

Qualitative exploration of intra-household variations in treatment of child illness in polygynous Yoruba families: the use of local expressions*



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Abstract

The drastic cut in government expenditure on health with the extension of the 'user pays' principle to health care utilization in Nigeria following the adoption of the Structural Adjustment Program is probably having its greatest effect on the family. Contrary to what happened in the past, when the cost of treatment was usually borne by the mother of a sick child, the role of the father is becoming increasingly significant.

Before the introduction of the 'user pays' principle to health care, treatment in many government hospitals was free. Intra-household variations in response to and treatment of child illness, especially in polygynous Yoruba households in Nigeria, occurred for a number of other reasons. Probably because the mother and her children usually form a social unit within a polygynous union, meeting the cost of treatment and some other minor daily needs of the child has always been the responsibility of the mother, although the economic independence of most senior wives seems to have waned as a result of current economic difficulties. In the past, a woman's ability to meet the cost of treatment of her children was partly explained by her separate income from that of her husband, but with the persistent rise in cost of treatment, many mothers now have to look to their husbands or other sources for assistance in paying for treatment of their children.

This paper examines treatment behaviour under the present circumstances and explores how common expressions of the Yoruba can be used to explain differences in a polygynous husband's responses to the treatment of illness of his wives' children. Such treatment poses a great risk of child morbidity and mortality now that the role of the father has become important in meeting the current high cost of treatment in many Yoruba families.

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Polygynous unions and the Yoruba family structure

Polygyny is one of the most widely known features of African marriage (Mair 1969:1; Kayongo-Male and Onyango 1984:65); in many West African countries polygyny is a flourishing institution rather than a dying tradition (Ware 1983:16). Among the Yoruba of Southwest Nigeria, polygyny — whether private or public (Karanja 1987:257) — is socially accepted and widely practised (Fadipe 1970:65). Recent studies have shown that most Yoruba men believe that they are by nature polygynous, and in order to satisfy their sexual needs, they tend to marry many wives (Orubuloye 1994).

Among the Yoruba, the involvement of the extended family is usually very critical and noticeable when a young man marries his first wife (Fadipe 1970); but this involvement is usually minimal when he decides to take a second or a third wife. Usually there is no overt condemnation or disapproval of such acts from the relatives and the extended kinsmen. However, relatives could put pressure on a man to take a second or a third wife, if the first wife finds it difficult to have a child. Generally, the choice of the subsequent wife or wives is that of the man himself.

Men derive social, moral, economic and psychological advantages from having many wives. In the past, it brought prestige, and a man with two or more wives and many children was seen as wealthy and of high social status in the community. Having many children also brings psychological satisfaction and social respect to parents (Oni 1988). In the traditional Yoruba society, a woman is married to her husband's lineage and the lineage expects her to bear many children. The number of children a woman has for her husband often becomes a crucial factor in determining her status in the husband's house and establishing her stay and favour with the husband and his relations. A delay in her becoming pregnant in the first few years of her marriage brings a great deal of suspicion about her premarital character and sexual behaviour. The suspicion develops to hatred and in most cases rejection by her husband's relatives if she is unable to bear children, or if all her children are girls. A woman in such circumstances stands the risk of losing her husband's attention to another woman who may subsequently be brought in as a second wife either by the husband or his relatives. However, the birth of a male child consolidates the position of the senior wife in the household, and among her husband's kinsfolk. The reverse is the case if she has not given birth to a male child before the new wife is brought into the family.

In addition to the health reasons for sexual abstinence (Orubuloye 1977), the Yoruba consider it morally wrong to have sexual relations with a woman once she is pregnant, and abstinence continues until the child is weaned at the age of two to three. This period of abstinence can also last for about one year after the death of an infant. The alternative for the man to nearly three years of sexual abstinence is therefore casual relations which many consider wrong, or a second or third wife (Orubuloye 1977; Caldwell 1980).

