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Experience of Contemporary Russian Muslim Polygamous Families: Narrative Analysis

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The article investigates the polygamous family of modern Russian Muslims. It also deals with the perception of polygamy by the Muslims brought up in modern Russian society, the emotions which the Russian Muslims, men and women, experience, the motives they are driven by. These issues are considered through the example of materials from islam.ru website for 2009 – 2015. The author comes to the conclusion that the current Russian Muslim society hardly realizes the idea of polygamy. The public assessment of this phenomenon is rather negative than positive. This is partly due to the experience of the Soviet and Russian system of education and training with its specific individualism and self-importance of women in the family and society, the romanticizing of love and marriage, as well as the existence of the system of education in the context of the Christian tradition in Russia, with its view of marriage as a sacred union of one man and one woman.

Keywords: archaic, narrative analysis, grounded theory, contemporary Russian Muslims, polygamous family.

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Research area: culture studies.

We have investigated the problem of the revival of Muslim polygamy in terms of the concept of antiquity proposed by Ch.K. Lamazhaa. The scientists understand antiquity as those social institutions that were born in a stateless society and now manifest themselves, reviving in the modern society. “Archaic tendencies are a universal social mechanism allowing society, groups and individuals to preserve their identity and social order in

times of crisis ... This resource-saving social mechanism that ensures the survival... organizes social and cultural life, allows society groups and individuals to preserve their identity and social order in times of crisis” (Lamazhaa, 2011: 19). We raised a question of how the rebirth of the elements of antiquity is experienced by modern man.

The polygamous family, which today is widely spreading among Russian Muslims, can

be considered as one of the examples of archaic institutions.

There are no scientific papers on the subject of a polygamous family in modern Russia; secular publications contain only a certain amount of journalistic articles. A modern revival of Islam in Russia is described in the book by A.V. Malashenko (Malashenko, 1998), where the issues of polygamy are not touched. The work by B. Forrest, J. Johnson and M.T. Stepaniants (Forest, Johnson, Stepaniants, 2005) is devoted to the growth of religious, including the Islamic identity. The problem of the correlation of Islamic law and modern Russian legislation is discussed in the work of L.R. Sykiainen (Sykiainen, 2015).

There are researches on polygamy in the modern world both in Muslim and non-Muslim countries in the world scientific literature. Thus, the article of B.D. Rodgers-Miller (Rodgers-Miller, 2004) is devoted to the history of polygamy in the Ottoman Empire, and its problems in present-day Iran, especially to *mut'a* that is temporary marriages, and prospects for the future in Iraq. The conclusion is that during Saddam Hussein's reign Iraqi women were among the freest in the Middle East, but currently there is a return to *traditional* polygamous values in the country, which is supported by many women.

A number of works are devoted to polygamy in the United States, in most cases, from the point of view of their legal status in American society, where polygamy is prohibited by law. Thus, in the article of M. Alexandre (Alexandre, 2007) the issue of polygamy is considered from the point of view that polygamy still secretly exists in the US and needs legal regulation. The article of Faucon (Faucon, 2014) is devoted to the plight position of Muslim polygamous families in the state of Utah. It presents the conclusion about the need in legalizing them in the name of equality.

In the article of D. Hassouneh-Phillips (Hassouneh-Phillips, 2001) polygamy among

Muslim Americans is considered from the point of view of violence against women, and there is a conclusion that polygamy and violence can be intertwined phenomena. The article of M. Goldfeder and E. Sheff (Goldfeder, Sheff 2013) about children in polygamous marriages argues, on the contrary, that the opinion about violence in polygamous families is not proved; such families are notable for honesty in relations and warmth.

The book of A. Phillips and J. Jones (Phillips, Jones, 2005) views polygamy in Islam, including the present, from an apologetic position. A similar position is held by H. Johnson (Johnson, 2004), although he comes to the conclusion that the days of polygamy have passed, and that it is easier for a woman to be married to a monogamous husband.

The issues of polygamy in the modern world are also touched in the works of N. Coulson and D. Hinchcliffe (Coulson, 1978), L. Maparyan (Maparyan, 2013), L. Ahmed (Ahmed, 1992.), A.S. Ahmed (Ahmed, 1998), J. Nasir (Nasir, 2009), I. Manjii (Manjii, 2011), M. Badran (Badran, 1996), F. Mernissi (Mernissi, 1987).

Women's rights in the context of Islamic polygamy are studied by R. Gaffney-Rhys (Gaffney-Rhys, 2011), V. von Struensee (V. von Struensee, 2005), R. Gaffney-Rhys (Gaffney-Rhys, 2012).

Let us start with the legal and statistical aspects of the problem. There is no punishment for polygamy in the modern Russian legislation, at the same time it is not allowed. The Family Code of the Russian Federation has Article 14, which states that a person who is already in a registered marriage can not enter another marriage. Article 27 recognizes a marriage invalid, if there are circumstances described in Article 14. There was Article 235 in the Soviet Criminal Code, which criminalized polygamy. It included not only cases of legal marriage, but also *de facto* cohabitation with more than one woman. However, this article

was applied only to traditional Islamic regions; in other regions that cohabitation was tacitly allowed. After World War II the authorities turned a blind eye to the fact that veterans brought second wives from the front and became fathers of new children, forgetting the old families.

In the tradition of the Russian statehood the issue about *alien* matrimonial mores was not sharp. The autonomous entities such as the Khanate of Khiva and Bukhara Emirate had their own rules, which were Shariah-compliant. The Kazan Tatars, joined Russia in the 16th century, did not almost have a tradition of polygamy, and in converted to Mohammedanism or pro-Iran mountain communities of the Caucasus, subjected to the massive Islamization in 17-18th centuries, Polygamy was characteristic only for the wealthier sectors of the Caucasian mountaineers, and when the cases of the polygamy allowed by Koran happened, they were treated exactly as the ones permitted by the sharia and therefore as the phenomenon that could not be accused. In July 1999, polygamy was permitted in Ingushetia by the decision of its president Ruslan Aushev, but then was canceled by the decree of Boris Yeltsin. In 2004, the Ingush deputies tried to hold the relevant amendments through the State Duma, but to no avail. The calls to legalize polygamy are expressed by the Chechen President Ramzan Kadyrov, some religious leaders of Tatarstan, Bashkortostan, Dagestan and other North Caucasian republics. But in none of the regions the offers of the politicians have not been approved.

In May 2015, in connection with the calls of the Chechen President Ramzan Kadyrov to legalize polygamy, a number of state and public figures of Russia expressed their opinion on the polygamy in Russia. Thus, the President's press secretary, Dmitry Peskov, said that in our country, polygamy is prohibited by law. The Federation Council Speaker Valentina Matviyenko said she did not support the idea of the introduction

of polygamy in Russia. A member of the Duma Committee on the issues of Family, Women and Children Olga Alimova said that in the near future the deputies would consider introducing a punishment for polygamy in Russia. She was supported by the member of the Federation Council Committee on the Federal Structure and Regional Policy, Chairman of the Russian Union of Women Ekaterina Lakhova. Alimova later disavowed her statement, and the head of the Duma Committee on the issues of Family, Women and Children Elena Mizulina said that the legalization of polygamy in Russia would not happen.

In practice, the legal ban on polygamy in terms of property issues, inheritance and alimony can be set aside on the basis of a notarized contract on the basis of the Civil Code. But in practice, this loophole is enjoyed by few. Most of the abandoned second and third wives remain completely powerless even in Muslim areas.

There is no statistics of polygamous families in Russia. Muslim leaders say about its prevalence, without naming specific figures. Polygamous family is most common in Dagestan, Chechnya and Ingushetia, as well as in Tatarstan. In all these regions, the number of polygamous families under the certificate of the spiritual leaders of these regions is growing rapidly. It is also growing in Moscow, St. Petersburg and other large cities. Thus, the head of the International Islamic Mission, the famous Mufti Shafiq Pshihachev, who is familiar with the situation in the North Caucasus, argues that the people in this region have a share of polygamists, "No matter if it will be presented as a civil marriage or an officially registered one, in any case, polygamy can not be avoided. I have been working in Russia for 28 years. It is a reality that is coming to us ... This proportion is most pronounced in Dagestan, Chechnya, a little less in Ingushetia. This is not really shown off.

