

Understanding the Decision-Making Dynamics and Power Relations in Polygamous Families in South Sudan

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ABSTRACT

The article investigates the parity in the Decision-Making Dynamics and Power Relations in Polygamous Families in South Sudan using the experience of Fortifying Equality and Economic Diversification for Resilience (FEED II) in understanding the inequalities between women and men in access to and control over resources in relation to food security in South Sudan. The research team consulted existing literature on polygamy including Slonim- Nevo & Al-Krenawi, 2006; Yilmaz & Tamam, 2018; Abdullah, Abdullah, & Ferdousi, 2015; Jankowiak, Sudakov and Wilker 2005; and Moran 1990. The study uses a qualitative research method, consisting of in-depth interviews for polygamous and monogamous families and households with absent husbands. The sampling was done through purposive and snowball techniques to identify and select respondents who met the inclusion criteria to participate in the study. Additionally, key informants weighed their views on polygamy in terms of culture and religion. The results showed that, in all family types, monogamous, polygamous or even families with absent husbands, most of the respondents identified husbands as the major contributor to decisions. that men in Western Equatoria State, Western Barl el Ghazal, Warrap, and Northern Barl el Ghazel have greater influence in areas concerning setting rules, food provision and resource management whereas those of Jonglei, Eastern Equatoria and Central Equatoria have greater authority to make decisions about financial management of the families, family care, family movement and provision of food to families.

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KEYWORDS: Polygamy, Monogamy, dynamics, Decision making, household, family

1. INTRODUCTION

The study interrogated the participation of women and female youth in managing common threats to food security; use of female-friendly agricultural and business practices that promote sustained income generation and management of natural resources; as well as an equal and safer environment for women's participation in leadership. The study reviewed how women have been expected to consult with men and get their approval on most issues, and usually face a subordinate position in the decision-making process. When women fail to consult or involve their husbands, this can result in conflict in the home, including GBV¹. In this case, the decision-making power is even more complex in polygamous families where it is not clear whether the husband is the key

decision-maker for the whole family or if the wives have some independent decision-making power for their household units.

The study covered all the seven states within South Sudan namely; Central Equatoria, Western Equatoria, Warrap, Northern Bahr El Ghazal, Western Bahr El Ghazal, Eastern Equatoria, and Jonglei to understand how decisions are made in polygamous families in relation to production, resource allocation, use of money, food security, nutrition, and general livelihoods., examined the role that wives and husbands play in the decision-making processes for separate household units as well as the entire polygamous family, documented the implications of the decision-making dynamics and power relations practiced in polygamous families on their well-being,

¹ FEED II Gender Analysis Report, February 2021

livelihood activities, and participation in community activities .

2. Literature Review

Dynamics of Polygamous Households

In South Sudan upto 40% of marriages are polygamous because men and women in South Sudan associate having multiple wives with wealth and social standing.² Since marriages require expensive dowries/ bride price, usually paid in the form of cattle, having multiple wives is a sign of affluence. According to Dinka, Nuer and Shilluk culture, the bigger the family you have, the more people respect you.³ In many cases, however, the sacrifices made to afford bride price contribute to enduring poverty. Additionally, having more wives increase the opportunity for having more children.

In South Sudan, polygamy is another patriarchal practice that reinforces women's subordinate status as well as being closely tied to other forms of violence. According to the qualitative research, men are the primary decision-makers when it comes to deciding to marry additional wives. A husband might not even inform his wife that he has taken additional wives, much less consult her when doing so⁴. Therefore, polygamy also contributes to increased tensions within the household. Although some women described an idealized relationship between co-wives, where the first wife might act as a sister or mother to the younger wives, most women considered the practice of polygamy to be a form of violence. Suspicion and distrust between husbands and wives and between co-wives can lead to violent episodes, particularly when coupled with poverty and limited resources in large households⁵.

In polygamous societies like South Sudan, senior co-wives are typically the oldest among the wives and closer in age to their husbands. As a result, they are accorded traditional privileges not enjoyed by their rival co-wives⁶. Also, in cultures where senior co-wives help their husbands pay the bride prices of junior wives – for instance, among the Igbo people of Southern Nigeria – the relationship between co-wives is best described as that of a mother (elder sister) and daughter (younger sister) instead of as rivals, leaving senior co-wives with relatively higher intrahousehold power⁷. More importantly, senior co-wives do not (at the time of marriage) select into polygamy. Following

this, they do not have direct control over their polygamy status (assuming they do not divorce the husband once he marries a second wife). In contrast, junior co-wives select into polygamy and, as such, directly determine their polygamy status. Based on these, it is argued the two groups of polygamous women possess dissimilar characteristics and should be treated differently.

