify/afford a second marriage. 17% of women did not know their husband's income, showing lack of financial transparency, especially in patriarchal setups or marriages with unequal communication and power dynamics.

The data strongly indicates that economic insecurity and low income are key features of households involved in polygamous unions. This may exacerbate financial strain, emotional stress, and inequality among co-wives, particularly for the first wife.

CHAPTER 05

Polygamy Related Data

Permission From First Wife Before Remarriage



Out of the 1419 first wife survey data collected

1251 women i.e. 88% of the husband did not seek permission before marrying

168 women i.e. 12% of the husband took permission before marrying another woman

Analysis

Overwhelming majority (88%) were not consulted. This shows a serious disregard for the first wife's consent, despite the fact that in Islamic law, transparency and fairness are required in polygamous marriages. It reflects a pattern of unilateral decision-making by husbands and limited marital agency for women. There is lack of transparency, serious breach of trust and marital communication which deeply affects the first wife's emotional, social and economic well-being.

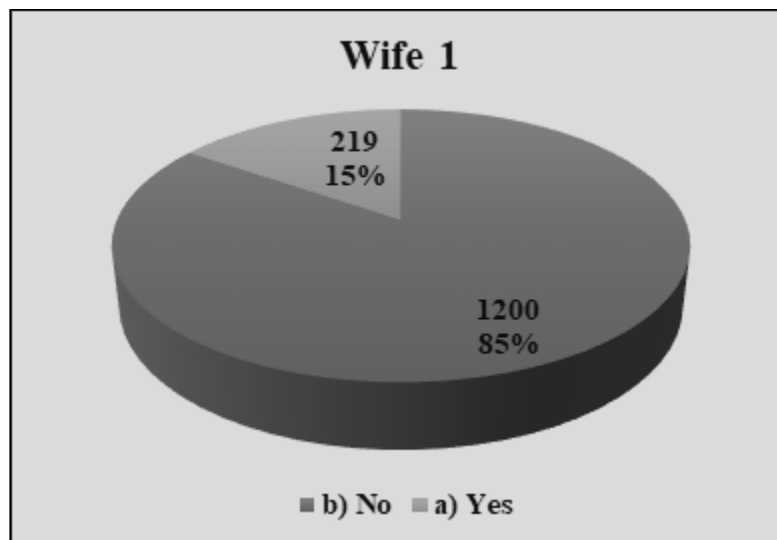
Only 12%, a very small proportion of husbands sought the wife's approval before remarrying, possibly indicating more egalitarian relationships or higher legal/religious awareness among these families. It hints at some degree of respect for the wife but it does not imply consent. Informing is not even consulting, let alone consenting.

These findings highlight systemic gender inequality and lack of enforcement of women's rights in marital practices. Emotional, financial, and social consequences for first wives are likely significant when such decisions are made without their involvement.

Consent in polygamous marriages is largely symbolic rather than real, reinforcing women's lack of control over marital dynamics. This underscores the need for stronger legal safeguards and community awareness to ensure women's consent and dignity are respected.

These numbers underscore systemic marginalization of first wives within the practice of polygamy. They point to a need for institutional reforms—for instance, requiring documented consent before a second marriage is legally or religiously validated.

Information to Wives Before Remarriage

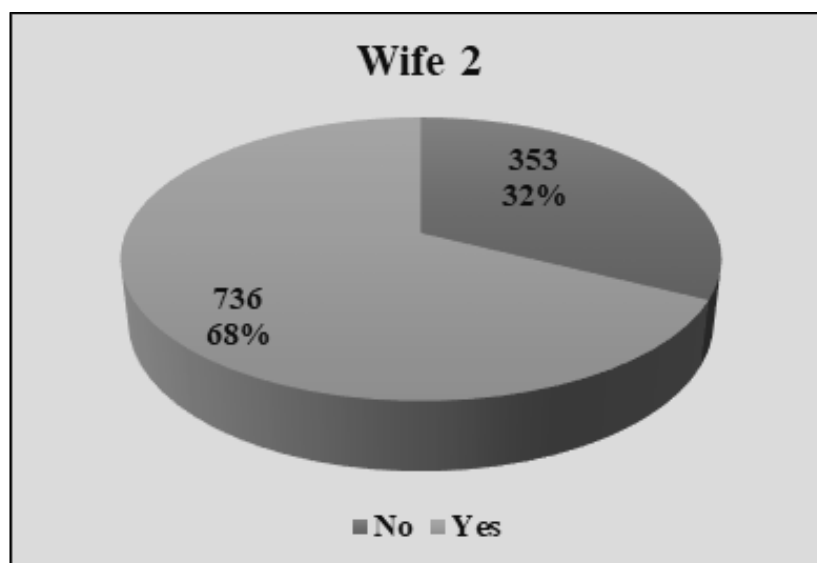


Out of the 1419 first wife surveyed

1200 women i.e. 85% got into second marriage without informing the wife

219 women i.e. 15% got into second marriage after informing their wife of their plan

85% of first wives were *not even informed* before their husbands remarried. Transparency and consent are both extremely low — together suggesting women's voices are often disregarded in marital decisions. This reinforces the urgent need for legal literacy, marriage registration awareness, and stronger procedural protections for women's consent in polygamous contexts.



Of the 1089 second wife surveyed

736 women i.e. 68% of the men informed their second wife of their first marriage

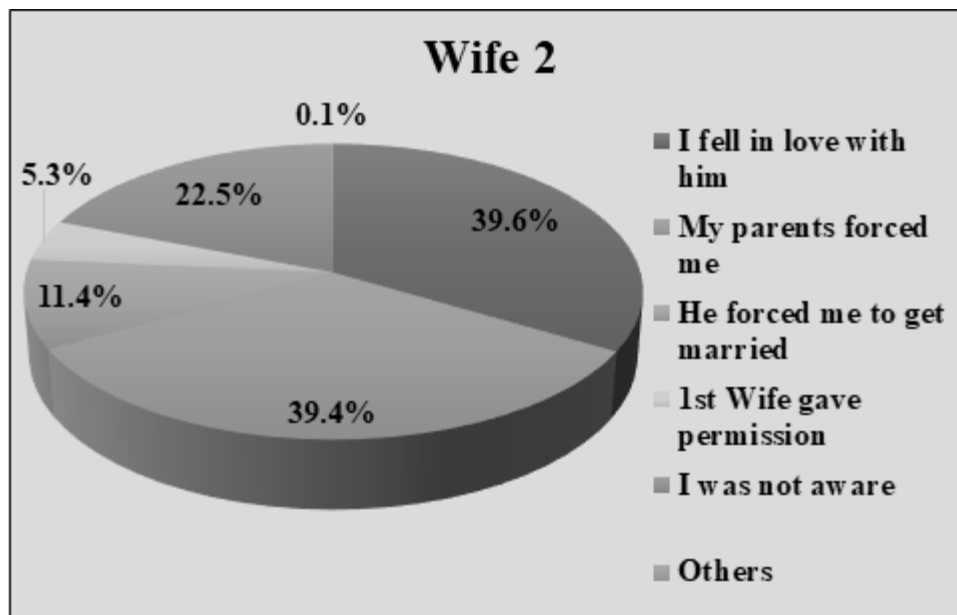
353 women i.e. 32% of the husband did not inform their second wife of their previous marriage

A majority were informed (68%). They entered marriage knowing their husbands were already married. There is some degree of openness and may indicate that second marriages occur with some awareness or acceptance of husband's marital status.

However, nearly one-third of second wives were misled (32%). They were in the dark about the husband's previous marriage. This is deception and fraud leading to emotional trauma and potential legal/religious complications once the truth emerges.

Among first wives, only 15% were informed about their husbands' plans to remarry and among second wives, 68% were informed about the first marriage. Together, these reveal a pattern of asymmetrical information. Husbands are more likely to be transparent with second wives than with first wives. The least a man can do is inform but even that is not done. While the first wife's awareness of her husband is taken for granted, the second wife's awareness is more often sought — perhaps because concealing a prior marriage becomes more difficult socially or legally. The data show that second wives experience relatively higher autonomy in terms of information before marriage and yet, a substantial 32% still enter marriages under **false** pretences, which raises ethical and legal concerns around misrepresentation. Men use transparency selectively, based on whatever suits them and is convenient.

Second Wife's Reason for Marriage



Out of the 1089 second wife surveyed

431 women i.e. 39.6% fell in love hence agreed to marry even though they were aware of his previous marriage

429 women i.e. 39.4% were forced to marry due to family pressure

124 women i.e. 11.4% men forced the women to marry him

58 women i.e. 5.3% women agreed to marry because the first wife gave permission for the husband to re-marry

245 women i.e. 22.5% of the women said they were not aware

1 woman 0.1% said they had other reasons.

Reason	% of Second Wives	Interpretation
Fell in love with the man	39.6%	Emotional attachment was the dominant factor; many second wives entered the marriage willingly out of affection despite the social and moral complexities.
Forced due to family pressure	39.4%	Nearly equal to those who married for love, this reflects deep family or community control over women's marital choices, highlighting limited agency.

Reason	% of Second Wives	Interpretation
Men forced them to marry	11.4%	Indicates coercion or manipulation, where consent was compromised, reflecting serious gender power imbalances.
First wife gave permission	5.3%	Shows a small subset where polygamy was socially or religiously negotiated, with the first wife's involvement serving as justification or acceptance.
Not aware of his previous marriage	22.5%	Suggests deception or concealment by husbands in nearly one-fourth of cases, despite earlier claiming awareness (this overlap implies post-marriage realization).
Other reasons	0.1%	Negligible; likely includes personal or unique situations.

There is a near equal split between love (39.6%) and family pressure (39.4%). reveals a tension between personal choice and patriarchal control. Emotional vulnerability and social pressure are both significant drivers of women's entry into polygamous marriages. Over half (51%) of second wives experienced either coercion or lack of full awareness, questioning the validity of their consent. Only 5% of cases involved the first wife's explicit consent, suggesting that polygamy was rarely mutual or consensual between co-wives.

If we take family pressure [39.4], force by men [11.4] and deception [22.5] then 73% of second wives had no active consent to being the second wife. Which means most second marriages are a fraud, deception and coercion. In spite of being aware [68%] they did succumb to the second marriage. Which means awareness is not necessarily an agency which a woman applies for herself and for the benefit of her future.

It would be interesting to unpack 'love' as nearly 40% second wives married out of love. It could mean economic security, emotional attachment, attraction and sexual drive. Comparing it with the data on the age of marriage of the second wives, 70% married between 18-30 years and 17% between 30-40 years reflecting that second marriages occur a bit late in life. It could imply that it was a well thought out decision of the second wife, especially of those who fell in love [40%]

Those who were coerced by family [39.4%] and forced by men [11.4%], more than 50% in spite of their majority age could not resist that force. Being above 18, does not ensure self-confidence, self-awareness, ability to resist coercion, agency and ability to deny consent. Looking at the data on how many were asked for consent by the qazi [97% were asked consent and 94% signed] one wonders what happened to this important tool of Islamic marriage framework, consent. It also implies that having rules favouring women also do not ensure its usage. The agency of a Muslim woman to say 'NO' when asked at the time of marriage is severely compromised. A girl child who has not been taught to say 'no' earlier on, will not be able to muster courage at the time of marriage. She also learnt to live with coercion, pressure and forced consent for every important decision in her life.

Knowledge about Remarriage

Out of the 1419 first wife surveyed

284 women i.e. 20% - women's family members found out

23 women i.e. 2% - women themselves found out

125 women i.e. 9% through friends

255 women i.e. 18% through neighbours

513 women i.e. 25% through others

219 women i.e. 15% through her own husband

Of the 1089 second wife surveyed

109 women i.e. 10% were informed by the in-laws

107 women i.e. 10% second wife's family members found out

115 women i.e. 11% second wife's parents already knew it

142 women i.e. 13% second wife themselves found out

69 women i.e. 6% through others

24 women i.e. 2% through neighbours

40 women i.e. 4% through friends

736 women i.e. 68% informed by the husband

Source of Information	1 st Wife (n = 1419)	%	2 nd Wife (n = 1089)	%
Women's family members found out	284	20%	—	—
Woman herself found out	23	2%	142	13%
Through friends	125	9%	40	4%
Through neighbours	255	18%	24	2%
Through others	513	25%	69	6%
Through her own husband	219	15%	736	68%
Informed by in-laws	—	—	109	10%

Source of Information	1 st Wife (n = 1419)	%	2 nd Wife (n = 1089)	%
Second wife’s family members found out	—	—	107	10%
Second wife’s parents already knew it	—	—	115	11%
Total	1419	100%	1089	100%

For the first wives:

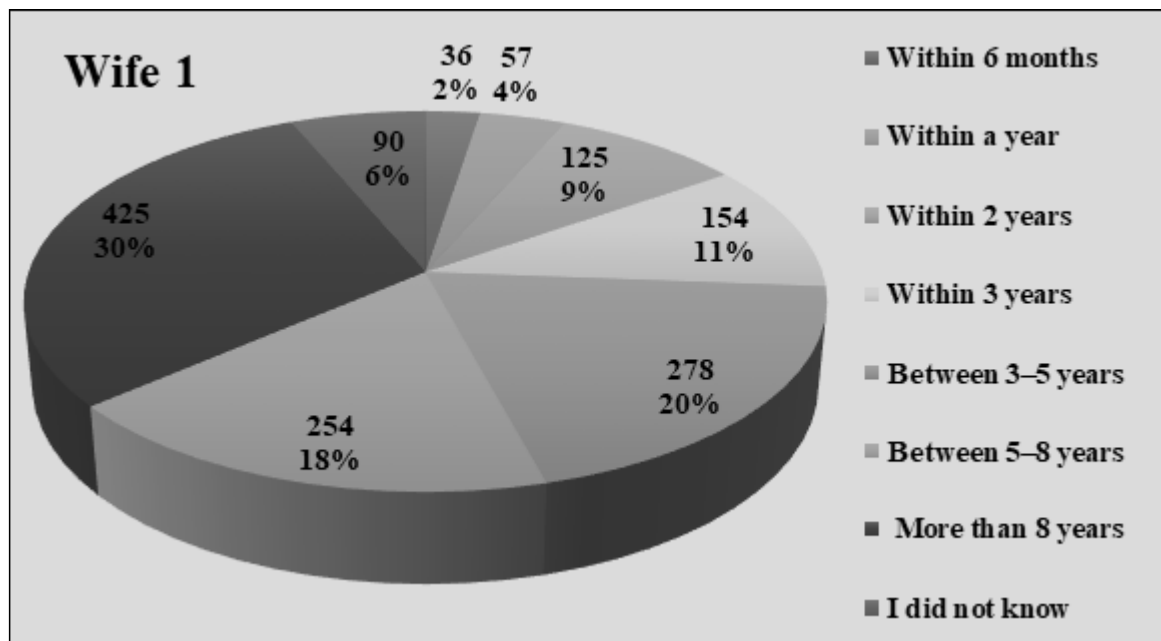
Only 15% were informed directly by their husbands, showing that majority of first wives (85%) learned indirectly, highlighting secrecy and lack of transparency. The most common sources were “others” (25%) and family members (20%), suggesting that community or social circles often reveal such information rather than the husband himself. Only 2% of first wives personally discovered it, indicating that many were kept in the dark.

For the second wives:

A contrasting picture emerges — 68% were directly informed by the husband, indicating greater openness toward the second marriage. Around 10–13% were informed through family or parents, showing partial family involvement or consent. Very few second wives (only 2–6%) found out through neighbours or others, which implies that the second marriage is often disclosed within controlled circles.

The data reveals a double standard in communication. Husbands tend to hide the second marriage from the first wife while disclosing it to the second. This suggests lack of honesty and emotional consideration toward the first wife and more negotiation or transparency in the case of the second marriage. It also points to patriarchal control over information flow, where the husband decides who “needs to know.”

Number of Years Between Two Marriages



Out of the 1419 first wife surveyed

36 women i.e. 2% said within 6 months

57 women i.e. 4% said within a year

125 women i.e. 9% said within 2 years

154 women i.e. 11% said within 3 years

278 women i.e. 20% said between 3-5 years

254 women i.e. 18% said between 5-8 years

425 women i.e. 30% said more than 8 years

90 women i.e. 6% wives did not know when their husband had remarried

Time After First Marriage	Number of Women	Percentage	Observation
Within 6 months	36	2%	Extremely early re-marriage; indicates pre-existing marital instability or possible overlap of relationships.
Within 1 year	57	4%	Suggests dissatisfaction or impulsive decision to remarry soon after first marriage.
Within 2 years	125	9%	Reflects early-stage marital conflict or incompatibility.
Within 3 years	154	11%	Some marriages deteriorated quickly, leading to early re-marriage.
Between 3–5 years	278	20%	Peak period for re-marriage; possibly after the initial family setup or birth of children.
Between 5–8 years	254	18%	Mid-phase re-marriages, often linked to emotional drift or external influences.
After more than 8 years	425	30%	Majority experienced husband's re-marriage after long-term relationships, suggesting breakdown after years of cohabitation and family life.
Don't Know / Unaware	90	6%	Indicates secrecy, deceit, or lack of communication between husband and wife.

The largest group (30%) reported that their husbands remarried after more than eight years of marriage, showing that many men entered second marriages later in life, often after the first family was established.

About 20% remarried within 3–5 years, making it the second most common period, often reflecting mid-term marital strain.

26% of men remarried within the first three years, pointing toward early marital dissatisfaction or pre-existing relationships.

The 6% of wives unaware of the remarriage reflects lack of transparency and possible emotional or physical separation even before the second marriage occurred.

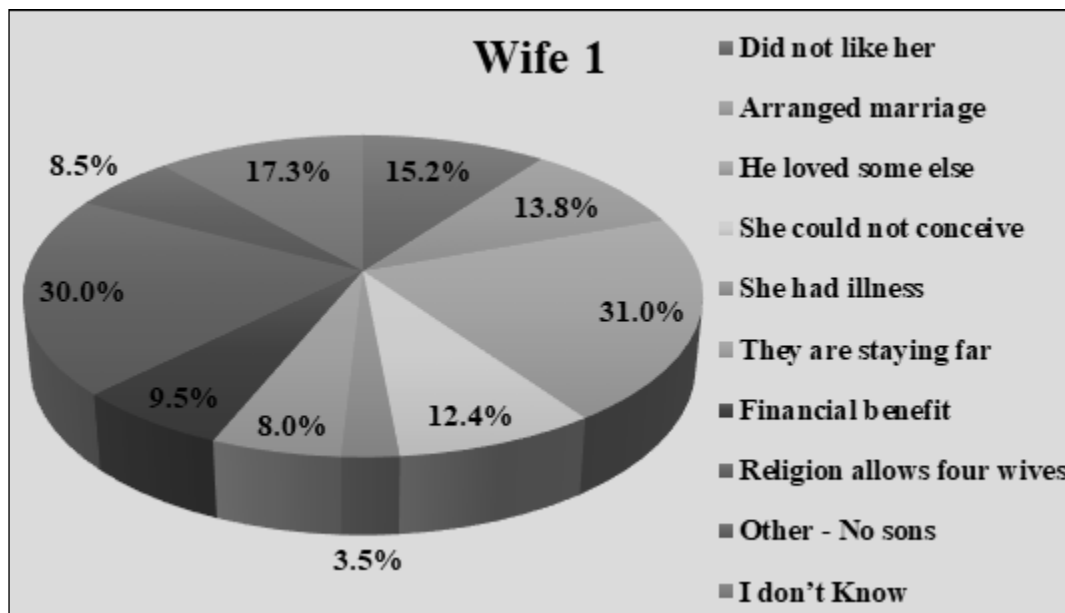
The data suggests that while some men remarry early due to dissatisfaction or desire for variety, the majority remarry after several years, possibly due to emotional distance, familial pressures, or pursuit of companionship later in life.

This pattern reveals two forms of polygamy:

1. Early-stage polygamy, driven by impulse, attraction, or social norms, and
2. Late-stage polygamy, reflecting emotional fatigue, neglect, or rationalized decisions after a long marriage.

Both scenarios deeply impact the first wife's emotional security and the stability of the household.

Reasons By Husband to the First Wife to Re-Marry



The reason for re-marriage given by husband to the wife:

440 women i.e. 31% said they loved someone else

425 women i.e. 30% of the husband re-married as their religion allows 4 wives

246 women i.e. 17.3% of the women did not know why he remarried

215 women i.e. 15.2% husband did not love their wife

196 women i.e. 13.8% said it's an arranged marriage

176 women i.e. 12.4% remarried as the wife could not conceive

135 women i.e. 9.5% of the men married for financial benefits

120 women i.e. 8.5% married for reason said they had no sons

113 women i.e. 8% men were staying far away for work

49 women i.e. 3.5% men remarried on the pretext of wife's illness

The two most common reasons given were:

- "Loved someone else" (31%), indicating emotional detachment or infidelity.
- "Religion allows four wives" (30%), showing religious justification as a means to legitimize remarriage.

- 17.3% of women did not know why their husband remarried — reflecting secrecy, lack of communication, and disregard for the first wife's emotional position.
- Personal rejection is evident where 15.2% were told that their husband no longer loved them.
- Infertility-related reasons (wife could not conceive – 12.4%, had no sons – 8.5%) together form about 21%, showing how women's reproductive capacity remains a key justification for remarriage.
- A smaller yet notable portion (9.5%) indicates financial motives, hinting at material gain or dowry-linked benefits.
- Only 3.5% of husbands cited wife's illness, meaning that health reasons were less commonly used as justification.

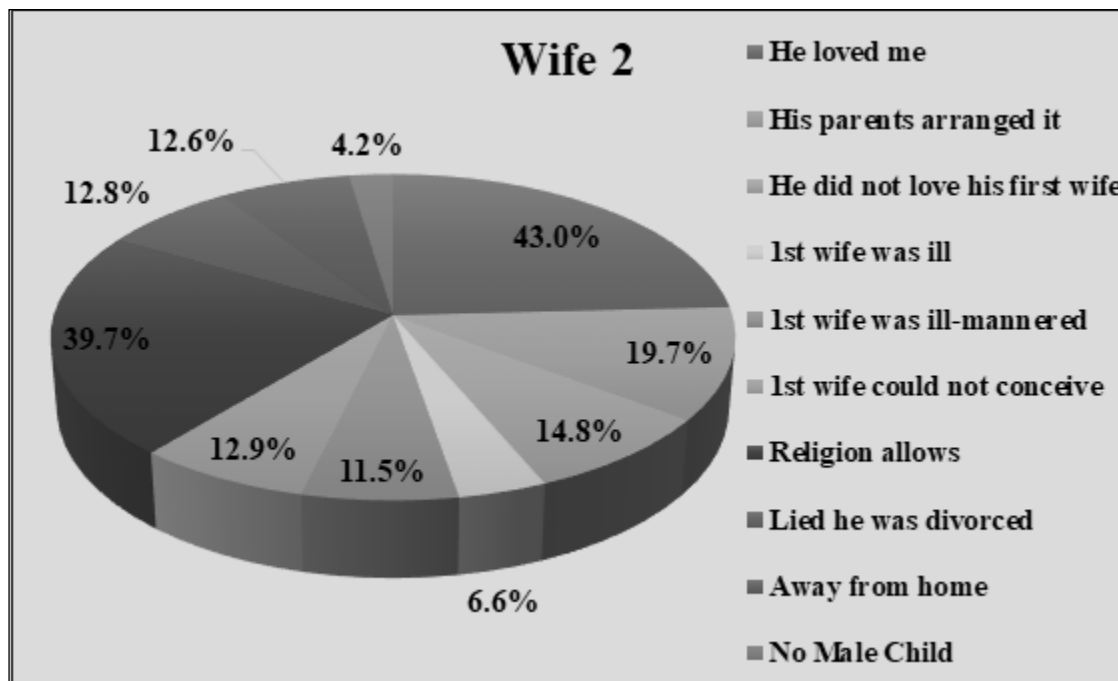
The data highlights emotional, religious, and patriarchal justifications behind men's re-marriages.

Many husbands rationalized their actions through religious or social norms, often sidelining emotional accountability.

The high percentage of women unaware of the reasons suggests silencing and exclusion of first wives from crucial decisions.

Reproductive expectations (especially desire for a son) and love for another woman remain strong motivators for remarriage, showing gender bias and unequal marital power dynamics.

Reasons Given By Husband To the Second Wife for Remarriage



468 women i.e. 43% were told by the man that they loved her

432 women i.e. 39.7% of the husband re-married to exercise their rights as their religion allows 4 wives

214 women i.e. 19.7% said it was arranged by his parents

137 women i.e. 12.6% men were staying far away for work hence remarried

161 women i.e. 14.8% husband said that they did not love their first wife

140 women i.e. 12.9% remarried as the wife could not conceive

139 women i.e. 12.8% of the men lied that they were divorced

125 women i.e. 11.5% remarried as the first wife was ill-mannered

72 women i.e. 6.6% men remarried on the pretext of wife's illness

46 women i.e. 4.2% married for wife not bearing sons

Reason Given by Husband to Second Wife	Number of Women	Percentage (%)
Said he loved her	468	43.0%
Religion allows four wives	432	39.7%
Marriage arranged by his parents	214	19.7%
Did not love first wife	161	14.8%
Wife could not conceive	140	12.9%
Lied that he was divorced	139	12.8%
First wife was ill-mannered	125	11.5%
Staying far away for work	137	12.6%
Wife's illness	72	6.6%
Wife did not bear sons	46	4.2%

Reason Given by Husband to the Second Wife

The dominant reasons given to the second wife were:

“He loved her” (43%), suggesting that emotional or romantic justification was the most common explanation. “Religion allows four wives” (39.7%), again showing that religious sanction is used as a legitimizing tool for remarriage. Together, these two reasons alone account for over 80% of responses.

19.7% of second wives said the marriage was arranged by his parents, which indicates family involvement and normalization of polygamous practices within certain households.

12–15% of men justified remarriage by discrediting the first wife, citing:

- “Did not love the first wife” (14.8%)
- “First wife ill-mannered” (11.5%)
- “Wife could not conceive” (12.9%)
- “Wife did not bear sons” (4.2%)

These collectively reflect patriarchal blame-shifting, where the first wife is portrayed as the cause.

12.8% of men lied that they were divorced, showing deception and manipulation in initiating the second marriage. 6.6% used the wife's illness as justification — similar to data from the first wives, showing a recurring pretext.

Compared to the reasons given to the first wife, husbands present a more emotionally appealing or religiously justified narrative to the second wife.

- To the first wife → “I love someone else” or “Religion allows it.”
- To the second wife → “I love you” or “Religion allows it.”

This contrast shows strategic communication: emotional justification to gain the second wife's consent, and religious or vague reasons to pacify or deflect the first wife.

The data also reflects gendered power imbalance — men control the narrative, often invoking love, religion, or the first wife's faults to rationalize remarriage.

Combined Table of First and Second Wife

Reason for Re-Marriage (as told by Husband)	1 st Wife (n = 1419)	%	2 nd Wife (n = 1089)	%
Loved someone else / Loved her	440	31.0%	468	43.0%
Religion allows four wives	425	30.0%	432	39.7%
Did not love first wife	215	15.2%	161	14.8%
Wife could not conceive	176	12.4%	140	12.9%
Wife did not bear sons	120	8.5%	46	4.2%
Wife was ill / illness used as pretext	49	3.5%	72	6.6%
First wife ill-mannered	—	—	125	11.5%
Married for financial benefits	135	9.5%	—	—
Arranged marriage (by parents)	196	13.8%	214	19.7%
Staying far away for work	113	8.0%	137	12.6%
Lied that he was divorced	—	—	139	12.8%
Wife did not know reason	246	17.3%	—	—

Emotional Justifications

The most frequent reason given to both groups revolves around love:

- To the first wife: *"I loved someone else"* (31%)
- To the second wife: *"I love you"* (43%)
- → This shows a shift in emotional framing — the same emotion (love) is expressed as betrayal to the first and affection to the second.

Religious Justifications

A significant proportion in both groups — 30% of first wives and 39.7% of second wives — heard the reason that *"religion allows four wives."* Religion is used as a moral and legal cover, making remarriage appear justified and permissible.

Blaming or Devaluing the First Wife

To second wives, men often discredit the first wife, citing:

- *Ill-mannered* (11.5%)
- *Could not conceive* (12.9%)
- *Did not love her* (14.8%)
- *No sons* (4.2%)

This pattern reflects victim-blaming and the reinforcement of patriarchal norms that judge women by obedience and fertility.

Deception and Concealment

12.8% of second wives reported that the man lied about being divorced, and 17.3% of first wives said they did not know the reason at all, showing dishonesty and manipulation in both relationships.

Family and Social Influence

Arranged marriages by parents were mentioned by 13.8% of first wives and 19.7% of second wives, implying that family involvement sustains and normalizes polygamous practices.

Work-related reasons (“staying far away for work”) appeared more often among second wives (12.6%) than first (8%), perhaps used as a socially acceptable excuse for taking another wife.

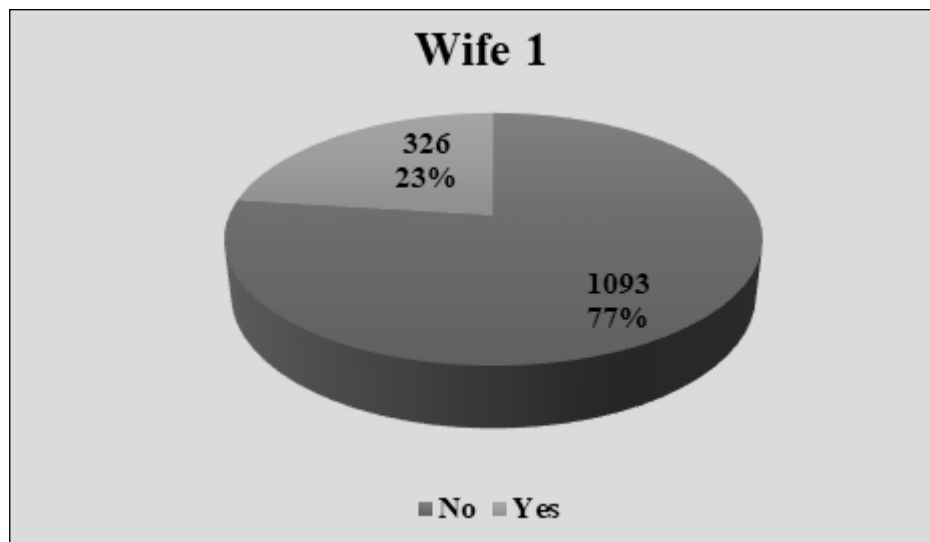
Health and Reproductive Reasons

Infertility (*could not conceive* and *no sons*) together accounted for 21% among first wives and ~17% among second wives, showing that reproductive expectations remain a recurring justification.

Interpretation & Insights

Husbands tailor their justifications depending on the audience. To the first wife: reasons that distance or dismiss her — emotional detachment, religion, or her inadequacy. To the second wife: reasons that attract or reassure her — love, religion, or sympathy toward the husband’s situation. The data exposes a dual communication strategy rooted in patriarchal privilege, where men control both narratives to maintain power and legitimacy. The consistent invocation of religion and reproduction reveals how social and cultural norms are instrumentalized to rationalize polygamy. Emotional manipulation (love), moral justification (religion), and social conditioning (infertility, arranged setups) together form the triad of rationalizations used by men to remarry.

Divorce as an Option Before Remarriage



Of the 1419 first wife survey data collected only

1093 women i.e. 77% of the husband did not ask for the divorce before re-marrying the second wife.

23% i.e. 326 husband asked for divorce before re- marrying

Response	Number of Husbands	Percentage	Interpretation
Did not ask for divorce	1,093	77%	The overwhelming majority of husbands remarried without seeking divorce, implying continued marital ties — effectively resulting in polygamous marriages.
Asked for divorce	326	23%	Only about one in four husbands sought formal or verbal dissolution before remarrying, suggesting that divorce is not a common procedural step prior to entering a new marriage.