Two adults agree they can register their marriage according to Sharia” (Polygamy in Russia ... 2015). The first Deputy Chairman of the Russian Muslim Board Damir-Hazrat Mukhetdinov said that polygamy had become very common lately in a Muslim environment, both in Russia and in the CIS countries. Back in the USSR, despite the prohibitions and criminal penalties, polygamy took place, especially in the republics of Central Asia and the Caucasus. Now, for some reason, it has become more permissible, and the number of such alliances has increased. And not only in the Caucasus but also in the European Russia” (‘They are all the same...’ 2015). The Mufti of Moscow Ildar Aliautdinov (The Council of Muftis of Russia) argues that only in Moscow imams conclude up to several hundreds of polygamous marriages annually. Moreover, he said that “he sometimes refuses the ceremony of such a marriage due to the fact that, for example, the man refuses to call his first wife to ask for permission” (Mufti of Moscow ... 2015). However, the refusal to perform the marriage ceremony does not mean that the marriage is not contracted. According to Damir-Hazrat Muhetdinov, an Imam really often refuses to enter into a second marriage, “If we are asked by Muslims to perform the ceremony of Nikiakh (wedding), in accordance with the canons of our religion, we find out, whether the consent of the first wife has been obtained, whether this man is able to provide their wives with everything they need. We need to make sure whether he will be fair to his wives, and generally assess the adequacy of this man, to see why he decided to take a second wife.” But many Muslims conclude remarriage, bypassing the mosque, “Unlike Christianity, there is no the concept of the church in Islam. So if in the mosque an imam refused to perform the ceremony of Nikiakh for you, you can find another Muslim, lead two witnesses and perform the rite in the apartment,

in the street, in the subway, anywhere, even on the phone” (‘They are all the same ...’ 2015).

The polygamy in Russia, including non-Muslim regions, in particular Moscow and St. Petersburg, received an additional distribution as a result of migration from Muslim regions of Russia and the CIS countries, where migrants who have families at home, enter into second marriages with local women, resorting to perform the rite of Nikiakh, sometimes in a mosque.

But the lack of exact figures of statistics does not eliminate issues, such as how a polygamous family is perceived by the Muslims brought up in modern Russian society, what emotions the Russian Muslims, men and women, experience, what motives they are driven by. We will examine through the example of materials of *islam.ru* site for 2009 - 2015, whose editors office is based in Dagestan, but which, nevertheless, addresses to all Russian Muslims. We considered the columns *Muslim Woman, Family and Trust Line*. The latter is especially interesting because it contains the original letters with the problems, the answers of the theologians and psychologists, as well as the discussion of the problem raised by readers in a particular letter. We also used some materials from *islamdag.ru* site.

Before proceeding to the analysis of the texts, we note that Shariah puts forward very strict requirements to a polygamist regarding both the material security of wives and ensuring their peace of mind. The latter refers in particular to the compliance with such a strict justice in relation to women that many Muslims consider it to be elusive and a polygamous marriage to be undesirable or even impossible. “I am concerned that although Allah in the Qur’an says that we can have ‘... two, three or four wives,’ but says it with a challenge, ‘ ... but if you are afraid that you will be unfair, then marry just ONE’.” In other words, it turns out that Allah challenged us ... Thus,

there is no direct (halal) permission to polygamy in the Al-Quran, in addition, he informed us that there is a reason to be afraid of being unfair. No matter how much I want to be surrounded by four beautiful women, I will not venture and dare to accept the challenge of Allah”, writes a commentator on *islamsemya.com* site (*Polygamy is dangerous for Muslims*, 2015). Many members of the Muslim clergy meet those who come to reenter marriage with wariness. The propaganda of the trend of polygamy is often associated with Salafi (Wahhabi) Islam (*Polygamy in Tatarstan*, 2014).

From a methodological point of view, we used a narrative analysis and elements of the grounded theory, conducting an open and selective coding in accordance with the recommendations of Anselm Strauss (Strauss, Corbin, 2001) at this stage of the investigation. The test material allows us to identify the most relevant categories, related to the modern polygamy practiced by the Russian Muslims, namely, to consider various strategies of behavior of men and women in their marital union in the context of the perception of the behavior by society. Let us imagine the selected categories in figures, supplementing

them with the explanatory material filling these categories that is narrative. The last is extracts from a variety of posts on the subject of polygamy, published on *islam.ru* website, namely excerpts from the feature articles, interviews, letters to *Trust Line*, comments of theologians, psychologists and ordinary readers on these letters.

The first categories we marked refer to the grounds, public evaluation and wives' acceptance or rejection of polygamous decisions made by men. The rest of the categories derive from these first. Besides, first we will have a look at the decision about a re-marriage of men through the eyes of the Muslims themselves, that is, from the standpoint of whether it meets the requirements of Shariah. The latter implies that a man marries again to support divorcees, widows and financially poor women. However, these reasons do not always allow the first wife to put up with her husband's polygamy.

On Figure 1

(1) **From a letter to *Trust Line* (hereinafter referred to as F/L)**, “My husband has begun recently frequently saying that now there are a lot of divorced women who need help, need a husband. And that it would be good to marry such

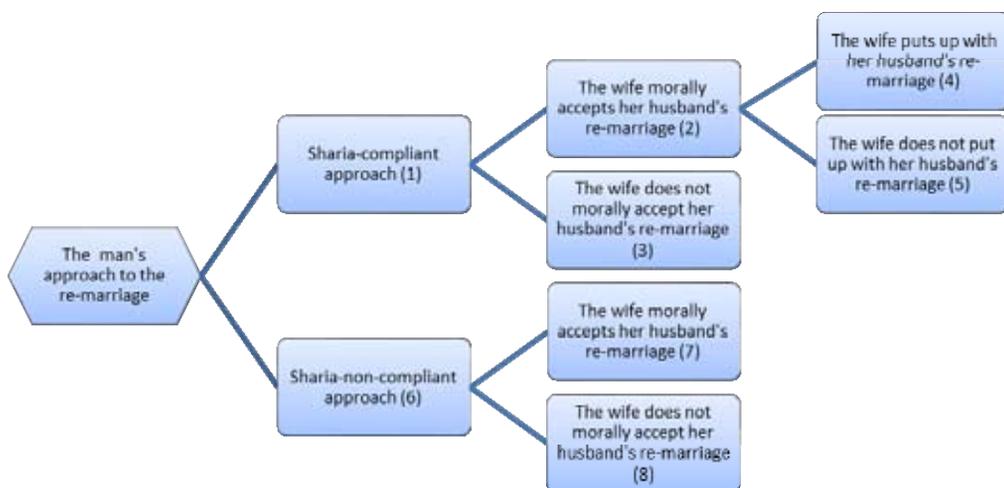


Fig. 1

a woman to help her financially, and help her to escape adultery.”

(2) **F/L**, “Good for him. Few people get married with such intent as he has in our time.”

(3) No examples.

(4) No examples.

(5) **From a psychologist’s comment (hereinafter referred to as P/C)**, “I am aware of the situations when wives agreed with polygamy, but for them it became an ordeal.” **F/L**, “When I think of the situation that my sweetheart will embrace, kiss, and speak words of love to another woman, I just want to sink into the ground. I can not eat or sleep properly. I never thought that it would be so hard.”

(6) **From the Muslim journalism (hereinafter referred to as M/J)**, “For many men today, polygamy has become some indication of a colorful, successful man.” **M/J**, “Today many people get married for the second time for fun. They say, they will get married, and then they will see how it will go.” **M/J**, “Today, polygamy is talked about everywhere; it is a favorite theme in male companies and during their parties. Having several wives has become trendy; everyone wants to feel like a ‘sultan.’” **M/J**, “For some men a second wife has become an attribute of a successful life like an expensive car or a luxurious house. In this environment, having two wives has already become a norm, there they even think about marrying to one more woman again and again...”. **M/J**, “Alas, in practice, many Muslims treat polygamy as fun.”

(7) **No examples**

(8) **From the readers’ comments (R/C)**, “It is a nightmare. I probably would have gone crazy. Well, you cheer up there.” **R/C**, “It is a nightmare. I would not admit such a husband close to myself. It would have been better for him to go on traveling between his wives.” **R/C**, “Look at yourself then before get into polygamy, lazy schmuck.”

However, the causes of re-marriages approved by sharia are rare. Let us look at the real motives of polygamy mentioned at *islam.ru* site, and the way the modern Muslim community reacts to them.

On Figure 2

See Paragraph 1 for Fig. 3

(2) **P/C**, “If you are driven by the intention to help this girl, to indirect her from possible errors and household difficulties, and you can make it so that they [wives] will not quarrel, then talk it over with your wife in order to avoid misunderstandings, and get married to this girl.”