Furthermore, among the Yoruba, it is very common for successful married men to become polygynous. These are men who are successful both economically and in terms of reproduction. Women who were monogamously married into a family but were unable to bear children for their husbands, are likely to divorce them and marry such successful men in order to try their luck. Seniority within this kind of polygynous marriage does not connote older age: a woman who is younger in years could be the senior wife to a much older woman as long as she was married into the family before her, and the relationship between them is usually based on this kind of situation. Co-wives' rivalries appear to be less intense in this case.

A man's senior wife can also decide to take a younger wife for her husband, or the man may seek the opinion of his senior wife before looking for other wives. When this happens the senior wife enjoys a privileged position: she has authority over the junior wives and leaves to them the heavy housework. As long as her own position is secure, a senior wife has

nothing to lose from this type of arrangement if she has had the opportunity to approve the girl beforehand, though her consent is influenced by the tact with which her husband introduces his new wife (Marris 1961:49).

Although in the past, all the wives, both senior and junior, lived together in the same compound, this kind of agreement between the senior wife and her husband to bring in a new wife did not always prevent such households quarrelling among themselves. If the wives agree and their husband treats them with scrupulous fairness, the household may live happily together, but such households are more vulnerable to any change in the husband's economic circumstances which may also generate more conflict and tension between the wives. Quarrels are most likely to arise from jealousy and favouritism. The senior wife may resent the new wife as a threat to her security and status in the household, especially if she had not been consulted by her husband before his decision to take another wife. A common expression to describe the situation among the Yoruba is *Orisa je n pe meji obinrin ko de'nu*, meaning *a prayer to the god to become two in a husband's house is never from the heart of a woman*.

Relationships in polygynous marriages tend to give rise to divisions among children. Women generally support their own children, with occasional help from husbands, and the most important divisions among children in the same household usually stem from their mother's status, which might include her seniority in the house, education level, her family's social and political connections, her business success or such special situations as being the favourite wife of her husband or the 'official' wife who must appear in 'civilized' contexts with the man (Bledsoe 1990). Furthermore, Castle (1992, 1993) posited that a woman's status or position in relation to other women within the marriage union dictates her degree of control and her differential access to resources. A man with many wives is more likely to allow his favourite wife access to his cash and resources than the other wives in the union.

Among the Edo-speaking people of South-western Nigeria it has been found that the existence of both co-wives and what others have called 'outside wives' (Karanja 1987; Omorodion 1993) often gives rise to jealousy and it may result in women inflicting harm on their co-wives and co-wives' children (Bradbury 1957; Omorodion 1993). Last (1992:799) writing on the Hausa of northern Nigeria observed that a situation whereby one wife has 90 per cent of her children alive while her co-wife has 90 per cent dead, usually brings a reaction to a woman whenever there is a death of a child in her family. Last's work admittedly presented a picture of child mortality experience in polygynous families in a northern Nigerian village, but among the Yoruba, similar experiences are not uncommon, for child mortality is a function of response to and treatment of child illness.

The situation in polygynous households differs from that in monogamous ones. A man with many wives usually spends very little time with each and in contrast to the situation that Steady (1987) observed in Sierra Leone, where the first (senior) wife plays the primary role in health care payment and decision-making, each Yoruba wife and her children are virtually subsidiary households on their own. The children of the same mother are drawn together by close ties of loyalty and affection. In Yoruba households the smallest social unit is the mother and her children, who then form part of a larger whole, her husband's household, to which his dependants are also attached (Marris 1961:14). The role of child rearing is closely associated with that of child bearing. Children who are not well-trained bring shame and dishonour upon their parents and most often the mother gets the blame. Such expressions as *omo ti o ba dara ni ti baba, eyi ti ko ba dara ti iya re ni*, meaning *a good child belongs to the father, while the bad one is for the mother* (Renne 1993:343) explains the Yoruba expectation of mothers in the character building of their children.

