



Al-Hikmah Journal of Politics and Public Administration

ISSN (Print): 3121-8814

Volume 1, Number 3, June 2026



CONFLICT MANAGEMENT STRATEGIES IN POLYGYNOUS FAMILIES: AN ASSESSMENT OF ILORIN WEST LGA, KWARA STATE, NIGERIA

R. D. ALANAMU¹, A. A. ADEKOLA² & Y. O. ONIMAGO³

^{1, 2, 3}Centre for Peace and Security Studies, Al-Hikmah University, Ilorin, Kwara State Nigeria

E-mail: alanamurasheedatdamilola@gmail.com

Abstract

Polygyny remains a prominent family system shaping interpersonal relations in Ilorin, Kwara State, Nigeria. However, the practice is frequently associated with rivalry, jealousy, and unhealthy competition among co-wives, often resulting in family conflicts. Despite its prevalence, limited scholarly attention has been given to the effectiveness of conflict management strategies in addressing these tensions. This study examined conflict management strategies in polygynous families in Ilorin West Local Government Area of Kwara State. Specifically, the study identified the strategies employed in managing conflicts, assessed their effectiveness, and examined the challenges associated with their application. The study adopted convergent parallel mixed-methods design, integrating quantitative and qualitative approaches. A multi-stage sampling technique was used to select 80 polygynous families, and four respondents comprising the husband, two wives, and an elderly child in each of selected families across the study area. A total of 320 respondents were administered copies of questionnaire out of which, 312 copies were retrieved and analysed using descriptive analysis. In addition, 18 in-depth interviews (IDI) were conducted with husbands, wives, and informal mediators, including religious and traditional leaders. This interview data were subjected to content analysis. Findings revealed that third-party intervention, joint problem-solving, and reconciliation were the most commonly adopted conflict management strategies. Although these strategies promoted temporary peaceful coexistence, and family harmony, their effectiveness was constrained by inadequate communication, cultural and religious pressures, and inadequate decision-making by the husbands. The study concludes that existing strategies are insufficient for sustaining long-term family stability and recommends the establishment of counselling units by religious and government institutions to support harmonious polygynous households.

Keywords: Polygyny; Family Conflict; Conflict Management Strategies; Polygynous Families

Background to the Study

Family is an essential unit and life-line of any society since the creation of man. The success, progress, and failure of any society underscore the importance of family as a centre of marriage rituals and an agent of socialisation in any community (Abubakar & Alamai, 2015). There are several forms of marriage, and one form that is often discussed in Muslim society is polygyny.

Polygynous is described as a situation where a man is having multiple wives (binti-Rozli & Hussin, 2025). About 2% of the global population lives in polygynous families (Kramer, 2020). This includes countries like , Pakistan, Iraq and Yemen where many families live in polygamous households, and in Saudi-Arabia, Qatar, the United Arab Emirates etc, polygyny is legal and religiously accepted (Kramer, 2020). In the Pacific Islands, Europe, North America and Asia, polygyny is legal but not widely accepted (Chae & Agadjanian, 2022). This implies that although polygyny remains relatively uncommon in some part of the world, it continues to persist in certain cultural and religious countries where it is socially and legally recognised.

Similarly, the polygyny practice constitutes between 20% and 50% of marriages across many African societies (Chae & Agadjanian, 2022). Its prevalence is particularly pronounced among Muslim populations, individuals with lower educational attainment, and rural residents, where cultural traditions, religious orientations, and agrarian socio-economic structures continue to reinforce its acceptance (Fenske, 2015). Nevertheless, emerging evidence suggests a gradual shift in the demographic pattern of polygyny, as increasing numbers of highly educated and economically affluent men engage in the practice in Africa (Fenske, 2015).

This trend underscores the complex interplay of cultural values, religious orientations, economic capacity, and social status as critical determinants sustaining contemporary polygynous unions in the continent. For instance, in many sub-Saharan African societies, polygyny extends beyond a marital arrangement to represent a socially legitimised institution associated with prestige, lineage expansion, and socio-economic influence (Chae & Agadjanian, 2022).