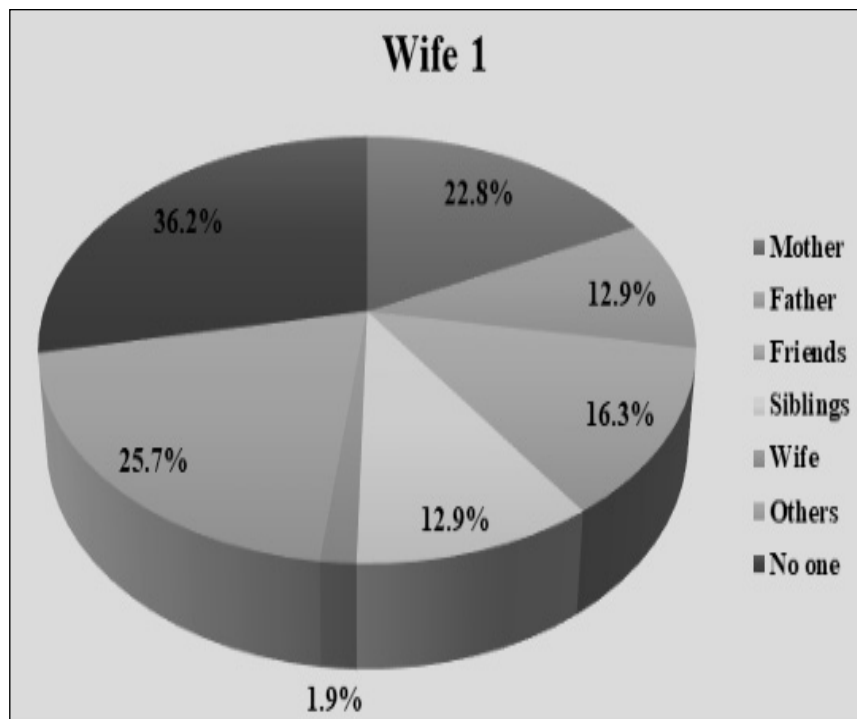
The 77% non-divorce rate shows that most husbands did not legally or religiously dissolve the first marriage before remarrying. This reinforces the earlier data where 88% of first wives said their husbands didn't seek their permission and 85% were not informed of the second marriage. Together, these suggest a pattern of unilateral male decision-making in marital transitions.

The first wives are left in ambiguous marital statuses — neither divorced nor treated as active spouses. This creates social stigma, financial insecurity, and psychological trauma, especially when combined with displacement data (many moved to parents' homes or were unaware of their nikaahnama location).

While Islamic law allows polygamy under conditions of justice and fairness, this data shows procedural and ethical lapses; no prior information, no prior consent, no physical/material arrangement, no transparent communication and no valid reason. The data below which shows the reasons given by husband to remarry, suggests that simply because the religion has allowed polygamy, the men will do it [30% first wife and 40% second wife]. This shows a total misuse of the provision. Our experience also show how arrogantly men proclaim to their wives that he has been given this permission These practices suggest deviation from the spirit of Shariah's conditional permission for polygamy.

Only 23% of husbands sought divorce before remarrying — confirming that polygamy overlaps with ongoing marriages. The result is a pattern of marital overlap, lack of consent, and absence of legal clarity for first wives.

Support to Husband for Getting Married the Second Time



[First Wife Perspective]

Out of the 1419 first wife surveyed

514 women i.e. 36.2% reported that husband did not receive any support from anyone

324 women 22.8% reported that husband was supported by his mother

231 women i.e. 16.3% reported that husband was supported by friends

183 women i.e. 12.9% reported that husband was supported by his father

183 women i.e. 12.9% reported that husband was supported by siblings

365 women i.e. 25.7% were supported by others

27 women 2% reported that husband was supported by wife

Supporter of Husband's Second Marriage	Number of Women (out of 1419)	Percentage (%)
No one supported him	514	36.2%
Mother	324	22.8%
Friends	231	16.3%
Father	183	12.9%
Siblings	183	12.9%
Others	365	25.7%
Wife (first wife herself)	27	2.0%
Total	1419	100%

The largest share (36.2%) of women said that their husbands received no support from anyone for the second marriage. This indicates that a significant number of men acted independently, driven by personal motives or desires rather than family or social influence.

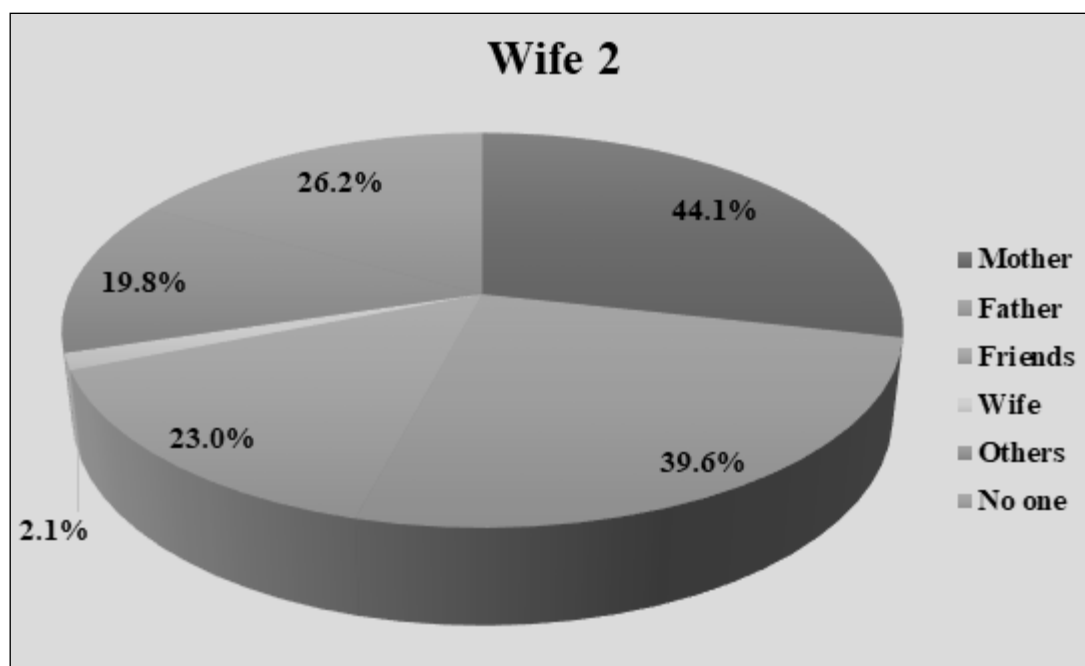
However, nearly two-thirds (63.8%) of husbands did receive support, suggesting that social and familial endorsement plays a major role in sustaining polygamy.

Among supporters, the mother's role is most prominent (22.8%) — showing that maternal influence and possible cultural acceptance within families contribute significantly. Friends (16.3%) also emerge as a major encouraging group — possibly normalizing or even facilitating the second marriage. Fathers and siblings (12.9% each) together form another quarter of supporters, indicating that immediate family often condones or assists in remarriage decisions. Others (25.7%) — may include community members, religious figures, or extended relatives — pointing to broader social reinforcement.

Interestingly, only 2% of first wives said they themselves supported their husband's second marriage — a very small fraction, possibly driven by social pressure, guilt, or religious obligation.

- The data shows that while a segment of men chose polygamy without explicit external support, the majority operated within enabling social structures.
- Mothers and friends are central figures in this support network, reflecting internalized patriarchal attitudes that justify or even encourage men's remarriage.
- The fact that over one-third faced no opposition underscores a lack of accountability and social permissiveness toward men's decisions to remarry.
- Overall, the findings suggest that polygamy is not merely an individual choice but often a collectively upheld practice, reinforced by family and community complicity.

Support To Husband For Getting Married The Second Time? [Second Wife Perspective]



Out of the 1089 second wife survey data collected

480 women i.e. 44% reported that husband was supported by his mother

399 women i.e. 39.6% reported that husband was supported by his father

285 women i.e. 26.2% reported that the husband did not receive any support from anyone

250 women i.e. 23.0% reported that husband was supported by friends

216 women i.e. 19.8% reported that husband was supported by others

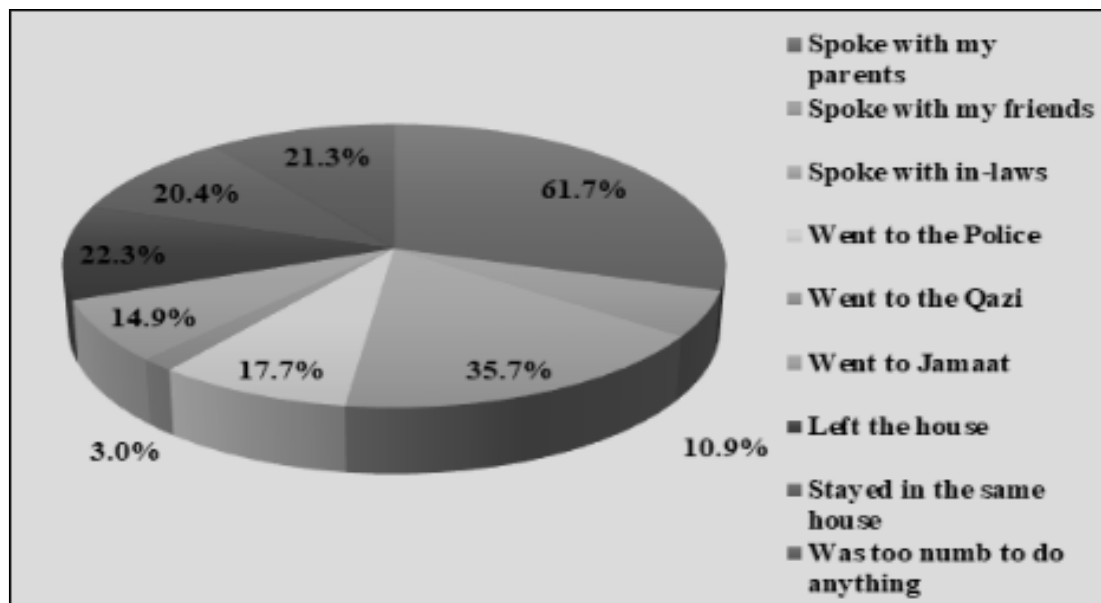
23 women i.e. 2.1% reported that husband was supported by first wife

Source of Support	Number of Women	Percentage	Observation
Mother	480	44.0%	Mothers emerged as the strongest supporters, reflecting how family elders—especially mothers—often play a central role in endorsing or arranging second marriages.
Father	399	39.6%	Nearly equal influence as mothers; suggests strong parental backing and acceptance of polygamy within traditional family structures.
No Support (self-decision)	285	26.2%	Indicates that over one-fourth of men pursued the second marriage independently, possibly without family consensus or approval.
Friends	250	23.0%	Peer influence is significant; social networks may normalize or encourage second marriages, especially in male-dominated circles.
Others (relatives, community figures, religious leaders, etc.)	216	19.8%	Highlights the extended community's role in legitimizing polygamy and influencing personal marital decisions.
First Wife	23	2.1%	Extremely rare; indicates minimal acceptance or consent from first wives, reinforcing the conflictual and unequal nature of polygamous arrangements.

The data indicates that second marriages are rarely isolated choices; instead, they are socially endorsed acts, heavily influenced by family elders and peer groups.

This suggests that cultural and familial acceptance of polygamy continues to sustain the practice, even when it may lead to emotional distress for the first wife and complex family dynamics.

Action After Knowing about Husband's Remarriage



Out of the 1419 first wife surveyed

876 women i.e 61.7% spoke to their parents

506 women i.e. 35.7% spoke to their in-laws

316 women 22.3% women left their house

302 women i.e. 21.3% of the woman were too numb to do anything

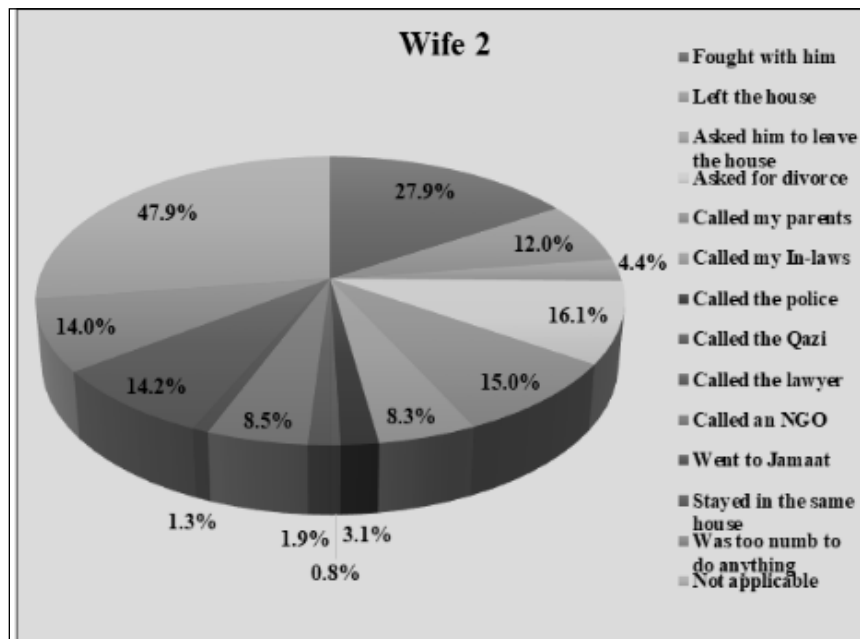
289 women i.e. 20.4% stayed in the same house

212 women Jamaat (14.9%)

42 Qazi (3.0%)

251 women i.e. 17.7% went to the police station

155 women i.e. 10.9% spoke to their friends



Out of the 1089 second wife surveyed

304 women i.e. 27.9% women fought with their husband

175 women i.e. 16% asked for a divorce

163 women i.e. 15% called their parents

155 women i.e. 14.2% stayed in the same house

152 women i.e. 14% of the woman were too numb to do anything

131 women i.e. 12% left the home

90 women i.e. 8.3% spoke with their in-laws

93 women i.e. 8.5% called the NGO

48 women i.e. 4% asked him to leave the home

14 women i.e. 1.3% went to the Jamaat

9 women i.e. 0.8% went to the Qazi

21 women i.e. 1.9% went to a lawyer

34 women i.e. 3.1% called the police station

47.9% NA

Action Taken	First Wife (%)	Second Wife (%)	Interpretation
Spoke to parents	61.7%	15%	The first instinct for first wives was to seek emotional and practical support from natal families, showing dependence and deep distress.
Spoke to in-laws	35.7%	8.3%	First wives tried to negotiate within the husband's family, while second wives had weaker in-law connections.
Left the house	22.3%	12%	Both groups experienced displacement, but first wives were almost twice as likely to leave, indicating their vulnerable status after the remarriage.
Too numb to react	21.3%	14%	Emotional paralysis was common, showing the shock and trauma associated with betrayal or unexpected polygamy.
Stayed in the same house	20.4%	14.2%	A significant portion stayed despite emotional conflict, possibly due to economic dependence or children.
Approached Jamaat / Qazi / lawyer	17.9% (14.9% Jamaat / 3.0% Qazi)	4% (1.3% Jamaat / 0.8% Qazi / 1.9% lawyer)	First wives were four times more likely to seek community or religious redress, showing social reliance on informal justice.
Went to police station	17.7%	3.1%	Very few women approached formal legal systems — fear, stigma, or lack of trust likely deterred them.
Spoke to friends	10.9%	—	Social sharing was limited, perhaps due to shame and stigma.
Fought with husband	—	27.9%	Second wives more often confronted the husband directly, suggesting greater assertiveness or immediacy of reaction.
Asked for divorce	—	16%	Indicates agency and disillusionment, though follow-up outcomes (granting of divorce) are unknown.
Called NGO	—	8.3%	Some second wives sought external institutional support, showing growing awareness of rights and resources.
Asked husband to leave home	—	4%	Reflects assertive resistance, albeit in a small minority.

Most first wives turned to parents (62%) or in-laws (36%) — reflecting reliance on family networks, not institutions. A few pursued legal channels (18% to Jamaat and 18% to police). 18% going to the police reflects limited but a strong belief in the ability of the state to address her issues. If the state

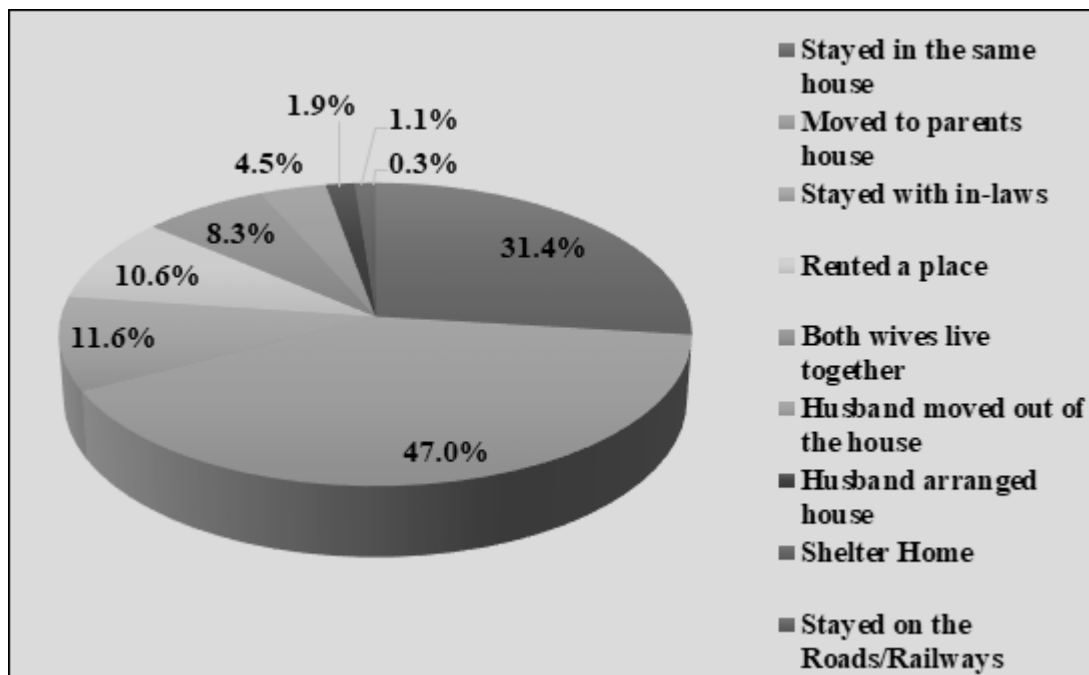
apparatus becomes more responsive, we would probably have more than 18% reaching out at the time of distress. But what will the state apparatus, especially the police do if there are no relevant laws safeguarding the women. Like we heard at the time when triple divorce was prevalent, ‘we cannot help because there is no law to prevent triple divorce.’ We hear that now for polygamy.

Nearly half (48%) of second wives already knew about the first marriage — awareness did not prevent distress. Their responses show more confrontation (28%) and demand for divorce (16%), indicating slightly higher assertive behaviour. Some engaged external actors (NGOs, lawyers, police), signalling emerging awareness of rights — though still limited.

Both groups experienced shock, emotional paralysis, and displacement. First wives reacted socially, turning inward to families and communities. Second wives reacted more personally, confronting husbands or seeking modern institutions.

The data reflects a deep emotional and structural vulnerability among both groups. Together, the responses show that polygamy triggers crisis, not choice, leaving both sets of women to navigate trauma with limited systemic support.

Residence of Wives after Husband's Remarriage



First wife survey data collected shows

667 women i.e. 47% moved to their parents' house

446 women i.e. 31.4% stayed in the same house

164 women i.e. 11.6% stayed with their in-laws

151 women i.e. 10.6 % rented a place

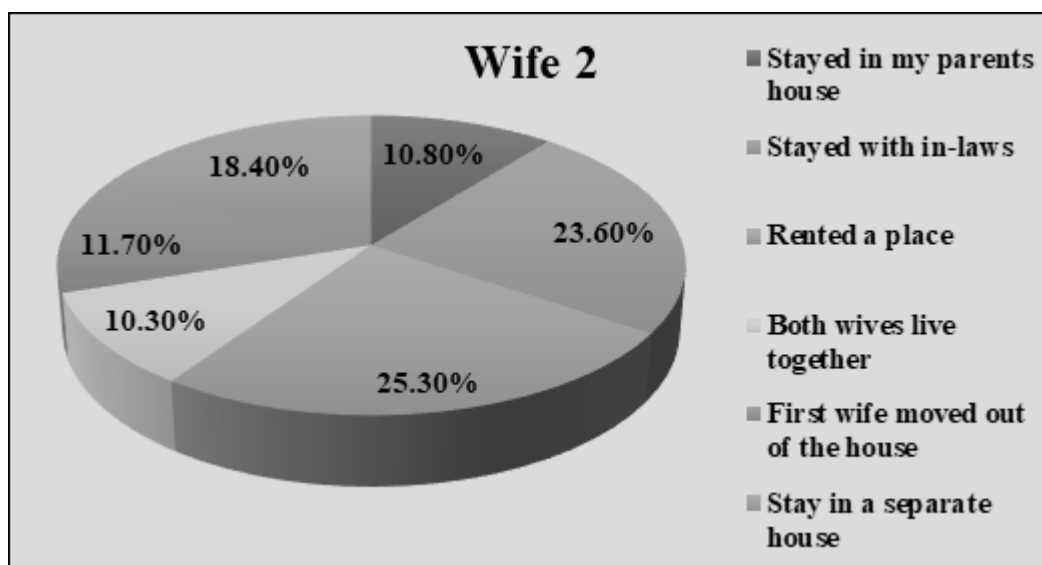
118 women i.e. 8.3% both wives lived together

64 women i.e. 4.5% husband moved out of the house

27 women i.e. 1.9% husband arranged for a house

16 women i.e. 1.1 % of them moved to stay in shelter homes or

4 women i.e. 0.3% lived on the roads/railway



Second wife survey data collected shows

275 women i.e. 25.3% rented a place

257 women i.e. 23.6% stayed with their in-laws

200 women i.e. 18.4% stayed in a separate house.

127 women i.e. 11.7% first wife move out of the house

118 women i.e. 10.8% of the women stayed in their parent's house

112 women i.e. 10.3% both wives lived together

Living Arrangement	First Wife (%)	Second Wife (%)	Interpretation
Moved to parents' house	47%	10.8%	A large share of first wives were displaced to their parents' homes, revealing economic dependence and social rejection post-remarriage.
Stayed in same house	31.4%	—	Some first wives retained their place in the marital home, possibly due to children or family support, but likely faced emotional distress.
Stayed with in-laws	11.6%	23.6%	Second wives were twice as likely to stay with in-laws, indicating they were often socially integrated into the husband's family, while first wives were excluded.
Rented a place	10.8%	25.3%	A higher proportion of second wives lived in rented accommodations, showing a shift toward establishing separate households.
Both wives lived together	8.3%	10.3%	A small but notable number of families practiced joint cohabitation, possibly due to financial limitations or community norms tolerating shared arrangements.
Husband moved out	4.5%	—	Indicates that in some cases, men separated themselves from both households, reflecting instability and avoidance of responsibility.
Husband arranged separate house	1.9%	18.4% (separate house)	More second wives had husband-arranged housing, suggesting preferential treatment or attempts to maintain secrecy.
Stayed in shelter/roads	1.4%	—	Reflects extreme marginalization and vulnerability faced by a small fraction of first wives after being displaced.
First wife moved out (reported by second wives)	—	11.7%	Confirms the displacement trend observed among first wives.

Nearly half of first wives (47%) were forced to move to their parents' homes, while most second wives (67%) found housing either rented, with in-laws, or arranged by the husband. Second wives were more likely to receive new housing or integration, showing social and material preference for the newer marriage.

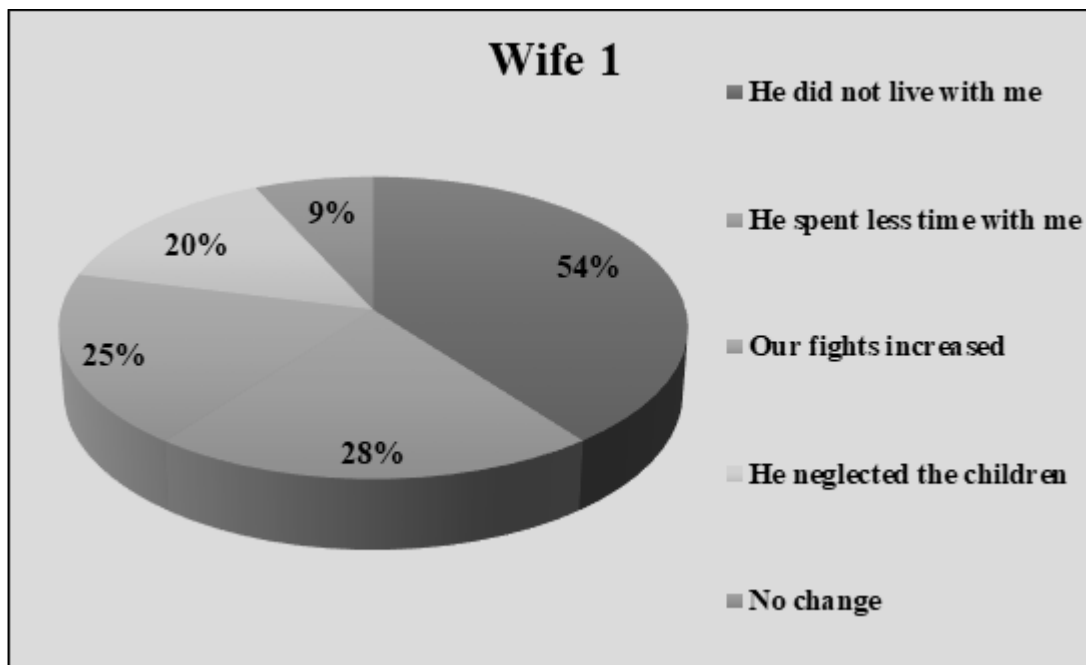
A minority of first wives [1.4 %] faced homelessness or shelter living, showing the severe fallout of abandonment. Again a small minority of both wives living with each other (8–10%). A small number of polygamous unions are residually shared, likely due to economic necessity rather than harmony.

First wives experience displacement, insecurity, and neglect, often returning to natal homes or worse. Second wives receive housing, support, and social legitimacy, yet often within constrained or dependent conditions.

CHAPTER 06

Impact of Polgamy

Impact on Relationship



Out of the 1419 first wife surveyed

54% of the husband did not live with their first wife

28% husband spent less time with the wife

25% agreed that the fights had increased between them

20% of the wife felt that the husband neglected the children

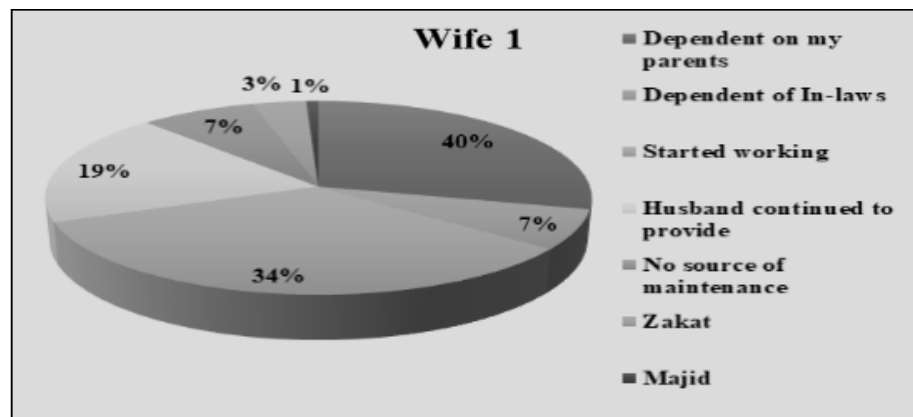
9% of the wife said that there was no change in the relationship

The majority (82%) of first wives reported negative changes — separation, neglect, or conflict — after their husbands remarried. The physical absence (54%) underscores that remarriage often leads to abandonment, not just emotional distance.

Only 1 in 10 women felt no change, showing that stability post-remarriage is rare.

Relationship Impact	% of First Wives	Interpretation
Husband stopped living with first wife	54%	Indicates severe marital breakdown — more than half of the men physically and emotionally distanced themselves post-remarriage.
Husband spent less time with first wife	28%	Reflects partial withdrawal — emotional neglect and reduced companionship.
Fights increased between them	25%	Suggests heightened conflict, insecurity, and emotional strain due to the husband's remarriage.
Husband neglected the children	20%	Points to broader family impact — the husband's divided attention affected parenting and children's well-being.
No change in relationship	9%	A very small minority experienced continuity, possibly due to acceptance, separate arrangements, or emotional detachment.