Although both husband and wife take part in household decision-making, the Yoruba conjugal family is largely open to the extent that other kin and in-laws join in making

decisions about child-rearing and even the timing of the next pregnancy (Adeokun 1983:136). As has been found in other parts of the world, the decision to seek either curative or preventive health care for a sick child among the Yoruba is also rarely taken alone. Decision-making usually involves a range of people: fathers, mothers, co-wives, relatives and friends (Friedson 1961 cited in Graham 1984:166).

Although some studies have found little difference between the health outcomes of children of polygynous and monogamous women (Desai 1992:15-16), others have found that women's household status in relation to other women in the household appears to be an important factor affecting their opportunity to exploit resources controlled by their husbands (Castle 1992,1993). Except for a few studies on the role of infertility, the effects of women's status in polygynous marriage and the relationships with their husbands in the treatment of their child illness, particularly among the Yoruba, have received little attention.

Yoruba proverbs which usually appear in the form of a plain statement of fact, of a warning, or an apt expression, are capable of bringing out more sharply than ordinary statements the required point (Oni 1995). The importance of these Yoruba proverbs is summarized in another proverb which says *owe l'esin oro, bi oro ba sonu, owe ni a fi n wa a*, meaning *a proverb is a horse which can carry one swiftly to the idea sought* (Delano 1973:77). Some relevant Yoruba expressions in form of proverbs are discussed in this paper. The discussion is based on responses during a qualitative survey conducted in six Ekiti communities in Southwest Nigeria. The qualitative survey included in-depth interviews and focus group discussions, which revealed a great deal about how husbands respond to illnesses in the children of individual wives. The discussions also show how a mother's position among her husband's wives and her relationship with the husband affects the treatment received by her children when they are sick.

Method

The data used in this paper came largely from a qualitative study conducted in six communities in Ondo State, Nigeria, between April 1993 and February 1994. The study consisted of seven focus-group discussions, six for all mothers with at least one surviving child, and one for fathers. Perceptions of child illness, the origin and cause of illness, income management between husband and wives, the role of co-wives, and their relationships in child illness, were among the issues discussed in the focus-group sessions. Several common expressions and day-to-day proverbs were discussed and explored to explain how fathers respond in different ways to illness in the children of their various wives. Thus the discussions shed more light on how the position of a woman among many wives, and her relationship with the husband vis-[^]-vis the other wives, affect the treatment and the amount of the husband's attention she receives when her children are ill.

Design and organization of the focus-group discussions

A total of seven focus-group sessions were held in the survey communities: six sessions for women of childbearing age (15-49 years), and one for men, some of whom were the husbands of the women who had been interviewed before or participated in the focus group discussions. Each of the discussion meetings lasted for about one hour. An average of eight to ten people participated in each focus group, and all the discussions were tape recorded.

A typical focus-group discussion meeting started with the singing of songs related to children's health and well-being to arouse the interest of the discussants; this was followed by a short introduction about the purpose of the discussion. The moderator, recorder and discussants were then asked to introduce themselves. Each discussant was asked to state his or her name, age, religion, occupation, marital status, number of husband's wives (number of

wives ever had for men discussants), wife's order of seniority, and the number of children ever born. The issues already prepared for discussion were then raised. A typical meeting ended with songs and refreshments.

As part of the qualitative survey, a number of in-depth interviews were conducted with married women of different ages selected randomly from the quantitative survey. Issues covered in the in-depth interviews include those related to intra-household relationships, income management, treatment decision-making and other treatment-related issues between wife and husband, with particular reference to the comparison of monogamous and polygynous unions.

In addition to the qualitative survey, a quantitative survey was conducted covering a total sample of 1538 Yoruba households. This survey generated information on child illness and how parents and other family members respond to child illness. In each of the six communities, four clusters were randomly selected, from which dwelling units were selected on a systematic basis until the quota for each cluster was reached. The first available household in each dwelling unit was selected for interview; from this household, one currently married woman of childbearing age (15-49 years) with at least one surviving child under 15 years of age was interviewed. In order to extend the survey to many households, only one respondent was interviewed from each household.