In analyzing the changing relationships between husbands and wives over the course of a polygamous marriage to understand the level of decision-making dynamic within the family. Moreover, some women in polygamous marriages describe their husbands as being dominant, controlling over decision-making, and entrenching a patriarchal system⁸.

However, husbands who can provide intimacy and trust, and treat their wives justly can contribute to good cooperation and relations between these wives⁹. In a patriarchal family system, husbands tend to be more dominant and in control of the family hierarchy. In polygamous marriages, husbands tend to provide less space for wives to discuss matters and may not overly care about their emotions and feelings. This is because the husband feels that he needs to be fully respected and cannot tolerate his decisions being rejected.¹⁰

This has led to research finding that the practice of polygamy can result in competition, unequal distribution of household resources, co-wife envy, and failure to do justice to all the family members¹¹. However, Moran (1990) argues that conflicts between wives' stem from their own goal of monopolizing their husbands to fulfill certain rights such as time and attention. This study found that the wives try to avoid attitudes that can damage good relations to maintain a positive home environment. This desk review has supplemented the fieldwork through data collected from project sites which has shed light on the dynamics of polygamy as a practice in African countries of which South Sudan has not been an exception.

Social Network Framework for Decision Making

The team used Social Network Framework to analyze decision-making dynamics in polygamous households of South Sudan. It considered how individual male or female decisions were shaped by social interactions and the resources embedded within them. Barry Wellman, a leading network scholar, writes,

² The link of polygamy and War, 2017

³ The Peril of Polygamy, 2017

⁴ The Peril of Polygamy, 2017

⁵ Ibid, 2017

⁶ Sween and Clignet, 1978

⁷ Leith-Ross, 1965

⁸ Thobejane (2016); Mukhuba (2017)

⁹ Seeley, 2012

¹⁰ Mukhuba, 2017¹⁰.

¹¹ Slonim- Nevo & Al-Krenawi, 2006; Yilmaz & Tamam, 2018; Abdullah, Abdullah, & Ferdousi, 2015

“Network analysts want to know how structural properties affect behavior beyond the effects of normative prescriptions, personal attributes, and dyadic relationships within the polygamous family which could be applicable to the context of South Sudan. They concentrate on studying how the pattern of ties in a network provides significant opportunities and constraints because it affects the access of people and institutions to such resources as information, wealth, and power”. As such, women and men are likely drawn into polygamous practices based on the social norms promoted in the community through generations in South Sudan.

Conflict Theory in Decision-making Dynamics

Conflict Theory was founded by Karl Max who argued that conflict happens due to existing forces of opposition in the life of individuals, groups, social structures, and society in general. According to Kombo and Tromp¹², this theory views human society as a collection of competing interest groups and individuals, each with their own motives and expectations. The principal assumption underlying this theory is that all members of the society do not have the same values, interests, and expectations which vary according to one’s position, privileges, ability, class, and wealth. This theory plays a great role in decision-making within the polygamous families of South Sudan because the decision was determined by family background, one’s position, privileges, ability, class, and wealth. This notion of status could reduce or promote negative attitudes toward each other and build confidence in each other by avoiding competition based on individual and group expectations as well as interests.

The Accommodation Model

In a 2006 review of empirical research on the factors influencing parental decisions about care arrangements, Marcia K. Meyers and Lucy Jordan proposed that decisions might better be described as “accommodations” rather than “choices”. Their paper compared research that had been produced within two broadly defined traditions: those based on traditional economic theory and those drawn from other social

and behavioral science theories of “contextualized pattern of action.”¹³ In this context, the accommodation model is one way to integrate across theoretical frameworks to emphasize the complexity, multiple determinants, and fluidity of decision-making in polygamous families. Polygamous families are often highly constrained on multiple dimensions that include but are not limited to, family status, cultural norms, education level, family income, and community perspective on a given issue on which the decision should be made.