In Nigeria, polygyny remains a wide-spread marital practice, particularly across the northern region. Data from the Nigeria Demographic and Health Survey (2022) indicate notably high rates of men with two or more wives in states such as Kebbi (27.3%), Katsina (26.6%), Kaduna (26.2%), Jigawa (23.6%), and Kwara (21.0%). Similarly, the reported relatively comparable proportions of males (9.9%) and females (9.6%) living in polygynous unions nation-wide, with the highest prevalence recorded in Jigawa State and the lowest in Akwalbom State. This shows how regional variations shaped by socio-cultural, religious, and economic factors, particularly in northern states of Nigeria where traditional family systems remain deeply entrenched, encourages the practice of polygyny, most especially, state such as Kwara. The practice and persistence of

polygyny in Kwara State exert significant influence on family relations, household welfare, and broader socio-economic interactions (Alanamu et al., 2025).

However, due to the complex interpersonal, economic and gender dynamics inherent in polygyny family systems, conflict management has attracted scholarly attention across Africa and parts of Asia (Chae & Agadjanian, 2022; Owoo et al., 2021; Smith-Greenaway & Trinitapoli, 2014). Polygynous families are sometimes driven with tensions related to competition, emotional rivalry, and unequal access to resources. Consequently, a range of conflict management strategies has evolved within polygynous households, reflecting both formal and informal attempts to maintain household stability amid competing interests.

Broadly, these strategies include negotiation, mediation and third-party intervention, equitable resource distribution, spatial or residential separation, religious and moral counseling, and women-led cooperative arrangements (Fenske, 2015; Chae & Agadjanian, 2022). In many Nigerian contexts, particularly among the Yoruba and Hausa-Fulani, elder mediation and intervention by religious leaders remain central. Imams, pastors, and family elders are often called upon in Ilorin, Kano, and Sokoto to resolve disputes, restore dialogue, and reinforce norms of fairness and restraint (Albert, 2001).

At the grassroots level, co-wife cooperation in trade, farming, and child care has been observed in parts of Kwara and northern Nigeria, where shared economic responsibilities foster interdependence rather than rivalry (Smith-Greenaway & Trinitapoli, 2014). However, the level success of these strategies remain largely unknown in Ilorin west LGA of Kwara State.

Statement of the Problem

In Ilorin, the capital of Kwara State, polygyny is not merely a cultural relic but a living family system that shapes interpersonal relations, inheritance patterns, authority structures, and child-rearing practices. However, it is always driven with rivalry among co-wives, jealousy and unhealthy competition for limited resources. These strains have jeopardised marital stability, the psychological well-being of family members, household cohesion, community relations and social order (Egbeolowo, 2019).

Various conflict management strategies are employed within polygynous families in Ilorin West Local Government Area. These strategies included mediation by elders, intervention by religious leaders, informal negotiation among family members, reliance on Islamic injunctions, traditional arbitration, or, in some cases, avoidance and suppression (Agbaje, 2020; Ojelabi, 2019). While

these mechanisms are culturally embedded and widely practised, their effectiveness in promoting long-term harmony, equity, and sustainable family relationships remains unclear.

Existing literature on family conflict in Ilorin and Nigeria has predominantly focused on monogamous marriages and general marital instability, with relatively limited empirical attention to the internal dynamics of polygynous households. For example, Owoo et al. (2021) examine the relationship between family structures and intimate partner violence in Nigeria, highlighting how household composition influences conflict exposure and relational tension. Similarly, studies on marital stability in Ibadan emphasise conflict resolution mechanisms such as communication, counselling, and mediation as central to marital adjustment, though these are largely situated within monogamous frameworks (Adegoke, 2010). In addition, research on monogamous households in Ilorin metropolis of Kwara State suggests that emotional regulation and self-management strategies play a role in reducing distress and managing intra-household tension, particularly in urban settings (Ola et al., 2025). These studies indicate that while conflict management and marital stability have received scholarly attention, the literature remains fragmented and conceptually skewed toward monogamous marriage systems with limited study focusing on the effectiveness conflict management strategies in polygynous families in Ilorin West LGA, Kwara State, Nigeria; an academic lacuna this study filled.