Respondents were asked questions on the most recent illness experienced by each of the children living in their households. The questions covered type of illness, symptoms noticed, the person who first noticed the symptoms, the person who decided where to seek medical help, and the person or persons who paid for the treatment. A comparison of these variables on treatment of child illness was made between the children of senior wives and those of junior wives. The quantitative analysis was used to illuminate the qualitative findings on which this paper is based.

Findings

In its various forms and dimensions, polygyny, as a form of marriage, continues to flourish among the Yoruba. At the time of the survey, 31 per cent of the women covered in the survey were in polygynous unions: 38 per cent in rural and 22 per cent in urban areas were in polygynous families. In both the rural and urban areas, there is evidence that those who are currently in monogamous unions may end up in polygynous unions, and almost all women have to see this as possible throughout their lifetimes (Caldwell 1994b:7).

A total of 2016 illnesses to non-fostered children were reported in the 1,538 households covered in the quantitative survey; of these, 636 were in 469 polygynous households. One way to understand the differences in husbands' responses to their wives' children's illness is to examine the issue of who decides and who pays for the treatment. The wife's status in a polygynous union is classified into two in this paper: 'senior' and 'junior'. This classification is not based on the age of the women at marriage but on their position at the time they enter the union. Senior wives are those women who have one or more other women taken into the union after them, that is, they do not occupy the latest position. Junior wives however, are women who were taken last into an existing marriage. This classification stems from the experience of the author and evidence from qualitative data that most recent wives are likely to be treated differently from the preceding ones. At the end of the classification, 53 per cent of the polygynously married women covered in the study were of junior status and 47 per cent were senior.

The quantitative data on person who met the cost of treatment of child illness within the polygynous unions show that husbands paid more for treatment of illnesses to children of the junior wives than to those of the senior wives. The implication of this is that senior wives

were more likely than junior wives to pay for treatment of their own children's illness, also that younger or junior wives have a better chance of getting support from their husbands, while often the only option for a senior wife is to seek assistance from her grown-up children working and earning incomes. This traditional source of support from grown-up children has now become an unrealistic expectation for most mothers because of the increasing rate of youth unemployment due to the economic adjustment programs.

Since senior wives, as a result of their economic activities, are more likely to be economically independent of their husbands than the junior wives, they should be more able to afford treatment for their children than junior wives. It might be argued that most senior wives have stopped child-bearing, so they can concentrate more on economic activities, while junior wives are still in their active reproductive years and so are less able to afford treatment: it is therefore to be expected that junior wives receive more financial support from husbands, especially in paying for treatment of their children.

However, the data in this study seem to suggest that the economic independence enjoyed by Yoruba women is waning, mainly as a result of the difficulties caused by the Structural Adjustment Program, which is affecting the family income as well as individual incomes. Also, among the Yoruba, the expected role of the husband, regardless of the economic status of the wife, is to take responsibility for the health and education of his children. Although women do assist their husbands, it is the responsibility of the man to meet the basic needs of his children and of course of his wives as well. If senior wives therefore were able to pay for treatment in the past with the proceeds from their economic activities, it was generally regarded as a form of support for the husband, not perceived as the woman's responsibility.

In this paper much reliance is placed on qualitative data. Statistical analysis and significance often derived from quantitative analysis do not always tell us as much as we wish about the issues such as are discussed in this paper. The point has been made by Caldwell that

Many demographers fail to appreciate that the quantified part of some phenomenon is merely one aspect of it, and often one that has been pushed into a certain configuration to make the measurement possible. And they do not often appreciate just how artificial it is to break up continuous variables into quantifiable segments (Caldwell 1994a:9-10).