The accommodation model, with its attention to the contextual realities confronting polygamous families as providers and as caregivers, also views a particular situation choice not as discrete and isolated decision but as one in a series of interdependent decisions about society and family life that unfold over time. The research team used this theory to understand the resulting complexities and uncertainties in South Sudan assumed by polygamous families to make decisions under conditions of imperfect and incomplete information about their own preferences, as well as about the characteristics and potential consequences of their decision alternatives in relation to being married to or in a polygamous household. In the South Sudan context, given limited information, this model suggests that polygamous families’ preferences may not be fixed at any point in time, but rather, dynamic, and dependent upon the culture, community norms, choices, and experiences based on the traditions passed down through generations on level of decision making within polygamous families.

Conceptual Framework on Household Decision making Dynamics

In analyzing household decision-making, a conceptual framework based on the survey data was developed using MAXQDA 2020 on signifying that decision-making in households as per the survey is due to many players. Results indicated that household decision-making is based solely on the husband, using advanced text search and tree mappings, a model which came out is as shown below.

¹² Kombo and Tromp (2006, p. 57)

¹³ Meyers & Jordan, 2006, p. 64.

Household decision making husband dependency theory

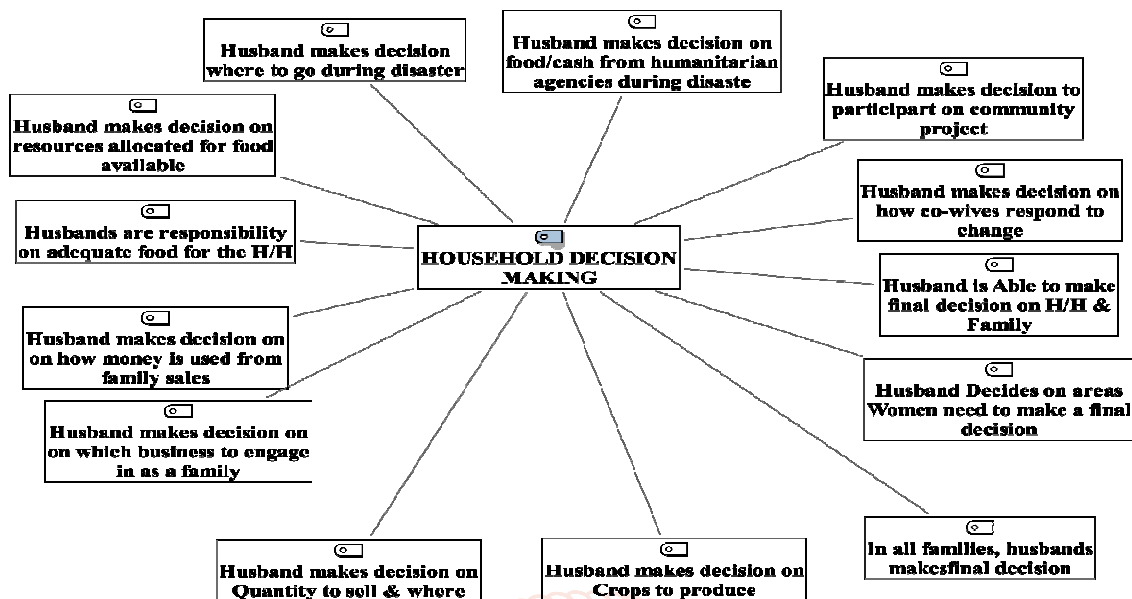


Figure 1: Household decision making conceptual framework: Source, Survey Data

3. METHODOLOGY

This study used a qualitative in nature and involved individual in-depth interviews by targeting respondents from polygamous and monogamous families, households with absent husbands (excluding divorcees, widows, or those separated), and community key informants (traditional and religious leaders). A combination of purposive and snowball sampling techniques was used to identify and select individuals from polygamous families and households with absent husbands to participate in the study while random sampling was used to select respondents from monogamous families. All key informants were purposively selected. From polygamous families, the study targeted the husband, first wife and one other co-wife to have a deeper understanding of the decision-making dynamics in these families and the roles each one of them play in decision-making. In monogamous families, both the husband and wife were interviewed while in households with absent husband, only the wife was interviewed.

The study used two different tools - interview guide for in-depth Interviews with polygamous and monogamous families and households with absent husband, and interview guide for key informants (traditional and faith leaders). A total of 232 interviews were conducted as part of the study of which 204 were in-depth interviews conducted with respondents from 94 families and 28 were key informant interviews.

