

Family Conflict, Parenting Styles, And Psychological Adjustment Among Children From Polygamous Families: Evidence From Ijebu-Ode, Ogun State

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Abstract

Background: Family structure plays a crucial role in children's psychological development, particularly within polygamous households where family conflict and parenting practices may shape emotional and behavioural outcomes. A correlational survey design was adopted using a two-phase approach. In phase I, 250 adolescents (aged 12-18 years) were screened to identify those from polygamous families. Phase II involved 134 eligible participants who completed standardised measures of family conflict, parenting styles, and psychological adjustment. Pearson correlation and multiple regression analyses were employed. Family conflict was not significantly related to psychological adjustment ($r = -0.077$, $p > 0.05$). However, parenting styles jointly predicted psychological adjustment, with authoritarian parenting emerging as the only significant independent predictor of poorer adjustment outcomes ($\beta = 0.188$, $p < 0.05$). Psychological adjustment among children from polygamous families appears to be shaped more by parenting practices than by family conflict alone. Interventions targeting rigid and harsh parenting styles may therefore be more effective than conflict-focused approaches in promoting healthy emotional development.

Keywords: Authoritarian parenting, children, family conflict, parenting styles, polygamous families, psychological adjustment.

Introduction

Polygamous families are still common and are deeply rooted in the culture of many Nigerian societies, particularly in the Ijebu axis of Ogun State, Nigeria. Even though these families are accepted by society, they often put their kids in situations that are hard for them to deal with emotionally. Mixed parenting, lack of attention, and competition between siblings often cause family problems that last (Oginni et al., 2018). These difficulties are not random; they actually affect how kids see emotions, make friends, and deal with stress. The question of parenting style is closely related to this. In polygamous homes, parents have quite diverse ways of doing things. Some are harsh and dictatorial, while others are free and easy, and still others are aloof and frigid. This lack of consistency often hinders the emotional development and coping strategies of the children (Odeyemi & Oyetunde, 2020). Children who do not receive strong support may experience difficulties with self-esteem, social interactions, and conduct, rendering them more susceptible to psychological illnesses. While existing literature has addressed family conflict and parenting as distinct subjects, there is a paucity of research regarding their combined effects in polygamous contexts. The distinctive characteristics of these families can amplify the effects commonly associated with other family structures (Akanbi & Akinlabi, 2021). Given this gap, the present study examines the correlation between family conflict, parenting methods, and the psychological adjustment of children from polygamous families in Ijebu-Ode. It seeks to generate outcomes that guide interventions customised to the distinct issues encountered by these youngsters.

The family structure that is characterised by having more than one female as the wife of one man and with a large number of children of both the same gender and different ones is often referred to as polygamous (Sinai & Peleg, 2021). Although this structure is widely accepted culturally in most areas, it creates several relational dimensions. The factors contributing to the existence of polygamous households vary around the globe, spanning a wide range of social, economic, and cultural contexts (Mahmud, 2025). According to Charles et al. (2023) and Abalogu and Adingupu (2025), polygamy is strongly influenced by religious traditions, communal goals, and legal systems across a number of civilisations worldwide, including those in Africa, the Middle East, and several Asian countries. Nevertheless, the model often causes emotional tension due to rivalry over resources, parental attention, and household control.

One of the consistent factors all over the world is socio-economic instability. Third-party involvement, whereby a family provides equally to multiple wives and children, may create stress and conflict in low-income households (Chai & Schieman, 2022). Also, unbalanced emotional and material support is likely to lead to sibling conflicts and inconsistency in parenting (Ferencz et al., 2023). Cultural expectations can allow or even welcome polygyny; however, the emotional and psychological impact on the family members, especially children, can be massive.

The local issues of polygamous families are peculiar to the Nigerian setting, and they have a direct influence on the psychological adaptation of children (Adegboyega, 2024). The common family quarrel, typically rooted in competition between co-wives, child discrimination, and a lack of paternal interest, leads to the development of an unstable emotional state (Ene & Omoera, 2024). These tensions are typical in such regions as Ijebu-Ode, where polygamy is culturally tolerated and not always controlled (Iroye, 2021). Growing children can observe open conflicts or non-hostile favouritism, which causes anxiety, aggression, or withdrawal (Ayewoh, 2024). Polygamous households also differ in terms of parenting styles. There are parents who employ strict and authoritarian styles, as well as those who are permissive or cold (Folorunsho et al., 2024). Such inconsistency in discipline and emotional support may confuse, make children insecure, and socially isolate them (Na-Allah & Obafemi, 2023). Psychological outcomes deteriorate when support is not distributed equally. These patterns are not addressed in most Nigerian households, particularly in rural or low-income regions, underscoring the need for interventions that facilitate stability, emotional support, and consistent parenting behaviours.