Wives Economic Dependency



Out of the 1419 first wife surveyed

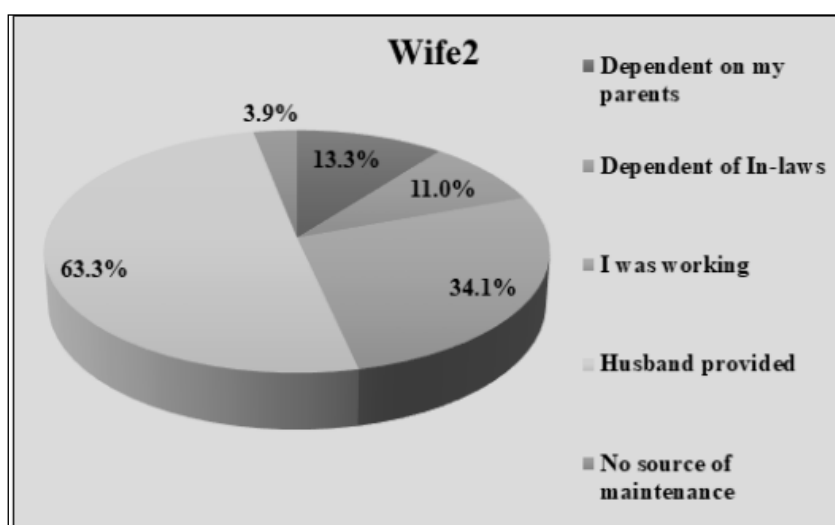
40% of the women are dependent on their parents

34% of the wife started working

19% of the husband continued to provide

11% of the wife had no source of maintenance so took help from jamaat (3%) & masjid (1%)

7% are dependent on In-laws



Out of the 1089 second wife surveyed

63.3% of the women are provided maintenance by their husband

34.1% of the wife are working

13.3% women are depended on their parents

11% are dependent on In-laws

3.9% of the wife had no source of maintenance

First Wives (out of 1,419 surveyed):

- 40% – Dependent on their parents
- 34% – Started working to support themselves
- 19% – Husband continued to provide maintenance
- 11% – Had no stable source of maintenance; sought help from:
 - Jamaat: 3%
 - Masjid: 1%
- 7% – Dependent on in-laws

Second Wives (out of 1,089 surveyed):

- 63.3% – Provided for by their husband
- 34.1% – Working and self-supporting
- 13.3% – Dependent on parents
- 11% – Dependent on in-laws
- 3.9% – No source of maintenance

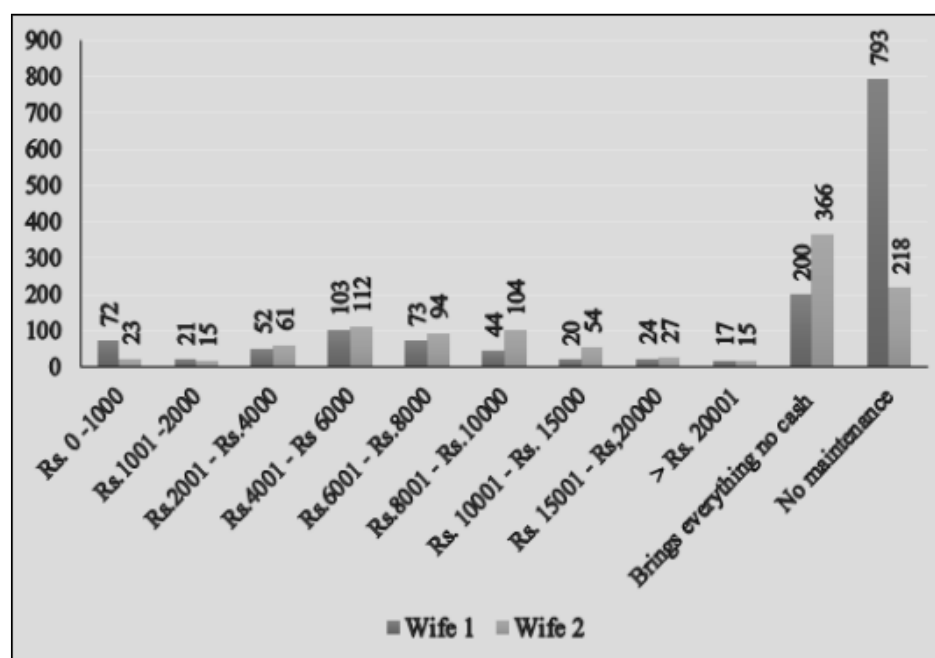
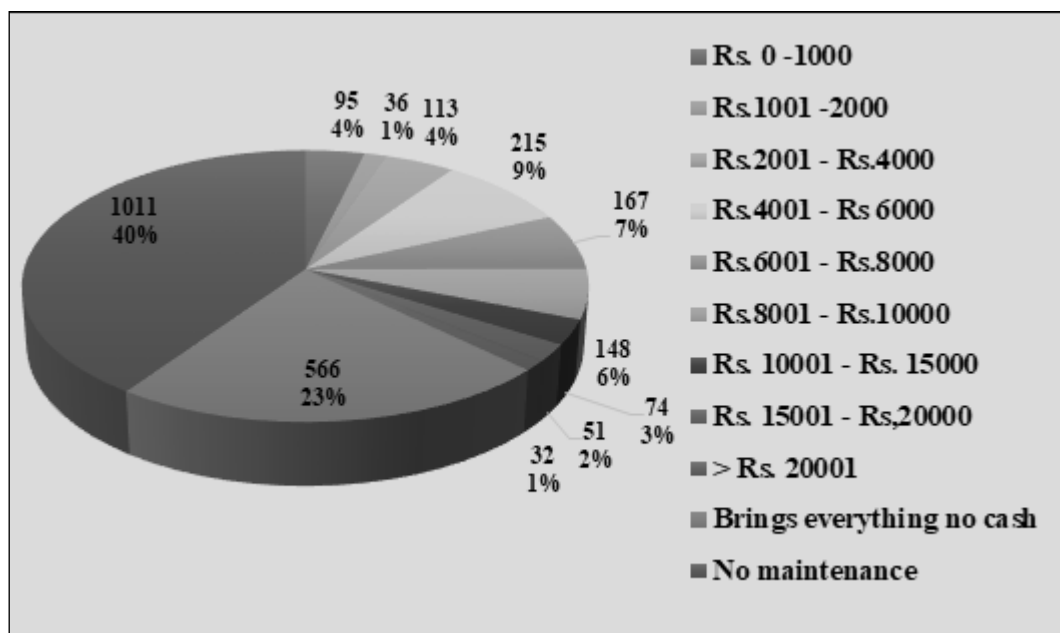
The data highlights a stark contrast in economic dependency between first and second wives:

First wives tend to face greater financial vulnerability after their husband's second marriage. A large proportion — 40% — rely on their parents, and only 19% continue to receive maintenance from their husbands. About 34% were compelled to start working, indicating a shift toward economic self-reliance driven by necessity rather than choice. A small fraction (11%) depends on community aid from jamaat or masjid, underscoring a lack of formal support systems.

Second wives, on the other hand, are generally more financially supported by their husbands — 63.3% receive maintenance from them. Around 34.1% are employed, showing a similar participation in work as first wives but likely with more stability. Only 3.9% report having no source of maintenance, much lower than first wives.

Overall, the figures reveal that first wives experience a significant economic setback after polygamy, often becoming dependent or entering the workforce out of compulsion, while second wives tend to receive more consistent financial support from their husbands. This pattern points to an unequal distribution of resources and responsibilities between the two marriages.

Monthly Maintenance By Husband



Out of the 2508 women surveyed

1011 women (1st wife-793 & 2nd wife- 218) i.e. 40% did not provide maintenance

566 women (1st wife-200 & 2nd wife-366) i.e. 23% had their husband buy everything required for the house but did not give cash

131 women (1st wife-93 & 2nd wife-38) i.e. 5% received maintenance below 2000/- per month

113 women (1st wife-52 & 2nd wife-61) i.e. 4% received maintenance between 2000/- to Rs.4000/- per month

215 women (1st wife-103 & 2nd wife-112) i.e. 9% received maintenance between 4000/- to 6000/- per month

167 women (1st wife-73 & 2nd wife-94) i.e. 7% received maintenance between 6000/- to 8000/- per month

148 women (1st wife-44 & 2nd wife-104) i.e. 6% received maintenance between 8000/- to 10000/- per month

157 women (1st wife-61 & 2nd wife-96) i.e. 6% received maintenance over 10000/- per month

Maintenance Type / Amount	Total Women	%	First Wife	Second Wife
No maintenance	1,011	40%	793	218
Husband buys household needs (no cash)	566	23%	200	366
Below ₹2,000/month	131	5%	93	38
₹2,000 – ₹4,000/month	113	4%	52	61
₹4,000 – ₹6,000/month	215	9%	103	112
₹6,000 – ₹8,000/month	167	7%	73	94
₹8,000 – ₹10,000/month	148	6%	44	104
Above ₹10,000/month	157	6%	61	96

The data shows that financial neglect is widespread among both first and second wives, but the burden falls more heavily on first wives.

40% of women (1,011 total) receive no maintenance at all, with first wives forming the majority (793).

23% say their husbands buy household items instead of giving cash — a form of control that limits women's financial autonomy.

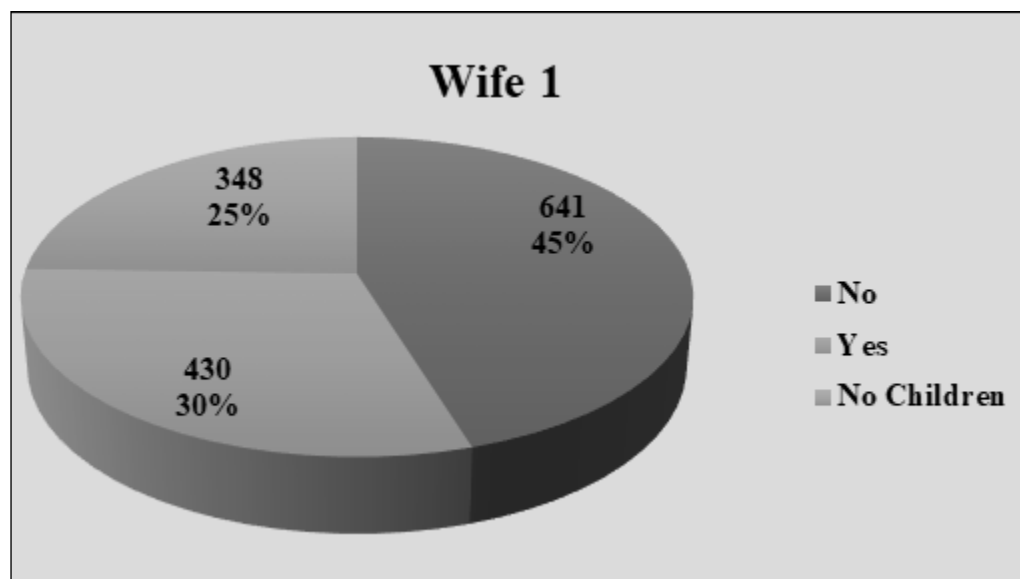
Only 32% receive regular cash maintenance, and within this group, most receive very small amounts:

- 5% below ₹2,000/month
- 4% between ₹2,000–₹4,000
- Only 6% receive more than ₹10,000/month.

Second wives are more likely to receive moderate to higher levels of maintenance, while first wives dominate the “no maintenance” category.

The findings reflect deep economic inequality between first and second wives and show that a large proportion of women—especially first wives—lack consistent financial support, underscoring systemic neglect and dependence within polygamous marital arrangements.

Maintenance of Children



Out of the 1419 first wife surveyed

641 women i.e. 45% were not provided maintenance for their children

430 women i.e. 32% were provided maintenance for their children

348 women i.e. 24% women do not have children

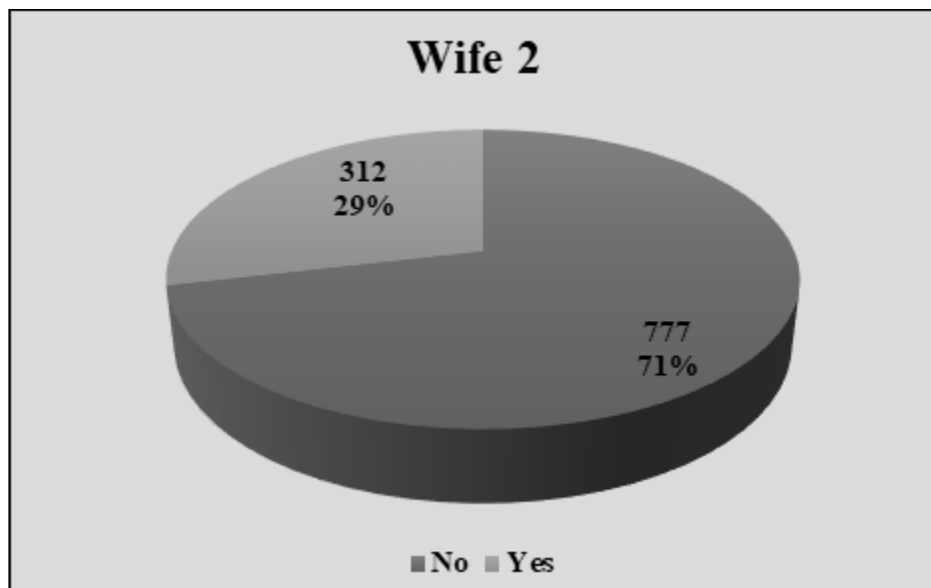
Category	Number of Women	Percentage
Not provided maintenance for children	641	45%
Provided maintenance for children	430	30%
Do not have children	348	24%

Maintenance for Children (First Wives)

Among the 1,419 first wives surveyed, nearly half (45%) reported that their husbands did not provide maintenance for their children after the second marriage. Only 30% said their husbands continued to support their children financially. Meanwhile, 24% of the women did not have children.

This data indicates that a substantial number of men discontinue financial responsibility toward children from their first marriage once they remarry. The lack of maintenance not only deepens the economic insecurity of the first wife but also affects the well-being and stability of the children, highlighting a critical gap in accountability and social support mechanisms for first families in polygamous contexts.

Going Back to First Wife



Out of the 1089 second wife surveyed

312 women i.e. 29% said that their husband abandoned them and went back to the first wife

777 women i.e. 71% said that their husband did not abandon them and go to the first wife

29% (312 women) — said their husband abandoned them and went back to the first wife

71% (777 women) — said their husband did not abandon them

Nearly one in three second wives report being abandoned by their husband, who returned to his first marriage. This indicates that second marriages often lack long-term stability and security for women. While most second wives (71%) continue in the relationship, a significant 29% experience abandonment—leaving them vulnerable both emotionally and economically, especially since many lack legal protection or consistent maintenance.

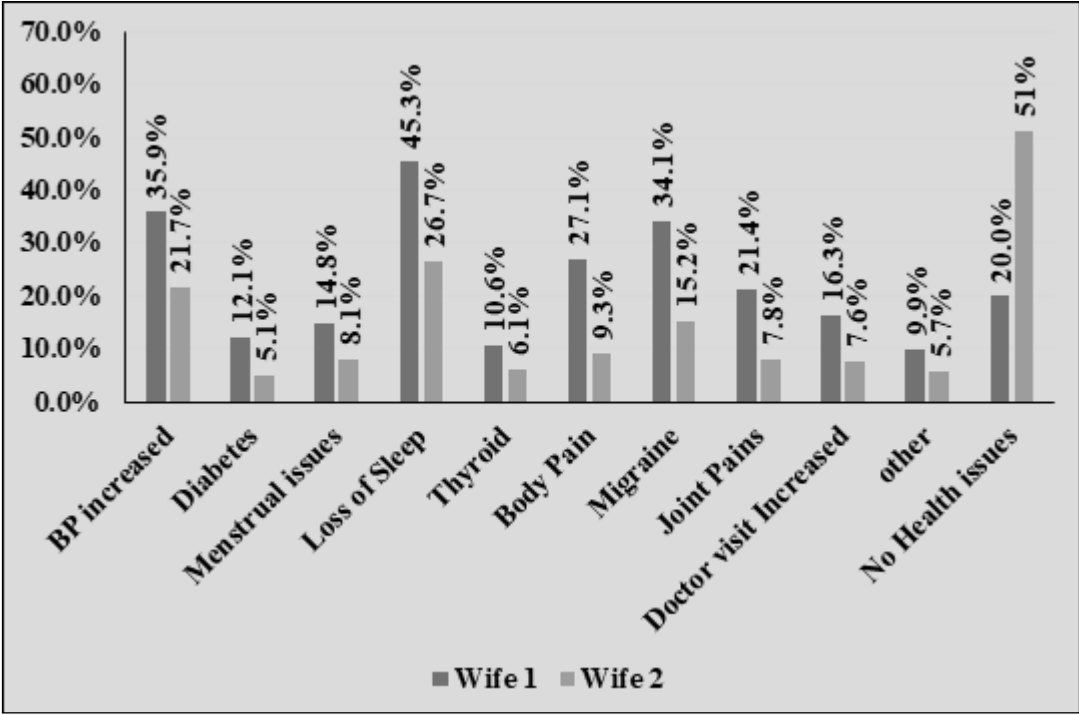
Physical Health of the Wives

Out of 1419 First wife

- 510 women i.e. 35.9% reported high blood pressure
- 171 women i.e. 12.1% reported having diabetes
- 210 women i.e. 14.8 % reported having menstrual issues
- 643 women i.e. 45.3% reported loss of sleep
- 150 women i.e. 10.6% reported having thyroid
- 385 women i.e. 27.1% reported body pain
- 484 women i.e. 34.1% reported having migraine
- 303 women i.e. 21.4% reported joint pain
- 232 women i.e. 16.3% reported that visit to the doctor has increased
- 141 women i.e. 9.9% reported other medical issues
- 284 women i.e. 20% had no health issues

Out of 1089 Second wife

- 236 women i.e. 21.7% reported high blood pressure
- 56 women i.e. 5.1% reported diabetes
- 88 women i.e. 8.1% reported menstrual issues
- 291 women i.e. 26.7% reported loss of sleep
- 66 women i.e. 6.1% reported thyroid
- 101 women i.e. 9.3% reported body pain
- 166 women i.e. 15.2% reported migraine
- 85 women i.e. 7.8% reported joint pain
- 83 women i.e. 7.6% reported that visit to doctor increased
- 62 women 5.7% reported other medical issues
- 555 women i.e. 51% had no health issues



Health Condition	First Wife (%)	Second Wife (%)	Observation
High Blood Pressure	35.9	21.7	Stress and anxiety due to emotional neglect likely contribute to higher BP among first wives.
Diabetes	12.1	5.1	First wives show more than double the rate, suggesting chronic stress and lifestyle impact.
Menstrual Issues	14.8	8.1	Indicative of stress-induced hormonal imbalance among first wives.
Loss of Sleep	45.3	26.7	Nearly half of first wives report insomnia — a direct sign of psychological distress.
Thyroid Problems	10.6	6.1	Stress-related endocrine issues more prevalent among first wives.
Body Pain	27.1	9.3	Somatic symptoms like pain may reflect emotional and physical exhaustion.
Migraine	34.1	15.2	Emotional tension and anxiety are possible triggers for frequent migraines.
Joint Pain	21.4	7.8	Physical strain possibly linked to increased domestic workload and stress.
Increased Doctor Visits	16.3	7.6	Indicates greater health deterioration and medical dependence among first wives.

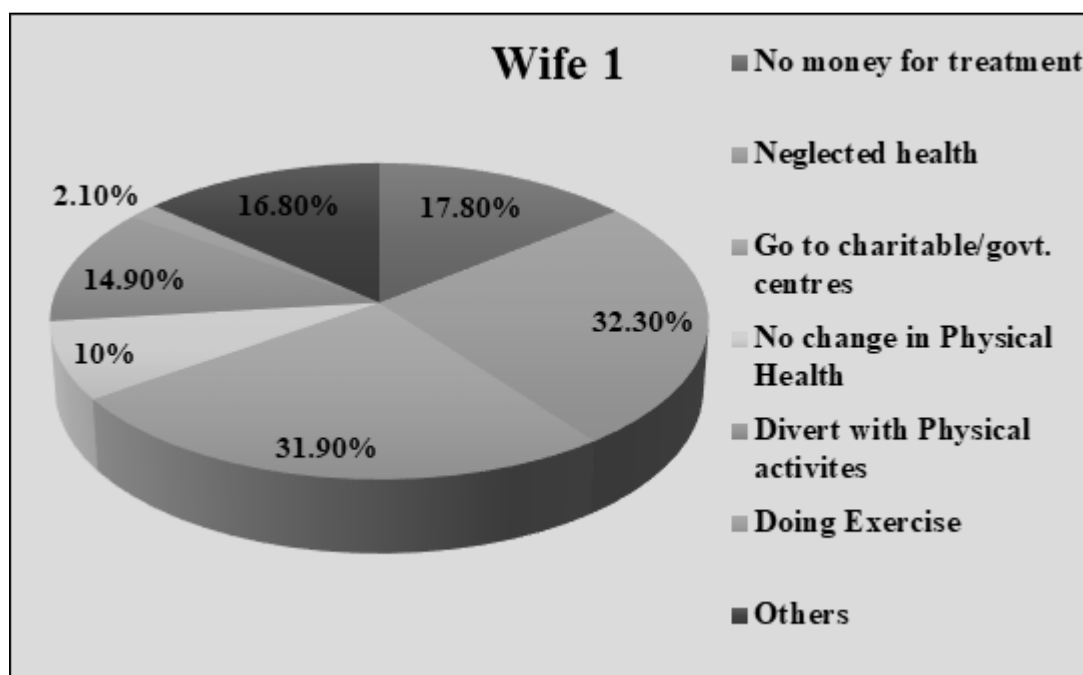
Health Condition	First Wife (%)	Second Wife (%)	Observation
Other Medical Issues	9.9	5.7	Reflects overall higher vulnerability of first wives.
No Health Issues	20	51	Second wives are over twice as likely to report no health problems.

The data reveals a significant disparity in physical health outcomes between first and second wives, indicating that the emotional and social consequences of polygamy translate into tangible health impacts, especially for the first wife.

- First wives are consistently more affected across every health indicator, suggesting that emotional distress, insecurity, and neglect following the husband's second marriage have direct physiological consequences.
- The high rates of hypertension (35.9%) and sleep loss (45.3%) strongly imply psychosomatic stress linked to marital strain.
- In contrast, second wives report comparatively better health, likely due to greater attention, emotional validation, and social status during the early years of their marriage.
- The gap in reported "no health issues" (20% vs 51%) highlights a stark contrast in overall well-being.

Polygamous marriage exerts a disproportionate toll on the physical health of first wives, reflecting how emotional deprivation and competition translate into chronic illness. The findings indicate that polygamy not only destabilizes marital harmony but also undermines women's physical well-being, creating a cycle of stress, illness, and medical dependency.

Physical Health Care Measures by First Wives



Out of the 1419 first wife surveyed

459 women i.e. 32.3% women neglected their health

453 women i.e. 31.9% visited charitable and government health centres for their treatment

252 women i.e. 17.8% of the women did not have money to undergo treatment

239 women i.e. 16.8 % used other alternatives to take care of their physical health

212 women i.e. 14.9% women diverted their minds to physical activities to help cope the stress

142 women i.e. 10% did not experience any physical health issues

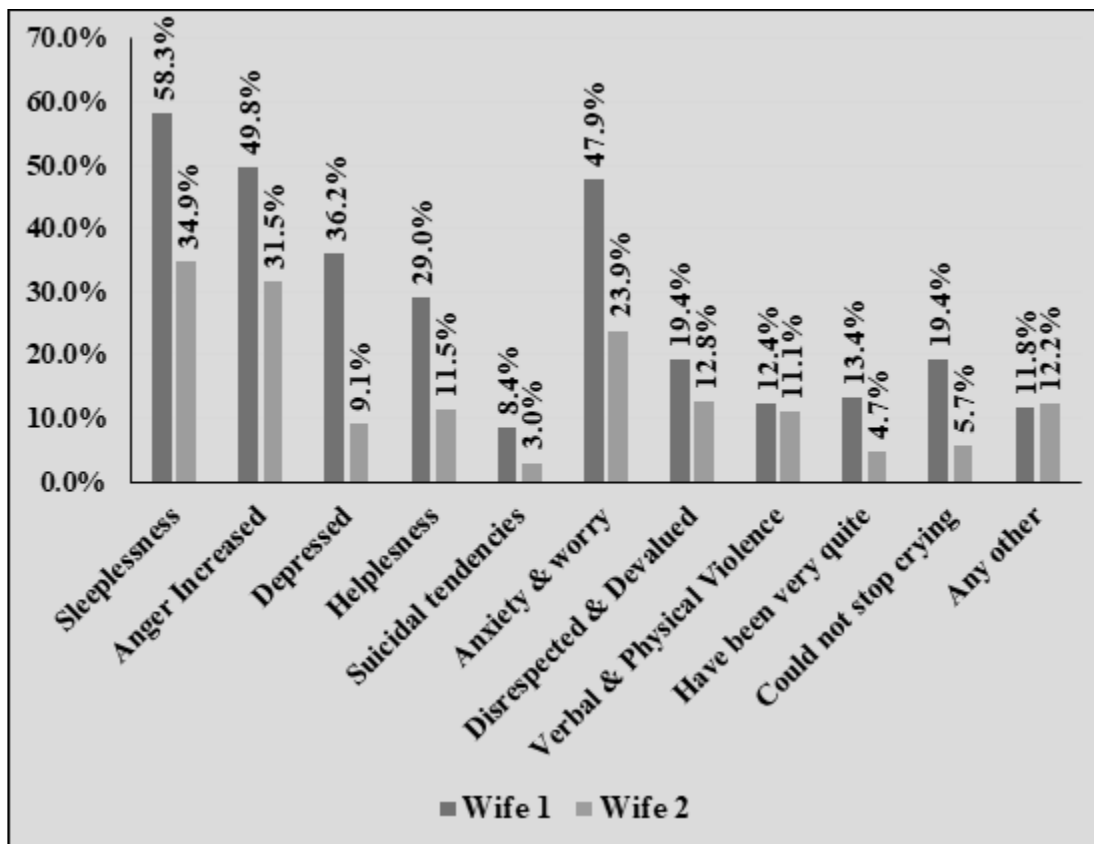
30 women i.e. 2.10% did exercise.

Health Care Action	Percentage
Neglected the health	32.3
Visited charitable/government health centres	31.9
Could not afford treatment	17.8
Used home remedies	16.8
Engaged in physical activities to cope with stress	14.9
Did not experience any health issue	10
Did exercise	2.1

1. Neglect of Health is Most Common: The largest proportion (32.3%) reported neglecting their health, indicating limited prioritization or access.
2. Dependence on Public/Charitable Health Services: Almost equally high (31.9%) visited government or charitable health centres, showing reliance on affordable care.
3. Financial Constraints: 17.8% could not afford treatment, highlighting economic barriers.
4. Home Remedies & Coping Strategies: 16.8% used home remedies, and 14.9% engaged in physical activity to manage stress, indicating informal/self-care methods are common.
5. Exercise is Least Practiced: Only 2.1% reported doing regular exercise, suggesting low preventive health behavior.
6. Some Reported No Health Issues: 10% did not face any health issues, possibly due to youth, lifestyle, or underreporting.

Observation: Overall, the data suggests that economic factors, access to care, and self-managed solutions play a major role in how individuals deal with health, while preventive behaviors like exercise remain minimal.

Mental Health



1419 First wife surveyed

827 women i.e. 58.3% - sleeplessness

707 women 49.8% - anger increased

679 women i.e. 47.9% - anxiety and worry

514 women i.e. 36.2% - depressed

412 women i.e. 29% - helpless

275 women i.e. 19.4% - felt disrespected and devalued

275 women i.e. 19.4% - could not stop crying

190 women i.e. 13.4% have been very quiet

119 women i.e. 8.4% - had suicidal thoughts

176 women i.e. 12.4% shocked by verbal and physical violence

167 women i.e. 11.8% had other impacts

1089 Second wife surveyed

380 women i.e. 34.9% - sleeplessness

343 women i.e. 31.5% - anger increased

260 women i.e. 23.9% - anxiety and worry

139 women i.e. 12.8% felt disrespected and devalued

133 women i.e. 12.2% had other impacts

125 women i.e. 11.5% - helplessness

121 women i.e. 11.1% - shocked by verbal and physical violence

99 women i.e. 9.1% - depressed

62 women ie. 5.7% - could not stop crying

51 women i.e. 4.7% - have been very quiet

33 women i.e. 3% - suicidal

Mental Health Indicator	First Wife (n=1419)	%	Second Wife (n=1089)	%	Observation
Sleeplessness	827	58.3%	380	34.9%	Emotional distress and anxiety are much higher among first wives.
Anger Increased	707	49.8%	343	31.5%	Frustration and resentment are stronger in first wives due to neglect.
Anxiety and Worry	679	47.9%	260	23.9%	First wives report double the anxiety levels compared to second wives.
Depression	514	36.2%	99	9.1%	Clear psychological toll on first wives due to emotional displacement.
Helplessness	412	29.0%	125	11.5%	Reflects powerlessness and lack of control over marital decisions.
Felt Disrespected & Devalued	275	19.4%	139	12.8%	Feelings of lowered self-worth appear in both groups but are deeper among first wives.
Could Not Stop Crying	275	19.4%	62	5.7%	Emotional breakdown more common among first wives.

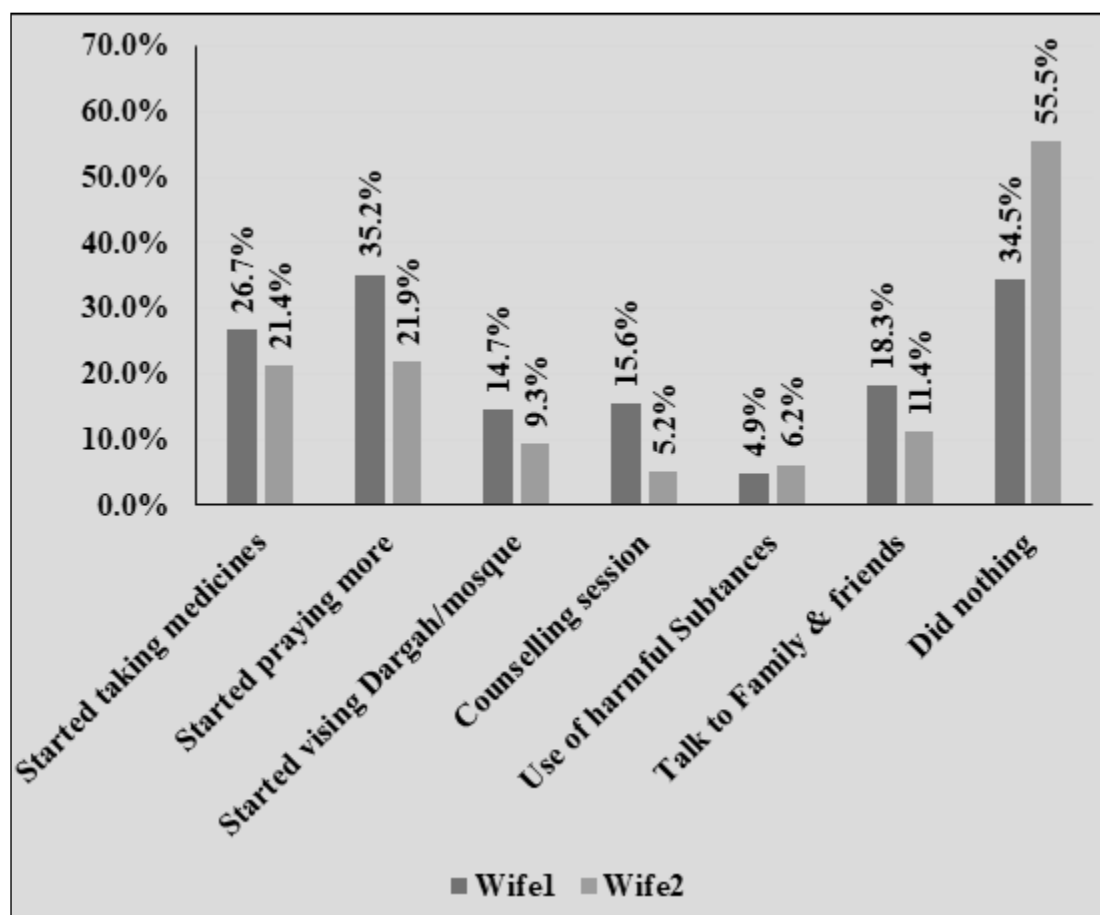
Mental Health Indicator	First Wife (n=1419)	%	Second Wife (n=1089)	%	Observation
Been Very Quiet / Withdrawn	190	13.4%	51	4.7%	Signs of social withdrawal and possible depression.
Suicidal Thoughts	119	8.4%	33	3.0%	Alarming mental health risk, nearly 3x higher in first wives.
Shocked by Verbal/ Physical Violence	176	12.4%	121	11.1%	Both groups face abuse, but first wives slightly more affected.
Other Impacts	167	11.8%	133	12.2%	Minor difference; suggests other stress-related or psychosomatic issues.

- Across every mental health indicator, first wives show substantially higher distress levels than second wives.
- The most severe disparities are seen in depression (36.2% vs 9.1%), sleeplessness (58.3% vs 34.9%), and anxiety (47.9% vs 23.9%), reflecting the psychological trauma of emotional rejection after the husband's remarriage.
- Suicidal ideation (8.4%) among first wives is a major concern, highlighting the mental health crisis linked to polygamy.
- Although second wives also experience stress, their relatively lower rates indicate greater emotional security in early stages of the relationship.
- Overall, the data underscores that polygamous marriages severely affect women's mental well-being, with first wives bearing the brunt of emotional, psychological, and social harm.

Mental health issues are much more prevalent among first wives than second wives in almost all categories.

Sleeplessness, anger, and anxiety are the most common mental health challenges, affecting over 70% of women overall.

Mental Health Care Measures



As per the data collected shows that

Out of 1419 first wife surveyed

26.7% started to take medicines

35.2% started praying more

14.7% started visiting dargah/mosque

15.6% took counselling session

4.9% used harmful substances

18.3% talked to family and friends

34.5% % did nothing

Out of 1089 second wife surveyed

21.4% started to take medicines

21.9% started praying more

9.3% started visiting dargah/mosque

5.2% counselling

6.2% use of harmful substances

11.4% talk to family and friends

55.5% did nothing

Coping / Care Measure	First Wife (n=1419)	%	Second Wife (n=1089)	%	Observation
Started Taking Medicines	379	26.7%	233	21.4%	Indicates medical intervention; slightly higher among first wives due to greater psychological distress.
Started Praying More	499	35.2%	239	21.9%	Faith-based coping is the most common response, especially among first wives seeking emotional relief through spirituality.
Visiting Dargah/ Mosque	209	14.7%	101	9.3%	Religious visits reflect spiritual dependency and search for comfort.
Counselling Sessions	222	15.6%	57	5.2%	Very few women seek professional help; indicates stigma or lack of access to mental health services.
Use of Harmful Substances	70	4.9%	68	6.2%	Slightly higher among second wives — possibly reflecting guilt, insecurity, or coping through harmful means.
Talked to Family/ Friends	260	18.3%	124	11.4%	Social support systems more utilized by first wives; second wives may have weaker family backing.
Did Nothing	490	34.5%	605	55.5%	Over half of second wives took no measures; shows emotional suppression or normalization of distress.