Aim and Objectives of the Study

The main aim of this study is to assess conflict management strategies in managing polygynous family conflict in Ilorin West LGA of Kwara State, Nigeria. The specific objectives of this study are to:

- i. Identify conflict management strategies in managing polygynous family conflict;
- ii. Assess the effectiveness of the employed strategies in managing polygynous family conflict and
- iii. Identify challenges of managing polygynous family conflict.

Conceptual Clarification

Polygyny Marriage

Several scholars have defined polygyny within the broader framework of marriage systems. According to Abhulimhen-Iyoha (2023), polygynous marriage refers to a voluntary marital union in which one man is married to several wives. The author further explains that such a marriage

system permits a man to marry multiple women depending on his social, religious, and economic capacity. Also, Zeitzen (2008) defines polygyny as a form of marriage in which a man has more than one wife at the same time, while polyandry refers to a marital arrangement where a woman is married to multiple husbands. Paige (2025) traces polygyny to the broader concept of polygamy, which generally denotes a marital system involving multiple spouses, but specifically identifies polygyny as the most common form involving one husband and several wives. In corroboration, Kamali (2019) argues that while polygyny is permissible within Islamic marital jurisprudence under specific conditions of justice and fairness, polyandry is prohibited in Islamic tradition. Similarly, Esposito (2001) conceptualises polyandry as a form of polygamy in which a woman simultaneously maintains marital relations with multiple husbands which stands in direct contrast to polygyny. It can be deduced from the above distinction between polygyny and polyandry that gendered patterns of marital authority and inheritance systems are prevalent in many traditional societies. Although both forms fall under the broader category of polygamy, polygyny remains substantially more widespread, particularly in African and Islamic societies where cultural legitimacy, lineage expansion, and socio-economic considerations continue to sustain the practice. In view of the above clarifications, polygyny is considered this study as a marriage that involves a man with more than one wife.

Conflict Management

Conflict has been perceived differently by different scholars, indicating that the single phenomenon of conflict can be given different subjective interpretations, de Wit et al. (2012) and Rispens et al. (2021) perceived conflict as a reflection of interpersonal hostility and incompatibility among individuals or groups. Similarly, Mitchell (2023) view conflict as an interpersonal disagreement arising from differences in choices, interests, values, or preferences To Lederach (2014), conflict should be viewed as an opportunity for constructive social change and transformation. This means that conflict is neither entirely negative nor positive. Sigmund Freud conceptualised conflict as “the simultaneous occurrence of two or more mutually antagonistic impulses” (cited in Zhao et al., 2019).

Rispens et al. (2021) also argued that conflict is often rooted in people’s perceptions and beliefs about incompatible goals and opposing interests. The converging views from the above discourse is that, conflict requires management, and the effective management of the is essential not to eliminate conflict entirely, but to regulate, channel, and transform it into constructive outcomes

According to Coursera (2024) conflict management is an umbrella term used to show how conflict is fairly and efficiently handle. The author explains further that the goal is to conflict management is minimise the potential negative impacts that can arise from disagreements and increase the odds of a positive outcome.

Deutsch (2006) contended that the inevitability of conflict, particularly within close relationships such as between husband and wife or within the family system, underscores the importance of conflict management for healthy social relations, which cannot be eliminated or terminated but must be handled constructively to achieve positive outcomes. In the context of marital relationships, Deutsch's view highlights that conflict between husband and wife is both inevitable and natural, arising from differences in personality, expectations, values, communication styles, and life goals. Rather than being seen as a threat to marital stability, such conflict becomes a normal feature of intimate partnership that requires thoughtful management. Marital conflict management therefore involves deliberate efforts by spouses to regulate the intensity and direction of disagreements in ways that preserve emotional wellbeing and relationship stability. This includes reducing destructive or excessive conflict, such as hostility, verbal aggression, or withdrawal, while also encouraging constructive engagement where important issues are openly discussed rather than ignored (Albert, 2001). This implies that some level of disagreement is healthy when it promotes understanding, negotiation, and mutual adjustment.

