



**Prof. Thuledi Makua**  
**INAUGURAL LECTURE**

**DATE: 18 November 2022**

**TIME: 17:00**

**Topic: Interventive Polygyny: indigenous promotion of moral health**

**Define tomorrow.**

**UNISA**



college of  
human sciences



1. Principal & Vice-Chancellor Prof P Lenka-Bula
2. Acting Executive Dean Prof Z Nkosi
2. Registrar Prof MS Mothata
4. School Director Prof M Moleki
5. My COD Prof M Matlakala
6. The respondent to my lecture Prof T. Mgutshini
7. My wife Dr Manala Makua
8. Family, Colleagues and friends who I will take my time to acknowledge you at the end of this lecture

I greet you all this evening.



# Introduction

On the topic: **Interventive polygyny: indigenous promotion of moral health**, allow me to indicate that to both men and women, it summons:

- Anxiety
- Autophobia
- Rejection
- Seclusion
- Stress

It takes moral courage for an interventive polygynist to stand up for his/her **beliefs**, in order to promote moral health.

# Anxiety



Women may show stranger anxiety signs when exposed to the co-wives.

- An individual also experiences alysia anxiety - withdrawing from social contact to avoid the co-wives.
- Mothers with anxiety levels are likely to produce babies who display poor moral health when grown up.



# Atelophobia

A feeling of being not perfect enough as other co-wives to take care of the household.

- Terrified of making mistakes.
- They feel they won't succeed.
- Fear that she will be undermined due to her imperfection.

# Rejection



A person with **social anxiety** feels uncontrollable fear that she will be judged or rejected by the other co-wives.

- Fear that she will be repeatedly bullied or ridiculed.
- Believe that she is unattractive to others.



# Isolation

Isolation or being away from others, or a private or sheltered place that is away from other co-wives.

- Loneliness and social **isolation** with depression.
- Poor sleep quality.
- Impaired executive function.
- Accelerated cognitive decline.



# Stress

New environmental stress may cause homeostatic disequilibrium that contributes to the development of psychosomatic disorder.

- Stress elevated by culture shock due to sudden thrust into co-wife culture.
- Spend time with co-wives.
- Always in their social gathering.
- Discuss the positives of your marriage with the co-wives.
- Be part of the co-wives therapeutic group.
- Seek advices from the co-wives.





# Interventive polygyny

Interventive polygynous marriage is commonly regarded as a “harmful cultural practice”, detrimental to women and children.



## What is not interventive polygyny

Serial monogamy can be associated with serial abandonment of partners, sometimes with self enrichment intend.

- The proponents of this ideology fail to see the harm caused by the Western favoured serial monogamy basing their argument on the right of the man/woman to choose in the free world.
- Female-headed serial monogamous household has challenges of unstable relationships hence poor moral health to children.
- In societies that provide no institutionalized role for unmarried women, the status of a co-wife may be preferable to that of a single woman.



## Effects of serial monogamy

Divorce leads to frustrations in the household, children scattering into the street.

- Repeated irritable and aggressive behaviours in the household resulting in physical assaults.
- Serial monogamy keeps you from finding real love
- Abandonment of the family without realistic reasons of ill-health.
- Poor moral health to children.



# What is interventive polygyny

Interventive polygyny, marriage in which two or more women share a husband.

Interventive polygyny is a legal African moral union

Polygyny being seen as the right for a man/woman to choose in the free world.

Male-headed interventive polygynous household instil moral health to children.

Interventive polygyny is cross-culturally common and a topic of considerable academic and policy interest.

Interventive polygyny intends to manage the social discourse between the husband and the wife. Men and women who are spiritually responsible to be in the interventive polygyny contribute significantly to the wealth and health of the household.



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# Types of interventive polygyny



Interventive polygyny is entered into by men and women who intend to solve the household differences without immoral discourse.

Sororal and levirate polygyny



# Sororal polygyny

Sororal polygyny, in which the co-wives are sisters, is often the preferred form because sisters are thought to be more mutually supportive and less argumentative than non-siblings (Makua, 2013:167).

- The eldest girl in a family marries first and arranges that her younger sister joins her as co-wife, sometimes to solve poverty.
- To solve infertility, her first child belongs to the infertile elder sister.
- To solve children gender in order to continue family line.
- Sororal marriage might only occur if a woman died childless, in order to continue her family line.
- To take care of her deceased sister's children



# Levirate polygyny

A type of marriage in which the brother of a deceased man is obliged to marry his brother's widow.

- Levirate marriage has been practiced by societies with a strong clan structure in which endogamy is encouraged.
- Levirate marriage can, at its most positive, serve as protection for the widow and her children.
- It ensures that they have a male provider and protector for moral health
- A levirate marriage can also occur if a man died childless, in order to continue his family line.