Faith-based coping dominates: A significant portion of women, especially first wives (35.2%), turn to religion and prayer as a primary mental health strategy. This suggests that spirituality provides emotional comfort in the absence of formal mental health support.

Low professional intervention: Only 15.6% of first wives and 5.2% of second wives sought counselling or therapy, highlighting limited awareness, access, and acceptance of mental health services.

Medical dependency: Over one-fourth of first wives (26.7%) use medication, reflecting chronic anxiety, depression, or insomnia, often requiring pharmacological support.

High inaction rate: Alarmingly, 34.5% of first wives and 55.5% of second wives did nothing to address their mental distress. This suggests a severe gap in mental health outreach, stigma, and possibly acceptance of suffering as fate.

Use of harmful substances: Though relatively low, 4.9%–6.2% resorting to harmful coping reflects self-destructive behavior arising from unaddressed emotional pain.

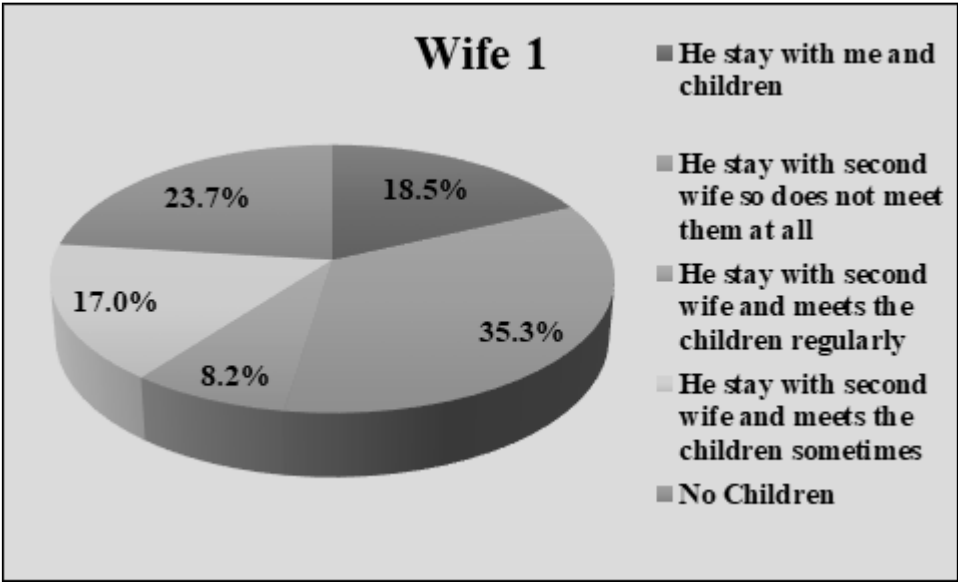
The data reveals a major mental health crisis among women in polygamous marriages, with spiritual coping outweighing professional or therapeutic help.

First wives appear more proactive in seeking relief, but both groups face barriers to mental healthcare such as stigma, lack of access, and normalization of emotional suffering.

The findings highlight the urgent need for:

- Culturally sensitive mental health programs targeting polygamous households,
- Community-based counselling and awareness, and
- Integration of faith leaders in mental health advocacy to bridge the gap between spirituality and psychological support.

Impact On Children



As per the survey data of the first wife shows that 18.5% of the husband stays with the wife and the children, 35.3% husband lives the second wife and does not meet them at all, 8.2% says that the husband lives with the second wife but meets the children regularly, 17% women husband stays with the second wife and comes to meet the children sometimes. 23.7% women said that they do not have children.

Husband’s Living Situation / Contact with Children	% of First Wives
Stays with wife and children	18.5
Lives with second wife, does not meet children	35.3
Lives with second wife, meets children regularly	8.2
Lives with second wife, meets children sometimes	17.0
Wife does not have children	23.7

35.3% of husbands live with the second wife and do not meet their children, indicating a major drop in involvement. Only 18.5% stay with the first wife and children, maintaining full presence. About 17% meet children sometimes, and 8.2% meet them regularly despite living with the second wife.

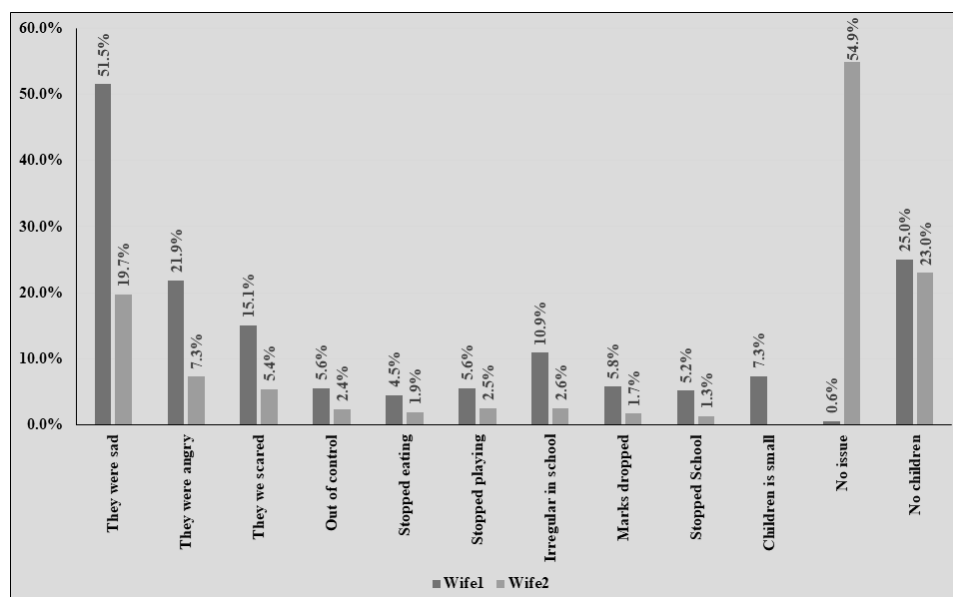
Children's Reaction on Father's Remarriage

Out of 1419 first wife surveyed

- 51.1% of their children were sad
- 21.9% of their children were angry
- 15.1% of their children were scared
- 5.6% of their children were out of their control
- 4.5% stopped eating
- 5.6% stopped playing
- 10.9% of their children were irregular in school
- 5.8% of their children had their marks dropped
- 5.2% stopped going to school
- 0.6% did not face any issue
- 23.8% had no children
- 7.3% children were too small

Out of 1089 second wife surveyed

- 19.7% of their children were sad
- 7.3% were angry
- 5.4% were scared
- 2.4% were out of control
- 1.9% stopped eating
- 2.5% stopped playing
- 2.6% irregular in school
- 1.7% school marks dropped
- 1.3% stopped going to school
- 23% had no children
- 54.9% did not face any issue



Children's Reaction	First Wife (n=1419)	%	Second Wife (n=1089)	%	Observation
Sad	725	51.1%	215	19.7%	Sadness is the most common reaction; children of first wives are far more affected emotionally.
Angry	311	21.9%	80	7.3%	Feelings of anger and betrayal are stronger among first wife's children, reflecting deep emotional hurt.
Scared / Fearful	214	15.1%	59	5.4%	Indicates emotional insecurity and anxiety due to family disruption.
Out of Control (Behavioural Issues)	80	5.6%	26	2.4%	Behavioural instability seen more among first wife's children.
Stopped Eating	64	4.5%	21	1.9%	Emotional shock affecting appetite and health.
Stopped Playing	80	5.6%	27	2.5%	Withdrawal from social and playful activities.
Irregular in School	155	10.9%	28	2.6%	School attendance disrupted, indicating emotional distraction.
Drop in Marks	82	5.8%	18	1.7%	Academic performance negatively affected by emotional stress.
Stopped Going to School	74	5.2%	14	1.3%	Extreme response indicating deep trauma or neglect.

Children's Reaction	First Wife (n=1419)	%	Second Wife (n=1089)	%	Observation
Did Not Face Any Issue	9	0.6%	598	54.9%	A majority of second wives' children unaffected, likely due to being unaware or too young.
Had No Children	338	23.8%	251	23%	Similar proportions of respondents without children.
Children Too Small	104	7.3%	—	—	Indicates very young children unable to comprehend the situation.

Emotional Impact Strongest Among First Wife's Children:

Over half (51.1%) of the first wife's children felt sad, and nearly one-fourth (21.9%) expressed anger. This demonstrates emotional shock, betrayal, and confusion when learning about their father's second marriage.

Psychological and Behavioural Distress:

15.1% felt scared, showing emotional insecurity. 5.6% became out of control, and 5.6% stopped playing, reflecting withdrawal and instability. Indicators like irregular school attendance (10.9%), drop in marks (5.8%), and school dropout (5.2%) highlight educational disruption as a result of emotional distress.

Contrast with Second Wife's Children:

A significant 54.9% of second wives' children faced no issues, likely because many were too young or socially conditioned to accept the marital situation. Emotional reactions such as sadness (19.7%) and anger (7.3%) were much less common.

Educational and Developmental Consequences:

Among first wives, nearly one in five children showed some form of school disturbance — absenteeism, falling grades, or dropping out — indicating the long-term psychosocial effects of marital instability on children.

The data reveals that children of first wives bear the deepest emotional and behavioural scars of polygamy. Feelings of sadness, anger, and fear dominate their responses, often leading to school irregularities and withdrawal from normal life activities.

In contrast, children of second wives appear relatively unaffected — either due to age, unawareness, or greater family harmony within the newer marital unit.

This points to a generational impact of polygamy, where children's emotional stability and academic performance are compromised, especially in families where the first marriage is disrupted.

Psychological Implications for Children in Polygamous Families

The emotional and behavioural reactions of children, especially those from the first wife's household, point toward deep and long-term psychological consequences that go beyond immediate distress.

1. Emotional Insecurity and Loss of Trust

Children who discovered that their father had remarried often experience confusion, betrayal, and loss of trust — not only toward the father but also toward family relationships in general. This early experience of emotional instability can make them fearful of abandonment and hesitant to form trusting relationships later in life.

2. Anxiety, Depression, and Withdrawal

The high proportion of children who felt sad (51.1%), angry (21.9%), and scared (15.1%) reflects the onset of stress-related symptoms. Many become quiet or withdrawn, internalizing pain that can lead to childhood depression or anxiety disorders if left unaddressed.

3. Behavioural Challenges

With 5.6% of first wife's children described as “out of control”, the data suggests a link between family conflict and behavioural problems such as aggression, irritability, or defiance. These are typical coping mechanisms in children struggling with emotional neglect and divided parental attention.

4. Academic Disruption and Cognitive Impact

The findings that 10.9% were irregular in school, 5.8% saw a drop in marks, and 5.2% stopped schooling indicate that emotional distress has direct academic consequences. Stress, lack of concentration, and low motivation reduce their ability to perform, showing how emotional trauma spills over into cognitive functioning.

5. Impaired Family Bonding and Identity Confusion

Children caught between two family units often experience identity conflicts — unsure of where they belong or whom to trust. This weakens parent-child bonding, particularly with the father, and may lead to resentment, insecurity, or social withdrawal. In adulthood, such children may struggle with relationship stability and emotional regulation.

6. Contrast with Second Wife's Children

The majority (54.9%) of second wives' children did not face visible issues, possibly because they were younger, unaware of the previous marriage, or grew up in a more emotionally stable environment. However, this does not rule out latent effects, such as confusion or guilt, once they become aware of the family dynamics.

The data highlights that polygamy deeply impacts children's psychological development, particularly those from disrupted first marriages. The combination of emotional loss, insecurity, and social confusion can lead to long-term emotional scars, affecting their confidence, learning, and capacity to form stable relationships.

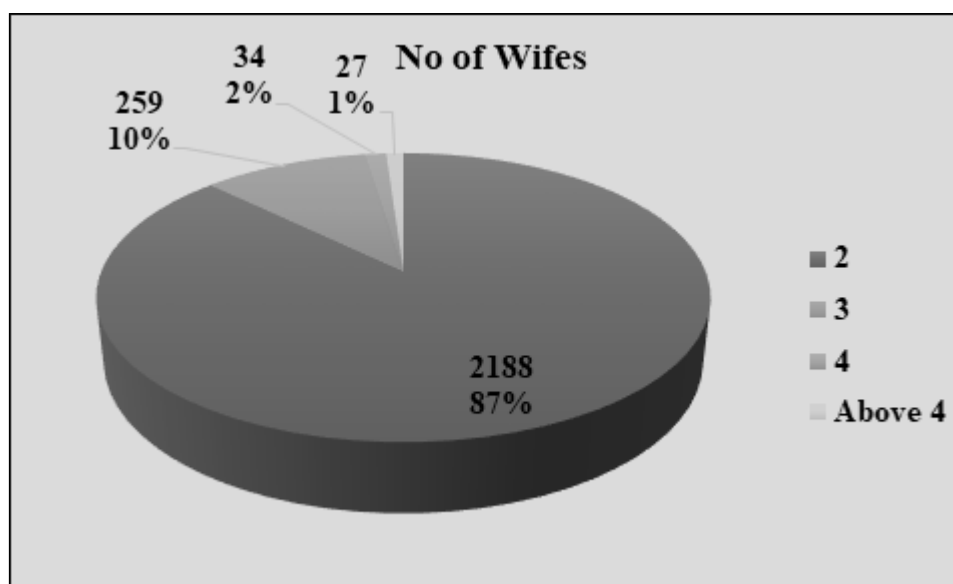
There is an urgent need for:

- Family counselling and child support programs in polygamous communities,
- School-based emotional well-being interventions, and
- Parenting education to help fathers maintain emotional connection and stability across families.

CHAPTER 07

Legal Protection Against Polygamy

Number of Wives



Out of the 2508 women surveyed

2188 women i.e. 87% reported that their husbands have 2 wives

259 women i.e. 10 % reported that their husbands had 3 wives

34 women i.e. 2% reported that their husbands have 4 wives

27 women i.e. 1% reported that their husbands had more than 4 wives

Number of Wives	Number of Women	Percentage	Observation
2 wives	2188	87%	Majority of women reported that their husbands had only one additional wife. This indicates that two-wife marriages are the dominant form of polygamy in the sample.
3 wives	259	10%	A smaller but notable group of men had three wives, showing extended polygamous arrangements exist in some families.
4 wives	34	2%	Only a small fraction reported four wives, suggesting that traditional maximum-limit polygamy (as per Muslim personal law) is rare.
More than 4 wives	27	1%	This group represents extreme cases of polygamy, exceeding the legal/religious norm, highlighting possible social or legal disregard for prescribed limits.

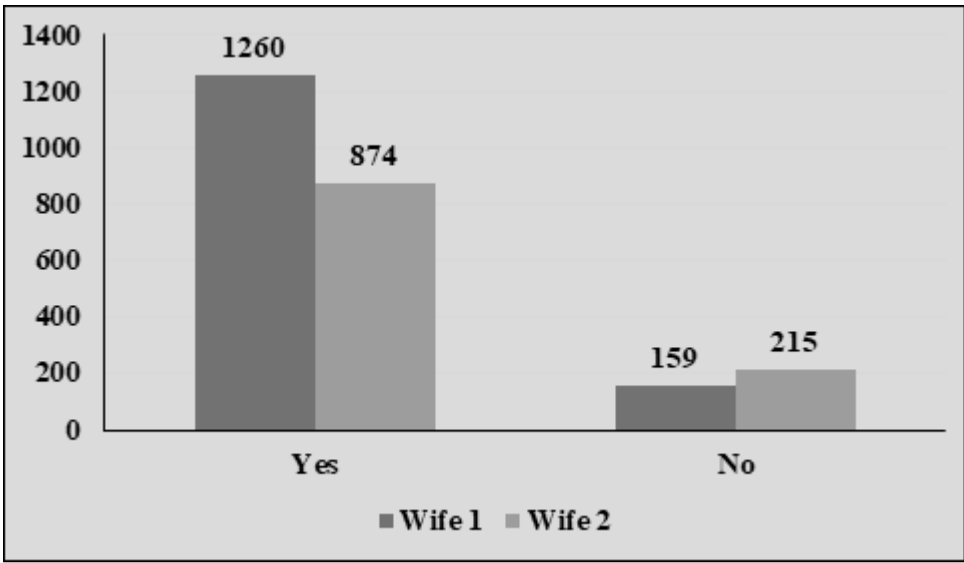
Polygamy with two wives (87%) remains the most common and socially tolerated form.

The decline in numbers with each additional wife indicates that higher-order polygamy is uncommon and possibly socially or economically unsustainable.

The 1% reporting more than four wives may reflect customary or unregulated practices beyond formal legal frameworks.

Overall, the data reflects that while polygamy persists, it is largely limited to one additional marriage rather than multiple concurrent ones.

Making Polygamy Legally Invalid



Out of the 2508 women surveyed

85% of the women wanted polygamy to be made legally invalid

1st wife - 1260

2nd wife - 874

15% of the women were against making polygamy legally invalid

1st wife - 159

2nd wife - 215

Opinion	Total (%)	First Wife (n)	Second Wife (n)
Should be legally invalid	85	1260	874
Should NOT be legally invalid	15	159	215

An overwhelming majority (85%) of the 2,508 women surveyed want polygamy to be legally invalidated. Among them, 89% of first wives (1,260 out of 1,419) and 80% of second wives (874 out of 1,089) support its abolition.

This strong consensus indicates widespread dissatisfaction among women living in or affected by polygamous marriages, and a collective desire for legal protection, equality, and marital stability.

Among first wives, 1260 out of 1419 [89%] show the strongest opposition to polygamy. This reflects their direct experience of emotional neglect, financial strain, and the erosion of marital security following their husband's second marriage.

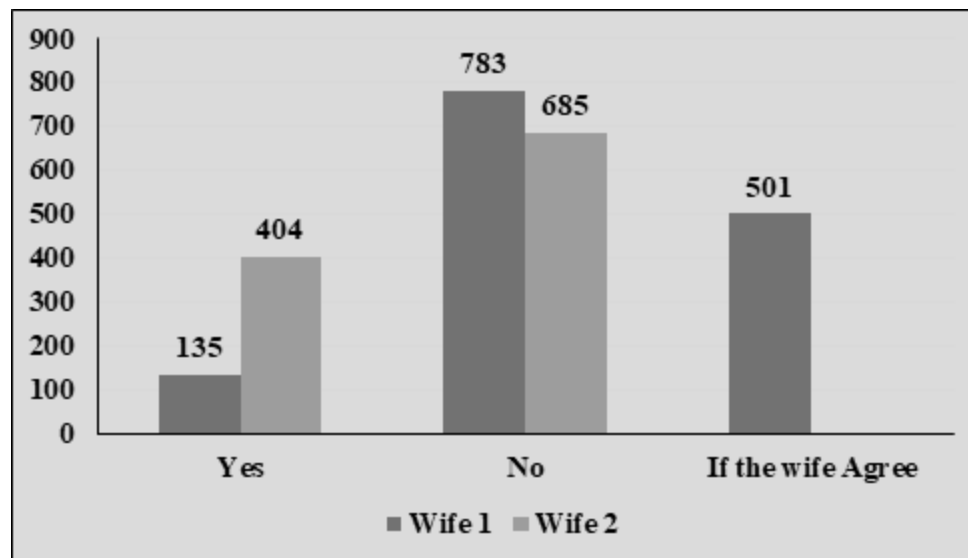
Interestingly, a significant proportion of second wives (874 out of 1,089, or 80%) also support making polygamy legally invalid. Their views likely stem from experiencing instability, competition, and lack of legal or emotional fulfilment, even as second wives.

Only 15% of the women surveyed oppose making polygamy illegal, showing that support for polygamy is limited and largely outweighed by the overwhelming majority seeking reform.

Overall, the findings suggest a clear call from women — both first and second wives — for legal and social change to end polygamous practices, reflecting their aspirations for monogamous, secure, and equitable marriages that uphold women's dignity and rights.

To get a slightly more nuanced understanding of what women want when we peeled the layer of polygamy a bit deeper. We asked the respondents about those reasons which are frequently used by the community, especially the religious groups, to justify polygamy. They justify polygamy if the wife is terminally ill, if she is not able to conceive and if she gives her consent to husband's remarriage. Although none of the above reasons are mentioned in the Holy Quran, it is come up in the society through men who have brainwashed even women to accept these conditions as Quranically valid. We asked:

Making Polygamy Conditional



Can A Man Remarry If His Wife Is Terminally Ill?

Out of the 2508 women surveyed

59% of the women do not want the man to remarry if his wife is terminally ill

1st wife - 783

2nd wife - 685

21% of the women agree that a man can remarry if his wife is terminally ill

1st wife - 135

2nd wife - 404

20% i.e. 501 first wives say that the husband can remarry only if the wife agreed

Remarriage in Case of Terminal Illness

When asked whether a man can remarry if his wife is terminally ill, a majority of 59% (1,468 women) rejected the idea — including 783 first wives and 685 second wives.

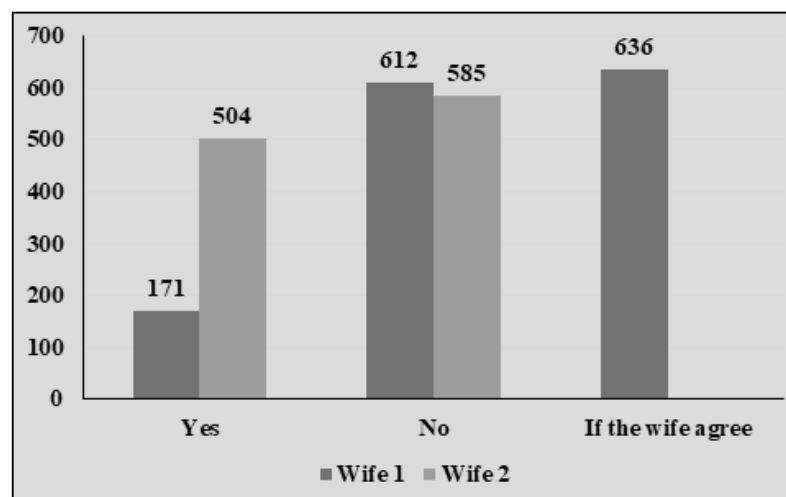
A clear majority (59%) of women — including both first (783) and second wives (685) — believe that a man should not remarry if his wife is terminally ill. This majority view suggests that most women value loyalty, care, and companionship during illness over the pursuit of another marriage. It reflects a moral expectation that a husband's duty should be to support his ailing wife, not to seek a new partner.

However, 21% (539 women) — mainly second wives (404) — felt that remarriage is acceptable in such circumstances, possibly reflecting a more pragmatic or self-justifying viewpoint also probably reflecting how they rationalize or reconcile their own marital circumstances.

Another 20% (501 first wives) agreed only if the wife gives consent, highlighting women's demand for agency and respect even in extreme situations. They adopted a conditional position, stating that the husband may remarry only if the wife gives her consent.

Overall, the data convey a strong sentiment that remarriage during a wife's illness is socially and emotionally unacceptable to most women. Even when some allowance is made, it is tied to the wife's consent, not the husband's unilateral choice. The findings underscore women's expectations of emotional commitment, moral responsibility, and autonomy within marriage — even under difficult circumstances.

Can A Man Remarry If His Wife is Not Able to Conceive?



Out of the 2508 women surveyed

48% of the women do not want a man to remarry if his wife is not able to conceive

1st wife - 612

2nd wife - 585

27% of the women said that a man can remarry if his wife is not able to conceive

1st wife – 171

2nd wife - 504

25% i.e. 636 first wives say that the husband can remarry only if the wife agreed

Remarriage in Case of Infertility

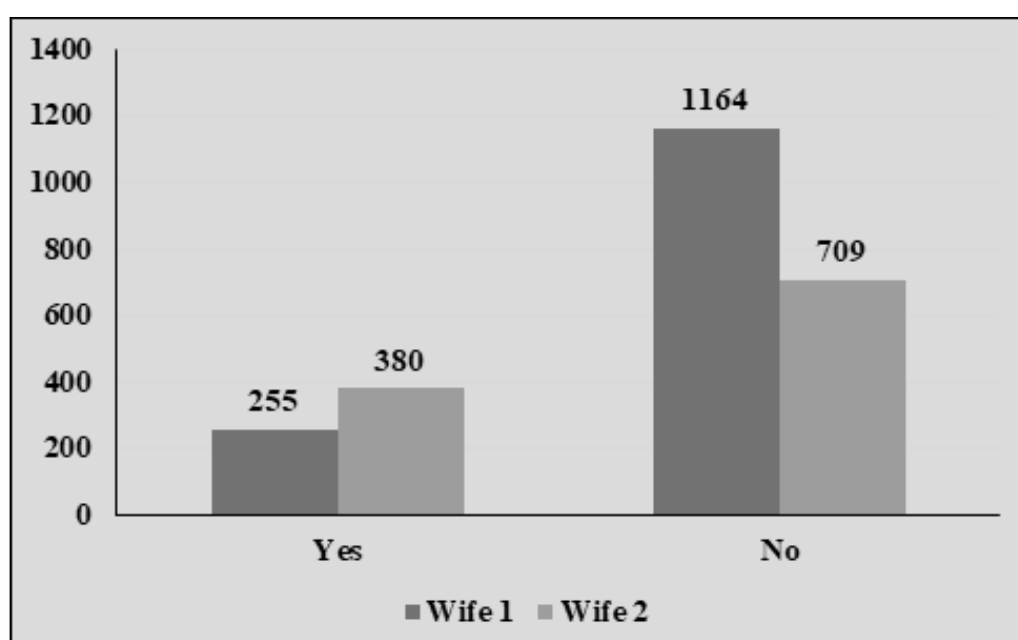
When the wife is unable to conceive, the responses show slightly greater acceptance but still a strong leaning toward opposition.

The responses from 2,508 women reveal that nearly half, 48% i.e. 1197 women [612 first wives and 585 second wives] of the women surveyed do not support remarriage on the grounds of infertility. This indicates a strong emotional and ethical resistance to treating a woman's ability to conceive as the basis for marital continuity.

Interestingly, 27% of respondents — mostly second wives (504) — expressed that a man can remarry if his wife is unable to conceive. This reflects a comparatively more permissive view, possibly shaped by their own experiences within polygamous contexts.

Meanwhile, 25% (636 first wives) took a conditional stance, allowing remarriage only with the wife's consent. This group represents women who uphold marital fidelity but also recognize the husband's desire for children, emphasizing mutual respect and agency in such decisions.

Overall, the data suggests that while some acceptance of remarriage exists in cases of infertility, the majority opinion [73%], including both the opposed and the conditional groups, leans towards protecting the first wife's dignity and consent, rather than permitting unilateral male decision. Though infertility evokes some sympathy for remarriage, most women still prioritize **loyalty, respect, and consent** over unilateral male decisions.



Can A Man Remarry If His Wife Is Ill Mannered?

Out of the 2508 women surveyed

75% of the women disagree that a man can remarry if his wife is ill-mannered

1st wife - 1164

2nd wife – 709

25% of the women agree that if the wife is ill-mannered then the husband can remarry

Out of 2,508 women surveyed, a significant majority (75%) — comprising 1,164 first wives and 709 second wives — disagree that a man should remarry on the grounds of his wife being ill-mannered. This dominant opinion reflects that most women do not view personality conflicts or behavioral issues as a valid justification for remarriage. It suggests that women expect communication, understanding, and effort within the existing marriage rather than the pursuit of another wife.

On the other hand, 25% of the respondents believe that a man can remarry if his wife is ill-mannered. This minority view may reflect those who perceive a husband's emotional dissatisfaction or incompatibility as sufficient grounds for seeking another marriage, though such opinions remain limited compared to the strong overall opposition.

Overall, the data clearly demonstrate that the majority of women — both first and second wives — reject the idea of remarriage based on behavior or attitude, reinforcing a belief in marital responsibility, tolerance, and mutual adjustment rather than polygamy as a solution to marital discord.

Overall Interpretation

Across all three areas of inquiry, women — both first and second wives — consistently express strong opposition to polygamy and remarriage on moral, emotional, and ethical grounds.

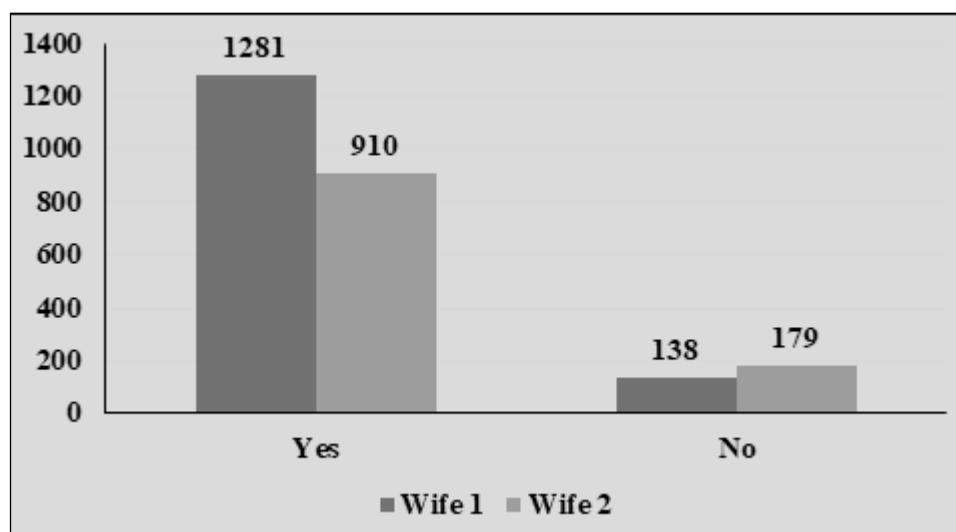
The overwhelming demand for legal invalidation, combined with the disapproval of remarriage in cases of illness, infertility, or poor conduct, underscores a collective aspiration for monogamous, respectful, and equitable marriages.

Even when some allowance for remarriage is made, it is conditional upon the wife's consent, demonstrating women's desire for agency, dignity, and equality in marital decisions.

Overall, these findings highlight a decisive movement among women toward rejecting polygamy and reaffirming the values of loyalty, compassion, and mutual respect in marriage.

Application of the Law of Land

Should 494 IPC / 86 BNS Be Made Applicable to Muslim Men if They Remarry?



Out of the 2508 women surveyed

87% of the women agree that 494 IPC/86 BNS be made applicable to Muslim men if they remarry

1st wife - 1281

2nd wife - 910

13% of the women do not want 494 IPC/86 BNS be made applicable to Muslim men if they remarry.

1st wife - 138

2nd wife – 179

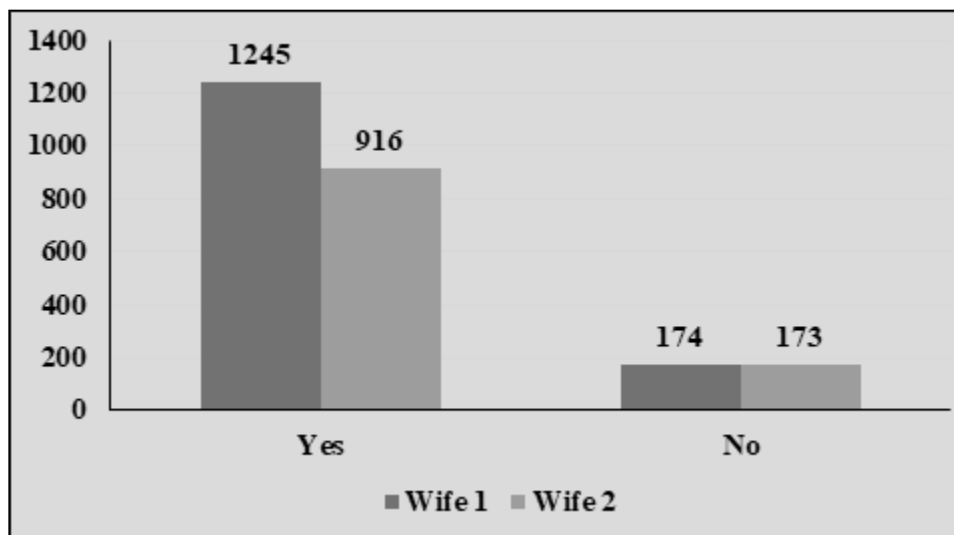
87% of women support this law applying to Muslim men amongst which 1st wives are 1281 (out of 1419) i.e. 90.2% and 2nd wives are 910 (out of 1089) i.e. 83.6%

13% do not support any form of legal binding on Muslim men. Amongst those who don't support the 1st wives are 138 [9.8%] and 2nd wives are 179 [16.4%]

There is an overwhelming support especially by the first wife to apply the law of the land to Muslim men if they remarry. There is a desire for legal protection and support.