Conflict Management in Polygynous Families

The literature on polygynous families underscores a multifaceted interplay of cultural, religious, economic, and demographic factors that sustain the practice. According to Al-Krenawi and Graham (2006), the equitable distribution of resources, especially in many Islamic and customary contexts, is employed. This creates a platform for fairness in the allocation of time, finances, housing, and emotional support. Research from East African contexts, particularly in polygynous family studies, indicates that physical separation of co-wives can reduce domestic friction and minimise overt conflict by limiting day-to-day interaction (Bove&Valeggia, 2009). However, while this arrangement may enhance short-term stability, it is often contingent on adequate financial resources and may unintentionally weaken emotional cohesion within the wider family unit.

In Malaysia and Indonesia, structured Islamic family counselling has been institutionalised to promote principles of justice, patience, and marital responsibility in polygynous unions, with evidence suggesting improvements in communication and reductions in overt household conflict (Peletz, 2018). Nonetheless, scholars such as Al-Krenawi and Graham (2006); and Peletz (2018) caution that such interventions may reinforce patriarchal norms if not deliberately framed within gender-sensitive and rights-based approaches.

Similarly, co-wife cooperative strategies observed in parts of West Africa, including The Gambia and Senegal, such as shared economic activities and collective childcare, have been shown to foster interdependence and reduce intra-household rivalry, thereby enhancing family stability (Falen, 2008). However, the sustainability of such cooperation is highly dependent on the husband's impartiality and equitable treatment of spouses. In contrast, formal legal frameworks, such as South Africa's Recognition of Customary Marriages Act, provide institutional protection for property rights, inheritance, and spousal maintenance in polygynous unions, helping to reduce disputes in divorce and succession cases (Bennett, 2011). While legal regulation strengthens rights protection, it may also intensify familial tensions where litigation replaces informal reconciliation mechanisms. Studies conducted in Northern Nigeria indicate that when husbands consciously strive for equitable treatment among co-wives, levels of jealousy and rivalry decrease significantly (Lawson et al., 2015; Munro et al., 2019). However, the success of this strategy is often constrained by economic hardship, which makes equal provision difficult to sustain. Another widely adopted strategy is mediation by elders and traditional leaders (Albert, 2001; Akinwale, 2010). In many Nigerian communities, particularly among the Yoruba in the southwest and the Hausa-Fulani in the north, family elders and community leaders intervene in domestic disputes to restore order and preserve family unity. Such mediatory mechanisms are deeply embedded in indigenous conflict resolution systems and are often effective in rural settings where traditional authority structures remain strong (Koos et al., 2020).

Evidence from Nigeria and other parts of Africa and Asia suggests that no single conflict management strategy is universally sufficient in polygynous families. Rather, the most successful outcomes tend to emerge from a combination of equitable resource allocation, culturally grounded mediation, structured counselling, and, where necessary, legal regulation. The effectiveness of these strategies is shaped by socio-economic conditions, cultural expectations, gender relations, and the rural-urban divide. This study therefore examines the

effectiveness of adopted strategies by the polygynous family in Ilorin west LGA of Kwara State Nigeria.

Methodology

The study adopted a convergent parallel mixed-methods design, which enabled the simultaneous collection of quantitative and qualitative data to obtain a comprehensive understanding of conflict management in polygynous families. Both data sets were analysed separately and later integrated during interpretation to enhance triangulation and validity of findings. The study population comprised residents of Ilorin West Local Government Area, Kwara State, Nigeria, with an estimated population of 548,300 (NPC, 2022). The choice of Ilorin West was informed by the high prevalence of polygynous family settings and recurring family conflict cases reported within the area (Hussain-Abubakar, 2017; Atanda, 2025).