All the data was collected manually using hardcopy forms and later transcribed for data encoding purposes. All the data was coded and entered into the

Statistical Package for Social Science (SPSS) for analysis. Thorough verification of data was done before analysis by checking all the responses and disaggregating data according to gender, age, and monogamous or polygamous groups. Data was coded and entered using the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) while analysis was done using MAXQDA 2020 where appropriate. During data analysis, the study team categorized the data by identifying recurring themes, languages, opinions, and beliefs to have an ascertained understanding of the context of polygamy, including the legal status of polygamy, power dynamics and the prevalence of polygamy and how the practice differs across regions, religions, and tribal groups within the specific contexts of South Sudan.

4. DISCUSSION OF RESULTS AND FINDINGS

4.1. Profile of Respondents

The majority of the respondents (138) were women while 70 were male. About 127 respondents were from polygamous families, 55 were from monogamous households and 26 were from households with absent husbands. In terms of age, most of the respondents were above 35 years (104), followed by 25-34 (82) and 15-24 (22). Most of the respondents were Christian (186) followed by those who follow African traditional beliefs (21) and only one was of the Islamic faith. With regard to education, 112 of the respondents have never attended any school, 74 have attended primary school, 20 have attended secondary school and only two have a university education. Comparing education by gender, the majority of women (90) have never

attended school compared to 22 men. This is undoubtedly the situation in South Sudan, where the literacy rate is high, estimated at around 27% (World Bank, 2021). Most analysts, on the other hand, observe a high predisposition for polygamy among households with low education levels and a high dominance of husbands in decision-making.

According to the survey, most respondents came from polygamous families, indicating that the practice is common among South Sudanese families. Additionally, because the survey was tailored to polygamous families, it was essential to have most respondents from these families to boost survey strength. As a result, the respondents' opinions essentially reflected how they felt in their actual polygamous households. These findings show how polygamous most South Sudanese households are, and when we add up all the respondents who were married to husbands who had two or more wives, we find that many of the respondents unquestionably belonged to this group of polygamous families.

4.2. General Findings on Household Decision-Making

The majority of respondents from polygamous, monogamous, and absent husband's households come from WEQ, Warrap, WBG, and NBG. All household types were asked to give their opinions on decision-making within the family in regard to six major themes (1) decisions about agricultural production (2) decisions about income generating activities (3) decisions about disaster response (4) decisions about participating in community development making on which crops to produce and quantity to sell (5) decisions about child care. The findings indicate that men have the majority or sole decision-making rights over decisions about disaster response and income-generating activities. Women have the greatest influence on decisions about agricultural production and decision about child care. Generally, in all family types, monogamous, polygamous or even families with absent husbands, most of the respondents identified husbands as the major contributor to the decisions. The study validated that husbands play a crucial role in being consulted first for major decisions in the household, but this does not conclude that other members are excluded from decision-making processes. Women also play a role in decision-making for the household as there is shared responsibility in the house. Women are also informed about issues and discuss decisions in the family.

1. The Role of Men in Household Decision Making

With respect to the areas in which husbands make the final decisions around household and family issues,

the results indicate that men in Western Equatoria State, Western Barl El Ghazal, Warrap, and Northern Barl El Ghazal have greater influence in areas concerning setting rules, food provision, and resource management, whereas those of Jonglei, Eastern Equatoria, and Central Equatoria have greater authority to make decisions about the financial management of the families, family care, family movement and provision of food to families.

“My husband is responsible for providing money for children's education, feeding, and taking care of children and my personal needs. His presence in the house gives the family weight” [monogamous wife from Rajaf Centre, Rajaf (Tokiman East, CES)]

2. The Role of Women in Household Decision Making

In all three categories of the family, both husbands and wives as well as all adult members of the family sit together to discuss issues that require collective decision-making. However, as culture is dynamic, the traditional roles assigned to males and females have been evolving. Men are no longer the only breadwinners. In conformity with this, women are no longer ‘homemakers’ as occurred in the past as our findings have validated Vincent-Lacrin's (2008) research that women just like men also work outside the home to help support the day-to-day running of the home.

The findings indicate that women in Western Bahr El Ghazal, Western Equatoria, and Central Equatoria make decisions about what to cook, raising children, crops to produce, and family business, whereas women from Eastern Equatoria, Jonglei, Northern Bahr El Ghazal have almost the same decision-making power in terms of raising children, food provision and child education in the absence of their husbands.