Codification of Muslim Family Law

Should The Muslim Family Law Be Fully Codified?



Out of the 2508 women surveyed

86% of the women want the Muslim Family Law to be fully codified

1st wife - 1245

2nd wife - 916

14% do not agree to having a fully codified Muslim Family Law

1st wife – 174

2nd wife – 173

86% of women support full codification amongst which 1st wives are 1245 [87.7%] and 2nd wives are 916 [84.1%]

14% oppose codification amongst which 1st wives are 174 [12.3%] and 2nd wives are 173 [15.9%]

Muslim women support and favour a comprehensive codification of Muslim family law for more clarity and consistency and state support in enforcing their rights. Needless to say the first wives tend to support codification more as they see themselves as getting a poor deal in this entire situation of polygamy.

Since we were anyway going to reach out to 2500 women, we felt the need to get a validation about the impact of triple divorce law. Has the Incidence of Triple Talaak Gone Down?

Child Marriage



Should Child Marriage Be Legally Banned Within The Muslim Community?

Of the 2508 women surveyed

93% of the women want a legal ban on child marriage within the Muslim community

1st wife-1320

2nd wife-1006

Only 7% do not want a legal ban on child marriage within the Muslim community

1st wife - 99

2nd wife – 83

Should Child Marriage Be Legally Banned Within the Muslim Community?

An overwhelming 93% support a legal ban on child marriage. Both first and second wives are unanimous in their demand. 93% [1320] first wives and 92% [1006] second wives do not want children to be married off.

We still do have a small group of 7% who oppose a legal ban on child marriage. Here too the first and the second wives are in agreement with each other [1st wives: 99 → 7.0% and 2nd wives: 83 → 7.6%]

Overwhelming consensus indicates that child marriage is widely recognized as harmful, with almost uniform agreement across first and second wives.

Combined Analysis Across All Three Issues

Issue	Overall Support	Overall Opposition	Trend by Wife
494 IPC / 86 BNS applicability	87%	13%	1 st wives more supportive than 2 nd wives
Muslim Family Law codification	86%	14%	Slightly higher support among 1 st wives
Child marriage ban	93%	7%	Almost identical support among 1 st and 2 nd wives

Combined Analysis

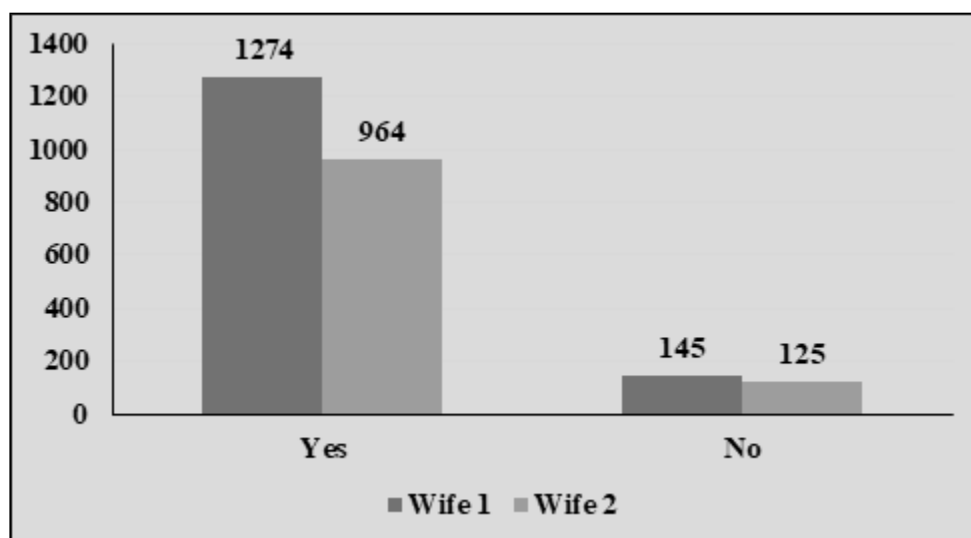
High overall support for legal reform: All four issues show strong endorsement (86–93%) from women surveyed. First wives consistently show slightly higher support for reforms compared to second wives, suggesting that the first wives may perceive a greater personal impact of polygamy and inconsistent legal protections.

Legal codification and equal application of laws (494 IPC / 86 BNS) reflect a broader desire for clarity, fairness, and enforceability in Muslim personal law.

Child marriage is seen as a critical issue with near-universal agreement on action or improvement.

Status of Triple Divorce

Has The Incidence Of Triple Talaak Gone Down?



Out of the 2508 women surveyed

89% of the women have reported that the incidence of triple divorce has gone down

1st wife – 1274

2nd wife – 964

11% of the women report that the incidence of triple divorce has not gone down.

1st wife - 145

2nd wife – 125

It is heartening to see that 89% of the respondents have reported that the incidence of triple divorce has gone down. Amongst them the 1st wives 1274 i.e. 89.8%, almost 90% and amongst 2nd wife 964 i.e. 88.6% report a reduction in triple divorce.

11% believe it has not decreased amongst which 1st wives are 145 [10.2%] and 2nd wives are 125 [11.4%]

The law against triple divorce has been extremely effective. It has brought relief to Muslim women who earlier were unilaterally divorced and abandoned. It implies that social awareness and legal interventions play a crucial role in eliminating socially regressive practices.

CHAPTER 08

Lived Reality of Victims of Polygamy

In this chapter victims of Polygamy tell their own stories of pain, suffering courage and resilience. This section covers 22 cases of women, who tell their story in their own words.⁸ It is followed by an analysis of these studies where we discuss the main facets of polygamy based on real and lived realities.

Individual Case Studies

Lived Reality 1

My name is Vahida, I am a 40-year-old woman living in New Delhi. I have four members in my family and currently have no source of income. I have studied till class 12.

I was 19 years old when I got married. It was an arranged marriage but he loved me a lot. From this marriage we had 3 children, a girl and two boys. Everything was fine for a few years. He does furniture business in which he is a contractor, so he earns a decent amount of money. We saved some money and got our own separate house. The registry of the house was done by him in my name and everything was going well.

But when his mother and sister heard that the registry of the plot is in my name, they objected and started provoking my husband. He got irritated and stopped talking to me. After some time, he stopped coming home at night. He gave the excuse that there is a lot of work and hence he cannot come home. I told him to spend time with the children at least but he kept away. On insisting he would say that if he does not work who will feed us.

Days passed by when one day he called me and asked me what I would do if someone else came into his life. I said I will not be able to do anything because I have to live with him, how will I educate the children and how will I run the house. Then he said that he has married a second time and that he lives with her. So, when he is not with me, he is with her. He said that he is sharing this with me today because the second wife is pregnant.

8 Names of all the women have been changed for confidentiality.

It has been 10 years and since then he lives like this. He spends very little time with me. The plot which we had bought, which is in my name, now belongs to him as well. He laid his claim on it. I told him that I will not give anything to anyone. All this belongs to my children and his children from the second marriage have no right on it. On hearing this he became violent and fought with me. This scared my children and they also started crying. My daughter is the eldest among the children. Today she is 22 years old and has also started working. When my husband heard that she is working, he stopped giving her the expenses that he was giving earlier.

My husband's second marriage has had a very negative effect on my children. My daughter says that she will leave us all and go away somewhere far. I feel very scared when she speaks like this. Sometimes my husband and my daughter have arguments. I request my daughter to keep quiet. At times my husband has suggested that both wives can stay together to save rent. I have refused and that also has led to a lot of violence. He will not leave me and he will not leave her either.

10 years is a very long time. When I asked my husband why he did this, he said that the second wife was after him and she forced him to marry her. But when I spoke to the second wife she said that it was not her but he who was after her saying that he did not love his wife and does not like her, that is me. Then I realized that it was my husband's fault. He lied to her there and he lied to me here. Since then, I don't talk to my husband much. I talk only as much as is necessary. I cannot separate because I have 3 children and need his assistance with their education and other expenses.

Now he comes very rarely because whenever he comes, we fight. I have told him that you can spend as much time with his second wife as he wants but will have to bear the expenses of my children. My husband has four children, 3 with me and 1 with the other wife. I don't have much expectations from him. I have started my studies again, in which my daughter helps me. I have taken admission in BA so that I can do a job after some time and stand on my feet. My younger son is just 8 years old, so I cannot leave him and do a job right now. Now I have to live for my children and I don't want anything else from life.

When my husband married someone else, I was not able to understand how I should behave with him. I felt like killing him but I could not do that. I was emotionally broken. My trust was broken. I cried a lot and felt very lonely as if my world had shattered all of a sudden.

When my husband told me that he has remarried, I could not believe him. Only after seeing the *nikaahnama* (marriage contract) I was convinced. He met her at his workplace and fell in love with her.

When my husband remarried, I was very broken. I had stopped eating and drinking. I always wondered why this happened to me. I was not able to take care of my children and had to call my parents. They explained to me saying, "you have these kids ahead of you, you have to bring them up, don't take any

wrong step” and after 2 days they left. I stopped going out, didn’t even talk to anyone, neither did I bathe nor eat, I was just crying and weeping.

In this situation, my children supported me and one of my friends Farzana supported me. She got my counselling done by BMMA volunteer, Niyazmeen apa. Even today I am fighting the battle. I take guidance from Niyazmeen. Some time back, my husband and I had a fight, so on apa’s advice I even went to the court. But I did not stretch the matter much because I was worried about the children.

If a man already has a wife, then he has absolutely no right to marry a second time. Many times, it happens that the woman is wrong and she has relations with many men after marriage. Or a woman is not able to become a mother and she forces her husband to marry again, only then the man can, may be marry again, otherwise he cannot do it. And there should be strict laws against those men who marry twice without any reason, which should include both punishment and fine.

Lived Reality 2

My name is Chand Bano. I am 40 years old, I am living alone in New Delhi and have an income of Rs 10,000 per month.

I was the 5th among 6 siblings. When I got married, I was only 14 years old and it was an arranged marriage. Since childhood, my parents had taught me that the status of my husband is superior to that of my parents. They would say, whatever he says or does, never let him get angry. I made up my mind that I will never make my husband angry. In our locality, girls are not educated, so I did not get an education, which I regret even today. After marriage, like other girls I started fulfilling my responsibilities. In my family, there were 3 sisters-in-law, 2 younger brothers-in-law, mother-in-law and father-in-law. I was taking care of all of them. I looked after their needs. Time passed and we got my brothers-in-law married. After some time, my father-in-law passed away. After which my mother-in-law started living with her younger son and we started living separately. It has been 15 years since our marriage, but I did not have any children. But I had no complaints. I was very happy serving my husband.

Then one day, suddenly, this happened. He brought a woman and told me that he has married her and now we will live with her. Hearing this, the ground slipped from under my feet. I was not able to understand what to do and I started crying loudly. Hearing this, people gathered around and started asking me. My husband told them that it was not a big deal and that he had married again. 'I did not get a child from her, so what would I have done, that is why I married again,' he told them. Then I said that you should have at least told me that you are getting married again. When I regained my composure, the question before me was how will I spend my life alone?

I came to know that this is the second marriage of his second wife and she has a son from her first marriage. Because she was a Hindu by religion, she had changed her name and her son's name.

My husband took his second wife and went away and did not come for many days. Then one day he came and said that he wanted to keep both of us together. I could not tolerate this idea and I refused it outright. I faced violence because of my refusal. He used violence to pressurize me but I did not change my decision. As a result, he stopped giving me money. I told this to my mother. I did not have father. My mother told me to bear with him and stay with him. There is nothing that she could do. She said 'you have to fight your own battles.'

When my husband stopped giving me maintenance, I filed my case in the *Mahila Panchayat*, the result of which was that my husband agreed to give me 3000 rupees a month and I agreed. But he never stayed with me. Sometimes he would come and we would have a fight and he would leave. This is how life was going on. Then I started working. I started going from house to house, cooking food,

which took care of my expenses well. I did not need to cry in front of my husband because he was very irregular in giving maintenance.

It has been 20 years since his second marriage, but he did not have any child from his second wife as well. And when I ask my husband today that he married the second time for a child, but did not have a child from her as well, so would he marry for the third time? He does not say anything, he just smiles. When he remarried someone else, I thought there must be some deficiency in me as I was not be able to bear a child. But my husband never thought that there might be some deficiency in him, and he too could be the reason for us not having any children. I ask myself, what crime was I punished for, why was my trust broken, why was I cheated.

When my husband got married again, I could not believe it at first. I was shocked and I was mentally upset. My heart was broken and everything that my parents told me in my childhood about the husband being everything and I should never make him angry, seemed like a lie. I did not eat for many days and kept crying continuously. I was feeling very lonely. It felt like my whole world had ended in a moment. I was very angry with myself that what mistake did I do that he did not even think it right to tell or ask me before doing this. I was not prepared for this in any way, so I was very sad and it took me a lot of time to get out of it. Maybe even today I have not been able to come out of the shock and I don't think I will ever be able to in the near future.

After a few days, I came to know that his mother had supported him in getting him married, which was another shock for me. The support I got was from my friends and an NGO. The organization supported me a lot and taught me to live for myself. Only then I became capable enough to start working for myself and stand on my own feet.

When my husband told me that the reason for his second marriage was my inability to bear children and when I found out that he did not have any children from his second wife as well, then why did he marry again? What was my fault? Therefore, according to me, a husband should not marry again and if someone does so, there should be strict laws against him! Whatever be the reason, a man should not marry again while being in one marriage. Divorce the first wife and then marry the second time.

Lived Reality 3

My name is Zakiya and I am 42 years old. I don't have any source of income and I am dependent on my children. We are three people in my family.

When I was two and a half years old my mother died, then my father remarried, and I was brought up by my grandparents. My father had four children from his second marriage, two daughters and two sons, but they never accepted me.

My stepmother gave all my father's property to my step brother and sister and never accepted me as her own daughter, due to which I was brought up by my grandparents. My grandparents raised me very well; they gave me a lot of love and care. My grandparents also sent me to school, but I could not study because one day the teacher beat me and the fear of that beating got embedded in me and I did not go to school, but I studied Quran and Urdu.

When I was 17 years old my grandparents got me married because my grandmother was sick and she wanted to see me married before dying. After 3 years of marriage I had a daughter and when the daughter was 6 months old my grandmother also died. After 2 years my grandfather also passed away. By then my son had also come into this world. I got busy in raising both my children. I told my husband about the grief of my grandparents' death. He understood my pain and cared for me.

After a few years my health started deteriorating. When I consulted a doctor who was near our house, he treated me for a year but I was not able to recover and I was confined to the bed. Then my husband took me to a big hospital where it was found that my veins were filled with water and it had to be removed. This treatment lasted for 7 years, and my children and my husband supported me completely in this.

After I recovered, we went to the village for a program where I also went to my aunt's daughter's house. Shanno, the woman whom my husband later married, was also there. I did not know when she and my husband started their affair. After 2 years of that relationship, my husband told me that he wanted to marry her.

I could not believe that Shanno who lived in the village and my husband who lived in the city, could meet and start a relationship. When did this start? When I asked my husband, he said that he has already married her and she has been living with him in Delhi for a year. I was heartbroken to hear this. I was not able to believe what I heard. 'What should I do?' I asked myself.

I cried a lot and this continued for many days. My husband did not talk to me much. He would come to meet the children in the evening. One day my husband told me that what he did to me was wrong and that he wanted to rectify his mistake. He wanted us to stay together but I refused. I accepted his

marriage but told him that I cannot keep her in this house and that he will have to give me and my children full rights and also bear all our expenses.

My husband agreed to this, and we started moving towards a normal life. Whenever I cried, my children would console me saying they were with me. On hearing this, I would forget my sorrow and hug my children. After some time, I started working. I started cleaning work in a hospital, from which I would earn good money and slowly I started getting out of the trauma. My husband would always visit us. He did regret whatever he did, but he loved his children a lot, he never left us.

Today, my husband is no more but we three still remember him. When my husband remarried my children started hating him and would say bad things to him. But I would make them understand that their father loved them a lot, no matter how he was. It took a lot of time for my children to accept this, but they understood. Today in 2025 it has been 5 years since my husband passed away. But despite the pain I have suffered I never tell even my children about it because they would feel sad. I have kept it suppressed in my heart and don't discuss it with anyone. I do not know if my husband ever understood this pain.

When I came to know that my husband had married someone else, I was very sad and shattered. If I would not have had children, I would have probably died and left this world. I could not believe it at first. I was shocked. My heart was broken. I did not eat for many days and kept crying continuously. I was feeling very lonely. It felt like my whole world had ended in a moment.

In this situation my children supported me completely and took care of me. I did not even realize when my small children grew up so much and became so wise that they took care of me. My job also helped me to come out of this trauma where I forgot all the sorrows and pain.

I definitely felt that my husband was sorry for whatever he did to me. He always showed this and there was no lack of love in him.

No man should have the right to marry a second time when his first wife is alive and loves him very much. After my mother passed away, my father married again, due to which I longed for my father's love all my life. And hence I believe that a man who marries again after his wife dies should also think a little about his children, whether the other woman will be able to give motherly love to them.

I feel that a man should not marry again. My husband was a good person but what he did to me is not the mark of a good person. Even though he regretted his decision, the pain he gave me, I will never forget it till my death. Therefore, there should be strict laws against a man who marries more than once.

Lived Reality 4

My name is Roshan. I am 60 years old and currently working with an NGO.

I married my husband, Hussain, about 40 years ago. For the first five years, we had no children. During this period, my husband eloped with a Hindu woman and married her, leaving me behind. Six months later, he returned because her family forced her to divorce him.

At that time, I was living in my mother's house. Soon after, my husband married another woman. When he brought her home, I also went and introduced myself as his wife. Shama had no idea that Hussain was already married. She stayed with him for only two months before divorcing him. She divorced him because I insisted on living with my husband, which created conflict.

His family consisted of six siblings, five of them sisters. Since I was unable to bear children due to health problems, all of them constantly taunted and tortured me. Everyone wanted an heir, and the pressure was unbearable.

In desperation, I myself decided to find another girl for my husband and arranged their marriage. But soon after, both of them threw me out of the house, telling me that I could only return once I had a child. Later, when that woman gave birth to a daughter, instead of accepting me back, they permanently abandoned me.

Life became even harder in 2002 when my husband's house was burned down, destroying all my dowry, including gold. Living at my mother's house was equally difficult, as my sister-in-law mistreated me. At that point, I decided to step outside, even though I had studied only up to class 7. I joined an NGO in Godhra and began working with them.

It was my first time ever working outside home. I used to walk long distances, sometimes five kilometres at a stretch, because there was no transportation in those villages. I worked with women affected by communal riots. I worked with Dalit and Adivasi women, supporting them. I also promoted peace and communal harmony. The NGO appreciated my dedication and I continued this work in Godhra for 15 years.

When my father passed away and my mother's health deteriorated, I returned to stay with her. There too, I worked extensively with women and children, especially focusing on girls' education and reducing dropout rates. By then, my husband had three more children — three daughters and a son — yet neither he nor his family accepted me back. I had to sustain myself entirely on my own, working with NGOs.

After my mother's death, I had no support left. My younger sister, who also had four children, was abandoned by her husband. Together, we bought a small house with our hard-earned money. Even

today, I live there and take care of my sister and her children. I even managed to arrange the marriages of two of her daughters.

Meanwhile, my husband now owns a bungalow worth over a crore. And yet he has never given me even a single rupee or asked about me — despite the fact that our divorce has never been finalized. Surprisingly, his children treat me very well, and I was even invited to their weddings. His current wife has also begun speaking with me.

However, due to all the stress, I developed cancer, underwent eye surgery, and now suffer from thyroid, high blood pressure, and diabetes. Despite these illnesses, I continue to work because I have no one else to support me financially.

I have faced unimaginable struggles in life. But instead of giving up, I decided to empower other women like me. I encourage them to raise their voices, claim their rights, and move forward so that no one else has to go through what I went through.

I started a large women's organization, uniting women to fight for justice. I built myself up after facing tremendous hardships, and even when society pressured me to remarry, I refused. I wanted to prove that I could stand on my own feet and tell my story — not as a victim, but as a fighter.

Lived Reality 5

My name is Hasina Banu and I am 57 years old. I was born and raised in Himmatnagar. I come from a small family, only one sister and no brother.

I married for love. My husband's name was Sikandar Khan. Before I entered his life, he had already been married several times. From his first wife, he had one daughter. After some years, their marriage ended in divorce. Later, he married another woman from, but that marriage lasted only six months before ending in separation.

Sikander then married another woman. With her, he had a son. Unfortunately, their relationship became very troubled. During one of their quarrels, she poured kerosene on herself and set herself on fire. At that time her son was only six months old. This incident left a deep scar on the family and changed the course of Sikander's life.

It was around this period that I met Sikander. We became close while I was still in college. At first, I did not know about his past marriages or the painful events he had lived through. Despite his complicated past, we built a life together. For some time, we were happy. He pursued acting and found opportunities in Gujarati cinema, which gave him recognition and pride.

But life changed drastically in 2002, during the riots. He risked his life to save a child, and in the process, he lost one of his eyes. After that, everything became harder. His health declined, he needed constant medicine and daily expenses increased. We had children of our own too — he had his son, and I had my daughter. Raising them in such circumstances became overwhelming. To support their education and manage our survival, I made the difficult decision to go to Dubai. His mother looked after the children while I was away. My life in Dubai was full of hardships. I had to work long hours, cooking, cleaning and taking care of other people's children. Many nights I only managed to sleep at two or three in the morning, completely exhausted.

Meanwhile, his health continued to worsen. He would call me and insist that I come back. I constantly worried about how to pay for the children's studies and how to manage rent and food. Even though I endured the struggles for a while, the burden became too much. At last, I went to the Indian embassy for help. They arranged my ticket, and I returned to India.

Not long after my return, tragedy struck again. Sikander suffered an attack and passed away. His death shattered me. Without him, managing the household and raising the children alone became a heavy challenge. His son grew up and eventually married for love, and life moved forward in its own way.

My daughter and I went back to Himmatnagar, where I arranged her marriage. Later, because of loneliness and the need for support, I remarried. But this new husband was also already married, and once again I found myself without true peace.

Even now, I remain troubled. My life has been filled with struggles — from his complicated past and tragic death to the hardships I faced abroad and the loneliness that still follows me. Yet, through it all, I have tried to stay strong for my children, to give them a better life, and to hold on to hope for stability and peace in the years ahead.

Lived Reality 6

My name is Farzana and I am 36 years old. I am the mother of three children—two from my first marriage and one from the second.

My life journey has been filled with hardships and painful lessons. From the very beginning of my first marriage, I endured severe physical and emotional abuse. My first husband regularly beat me, neglected me and failed to provide even the most basic necessities for me and my children. There were days when we had no food to eat. Unable to bear this cruelty any longer, I left my marital home and went to live with my mother. At that time, my father had already passed away and as my mother's only child, I felt an even greater responsibility to stand on my own.

When I returned to my mother's house, my mother herself was going through her *iddat* [waiting period after death of husband or divorce] after the passing of my father. This was a very sensitive and difficult time for her. Despite my own struggles, I tried to respect her condition and live quietly under her roof. To support myself and my children, I started giving private tuitions to children and took up whatever part-time work I could find.

During this time, I came into contact with a nman. He visited often and over time, a relationship developed between us. I eventually fell in love with him, believing he was single and also struggling in life. What I did not know—and what he did not disclose to me at the start—was that he already had a wife and three children. By the time I discovered the truth, we had grown very close. Eventually, I married him. And after that I took divorce from my first husband.

The news of our marriage reached everywhere. When my mother came to know, she threw me out of her house and took away my two children. When his first wife came to know, she was devastated. She fought with him, left their home and filed for divorce. The court ordered my second husband to pay his first wife a monthly maintenance of 15,000 rupees for herself and the children. Since he was working as a rickshaw driver, his income was not enough to meet this obligation, in addition to our own household rent and expenses. I continued working through tuition and part-time jobs, but the financial burden kept growing.

When he failed to pay the required maintenance, his first wife lodged a complaint and he was arrested. To secure his release, I was forced to mortgage my mother's house and use that money to pay off the dues. This decision was heart breaking, as it meant putting my mother's only home at risk.

After his release, his behavior towards me changed drastically. He became short-tempered, violent, and abusive—just like my first husband. He often refused to provide food, shouted at me, and beat me over trivial matters. I began to realize that my second marriage was also a terrible mistake. I regretted

deeply that another woman's home and children were hurt because of me and at the same time, I found myself trapped in the same cycle of abuse that I had once escaped.

In desperation, I even travelled to Dubai for work, hoping to earn enough to save my mother's house and provide for my children. However, the work there was extremely harsh. I was made to serve households and care for children endlessly, day and night, under unbearable conditions. Unable to cope, I eventually returned home.

At present, I live with my mother again, along with my three children. Life remains extremely difficult, as I struggle daily to provide for them with very limited resources.

Looking back at everything I have endured; I have learned one important lesson: no woman should marry a man who is already married. Doing so destroys families, breaks children's lives, and brings nothing but suffering. I share my story so that no other woman falls into the same pain and regret that I have experienced.

Lived Reality 7

My name is Tehsin. I am 28 years old, a BE (Bachelor of Engineering) graduate from the Hassan district of Karnataka. I am the eldest of three daughters. My father, who worked hard in Saudi Arabia, ensured that all his daughters received a good education.

After completing my BE, I got married during the COVID-19 period in 2020. My parents spent around ₹50 lakhs for the wedding, which included ₹5 lakh in cash, 250 grams of gold jewellery, clothing, and household items. A grand marriage took place. My husband had completed a BBA degree and had a sister and parents. His sister was married and had a one-year-old child. Since she was working as a teacher, I had to take care of the baby.

As it was the COVID period, I was working from home. I would finish all household chores, take care of the baby and manage my office work online. Like this, a year passed after my marriage.

After the pandemic, both of us moved to Bengaluru for work and started living there. Despite earning ₹70,000 per month, I was forced to give my entire salary to my husband as soon as I received it. Even for commuting to the office by bus, I had to ask him for money. He was working as a manager in a food delivery company. The company provided one biryani packet per day to the staff. He would eat from it and give me the leftovers. Often, I had to go to bed half-hungry. Even when my parents visited, they were not served proper meals.

Groceries and vegetables for cooking were sent from Hassan by my in-laws. Though I earned ₹70,000 per month, my husband did not even buy me sanitary pads during my periods. I had to use cloth, which led to infections.

Later, during Ramzan, I visited my in-laws' home in Hassan and then went to my parents' house with my husband. All relatives had gathered there. On that day, I received my monthly salary — ₹60,000 of which I transferred to my husband's account and kept ₹10,000 with myself. He picked a fight demanding the full amount and tried to strangle me in a room. When I screamed, my mother came and asked what had happened. It was then that I revealed everything. Until then, my parents were unaware of my suffering. My husband then fled to his parents' home.

The next day, both families met and tried to resolve the issue through a community meeting, but nothing worked. All the gold, clothes, and household items that were given to me during the wedding were still with my in-laws. Despite multiple efforts by my parents, no solution was reached.

Eventually, a legal case was filed. The case dragged on in court for a long time. Meanwhile, my husband remarried and lived comfortably with his second wife. When this came to light, my parents

collected official proof of the second marriage and submitted it in court. In the mediation center, a final settlement was made: my husband was ordered to return all the gold jewellery, cash, clothes, and household items that were given at the time of marriage. I, expressing my unwillingness to continue the marriage, was granted a *Khula* (Islamic divorce initiated by the woman). After the settlement, I moved abroad and am now working in a reputed company.

I am now staying at my parents' house. When I found out that my husband had remarried, I was deeply hurt. Just because I didn't transfer my entire salary to him, he refused to take me back. No matter how many community negotiations were held, nothing worked. I stayed at my parents' house, while he went ahead and married again. He didn't even inform me about the second marriage. My home was filled with sadness. I was mentally devastated and went into depression. My parents took me to a doctor for treatment. They stood by me with full support, unlike my husband's family.

A man should not be allowed to remarry while still married to his first wife — especially when he hasn't treated her well or understood her. Muslim men should not be legally allowed to marry again without justice for the first wife. The law should not allow this.

Lived Reality 8

My name is Rehana Begum. I am 26 years old and I have studied up to class 12. Our hometown is Kampli. After my father left us, my mother remarried. My mother has two daughters—my sister and me. Our stepfather took good care of us, ensured our education up to pre-university, and then arranged our marriages.

I got married in 2017. At the time of my marriage, my husband was living with his mother and sister. My mother-in-law mentally harassed me every day. She would taunt me, saying, “Your mother got remarried, you too should do the same,” and insulted me by saying I was like my mother and had an illicit relationship with my stepfather. She also physically assaulted me.

I gave birth to a baby girl. Now she is six years old and has a heart condition. The responsibility for her treatment lay with my husband, but he refused to acknowledge her as his child. He doubted her parentage and accused me of having the child with someone else, which led to daily abuse.

At that time, I was seven months pregnant with my second child. Due to severe conflict at home, I left to get treatment for my first daughter and to prepare for the delivery of my second child. Later, I found out that my husband secretly remarried without informing me. While I waited for him every day, thinking he would come to see me, I eventually underwent a caesarean delivery. Despite multiple attempts by me, my family and even the doctors to contact him, he never answered any calls. He had blocked all our phone numbers.

I kept hoping he would come to see our second child, but even after one and a half years, he never came. I had to take care of both daughters all by myself. Later, I received a call from Anganwadi workers from his village, asking me to come collect my daughter’s Bhagyalakshmi bond. When I went there, the locals informed me that my husband had remarried after giving me *talaq* and paying Rs. 5 lakhs in compensation. They asked me why I had agreed to such an arrangement. This news shocked me, and I returned to Kampli and shared everything with a neighbouring sister.

When she and some others went to my husband’s village to inquire, it became evident that he had indeed remarried. But the new woman claimed she wasn’t married to him. My husband told the women who came to inquire that she was a relative, his uncle’s daughter, and that she had no parents, so they had brought her home to take care of his mother. However, neighbour’s and local people confirmed that he had indeed married her.

On another visit by these women to my husband’s home for inquiry, my mother-in-law and sister-in-law refused to even come out. The women waited until evening but got no response. I then approached an organization to help resolve my issue. They too tried to inquire, but received no proper response.

They eventually helped me file a police complaint and also submitted a petition to the Jamaat. But the Jamaat ruled that both wives should live together under one roof!

How can I live in such a situation? I have struggled immensely to get justice for my daughters. I have faced many challenges. My two daughters deserve justice, but I do not know how to seek proper relief. I am very distressed.

Because of stress, I went into depression and my health also started to deteriorate. To get my elder daughter treated in the hospital, my mother had to borrow a lot of money. I could not stop crying. Looking at my children's faces I felt deep sadness and disgust at the same time. I even felt like ending my life.

On top of not telling me about his second marriage, my husband also lied, saying that he had already given me five lakh rupees as compensation, which hurt me even more. He went around telling people that I was at fault. Even when our child was unwell, he did not show an ounce of fatherly care. How can I go to work while taking care of a small child? Then again, the thought of becoming a burden on someone else along with my children made me lose confidence in myself.

How do women like me get justice? Falsely under the name of Shariah, how many more women's lives will be destroyed? Should the girls in future too have to go through this? How should we face this? Therefore, a law must be introduced making it illegal for a man to remarry without the consent of his wife. Women must come forward to share their suffering.