Markedly, one of the major urban centres in Ogun State, such as Ijebu-Ode, presents a culturally appropriate and socio-economically diverse environment in which the psychological adaptation of

children in polygamous families is to be explored. Being the town with strong traditional roots, polygamous families are very common there, especially in older generations and extended families (Ukochovwera, 2021). This cultural practice has predisposed it as a suitable context in which parenting styles and family conflict can be reviewed in relation to the polygamous context and influence child development. In addition to cultural fit with the subject of the study, Ijebu-Ode has distinct socio-economic differences. The population consists of low- and middle-income families, many of whom are unable to afford a proper living, have restricted access to social services, and live in crowded conditions. The conditions tend to increase the stress levels in the household, especially in polygamous families where emotional and material resources are distributed among two or more units (Ogunyomi & Casper, 2021). Consequently, there is an emotional neglect of children in these homes, inconsistent parenting, and increased sibling rivalry, elements which affect the psychological adjustment (Kolawole, 2025). Moreover, schools in the region are recording an increase in emotional and behavioural issues among the students, with most of them associated with instability in the family and inconsistency with parents. Although such problems are common, little attention has been given in the existing literature on the effects of parenting styles and family conflict that have a joint determining role on psychological outcomes among children in polygamous families in such an environment.

Although existing Nigerian studies have independently examined family conflict, parenting styles, and children's psychological outcomes, very few have investigated their combined and relative predictive effects within polygamous family settings. Moreover, most prior research assumes that family conflict directly predicts maladjustment without empirically testing whether parenting practices may exert stronger or more proximal influence. This study addresses this gap by simultaneously examining family conflict and parenting styles as predictors of psychological adjustment among children from polygamous families in Ijebu-Ode, Ogun State.

The following research questions were posed in this study: 1. What is the relationship between family conflict and psychological adjustment among children from polygamous families? 2. What is the influence of parenting styles on the psychological adjustment of children in polygamous households? 3. Are there combined effects (s) of family conflict and parenting styles on the psychological adjustment of children in polygamous households?

Literature Review

Theoretical Review

Family System Theory

Family Systems Theory is an effective perspective developed by Murray Bowen (1978) that helps explain children's psychological adaptation in polygamous families. The basic idea of the theory is that the family is not a group of individuals but an emotional unit, in the behaviour of which the dynamics of the whole system are closely intertwined. The view is particularly applicable in polygamous families, in which there are several figures of parenthood, half-brothers, and complicated relationship structures, which complicate emotional interdependencies. In this type of system, co-wife conflicts, the disparity in parenting styles, and resource competition can cause an imbalance in the emotional state and damage the developmental conditions of a child. One of the main ideas of the Family Systems Theory is interdependence, that is, the fact that any change in a certain section of the family system cannot help but influence the others. Indirectly, in a polygamous household, such as co-wife emotional tension, a child may be negatively influenced regarding the manner of treatment or backing. When one of the mothers is marginalised, her children can also get less attention or less consistent parenting. These imbalances may cause emotional insecurity, confusion, and behavioural problems in children, which the focus of the study is the psychological adjustment.

The other concept is homeostasis, which is the family's tendency to remain emotionally stable. With high-conflict polygamous families, children can adjust by repressing, over-submissive or acting out, but not because this behaviour is healthy, but due to the need to maintain the balance of the family. With time, however, such coping patterns are also damaging to psychological growth. Also involved are subsystems and boundaries. Children can navigate multiple mothers, ambiguous lines of authority, and emotional attachments. Such processes may create identity confusion and interfere with the development of secure attachments, which are essential in the regulation of emotions and psychological health. Nonetheless, Family Systems Theory can elucidate the reasons behind the varying levels of psychological adjustment observed in children from polygamous families. It indicates that familial discord and inconsistent parenting are not isolated occurrences but rather expressions of profound systemic inconsistencies. This theoretical framework underscores the significance of comprehensive, family-oriented interventions that concentrate not solely on people but also on the entire emotional system in which they function.

In this study, family conflict is conceptualised as a system-level stressor (Hypothesis 1), parenting styles are conceptualised as proximal interactional processes that shape child adjustment (Hypothesis 2), and the combined effects of these parenting styles are conceptualised as reflecting broader family-system dynamics that influence psychological outcomes (Hypothesis 3). This study is guided by family systems theory.

Review of Empirical Studies and the Development of Hypotheses

Family Conflict on Psychological Adjustment among Children from Polygamous Families

The family conflict has become an intrinsic virtue of most polygamous families, where emotional tension, resource allocation rivalry, and irregular patterns of parenting rivalry bring up environments that can adversely impact the psychological well-being of children. Several studies have delved into the aftermaths of such family relationships, shedding some light on how constant antagonism in polygamous households leads to poor psychological adaptation in children. Interestingly, Al-Krenawi (2022) carried out a wide-ranging study in the Middle East, which included 300 children and 150 polygamous family mothers. The study established that children in such families had much more anxiety and lower self-esteem levels than children in monogamous families. The high amount of family conflict that was brought about by competition between co-wives and continuity of caregiving was highly described as causing these consequences. In addition, the degree of psychological distress was high in mothers, which deteriorated the negative emotional climate and ruined the possibility of the family to manage the situation effectively. Likewise, another longitudinal research carried out by the authors Buehler et al. (2020) was conducted on 120 children of polygamous families in Uganda. The researchers found out that the children forced to live with the unremitting inter-parental conflict also developed internalising issues such as anxiety and depression, and externalising behaviours through aggression within two years. The findings affirm the psychological risks of unresolved conflict in polygamous families as time goes by.

