

# Bigamy in India: Finding from National Family Health Survey

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Bigamy exists in many societies where it is legally and socially acceptable as well as where it is not accepted too. Bigamy is basically a problem of a male-dominant culture than religion. In India according to Hindu, Parsi and Christian Marriage Act, there is a prohibition on contracting a second marriage during the lifetime of the spouse. According to 1974 survey, Muslims to account for 5.6 percent of bigamous marriages and upper-caste Hindus accounting for 5.8 percent i.e., as many as one crore Hindu men had more than one wife in 1971, compared to 12 lakh Muslim men. As opposed to prevalent notions in our society, bigamy affects Hindu women more than Muslim women as laws governing their marriages have provisions for equal rights for more than one wife. But in Hindus, the second wife's children do not have any rights over the father's ancestral property. Due to social stigma and fear of being abandoned by husband, as well as lack of financial independence, most women accept a second wife. Majority of first wife is reluctant to prosecute her husband considering the fact that he is the father of her children.

Except legal cases on bigamy and the last census of 1961 and 1974 survey information, not much is known on this issue. In the large scale survey (National Family Health Survey) conducted in India, information on second marriage of husband was collected from women. In this paper an attempt is made to examine the prevalence of it by religion, caste, tribe and other socio-economic characteristics of women who were interviewed. Also an attempt is made to examine the physical, verbal violence faced by the women in these marriages. Among currently married women, 1.7, 2.5 and 2.1 percent among Hindus, Muslims and Christian reported that their husband have one more wife. Southern and North Eastern regions have more chances of polygamous marriages as compared to the other regions. Results show that poor and illiterate or literate up to primary level women are more vulnerable to second marriage of husband. In ancient India, this practice was found more common among the affluent and powerful persons. Over the time it has changed and shifted towards the lower socio economic and poor peoples. More number of older women reported polygamy than the younger ones. Those women whose husband have one more wife are facing much higher degree of emotional, physical and sexual violence in comparison to those women whose husband have not gone for one more wife. Violence faced by these women may be cause or consequence of second marriage of husband.

**Further analysis will be carried out.**