I have undergone immense mental stress. My health deteriorated drastically after childbirth. No one came to see me or help me. If a man cannot take care of one wife and his children after marriage, how is he allowed to marry another? Shouldn't this be questioned? I have so many questions inside me, and it seems like there are no answers for Muslim women. Therefore, there must be a law to punish men who remarry without their wife's consent—otherwise, they have no fear.

Lived Reality 9

My name is Naseema Banu, I am 40 years old. I have one elder sister and one younger brother; both are married and living well. My parents are not alive. I have been married for 15 years. I studied journalism and I am working as an Editor in a private TV channel in Hassan, earning 10,000 rupees per month. Currently, I live separately with my elder son in a rented house.

My marriage took place in 2010. That time, he lied to me that he is an orphan and has no family. Within three days of meeting me, the marriage was fixed and held. For six months, everything seemed fine, but then the harassment began. Every day, he would come home drunk and beat me. He used to say, “You go to work, I won’t bring anything, you take care of me,” and subjected me to a lot of cruelty. I gave birth to two sons. This went on for about two years.

When I could no longer tolerate his torture and while I was heavily pregnant with my second child, I attempted suicide by pouring kerosene on myself. Neighbours rushed in and saved me. Later, my father came, and a compromise was made through a panchayat. That’s when I found out that my husband had already been married twice before me. He had lied to me, claiming he was an orphan and never married before. His two previous wives had also left him because of the same harassment and violence.

After some time, the fights started again. Once, he cut my fingers with a knife and instead of taking me to the hospital (because it would lead to a police complaint), he treated me at home. After this incident, I told my father I no longer wanted to live with my husband. I took both my children and returned to Hassan. Since they were very young, I left them with my father and started working. At that time, my salary was 5,000 rupees.

Three months later, my husband came back to Hassan and said, “Let’s live together. I will also start working here. We’ll set up a separate home. Children also need their father.” Believing him, I agreed. I sold the gold ornaments given to me by my mother during my marriage and used that money to lease a small house. I worked and he stayed home to look after the children. For some time, life went on like this.

But since my salary was small and it was hard to manage, I enrolled my children in anganwadi and asked my husband to go out and work. He worked for a short while but soon returned to the same abusive behaviour. Later, I came to know that he had a habit of marrying a new woman every three years. I also found out that he has one sister and three brothers, but even they have abandoned him because of his behaviour.

After five years of my marriage, I came to know through others that he had married another woman again. In total, he has four wives. Knowing this, I felt deep sorrow that, yet another woman’s life had

been ruined by him. Because of all this harassment, my body developed BP (high blood pressure) and diabetes. My second son is now living with my husband, while the elder one is with me. I am struggling very hard to bring my younger son back to me.

My sister and brother give me a lot of support, but my husband's family gave me none. I strongly believe that a man should never be allowed to marry another woman when he already has a wife. Because this law is not enforced, my husband has destroyed the lives of four women. Without giving divorce to any of them, he marries again and again and ruins their lives. Parents of girls should carefully check all the details of such men before giving their daughters in marriage, instead of rushing into it and ruining their lives.

There must be strict laws against men who marry more than once without divorce. They should be given severe punishment. Living as a single parent is very difficult for a woman. I am going through enormous struggles alone. My health has already worsened, and one of my children is away from me. Society and community leaders and Jamaat do not stand up for justice in favour of women. In every system, the male-dominated structure suppresses women's lives.

In other religions, women have some legal protections, but Muslim women are left without any protection under the law. Men are misusing the provision of polygamy, which was allowed in some circumstances in the past. Today, the entire system is biased in favour of men. Even though my father educated me, my life is still filled with struggles. I can only imagine how much worse it must be for uneducated women raised within traditional boundaries.

Only those who have lived through it can truly understand the suffering. Whenever I recall the abuse my husband subjected me to, I break down. For two or three days, I fall ill with mental distress.

Lived Reality 10

My name is Tahira and I am 34 years of age. I am the eldest sibling followed by two sisters and a younger brother. I studied in an English medium school but could not cope with the studies and dropped out from school in class 6. I took over the household responsibilities along with my mother. My parents received a proposal for me, they like it and arranged for us to meet. Both of us liked each other and in 2015 we got married. I was 24 years old and my husband was 25 years old. The marriage Nikaahnama is currently with my mother. Mehr fixed at the time of marriage was Rs.1100/- which I have not yet received. Since it was the first wedding in the house my parents were very happy and eager. They gave me dowry and gifts including household utilities worth 2-2.5 lakh rupees.

My husband is a taxi driver and worked night shifts. Four days after our marriage he resumed work. I was alone at home at night and new to the neighborhood so I requested my husband to drop me at my parent's place and then go to work. On this request he called my father and complained that I am not letting him work and got me beaten up by my father. Since that day he started hitting me. He said 'your father hit you and now I too will do the same'. Looking at him, my sister-in-law and her friends also have raised their hands on me. They all call me mad.

My father had been sick and my husband helped to take him for dialysis. He would say, "I married you out of pity as your father was sick." When I was pregnant with my 1st child, he got into financial problems and got involved with wrong people and was framed and sent to prison. I used up all my saving and borrowed 1 lakh from my father to support him and to get him out on bail. With all the fear and stress and running about for my husband I got severe jaundice and had to be admitted in the hospital. After a few weeks my husband told me "Your father will not be able to see my child's face" and true to his words my father passed away a month before my son was born.

My second child was born in 2017. When I was 5 months pregnant with my third in June 2021 my husband gave me triple divorce and sent me to my mother's house. I gave birth to my third son on 8th Nov 2021. He did not visit or provide any financial help for me or my children. My sister said she would take over the responsibility of my third child to help ease the burden. After a year of the delivery, I called and informed my husband that I am giving my child to my sister for adoption. When he heard this, he approached the legal aid center Aurton ki Shariah Adalat [ASA] of BMMA. Here he complained that I am unlucky, I don't keep the house clean, that I am ill-mannered and not beautiful. He wanted a reconciliation. I told the ASA that I had given away my child to my sister and I am not ready for reconciliation. I refused as I now got a job at a school and was drawing an income of Rs.6500/- per month. He persisted. He visited my family, the school and spoke to my colleagues requesting another chance. I agreed to meet him and give him another chance. In the ASA we reconciled and I had to break my ties with my maternal family so that I could go and live with him in 2022. For a year and half everything was all fine. He gave me Rs.400/- per day for the household expenses and took care of me and the children. I stood by his side caring and nurturing and supporting him and my children.

On 26th May 2024 his father passed away. He borrowed money from a friend for his father's funeral. After 3 days, when I questioned him, he got angry and started hitting me. His violence increased. He stopped speaking to me directly and spoke to me through the children. But his sexual demands did not stop.

After 9 years of marriage and fathering three sons, he remarried. He married the same woman who had financially supported him in his father's funeral. She was also divorced and had a son in his 20s from her first marriage. He met her on a trip to Ajmer in the train and fell in love and got married to her. When I confronted my husband, he said I should not interfere in his matters.

After my husband's second marriage he became more violent. He once banged my head so badly that I was bleeding and the floor was filled with blood and I had to be taken to the hospital. I had to register a complaint in the police station. He said he wants to divorce me and that I should go away from his house. If I want, I can take the children and go he said, or if I do not want to take the children then I can leave them with him. He said he will take care of them.

In 2022, to help resolve disputes between us, he asked my family to break ties with me and not to keep any contact with me and they agreed so that I could settle down and be happy. Since then, it has been over 2.5 years that I have no contact with my maternal family. None of the family members even invited me for my sister's wedding and that pained me. I don't have any place to go. How can I leave my children?

The worst is when in 2025 he brought the second wife home along with his sister. I was shocked and was not able to say anything. I was hurt and very sad when he was fondling the second wife in front of me and the children. My sister-in-law told me to keep quiet and said she would support me later.

After the second marriage he said he must support two houses and thus has reduced the daily expenses from Rs.400/- per day to Rs.200/- per day and he gives Rs.10/- to all three children. Other than that, my husband does not provide for any of my personal or medical health related expenses. I do homebased work and earn Rs.700-800/- per month to meet my personal expenses. Other expenditure for the children are borne by him.

The second wife claims that, since my husband had orally divorced me in 2022, I am no longer his legitimate wife and it is not right for me to have any relationship with him. She says that if my husband tries to keep sexual relationship with me, I should take pictures and send it to her as proof. My husband calls me mad and he also asks my children to hit me and call me mad. I have lost my self-confidence and feel worthless. I am treated worse than a servant.

I cannot bear to see my husband with any other woman. The only thing I want is for my husband to let go of the woman and take care of me and my children.

Lived Reality 11

I am Shabana. I am 40 years of age. I work as a domestic help and have a monthly salary of Rs. 8000. I once dreamt that after marriage, I would have a home, one filled with love and respect. My husband would be my support. But within a few months, all my dreams were shattered. Every day and night brought me new wounds.

Just a few days after our marriage, I discovered that my husband was addicted to drugs and he also dealt in drugs. He allegedly paid the police a weekly bribe, so the police were in his control, and because of this, he had a lot of money. After a few days, more secrets about him began to emerge. He was constantly eyeing other women with his money.

My husband's promiscuity was revealed, and his illicit relationships also began to surface. I caught him having an illicit relationship with a woman and I even filed a police report. Upon going to the police, he shamelessly told them that he wasn't married to her. She stayed in Delhi and he would send her money on a monthly basis. This used to make me very angry. Even after I told him a million times, he would say, "It is my money, I can do anything, why are you jealous?"

I slowly learned about my husband's three previous marriages. I was the fourth. My mind felt dizzy and it was difficult to control myself. He had made me his wife and put me on the path to humiliation. Does he want to treat me like a doormat in exchange for food, clothing and shelter? Slowly, I became aware of all my husband's bad habits. He had made his own life miserable and he was also making mine.

When he left his first wife's children with me on the wedding day, I asked him about them and he lied by saying that they are his relative's children. When I came to know that they are his children, I was very sad. Today, I wonder how I managed to spend my days with this man. I convinced my heart that Allah sees everything.

I didn't want to live with him, but my parents forced me to. I was married into my sister's family but I wasn't allowed to go to my sister's house at all; my brother-in-law kept an evil eye on me there. Neither my body nor my honour nor my life were safe. And God, in this confusing life, placed a child in my womb. Now I began to worry about the child's future. What would happen, and how would it be? I was worried that the torture that I faced should not be the reality for my children. I felt helpless and hopeless.

I cried a lot. My health deteriorated so much that I was admitted to the hospital. I didn't want to be with him, but I had to endure it for the sake of the little life in my womb.

He brought his first wife's children to me. I was furious. My home had become a den of drug abuse. I repeatedly tried to stop him, reason with him, but each time I was met with slaps, abuse, and rebukes.

After daily fights and physical violence, he would become normal again. I was four months pregnant and fell ill from the fighting and beatings. My father-in-law dropped me off at my sister's house and I breathed a sigh of relief. I decided I wouldn't go back to him. After that, he threatened to throw acid on my face if I didn't return home. If he saw me on the street, he would pull off my burqa and run away and I would return home half-burqa-clad. I wanted my future child to grow up in a noble and good environment. I wanted to make a new beginning.

Now I wanted to live not in fear, but for my rights. I stubbornly stayed at my sister's house for three years and because of this, he brought another woman into the house and constantly threatened to kill me. Even after separating myself from him, I couldn't stay away because every now and then I would hear news of him or he would come and show his inhuman nature.

I always wondered if my life was meant only for suffering. Would I have to raise my child in the same dark and dirty environment? I needed someone to help me, hear my cries, someone to take me away from here. I was very scared.

He begged and pleaded for forgiveness to bring me back home. I was fed up with his actions. But for the sake of my son, I mustered up the courage, made peace with him once again and started living with him.

Everything was fine for fifteen days, but then the same situation started again. Fed up with his behavior, I wanted to leave the house one night but he put a knife to my child's neck and threatened to kill him. The venom he harboured for his child made it seem like if he held a knife to his neck today, it is possible that he could stab him tomorrow. A savage man who is always drunk can do anything. He would ask my child obscene questions about me, like who was I seeing or who had come to the house.

As punishment for staying at my sister's place, he would burn the child's hands with a burning stick. I was terrified and silent and I would suffocate day and night with fear. He would constantly be intoxicated and beat me like an animal and after beating me, he would beg for forgiveness. After each beating, I would feel a growing pain in my body, along with a growing hatred. I would feel a sense of dread and disgust for this human-like animal. Whenever he came near me, I would tremble with fear and because of this, I couldn't sleep for many nights. I would often lie awake alone at night, staring at the ceiling, wondering.

His second wife ran away after the first day of marriage because the first wife had beaten her so much. I now realized that this was the reason his first wife had left him and found another man. His children had also left him.

The environment here was neither good for me nor for my children. Sometimes, drunk, he would try to have sex with me in front of the children. If I refused, he would beat me at night. I started cursing myself for coming back to this hell.

With tears in my eyes, filled with grief, I would look at my son's beaten-up body and blame myself. At night, I would suddenly wake up and spend the entire night thinking. I remembered his threats: "If you try to leave me, I will throw acid on the child's face." Imagine what a mother goes through when she faces the threat to her child's life.

On the 26th of Ramzaan one year, five minutes before I was supposed to break my fast, he beat me like an animal. The neighbours came and rescued me. Everyone asked why I stayed with this animal. I hate him now because I have no one to support me. I don't even want to see his face. I don't feel good seeing him. I want to divorce him. I will support myself and my son by working.

I filed my case in the Aurton ki Shariah Adalat [ASA] of BMMA. The head of the Adalat, sensed my fear, anger and helplessness and I felt a sense of strength after talking to her.

I felt hopeful that I could make my own decisions. With legal help, I found people who listened to me, found my words genuine and encouraged me. With this support, I'm trying to improve myself. I feel at ease by sharing my thoughts. I've been told in the court that women should take their time to think and make their own decisions, not rush into them.

I'm strongly against second marriages. By ruining one woman's life, it also ruins other women's lives. How is this God's command that men marry multiple times while still married?

Our government is useless. They should ban all this. Having multiple marriages means mocking a woman's dignity and honesty. I don't want to see any other woman as helpless as I am.

Lived Reality 12

My name is Tahira. I am 39 years of age and living with my 4 children; 2 girls and 2 boys. I lived with my family in Delhi Nizamuddin. Including me, there were eight siblings in our family; I was the third in line. My childhood consisted of playing with friends and going to the madrasa to learn Arabic. I had no interest in studying, but somehow, I managed to finish fifth grade. I realized my childhood was over when my mother stopped me from going out and playing.

One by one, all my friends advanced in their studies but because my family was poor and we were a large family, I could not pursue my studies.

My father was a tailor and he was the only breadwinner. Making ends meet was very difficult. My brothers started helping my father in taking care of the household responsibilities at a young age. The situation started improving a bit but my brothers could not study.

But the dreams that my heart had seen were a little different. I liked the city of Mumbai very much and I used to dream of being there some day. A desire started stirring in my heart. I wanted to go to the city of Mumbai and always prayed for it. In a moment of acceptance, my prayers were answered. But it proved worse than a curse for me.

My aunt lived in Mumbai and visited us every two years. She asked for my hand in marriage for her son. My parents were all delighted with the proposal. They thought, “We’re blood relatives, our daughter won’t face any problems. We can trust them blindly, as if she’s going to her own home.” I thought the boy is hardworking, a driver, earns well and will keep me happy. First, she is my aunt, then my mother-in-law.

I was most happy when the marriage was finalized. I thanked God that my prayers had been answered. My only dream was that my husband should be very loving, feed me my favourite food and take me on trips. I decided to take great care of my aunt and uncle, serving them so that peace and love would prevail in our home.

The atmosphere was happy. My parents gave dowry as per their capacity and I came to my in-laws’ house in Bandra.

For a few days after the wedding, I felt embarrassed because my husband didn’t talk to me much. I felt that perhaps he, too, was shy about this new relationship and that things would eventually settle down. My aunt and uncle, despite their son’s behavior, were pretending to be oblivious. I served my aunt and uncle wholeheartedly. I gave them their medicines on time, then breakfast on time and I considered it my responsibility to take care of all the household chores. But I felt very sad when my husband would come to me at night only to satisfy his sexual hunger, and after that would go back to sleep. My eyes

would stare at the ceiling in the dark and I would helplessly feel the pain he inflicted on my body, which he considered his right.

I asked myself; is this the relationship between husband and wife? Am I just a need, for my husband and a maid for the rest of the family? I never imagined that the beginning of my new life would be so terrible. Days passed like this. I complained to my aunt about my husband that it has been a long time since I came to Mumbai, he does not take me anywhere for any outing and even on holidays he sleeps all day. Both of them made an issue of this, saying that it costs money to travel, what will he eat if he leaves his work and takes me for an outing? My mother-in-law and husband did not consider it necessary to pay attention to what I said.

Now, all the days were the same for me. The love and intimacy I had dreamt of seemed like a fairy tale. Now, I only needed my husband's love at night and I was paid for all the housework.

One day, I was unwell. The doctor examined me and gave me the good news that I was pregnant. I began to feel happy and hopeful again, hoping that perhaps the arrival of a child would make this person appreciate me. When I was four months pregnant, my parents took me with them to Delhi. When I told them the whole truth, they were very sad. My mother had not expected this from her own sister.

I felt very relieved after returning home. I started thinking about the child and that everything would be all right.

A few months later, I gave birth to a daughter. Seeing her, I forgot all my troubles. When the news of my daughter's birth reached my in-laws, they were upset. They wanted a son, not a daughter. Knowing their nature, I felt very angry and hurt. My husband neither called me nor tried to inquire about the child nor my well-being. Those 'scoundrels' named the daughter as per their wish. My father said that it was his child and if I name her otherwise there might be fights on this issue in future.

It had been more than 8 months since I was at my mother's place but neither my husband nor my aunt called nor sent any message. My father was angry and told my husband that he should take back his wife or he will file a complaint with a women's organisation. On hearing this, my uncle came and took me away.

After coming to my in-laws' house in Bandra, I saw everyone's attitude as if it was my wish to have a girl. No one was happy for my daughter and there was no change in my husband's behaviour. He would give me only 50 or 100 rupees for my personal expenses and that too after asking several times. I was so helpless; how could I manage everything?

They were not happy with the arrival of my daughter. But when my daughter walked towards him on her tiny feet, I saw him smile lovingly for the first time and as he held her in his arms, he felt a surge of

love for her for the first time. I felt my difficulties ease. The atmosphere at home began to feel better. When my daughter turned one, cries for a son resonated in the house and God answered them. The following year, a son was born to me. Everyone was happy and I breathed a sigh of relief.

My mother-in-law's health began to deteriorate and my attention was no longer focused on my husband. I had no time for the children and household chores. But there was no change in him. He was fine with the children but he remained cold with me. Now he was out all day and came home late at night. He did not even need me at night. This suspicion made me uneasy. I asked him and he immediately said that he was in a relationship with a woman whom he met before marriage with me. He also said, just as you had a relationship, even I have one. I was shocked. I had broken all my unwanted relationships after my engagement with him. How does he bring up this issue when he is having a relationship after marriage?

His attitude towards me started getting worse. I found out that he had been having an illicit relationship with a woman after the birth of our second child. He married her after my mother-in-law died. Hearing all this, the ground slipped from under my feet. I drank the phenyl we had in our house. My condition started deteriorating. I felt a severe headache. By then, the children had called my husband. When he found out, his words still ring in my ears like hot molten lead. He said, "If you want to die, then die; don't pretend." I fainted and fell. My children started crying and screaming. I was admitted to the hospital and a police case was filed.

But when I told the police the whole story they scolded me, saying, "Your religion allows two or four marriages. Why are you ending your life?" I filed a police complaint, but it did not help.

He spread the news of my past amongst all the relatives and kept calling me of bad character. In addition, when I confronted him about his illicit relationship, he arrogantly told me that his married life was ruined because of me.

I want to go to the court to seek justice for myself and I will go Inshallah. Today I suffer from many ailments because of my husband. Even today he is the same. Even today after 17 years of our marriage, this man has never held my hand with love. He calls me a person of loose character. He has been cheating on me from the very beginning. I will give him one last chance, if he leaves her and comes to me then it is fine otherwise, I will drag him to the court and I have made up my mind on this.

Lived Reality 13

My name is Anisa. I am 62 years of age and have studied till class 12. I do sewing and earn about 3000/ per month. I have 2 sons, 1 daughter and daughters-in-law. My son-in-law is also with me and I have 4 grandchildren.

I was working when I got married. My husband was also working and he would be away from home. So I never suspected that my husband was cheating on me. I also had 3 children, but that cheating came to light one day when my husband brought his second wife home.

When my husband got married for the second time my world changed. One fine day he brings a woman and two children home, makes them stand in front of me and introduces her as his wife. He said she is unwell so look after her children. I was shocked. I asked him if she was his wife then was I? He said 'this is my first wife and you are the second wife'. Ground slipped from under my feet. When I refused to accept this fact, he beat me up and abused me. I thought that if I have to live in this house then I will have to do whatever he wants me to do. I was very scared. I worked in the house and also worked outside. The other wife would fight with my children and beat them. When my husband came home in the evening, she would lie and say wrong things about me. He would then beat me and my children and threaten me.

I did not know, he was already married, he did not tell me this. Ours was a love marriage, we both used to work. I was a Hindu before marriage, when we got married. I changed my religion and he knew well, I had no one, so he took advantage of this fact. I used to take care of his wife and children and also worked. My husband never fed my children but always his other wife's children. My children would fearfully sit in a corner, they were scared of being beaten. Gradually complaints started coming from school also. He would threaten to kill us and whatever we earned he would take that too. I worked like a servant in the house. He would torture me. I took care of his wife's cooking, washing clothes, bathing etc. I used to do all the work of the children also, used to make tiffin and get their school homework done.

I was mentally very disturbed, I had nothing except regrets. Everything had been taken away from me. I had no way out. This life of slavery and fear had a deep impact on my heart and mind. I was in a very bad condition. If we talk about mental health then my condition was like that of a mad person. I could not sleep in the night because of the fear. I used to stay awake the whole night to protect the children. I started having high blood pressure. My heart became very weak and would start trembling even if there was a slight sound. Due to working the whole day my body would remain tired. I did not feel like eating anything. During periods I became very weak. I got asthma. Doctor told me that if I did not pay attention to my health I would get TB. I could not even make tea, I could not drink milk. My mental condition was very bad. I had no one in the world except my three children and they were my only support.

A man should never be allowed to have more than one wife. A man marries for his own pleasure but it is the woman who has to suffer. How difficult it is today to raise children, educate them and make their future. When there is more than one wife, the number of children also increase, their needs increase, the struggles increase, peace of mind is ruined, day and night is ruined. Men always make women shut up by falsely saying that Allah has allowed us to have four wives. A man should not be allowed to marry for a second time. He cannot be allowed to ruin the life of women.

Yes there should be legal restrictions to stop men from marrying more than once. Earlier men gave triple divorce but when the law was made, they think twice before giving oral divorce. They worry about the consequences of divorcing like this. They are afraid. Now men consult lawyers before taking any step. Triple divorce has also become less. If the government makes a law against polygamy, it will be of great benefit to women. I want legal restrictions to be imposed on men and also a law should be made for not marrying more than once.

Lived Reality 14

My name is Noorjehan. I am 44 years of age. I am a post-graduate and teaching with an income of 10,000 a month. I stay with my daughter. When I got married, I was already divorced from my first marriage and my husband was also divorced. After marriage, my husband left me with my in-laws. He himself lived in a different place. And I used to take care of everyone in the house. I had a daughter and my husband had four children. My mother-in-law and father-in-law were very old. I used to take care of everyone.

7 years passed. My husband was an Imam in a mosque. Earlier he would not come for some days but then days changed to months. I asked him several times and he would say that there is more work in the mosque. Then I came to know that women come to his house. He had relations with many women. One of the women said that he has also done another nikaah.

When I went to his house, he beat me up and said that there is no need to come to his house. Then I started living in a rented room. He would come home, keep sexual relationship with me and leave. He would have sex with me in an unnatural way and say that is why he has come to me. I myself saw him in inappropriate condition with other women after abusing them. When I complained about him, he said that I was lying. Everyone believed him because he was the Imam in the mosque.

I did not even know when he got married and why. He is interested in different women. I was just busy taking care of my in-laws and children at home. Then I complained to the members of the mosque committee and when he was caught with a woman, they made an excuse that she had come to him for treatment. When things got worse, the mosque committee expelled him from the mosque and he ran away leaving me alone. I am the second woman. I don't know how many he has exploited after me. Since he was part of the masjid and did not want to have any problems from them, he would legitimize his relationships with women by doing nikaah.

My condition has become very bad. I have not been able to come out of that pain till now. I have gone into depression; my blood pressure drops so much that I faint and my heart starts beating very fast. My daughter is 15 years old. She now studies in class 10. When I faint, she calls all neighbours to help me. I have so much pain in my head that I take pain killers several times a day. I just regret that I married such a man and ruined my life and also the life of my daughter. My heart beats very fast and I feel as if I have lost my breath. Sometimes my whole body starts throbbing.

After my marriage my brothers took care of me and supported me, but I did not get any support from my in-laws. They always supported their son. They treated me like a fool and said that 'our son is the Imam in the mosque, you are putting false allegations on him, you doubt him, you are ruining both this world and the hereafter'. Even today my husband lives with his parents.

No husband should marry a second time while living in one marriage. If someone's wife is killed, that is a different matter, or if there is a divorce, that is a different thing, but a married man should never be allowed to marry a second time. Because a man does not marry under compulsion, he marries for fun and ruins the lives of women.

He tells a lot of lies. He himself is wrong but always blames the women. Sometimes he threatens that he will marry again even if it is a small matter. He mentally tortures me and says with great pride that he is allowed four marriages. The wife is worried about food and children and home, but men are only busy in their debauchery. A man must never be allowed second marriage if he has one wife. This should not happen. Rather at the time of marriage itself this condition should also be written that while having the first wife, he will not take a second woman.

A law should be made on the second marriage of a Muslim man because until there is no fear, he will do the same thing again and again. If a law is made on divorce, then a man thinks 100 times before giving a divorce. Similarly, if a law is made on polygamy, then a man will think before second marriage and the lives of women will not be ruined.

Lived Reality 15

My name is Samira. I am 35 years old and a graduate. I work in a boutique and earn about 10,000 per month. I have a son and I live with him.

I was engaged to my uncle's son since childhood. Both of us were eager to get married. In a way you can call it a love marriage. When we got married, I was very happy. Suddenly my husband's attitude changed. He started torturing me. He was very violent even during sexual intercourse he would hit me black and blue. He troubled me a lot and I started to get scared of him.

One day with great courage I asked him why he does this, he said he will tell me when the time comes. When I complained about this to my uncle, he did not believe me and said that I was putting the blame on his son. I was pregnant. I went to my mother and told her everything. She also said that I was lying. When I came home and the matter became serious, my husband wrote me a letter and told me that it was his compulsion to marry me. He was already married and had 2 children too. That is why he wanted me to get upset and go away and leave him.

Now I am working and raising my children. My father had talked about divorce but my husband said no. If he gave me divorce then he would be held responsible for breaking the marriage.

My husband had secretly married before me but no one knew about it. Even my family members did not know, neither my in-laws. He did not even come to see the child. He broke all relationships. Everybody thought I was wrong and that I am the bad one.

After knowing about his marriage my health became very bad. I got depressed. I worried all the time about what would happen now. The doctor said that it would be alright after the child is born but that did not happen, I became completely mentally ill. I would talk nonsense; I could not sleep at night. I would just keep thinking about my situation. Earlier I lived alone but now the expenses of the child also got added. I even tried to commit suicide. I was very broken and kept crying. I had headache all the time. I was in no condition to handle the little child. My mother looked after him. I would hide him worrying that he might be harmed. Even today somewhere in the corner of my heart I am afraid about myself and my child.

I did not get any support from my in-laws or my husband. They supported their son only and always covered up his mistakes. My mother and father supported me completely. Got me treated completely, feeding me and looking after me. My mother used to cry a lot that one should not trust anyone beyond limits, especially in matters of marriage.

No Muslim man living in one marriage should be allowed to marry a second time. Because men ruin the lives of women anyway and say with pride that they are allowed to marry four times. If there was a law allowing only one marriage, my husband would not have ruined my life. He would not have cheated. Men must never be allowed to marry more than once.

There should definitely be a law prohibiting marriage while already married. He has a wife at home and then goes on to have relationships outside the marriage. There is so much responsibility in one marriage. Responsibility of the wife, responsibility of the children, education, food expenses and other expenditure. So, if there are 2 wives, the number of children will be more and as they grow their expenses will also grow. That is why a man should be allowed to have only one marriage. And a law should also be made. If there is a law then men will also be afraid that if he marries a second time, legal action will be taken.

Lived Reality 16

My name is Shamim Banu. I live in Bharathipuram, Dindigul, along with my mother and my younger son. I am 34 years of age and a graduate in science. This is the story of my life — a story of dreams denied, pain endured and a continued fight for justice, dignity, and survival.

I was a bright, hopeful girl with dreams of becoming a teacher. I completed my graduation with the intention of pursuing a B.Ed., but my family, my parents and brothers, refused to support me. Instead, they arranged my marriage, believing that it was the right path for a woman. I was married off to a man from a nearby town. At that moment, I didn't realize I was stepping into a life of abuse, betrayal and heartbreak.

At the time of my marriage, 120 grams of gold was agreed to be given as dowry. But due to financial constraints, my parents could only give half. From the very beginning, this became a reason for torture. My husband and mother-in-law continuously demanded the remaining pressuring me emotionally and mentally. Just 40 days into my marriage, they sent me back to my maternal home, asking me to return only after the full dowry was given. My parents pleaded for time and eventually sent me back.

But things only got worse. Back at my in-laws' home, I was treated like a housemaid. My husband started distancing himself. They demanded I give up all my remaining jewelry. I was told that if I refused, they would go to the Jamath (mosque council) and accuse me of bad behavior. Out of fear and emotional pressure, I gave up all my gold. I was left with nothing.

My husband did not go to work regularly, and whenever I asked him to be responsible, he would beat me and abuse me, saying, *"Go to your mother's house and bring money."* Still, I tried to adjust. We had our first son and I went to my maternal home for delivery.

After my delivery, they again demanded the remaining dowry when I returned. My parents, who had just spent all they had on my baby shower and medical expenses, couldn't fulfill the demand. When I went back after five months, they used me for housework, ignored me, and insulted me daily. My husband beat me severely — again and again — and no one stopped him. I became numb to the pain. Eventually, my brother brought me back to my mother's house. A few months later, my husband came, apologized and took me back, but the cycle of abuse continued.

Each time I returned, they made new promises and my parents sacrificed everything to support me. They even gave some more gold and re-purchased household items to help me settle in a separate home my husband arranged. But peace didn't last.

I conceived for the second time when my first child was just two and a half years old. Again, they asked for the remaining gold. My family begged for more time, but that only triggered more violence. One day, after yet another argument, my husband smashed my head against the wall and floor. I started

bleeding heavily and lost consciousness. Instead of admitting the truth, he told the hospital I had fallen while carrying a water pot. I was moved from a private hospital in and then due to the severity of my condition, to Madurai Government Hospital. At that time, I was 4 months pregnant. I was in coma. My parents stood by me, helpless and heartbroken, with no support, emotionally or financially. All they wanted was for me and my unborn child to survive.

I regained consciousness only during labor. I didn't understand what was happening. I kept asking about my first son, unaware I was about to give birth to my second. My baby boy was born at just 1.5 kg. I was weak, broken and devastated. My husband never came to visit me. He even kept my first son away from me. I didn't recognize my own child when someone finally brought him to me. When I finally recovered enough to speak, I told my parents everything that had happened.

My parents approached the local Jamath, expecting justice but all we got were false assurances — “Let her recover first. We'll talk later.” Days turned into months. During this time, my husband married another woman, without divorcing me, with the support of a Jamath, I came to know from others.

So now I was not only abandoned, but replaced and still legally married.

I now live with my younger son, who is in 4th standard, along with my elderly mother. My father passed away three years back. I receive no maintenance, no jewelry returned, no share of assets, and no custody of my elder son. My brother who works in Tiruppur as a garment worker, supports us with his small earnings. He gave up his own dreams of marriage to take care of me and my son. Despite all this, no legal action has helped us. The police, the law and the religious institutions have all failed to protect us.