The study by Stewart and Chung (2022) is based on the academic research that tracked 150 Indonesian children of polygamous families concerning sibling rivalry. It revealed that competition, which brought rivalry as a result of competition for parental attention and unequal distribution of resources, raised anxiety and reduced self-worth. This underscores the significance of balanced parenthood and quality conflict resolution among families in order to have healthier emotional development. In addition, Ladan (2020) also addressed the situation in Nigeria, and the author focused his attention on the role of socio-economic conditions on the family of 300

polygamous families. The findings showed that financial strain, paternal superiority and co-wife competition caused a family discord which resulted in emotional imbalance and poor psychological accommodation of children. The study recommended economic empowerment and institutionalised support systems in a bid to reduce such adverse effects. Also, Cox and Paley (2021) in their research of 200 Indian children discovered that family conflict was less experienced by participants who had stronger emotional regulation skills. This highlights the protective ability of individual coping mechanisms. Goldenberg et al. (2016) give a brief background of the application of systemic family therapy in improving communication, conflict management, and parenting in different family settings. Research, such as that by Al-Krenawi (1998), has specifically employed family therapy with multispousal families.

All these studies emphasise the complicated connection between family conflict and psychological adjustment in a polygamous family. This study aims to establish community-based perspectives on how family conflict in polygamous households affects the psychological adaptation of children and to determine culturally sensitive ways of mitigating emotional distress caused by conflicts. It will examine the dynamics of family conflict in Ijebu-Ode, Ogun State. Hence, we suggest the following:

Hypothesis 1: There is no significant relationship between family conflict and psychological adjustment among children from polygamous families.

Hypothesis 2: There is no significant influence of parenting styles on the psychological adjustment of children in polygamous households.

Hypothesis 3: There is no significant combined effect of family conflict and parenting styles on the psychological adjustment of children in polygamous households.

Parenting Style and Psychological Adjustment among Children from Polygamous Families

Parenting styles refer to the patterns of behaviour and mood that parents rely on to nurture their children. Parenting styles are also important in the psychological adjustment of children in polygamous families, where the household models are in many cases complicated and emotionally laden. Caregiving inconsistencies may occur due to the different roles and duties of the different spouses, coupled with the lack of parental availability. It has been demonstrated that these discrepancies have an effect on the emotional stability, conduct, and sense of identity that youngsters possess. Sharif (2023) conducted research on the ramifications of permissive parenting in polygamous families in Northern Nigeria. It is vital to mention that this research was

accomplished. Permissive parenting, which is marked by high responsiveness and low punishment, was shown to be connected with impulsivity, low academic achievement, and an inability to adapt to cultural standards, according to the findings of a study that involved 250 children between the ages of 10 and 18 years old. The lack of a framework and consistency in the rules is likely to have contributed to emotional instability and the prominence of the need to educate parents on the balanced method. At the same time, Hassan and Yusuf (2022) investigated the phenomenon of authoritarian parenting among polygamous families in Kenya that were located in rural areas. The study, which included two hundred homes, discovered that the most significant predictors of unhappiness, detachment, and diminished self-esteem were severe discipline and insufficient emotional warmth. Also, the hierarchical and competitive dynamics that are common in polygamous families made these results even worse.

Ogunsanya et al. (2021) conducted an investigation on the issue of negligent parenting and collected data from 180 families located in the southwestern region of Nigeria. They discovered that emotional unreachability and a lack of supervision led to an increase in the incidence of aggression, a feeling of abandonment, and behavioural abnormalities among children. This was especially true in households in which the father had a significant number of women and children. The paper has stressed the importance of promoting the involvement of parents in polygamous households. Bakari et al. (2023) also found positive results when they examined authoritative parenting among Malaysian polygamous families. Their results showed greater psychological adaptation, as indicated by higher self-esteem and reduced behavioural disturbances, typified by warmth, responsiveness, and firmness in parenting. The paper has highlighted the importance of cultivating this style in polygamous life. According to Ladan (2020), socio-economic poverty usually influences the upbringing of children in polygamous families. The families that were strained financially had increased chances of authoritarian parenting or negligent parenting styles, which added to the anxiety, despair, and disruptive behaviours among the children. These results highlight the effects of the economy on influencing behavioural and emotional results.