The roles wives play in polygamous and absent husband families included consulting with each other in decisions as quoted:

“Wives consult with one another on decisions affecting other households & they consult with their husbands on how to run their families. In consultation of both wives and husbands in decisions that affect their separate households, they sit together to decide on what to do to solve the issues, however, the final decision comes from husbands” [Tombe, from Rajaf Payam, Juba County]

This primary data shows women from three family types are responsible for household management, such as food preparation, and child care across all

states. These are common decision-making areas noted for women in all seven states. In all household types, women have the ability to decide about family upbringing, types of crops to produce, use of poultry and livestock, and micro-business.

3. Decision-Making Dynamics in Polygamous Family

The majority of the polygamous households in Western Bahr el Ghazal, Warrap, Western Equatoria, and Jonglei reported that collective decision-making occurs within their families however, men have greater influence. A key informant from Anyidi, Jonglei was quoted as saying:

“Yes, decisions are made collectively based on my own experience. We sit down as a family to decide on the distribution of little resources we have, when our children should go to school and what we can do to make sure we get the school fees ready before the school opens”

This implies that decision-making in a polygamous family is a key responsibility of every member of that family. Most of the families in South Sudan which are polygamous pull a common pool of decisions that are selected when the need comes.

4. Decision-Making Dynamics in Monogamous Families

In monogamous families' decisions concerning the family's resources are made by the husband, for example, a key informant from Eastern Equatoria was quoted saying:

“The husband makes the decision for the whole family & all decisions are made by the husband in each separate household ...such decisions are not made collectively. It is the sole responsibility of the husband. I rarely involved my wife in anything to do with family resources simply because women do not foresee things ahead of tomorrow. They just get overexcited with little money in hand forgetting tomorrow”.

Some respondents from Northern Bahr El Ghazal, Warrap, Jonglei, and Western Equatoria highlighted the authority of husbands. One respondent noted that “A husband is like the president of a given homestead.” Husbands have the sole responsibility for the household, in that he validates and makes the final decision for the family. Women are only allowed to make decisions depending on what type of decisions and what kind of husband they married. Women married to a husband that controls their autonomy in decision-making bother not to share their plans with them because they believed that their husbands will disapprove of their decisions.

5. Decision-Making Dynamics among Co-Wives in Polygamous Families

In some locations, co-wives have equality in decision-making (Eastern Equatoria and Central Equatoria) while in other locations the first wife's decision-making influence is almost as important as that of the husband, and she is consulted in absence of the husband to make the final decision for the entire family (Northern Bahr El Ghazal, Warrap, and Western Bahr El Ghazal and Jonglei).

Most of the respondents agreed that all wives in polygamous families are given the same privilege to make decisions on issues affecting the entire family. Respondents from Northern Bahr el Ghazal and Warrap had the highest level of agreement and also affirmed that all wives were allowed to make decisions on issues pertaining to each wife's household.

According to female respondents in the polygamous family, the first wife is considered the follower of the husband in the family hierarchy; she follows the husband in decision-making. Indeed, female respondents from Warrap said, in the absence of the husband, the first wife assumed full responsibility for all wives and children in decision-making. She consulted with co-wives on issues affecting the entire family. Some respondents from the polygamous families in Central Equatoria, Western Equatoria, and to some extent in Jonglei, said the first wife has authority to influence decision-making only on important issues.

“First wife is the logistician of all wives. She is the one that decides on the distribution of the resources. In case the second or third wife is good as well, the first wife will delegate the power to make decisions and she can also do the distribution because this is the routine you taught them from the beginning. Women learn from each other”. [Community leader, Jur River, Western Bahr el Ghazal]

“Well, when it comes to resource distribution, women are not the same. There are those who are new in the marriage and those who have been in marriage for quite a number of years. The first wife is experienced, and she can make her own decisions. The other wives are inexperienced and at the stage of learning how to make decisions, so; sometimes they are not able to make decisions alone. In such cases, they seek advice before they can do anything because they fear the outcomes of their decisions”. [A fourth wife, Tonj South, Warrap]

In Northern Bahr El Ghazal and Warrap, the first wife makes important decisions and guides the husband on issues such, as the husband getting a second, third or fourth wife. Having many co-wives gives pride to the first wife and reduces the workload for the family. This view not prominent in other state but applies to Northern Bahr El Ghazal and Warrap respectively. The trend in the responsibility of the first wife on equal decision-making like the husband may differ across all other states due to the cultures and customs of varying communities in South Sudan. In Eastern Equatoria and Central Equatoria states, cases of equal opportunity for all wives in decision-making have been observed and reported during interviews, but the issue of the first wife having more and equal power to that of a husband has not been reported frequently only slightly. In summary, equal opportunities for all co-wives in decision making is recorded in EEQ and CES whereas, Northern Bahr El Ghazal, Warrap, and Western Bahr El Ghazal and JS consider the first wife's decision-making as important as that of the husband, and she's consulted in absence of the husband to make the final decision for the entire family.