I am tired. I am still sick from my injuries and the medicines which I have to take. I cry not for myself anymore, but for my sons, for all the women like me whose lives are torn apart by dowry, violence, and injustice.

What did I do wrong? I got married like my family wanted. I tried to adjust. I tolerated abuse for the sake of my children. But still, I was beaten, abandoned, robbed, and silenced.

I want justice. I want my jewelry, my rights, and my son back.

I want laws that actually protect women, not just on paper.

I want religious councils and courts to stop protecting abusers.

And I want women like me to be heard, believed, and helped.

If you can help me, or women like me, please don't wait. Every day, someone like me is silently suffering, hoping the world will finally listen.

Lived Reality 17

My name is Shaheen. I am 29 years of age and have studied till class 8. My husband is 32 years old. We got married eight years ago. I have two daughters. My elder daughter is in 4th standard and my younger daughter is in class 1. I am currently living with my in-laws.

In the early years of our marriage, especially until the birth of our first daughter, there were no major issues. However, things changed after my husband returned from working in another district. He began a relationship with another woman. I was unaware of this at first, but I came to know about the affair through his WhatsApp status, where he had posted a photo from a baby shower. When I asked him about it, he said, “It’s not what you think.” He claimed he had only shared the photo with his in-laws and that it was a friend’s celebration. My in-laws also supported his explanation, so I believed them and remained silent.

After some time, he began staying out more frequently. When I asked, he said it was due to work. During this period, my second daughter was born. Then, rumours began spreading that he had a daughter with the other woman. I confronted him and also asked my in-laws, but they denied everything. Still, I couldn’t help but feel suspicious because of his behaviour.

At that time, my relationship with my maternal family was not strong enough to share these issues. Due to my family’s difficult financial situation, my brother helped us by taking a loan from a moneylender to move us into a leased house. He used the 56 grams of gold that he had given me as dowry during my marriage. However, my husband failed to repay the principal and interest and we lost that jewellery. This led to conflict between us.

My family’s socio-economic situation worsened further. My eldest sister’s husband was seriously ill and my family had to take responsibility for maintaining her whole family and her husband’s medical expenses. Also, my younger sister remained unmarried due to financial constraints. All of this made it difficult for me to open up to my family about what I was going through.

Later, I found out from neighbours that my husband had a second son with the same woman. They told me she was originally from a Hindu background and was now living with him illegally. I once again questioned my mother-in-law, but she completely denied everything. When I asked my husband about the woman, he said nothing and stopped visiting home altogether, not even to see our children.

Left with no other option, I broke down and went to my maternal home and filed a police complaint. At the police station, my husband’s family said they would take the matter to the Jamaat with the support of a political party. During the mediation process, my husband and his family openly supported the second woman. It was only then that I realized everyone was fully aware of the affair and had been hiding it from me.

My husband admitted that he had already married the other woman and had two children with her. He told me, “I can’t leave her. If she agrees, I’ll take care of both families.”

I stayed with my parents after that. I was severely depressed and attempted suicide multiple times. The only reason I’m still alive today is because of my two daughters.

We are originally from Dindigul District, but somehow, they arranged Jamaat representatives from Trichy District and quickly conducted a marriage for him with the second woman. They even issued a marriage certificate stating the marriage happened four years earlier. Once I found this out, I filed another complaint. At the police station, my husband again said he would support both families and showed the marriage certificate with the backdated date. It was clear to me that, for the sake of money, some members of the Jamaat acted against me.

My husband said he would arrange a separate house for me to live in. But the house we are living in now is a lease house, acquired through a loan taken using my gold. Later, he told me I could no longer live in a rental house with his low income and that I must stay with his parents instead.

I have studied only up to the eighth grade. I do not have a job. I am dependent on my in-laws to raise my children. But there is no peace in this house. My father-in-law constantly speaks to me harshly and insults me. My husband never visits me or his daughters. He openly lives with his second wife.

Because she earns an income working at a shop, she receives respect and consideration—something I do not get. Somehow, they allow me and my children to stay here, but I live in constant anxiety.

My husband has taken advantage of the uncodified Muslim personal law, which allows up to four marriages, to deceive me. He converted a Hindu woman to Islam, married her as his second wife and secured a marriage document falsely dated four years earlier. This was a betrayal of my trust and an abuse of religious law.

Today, I continue to live here without any self-respect for the sake of my children. This situation has caused me immense emotional and physical stress. I suffer from body pain, insomnia and constant exhaustion. Mentally, I feel overwhelmed. I often experience intense anger and at times, take it out on my children by scolding or even hitting them, which makes me feel even more broken.

No other woman should have to go through what I have endured. There must be legal restrictions to prevent such multiple marriages when they lead to injustice and emotional damage to women and innocent children in the name of Islam.

Lived Reality 18

My name is Bharti. I am 36 years old. I currently live in Marunoothu with my three children. My hometown is Hyderabad, where I studied up to the 10th grade. My family still resides there. I have three sisters and one brother.

Seventeen years ago, a man from Tamil Nadu came to Hyderabad and began working in my father's business. Over time, he fell in love with me. He expressed his love and told me he wanted to marry me. Eventually, we got married. We lived together in Hyderabad for thirteen years without any major problems. During that time, we were blessed with two daughters and one son. We were a happy family.

During the COVID-19 lockdown, my husband started building a house in his native village, Marunoothu, in Tamil Nadu. He built it with love and care for me and our children. While living in Hyderabad, I was eagerly counting the days to move into our new home. But during that joyful period, my life took a painful turn because of another woman. An affair began between her and my husband, which went far beyond what was appropriate. That affair eventually turned into love and without informing me, they got married in a mosque in Trichy.

I only found out about the marriage after it had already happened. Shocked and heartbroken, I immediately gathered my children and moved to Marunoothu—my husband's native place. When I asked him how he could marry another woman, he firmly replied that, according to Islamic tradition, a man is allowed to marry up to four wives.

After that, he began living with his second wife. This deeply affected our children. They had always depended on their father for everything. Seeing him choose to live apart from us caused them emotional pain and confusion.

Neither I nor my children knew Tamil, which made life in Marunoothu very difficult. I approached the local jamaat (community council) for help with the support of my mother-in-law, but they turned us away. The only person who supported me was my mother-in-law. She too had been abandoned by her husband in the past. Despite her own struggles, she stood by us and worked hard to help support me and my children—even doing labour jobs to make ends meet.

My husband neglected our children's education. Since they didn't understand Tamil, they found it hard to adjust in the local school. Learning a new language was a daily struggle, and they often came home feeling emotionally broken. My husband never visited us. When I raised the issue again with the jamaat, they told him to treat both wives equally. After that, he began coming home just once a week. Then, about three months later, he visited again. But after that, he completely stopped coming.

With the help of a voluntary organization, my mother-in-law and I filed a complaint with the police. The police contacted him, and for a few days, he came and stayed off and on. But now, he has stopped coming altogether. This has left our children deeply affected. They long to spend time with their father, but he shows no interest. Seeing their pain and disappointment causes me unbearable emotional stress.

I cannot go to work because I don't speak Tamil, and I feel uncomfortable attending public functions. My mother-in-law is the only one who goes to work and supports us financially. This situation has left me mentally exhausted. I feel helpless and unable to properly care for my children, which hurts me deeply. I don't know what the future holds.

Since ours was a love marriage, I couldn't seek help from my own parents. My mother-in-law, who is already struggling, is the only support we have. I am deeply worried about my children's future.

I want to raise my voice against polygamy, which has destroyed our family and hurt me and my children. After 13 years of a peaceful married life, everything suddenly collapsed. My children crave their father's love and affection. They are losing faith and growing up with sadness and pain, which I cannot bear to watch.

Please understand our pain. My only hope is that this injustice will be acknowledged and that changes will be made so that no other woman or child has to go through what we are suffering.

Lived Reality 19

My name is Shayla Banu and I am 30-year-old. I live in Nagal Nagar and have two sons. Unfortunately, my husband only visits us occasionally and treats our home as if he were a guest. The experiences I've gone through are things no woman should ever have to face.

My mother took a loan from a moneylender using our house documents as collateral to feed us as my father passed away when we were small kids. When we repaid the loan and requested the return of our documents, the lender refused to return them. During this time, a mediator stepped in to speak on our behalf. This man later became my husband.

Initially, he came only to discuss the house issue, but he started visiting frequently. At that time, we were searching for a groom for my elder sister. He brought a proposal for her and she eventually married into that family. Today, she lives peacefully and has three children. So, our family started believing in him.

After my sister's marriage, the mediator began speaking to me more directly. Though he was already married with two children, he expressed a desire to marry me. I did not agree at first. I had only studied up to the 8th grade, as I lost my father at a young age and could not continue my education. He continued to pressure me.

I was not interested in becoming a second wife, so I left my house and stayed with my aunt after an argument with my mother. Later, my mother convinced me to return home and arranged an alliance for me with a family from Madurai. The groom's side said they expected nothing in return and the engagement took place immediately.

However, the mediator persisted. He kept persuading me, promising to build a house for me and saying that he wanted a male child. Coming from a poor background and witnessing my mother's struggles as a single parent, I eventually gave in to his words. Though I feared how his first wife might react, he assured me that according to our religion, a man could have up to four wives. I believed him and agreed to the marriage.

Just two days before my arranged marriage, the mediator manipulated me again and forced me to leave my home. He took me to Nagore and we got married there.

After the wedding, we returned to the house where his first wife lived. My mother had filed a police complaint by then and his first wife and her relatives also confronted us. The police intervened and in front of everyone, my husband stated that he married me because he wanted a male child. Since there was no space for me at his house, the police sent us back to my mother's house.

Since then, I've been living at my mother's house with my two sons. My husband never fulfilled the promises he made. He never stayed with us regularly, nor did he respect me. He occasionally visits, sometimes to bring things for the children, but often ignores even their basic needs.

To avoid burdening my mother, I started working as a housemaid in a nearby home where I cook for elderly people. I manage our living expenses, including food, education and medical needs from that income. My husband does not provide any financial support. He continues to live with and prioritizes his first wife and children.

This hurts me deeply. I feel humiliated having to beg for basic needs from someone who promised to care for me. With no other option, I continue working as a maid to support my family. We have no separate home. I live in my mother's house and handle all expenses myself.

My husband visits us once every few days, only at night. He leaves before the children even wake up. It has been ten years since our marriage. My elder son is now in 4th grade and my younger son is in LKG. Their father does not even contribute to their education. Whenever I ask, he claims he has no income, though I know he earns as a middleman.

He has given us nothing—no financial support, no emotional presence, no dignity in society. He never includes us in any family functions. My children are growing up feeling rejected, unable to experience the love of a father. My elder son feels ashamed knowing I work as a housemaid. I face physical pain from the work and emotional pain from the situation every day such as stress, head ache and body pain. Sometimes I blow out my stress over my children and feel guilty later on.

Because of the allowance for polygamy in our religion, my innocence was exploited when I was just 20 years old. My mother, a widow, continues to suffer alongside me. Now, my children too, face the consequences of being born to a second wife.

I strongly oppose the provision of polygamy. It has destroyed my life. I receive no respect, no support and no rights as a wife or mother. I don't want anyone else to suffer the way I have. This practice must stop so that no other woman or child experiences the same pain.

Lived Reality 20

My name is Hanifa. I am a 30-year-old artisan, spending long hours bent over my embroidery frame, painstakingly stitching gold and silver threads into delicate zari patterns. Despite my skill, I earn barely ₹4,000 a month—far from enough to support two children. Today I live in my maternal home in a semi-urban neighbourhood, sharing a small house with six family members, including my 12-year-old elder daughter.

I met my future husband through phone conversations. Like many young women with limited social exposure, I was drawn by his attentive words and the promise of stability. I entered the relationship believing in his affection and good faith. What I did not know—and what he did not reveal—was that he was already married. At the time of their marriage, neither me nor his first wife knew of each other's existence.

Soon after the wedding, I gave birth to my first daughter. Even when I discovered his previous marriage, I continued to live with him. With no independent financial security and no alternative support system, I chose patience and loyalty, hoping that over time my dedication would be rewarded with stability. Like many women in similar situations, I tried to believe that my sacrifices would protect my child and my marriage.

But instead of stability came betrayal. The abuse began to surface soon after my first pregnancy. My husband stopped providing financial support and began subjecting me to physical and mental harassment.

When the first wife obtained a divorce, I allowed myself a brief hope that my husband might finally improve. But my hopes were crushed: my husband became even more aggressive, continued to beat me and refused to take responsibility for his family. In spite of the abuse, I stayed with him for ten years, trying to maintain some semblance of a home and to protect my daughters from the trauma I myself endured.

Under extremely difficult circumstances, I conceived again and gave birth to my daughter. By then, the family atmosphere had become tense and unstable. My husband's anger was unpredictable. He blamed me for everything. Stress during pregnancy, lack of medical care and constant fear took a toll on my health.

The breaking point came when my husband forcibly expelled me from the marital home. With no option, I returned to my parental house with my elder daughter. My husband kept the younger child with him.

One year ago, he demanded custody of both daughters; when I refused, he ran away with the younger girl. Despite repeated attempts, I was not able to get my younger daughter back. I was also misled by

legal counsel during critical stages of the custody battle, leaving me powerless. The sense of loss was profound. It felt like someone has cut my heart in half. Every night I worry if my younger daughter is safe, is she fed or is she being brainwashed to forget me.

The emotional trauma has been compounded by financial stress: travel for court hearings, legal fees, and missed workdays reduce my already small income.

Recently I discovered that my husband had married again—his third marriage. He had never informed any of the wives about his previous relationships. Each remarriage deepened the chaos at home, worsening my mental health and undermining my dignity.

When I married him, the first wife had not known; when he married the third wife, neither me nor the first wife were informed. This pattern of deception has left multiple women and children vulnerable, financially insecure and socially stigmatised.

Despite these hardships, I have refused to give up. Determined to protect my rights and my children, I have filed three cases:

- Section 498A IPC case for cruelty and harassment.
- Maintenance case to secure financial support.
- Custody case to regain my younger daughter.

These ongoing legal battles add emotional strain and financial pressure to my already fragile situation. But for me, they are also a form of self-assertion—proof that I will not quietly accept injustice.

The cumulative effect of these experiences on my mental and physical health has been severe. Years of betrayal, violence and court proceedings have left me anxious, traumatised and at times physically unwell. Yet I continued to work in zari embroidery to provide for my elder daughter, though my income is meagre and irregular.

My main support system today is my own family, who shelter me and my elder child. I have also built a bond with the first wife, who understands my suffering. We share experiences, information and moral support—two women once placed in competition by the same man, now united in mutual empathy.

By contrast, my husband's family has openly opposed me, using abusive language and blaming me for his remarriages.

I worry not only about myself but also about the future of my daughters. I fear my younger child may face neglect, alienation or manipulation. I know that without my intervention, both children could be denied education, stability and the chance of a secure childhood. My fight for custody is therefore not just a personal battle but a struggle to protect the next generation from repeating cycles of injustice.

Despite these circumstances, my resolve remains unbroken. I am outspoken about the issue of polygamy and undisclosed remarriages. I strongly oppose men taking more than one wife without disclosure or consent. In my view, men exploit women, conceal their previous marriages and escape punishment, while women bear all the cruelty, social stigma and financial consequences. We are left holding the children and the men just move on.

I believe there should be a strict law against such polygamy, including criminal conviction and monetary penalties for men who exploit women and children through multiple undisclosed marriages.

My story is not just about personal suffering but also about resilience and the urgent need for systemic change. It highlights how gaps in legal awareness, weak enforcement of women's rights and the absence of social support systems can leave women trapped in abusive relationships. It also shows how economic vulnerability—earning only ₹4,000 a month—can limit women's choices and prolong their exposure to violence.

At the same time, my case demonstrates the power of solidarity. The support of my family, the empathy of the first wife, and the attention of legal aid organisations give me hope. With proper legal guidance, I can start the battle again for the custody of my younger daughter. With stable income or vocational support, I can strengthen my financial independence. With community advocacy, my voice can help shape laws that protect women from similar exploitation.

I continue to fight in court and with my needle and thread to stitch together myself a future and the future of my daughters who can grow up safe, educated and free from the injustices I have endured. My story is the same as that of many women who are caught in cycles of deception, violence and legal uncertainty, yet who persist in seeking justice.

Lived Reality 21

My name is Asma. I was only 13 when I was married. My husband, then 19 or 20, worked as a carpenter. A room was allotted to us in my father-in-law's house. Like so many child brides, I stepped into marriage still a child myself, unaware of the hardships ahead.

Two years after the wedding, I gave birth to my first daughter. Despite my age and limited resources, I worked tirelessly, taking up agricultural labour to supplement my husband's meagre income. I dreamt of building a comfortable life for my family. With great effort and careful savings, we managed to buy a small piece of land and construct a house of our own. For a brief period, it seemed as though my sacrifices were leading to a better future.

During these five years, I gave birth to two more daughters. I juggled farm work, housework, and childcare, pouring every ounce of my energy into my family. By my early twenties, I was already worn down—my youth and health depleted by hard labour and repeated pregnancies. Yet I endured, believing my devotion and hard work would be appreciated.

Instead, my husband began to grow distant. The physical abuse that had started earlier intensified. I described myself as “a watchman”—someone who guarded family, kept children safe and tried to protect what little we had built. But my husband's persecution continued. Then one day, he justified his cruelty by blaming me for giving birth to three girls. Using this as an excuse, he married again.

The second wife was shockingly young—around the same age my eldest daughter. He brought her into the same house that I had helped build. I recall that moment as the cruellest blow. “All my years of sacrifice felt worthless,” I said. “The house I built was in his name. Where should I go? How could I leave my three girls? With whom would I leave them?” These impossible questions haunted me day and night.

The stress and heartbreak took a toll on my body. I developed high blood pressure and diabetes. I began using tobacco to cope with my anxiety and despair. I knocked on every possible door for help—Gram Panchayat, local leaders, even my own extended family. But no one offered a solution. The Panchayat told me that even if my husband had done wrong, they could do nothing because Islam permits multiple marriages. My father and brother were themselves trapped in poverty and unable to support me. I felt utterly abandoned..

Yet above all my suffering burned a fierce desire to survive—for myself and, even more, for my daughters. I refused to give up. After days of searching, I found work in a recycling factory. The job was hard, but it gave me a small measure of independence. Different hardships continued to come my way, but I began to rebuild a sense of purpose.

My story shows not only the damage caused by child marriage and polygamy but also the resilience of a woman fighting to protect my children. My experience raises urgent questions about how religious guidelines are misinterpreted and enforced. “If religion is meant to guide people,” I said, “then it must change some rules for the benefit of humanity. Otherwise, polygamy will only be used by some men to take advantage of women.”

I was not alone. Across communities, countless women are forced into early marriages and later betrayed under the cover of social or religious norms. They shoulder backbreaking labour to support families that often discard them. They are told to be patient, to accept, to sacrifice—while men escape accountability. My life is a stark example of how these systems fail women and children.

Today, I still struggle with ill health and economic insecurity. I continue working to feed and educate my daughters. But I also speak out, sharing my story with others. I hope that one day, laws will change and justice will be accessible even to poor women. I dream of a future in which my daughters can make their own choices, marry when they are ready, and live in homes free from violence and betrayal.

My story is painful but also inspiring. They are also a call to action for policymakers, community leaders, and religious authorities: to protect vulnerable women, to enforce existing child marriage and domestic violence laws, and to ensure that no one can misuse religious or cultural traditions to harm others.

My life stands as a testament to courage. Though betrayed by those closest to me and by systems meant to protect me, I have chosen not to be silent. I continue to work, to care, and to fight—for my dignity and for the rights of my daughters.

Lived Reality 22

My name is Maliha. I grew up in a modest neighbourhood—what people in my district called a para. I was known among neighbours as a bright, polite and curious teenager who loved studying and had ambitions of doing well in my examination. My parents were proud of me and hoped education would open a path for a better life.

At this vulnerable time in my life, I came under the influence of one man, my neighbour and private tutor. He was nearly 35—seventeen or eighteen years older than me and already married with three children: two sons and a daughter. He taught me after school and gradually became a constant presence in my daily life.

I was fully aware of his existing marriage. Yet his attention and help, unusual for a man much older and already married, felt reassuring as I faced academic pressure and limited family resources. He, on the other hand, recognised how easy it was to influence my trust.

He helped me with books, paid small fees on my behalf and listened to my worries. Over time, the support grew into dependence. For me, who had known only the protective walls of my parents' home, he seemed like someone who could guide and safeguard my future. This emotional reliance slowly blurred boundaries. The “teacher–student” relationship shifted into something more intimate.

Eventually, this dependence turned into a marriage proposal. Whether out of genuine affection or manipulation, he persuaded me to marry him. I agreed, imagining I would gain stability, status and a partner who cared.

But marriage did not bring the reality I expected. From the beginning, his family—especially his first wife and children—refused to accept me. I was not allowed to live in his household. Instead, I stayed with my parents, essentially a “second wife on paper” without a real home.

Within a few days, and the harsh reality of polygamy set in. I was caught between the hostility of his family and the growing discomfort of my own parental home. My brother resented the situation and pressured me to leave. Life became emotionally and socially painful.

I believed that once he divorced his first wife, I could live openly as his only wife. But he never took that step. He claimed he could not afford the financial obligations of talaq. If his wife left, the children would remain with him, increasing his costs and responsibilities.

In truth, he had not married me out of readiness to build a second household. He had done so without serious planning, driven by attraction and the convenience of secrecy. I, still a teenager, found myself locked in a relationship where I had no control, no secure home and no social acceptance.

Meanwhile, my husband struggled to earn even a minimum income. His work was irregular and insufficient to support two families. Promises of a divorce and a better future for me became empty words.

Realising the enormity of my mistake, I experienced deep emotional pain and disappointment. Yet I had to survive. I began giving tuitions myself, using the very skill that had first brought me into contact with him. Piece by piece, I tried to rebuild a semblance of independence.

My case was not isolated. Many teenage girls in similar circumstances are drawn into relationships with older men who present themselves as mentors or protectors. Without legal safeguards and community awareness, these relationships can slip into exploitative marriages that destroy a girl's education, independence and dignity.

His actions—though tolerated under religious and cultural norms—placed me in a situation where I bore all the risks and losses. The first wife remained legally married, still entitled to marital rights, while I had none of the benefits of a recognised home or financial support.

My story also highlights the social cost of unregulated polygamy. First wives may live under the constant threat of abandonment. Second wives may be emotionally lured and then left without security. Children from both households grow up witnessing tension, hostility and divided resources.

In my case, me and the first wife and the children were not freed from their bond to my husband. No one was protected. The family unit was fragmented and the responsibility was never equally shared.

Despite me suffering, I still recognise that there may be circumstances when a second marriage is necessary—widowhood, infertility or mutual agreement. But I question whether current rules truly protect women or simply allow men to take advantage.

I argue that if religion is for everyone, then religious rules should also be applied with fairness to everyone. Women should not be introduced to a “safe shelter” that turns out to be a trap of dependency and pain.

Today, I continue to live apart from my husband. I earn a small income from private tutoring and remain emotionally scarred by my experience. My teenage hopes of a secure married life were replaced by a hard lesson.

Yet I have not lost my sense of justice. I speak openly about my story, hoping other girls will learn from it and that lawmakers will recognise the urgent need to regulate polygamy in ways that uphold dignity, equality and genuine consent.

Analysis of the Case Studies

➤ Socio-Economic Status of the Respondents

Women in polygamous marriages often depend largely on their husband's earnings. As a husband's financial resources must be shared among several wives and children, each household tends to receive limited economic support. Many Muslim women in such circumstances lack independent sources of income and have little control over household finances. Consequently, Indian Muslim women in polygamous unions occupy a particularly vulnerable position — shaped by overlapping gender, economic, and legal disadvantages. Although polygamy remains permissible under the uncodified Muslim Personal Law, it generally proves detrimental to women's well-being, leading to diminished autonomy, lower living standards, and increased psychological distress.

The respondents of this study are mostly in their 30s and early 40s having undergone a lot of pain in the best years of their life. Some respondents are in their 60s and are dependent on their adult children. Most do not have a steady income and are dependent on maternal family as well for their daily needs. Some were also working at the time of the interview. But their income does not ensure a comfortable life. One runs a boutique, one is a teacher, one is a journalist, one works and earns through stitching and sewing while others are into informal low paying contractual jobs, like domestic work, *zari* work [a kind of embroidery], agricultural labour and so on. The maximum amount we reported most of them earning, if at all was Rs. 10000 per month. Few of them were in such dire straits that they shifted to another country for some time to earn money. There too they faced a lot of hard ships with long hours of difficult work, insecurity to make money to survive and also earn enough to support a family back home.

It is also interesting to observe that some of the respondents were graduates and even postgraduates. One was an engineer by education. Most had completed class 12. This implies that contrary to popular belief, a good education is no insurance against polygamy, it does however give them an advantage of earning money to support themselves financially. Their dependence on others decreases and they are more confident.

Most marriages were arranged by the parents which is still an enduring trend in India with one exception where the man wooed the respondent claiming his love.

While most were married in adulthood, we still do see some respondents being married at the age of 13, 14, 17 and 19. Early marriage led to early motherhood combined with the trauma, violence and abuse coupled with the socio-economic impact that comes with polygamy. One respondent was married at 13 and was a mother by 15. Another, in a span of 5 years of marriage had 4 children.

Most respondents don't have more than 3 children with a big majority only having one child. One respondent did not have any offspring at all, living alone while the rest stay with their son, daughter or parents.

➤ Facets of Polygamy

Fraud and Lies

When one respondent asked her husband about his second marriage, he put the blame on the second wife saying that it was she who was after him to get married. When the respondent spoke to the second wife, she said it was not her fault, it was the husband who was after her to get married to him. He said to her that he does not love his first wife and does not like her at all. The respondent shares that after this revelation she stopped talking to her husband. She speaks only when necessary. She has 3 children and she needs him for their education and other expenses. He lied to both of them, blaming each of them for his own deeds.

In another instance, when the women went to her husband's village to collect her daughter's bond money from the local government office, she was told that he told the villagers that he re-married after giving her divorce and a compensation of Rs. 5 lakhs. She heard three shocking news at the same time; that he had divorced her, that he gave a hefty compensation and that he had remarried. Upon confrontation, he still lied saying that the woman is his uncle's daughter and not his wife. But the neighbours confirmed that he had indeed married her.

In one instance, the husband not just married but had children and kept his first wife in the dark. She confronted him on his WhatsApp status which had photos of his child's baby shower. On being confronted he denied everything, claiming it was his friends' child's celebration. His parents also supported his explanation. The respondent had to keep quiet and believe in them.

In one instance, the respondent's husband married a Hindu woman. Later his family forced him to divorce her as she was the second wife. Then he married another woman who had no idea that he was already married and that one marriage had ended in divorce.

One respondent says when she married her husband, the first wife had not known; when he married the third wife, neither she nor the first wife were informed. This pattern of deception has left multiple women and children vulnerable, financially insecure and socially stigmatized.

Men commit fraud. They remarry and do not inform the first wife, nor the second wife. A man does not marry under compulsion, he marries for fun and ruins the lives of women. He tells a lot of lies. He himself is wrong but always blames the women. Sometimes he uses polygamy as a threat to get his way done. For every little 'mistake' a woman does, polygamy hangs as a dangling sword over her head just as triple divorce was, some years back.

'The wife is worried about food, the children, their education but men are only busy in their debauchery' say the respondents. One respondent says: Even today after 17 years of our marriage, this man has never held my hand with love. He calls me a person of loose character. He has been cheating on me from the very beginning.

It is a fraud in the name of religion.

Suddenness Stuns

In most cases the man just turns up at the residence with the other wife and children and announces that he is already married. It is just shocking for the woman. There are no words, there are no emotions, just plain numbness till it all crashes on her. The man shows no remorse and it is 'no big deal' for him. The blame conveniently falls on the woman that she could not bear a child for instance. In another instance, it was blamed on the fact that she did not bear a male child. In another case, a 'love marriage' did not ensure monogamy.

Illicit Relationship or Marriage

One respondent could not gauge whether her husband married these multiple women with whom he had a relationship simply to be able to have an illicit arrangement given a 'halal' name. On top of it, he was an Imam in the nearby mosque. To avoid being accused of adultery, he would marry some of the women he had a relationship with to legitimize it. She has no idea how many such women were there in his life. She was left caring for her in-laws and children at home. When she complained to the mosque committee, he was expelled. He ran away leaving her alone with his parents and children.

Hindu Woman

In the study some instances of one of the wives being a Hindu came up. Needless to say, they converted to Islam. Facing flak from her family and community, leaving everything to set up a family, only to see another wife come into the picture. The wife has no option but to continue as children are involved and most often her parents are reluctant to take her back in the fold again.

Negligent Parents

Parents of girls should carefully check all the details of the men before they marry their daughters, instead of rushing into it and ruining their daughters' lives. There were instances where the parents were aware of the married status of their son-in-law and yet they got their daughter married to an already married man. How are some parents ok with their daughters marrying an already married man? How are some parents ok if their son marries another woman while still in his first marriage? Do they find it morally and ethically correct?

Father's Remarriage And Impact On The Respondent

Some respondents had seen their mother suffering because their father had remarried. The respondents said that they always longed for their father's love and attention which they never got. He never realized, understood and acknowledged the impact his remarriage would have on his children. It is

also a pattern that we see on the husband's side. That his father had remarried and the son simply repeats that pattern.

Child marriage

Women as young as 13 or 14 years had been married. In a few years they become mothers of 2-3 children, their husbands have remarry and they face a life of misery. In some instances, we see that the second/third wife is as young as the daughter of the first wife.

In some instances, women are not just second but also the third and the fourth wife. Life is difficult with poverty, illiteracy, lack of work options and lack of skills. Underage marriage is tough enough. But a child is also saddled with multiple pregnancies and an absconding, violent, polygamous husband.

Remarrying for Children

As mentioned earlier, men justify their remarriage either because the wife does not bear children or does not bear him a male child. In one instance when he was unable to get a child from the second marriage as well, he had no answer when confronted. Male ego does not permit him to even think of a probability of him having any deficiency.

Remarrying to get a child is simply an excuse because otherwise the children never figure in this arrangement. Men never think about the repercussions of their action on their children. They stop meeting them, loving them and supporting them. They don't exist for them. One can only imagine what impact an absentee, absconding father can have on their children. Many such children grow up in pain and anxiety. collapses.

All possible child rights are violated, especially the right of the child to feel safe.

Relationship with Children

The impact on children, whether of the first or second wife, is tremendously negative. They not only see violence over their mother but also see the audacity with which the father remarries and shows no remorse. The children when they are small, feel scared and worry for their mother. As they grow up the resentment grows. In one instance, the grown-up-earning daughter was very angry and wanted to run away. The respondent said that she was scared for her daughter now.

Women take it upon themselves to be the peacemaker between the children and their father. One respondent shared that when her husband remarried, the children started to hate him and would say bad things about him. But she would make them understand that he is their father and that he loves them a lot. It is a constant struggle to stand up for a man who did not stand with her. To constantly defend him, to show the children his good side, to put him on the pedestal of being a father, to

constantly broker peace and acceptance – it is a silent mental drain on the woman. She forgets that she is also a victim, she forgets that she is defending the perpetrator.

When children see their father living a separate life, they undergo a lot of emotional pain and confusion. They were dependent on their father for everything and now he does not exist for them. He starts to neglect their education, their upbringing. They long for him, but he does not show any interest or inclination to be with them. Seeing children in pain and disappointment, women undergo deep emotional stress. The helplessness and hopelessness are immeasurable. For decades a woman has to bear the responsibility of herself and the children single handedly. He gives nothing – no financial support, no emotional presence, no dignity in society. The children grow up feeling rejected and unable to experience the love of a father.

Violence

Women facing violence, whether first or second wife, is a common theme running across all case studies. Women have nowhere to go and that becomes the core reason for them to continue in a violent marriage where there is no dignity and no security. In one instance the other wife also beat up the respondent's children. She would lie to the husband about the respondent and then he would beat her and the children.