(3) **No examples**

(4) **P/C**, “Unfortunately, many men take second wives not in order to make a family with them, but because of their natural polygamy, let us call it so.” **M/J**, “It’s more like an extramarital affair, but under the cover of polygamy.”

(5) **No examples**

(6) **R/C**, “Such men need to be given bromine to stop their hormones.” **R/C**, “Your husband must have been suffering from itching in his genitals, in any case, do not accept a second wife, and pick a fight with this asshole, just fancy that, he wants a second wife, bastard, as if he wanted to make something good.”

(7) **R/C**, “Marry a second wife, and she [the first wife] will immediately become kind and gentle.” **R/C**, “Yes, marry a second wife. She [the first wife] is spoiled.” **R/C**, “If I were the husband of the woman, I would have got married again long ago, and maybe a few more times.”

(8) **R/C**, “Ibrahim, I totally agree with you. Our daughter-in-law also did not listen to our brother, but as soon as he started to speak about marrying a second woman, she began to wear a scarf, pray, and obey.”

(9) **R/C**, “A husband seems to live as a master who is ready to marry another woman if something goes wrong with his first one. Well, this is all allowed!”. **R/C**, “There is a numerous

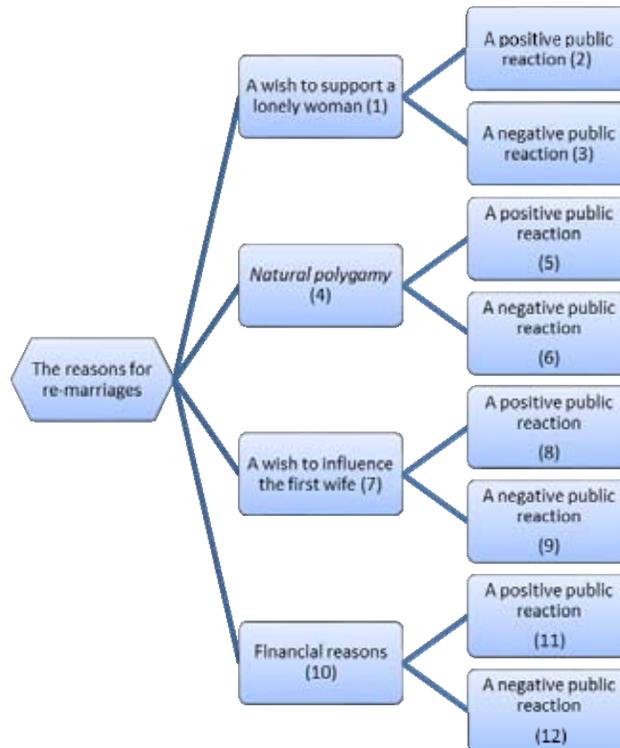


Fig. 2

category of strange wimps for whom the easiest way to solve a problem in their relationship with a woman is to get another one quickly!”. **R/C**, “Dear Muslims, is it ok to take a second wife in order to avenge the first?”. **R/C**, “And then when some problems with his second wife appear, he gets married to the third one and so on. So before you advise, think a little. What kind of advisers you are!”. **R/C**, “From time to time, I am shocked by the theologian tips on this website. Sometimes it seems to me that you, dear theologian, are a man from another planet. How can I create another family only to reason my wife? It will only make the matters worse!!! To tell the truth, you had better have advised to divorce than this.”

(10) **R/C**, “Now such ‘treasures’ get married not only without providing their wives with all those need, but even living parasitically thanks to them. Four working wives may support one parasite quite comfortably, and he will only change them every night and live happily.”

(11) **No examples**

(12) **No examples**

Let us now look at the cases of agreement or disagreement of the wife with the re-marriage of her husband and what such cases can result in.

On Figure 3

(1) **F/L**, “I agree with him, and also told him that it is right and it will be a good deed ... I feel that something is breaking down in me. Even now I’m writing and I can not hold back the tears. I do not show this to my husband, I support him in everything.”

(2) **M/J**, “Although they say that women face difficulties in such marriages, Leila says that life is easier for her. “When the other woman is here, I feel better, I rest in the village”, she admits. The other wife helps keep an eye on the house, they bring together their children.”

(3) **From a theologian comment (hereinafter referred to as T/C)**, “From the

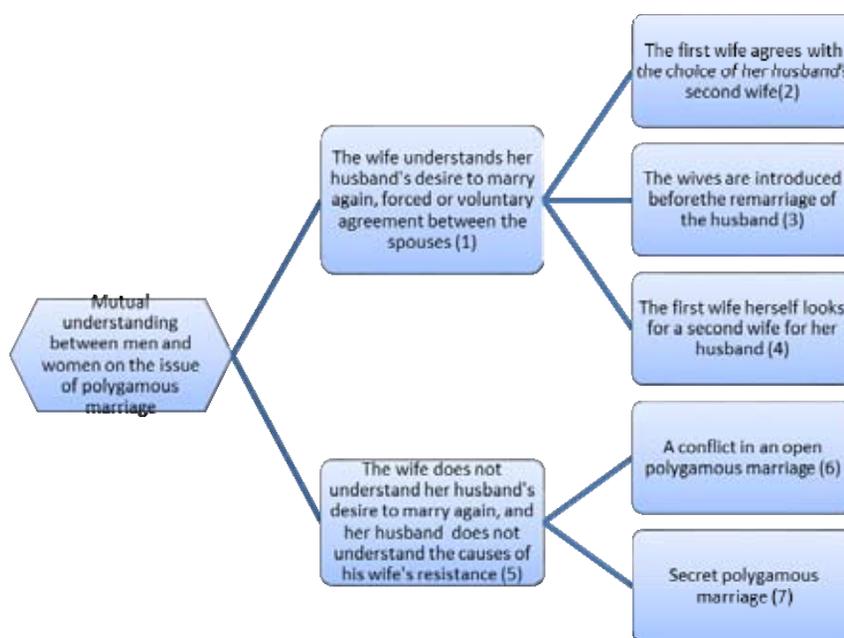


Fig. 3

very beginning this girl has been trying to find common ground with you, rather than trying to fight with you or join in the confrontation ...". **F/L**, "She really wants to make friends with me, saying that she will be around to help only to see him. In general, she is young and in love, I understand that, but I do not want to break her life, because my husband loves me very much. It is bad to use that young thing only for the sake of my husband's sexual needs."

(4) **From an interview (hereinafter referred to as F/I)**, "For two years his wife suggested and tried to persuade me to marry him. His wife told him that he should get me and not seek other options. And his decision was inspired by my friend." **M/J**, "46-year-old Leila from Dagestan herself chose her husband's second wife, 'In our case, he did not choose a second wife himself, just putting me before the fact. We decided to take a second wife together'."

(5) **P/C**, "A man is capable of experiencing feelings for more than one woman simultaneously. And it is important to consider the following thing that it is impossible to measure the strength

of these feelings, that is, whom he loves most, you or the other woman. Feelings may differ not so much in intensity as in quality. But due to the fact that the woman tends to monogamy, the idea that it is possible to love two people at the same time is unacceptable for her. As a result, she can believe by mistake that her husband just tells her about love, but really loves another woman." **F/L**, "Why is it hard? – my husband asks me this question in surprise when I say that it is hard when your husband (the closest and most beloved person in life) decides to marry again."

(6) **P/C**, "While many women wisely realize that their husbands with full rights may take two, three or even four wives, at an emotional level, this very idea horrifies them ... It is a kind of a cognitive-emotional dissonance".

(7) **M/J**, "A negative attitude of women to polygamy forces men often to get married in secret, depriving it of social control."

What is the strategy of a man going to become a polygamist with respect to his first wife, is the wife's position important for him?