A multi-stage sampling procedure was adopted for the study. At the first stage, purposive sampling technique was used to select 80 polygynous families because the study specifically focused on families with lived experiences of polygyny and conflict management, which could not be adequately identified through probability sampling alone. At the second stage, quota sampling technique was employed within each selected family to ensure adequate representation of relevant family categories involved in conflict management. Four (4) respondents were selected from each family, comprising husband, two wives, and one elderly child considered mature and knowledgeable about family conflict issues, thereby producing a total sample size of 320 respondents for questionnaire administration.

For the qualitative component, purposive sampling was also used to select 20 participants for in-depth interviews (IDIs), comprising 5 husbands, 10 wives, and 5 informal mediators, including religious and traditional leaders, based on their direct involvement and experience in family conflict resolution. However, 18 interviews were successfully conducted and analysed due to participants' availability and willingness to participate. The instruments were validated by experts in peace and conflict studies and research methodology, and necessary corrections were effected before administration. A pilot study was also conducted outside the study area, while Cronbach's Alpha was used to test the reliability of the questionnaire, yielding an acceptable reliability coefficient. Out of the 320 copies of questionnaire distributed, 312 were retrieved and found valid for analysis.

Quantitative data were analysed using descriptive statistics such as frequency, percentage, mean, and standard deviation, while qualitative data from interviews were analysed thematically through content analysis and presented narratively to support the quantitative findings. Ethical approval was obtained from the Al-Hikmah University's ethics committee before data collection. Participants were informed of the purpose of the study, and informed consent was obtained. Confidentiality, anonymity, and voluntary participation were also assured, while all information provided was used strictly for academic purposes.

Data Presentations, Analysis, and Discussion of the Findings

Table 1: Demographic Data of Sampled Respondents in Ilorin Metropolis

Demographic information	Frequency	Percent
Gender		
Male	92	29.5%
Female	220	70.5%
Total	312	100
Age Group		
18 – 25	69	22.12%
26 – 35	67	21.47%
36 – 45	134	42.95%
46 and above	42	13.46%
Total	312	100
Marital status		
Divorcee	29	9.29%
Married	283	90.71%
Total	312	100
Number of Children		
1 – 2 children	127	40.71%
3 and above	185	59.29%
Total	312	100
Level of Education		
Primary Education	21	6.73%

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Secondary Education	138	44.23%
Tertiary Education	145	46.47%
Non-formal Education	8	2.56%
Total	312	100
Occupation		
Trading/Artisan	142	45.51%
Professionals/Civil Servant	140	44.87%
Transporters	16	5.13%
Unemployed	14	4.49%
Total	312	100

Source: Research's Field Survey, 2025

The data show that most respondents are female (70.5%), married (90.71%), and in the 36–45 age group (42.95%), indicating that the study captures the perspectives of those most directly affected by polygynous family conflicts. Most participants have secondary or tertiary education (90.7%) and are engaged in trading or professional work (90.38%), suggesting they are relatively educated and economically active, which may influence their knowledge and use of conflict management strategies. Family size is also notable, with 59.29% having three or more children, highlighting potential pressures that may drive household conflicts.

What is the nature of management strategies employed in managing polygynous family conflict in Ilorin west LGA of Kwara State?

Table 2: Mean ratings on the nature of management strategies employed in managing polygynous family conflict in Ilorin west LGA of Kwara State

S/N	The nature of management strategies employed in managing polygynous family conflict:	Mean	Std. Deviation	Decision	Rank
1	Intervention of third parties	4.30	1.04	Accepted	1 st
2	Joint Problem solving	4.29	1.00	Accepted	2 nd

3	Reconciliation	3.91	0.96	Accepted	3 rd
4	Avoidance	3.16	0.85	Accepted	4 th
5	Compromising	2.07	0.42	Rejected	5 th

Source: Researcher's Field Survey, 2024

Key: Mean > 3.00, accepted; Mean < 3.00, rejected.

The results indicate that the nature of management strategies employed in managing polygynous family conflict in Ilorin West LGA is generally positive. Intervention of third parties (mean = 4.30) ranks highest, suggesting that mediation by elders, religious leaders, or respected community members is the most commonly utilised and preferred strategy. According to a religious leader, in many instances, he has been called upon to intervene and resolve conflict in polygynous families.