This research demonstrates the significant correlation between parenting techniques and the mental health of children in polygamous households. Understanding these relationships is crucial for creating culturally sensitive interventions that promote healthier emotional growth. This paper investigates the impact of parenting strategies on the psychological adjustment of children in polygamous families in Ijebu-Ode, Ogun State. It seeks to develop culturally pertinent therapies

that promote emotional well-being and resilience among this often-overlooked yet unique community. Thus, the hypothesis below is suggested:

Conceptual Framework

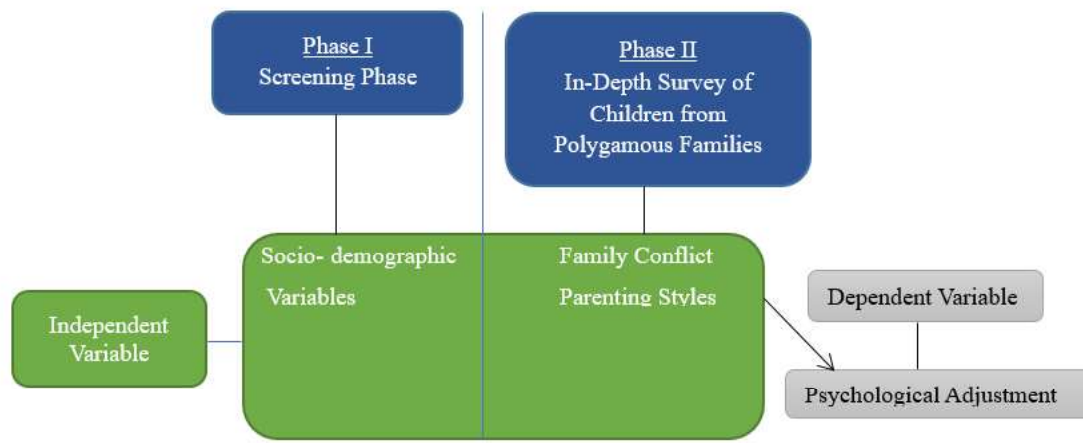


Figure 1: Hypothetical model for the study

The conceptual framework illustrates family conflict and parenting styles as independent variables predicting psychological adjustment. Parenting styles are conceptualised as proximal mechanisms through which family dynamics influence child outcomes, while family conflict represents a broader contextual stressor. Psychological adjustment is operationalised as emotional and behavioural functioning, with higher scores indicating poorer adjustment. The model assumes both independent and joint predictive effects of family conflict and parenting styles.

Methods

Design

In this research, the correlational survey approach was used to examine the relationship between family conflict, parenting styles and psychological adjustment among children of polygamous families in Ijebu-Ode, Ogun State. Its design consisted of two phases: screening (Phase I) and implementation (Phase II). Only the children in polygamous homes went to the second phase. Quantifiable data collection was enabled by standardised instruments, and Pearson's correlation and multiple regression were used to test relationships among variables. This method helped cover extensive data and increase the generalisability of the results to other similar groups.

Phase I: Screening

This sub-section talks about the screening process. 250 students were tested using a family structure form, which showed that 134 of them came from polygamous families and 116 came from nuclear families based on the features of their houses.

Research Design

In Phase I screening, a descriptive survey methodology was used to classify individuals into groups based on family structure. This design helped obtain baseline data at the maximum level without changing any factors and ensured accurate group identification.

Sample and Sampling Procedure

During the screening round (phase I), 250 pupils were randomly selected from Adeola Odutola College, a public secondary school located in the Ijebu-Ode Local Government Area of Ogun State. This was a means of making sure that every kid had an equal opportunity at being selected, which made the sample less prone to being skewed. The primary objective was to assess the family backgrounds of the pupils with the help of the Screening Form of Familial Structure. This instrument was based on the data regarding the number of co-wives, the existence of step-siblings, and the extent of paternal engagement in order to categorise the respondents into nuclear and polygamous families. Based on their responses, 116 students were identified as having nuclear families, and 134 students were established to be in polygamous families. The 134 students representing the polygamous families were the only ones to be taken into the actual phase (Phase II) of the study. In general, the gender balance in the total screening sample was slightly skewed towards female respondents. The average percentage of male students was 46.8 (117 out of 250), whereas female students constituted 53.2 (133 out of 250). Among the nuclear family group, 48 respondents (41.4%), and 68 respondents (58.6%), respectively, mentioned they were male and female, respectively, and again, the composition of the group is female-dominant. This could give a biased understanding of gendering experiences in nuclear families, especially when it comes to parenting and emotional adaptation. On the aspect of birth order, there were 28 (24.1) first-borns, 34 (29.3) second-borns, with most (54) (46.6) of the respondents in other birth positions. This is an indicator of a healthy distribution that is open to examination of the effects of birth order on family roles and adaptation. Sibling distribution indicated that 84 respondents (72.4%) had 1-5 siblings, 23 (19.8%) had 6-10 siblings, and only 9 (7.8%) had 11 or more siblings, which is a moderately sized family by nuclear-family standards. Only 1 of the respondents indicated the

presence of two mothers in the household, with no step-parents, validating the monogamous form of this subgroup.