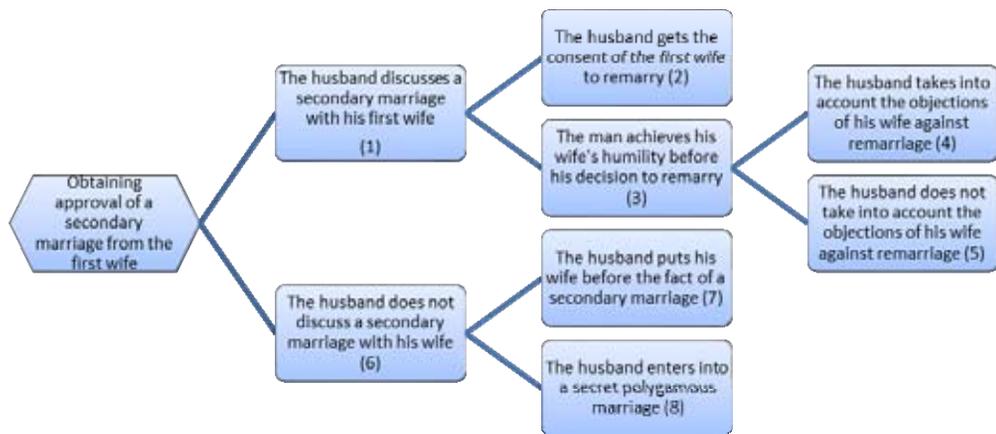


Fig. 4

On Figure 4

(1) **P/C**, “Arrange quietly that you will get married again, and you can get a second wife without fear of having trouble with the first.”

(2) No examples

(3) **M/J**, “It is better to talk to your wife from the Shariah position, but gently. No matter how she will respond, you need to hold back emotions even if she does not behave quite right. Continue to talk to her, gradually accustoming her to the idea, but at the same time, allowing her to know that her negative behavior will not help to change your decision. Otherwise, she will start to manipulate, feeling your slack. Remind her that everything happens by the will of God, tell her about the dignity of patience and the reward for it.”

(4) No examples

(5) **R/C**, “Is there any point you think making the person aware of remarriage if nobody particularly cares about her approval or disapproval? Do you see the sign of respect here?”

(6) **M/J**, “If your husband tries to find out from you hintingly, what you think about this issue, a religious woman should not think that he asks for her permission. Because he just does not need it. And it is unlikely that he advises. So it is useless to tell him phrases like ‘I’ll never let this

happen’ or ‘I’m sure you have no opportunity to do so’. If he decides, he will do it all the same.”

(7) **M/J**, “Men believe that aggressive actions of those wives who do not agree with the re-marriage will not help either strengthen their families, nor make the husband abandon the idea of polygamy.” **F/I**, “He created almost a fait accompli and did not let us meet before the marriage. Even though we do not make scenes or demonstrations about his marriage.” **R/C**, “What is this swinish attitude to his first wife, whose opinion is not taken into account at all?”. **R/C**, “I am against the fact that it is imposed on wives by force, when a husband who has just thought about getting married places before an accomplished fact, not taking into account any opinion or feelings of his first wife. Your own desires and the desires of a woman who is not even your wife yet, of course, are more important.”

(8) **T/C**, “I will be frank and straight, the practice shows that, if a man decided to take another wife, he will not stop. Such a person, in any case, will take a second wife, whether it is open, when he notifies all the relatives and friends, or in secret.”

A man who wants to marry again, solves the problem, whether his polygamy will be open

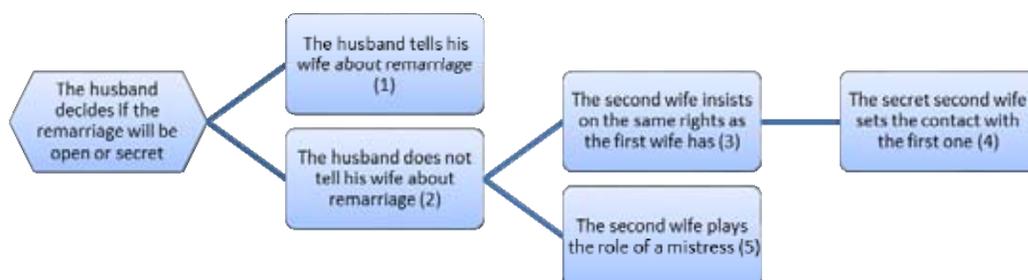


Fig. 5

or secret. What are the consequences of a secret remarriage?

On Figure 5

(1) T/C, “As such, there is no canonical need for this, but ... How is it possible to answer the questions of the first wife, such as ‘Where were you last night?’, because the nights should be divided equally between the two wives? When one of the parties is unaware of the presence of re-marriage, you get a vicious circle of lies, deceit and reticence.” T/C, “The good news is that your husband did not deceive you and hide the truth, but told everything like it is. Probably, it was worth his while, and he decided to do this because he hoped to find your understanding.” M/J, “Hiding your re-marriage, though it became popular among men who cherish their peace and learn from the mistakes of their polygamous counterparts, is not the way. I do not know the examples when anyone has ever managed to keep their polygamy in secret. And the women, who learned about it not from the head of the family, feel cheated, and are not able to create anything like the paradise for him on Earth.”

(2) T/C, “The fact that your spouse has hidden the re-marriage from you, can say that he loves you, appreciates and cherishes you, and understanding that you will be hurt, he decided not to let you know.” M/J, “A man gets into a difficult situation and is forced to spin like a squirrel in a wheel in a constant tension, because he has to hide something somewhere. Then some wives are surprised to find out that their husbands have

hidden a second marriage from them. How else? He has already studied and knows your reaction. He is afraid!” P/C, “Experience has shown that in such situations, men do not tell his relatives about the second family, and it remains secret, at least until it becomes clear itself.” F/I, ‘He saw examples when husbands had been unable to cope with their first wives, and was afraid that I will also react too emotionally. He thought if these people failed to keep the peace in a polygamous family, we would not even try ... and chose the path of the least resistance.’ R/C, “Why did he hide all from you? You can talk to him, maybe he did not want to upset you.”

(3) M/J, “Even if she agrees with the fact that you can not perform even something from what you are obliged to, she does it only because she has a great desire to get married just to you. After the marriage, she will understand that this is not the ultimate dream and it is not enough for her to see you *at least once a week*. It will be vital for her to be introduced to your relatives to be happy, she will want you to spend time with her as long as it is implied by Islam, she will need to be patronized by you and surrounded by your concern as well as your other family (families).”

(4) F/L, “I have recently learned that my husband has been married to the other woman, which is much older than him, already for two years. I [his first wife] had no idea about it; she [his second wife] found me and told everything.”

(5) R/C, “Go with your daughter to his first wife, meet her, introduce your children. Then you

both go to him, and ask him to settle you next to him in his new city, and he will live for one day with one of you and next day with the other.”

(6) **R/C**, “He is quite happy with his family life divided into the main one (with the main wife) and the additional on (when he runs in to you).” **F/L**, “Does not he understand that he does wrong, why not to put everything in its place if there is a wish, is it right to be ashamed of his own child to let the other family live *in peace*?” **F/L**, “I can think of thousands of excuses why he can not come, given that he has difficult relationship with his first wife, who strongly objects to our marriage with him. But I can not imagine any reason why he can not call me.” **F/L**, “Many men, fearing conflicts with the first wife, begin to behave so that she does not feel that her husband has another wife. Consequently, he does not pay enough attention to the second one, just running in to her once or twice a week, secretly from the first wife for a couple of hours. On his way home my husband even deletes my number

among other numbers dialed, so that the first wife does not learn.” **R/C**, “You had better think about the fact that if it were so traumatic for his family to learn about you right now, then why on earth would it be easier later? Are you going to hide this fact to the end of life, until you meet the other wife at his funeral?” **R/C**, “I would break his neck just for one mere blatant offer to become the ‘secret’ wife, hidden and carefully concealed from the other women, and from relatives. You agreed and now clear up the mess.”

Now we will consider the consequences of open polygamy and, above all, its consequences for the first wife, a modern Russian Muslim.

On Figure 6

(1) **F/L**, “I’m sure that my husband loves me, he can not live with the unloved woman. And he can love several wives strongly, emotionally and each one very much. I was in a monogamous marriage and was not happy, now I have something to compare.”