We, the religious leaders, are familiar with this conflict. Whenever the need arises, we usually employ Islamic principles to preach, mediate, and appeal to the disputing parties in order to promote peace and reconciliation (IDI/male/religious leader/2025).

A community leader has this to say,

It is my responsibility as a Mogaji to ensure that peace is maintained in every household within this compound. Whenever a conflict arises and the husband is unable to resolve it among the co-wives, the matter is brought before me. I then invite other elders, particularly the oldest woman in the compound, to assist in resolving the dispute and restoring peace (IDI/male/community leader/2025).

The findings aligned with Adebayo (2021) that mediation by culturally legitimate actors enhances compliance and acceptance of resolutions. Nwoye (2016) notes that indigenous conflict resolution mechanisms are often more effective in communal society because they are grounded in shared values and norms. This approach not only addresses immediate disputes but also reinforces communal responsibility and respect for tradition. The current study supports the scholarly view that third-party mediation within traditional and religious frameworks remains a

dominant and socially legitimate strategy for managing polygynous family conflict in Ilorin West LGA of Kwara State.

Joint problem-solving (mean = 4.29) and reconciliation (mean = 3.91) emerged as highly rated strategies indicate that dialogue and relationship restoration are central to managing conflict in polygynous families. Although avoidance (mean = 3.16) is accepted, its lower ranking suggests it functions more as a temporary coping mechanism than a permanent solution. The oral evidence supports this interpretation. The elderly wife's account shows that avoidance is sometimes strategically employed to prevent escalation and preserve the husband's authority, particularly in culturally sensitive polygynous settings. This reflects Rahim's (2002) view that avoidance can reduce immediate tension but does not necessarily address the root cause of conflict. The findings suggest that further while dialogue and reconciliation promote constructive engagement and relational repair, avoidance serves as a short-term stabilising strategy within the cultural context of polygynous households.

How effective are the employed strategies in managing polygynous family conflict in Ilorin west LGA of Kwara State?

Table 3: Mean ratings on the effectiveness strategies in managing polygynous family conflict in Ilorin west LGA of Kwara State

S/N	The effectiveness of strategies in managing polygynous family conflict:	Mean	Std. Deviation	Decision	Rank
1	Peaceful co-existence among co-wives	4.30	1.04	Accepted	1 st
2	collective decision-making / participation	4.29	1.00	Accepted	2 nd
3	Peaceful co-existence among children	4.18	0.97	Accepted	3 rd
4	Improved socio-economic wee-being of the family	2.41	0.86	Rejected	4 th
5	durable family harmony / peace	2.07	0.43	Rejected	5 th

Source: Researcher's Field Survey, 2024; **Key:** Mean > 3.00, accepted; Mean < 3.00, rejected.

The findings show that the strategies employed in managing polygynous family conflicts in Ilorin West LGA are moderately effective in some areas. Peaceful co-existence among co-wives (mean = 4.30), and among children (mean = 4.18) are the most effective outcomes, suggesting that the strategies help reduce tension and foster harmony within the household. Supporting these findings, oral interview evidence affirmed similar narratives that religious inclination of the people has helped to pave way for mutual understanding among contending wives. A husband who has married to three wives for more than ten years has this to say,

I and my co-wives have lived together for several years, and hardly a month passes without a conflict occurring among us. However, my intervention as the head of the family through dialogue has greatly helped to sustain peace and unity in the family. My children freely go to their stepmothers' homes to eat and sleep (IDI/Male /2025).

In line with previous studies, joint problem-solving and third-party intervention are recognised as the most effective strategies for resolving polygynous family conflicts (Adebayo, 2021; Okeke&Odu, 2020). These methods reduce tensions between co-wives, promote cooperation, and help maintain household harmony. The current study in Ilorin metropolis confirms this trend. However, beside the strength of third parties to resolve polygynous conflict, the effort of some husbands has helped to arrive at collaborative problem-solving that keeps the family united and fosters peaceful co-existence. This supports Fadeyi (2019)'s view that mediation provides legitimacy to resolutions while dialogue allows fair negotiation among family members. These strategies emphasising mediation, dialogue, and participation are effective in sustaining harmony, improving socio-economic well-being, and reducing recurring conflict in polygynous families.

