



Polygamy and the Principle of Women's Protection in the Qur'an: A Thematic Tafsir Study

Poligami dan Prinsip Perlindungan Perempuan dalam Al-Qur'an: Sebuah Studi Tafsir Tematik

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Abstract. Polygamy is one of the concerns of Islamic family law that still stimulates discussion, especially on the notion of women's protection from the standpoint of the Qur'an. The fundamental problem of this study analyzes how the Qur'an perceives polygamy and the application of the values of justice, respect and protection for women in its regulation. The aim of this study is to investigate the notion of polygamy through a thematic interpretation of the Quranic verses connected to polygamy and women's rights. This research uses a qualitative library research method. The fundamental sources are the verses of the Qur'an concerning polygamy, including Surah An-Nisa verses 3 and 129. The secondary sources are the classical and modern tafsir volumes, books of Islamic law and relevant academic works. The data analysis was carried out utilizing the tafsir maudhu'i approach (thematic interpretation) to analyze the context, meaning, and purposes of the verses. The results reveal that the Qur'an does not give full approval for polygamy, but gives rigorous constraints based on justice, responsibility and fulfillment of women's rights. A basic aspect for preventing injustice and prejudice is the notion of protecting women. The study indicates that polygamy, from the perspective of the Qur'an, is a restricted permission that should be performed within the bounds of justice, human dignity and societal good.

1. INTRODUCTION

Polygamy is one of the concerns in Islamic family law that is still being debated by scholars, academics and society in general. The discussion is not just about the legal permissibility of it, but questions of justice, gender relations, women's rights and the interpretation of Qur'anic passages within a continuously changing social environment. The discussions on polygamy in Islamic tradition are often linked to the Qur'anic Surah al-Nisā' (4:3) that allows a man to have more than one wife, with some requirements, the main one being the ability to uphold justice. However, this verse is often partially construed as a legal sanction for the practice of polygamy without due consideration of the historical setting of revelation and the moral purposes intended by the Qur'an. In truth, this passage was disclosed within the framework of protecting vulnerable populations, especially orphan women, and emphasising the duty of fairness in marital partnerships. A. N. B. Simanjorang, S. Hadiningrum, P.G. Siahaan, D.F. Hutabarat, F.S. Dilla, and T.M. Tamba, 2025).

From the Qur'anic point of view, marriage is not just a legal tie between men and women, but also an institution based on the concepts of tranquillity (*sakinah*), affection (*mawaddah*) and mercy (*rahmah*). These principles include that any control on family life in the Qur'an is directed to the attainment of wellbeing (*maslahah*) and the protection of all parties concerned. Therefore, the study of polygamy cannot be divorced from the core values of the Qur'an on human dignity, fairness, and the protection of women as individuals who have rights and honour. The key issue is that the discussion has mainly been on the legal position of polygamy, whether it is acceptable or prohibited, but the aspect of women's protection as the central aim of Qur'anic advice has not always been the focus of interpretation. (F. Sugiyono, and A.F. Al-Hakam, 2025).

A number of prior studies have investigated polygamy from diverse angles. Research on the Qur'an Surah al-Nisā' (4:3), for example, has often been done using comparative studies with ancient and contemporary exegesis works. Studies on the interpretations of Hamka and Quraish Shihab show that both thinkers allow polygamy, but stress the criteria of justice, therefore it is a practice that cannot be practiced without limits. Other studies comparing the Tafsir al-Manār by Muhammad Abduh and the Tafsir al-Munīr by Wahbah al-Zuhayli show discrepancies in the interpretation of the verse on polygamy, especially in the emphasis on social context and the practical restrictions of polygamy. Moreover, some recent scholars have adopted contextual techniques to re-evaluate the verses on polygamy within the framework of the historical setting of the Qur'an's revelation, the socioeconomic realities of Arab society, and the principle of justice for women in current contexts. (K.S. Tanjung, A. Masum, N. Rahmi, and I. Mardiah, 2025).

These studies have made a substantial contribution to the understanding of the meaning of Qur'an Surah al-Nisā' (4:3), but there are a number of research gaps that need to be filled. Most previous studies are either on the legal elements of polygamy, or the comparative comparison of exegetical perspectives, or on the contextual interpretation of a particular verse. However, these methods have not yet fully revealed how the concept of women's protection is formed through the interdependence of many Qur'anic verses in connection to marital relations, family justice, women's rights, and the prohibition of harsh treatment towards women. Second, polygamy as a general issue is handled as a standalone issue, although in the theme interpretation approach (*tafsir maudhu'i*), the Qur'anic issue should ideally be seen through all linked verses to understand it more comprehensively. Third, there are few studies that have used women's protection principles as the principal analytical framework to analyse the notion of polygamy based on Qur'anic messages. (D.M. Hidayah, E.S. Anwar, and H. Luthfi, 2025).