Nevertheless, quantitative data sometimes point to issues which are later explored and discussed with qualitative evidence. Intra-household relationships in polygynous unions appear to be complex beyond what we can easily explain in statistical terms, and consequently a more in-depth qualitative approach seems appropriate. The findings presented here were collected from qualitative research conducted among some Yoruba communities in Nigeria.

Discussion

One of the most important distinctions among children is that stemming from polygynous unions. . . . The most important divisions among children in the same household usually stem from their mother's characteristics: their seniority in the house, education level, families' social and political connections, business success, or special designations such as the favourite wife or the 'official' wife of an important urban man who must appear in 'civilized' contexts with only one wife (Bledsoe 1990:563).

We need to know more about the structure of the family In terms of the husband's payment for the treatment of wives, does the situation differ between monogamous and polygynous marriages or senior and junior wives ? (Orubuloye, Caldwell and Caldwell 1991:207-208).

Iyawo ti a ba feran ni omo re n'wuni: It is the wife one loves whose children are admired.

For a long time there has been different or preferential treatment by husbands of their wives of different status in polygynous unions, in almost all cultures where two or more women are married to the same man.

The limitation of the quantitative findings briefly presented in the preceding section raises a number of questions. Which of the wives in a polygynous marriage usually gets more of the husband's attention, love and support than the others ? Do the husband's responses to illness in his polygynous family vary with different types of child illness ? How much do the husband's job and presence at home affect his responses to the illness of children of different wives ? There are more questions, which may be answered by future research. My intention in this paper is to explore common expressions among the Yoruba, and see if they explain some of the preferential and different treatments of child illness in polygynous unions.

One of the Yoruba expressions is: *iyawo ti a ba feran ni omo re n'wuni*, meaning *it is the wife one loves whose children are admired*. The corollary to this statement is the common belief among the Yoruba that good children can only come from a good wife, although the concept of 'being good' is always from the husband's point of view. If a woman is considered bad by the husband, her children invariably will be seen as bad. A thorough examination of this expression will probably elucidate the differences in husbands' responses to each of their wives and involvement in treatment of their children's illnesses.

The eleven men who took part in the male focus-group discussion all agreed that it is not possible for a man to love all his wives equally. There was a consensus among them that the polygynous family is common and one of its certain characteristics is that a man cannot love all his wives the same. However, they differed on the reasons for this. While some of the discussants thought that the senior wife usually enjoys the favour and support of her husband, others maintained that the junior wife stands a better chance.

Similarly, some of the men considered this situation as common and natural in polygynous families, while some argued that the character of the individual wife is a crucial factor in determining the husband's disposition and relationships with the wife. For example, one of the discussants said:

It depends on the character of the wives, I have seen a man with two wives, the younger one was so kind, good, hardworking and as a result the man loved her more than the first one who was hostile and had no respect for the husband and his relations.

Another man's opinion was:

A man may have a wife at home and she may not be useful in taking good care of the husband or she may not be the responsible type. As a result the husband may decide to go out and look for another wife. For example, my father first married my mother, and later, because of circumstances, he took another wife. As soon as my father brought in the second woman, there were repercussions. My mother started going to herbalists for one reason or the other. My father thus decided to shift his love and interest from my mother to the new wife and because of that my mother had to leave my father's house.

The reports above suggest a number of issues. Apart from the belief of Yoruba men that by nature they are polygynous (Orubuloye 1994), and that polygyny itself tends to bring social benefit to men, the second quotation suggests that men often take other wives as a result of the behaviour of their first one. This may be seen as a way men tend to rationalize or justify their action in taking another woman. Women would have a different explanation for the decision of a man to take a new wife. For example, no woman will agree that her bad behaviour has motivated her husband to take another woman, she would rather argue that the presence of a new 'stranger' in the marriage has led to her bad behaviour.