Collective decision-making / participation (mean = 3.91) is also accepted, showing that the adopted conflict management strategies positively encourage members of the family to unanimous take decision capable of promoting family unity. Corroborating this finding, informants during oral interview sessions asserted that issues that have to do welfare of siblings and health care of the parents are mostly collective responsibility of every members of the family since they both grow up under one roof. A polygyny husband who is equally belong to similar polygynous family background has this to say,

Polygyny is an interesting and laudable system of marriage embraced by wealthy individual of Ilorin emirate. I considered it as cultural heritage because an average Ilorin man will wish to belong to such system. I was raised by my step mother and I equally raised my step brothers. This was possible due to the foundation of collective responsibility imbedded in us by my father. I have equally trained my children along that line and that is why co-wives have to live and grow together under one roof (IDI/Male/husband/2025).

A senior son in a polygynous home shared similar experience,

I am the most senior son in the house. All my sibling, be it step brothers, sisters, my direct brothers and sisters take common decision on family matters and everyone has equal rights to our father's property. We are so guided to the extent that when issue that bothers on our parents arises, every one of us must contribute (IDI/Male/husband/2025).

The above findings suggest that the strategies employed in polygynous family conflict management do not merely resolve disputes temporarily but also strengthen participation and unity within the household. When family members are encouraged to engage in joint discussions, tensions are reduced and decisions are more widely accepted, thereby enhancing stability. According to Okeke and Odu (2020), when family members are actively involved in resolving disputes, outcomes are more sustainable and widely accepted. This current study corroborates these authors thereby underscoring the imperative of effective conflict management through collective decision making towards family cohesion.

However, as against the above-discussed area of effectiveness of the strategies, findings showed that improved socio-economic well-being of the family (mean = 2.16) and durable family harmony (mean = 2.07) are rejected, indicating that while strategies reduce immediate conflict, they may not fully ensure improvement on the socio-economic well-being of the family members. Besides this statistical evidence, oral findings showed that many polygynous homes are prone to financial stress, and if there is any peace sustained, it was not durable peace.

For instance, a wife said that ever since her husband married another wife, there has been confrontation and continuous suppression directed against her by her husband. This outcome aligns with the argument of Kalu (2018), who notes that polygynous families often experience financial strain due to increased household size and resource competition, thereby limiting the long-term impact of conflict resolution efforts. Similarly, Akinyemi (2020) observes that conflict management mechanisms in polygynous settings frequently address surface-level disputes without resolving structural issues such as economic inequality and emotional imbalance. The results suggest that effective conflict management in polygynous families must go beyond mediation and dialogue to address deeper socio-economic and structural factors. Without improving financial stability, fairness in resource allocation, and emotional security among spouses, peace may remain temporary rather than durable.

What are the challenges of managing polygynous family conflict in Ilorin west LGA of Kwara State?

Table 4: Mean ratings on the challenges of managing polygyny family conflict Nigeria in Ilorin west LGA of Kwara State

S/N	challenges managing polygyny family conflict:	Mean	Std. Deviation	Decision	Rank
1	Inadequate of open communication	4.30	1.04	Accepted	1 st
2	Cultural and religious constraints	4.29	1.00	Accepted	2 nd
3	Poor decision-making by the husband	4.18	0.97	Accepted	3 rd
4	Children's involvement in conflict	3.91	0.86	Accepted	6 th
5	Absence of community family counseling	4.16	0.95	Accepted	4 th
6	Unending mistrust among co-wives	4.07	0.92	Accepted	5 th

Source: Researcher's Field Survey, 2024;

Key: Mean > 3.00, accepted; Mean < 3.00, rejected.