In light of these research gaps, this study offers a different perspective with a thematic interpretation approach (*tafsir maudhu'i*) which not only elaborates on the legal status of polygamy but also explores how the Qur'an constructs principles of women's protection within the framework of polygamous practices. The objective of this research is to combine the several verses of the Qur'an about polygamy, justice, women's rights, husband's responsibilities and the goals of marriage in Islam. In this way, polygamy is not perceived solely as a question of the number of marriage partners but as a socio-religious phenomena which has to be considered within the context of justice, humanity and the protection of women. This work is new in that it attempts to recreate the concept of polygamy from the standpoint of women's protection as a basic principle of the Qur'an, not only from a formal legal perspective. (A. Humaira, N. Ar Rasyidah, R.T. Rahmani, and A.B. Kelana, 2025).

Based on the foregoing debate, this study intends to analyse the notion of polygamy from the Qur'anic perspective through the theme interpretation approach. To find out the principles of women's protection included in the relevant verses of the Qur'an. In addition, this study attempts to clarify the connection between the permissibility of polygamy, the demand of justice, and the goal of protecting women within the context of Qur'anic values. The results of this research are expected to provide scholarly contributions to the advancement of Qur'anic and Tafsir studies, especially in the understanding of Islamic family concerns with a more contextual, humanistic, and justice-oriented perspective.

2. RESEARCH METHOD

This research is a qualitative research with the library research method (*kajian kepustakaan*) to analyse the concept of polygamy and the principles of women's protection in the Qur'an through thematic interpretation approach (*tafsir maudhu'i*). (M.N. Adlini, A.H. Dinda, S. Yulinda, O. Chotimah, and S.J. Merliyana, 2022). This form of research is interpretative-descriptive to find out the Qur'anic message by looking at pertinent verses, interpretations of scholars, and associated academic material. The research design is built on the theme framework of Qur'anic interpretation via identification, collection and analysis of the Qur'anic verses linked to polygamy, justice, marriage and women's rights. The core sources are Qur'anic verses, particularly Q.S. al-Nisā' (4):3, while the secondary sources comprise of classical and contemporary tafsir books, Islamic studies literature, and scientific works about polygamy and gender justice. (A.P. Awadin, and A.T. Hidayah, 2023).

The sample technique utilised is purposive sampling which is the selection of verses, tafsir references and academic sources based on the relevance to the research objectives. The materials included are those that directly address the relationship between polygamy, justice and the protection of women in the perspective of the Qur'anic. Thematic content analysis is used for data analysis. The data collected are classified into main issues, such as the concept of polygamy, the principle of fairness and protection of women. Next, a contextual analysis of mufassir's interpretations is undertaken to construct a holistic view of polygamy according to the Qur'anic concepts of justice and human dignity. (R.L. Farhan, A.S. Himam, and M.A.Ghofur, 2024)

3. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Polygamy in the Qur'an Is Not an Absolute Freedom but a Conditional Provision

The subject of polygamy in the Qur'an cannot be divorced from the social context and moral motives behind the revelation of the verses. The Qur'an The main verse that is utilised as the basis for discussion about polygamy in Islam is the Qur'an Surah al-Nisā' (4:3). But the understanding of this verse calls for a holistic approach that does not just focus on the permissibility of marrying more than one woman but also recognises the values of protection, justice and social duty as the fundamental aims of the verse. This verse was unveiled within the framework of Arab civilisation, when wars had left many orphans without the protection of a family, and on the verge of social difficulties, such as the possible exploitation of their money and the unjust treatment of orphan women. Therefore, the issue of polygamy in this passage is tied to the protection of the rights of the weak, especially women and orphans. (D.U.L. Fitria, and R. Merita, 2023).

In Q.S. al-Nisā' (4:3), Allah says that if a person believes that he would not be able to act justly with orphan women, then he may marry other women whom he chooses, two, three or four. The scripture clearly says that a man can not have more than four wives. This restriction means that the Qur'an does not permit unrestricted marital customs as practiced in various pre-Islamic countries. In this way, the Qur'an, by imposing this constraint, brought about social reform by regulating what was previously an unregulated activity, and at the same time, strengthened the protection of women's rights and standing inside the institution of marriage. (E. Kurniawan, and A. Mustaniruddin, 2024).

Though the scripture allows polygamy it does not mean that men have unlimited freedom to marry several women on the basis of personal desire. The main condition stressed in the passage is the ability to do justice. In this sense, justice means that it is necessary to be

responsible for meeting the rights of wives (such as financial assistance, fair distribution of time, kind treatment of all women, and avoiding any kind of injury or discrimination). From the Qur'anic point of view, therefore, polygamy is not a matter of mere counting of the number of spouses, but a responsibility with far-reaching moral and social implications. (S. Fiddaroin, 2025).