The Key informants indicated that instances of violence are not uncommon in polygamous families. Physical altercations can take place amongst wives, husbands, co-wives, children, and extended family relatives of the husband and wife/wives. Some key informants noted that family fighting can result in lead to a chain of conflicts leading to communal violence not only in their polygamous homesteads but also in the entire community or clan.

A spear master was quoted explaining the source of tension between co-wives and their husband:

“Limited resources cause tension between co-wives. How do you feed all the children from separate households? That is problematic. The co-wives will think that it is because you took the food to the other wives, and you allow her and the children to starve. To me, it is not a good idea to have many wives. The husband would leave a wife, and go to the other wife and end up being confronted by the wives. So, there is no peace at all. See how old I am, I cannot remember when we had a fight with my wife. That is the best thing I know about having one wife”.

He continued his narratives.....

“Co-wives rarely love themselves. All you hear in the neighborhood is the disputes between co-wives and their husband. The co-wives are jealous. They neither support themselves nor

their husband. Yes, disputes between co-wives and their husband are very common. Sometimes a wife would come asking me to use my spiritual powers to make the husband love her alone and make sure he stays in her house. Let me tell you, such things are tempting and can cause the deadliest conflicts if you do not handle them well. If you are a heartless man, you will do as she wants while a wise man will not consider it. You just tell her that this is beyond my spiritual powers. Now when the secret leaked out that she is using spiritual powers to maintain the husband, other wives will seek the same powers and total confusion will transpire in that family”.

Co-wives in many polygamous families across the seven states respond to changes in personal and economic status in two ways; a) negative response, where co-wives become jealous of their peers, b) positive response, where co-wives support each other and cooperate with their peers to preserve their collective social and economic status.

4.3. Household Decision Making on Selected Issues

1. Decisions about Agricultural Production

In Eastern Equatoria and Central Equatoria, women make decisions on both cash and food crop production. Women in all family types in Northern Bahr El Ghazal, Warrap, Western Bahr El Ghazal, and the Western Equatoria make decisions on which food to grow for consumption but have more influence over cash crops. Women in Jonglei do not make decisions about crop production.

Women in Warrap, Central, Eastern, and Western Equatoria have significant influence over the quantity of production and location of sale, however, these decisions are shared by husbands and wives in Jonglei and Northern Bahr El Ghazal. In Western Bahr El Ghazal, the decisions are made primarily by husbands. The key informant interview results indicate that husbands decide how much to produce, sell, and do other family businesses, sometimes with input from their wives, children, and the entire family.

In the data analysis, the word “separately” was used routinely in the description of polygamous families. The findings indicated most of the polygamous families in agriculture-based communities in South Sudan cook and eat separately in distinct households. Each wife with her children prepares their own meal. However collective farming for the whole family compels co-wives to be unified. A respondent from Central Equatoria described the importance of polygamous families for agricultural production and

it reflects wealth accumulation that can be acquired through the collective power from a polygamous family.

2. Decisions about Income Generating Activities

The three most commonly cited sources of income in the study were farming (cash crops and vegetables), selling tea, and brewing alcohol. They are supplemented by salaried work, casual labor, animal husbandry, shisha, and making and selling firewood. Husbands typically receive income and share it among co-wives, children, and other family members for acquiring all the needed requirements within the family.

In analyzing the changing relationships between husbands and wives in both monogamous and polygamous families, it was found that some women in polygamous marriages describe their husbands as being dominant, controlling over decisions making, and entrenching a patriarchal system.