Table 1: Socio-demographic Characteristics of Participants in the First Phase of the Study (n=250)

Variable	Category	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Gender	Male	117	46.8
	Female	133	53.2
Position in Family	1 st	53	21.2
	2nd	68	27.2
	Others	129	51.6
Number of Siblings	1 – 5	179	71.6
	6 – 10	45	18.0
	11 and Above	26	10.4
No. of mothers/wives in father's household	1 – 5	219	87.6
	6 and Above	31	12.4
Family Type	Nuclear Family	116	46.4
	Polygamous Family	134	53.6
Relationship to Stepparent	Very Close	41	16.4
	Close	67	26.8
	Neutral	89	35.6
	Not Close	53	21.2
Total		250	100

Mean of Male Respondents: = $(117 \div 250) \times 100 = 46.8\%$

Mean of Female Respondents: = $(133 \div 250) \times 100 = 53.2\%$

Inclusion and exclusion criteria: In phase one of the study, specific inclusion and exclusion criteria were established to ensure a focused and relevant participant pool.

Inclusion Criteria: Students who were in-school adolescents (12-18 years old) currently enrolled in Adeola Odutola College, Ijebu-Ode, were eligible to participate in the study. Eligibility was also determined by the confirmation of a polygamous family history in Phase I screening, that is. co-wives, step-siblings, or joint paternity. Only respondents who met the following criteria in their respective households were chosen to participate in Phase II. Additional criteria included the presence of complete answers to screening items and the willingness to participate in the entire data collection process.

Exclusion Criteria: Students were excluded from the study if they were from nuclear families, as identified during the family structure screening. They were also excluded if they were not within the 12-18 years age range, unable to present all the required information during Phase I, or when they were unavailable during critical study phases. Participation required informed consent;

therefore, any student who refused to give informed consent or a parent/ guardian who did not give informed consent on behalf of him/her was excluded. Also, students whose family structures were conflicting or differing in their responses were not taken into account in Phase II.

Research Instruments

During this first stage, a Family Structure Screening Form was used to identify the family background of every respondent. The items contained in this tool measured the number of co-wives, presence of step-siblings, and amount of paternal involvement, and the objective of classifying the respondents into nuclear or polygamous family groups. Only the respondents who were classified as having been brought up in polygamous families (Phase II) went ahead and answered the entire set of psychological scales.

Procedure

During Phase I, 250 respondents from Adeola Odutola College in Ijebu-Ode were screened using a brief instrument to assess their family background. Of these, 116 were from nuclear families and 134 from polygamous households with at least two co-wives.

Data Analysis

Descriptive statistics were applied to the baseline data to generate frequency distributions, means, and percentages. This provided an understanding of the demographic composition and family backgrounds, allowing researchers to identify participants from polygamous families who would advance to phase 2 of the study.

Phase 2: In-Depth Survey of Students from Polygamous Families

Research Design

The second phase remained as a correlational survey design in which the survey targeted students who were identified during Phase I as members of polygamous families. This group of participants further took the test to investigate how family conflict, coupled with parenting styles and psychological adjustment, were related to each other, and standardised measures were used to examine the patterns without any manipulation of any variables.

Participants

Out of the initial sample, 134 students were identified as being from polygamous families, defined in this study as households with at least two co-wives and shared paternal involvement. These students constituted the final sample for Phase II of the study.

Sampling and Sampling Technique

The sampling method used in Phase 2 was purposive sampling of the 134 students identified in Phase 1. This had the advantage that the sample used in phase 2 was a specific group of children in polygamous families. Conversely, the gender balance of the demographic respondents of polygamous families was very close, with 69 males (51.5%) and 65 females (48.5%). This equilibrium enhances the objectivity of gendered reaction in the setting of polygamous families. In the family position, 25 respondents (18.7%) were firstborns, 34 (25.4%) were secondborns, and 75 (55.9%) respondents were classified under others. Such a high percentage in the latter is given by the large families that are usually found in polygamous families with children of more than one wife, adding complexity to the birth order dynamics. In terms of sibling count, 95 respondents (70.9%) had between 1-5 siblings, 24 (17.9%) had between 6-10 siblings, and 15 (11.2%) had 11 or more siblings.

Although still biased towards small to medium household sizes, this distribution is slightly higher for larger families compared to those reported in nuclear homes. With regards to the Number of Mothers in the household, 116 respondents (86.6%) stated that they lived with 2-5 mothers, and 18 (13.4%) stated that they lived with 6 or more mothers in the household. The reactions are in line with the anticipations of a polygamous family unit where there are many maternal roles involved. The respondents' connections to step-parents varied significantly. 23 (17.2%) said their relationship is very close, 32 (23.9%) said it is close, 50 (37.3%) said it is neutral, and 29 (21.6%) said it is not close. However, whereas it seems that some of the children living in polygamous environments were able to develop a positive relationship with their step-parents, a significant number (58.9%) of them were emotionally detached or strained with their step-parents, a phenomenon that may greatly affect their psychological well-being, coupled with their well-being. The relative gender mean of this group was 51.5% genders and 48.5% females, giving almost equal representation of both sexes in the polygamous scenario.