The findings reveal that managing conflict in polygynous families within Ilorin WestLGA is weighed down by deep communication and cultural barriers. The top-ranked challenge, is

inadequate open communication (mean = 4.30) which shows that many partners struggle to express feelings or resolve issues before they opt for resentment. In the qualitative findings, informants who are wives that experienced inadequate communication shared their experience. A woman said thus,

Whenever I am having issues with my husband or my junior wives, instead of my husband to give me listening hear, he rather avoid me and denial me communication rights I am due for. This action alone over the year has forced me confront him violently (IDI/Female/wife/2025).

Another woman said the same.

Whenever there is an issue between my husband and me, instead of encouraging open communication, he tends to give more attention to the second wife. The same situation also applies to the other wife (IDI/Female/wife/2025).

This study of Lavner et al. (2016) validate this finding that open communication significantly predicts marital satisfaction and stability, while poor communication fosters resentment and emotional withdrawal. When couples or co-wives avoid honest discussion, small disputes often turn into lasting divisions, making harmony difficult to sustain. This pose a big challenge in the management of polygyny conflict because inability of husband to regularly engage each of the wives in a friendly discussion either in group or intimacy, leads to communication gap, and that is capable of triggering unwarranted resentment to a minor disagreement in the home.

Right behind this challenge, is the cultural and religious constraints (mean = 4.29). This suggests that certain traditional or faith-based expectations such as silence in the face of injustice, or rigid gender roles, discourage dialogue or fairness in conflict resolution. In such settings, keeping peace often means suppressing emotion rather than addressing the real problem.

According to Amadiume (2015), rigid cultural expectations often silence women's voices in marriage, encouraging endurance of conflict rather than dialogue or confrontation. This finding therefore suggest that even many of the polygyny wives in Ilorin West LGA continues to endure conflict as a result of cultural obligation that require them to do so. In this situation, some of

these wives will experience negative peace within their mind and continue to live bitter hatred against co-member of the family.

Poor decision-making by the husband (mean = 4.18) is another challenge. As the central figure in a polygynous family, a husband's inability to balance attention, resources, and fairness among wives and children can deepen jealousy and competition. This finding is not different from the argument of Adebowale and Palamuleni (2015) that when husbands fail to equitably manage emotional and material resources among co-wives, jealousy and rivalry become more pronounced, eroding family unity. Hence, the danger of polygyny husband weakness becomes a serious challenge in the peaceful management of polygyny conflict.

The absence of community family counselling (mean = 4.16) as a challenge pointed to a gap in external support. Without neutral mediators or family-life education, many families navigate conflict alone, relying on trial and error rather than guided communication. Study by Esere (2008) affirm that community-based counselling helps families interpret conflict not as shameful failure but as a normal process that can be managed with skill. Without such interventions, resentment becomes the teacher, and emotional wounds often pass quietly from parents to children. Polygynous families, in particular, would benefit from structured mediation spaces where each wife's voice can be heard without fear, and the husband can reflect on his role beyond authority.

Conclusion and Recommendations

The study concludes that various conflict management strategies employed in polygynous families in Ilorin West LGA have moderately effective in promoting immediate harmony, collective decision-making, and co-existence among co-wives and children. However, structural and socio-economic challenges, poor communication, cultural and religious constraints, and limited community support reduce the long-term sustainability of peace and family well-being. Effective conflict management in polygynous households, therefore, requires not only dialogue and mediation but also attention to equity, resource distribution, and supportive mechanisms that reinforce durable harmony. It is against this foregoing that the following recommendations are made.

- i. Religious and government institutions should establish counseling units for married men and those intending to practice polygyny, to guide them on the socio-economic responsibilities required to maintain harmony among co-wives and their children.

- ii. Similarly, there is a need by traditional and religious leaders to constantly remind yet to marry or already married men, the financial implications of marrying more than one wife. This will prevent incessant socio-economic impacts of sustaining polygynous family.
- iii. Also, community and religious leaders should promote flexible interpretations of cultural and religious norms that allow fairness and emotional expression in family conflict resolution.
- iv. The Kwara State ministry Educational should integrate family peace education, gender sensitivity, and conflict management studies into community learning programmes to foster healthier interpersonal relationships within families.

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