One married an already married man, married thrice before her. His second wife had committed suicide because of his torture. But he continued his marriage spree.

In another instance, the respondent was not only facing violence but was declared mad by him and his entire family. He was also into drugs. She faced sexual violence as well. He would have sex with his second wife in front of his first wife and children. He was promiscuous and had multiple illicit relationships.

In one instance the respondent was the fourth wife and her husband got his first wife's children to their wedding. Her husband was interested only in sex, which was very painful and agonizing for her. He would not even talk to her. He would remain quiet all the time. She worked like a maid in the house.

In one case the second wife took care of the first wife and children and also worked to earn money. First wife's children were the respondent's responsibility alone. The husband never took care of the respondent's needs but always looked after the first wife and her children. He would also beat the respondent's children. They would fearfully sit in one corner. He would threaten to kill them all. He also took away all the money that she earned. She and her children worked like servants in the house. She looked after his wife's cooking, washing, cleaning etc. She worked for her children as well, making their tiffins, and taking them to school.

In another case, the second wife threw out the first one after her marriage. The first wife was not able to bear children.

Even educated woman were not spared. They were seen landing up in harsh family conditions. One respondent was educated and earning a good salary. She not only paid a hefty dowry but her salary was taken away from her.

Women Becoming Single Parents

Living as a single parent is very difficult for women. Women who become single parents often face a range of social, economic, and emotional challenges. Financial insecurity is one of the most pressing issues, as many single mothers have to balance earning a livelihood with caring for their children, often without adequate support systems. Social stigma and isolation can also affect their mental well-being, especially in traditional societies where single motherhood is less accepted. Despite these challenges, many single mothers show remarkable resilience, striving to provide stability, education, and emotional support for their children. Law makers, religious leaders and all those who favour polygamy must put themselves in the shoes of a single mother to know her travails. Till that sensitivity develops, we will continue to have people who will flagrantly promote polygamy.

Complications

Look at the complications in one particular case. One respondent divorced her husband as he was cruel but the second husband whom she married was already married with 3 children. His first wife was devastated when he remarried and she dragged him to court for maintenance and he went to jail for non-payment. The respondent then mortgaged her mother's house to get him out of the jail, losing whatever little security that the family had gathered over decades.

Slavery

Most respondents stayed with their in-laws even as the husband remarried and set up a new home. They continued to serve their in-laws and in one case, one respondent also had to look after the children of his first wife, who had died. They had to bear physical assault, violence from their husband as well as in-laws and faced torture for dowry. In one case, the respondent gave dowry worth 50 lakh including gold and cash and yet that did not ensure a happy married life. In fact, dowry is one reason for men to marry multiple times, each marriage making him richer. But the socialization that most Indian women are made to go through is to serve the marital family, take pains and efforts to win their hearts, never do or say anything to make them angry, to do or say things to gain their acceptance and love. Women are trained to bend over backwards to fit into the new family even as they face violence, abuse, rebuttal, starvation, indignity and even death.

Economic Ruination

A man marries for his own pleasure but it is the woman who has to suffer. It is the woman who lands up with the responsibility of raising the children, educating them and helping them make their

future. With multiple marriages, the number of children also increases and with it there is increase in spending on their basic needs.

In a respondents' story, she lives with her younger son studying in class 4 and elderly mother. Her father passed away. She received no maintenance from her husband. She lost her jewelry to him, no assets were shared with her and she did not even get the custody of her elder son. She is dependent on her brother who is a garment worker with meagre earning. He gave up his own dreams to support her. There is absolutely no support from her husband. He is scot-free with no legal action. The police, the law and the religious institutions - all failed to protect her and her family.

➤ **Support System**

Children

Children are supposed to be looked after by parents but when they see conflict in the house, they become the rescuers, they become the parent of their parents, they grow before their age and offer physical, emotional and mental support to their parents. In this study we see mothers receiving emotional and financial support from their children.

One respondent says that whenever she would cry, her children would console her saying, we are with you. On hearing this, she would forget her sorrow and hug her children. After some time, she started working as a cleaner in a hospital, from which she would earn good money and support herself and her children.

Another says, her children supported her completely and took care of her. She says she did not even realize when her children grew up so much and became so wise. Their presence and her job helped her to come out of the trauma. Spending the evenings with them helped her to forget her sorrow.

In one case the 22-year-old daughter of the respondent is earning and is taking care of the family.

Civil Society

Organizations, legal aid cells, *mahila panchayats* [women's community groups] are some informal structures within the community which provide much needed support to women in distress. BMMA's volunteers in many cases have done this important work of connecting victims to existing support system. BMMA's legal aid centre, also called the *Aurton ki Shariat Adalat* have played a crucial role in providing much needed space for women to talk openly about their trauma. Help in connecting to the police, talking and coercing the husband to comply, reaching out to lawyers are some of the interventions which BMMA's community volunteers do.

These informal community centres do amazing legal work. In one instance, when the respondents' husband stopped giving maintenance, she filed her case in the *Mahila Panchayat*. As a result, the

husband was made to give her 3000 rupees as maintenance. He was very irregular in his payments which pushed her to do work. She started to work as a cook in homes which took care of her expenses. While the community groups give the initial support and push, women themselves have to take charge of their lives and start living independently. The emotional and psychological support given by organizations are invaluable in such trying times. The hand holding, the support and solidarity prevents a total breakdown of the victim. They listen to her, give genuine and realistic advice, encourage and support her to share and express her thoughts and feelings. She is given the space to think, reflect and take decisions after thorough deliberation.

Self

Many women eventually start earning and stand on their own feet. When children grow up, they become their support.

In one instance the husband after remarriage had 4 children combined of both marriages. The respondent gave up all hope of her children getting any financial support. She picked up her books again and started studying for her BA exams. She hopes to start working once her 8-year-old son can be managed.

Another young respondent is an engineering graduate. Despite earning a salary of 70k per month, she was forced to give her entire salary to her husband as soon as she received it. Even for her daily commute she had to ask money from him. She could not even buy her own sanitary pads. She used cloth which led to severe infections. He gave her left over food to eat. Often, she went to bed hungry. After so much of cruelty, she finally gave him khula. She went abroad and now works in a reputed company.

Some respondents started to give tuitions. Some went abroad and worked for some years and came back. In one case, she collaborated with her sister and built a small house and stays with her and her 4 kids.

Parents

Many senior respondents now stay alone with their children and some young respondents stay with their parents. They stay along with their children. This support is crucial as that gives them a huge respite from the cruel living conditions with the husband. Along with the parent's support, support of the brother, especially married brother is critical for the mental peace of the woman.

Staying with the parents also gives her space to work as there is someone to take care of the children. One respondent works as a domestic help where she cooks for elderly people. She manages her living expenses, food, education and medical needs through that income.

Interestingly in one case it is the mother-in-law of the respondent who is very supportive. Her mother-in-law goes out to work and supports her financially. The respondent had love marriage and so she could not have gone back to her parents to seek support.

In another interesting scenario both the wives support each other. There is a bond between them where they understand each other's suffering. They share experiences, information and support each other. Two women once placed in competition by the same man, are now united in mutual empathy.

When parents including sister and brother support a woman, they become her lifeline. One respondent says: *They kept giving dowry of gold and household items, set up my home multiple times, took me to the hospital when I was beaten up, did all the medical expenses when I delivered, celebrated child birth ceremonies. They even went to the jamaat for justice. What would I have done without them?*

While support exists, there are also instances where it doesn't. One respondent shares that after his remarriage her husband talked about living together with the second wife. The respondent was not ok with that arrangement and refused it outright. On that her husband beat her black and blue. He used violence to convince her but she did not budge. As a result, he stopped giving her money. She shared this with her mother who asked her to continue to stay with her husband and that she cannot do anything to help her. She has to fight her own battle. This stance taken by parents, especially the mother, can really break a woman knowing that she has no choice but to do what she hates.

➤ **Impact on Mental and Physical Health**

Polygamy leads to constant fights at home which affects the children most. Women are angry and resentful and children are scared and lost. There is anger and crying at the same time. It is an expression of extreme frustration and helplessness. Women don't know what to do, how to handle a situation where her very existence and self-respect is affected.

Women report that they felt heart broken. This word, heartbroken, came up multiple times. They stop eating and drinking. They question why did this even happen. Many said that they just had no option but to bear the consequences because of the children. But it took its toll as women reported that they stopped eating, bathing, going out, talking to neighbours, just kept crying for days on end.

In one respondent's own words: *When my husband married someone else, I was not able to understand how I should behave with him. I felt like killing him but I could not do that. I was emotionally shattered. My trust was broken. I cried a lot and felt very lonely as if my world had shattered all of a sudden.*

'The ground slipped from below my feet' – this was another oft repeated phrase. It conveys the shock, disbelief and despair that women experience when they first hear about their husband's remarriage. Utter helplessness and not knowing what to do – that was the state of their mind. In one instance,

while the woman was busy doing her household chores, in walks the husband with his second wife and tells her that he has remarried. Regaining the composure after the initial shock, the first question that cropped up was: how will I spend my life alone now?

The childhood dreams that a parent shows to their girl child that marriage is everything and the husband is God-like, gets shattered big time. She is told by the parents that the husband should be served and never displeased. All that turns into a lie in an instant. Suddenly she feels lonely. The world ends for her in that moment. Other than anger, there is a lot of guilt. What did she do wrong, where did she go wrong, what mistake did she do that he did not even deem fit to tell her. She is not prepared for this shock and the sadness and repressed anger never really leave her.

One respondent says: Today in 2025 it has been 5 years since my husband passed away. But the pain I have suffered I never tell even my children about it because they would feel sad. I have kept it suppressed in my heart and don't discuss it with anyone. I do not know if my husband ever understood this problem of mine.

Another respondent says: I am now staying at my parents' house. When I found out that my husband had remarried, I was deeply hurt. Just because I didn't transfer my entire salary to him, he refused to take me back. No matter how many community negotiations were held, nothing worked. I stayed at my parents' house, while he went ahead and married again. He didn't even inform me about the second marriage. My home was filled with sadness. I was mentally devastated and went into depression. My parents took me to a doctor for treatment. They stood by me with full support, unlike my husband's family.

Another woman says: After all this came in front of me, I became very depressed mentally and my health started to fluctuate. To get my elder daughter treated in the hospital, my mother had to borrow a lot of money. I could not stop crying. Looking at my children's faces made me feel deep sadness and disgust at the same time. I even felt like ending my life, but when I looked at my two young children, I somehow consoled myself.

One respondent reported that her husband did not just not tell about the second marriage but also lied that he had given her a compensation of 5 lakh. This lie made her numb and helpless. How could she even prove her truth, how could she prove something that did not even happen?

Not even an ounce of fatherly love is shown to the children, even if they are unwell. But working is necessary to bring in the money. The anxiety, sadness and the guilt of leaving a sick child home is a big emotional burden which women carry. But there is no option as she cannot be a burden on her family who are anyway in a financial crisis. Women ask, can we expect basic humanity from people around us? Or is that too much of an ask? Carrying the mental and physical burdens alone for long periods of time is not easy.

Suicide

In one case, when the respondent could no longer tolerate his torture, and while she was heavily pregnant with her second child, she attempted suicide by pouring kerosene on herself. Neighbours rushed in and saved her. Later, her father came and a compromise was made through a *raji marji* panchayat [Reconciliation Group]. That's when she found out that her husband had already been married twice before her. He had lied to her, claiming that he was an orphan and never married before. His two previous wives had also left him because of the harassment and violence. After some time, the fights started again. Once, he cut her fingers with a knife and instead of going to the hospital (because it would lead to a police complaint), he treated her at home. Only those who have lived through it can truly understand the suffering. Whenever she recalls the abuse, her husband subjected her to, she breaks down. For two or three days, she falls ill with mental distress.

Another respondent drank phenyl and tried to kill herself. She felt severe headache after that and her condition deteriorated. She was rushed to the hospital by her children and they called their father. When he found out that she had tried to kill herself, his words still ring in her ears like hot molten lead. He said, "If you want to die, then die; don't pretend." Hearing this she fainted and fell. She was in the hospital for a long time and a police case was filed.

One woman was severely depressed and she attempted suicide multiple times. The only reason she says she is still alive is because of her children. She continues to stay with him without any self-respect only for the sake of children. This hurts. The humiliation is unbearable. One woman says: *I feel humiliated having to beg for basic needs from someone who promised to care for me.*

Physical Impact

The violence and the mental stress has its impact on the body as well. When a woman remains mentally disturbed, she has nothing but regrets, when everything is taken away from them, when they face a life of slavery and fear, it is devastating to the body.

One respondent says, her condition was like that of a mad person. She could not sleep in the night because of the fear of her husband beating her and the children. She started to have high blood pressure. Her heart became weak and she would start trembling at the slightest sound. She worked very hard during the day but would also feel very sleepy. In the night her body would be tired but she could not sleep. Her appetite was gone. She could not eat anything, could not even drink milk. She was too weak to even make tea for herself. She got asthma and the doctor warned that she would get TB if she did not pay attention to her health.

One respondent went into depression and still feels the pain of her husband's remarriage. Her blood pressure drops and she faints and palpitates. She stays with her young daughter who gets very scared

when her mother faints. She has to take pain killers for her severe headaches. Her body sometimes throbs badly, she loses breath and palpitates heavily.

In one instance, the respondent conceived for the second time when her first child was just two and a half years old. Her husband demanded dowry again. When her family asked for more time, the violence only increased. One day, after yet another argument, her husband smashed her head against the wall and the floor. She started bleeding heavily and lost consciousness. Instead of admitting the truth, he told the hospital that she had fallen while carrying a water pot. She was moved from a private hospital and then, due to the severity of her condition, to a government hospital. At that time, she was 4 months pregnant. She was in coma. Her parents stood by her, helpless and heartbroken, with no support, emotionally or financially. All they wanted was for her and her unborn child to survive.

The hard work that a woman has to do to survive for herself and her children takes a toll on her body. There is a lot of physical pain from the work and emotional pain from the situation. She is physically and mentally overwhelmed. Both combined gives her a lot of stress, constant exhaustion, insomnia, headaches and body pain. This gets released on the children through violence followed by immense guilt and sadness. In severe cases, women also develop long term chronic illnesses like cancer, thyroid, blood pressure, diabetes, which also leads to financial strain which again causes mental stress. The vicious cycle goes on.

Patriarchy Dehumanizes Women

Women raise a lot of questions not just on her own conditions but about the impact of patriarchal socialization on her, how it dehumanizes her and treats her like a piece of flesh. One respondent asks: *What did I do wrong? I got married like my family wanted. I tried to adjust. I tolerated abuse for the sake of my children. But still, I was beaten, abandoned, robbed, and silenced.*

In one instance, the husband other than remarrying, also treats his first wife inhumanly. He not only hits her but also tells the children to hit her and call her mad. She has lost her self-confidence and self-worth. She says, 'I am treated worse than a servant'. She fell ill because of helplessness and hopelessness.

In another instance, the husband brought his first wife's children to stay with her. He was also a drug addict and her house had become a den of drug abuse. She tried to stop him, reason with him but each time she was met with slaps, abuse and rebukes and threats that he would throw acid on her.

In another instance, he put a knife on the child's neck and asked him if he saw his mother sleeping with another man. He would have sex with her in front of the children. His second wife also ran away because of his animal like behaviour.

Impact of Court Proceedings

As it is the women are trapped in poverty accompanied by emotional pain and disappointment. The fight for justice adds to the stress; financially and emotionally. Constant traveling for court hearings, the money spent, loss of day's earning because of court processes, legal fees, delayed justice delivery – all add to physical and mental trauma. Years of betrayal, violence topped by delayed justice and elongated court proceedings leave her anxious, traumatized and physically very ill.

➤ Law as a Framework for Justice

The respondents were unanimous in their view that a man cannot be allowed to marry more than once. They should be punished and penalized. Because there is no law, a man continues to destroy the lives of women, in some cases, 4 women whom he married without anyone of them knowing about the other. How can one person have so much power that he can destroy the lives of so many women at the same time, not to mention the impact his actions have on his children. He is doing it because he believes that he will be protected, that he can get away with it.

In other religions, women have some legal protections, but Muslim women are left without any protection under the law. Men are misusing the provision of polygamy, which was allowed in some circumstances in the past. Today, the entire system is biased in favour of men. One respondent says, even though my father educated me, my life is still filled with struggles. I can only imagine how much worse it must be for uneducated women raised within traditional boundaries.

Legal Recourse

In one case, the respondent filed a complaint. The case dragged on in court for a long time. Meanwhile, her husband remarried and lived comfortably with his second wife. When this came to light, her parents collected official proof of the second marriage and submitted it in court. In the mediation center, a final settlement was made: her husband was ordered to return all the gold jewelry, cash, clothes, and household items that were given at the time of marriage. She, expressing her unwillingness to continue the marriage, was granted a *Khula* (Islamic divorce initiated by the woman).

Earlier men gave triple divorce but after the legislation against it, they think twice before giving unilateral divorce. They worry about the consequences of divorcing which is 3 years of imprisonment. They are afraid and consult lawyers before taking any step. The incidence of triple divorce has also gone down which indicates that law has its importance and impact. A law against polygamy too would benefit Muslim women.

Having multiple marriages means mocking a woman's dignity and human rights. And it is the responsibility of the state to ensure that a woman's dignity is maintained. But when a woman approaches

the police for filing a complaint, she is told that there is very little they can do as, “Your religion allows two or four marriages?”

‘I knocked on every possible door for help—Gram Panchayat, local leaders, even my own extended family. But no one offered a solution. The Panchayat told me that even if my husband had done wrong, they could do nothing, because Islam permits multiple marriages. My father and brother were themselves trapped in poverty and unable to support me. I felt utterly abandoned’. How helpless she feels! Religion, which should have offered compassion and justice, was instead used to legitimize his deviant behaviour. And the State also legitimizes this deviant behaviour and thus claims helplessness and escapes its responsibility.

Religious Laws

One respondent says: ‘How do women like me get justice? Under the name of Sharia, how many more women’s lives will be destroyed? Do girls born in the future also have to go through what I did? How should we face this? Therefore, a law must be introduced making it illegal for a man to remarry without the consent of his wife. Women must come forward to share their suffering’.

Another respondent says: *I have undergone immense mental stress. My health deteriorated drastically after childbirth. No one came to see me or help me. Isn’t basic humanity expected? If a man cannot take care of one wife and his children after marriage, how is he allowed to marry another? Shouldn’t this be questioned? I have so many questions inside me, and it seems like there are no answers for Muslim women. Therefore, there must be a law to punish men, otherwise, they have no fear.*

For men it is sufficient to say that Allah has allowed them four wives, but it is the women who has to bear the brunt of it. He mentally tortures the woman and says with great pride that he is allowed four marriages.

The provision of nikaahnama is a tool in the hands of Muslim women wherein she can put her conditions. She can use this provision to prohibit her husband from indulging in another marriage when remaining married to her. But nikaahnama, though an empowering tool is not really empowering. A vast majority do not read what is written on it, they do not use this provision to set conditions of marriage through Iqarnama [agreement document], many don’t even know where their nikaahnama is.

Men take advantage of Muslim personal law, which allows up to four marriages, to deceive women. In multiple cases, men convert Hindu women to Islam and then go ahead and remarry. This is the betrayal of a woman’s trust and an abuse of religion. One cannot fathom the level of injustice and emotional damage it can cause to women and innocent children in the name of Islam.

Because of the allowance for polygamy in Islam, many young, underage innocent women are exploited. Young girls are lured by much older men into marriage without them being told about their secondary

status. They present themselves as mentors and protectors. Without legal safeguards and community awareness, these relationships can slip into exploitative marriages that erode a girl's education, independence and dignity.

Law Against Polygamy

One respondent shares that despite all hardships, she refused to give up. She was determined to protect her rights and the rights of her children. She filed three cases; one for cruelty and harassment, one for maintenance to secure financial support and one for regaining the custody of her younger daughter. These ongoing legal battles added emotional strain and financial pressure to an already fragile situation. But for her, they are also a form of self-assertion—proof that she will not quietly accept injustice.

She says, 'men exploit women, conceal their previous marriages and escape punishment, while women bear all the cruelty, stigma and financial burdens. We are left holding the babies and the men just move on'.

All respondents want a strict law against such polygamy. It should be a crime with punishment and penalties. It is an exploitation of women and children who are rendered destitute just because of one man's whims and fancies.

Polygamy needs to be looked into along with child marriage, multiple pregnancies, extreme poverty and deprivation and social stigma fueled by patriarchy. Some respondents are also victims of child marriage and early and multiple pregnancies. One can only imagine the precarious condition of the child who is in no way equipped to deal with such a situation.

One respondent looks at religion and how its guidelines are interpreted and enforced by men to exploit women. Countless women are forced into early marriages and later betrayed under the cover of social or religious norms. Betrayed not just by their husbands but also by parents who don't think twice before marrying off their underage girls to men much older than them. Such small girls shoulder backbreaking labour to support their own children and serve large families. While girls are expected to be patient and sacrifice, men escape all accountability. The entire communities fail women and girls.

How can a society tolerate a man's polygamy in the guise of religious and cultural norms, how can a system let one partner go scot free and the other, the already vulnerable one, to bear all the risks and losses.

On the face of it, it may seem that the first wife stands to lose. But reality is much different. Both are losing. The first wife lives under the constant threat of abandonment, of husband bringing in another wife. The second wife is lured and made to feel that she is the coveted one. One not knowing about the other in most cases. Children in all cases witness tension, conflict, resentment. Whether the first

or the second, a woman as a mother loses hands down. Children of both woman experience fear, helplessness, anger, guilt and deep sadness. Male children repeat the pattern of their fathers. Female children deeply resent their fathers but land up with men who behave like their father. Nobody feels protected and accepted.

Some words by the respondents:

- ✓ *I want justice. I want my jewelry, my rights, and my son back*
- ✓ *I want laws that actually protect women, not just on paper*
- ✓ *I want religious institutions and courts to stop protecting abusers*
- ✓ *I want women like me to be heard, believed, and helped*
- ✓ *Please help women like me. Raise your voices. Someone somewhere a woman like me is suffering silently, hoping that somebody would listen*

In this triangle of two women and one man, there is no respect, no rights, no love and no dignity. It infringes on basic human decency. It betrays, it creates resentment, it creates hatred. Nobody is happy. It brings nothing but suffering, pain and regret, destroys families and peace of mind.

This study is also a shout out to state, community leaders, religious authorities, reformers and socially engaged individuals and organisations to raise their voices to protect vulnerable women and girls, to enforce existing child marriage and domestic violence laws, and to ensure that no one can misuse religious or cultural traditions to harm others.

One respondent who is a zari worker who stitches designs on clothes says, *I continue to fight in court with my needle and thread to stitch together my future and the future of my daughters who can grow up safe, educated and free from injustices.*

CHAPTER 09

Challenges Faced During the Study

Collecting data and conducting a study on a topic as sensitive as polygamy among Indian Muslim women presents unique challenges. These challenges span cultural, social, ethical, and logistical dimensions, often requiring nuanced approaches and considerable sensitivity. Our activists and leaders collecting data through interviews with Indian Muslim women on polygamy had to navigate a complex landscape of cultural sensitivities, ethical dilemmas, and operational barriers. Addressing these challenges requires building trust, ensuring confidentiality, and employing context-sensitive methodologies, all while prioritizing the safety and wellbeing of participants and researchers alike. Years of work within the community has gained BMMA leaders their trust and while faced with many challenges, they were able to navigate these challenges with relative ease.

This section highlights some of the hurdles encountered by our researchers and leaders during the study.

- **Taboo and Stigma:** Polygamy remains a sensitive and often stigmatised subject within many Indian Muslim communities. Discussions about marital life, especially in polygamous contexts, are often considered private and sensitive within Muslim communities. Many women feared that sharing personal details could lead to family conflict, social stigma, or community disapproval. Some were also concerned that their participation might be misconstrued as disloyalty or criticism of their husbands, leading to hesitation or guarded responses.
- **Family Surveillance:** While conducting interviews, some of the BMMA activists found it difficult to secure one-on-one conversations, with the men in the family hovering around the women. Gender dynamics and power imbalances within households further complicated the interview process. In several cases, husbands or senior family members sought to be present during the interviews or to monitor the conversation, limiting the women's ability to speak freely. Data collectors had to negotiate access sensitively, ensuring privacy without causing suspicion or tension within the household.
- **Blame games:** In some families, where the first and second wife resided in the same household, there was conflict between the two with each of them wanting to talk about their own side of the story.
- **Questioning the rationale of the study:** Some of the community members were skeptical of the rationale behind the study. In Delhi for instance, a BMMA leader was asked why she was only

asking questions to Muslim women and not including Hindu women in the study. In a few instances, the interviewers were asked for ID cards. In Bengal some were scared that there may be a legal proceeding against the men in the family.

- **Threatening the interviewer:** In Hospet, Karnataka, for example, some people reached out to the interviewers' family asking her to delete the filled questionnaire and telling her family that she is spreading misinformation about Islam.
- **Dealing with Ethics and Emotions:** Another major challenge was dealing with the emotional and ethical dimensions of the interviews. Several women became distressed while recounting experiences of neglect, jealousy, or emotional hardship in their marriages. Data collectors had to handle such sensitive disclosures with empathy and patience, while still maintaining professional boundaries. Ensuring informed consent, confidentiality, and emotional well-being of respondents required thorough preparation, cultural sensitivity, and a clear understanding of ethical research practices.
- **Trauma and Mental Agony:** To go from one house to another and listen to one distressing story after another of fellow Muslim women had a harrowing effect on the mental health of those conducting the study. A member from BMMA Mumbai broke down while narrating the story of one of the interviewers, as she remembered her own struggle. 'I slept on the railway station many years ago myself having faced abuse at home' she recalled. Some others found it extremely frustrating to see in real life how Islamic injunctions were being misused by men to get into polygamous marriages.

Despite these challenges, our interviewers and researchers stood firm as they have been questioning the issue and practice of polygamy and interacting with victims/survivors for over a decade now, providing them with psychosocial support and legal assistance and counseling. The trust that they have built with these women has taken years of work for and with them.

CHAPTER 10

Conclusion and Recommendations

1. Polygamy Causes Deep and Lasting Harm to Women

Across the 2500 women surveyed, the study that polygamy inflicts emotional, mental, social and physical harm on women. Women, whether first or second wife experience betrayal, shock, anger, insecurity and a total loss of dignity. The mental and emotional impact is huge and damaging in the long term.

2. Economic Insecurity and Neglect Are Common Outcomes

A majority of respondents reported financial neglect and unequal maintenance, especially after the husband's second marriage. Many women were left to fend for themselves and their children, leading to increased poverty and dependence on natal families or charity. The study exposes how polygamy contributes directly to women's economic vulnerability and social marginalization.

3. Adverse Impact on Physical and Mental Health

High prevalence of blood pressure, migraine, body pain, loss of sleep, and menstrual issues, particularly among first wives. Psychological stress manifested in anxiety, depression, and low self-esteem. These findings show that polygamy is not merely a social issue but a public health concern affecting women's overall well-being.

4. Children Suffer from Neglect and Emotional Instability

Many women reported that after the husband's remarriage, fathers stopped meeting or supporting their children. Children in such families often experienced emotional neglect, reduced financial support, and tension between half-siblings. The study thus establishes that polygamy disrupts family stability and adversely impacts the next generation.

5. Religion Is Frequently Misused to Justify Injustice

A large section of respondents believed that religion is being selectively interpreted by men and patriarchal community leaders to justify polygamy. Women's understanding of Islam emphasized justice, compassion, and equality — values incompatible with the suffering caused by multiple marriages. This highlights the need for faith-based reinterpretation led by women scholars. Values

of equality, justice, goodness and beauty, compassion and wisdom must guide the family law reforms movement.

6. Majority Demand Legal Prohibition of Polygamy

An overwhelming 85% of women in the study stated that polygamy should be made legally invalid in India. This strong consensus cuts across educational, regional, and age lines, indicating that Muslim women themselves are demanding reform within their community and from the State.

7. Parents Support for Polygamy is Alarming

A significant number of husbands were supported by family elders (especially mothers or fathers) to remarry; this is a cause for concern. This requires a big shift in the attitude of parents as they raise a son.

8. Need for Gender-Just Legal Reform and Community Action

The study concludes that polygamy undermines gender justice, economic stability, and family well-being, and contradicts the Quranic spirit of fairness. Therefore, both community reform and State intervention are essential. Legal prohibition must go hand-in-hand with awareness campaigns, education, and women's economic empowerment.

The lived realities of these 2500 Muslim women reveal that polygamy, far from being a religious necessity, is a deeply patriarchal social practice that breeds injustice, trauma and stagnation. Ending it would not only uphold women's Constitutional rights but also align with the core Islamic principles of *justice, equality, goodness, beauty, fairness, wisdom and compassion*.

Recommendations

Recommendations to the Indian State

1. Muslim Women are Indian Citizens

- Law of the land i.e. the BNS 86/IPC 494 must be applicable to the Muslim women also. If all Indian women are protected by this law then why should Muslim women be exempt from it? It is clear violation of her Constitutional rights if she is remains unprotected by the law of the land. It is also an abdication of the States' Constitutional obligation to protect the legal rights of Muslim women. A Muslim woman is protected by Article 14 (Right to Equality) and Article 15 (non-discrimination on gender) of the Indian Constitution.
- If and when a Uniform Civil Code comes into existence, it must have specific provisions for Muslim women addressing her legal concerns.

2. Legal Prohibition or Regulation

- Amend the Muslim Personal Law (Shariat) Application Act, 1937, to bring it in line with constitutional principles of equality and dignity.
- Make polygamy a punishable offence under a reformed Muslim Family Law, while ensuring protection and maintenance for existing second wives and their children.
- There must be a centralized legislation for registration of all Muslim marriages to discourage not only polygamy but also child marriages.
- The Qazis Act, 1860 must be overhauled and rejuvenated to include responsibilities of the Qazi and penalties for violation of the law of land pertaining to marriage.

3. Comprehensive Codification of the Muslim Family Law

- While piecemeal legislation looks practical and workable, a long-term solution is a comprehensive codification of Muslim Family Law. [BMMA has already worked on this draft legislation]. This will ensure reformation on all issues within the family law framework. It is long overdue as we are in the 78th year of independence.

4. Protection and Rehabilitation for Victims

- Provide social security, financial aid, and housing support for women and children affected by polygamy.
- Establish helplines, counselling centres, and fast-track family courts to handle cases involving polygamous marriages.

5. Awareness and Education

- Introduce awareness campaigns (through Urdu media, social platforms, and educational institutions) about women's rights in Islam and under Indian law.
- Include gender justice modules in religious and community education systems.

Recommendations to the Community

1. Reinterpretation within Islamic Framework

- Quranic Ethical Framework which guides the family life based on principles of equality, justice, wisdom, beauty and goodness and compassion must be applied in the daily life of a Muslim.
- Polygamy can never reconcile with the above principles as it is inherently patriarchal and unjust. The deeper ethical values enshrined in the Quranic verses (like Surah An-Nisa 4:3 and 4:129) must be applied to outlaw polygamy.

- Strengthen the voice of progressive Islamic scholars, women theologians and Islamic feminists to counter patriarchal interpretations.

2. Community-Led Reforms

- Mosques, madrassas, and community organizations should adopt community practices which prohibit polygamy.
- Encourage social boycotts of polygamous marriages and celebrate monogamous unions as the social ideal.
- Women's organizations and Muslim family networks should educate women on their marital rights under both Islamic and Indian law.

3. Empowerment of Muslim Women

- Promote education and economic independence for women to reduce their vulnerability to polygamous arrangements.
- Set up counselling and legal aid cells within the community for victims of polygamy.
- Encourage collective action by women's groups, community leaders, and youth to create dialogue about gender justice in Islam.

4. Religious Leadership Accountability

- Imams and qazis should be made accountable for conducting second marriages
- Community councils (Jamaats) should establish internal ethical guidelines discouraging polygamy as socially unjust.