Table 2: Socio-Demographic Characteristics of the Respondents from polygamous families (n=134)

Variable	Category	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Gender	Male	69	51.5%
	Female	65	48.5%
Position in Family	1 st	25	18.7%
	2 nd	34	25.4%
	Others	75	55.9%
No. of Siblings	1–5	95	70.9%
	6–10	24	17.9%

No. of mothers/wives in father's household	11 & Above	15	11.2%
	2-5	116	86.6%
Relationship with Step-Parent	6 and Above	18	13.4%
	Very Close	23	17.2%
	Close	32	23.9%
	Neutral	50	37.3%
	Not Close	29	21.6%
Total	134	100%	

Mean Distribution (Phase II – Polygamous Families):

Mean of Male Respondents = $69 \div 134 \times 100 = 51.5\%$

Mean of Female Respondents = $65 \div 134 \times 100 = 48.5\%$

Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria

The Phase II participants were in-school adolescents aged 12-18 years who were in Phase I determined to be of polygamous families with two or more co-wives and had common paternal involvement. There had to be a full response to all psychological instruments, too. Students were excluded if they were from nuclear families, provided incomplete data, refused consent, or missed major data-collection periods. Others who were not within the specified age bracket or provided inconsistent information about their families were also excluded.

Instrumentation

Psychological Adjustments: To measure psychological adjustment, the study utilised the Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire (SDQ), developed by Goodman (1997). The SDQ assessed five subdomains of psychological function: emotional symptoms, conduct problems, hyperactivity, peer problems, and prosocial behaviour. The total problems score was calculated in this study by adding the four problem subscales (emotional, conduct, hyperactivity, and peer problems), with higher scores reflecting greater psychological problems and poorer adjustment. This cumulative difficulty score was the dependent variable in both the correlation and regression analyses.

Family Conflict: This subscale was adapted from the Family Environment Scale by Moos and Moos (1986) and contextualised for use in polygamous Nigerian households. The instrument assessed the frequency and intensity of family disputes, including parental disagreements, verbal aggression, and emotional hostility.

Parenting Styles: This scale was adapted from the Parental Authority Questionnaire invented by Buri (1991). It grouped parenting styles into authoritative, authoritarian, and permissive based on a retrospective report of parental behaviour. Some of the dimensions examined were discipline,

warmth, responsiveness and autonomy support. Adjustments were made to ensure cultural appropriateness in the Nigerian context. Neglectful parenting was not assessed as a separate style in this study.

Data Collection Procedure

Participants in Phase II completed supplementary sections of the questionnaire. These enquiries pertained to psychological adaptation, familial discord, and parenting methodologies. To ensure continuity and minimise biases associated with location or testing conditions, the questionnaire was administered in the same school context as in Phase I.

Data Analysis

In Phase II, the statistical analysis employed several approaches to evaluate the relationships and anticipated impacts among the analysed variables. Pearson's Product-Moment Correlation was employed to determine the relationship among family conflict, parenting styles, and psychological adjustment, as well as to evaluate the strength and direction of the association. A multiple regression study was conducted to assess how family conflict and parenting styles, both together and separately, predict the psychological adjustment of children raised in polygamous families. This was conducted to determine the statistical significance of the independent variables.

RESULTS

Hypothesis Testing

Hypothesis One: There is no significant relationship between family conflict and psychological adjustment among children from polygamous families

Table 3: Pearson Correlation showing the relationship between family conflict and psychological adjustment

Variables	Mean	S.D	df	R	Sig.
Family Conflict	3.50	0.50	132	-0.077	>.05
Psychological Adjustment	2.20	0.50			

{ $r(132) = -0.077, p > 0.05$ }

The results in the table above indicate that there is no significant relationship between family conflict and psychological adjustment among the respondents. The correlation coefficient was -0.077 , with a p-value greater than 0.05 , indicating a weak, statistically non-significant relationship. Therefore, the null hypothesis, which states that there is no significant relationship between family conflict and psychological adjustment, is retained, while the alternative hypothesis is rejected. This

finding suggests that within this sample, family conflict alone may not be sufficiently intense or consistently perceived to exert a direct effect on psychological adjustment.

Hypothesis Two: There is no significant influence of parenting styles on the psychological adjustment of children in polygamous households.

Table 4: Multiple Regression showing prediction of parenting styles on psychological adjustment

Variables	B	T	P	R	R ²	F	Sig.
Authoritative Parenting	-0.141	-1.725	>.05				
Authoritarian Parenting	0.188	2.305	<.05	0.182	0.033	2.805	<.05
Permissive Parenting	0.039	0.460	>.05				

The regression model was found to be statistically significant, $F(3, 130) = 2.805, p < 0.05$, indicating that the parenting styles jointly have a significant influence on psychological adjustment. However, among the individual predictors, only authoritarian parenting significantly predicted psychological adjustment ($\beta = 0.188, p < 0.05$), while authoritative and permissive parenting were not significant. Based on these findings, the null hypothesis is rejected, and the alternative hypothesis is accepted. This implies that parenting styles, particularly authoritarian, influence the psychological adjustment of children in polygamous households.

Hypothesis Three

Hypothesis 3: There is no significant combined effect of family conflict and parenting styles on the psychological adjustment of children in polygamous households.