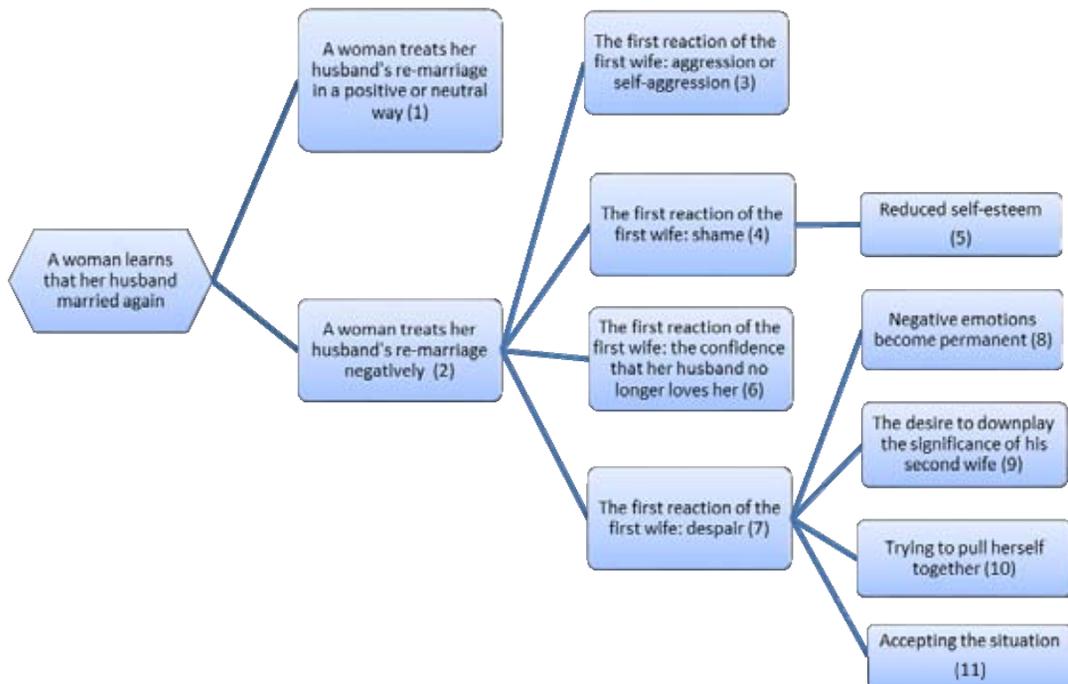


Fig. 6

(2) **M/J**, "There are few women who are willing to take such a turn of events."

(3) **M/J**, "There have been many cases when women were taken to hospitals, to psychologists because of a minute passion of their husbands!"

M/J, "I have been told, and I have witnessed many times, when women who all seemed very devout, and even taught the religion of Allah to others, in such a situation not just screamed and fought, but even tried to commit a suicide, beat their rival, and I heard that even murders had happened. Yesterday she was bright, clean, with peace in her heart and on her face, but today she chases her rival in a dark alley with a bottle of sulfuric acid under the cloak of the hollow."

(4) **P/C**, "You have to understand that if you take a second wife, the first one will feel aggrieved, will be covered with shame in front of her friends and relatives, as it would seem to her that she is not a favorite, good wife."

P/C, "In a situation when a man decides to marry another woman, a difficult role goes to his first wife. The first question she asks herself, 'What will the relatives, neighbors and acquaintances say? Will not they laugh at me?'" **P/C**, "The experience of working with similar cases shows that most women who find themselves in a situation similar to yours, are tormented by a sense of infringement."

(5) **P/C**, "[First wives] start to look for disadvantages in themselves that negatively affects their self-esteem, reducing it to the critical limit."

(6) **P/C**, "Many women begin to think that her husband took a second wife due to the fact that he had fallen out of love with her, and his attitude has changed." **P/C**, "If she discovers that her husband is going to marry another woman, the first thing that comes to her mind in a vast majority of cases is that he no longer loves her." **P/C**, "You are confused, depressed and on the verge of despair!"

(7) **M/J**, "I understand how hard it was for you to hear the words of your beloved husband, 'I'm getting married'. I am a woman, and I understand the whole storm of emotions that overwhelms a female heart at such a moment: despair, jealousy, resentment ... I saw my sisters in faith drown, being covered with a wave of pain. Even the most faithful women in similar situations said what really made me feel scary."

M/J, "It hurts. It's shameful. The feeling of betrayal. These senses are characteristic for the first wives."

(8) **F/L**, "It's hard because I keep thinking that now he could be with her, the fact that his phone is always locked with a code makes me angry. All the time I think that there might be their photos and photos of their little child."

(9) **P/C**, "After finding out the existence of a second wife, the first wives try to resist it, pushing their husbands to certain conditions or requiring a permanent confirmation of their self-worth and the insignificance of the other woman from them."

(10) **T/C**, "You are a clever woman, because you do not torment your husband with your emotions and do not involve your loved ones in it. And you had even better not tell your friends about it, as they are unlikely to support you." **P/C**, "The problem of polygamy is discussed a lot, and there are many examples when women were strong enough to preserve the family, and in the end they succeeded." **F/I**, "I remained silent and tried it as a test from Allah. My husband did not say anything. I got it, and our relationship was not affected by his polygamous decisions due to my efforts. I knew that if I am open in my emotions with my loved ones, it was unlikely that I would be able to keep the family together."

(11) **F/L**, "At first my heart was unbelievably hurt, but then I tried to understand my husband. Because loving another girl, he never let me feel

that by word or deed, or look, and treated me as if I were the love of his life.”

Russian Muslims observe a sad trend in the behavior of their first wives. Therefore a whole system of recommendations is developed, including which strategy the wife of the man, who is bent on polygamy, should choose. These strategies are very indicative of the Muslim society.

On Figure 7

(1) **M/J**, “A correct response is to say that you are ready to accept the will of Allah. And then tell your loved one that it will be very difficult, painful and unpleasant. Share how you love him, and what fears and concerns such a turn of events provokes in you.” **R/C**, “Remember that if he is a loved one, you should have the right to share what bothers you with him, of course, not in a hysterical manner or screaming, but do not choke with tears alone. Do not let him and her have

their new honeymoon, while you feel aggrieved and jealous at this time.” **R/C**, “I advise you, the author of the article, to talk to your husband, tell everything you feel and have on your mind, what you are afraid of. I’m sure your husband will find the right words of support.”

(2) **P/C**, “In no case show him your outrage in words or attitude. For so you can push him to the fact that he will *give up* on your family and leave you for the other one. Be a good and caring wife for him to make him run in a hurry to you from work, from friends and even from the other woman.” **P/C**, “If you take on the role of an offended, suffering and reproaching wife, your own family will only lose. This position, which is dependent on your emotions, will only irritate him and will only lead to alienation of affections.” **M/J**, “Try not to throw hysterics at him; if you want to cry, you should take the time he spends away from home.” **M/J**, “It is better not (sisters, remember this, Muslim men

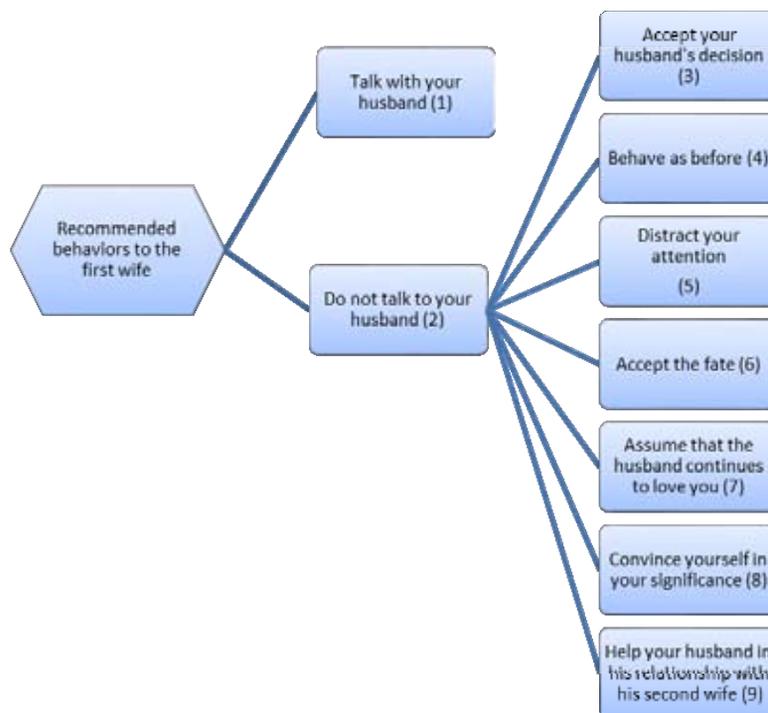


Fig. 7

say so) to tell your husband about your pain and hurt feelings constantly, as he is the cause of it all. The man has such a feature that his heart stretches there where it is quieter, where he is not disturbed, or pressed. If the first wife will constantly show her mood, pain and hurt to her husband, he will quickly get bored, and he will not be willing to come home.”

(3) **T/C**, “In order to cope with jealousy, first you have to accept your spouse’s decision.”

(4) **P/C**, “Create good conditions for your husband at home, so that he was attracted to you as before.” **P/C**, “No matter how difficult it may be, try to live in the mode in which you lived before. Create a cozy atmosphere at home to attract your husband. Do not overthink that your husband is with the other woman now, and do not imagine a picture of what may be in their relationship.”