The viewpoint of Mr. Agbelere seems to support the first line of explanation usually given by men whenever they take an additional wife:

The issue is that the Yoruba used to say *obinrin so iwa nu, O l' Oun ko lori oko*, meaning a woman who has lost good virtue considered herself to be ill-lucked in finding a suitable husband. My father has two wives, and it was not his will to marry two wives, for my mother was the first one and she was wise, clever, clean with good behaviour and virtues and she came from a good family. Nevertheless, as you all know, there is no way women will not misbehave. When this happened to my mother, some other people pushed my father to take the second wife. But, unfortunately, the new wife was so dirty that it was easier to continue to love my mother than her. She was not even allowed to prepare food for my father. It is not possible for a man to love a woman like that, who is also troublesome, quarrelling and fighting with all people most of the time. That is the situation.

Women's opinions are quite contrary to men's explanations. In a situation where the husband has taken an additional wife, most women will rationalize their behaviour in a way that will justify them and shift the blame onto their husbands. For example, findings from the female focus group meetings show that whenever a man decides to take an additional wife, his former wife will always blame him, especially when there is a misunderstanding between the co-wives, or when the man is failing in his duty of sharing his love equally between them.

One comprehensive and interesting opinion from the discussion meetings was given by Mrs Iyaalelagba, the first wife of a man who is currently married to three wives:

You see you men, no one can trust you, when a woman is married to you, she leaves everything she has before, her own paternal house, her father's name, and she becomes your wife. At this point, you will promise heaven and earth for her, some women even abandon their education for their husbands, no matter the education we've had before, we end it up in the kitchen for the men. Although, at the beginning, the man will pretend to love and he tries to do everything for the wife, suddenly, one day for some flimsy reasons, he starts to look for other women, and this often happens after the wife has given birth to two or three children. Before you know in some cases, the new woman has come into your matrimonial home. It is at this point that the first woman no longer knows how to do things in the right way, she does not know how to cook good food again, she is not good any more, and all those useless excuses will start to come from the man, and sometimes the man is driven into such action by the type of friends he has. Tell me, *ha !* which woman is good or which one is bad ? Which woman will not appreciate love from the husband? But when frustration has arrived, because of the *iyawo soyoyo*, then the attitude of the first woman will change. After all, our father used to say *'omo eni ni oko eni'* [meaning 'her children are her husband', that is, a woman's status is only consolidated in her husband's house by the number of children she has]. But one thing that is sure is that *opa ti a fi na*

iyaale ni, o mbe l'aja fun iyawo [the whip with which the first wife was beaten is kept inside the ceiling for the new wife]. That is the whole truth of the matter.

The two viewpoints presented above shows the divergence of husband-wife relationships in most polygynous unions. But whatever the direction of the argument, the character, attitudes and relationship between a man and his wife largely determine the type of treatment she receives from her husband. The variations in the disposition of the husband to each of his wives may be a product of the wife's attitude and behaviour, and at the same time it could be the other way round. If a man takes another wife as a result of dissatisfaction with the character and behaviour of the first one, obviously, the new wife will enjoy more of the husband's care than the first one. She also has a better chance of access to his resources than the first one with whom he has become dissatisfied.

Further findings seem to suggest who among the senior and junior wives is likely to have the greater chance of access to the husband's resources and support, especially when it comes to the question of paying for medical treatment. The opinion of Mr. Ikulelebe is stated below.

My own understanding of the discussion is that the second or younger wife more often gets the favour of the husband than the first wife. The reason is that if you look at it from all sides, she is younger and more beautiful than the first one, and as a result the husband would prefer her to the older one. Furthermore, historically I can say that the majority of Africans are polygynists. For example, as a farmer a man would need many hands on his farm, and from my experience my father married many wives for this reason. However, he used to love the junior ones most because they were young, attractive and active in all aspects of life.