The next part of the verse underscores the gravity of the need of justice: If a person fears that he would not be able to act justly, then he should marry only one lady. So the statement *fa wāḥidatan* (marry only one) indicates that monogamy is provided as a safer choice to avoid injustice when one cannot fulfil the concept of fairness. This implies that the main function of the verse is not to promote polygamy but to guarantee the justice of each marriage and the welfare of women.

Also, it is necessary to read Q.S. al-Nisā' (4:3) together with Q.S. al-Nisā' (4:129), which says that human beings are unable to establish a perfect equality between women, even if they try. This passage shows that the justice in a polygamous relationship is a very complicated and difficult issue. Some scholars read these two lines as stressing that polygamy is an exceptional case subject to moral responsibility rather than a free-standing male privilege. (I. Abdullah, et al, 2022).

Using the theme interpretation (*tafsir maudhu'i*) approach, it may be understood that the concept of polygamy in the Qur'an is orientated to safeguard women and create fairness in the home. The Qur'an does not establish polygamy as a means of male tyranny over women, rather it is a provision that is regulated by the principles of justice, responsibility and the prevention of injustice. Hence, polygamy from the Qur'anic point of view is a conditional and strictly regulated practice, not an unfettered freedom that can be exercised without consideration for the rights and dignity of women. (A. Latifah, K. Vikriadi, & A. Doloh, A. (2025).

The Principle of Justice as the Main Measure in the Discussion of Polygamy

The notion of justice in the Qur'anic perspective is one of the basic principles and the essential criteria to comprehend the practice of polygamy. Polygamy is not simply a matter of the law as to how many wives one can have, but also has to do with the person's capacity to fulfil moral, social and spiritual duties to the women he is married to. Hence, the issue of polygamy in theme interpretation (*tafsir maudhu'i*) is not restricted to the element of legal permissibility (*ibāhah*), but must be studied via the essential values of the Qur'an, especially justice (*al-'adl*) and the protection of women. (M. Milawati, M. Mardan, and M. Yusuf, 2025).

The first criterion for a person to practice polygamy, as stated in Q.S. al-Nisā' (4:3), is Justice. Not only does the passage place a restriction on the number of women, limiting it to four, but it also stresses that a man must be able to deal justly with his wives. The notion of justice in this poem is vast. Justice is not just the practical side like financial assistance, fulfilment of living necessities, suitable housing, or sharing time or marital turns equally. Justice is also moral obligation of treating women with respect, dignity, and humanitarian considerations. (A. Affandi, M.M. Billah, and M. Syaifudin, 2025).

In the family life setting, justice is the determinant whether polygamy can be practiced or not in accordance with the purposes of marriage in Islam. The Qur'an bases marriage on the basis of tranquilly (*sakinah*), love (*mawaddah*) and mercy (*rahmah*). So the husband and wife relationship cannot be assessed only through economic fulfilment. If a husband is able to meet the material necessities but inflicts emotional anguish, psychological discomfort or discriminating treatment towards one of his wives, then he has not fully met the norm of justice stressed by the Qur'an. Q.S. al-Nisā' (4:129) highlights the challenge of obtaining justice in polygamous unions. The text is saying that human beings will not be able to establish full equality amongst their wives, even if they try earnestly to do so. (Daud, I. (2025).

The Qur'anic exegesis scholars explain this to focus more on the interior factors such as emotional tendencies, affection, and love impulses which cannot always be entirely controlled by human beings. It implies that the Qur'an is aware of the psychological aspects of women in marriage interactions and not merely the measurable exterior parts. Q.S. al-Nisā' (4:129) is present to comprehend that justice in polygamy is a very difficult condition to fulfil. Therefore, this verse cannot be separated from Q.S. al-Nisā' (4:3) that affirms justice as the main necessity. The permission of polygamy is strongly linked to the moral constraints applied to it in these two passages through a thematic interpretative approach. The Qur'an permits polygamy by stipulating the specific conditions under which it may be practiced, but it also warns that if a person is unable to keep justice, he may become unjust to women. (F. Amilia, F. Tobroni, H. Burhanuddin, and H.Z. Salwa, 2024).

Therefore, from the point of view of the thematic interpretation of the Qur'an, polygamy is not a universal recommendation for all men, but a practice with rigors limitations. The principle of justice is the key tool for assessing the legitimacy of polygamous practices, because the major aim of the Qur'an is not only to restrict the number of married partners, but to maintain the balance of rights, dignity, and protection of women. Hence, the notion of polygamy should be thought of within the context of justice and moral obligation and not within the paradigm of unrestrained individual liberty.