(5) **P/C**, “Take yourself to something not to grieve for your husband in his absence so much.” **F/I**, “I found a variety of activities to occupy myself with something else but not internal experiences.”

(6) **T/C**, “All you can do is to demand what you have a right for, like a fair division of time, as it is stipulated in Islamic law, and providing you with everything you need.” **P/C**, “Feel certain that over time it will become much easier for you, the pain that you are experiencing now, will definitely subside.” **R/C**, “Make sure that your husband does not want to marry a second wife, and if you can not, suffer in silence ...”

(7) **T/C**, “You should not worry about your spouse’s *dislike*. It’s hard to believe and hard to accept (as we all were brought up on books and films, which showed us *him, her, and their love to death*), but the love to you personally in this case will not decrease, but even increase, because only the most generous women can *share* their spouse to the other woman.” **P/C**, “Unlike women a man is not limited to loving only one woman. His heart can hold a full-fledged love to many wives.

That what seems to be a betrayal in a woman’s eyes actually is not.”

(8) **P/C**, “We should immediately get rid of all the anguish, heart pangs and twisting on like ‘he fell me out of love with him, he is no longer interested in me, he treated our love and family treacherously, I made him a father suffered a lot, but he ..’ – this is only the perception of women.” **P/C**, “In no case assume that your husband married another woman, because he is not happy with you.” **R/C**, “First of all, do not stuff your head with nonsense, like ‘why am I not like that?’ and ‘why isn’t he satisfied only with me?’, or ‘why is she better than me?’, which is even worse than that. Everything is fine with you (if you have previously had a good marriage), but if he just wants to have not one wife, but several, it does not depend on you.”

(9) **M/J**, “You should understand that your husband feels bad now, and he needs help... He is not also totally ready for a second family, for a conduct of a second wife, for the fact that now he will have to share absolutely everything between two wives equally. And, by the way, he has half as much time for himself! Who can help if not the first loyal wife – in fact she knows all the details of her spouse’s character, only she will be able to lend a helping hand, as a new wife, anyway, does not know anything about him yet!”

Now let us look at the public perception of a re-marriage through the prism of how the society sees a second wife in a polygamous marriage.

On Figure 8

(1) **R/C**, “If you are ready for a polygamous marriage, then first of all, get acquainted with the other wives, and establish normal relations with them.” **R/C**, “It is possible, if before the wedding you acquainted, made friends or settled everything with his first wife and she agreed with a new marriage. She made it clear that without her consent you would never get married to her

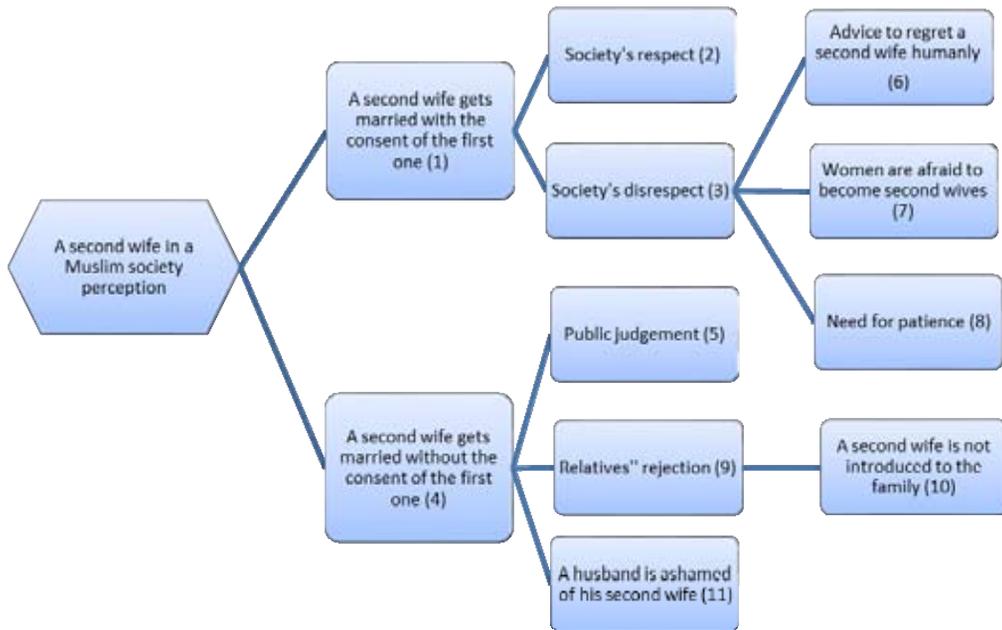


Fig. 8

husband. If not, do not be surprised and resent that the husband who offended and ignored his first wife, and did not care about her feelings, will behave with you in the same way.”

(2) **No examples**

(3) **F/L**, “Not all women are ready for this and agree with this. For example, I do not know any woman like that, and now people look at me as if I were insane, because I agree to become a second wife.” **R/C**, “For the sake of the *great love* you will have to admit a life in the background (which can not be called a full conjugal life), you will have to live on the ends from another family table (allegedly with the unloved woman), you will live with a constant fear of the fact that he will leave you one day, if this is required by his wife and parents.” **R/C**, “For some women things like living with someone else’s husband, giving birth to his children and communicating with his wives are ok. But for others, this is completely unacceptable and impossible. If you yourself can easily communicate with the other wives and children of your-someone else’s husband, you can

go to a harem as another wife. You might even be happy in this harem.” **R/C**, “A man who has a wife (wives) is someone else’s husband, even if you live with him after the Nikiakh. A decent person would have understood it at once.”

(4) **R/C**, “You had better have thought before hurting another woman, who had not done anything bad to you, when you decided to get married to her husband.” **R/C**, “You must think when you get married! Think about that whose soul hurts, when her husband is with the other woman!” **R/C**, “What kind of happiness is that which is built on someone else’s misfortune.” **R/C**, “Instead of understanding how hard it is to accept this situation for the first wife, you could have never got into someone else’s family, and tried to seize a piece of someone else’s personal and female happiness.” **R/C**, “It is only your fault. You broke someone else’s family, brought on misfortune there. You will not build your own happiness on someone else’s misfortune.” **R/C**, “Why did you need to hurt another woman, who had not done anything wrong? Now you deserve

it. It's only the beginning". **R/C**, "They had lived together, seemed to be happy until he presented her you as a gift, my dear. I'm sorry, but you're selfish." **R/C**, "The evil done by a person always comes back to them. For example, a beloved husband will also cruelly insult you and wipe the floor with you like he did with his first wife." **R/C**, "You should not have interfered with someone else's family." **R/C**, "Why did not reckon with the opinion of his wife, since you did not want him to take a second wife? You need to think about the feelings of others too, not only about yourself." **R/C**, "A man who has meanly betrayed his first wife will do the same thing to you."

(5) **F/L**, "I liked him as a man, as a person, but the second wife ... I've heard about it so many things." **F/L**, "I learnt that he had a wife accidentally. But later his wife also began to call me and say that he had long wanted to find a second wife and saw her in me. I do not know what to do. What's to be done? I do not think that his wife really wants it, and I do not want to interfere with someone else's family. You can not build your happiness on someone else's misfortune!!!" **F/L**, "Is it worth going into the family and becoming a second wife? Although I would be able to overcome my pride and marry him, but should I?"

(6) **M/J**, "The best thing is to understand her and just feel sorry for her, because often *she* is taken as a second wife not because she wants it so much, but because she has no choice." **M/J**, "Aida has agreed to be a second wife. 'It's better than living without a husband', she decided. Of course, everybody around is discussing her, someone directly accuses her, considering her a family destroyer, someone just stopped talking to her. But Aida is trying to not pay attention to that. The main thing now is that she has a family." **M/J**, "She agreed to be a second one, because she realized what loneliness is ..." **M/J**, "Second wives face humiliation, the feeling of inferiority

of family and attention, and sometimes feel unnecessary, or just like a back burner girl. It is painful and sad." **F/L**, "Basically, all who offered me to get married were already married. For a long time I did not agree, believing that it is not for me, that I will meet my man soon. But time passed and nothing changed, and when I was asked to meet the next candidate for a husband, I agreed."

(7) **F/L**, "I am possessed with the idea that all my life I'll hide as a mistress, that people will perk their finger in me and say that I am the second wife of that man. I'm afraid that his family will never recognize me, will always hate and curse. And his wife will probably hate me too. My family are not happy with this as well, and friends say that it is impossible to break into someone else's family."