Table 5: Summary of Multiple Regression table showing joint and independent prediction of family conflict and parenting styles on psychological adjustment

Variables	B	T	P	R	R ²	F	Sig.
Family Conflict	-0.089	-1.342	>.05				
Authoritative Parenting	-0.143	-1.743	>.05				
Authoritarian Parenting	0.191	2.347	<.05	0.200	0.040	2.561	<.05
Permissive Parenting	0.043	0.511	>.05				

{N = 134; $F(4, 129) = 2.561, p < 0.05; R^2 = 0.040$ }

The regression model, which included family conflict and the three parenting styles, significantly predicted the psychological adjustment of children in polygamous households, $F(4, 129) = 2.561, p < 0.05$, accounting for approximately 4% of the variance in psychological adjustment ($R^2 =$

0.040). Among the predictors, only authoritarian parenting made a statistically significant unique contribution ($\beta = 0.191, p < 0.05$), whereas family conflict, authoritative parenting, and permissive parenting did not significantly predict psychological adjustment. Given that higher SDQ total difficulties scores reflect poorer psychological adjustment, the positive β value for authoritarian parenting indicates that more authoritarian parenting is associated with worse emotional and behavioural outcomes for adolescents. Thus, the null hypothesis that family conflict and parenting styles would not jointly predict psychological adjustment is rejected.

Discussion

This paper examined the connections between family conflict, parenting styles and psychological adjustment among children in polygamous families. The results were also taken against the background of existing academic literature to appreciate the impacts of family relationships in polygamous families on children in terms of mental and emotional health.

Unlike expectations and much of the existing literature, this study did not find a statistically significant relationship between family conflict and children's psychological adjustment. Although higher conflict was descriptively associated with poorer emotional outcomes, the effect was not significant. This suggests that family conflict may influence child adjustment indirectly, operating through everyday parenting practices, emotional availability, and disciplinary styles rather than as an independent stressor. Consistent with family systems theory, parenting behaviours may therefore constitute the more proximal pathway through which broader family tensions affect children's emotional and behavioural functioning.

Although more emotional problems were descriptively associated with higher levels of conflict, this relationship did not reach statistical significance. This is contrary to the results of Al-Krenawi (2002) and Khosravi et al. (2023), who found that anxiety and low self-esteem among children in polygamous families were correlated with higher expectations of inter-wife rivalry and inconsistent parenting in polygamous families. In a comparable vein, Buehler et al. (2020) also found that an exposure to chronic inter-parental conflict was a significant predictor of internalising (for instance, depression, anxiety) and externalising (for example, aggression) behavioural issues. The difference between the current results and the literature suggests that, in the given sample, other family functioning factors, such as parenting style or the broader support system, may have been more salient than conflict itself in determining the children's psychological outcomes. Perhaps there was also not enough level, frequency, or perception of conflict measured in this study to demonstrate a definite statistical effect of adjustment.

The wider literature also highlights how sibling rivalry and perceived parental favouritism in polygamous families are also one of the routes through which conflict can influence the well-being of children. An excellent illustration is Stewart and Chung (2022), who emphasised that competition driven by inequality in resource distribution and focus is one of the causes of emotional trauma and a sense of worthlessness. Although the current data did not reveal a direct, significant relation between conflict scores and psychological adjustment, these theoretical and empirical findings are significant for interpreting how conflict processes may still be played out in polygamous families, even though they were not strongly represented in this dataset.

Conversely, the study's results on parenting styles were more in line with previous research. The prominence of authoritarian parenting as the strongest predictor represents the central empirical contribution of this study, highlighting parenting practices as a more immediate determinant of child adjustment than family conflict in a polygamous context. Only authoritarian parenting was a major predictor of children's psychological adjustment in the regression model. Greater authoritarian parenting was linked to worse outcomes of the adjustment process, which indicated that harsh, rigid and controlling parental behaviours are factors that lead to emotional and behavioural problems in children. This is in line with Hassan and Yusuf (2022), who noted that authoritarian parenting in Kenyan polygamous families was associated with emotional distress because of strict discipline and low emotional warmth. The current findings, thus, support the idea that in the context of polygamous families, the quality of the daily parenting practices can be of greater immediate influence on the adjustment of children than the family structure or conflict as such.

Authoritative and permissive parenting failed to present any significant distinctive effects on psychological adjustment after adjusting for other factors. However, in the past, researchers have reported positive results associated with authoritative parenting, as well as some risks that may be involved with being overly permissive. As an example, Bakari et al. (2023) have found that authoritative parenting, characterised by consistent discipline, responsiveness, and effective communication, is associated with increased self-esteem, improved social skills, and a reduction in behavioural issues in children from polygamous families. On the other hand, Sharif (2023) found that high levels of impulsivity, poor academic performance, and even failure to conform to social regulations were associated with permissive parenting, characterised by low structure and weak boundaries. Combined with the previous results, this suggests that authoritative parenting is not a strong independent predictor in the current analysis, but rather plays a theoretically

significant role as a protective factor. Meanwhile, even in some cases, permissive patterns can be dangerous.