It is evident from this statement that junior or younger wives tend to have a better chance of support and love from husbands than senior wives, and it repeats the view that African men are by nature polygynists. However, Mr. Igba-kolo-bi-orere expressed his view on what might make a man love one of his wives more than others:

My own explanation is that the character of the woman is important. Truly, a new wife might use her beauty and some other qualities to win the favour and interest of the husband at the expense of those married into the union before her. However, this is just an initial advantage, and very soon the illusion will fade away gradually. If she has no good manners her character will soon become clear to the man and his love might shift back to the elder wife. However if she has good manners, she might enjoy the husband's favour and care more than her senior counterparts in the union. Nevertheless, I agree that, naturally, husbands love one wife more than the others but their character will determine which one. Beauty may determine whom to marry, but character determines the longer-term affection, love and concern for a woman and her children.

It seems to be rare for a polygynous man to love and support all his wives equally, and junior or younger wives stand a better chance of getting the husband's affection and support. Does this also happen during the time of treatment of children's illness? Can a man transfer the love he has for a woman to her children in times of sickness and be less supportive to wives he seems not to love also whenever her children fall sick ?

The opinions of both Mr. Gbeborun and Mr. Moriyiri addressed the issue of how a husband's love toward a particular wife extends to her children.

Gbeborun: It appears to me that if a man is sick and there is a woman who cares for him and who is closer to him than other wives, he will love her more than the others . . .

However, when a woman or any of her children is sick, the way her husband responds to her and assists her in seeking treatment is usually a clear manifestation of the love he has towards her. Furthermore, to my mind it also depends on the attitude of the man. To be sincere, the majority of those that hate one or some of their wives normally transfer the hatred to the children of the wives, to the extent that the kind of treatment he gives to the mother, he will also give to the children. Invariably, when the children of the loved wife have received ten naira from the father, the children of the hated wife have received only one-tenth of that amount. We see this kind of example very well and it is very common around here. This should not surprise you, after all, our father used to say the proverb, *iyawo ti a ba feran ni omo re n'wuni*.

Moriyiri: There is no controversy in it. It is clear, and we all know it that a man will concentrate more of his effort and support on the wife he loves most and spend more on her children. From past experiences, I found out that the husband helps and spends more money on the wife he loved most. However, if a man tries to divide his love into equal portions between his wives by using his education and knowledge of books, and he puts them in different houses as is being practised nowadays, he may try to love them equally, and then there would be no serious jealousy among the wives. However, this is difficult for a man to do.

Mr. Otitokoro shared his own experience on this subject:

My experience in a polygamous house where I now live shows that men always transfer the love they have for a woman to her children, even when they are sick. My landlord took his second wife a few years ago. Each time I noticed that when anything happens to the senior one [*yaale*], that man always felt unconcerned about her. However, if anything happens to the junior wife [*iyawo*], he will go to any length to make sure he satisfies her and cares for her. As a result of this, it has been fighting today and quarrelling tomorrow, and there has been no peace in the household since. The man now has a kind of predominant love for the younger one and the same love has been transferred to her children. He can now spend thousands of naira on the children of the younger wife, while the older wife has to look for assistance from her own relations if she cannot meet the cost of the treatment herself.

The contribution of Mr. Agbateru also throws more light on the discussion:

We should not be surprised at what Mr. Otitokoro has just said, for we all know that the proverb says *iyawo ti a ba feran ni omo re n'wuni*. Experience has shown that, even if the child is not good at all, and even if he behaves like an idiot, the father will carry him and kiss him, because he loves the mother. It is quite likely that a man will love the children of his favourite wife more than all other children. In my case, my first wife had two children for me, and so did the second wife, but since I loved one more than the other, I cannot tell a lie, I love my junior wife more than the first wife, although I cannot tell you all the reasons. It is natural and it may be inevitable that I must love her children more than all other children, certainly, that is how it used to be.