(8) **R/C**, "Don't do that, if you are not ready. Wait for a husband for whom you will be the first wife. But if you agreed, then please do not demand your rights. Normal families break up because of such women."

(9) **M/J**, "Relatives show sympathy for the first wife and start to slander the second wife, teach the first one, give her those pieces of advice, which are not kind and peaceful, turn her against the second wife and so on. They think that the second wife destroys their family." **F/L**, "The relatives of the husband and his first wife started a big scandal as soon as they learnt about our marriage. My husband went to the city to stay with his relatives to solve the problem, but they do not accept me. The elder brother of my husband said that my husband is no longer a brother for him while he is with me, and the first wife's relatives insist on our divorce ..."

(10) **P/C**, "I do not want, and have no right to blame you, but you knew from the beginning that he was married. Moreover, getting married, you were willing not only to his family situation, but also to the fact that he had not introduced you

to his relatives. As the saying goes, what goes around comes around.”

(11) **P/C**, “Maybe for some time your spouse will be ashamed to take you to his friends or even just to go for a walk with you in the park, because polygamy is currently still rejected by society, and his friends will not always adequately respond to you.”

In the end we will look at the strategy of behavior of two or more wives of one husband in relation to each other, as well as the behavior of a polygamous husband associated with these strategies.

On Figure 9

(1) **F/I**, “Both I and she tried to get on track, helped each other, tried to ride out, but in the end

it is all bad. We are not friends, but do not fight. We communicate, sometimes help each other and discuss common problems of our big family.”

(2) **M/J**, “Men are thrilled with the situation when the wives of one husband are on friendly terms. It is their dream, which very rarely comes true.” **M/J**, “The situation where all the wives are friends with each other is especially unrealistic to perform, but it still appears in male fantasy”. **M/J**, “I have seen cases where the wives are friends. I know families where the first wife herself was looking for a second one. However, even in the best of cases, it is not that rosy. Most often women just pretend to have sincere and warm feelings to each other wishing to please their loved one. There are exceptions, of course. But to oblige women to communicate and make

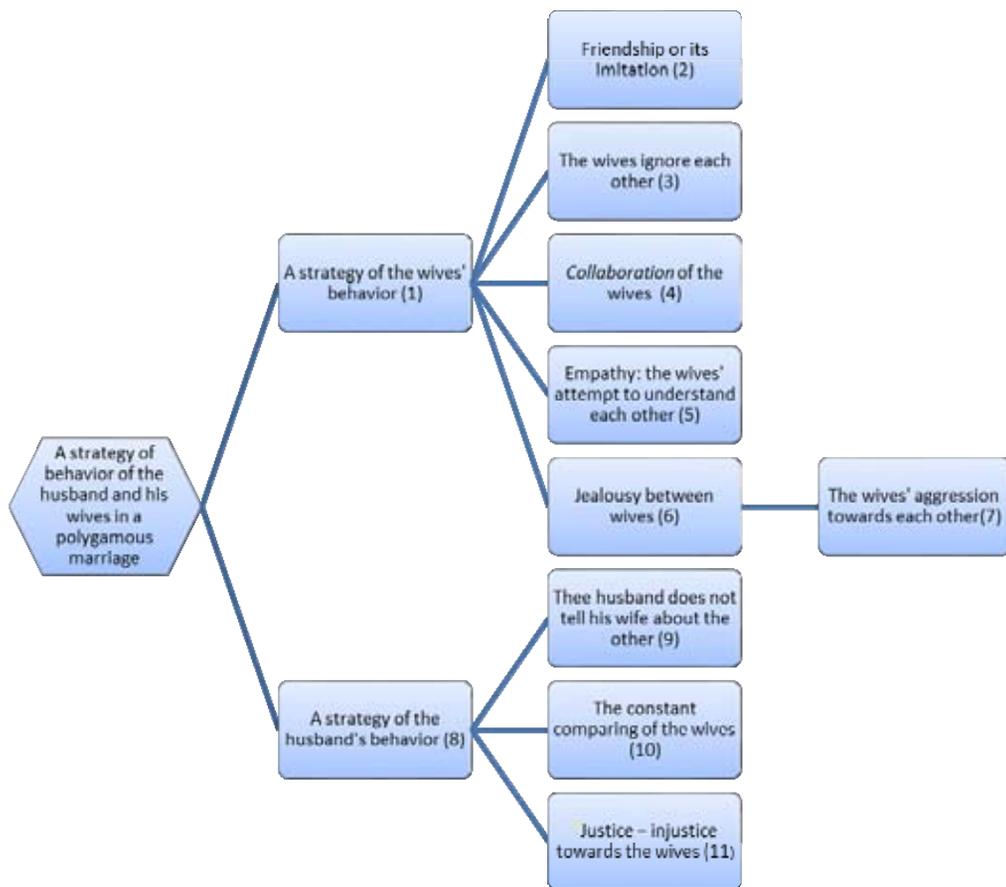


Fig. 9

friends, as is sometimes done by men, is risky.” **F/I**, “For Ali we became friends, visit each other, give gifts.” **F/L**, “Being the first wife, I have a relevant experience in polygamy. I don’t make friends with his second wife. She is a very nice and kind woman. However, we did not live, but often spent time together, cooked, talked about everything, walked, went shopping. And if you do not like that, you should not have broken into the family, whose members you do not like. For example, the second wife of my husband always tells me, ‘You (referring to me and my husband) are my family. I love you both!’”

(3) **P/C**, “You have to learn to treat her existence, if not with humor, then neutrally, as she did not exist for your family.” **M/J**, “Though some men manage that, and some of them said that their wives are friends. Still, those who have tried this, then regret about this in most cases, and think that it would have been better if he had not introduced them.” **M/J**, “Such families live peacefully in which the wives do not talk with each other and do not hear about each other from their husband.” **M/J**, “In general, men are advised to let their wives know as little as possible about each other. The less they see each other, the better it is for themselves as well as for their husband.” **M/J**, “In this case you’d better sit on the fence, keep a forced truce called *I do not know anything about her and do not want to know*. This is the best option for those who can not cope with their feelings.” **P/C**, “Maybe you should forget and let go of the fact that your husband has another wife and just continue to live happily without getting stuck and thinking about it ?! Another wife also feels no delight.”

(4) **P/C**, “In almost all cases for women it is much easier to accept a second wife of their husband, if she is not at war with her, but tries to communicate.” **P/C**, “If both of them are ready to resolve the conflict situation, the joint interaction will make it easier for them to understand each

other’s point of view, in particular, the desire to get family happiness.” **P/C**, “It is important to learn to live without conflicting and warring against another wife, and seek, if not to cooperate (that would be ideal), so at least to keep conflict-free, peaceful relations.”

(5) **P/C**, “In those moments when you are sick at heart, when the thought about his other family and how he spends time with her creep into your head, think how she feels when your husband is with you”. **P/C**, “It is unknown whether your marriage was agreed by the first wife. Maybe not, and she is also greatly burdened by your presence in the house, and the need to share the husband with you, like you are by her. Then you like no one else can understand her.” **P/C**, “Many women, who had been able to cope with this problem, noted that most of all the fact they were trying to understand the other’s wife, mentally trying to walk in her shoes, helped them.” **P/C**, “I will repeat that in the first wife’s eyes you may be an enemy, the destroyer of her family happiness. For this reason, treat her behavior with understanding, because it is possible that you yourself would have behaved in the same way if you had been her.” **F/L**, “When I imagine myself walking in her shoes, I understand how difficult it is for her.” **R/C**, “You can get acquainted with his new wife. It is possible that she is jealous, and together you will find a way out. And it will be easier for her as she will no longer need to hide.”

(6) **T/C**, “When there is the consent of both women, living in separate rooms of the same house is not prohibited, but it is not recommended, because sooner or later, jealousy will do the trick.” **P/C**, “To begin with, just do not imagine various scenes of the intimate life of her husband with his first wife and ask your husband to take care of the soundproofing of both bedrooms.” **P/C**, “But I want to inform you that often so-called second wives make themselves unhappy, giving in and breaking all the rules when they

feeling jealous.” **P/C**, “Working with the families strongly suggests that uncontrolled jealousy always leads to deterioration in relations. This is especially true for the polygamous family, as there will always be an idea in the head of one of the wives that her husband is still with another woman.” **P/C**, “It is jealousy that is the basis of the negative perception of the second wife, since this sense includes the fear of loss of love, self-prejudice and other negative phenomena.” **P/C**, “This is a consequence of a frustration that you are now not the only love of your husband and there is the other woman whom he loves. Taking the idea that your husband loves someone else and wants to marry her, you automatically crossed out all the good things that exist between you.” **M/J**, “In general, women who face with a similar problem note an oppressive feeling of jealousy that is the basis of all.” **P/C**, “If you made a positive decision and marry this man, you have to prepare yourself for possible difficulties. Here the matter is that the usual difficulties of any family are complicated by the action of your own jealousy.” **F/I**, “Although I congratulated her, gave her a wedding gift, she showed a lot of jealousy, then we made friends, and when I gave birth to another child, she started showing jealousy again, and the relationship broke down completely.”