## Where do we come from

Historically, more than 80% of preindustrial societies permitted polygyny (Murdock & White, 1969). Today it is most prevalent in sub-Saharan Africa (Macro & Calverton, 2003).

- Very little in the Bible prohibits polygyny, and it is more of a taboo in Western culture, but not in Christian theology as believed by many African Christians.
- In Christian theology, Abraham, Jacob, David and Solomon were polygynists.
- More honest way to behave than hiding illegitimate children and their mothers.
- Marrying widows ensures is a moral way of societal caring of the orphans.



## The morality of healthcare

Healthcare practices believed to be in line with principles of behaviour in accordance with standards of right and wrong.

- In our African culture there is no street kid. The widowed and orphaned are morally supported.
- This combats the poverty which is the health issue as indicated in the SDG 1.
- Levirate marriage expects the brother of the deceased to give moral support to the widow.
- Sororate marriage takes care of the deceased sister's children.



## The morality of healthcare (continued)

It is not always practical that a mother/father with deficient moral health will rear up a child with perfect moral health.

Mothers (co-wives) and a father with customary moral health lessen juvenile delinquency causing disequilibrium in the societal health.

The morality of healthcare involves diversified approach that embodies care of the **somatisation disorders, interpersonal disorders and social dysmorphic disorder.**

## Somatisation disorders

Pseudo neurological disorders; suffering from idiopathic pain disorder

- Need empathic relationship in polygyny (husband and co-wives) that serves as co-wives' psychotherapy group.
- The cushioning of the co-wives around the somatically anxious as psychotherapy inhibit hypochondriasis that has a potential to span out of control (Makua, 2020).





## Interpersonal disorders

Intractable pain conceptualised as a means for manipulation in interpersonal relationship to ensure the devotion of a family member or to stabilise a fragile marriage. Such behaviours are inhibited by solicitous and attentive behaviour of the co-wives.

- Polygyny supports the expectation that women will remain sexually abstinent for two beginning in the last months of pregnancy.
- Co-wives assist in adequate birth spacing for the mother to recover, lactate and care of a young child.

## Social dysmorphic disorder

A wife holding a strong but no delusional belief that her relationship to the husband is misshapen.

- The co-wives' and the husband serve to assist the wife realise that the possibility is that knowledge may be exaggerating the extend of the defect or that there may be no defect in the marriage at all. Her dysmorphic disorder is not otherwise specified.
- A child has got more than one mother to provide moral support, give instructions in the maternal care.





# Indigenous promotion of moral health

In African traditional societies, we know marriage as a sacred union between one man and one or more women excluding all others. This notion is extended to the union of two families, two communities or even two nations in the broader sense.

Polygenism marriage as an African theory, includes symbolic rites, often sanctified by malome (maternal uncle) and rakgadi (paternal aunt) benediction, which are thought to confer moral fortunes on the couple (Makua, 2022:230).

The co-wives and their children typically live in separate, but often adjacent, dwellings to their husbands and distinguishing between these household types reveals that male-headed polygynous households have significantly higher moral health.

## Indigenous promotion of moral health

In African traditional societies, we know marriage as a sacred union between one man and one or more women excluding all others. This notion is extended to the union of two families, two communities or even two nations in the broader sense.

- Sacred union in Africa, in the sense that it solidifies relationship that enriches communities and nations.
- Raising of balanced, socially and morally functional children (Makua 2014:157).
- It takes a village to raise a child from the morally healthy polygynous family.
- Sacred male and female energies are critical in enshrining morally balanced healthy community.







## Indigenous promotion of moral health

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- Sanctified by malome who will be in an African adage saying: “lebitla la mosadi ke bogadi.”
- Sanctified by Rakgadi who will be performing the “*lešago la gae*” ritual using the type of grass called “*letsikere*” and others to pacify or prevent domestic violence in the marriage (Makua, 2022:230).



## Indigenous promotion of moral health

The co-wives and their children typically live in separate, but often adjacent, dwellings to their husbands.

- Distinguishing between these household types reveals that male-headed polygynous households have significantly higher moral health:
- Children in their separate dwellings.
- Co-wives in separate rooms.
- Husband visiting individual wife privately.



## **Self-esteem,**

Polygyny within the framework of law and balance is a viable aspect of African family systems which has existed from human history.

The co-wives form supportive persons who protect one another against isolation and allow dependency needs to be gratified.



## Self-esteem

Interventive polygyny within the framework of law and balance is a viable aspect of African family systems which is existed as far back as human history

- Some polygynists feel elevated self-esteem (Makua, 2013:137).
- Women need social support (co-wives) for the realisation of self-esteem.
- Co-wives support build self-esteem in one another.
- Husband support and communication builds moral health amongst wives.