“Well, when it comes to resource distribution, women are not the same. There are those who are new in the marriage and those who have been in marriage for quite a number of years. The first wife is experienced, and she can make her own decisions. The other wives are inexperienced and at the stage of learning how to make decisions, so; sometimes they are not able to make decisions alone. In such cases, they seek advice before they can do anything because they fear the outcomes of their decisions”. [Charles, with three wives from Khor-Malang boma, Wau]

Another respondent described family dynamics regarding decisions on family income and resource distribution as follows:

“First wife is the logistician of all wives. She is the one that decides on the distribution of the resources. In case the second or third wife is good as well, the first wife will delegate the power to make decisions and she can also do the distribution because this is the routine you taught them from the beginning. Women learn from each other”. [Ojulu with three wives from Udici]

Victoria, a first wife in Western Equatoria narrated her experience regarding family income distribution.

“I am just a laborer and producer. The cash income from my garden belongs to him exclusively and he shares little with us. He would ask to sell the products and later come and take the money. I don't get an equitable

proportion of cash income from my farm. The only way to get the autonomy is to encourage him to have other wives so that I get the opportunity to do my own business of selling alcohol, and the garden produces in the market”.

Men make decisions about household finances and the distribution of livestock, while women make decisions about small household purchases. However, some female respondents from Western Equatoria and Central Equatoria who are educated and breadwinners for their families, explained that even when they earn more money than their husband, they give it all to the husband to decide on how it will be used and shared among the household members. In Western Equatoria, a female respondent who made more money than her husband gave her husband authority to decide on how the money is used because she believed he made better decisions and plans.

3. Decisions about Disaster Response

Data analysis across the seven surveyed states showed that husbands are the primary decision-makers during human-made disasters since it was assumed that men have more information about the conflict. Husbands make decisions about where to relocate, for example from Northern Bahr el Ghazal to Sudan, from Jonglei and Central Equatoria to Uganda, or other locations in South Sudan.

In a situation of emergency, any person such as elders or community leaders can decide to move their community members to safer places as quickly as possible. In emergency disasters, there is uniformity among all the state respondents that any person can decide when it considers safe. Because of the urgent nature of disasters, anyone with credible information can contribute to decision-making. In natural disasters, such as flooding or drought, decisions can be made by both women and men.

4. Decision about Participating in Community Development

All respondents affirmed that community development projects are generally beneficial. In the absence of a husband, a wife has ultimate authority over whether to join a community development project or not. However, many female respondents said they asked for the permission of their husbands to participate in community initiatives. One male respondent provided additional insight, saying:

“I allow my wife to participate in project activities if the project is good for both of us. “Women can be brainwashed by gender equality discussions and these might cause issues in my household” [man from Manyangok, Tonj South]

The respondents both male and female agreed that the husband is the decision-maker when a community project needs women's participation. Some respondents across the seven (7) states also reported that both husband and wife can decide. Some of the respondents agreed most projects for the community support well-being of every person, and any involvement of a partner is not bad at all. However, in the absence of a Husband, the wife has ultimate authority over whether to join a community development project or not. From the analysis, a female can decide to participate in project activities when the husband is not there

5. Decisions about Childcare

In all family types wives had the most influence over decisions about children's feeding, discipline; clothing, and education, however, husbands contribute to some decisions about children. One farmer from Marial Bai explained:

"Yes, women play a great role in the family. They take care of the children. A wife gives a report of a sick child. In fact, chickens, goats, and other livestock are being taken care of by a woman. She decides what to do with them. When there is no food in the house, a woman can decide to sell a goat to buy the food without consulting me. Or in a situation where a child is sick, she can decide to sell anything in the house that she believes would cater for the treatment of her child". [Husband from Wau]

Additionally, below are quotes from Angelina on this matter.

"...well, I believe it is a collective work of both parents; if a child wants to go to school, the first person to report has been a mother and if you have something then you give it to him /her without hesitation. Only when you have nothing at all, a mother will either send a child to the father or a mother talk to the father concerning education or any other needs. The husband will think about where to get money to pay the children's school fees. If he has no cash in the hand, he will direct a wife to sell a goat or cow to cater to the family needs".

Women also commented on the timing of the births of their children, stressing that it was primarily determined by husbands.

"My husband paid a number of cattle to my parents in exchange for my services. So, I have no power over my body. He can decide when to share the room with him so that we have another child. I cannot tell him to let me have another child for two reasons: one he is the breadwinner

of his family. He knows whether it is the right time or not depending on the availability of resources. Second, if I ask him to share the room with the intention to have another child, he will think that I am tricking him to top up another man's child." [Mary, a second wife from Wau]

In rural communities, husbands play a vital role in choosing their sons' or daughters' spouses in both monogamous and polygamous families. Husbands get their opinions and feelings on potential spouses from their daughter, son, wife, grandparents, and relatives; however, he makes the final decision. In the case of an absent husband's family, patrilineal uncles decide.