The neglectful parenting concept is a good idea, also discussed in the literature on polygamous families, especially in the context of high family sizes and minimal parenting. As an example, Ogunsanya et al. (2021) found that emotional issues and poor academic performance depended on neglectful parenting in polygamous families. Nevertheless, it should be observed that the current study did not specifically measure the negligent parenting style. A mention of hot and careless patterns in this discussion, therefore, is an input of research that has been done before and not the actual production of evidence by this dataset.

When family conflict and parenting styles were analysed in a combined model, the overall prediction of psychological adjustment was significant; however, only authoritarian parenting made a significant contribution. This shows that the combination of harsh parenting and conflict-prone family environments is perhaps the more harmful, although conflict alone had no evident independent effect. Instead of indicating an official statistical interaction, such results indicate that polygamous children are potentially especially susceptible when they experience both strict, punitive parenting and relationship conflicts in the family at the same time.

The broader literature also recognises the role of contextual and moderating variables that shape how family dynamics affect child outcomes. The socioeconomic status, such as the one, has been found to significantly contribute to the parenting practices, as well as the level of family conflict (Ali et al., 2023). Research has indicated that financial pressure and scarcity in low-income polygamous families could contribute to authoritarian or neglectful parenting and, thus, exacerbate the tension and stress in the household (Stallman & Ohan, 2016; Ashraf et al., 2024; Kolawole, 2025). Although not formally tested in the present study, previous findings suggest that economic hardship, harsh parenting, and repeated conflict can create a highly stressful environment that negatively affects children's psychological well-being.

On the same note, studies have shown that parental support and family intervention programmes may be used to counteract the adverse impact of problematic parenting and conflict. Yan et al. (2024) found that families participating in counselling/social support programmes exhibited better parenting and less conflict, which, in turn, were linked to better emotional outcomes in children. This set of insights suggests that both parent-centred and child-centred interventions can help in polygamous communities.

Lastly, children's personal capacity to regulate their emotions and cope with stress is another personal resource that helps them deal with family stressors. Similar findings have been reported by previous studies, which have identified that children with better coping skills exhibit resilience and fewer behavioural issues, even under high-conflict or low-support conditions. This implies that the pressure of parenting style and conflict is high, but children's personal coping resources can buffer against long-term damage. Enhancing emotional control and problem-solving abilities by school-based or community-based programmes might therefore supplement the family-based interventions in encouraging children in polygamous families to have healthier psychological adjustments.

Conclusion

This research paper discussed the relationship between family conflict and parenting styles and the psychological adaptation of polygamous family children in Ijebu-Ode in Ogun State. Family conflict was not significantly associated with psychological adjustment; however, parenting style, specifically authoritarian parenting, was the most significant predictor. Authoritarian parenting, which is associated with strict and stern control, was associated with poorer emotional and behavioural adjustment, but authoritative and permissive styles had no noticeable special effects, and neglectful parenting was not directly assessed. The research failed to statistically compare the adjustment of children in polygamous and nuclear families; hence, no inference can be made on the variations between the two families. The findings, in general, indicate the significance of culturally responsive interventions that minimise harsh parenting and encourage more supportive parenting in polygamous families. This study enhances Nigerian family research by illustrating that authoritarian parenting, rather than familial conflict, is the predominant predictor of psychological maladjustment, thereby changing the focus from family structure to daily parenting practices in polygamous households.

Recommendation

1. Government and non-governmental organisations should start structured parenting education programs in polygamous societies to encourage authoritative parenting, emotional support, and disciplining tactics that help children grow up healthy mentally.
2. Family counselling and conflict mediation services should be available, especially in polygamous families, to handle rivalry amongst wives, ease family tensions, and make sure that children have a peaceful place to live.

3. Schools should offer counselling and guidance services that take into account the specific problems that kids from polygamous homes encounter. These services can help find and help students who are having mental or emotional problems early on.
4. Policies that help polygamous households, especially those with low incomes, should be the most important. Economic stability can lessen the stressors that make bad parenting and family fights worse.
5. Religious and community leaders should take part in efforts that raise knowledge about child welfare, lower the stigma around polygamous family concerns, and promote good parenting.

Limitations

Whilst standardised instruments are used, the self-reported data can have resulted in response and social desirability biases, but this was controlled by using anonymity and a standardised administration procedure. The study was cross-sectional, and therefore causality to any of the observed relationships is not possible because the variables were measured at one point in time. Moreover, the sample size was a school-based one and was limited to one geographic area (Ijebu-Ode, Ogun State), hence limiting the external validity of the results to other cultural or geographical settings. The parenting styles and the family conflict were evaluated based only on the views of the children, which might not adequately reflect the intentions of the parents and the dynamics within the family. Lastly, the negligent parenting style was not considered a unique parenting style, unlike other possible parenting styles, including socioeconomic status, parental mental health, and child coping resources, which were not directly measured, and this could have contributed to the observed relationships.

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