## Self-esteem

The co-wives form supportive persons who protect one another against isolation and allow dependency needs to be gratified.

- Co-wives in a polygynous family prefer pragmatic co-operation.
- When their husband dies, the bond between these women becomes stronger.
- They deeply care for each other and their children.
- They want the best for one another and their shared children.



## **Psychological integration,**

Different personalities women are married into a unified family, especially when this is pursued as a deliberate sacred union.

Coming together based on individual acceptance of the members of household as co-wives.

An integrated wife is flexible, strong, and organized as well as balanced.



## Psychological integration

Different personalities women are married into a unified family as a deliberate sacred union.

- All wives use compromise as a technique to find a solution that will at least partially please all parties.
- Co-wives and husband work hard to make the marriage a success.
- Co-wives and husband try their best to create morally healthy environment for their children.
-



## Psychological integration

Coming together based on individual acceptance of the members of household as co-wives.

- Co-wives and husband have ability to see that others have a right to be their own unique persons.
- Do not compare with one another
- Give thoughtful advice to others
- Slow to judge others
- Do not compete with one another
- Engage in co-wives activities





## Psychological integration

An integrated wife is flexible, strong, and organized as well as balanced.

- Not expect to get her own way in everything.
- To be able to let go where possible without grudge.
- To open amicable discussion on misunderstandings.
- To be strong on personal believes but not aggressive.
- Strong but open and accept different opinions.



## **Personal autonomy,**

Interventive polygyny enhances the female autonomy with regard to marital placement. Makua (2020) found that some married women negotiated with her husband to marry her sister as the second wife.

This has been an ancient old African practice especially with an intend to solve barrenness in the household.

This gives the female autonomy to decide on who share the husband with.



## Personal autonomy

Interventive polygyny enhances the female autonomy with regard to marital placement.

Makua (2020) found that some married women negotiated with their husbands to marry their sisters as the second wives.

- Autonomous to choose to be in the polygynous relationship.
- To make suggestions that intend to solve marital conflicts morally.
- Autonomous to choose who to share the husband with.
- Co-wife personal validation of actions while being committed to her polygynous household.



## **Self-actualization,**

It is hard to distinguish what is indigenous intelligence and what is a product of mental conditioning.

As Kurt Goldstein conceptualise it, for moral health and functioning reasonably well, co-wives live together in a state of holocoenosis within the environment that may cause tension-disequilibrium.

As their coping methods improve, their chances of self-actualization increase. A regression to primitive levels of behaviour is contained by the co-wives' therapeutic moral support which circumvent a catastrophic reaction.



## Self-actualization

It is hard to distinguish what is indigenous intelligence and what is a product of mental conditioning in marriage.

- Conscientious embodiment of exemplary knowledge.
- Use of this knowledge in a good, beneficial and meaningful way.
- Intelligence goes with the use of indigenous concepts and knowledge.
- Our present day thinking is inclusive of the legacy of our ancestors knowledge.
- Sharing children raring among co-wives
- Co-wives group therapy stimulates moral health.



## Self-actualization

As Kurt Goldstein conceptualise it, for moral health and functioning reasonably well, co-wives live together in a state of holocoenosis within the environment that may cause tension-disequilibrium.

- Interdependence and interconnections of co-wives with their environment.
- Environment in which all co-wives and husband act together, with no barriers separating them to promote moral health.
- Participation in co-wives letšema activities.



## Self-actualization

As their coping methods improve, their chances of self-actualization increase.

- A regression to primitive levels of behaviour is contained by the co-wives' therapeutic moral support which circumvent a catastrophic reaction.



## **Realistic cognition.**

African people must objectively re-examine structures that were the backbone of their historical moral development and moral health in an attempt to successfully engage in modernity.

During the **African Holocaust** of enslavement marriage was pointless if you were owned by the slave master. A person could be sold off at any instant. Everything is temporary — commitment is void when someone owns you.





## Realistic cognition

African people must objectively re-examine structures that were the backbone of their historical moral development and moral health in an attempt to successfully engage in modernity.

- The quality of the individual's character is most fundamental in co-wives moral life.
- In Africa polygyny, each wife usually had their own house, as well as property and animals.
- Co-wives exercising the moral health founded on:
  - ✓ Care
  - ✓ Reciprocity
  - ✓ Loyalty
  - ✓ Respect
  - ✓ Sanctity



## Conclusion

- Polygyny is far from disappearing.
- Polygyny is part of the fabric of African life.
- If women and children do not benefit from polygyny, then why is it so common?
- Polygyny is more widespread in Africa than in any other continent.
- One in four married women in rural Tanzania have at least one co-wife.