(7) **P/C**, “As a result, when the first wife becomes aware of the presence of the second one, a lot of men divorce with the second wives, fearing of a conflict with the first.” **P/C**, “The second wives sometimes putting in even worse claims, blowing hypes to her husband to make him divorce with his first wife.” **P/C**, “Very often one wife does not act openly against the second one, but goes undercover, insidiously like a woman. This can manifest itself in the so-called indirect aggression.” **P/C**, “After all, you knew what you agreed with, and knew that the first wife, even showing her agreement, in a few days may start

scandals because of your unwanted presence ‘in their happy family life’.” **M/J**, “The first wife in such situations perceives the other as a rival and the destroyer of her family happiness.” **F/L**, “Recently his first wife has found out about me and threatened him that she would return to her parents if he did not leave me.” **F/I**, “Her behavior and attitude towards me changed dramatically. She presented the situation to everybody as if she had been the victim, but not the initiator of the incident.”

(8) **M/J**, “As for women, their quality and their behavior is dependent on their husband. He should be able to regulate relations. [Abdullah said.] “If a man is respected, everything will be okay. Women can not handle such a relationship; it is the task of men.”

(9) **M/J**, “My husband should not talk about what’s going on in the house to the other, should not praise the other woman, should be fair providing their needs. Being with one of his wives, he shall behave as if she was the only one.” **M/J**, “It is necessary for a man to avoid talks about the other woman with any of the wives, as well as comparisons, especially praising one wife to the other. If the husband does not understand the disgusting meanness of this attitude to his wives, and he is not able to provide his first and subsequent wives with a psychological comfort, then he loses his right to polygamy.”

(10) **P/C**, “He (even without trying to offend you) will still automatically compare you to his first wife.” **M/J**, “So in response to a cooked wonderful dinner you should expect something like ‘Oh, ... cooks the same, but much tastier.’ If your spouse is a tactful man, he can not say that, but can think, if he is a good and well-behaved Muslim, he can not even think, but ...”.

(11) **M/J**, “It is difficult to stand inequality for a woman, even if she agreed with that. She has so many problems with jealousy (if only you knew how difficult it is!), complicated with an

unequal treatment, an unequal position, unequal visits. This is too much load, and it is naive to believe that your women will cope with it at least for C grade.’” **M/J**, “Injustice is very painful. If most of all a polygamous husband has difficulty observing justice, his each wife has difficulty going through it.” **M/J**, “Polygamists whom I have spoken with over a decade in Islam claim that the most difficult part of the position of a husband of not just one woman is the observance of justice towards them.” **M/J**, “In practice, to satisfy the thirst of equality of two and more wives in all is almost an unrealizable ideal.” **F/L**, “He never, for all time, has treated me fairly and generally hidden my existence, so that his parents did not know about me.”

As a result of the analysis of the texts from *islam.ru* and *islamdag.ru* websites, we can conclude that the current Russian Muslim society hardly realizes the idea of polygamy. It causes a lot of intra-family conflicts between wives and husbands, as well as between the two wives of one husband. Relatively harmonious polygamous marriages basically exist at a recommendatory level, but in practical life polygamy causes family and personal tragedies. Russian Muslim women take an individualist approach to constructing a family, and therefore do not put up with an infringement on their idea of marriage with ‘him, her, and love to the grave.’ Men treat an archaic institution of marriage as a new toy, often unwilling to take into account the position of women. And if at the level of *educational* publications a conflict is removed by the regulations of the conduct of women, which are smooth in theory but difficult to implement in practice, in real life there is a conflict between men and women and between the women who realized in the family life (first wives) and the single women, ready to become second wives. Therefore, in a simplified form a

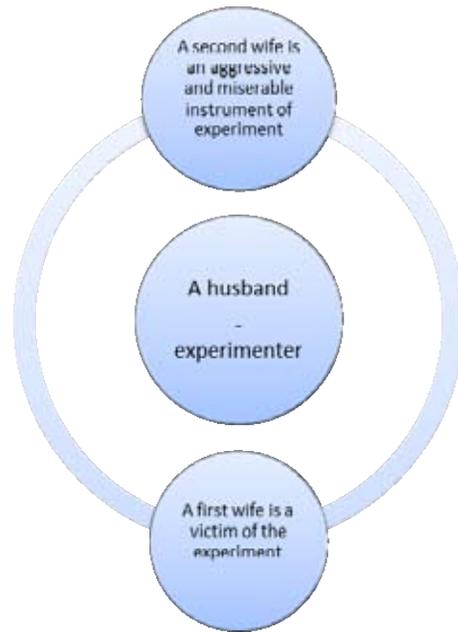


Fig. 10

polygamous family in its relation to a traditional family can be represented as shown in Fig. 10.

This is not a general scheme for the real perception of polygamous families by contemporary Russian Muslim community, covering all special cases, but the base one in relation to which all special cases can be built as a variation of the typical pattern and exceptions that confirm the rule. It points to the fact that this archaic institution that is a polygamous family is not natural for modern Russian Muslims. In part, this is because none of the Muslim peoples of Russia had a tradition of spreading a polygamous family, which is thus not the reassertion of cultural features, but the transfer of Sharia norms to the Russian land, more specific to the Arab world – this factor is more significant for the villagers. This is partly also due to the experience of the Soviet and Russian system of education and training with its specific individualism and self-importance of women in the family and society, the romanticizing of love and marriage, as well as, what we particularly emphasize,

the existence of the system of education in the context of the Christian tradition in Russia with its strictly monogamous view of marriage that is a sacred union of one man and one woman. This factor is more significant for the city dwellers. No matter how much a modern Muslim woman is consciously willing to follow the Shariah, she is a Russian woman with a rather romantic view of marriage, and a man who decides to experiment with polygamy appears an *experimenter* in the modern mass Muslim consciousness, and society, especially its women's half, rather denies his right for this experiment, than recognizes its legitimacy. The women in society rarely acknowledge the legitimacy and justification of a polygamous strategy of men and the wives of these men, their first wives, are seen as victims of the experiment. The second wives are perceived as those who use Sharia for arranging their own

destiny due to the first wives, often as destroyers of family ties, ready for aggressive actions in order to get rid of loneliness.

In recent years, in Russia the debate on the legalization of polygamous marriages in our country at least for the Muslim republic have periodically broken out. The last lively discussion took place in May-June 2015, after the resonant Chechen wedding of the already married police chief of Nozhai-Yurt district Nazhud Guchigov and the 17-year-old Luiza Goilabieva, and the following statements of the President of Chechnya Ramzan Kadyrov and the head of the Chechen administration Magomed Daudov. The commentators say a lot about the fact that it does not concern the tradition adopted from the Russian Muslims that is natural for them. However, the results of our research put this idea into question.

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Опыт полигамных семей у современных российских мусульман: нарративный анализ

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Статья посвящена исследованию полигамной семьи у современных российских мусульман. Исследуются вопросы, как полигамная семья воспринимается самими мусульманами, воспитанными в современном российском обществе, какие эмоции российские мусульмане, мужчины и женщины, переживают, какие мотивы ими движут. Эти проблемы рассматриваются на примере материалов с сайта islam.ru за 2009 – 2015 гг. Делается вывод, что современное российское мусульманское общество с трудом реализует идею полигамии. Общественная оценка этого явления скорее отрицательная, чем положительная. Отчасти это вызвано опытом советской и российской системы образования и воспитания с ее определенным индивидуализмом и самостоятельным значением женщины в семье и обществе, романтизацией любви и брака, а также существованием системы образования в контексте христианской традиции России, с ее взглядом на брак как сакральный союз одного мужчины и одной женщины.

Ключевые слова: архаика, нарративный анализ, обоснованная теория («grounded theory»), современные российские мусульмане, полигамная семья.

Научная специальность: 24.00.00 – культурология.