The Qur'an Positions Women's Protection as the Moral Objective of Polygamy Regulations

In the study of theme interpretation (*tafsir maudhu'i*), the subject of polygamy cannot be limited to one passage of the Qur'an. Rather, it must be studied via the convergence of several Qur'anic verses that deal with marriage, justice, financial responsibility, family obligations, and prohibition of injury to women. This demonstrates that the Qur'anic regulations on family life are not merely intended to establish formal legal structures but also to pursue wider moral objectives, such as maintaining human dignity, safeguarding the rights of family members, and building relationships based on justice and compassion. (D. Santoso, and M. Nasrudin, 2021).

Marriage is a commitment with ethical and spiritual implications as shown in the Qur'an. Allah says in Q.S. al-Rūm (30:21), that the objective of marriage is to foster tranquillity (*sakinah*), affection (*mawaddah*) and mercy (*rahmah*) between husband and wife. This notion means that the basis of marital partnerships in Islam is not simply a matter of possession or of fulfilling individual desires, but of respecting the rights and the dignity of each partner. Thus, all practices of marriage including polygamy should be interpreted in the light of these moral goals. (G. Sereikaite Motiejune, 2025).

The Qur'an deals with polygamy by strictly regulating it and making justice its basic requirement. Q.S. al-Nisā' (4:3) is not only on the number of spouses allowed but emphasises more on the necessity not to be unjust towards women. This shows that the freedom to practise polygamy is not an absolute right that can be enjoyed regardless of the conditions and repercussions for women. Rather, the verse restricts the practice of polygamy from becoming one of exploitation or disdain of women's rights.

The idea of protection of women is strongly tied to the obligation of financial assistance (*nafaqah*) and the responsibility of the husbands in the family, in addition to the issue of justice. According to the Qur'anic view, men are responsible to give protection and meet the requirements of women and treat them properly and honourably (*mu'āsharah bi al-ma'rūf*). Therefore, if polygamy leads to a wife losing her financial rights, being subjected to discrimination, psychological pressure, or not receiving proper protection, then such a practice is contrary to the moral purposes of the Qur'an. (N. A. Brillianty, and Z. Ulya, 2025).

In the thematic interpretation, it is also shown that the Qur'an always prohibits all sorts of acts of injustice to women. These restrictions are mentioned in several verses that stress the need to do justice to women, to protect their rights in marriage, and not to let marital interactions be a cause of misery. Hence, the primary criterion for the evaluation of polygamy

is not only the satisfaction of formal legal criteria but also the amount to which the practice provides justice and welfare for all concerned. (L. Noviana, and A. Awaludin, 2022).

From this point of view it may be argued that polygamy is permissible only if it is not accompanied by injustice, neglect, psychological harm or any disadvantage to women. If a practice of polygamy brings about more harm (mafsadah) than profit (maslahah) the principle of women's protection must be made the dominant factor. This is in line with the main purposes of Islamic law (maqāsid al-sharī'ah) that give priority to the realisation of welfare and prevention of harm as fundamental principles in the implementation of Islamic legal norms. (S. Aini, and A. Abdurrahman, 2021).

The Qur'an does not see polygamy as the major goal of the marriage regulations, but it is a restricted provision that should be kept under the norms of justice and human protection. The Qur'anic laws for family life have a moral purpose behind them, that is, the protection of women. Hence the concept of polygamy should be aimed at the preservation of the dignity, rights and security of women and not only the issue of legal permissibility without factoring in its social and humanitarian effects. (L.E. Rahmawati, 2023).

4. CONCLUSION

The study indicates that the discourse of polygamy in the Qur'an should be understood from a contextual and value-oriented approach that takes into account the larger objectives of the Qur'anic teaching in developing a just family system. The theme interpretation technique should be applied to position polygamy as a regulated social practice that requires continual ethical review, particularly in terms of its ability to maintain balance, accountability and human dignity in family relationships. The framework of the Qur'an suggests that the legitimacy of a marriage practice depends not only on its legality but also on how far it represents values of justice and prevents harm.

The implication of this study is the need for the development of a more complete strategy in comprehending the challenges in Islamic family, notably the integration of the textual interpretation and the social and ethical factors. This view enables scholars, religious institutions and the society to assess the real impact of polygamy on women's wellbeing, instead of merely formal legal considerations. Moreover, this study contributes to modern Qur'anic studies, by proposing that the protection of women might be a significant analytical framework in the interpretation of verses connected to family. Such a method could help to build a more balanced comprehension of Islamic teachings which respects the religious principles whilst also tackling concerns of dignity, equality and social justice within

contemporary settings.

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