Finally, Mr. Ape-jeun-ma-je-baje revealed how he thought that the mother's position and relationship with the father affects the treatment received by her children:

Thank you, the Yoruba often say *ohun a ba fe ni iwu'ni, ohun a ba feran ni'po lola eni* meaning it is what we want that is admired, and what we admire forms a greater part of our wealth. In Yorubaland, as Mr. Agbateru has said, it is true that the love the husband has for any of his wives extends to her children. I came from a family of many wives — my father had about seven wives — and I observed that, among them, my father loved my mother most, and I discovered that, because of this love, many family matters were revealed to us by my father, even things not revealed to the children of other wives. He used to call us and tell us certain matters in confidence. Furthermore, when children are sick, truly, the love of the father to the child's mother is a crucial determinant of whether there will be proper care from the husband for the sick child or not. It is not that this man will not try to help all his children, but more would be spent on children of the favourite wife. For example, if he spent five naira on the children of the wife he does not love very well, he would spend one hundred naira or more on any of the children of his favourite. There is care for all children in the family, but it is more for some than others.

All the discussants agreed that education does not have any effect on the differing behaviour of a man to his wives. Although one of them maintained that religion might make a man love all his wives equally, this also is a controversial issue. The polygynous nature of man and the different dispositions towards wives in polygynous unions among the Yoruba were clearly demonstrated. The in-depth interviews with women in polygynous unions were also quite revealing. Most of the women interviewed who were senior wives reported that their husbands had abandoned them and their children for new or junior wives. None of the women who were junior wives complained of lack of support from their husband, which also suggests that first wives are at a greater risk of being put aside by their husbands. Two case studies of senior wives are presented.

Mrs. Kojumaribi, 20 years old, had been married for five years without any problems. According to her, her husband used to perform all the responsibilities expected of him as a good husband. Suddenly the man decided to take another wife about six months ago, and, as a result, the reverse is the case with her now. She now suffers total neglect and lack of attention from the husband, and quite often he beats her up and gives her no money. The man does not even bother to care for the only baby girl she has for him. At the time of the survey, she had separated and now lives with her own parents, while the husband lives with the new wife, who now has his whole affection and care. She said that she was now prepared to divorce him very soon.

Mrs. Iyayipo is in a situation quite similar to the one above. She is about 35 years old. She complained that her husband does not pay attention to her any more, because he now has many wives. She was the first wife, but the husband now prefers the most junior wife. According to her, the husband now treats the junior one with more love and care than any of the senior ones, and the children of the favourite junior wife receive better treatment and attention from the husband when they are sick than her own children. She complained bitterly about this and how she had lost four children already, although she did not attribute their deaths to the attitude of the husband, two of the children died of measles, and the other two died mysteriously. The latter two deaths were said to have happened around midday.

It was very difficult to reach the husbands of these women for interview, but their situation elucidates the results of misunderstanding and differential love and support of husbands in polygynous unions.

Conclusion

Regardless of the character of a man, is he likely to behave differently to his wives? Is this likely to affect his responses to his children's illness and how they are treated? Unfortunately that is the case. Although we cannot conclusively say which of the wives in polygynous marriages will be more favoured by the husband than others, the qualitative evidence suggests that junior wives and their children have a greater chance of enjoying both the moral and financial support of husbands than senior wives, and this is also true for the treatment of illness.

One important aspect of treatment of child illness that could be greatly affected by the differing husband-wife relationships in polygynous unions is that of meeting the cost of treatment. The favoured wife and her children are more likely to enjoy both moral and financial support from the husband in paying health costs within the family. On the other hand, the neglected senior wife is now obliged to pay for treatment alone or seek for support from her grown-up children or from her own relations. This is an important issue, especially during this period of the Structural Adjustment Program, when the cost of treatment has gone up drastically and government health care support has almost completely collapsed. The SAP policy has also negatively affected the economic power of most women, who used to have economic independence from their husbands in the past. Most women then paid for treatment for their children more often, because they were able to do so; however, it seems they are now obliged to do so if their husband is not responding.

An implication of the differential responses from fathers to the treatment of child illness on the basis of the mother's position in the household, is that some children are at great risk of morbidity and mortality.

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