4.4. Community and Religious Leaders Opinion on Polygamy

The key informants shared their views on polygamy with regard to culture and religion and there are varying views. A group of Payam chiefs and paramount chiefs praised polygamy as a culture and hoped that it continues to the next generations because they inherited the same culture from their ancestors.

A community leader of Jur River expressed his views as follows.

"My grandfather had 12 wives. I am the only one who has not reached that number. I have 5 wives only. I'm supposed to have more; however, the situation is not the same because there is not enough food to feed them. Our grandfathers used to have abundant fish and cattle that they used to feed their families.

Those who were more religious or followed Christianity negated any positivity in polygamy and considered it an evil act, a sin, and an immoral way of living for people in South Sudan. According to this survey, Christians or those professing modern faiths oppose polygamy as a formal way of life, and some deemed it an ancient habit that causes discomfort in homes.

A community leader of Khormalang, Wau North Payam was quoted saying:

"People marry many wives depending on personal income. Anyone is free to have more wives as he wishes for so long, he has a dowry to pay. This is not something we started in our generation. We inherit this culture from our ancestors"

He states: "There is no customary law that allows marrying many wives. It is an individual ability to have many wives. Another person may have uncooperative wives, so they prefer to have separate

households. Even children do not cooperate because co-wives spread hatred among the children.”

4.5. Wife Autonomy in all Family Types

In general, women have limited autonomy in most South Sudanese communities. Women have autonomy in the areas of employment and family care. A group of respondents was quoted emphasizing this point as.

“Families are different. There is a family in which a wife must seek permission from the husband. If a woman wants to do anything, she must tell me first because this is my house. They are not here on their own,” said the husband of five wives.

In one polygamous family, the husband could not afford to meet the financial needs of the family therefore, he allowed the first wife and second wife to have businesses, however, the new wife was confined at home with the fear that she may have extramarital affairs with other men. Husbands can withdraw their autonomy if he develops suspicion.

Poni, a second wife explains the level of her autonomy:

“You do not have the freedom to do whatever I think is good for me and my children, especially the new wives. You get little space when your husband has got another wife after you. Much of his attention and control would be directed to the new arrival”.

In most cases, even if a husband was open to one of his wives participating in an independent activity, other family members may object and advise him to change his mind. Overall, wives had little autonomy in a polygamous family arrangement. During our interviews, we realized correlations between decision-making and education, employment, age, and place of residence. Women tended to have greater influence in decision-making when they were younger, were employed, and had fewer children. Moreover, women in rural areas had less autonomy in decision-making. Again, the influence of the extended family limited women’s influence on their autonomy. We conclude a low autonomy degree of wives in both monogamous and polygamous family types.

5. CONCLUSION

The practice of polygamy has been common amongst some South Sudanese people for generations. However, has been celebrated, disparaged, and ignored by the humanitarian community. During extended periods of war, polygamy served as a way of fortifying families and clans. With the widespread

loss of life, large families provided productivity and protection.

Social network theory would further explore the social connections, reputation, and influence that individuals have in their household, extended family, and community. The study indicated that wives have a significant influence on decisions about feeding, disciplining, clothing, and educating children. Husbands share some responsibilities for raising children, such as providing financial support, selecting schools, and giving advice.

In Conclusion, the study indicated that wives are the major role players in decision-making on how the child’s feeding, discipline, clothing, and education among others must be catered for in any polygamous family within South Sudan. Results also indicated that husbands share responsibilities with their wives in raising a child like coming together for advice, husbands contribute financial supports to cater to children’s needs including feeding, taking a supervisory role, and deciding on which school they can go to according to his financial capability, and among others. Overall, key informants weighed their views of polygamy in terms of culture and religion and the survey has shown that there are varying views, a group of those who were chiefs or paramount chiefs in the Payams view polygamy as a culture, praised it, and hope it continues to the next generations as they also got the same culture from their ancestors. Those who were more religious or followed Christianity negated any positivity in polygamy and considered it an evil act, a sin, and an immoral way of living for people in South Sudan. Christians or those practicing modern faiths according to this survey have taken polygamy against formal ways of living and some called it an ancient practice that leads to discomforts in home

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