

Plural wives





Abandoned by my husband's family

By Moleboheng Thato, South Africa

My name is Moleboheng Thato. I have one child and live in Sunrise, a township in Natalspruit, just outside Johannesburg. I am a woman who used to be in a polygamous marriage, but now I live alone.

When I married my husband as a first wife, we lived together in the Transkei, in the Eastern Cape, in South Africa.

I stayed for five years without bearing a child. My mother-in-law always used to insult me, saying that they wasted their 'lobola' money on marrying me because I could not bear children. It was very painful to me because it was not my fault that I did not bear children. The situation made me feel very bad.

When we had been married five years and there was still no child, there was a family gathering. It was decided that my husband must marry a second wife. According to my husband's family, they wanted grandchildren.

My husband did not want to take a second wife at first. He asked me about the idea of marrying another wife, and I was not pleased with it. But his family did not ask me if I was okay with this idea. Just because I loved my husband, I became patient and faced the facts. I then accepted and said he could go ahead and marry a second wife.

When my husband married again, his family favoured the second wife more than me and they were always trying to push us apart. After the marriage, my life became very painful. The second wife and I stayed in different houses but in the same compound.

All of a sudden, my husband stopped coming to my house to see and sleep with me, but only went to the small house (the second wife's). He also started giving me less money than he gave the new wife, because I did not have children.

In spite of the fact that my husband's family wanted to keep us separated, he started seeing me again and we made amends, because he loved me. After all of this, when we were together again I became pregnant. My husband told his family that he loved me, that we had a child coming, and that he must support us.

In 2006, I gave birth to my child, and life changed. Things were good between my husband and me. However, in 2007, my husband got sick. We travelled from Transkei to Johannesburg where we stayed together while the second wife stayed behind with her four children in the Transkei. He then passed away in 2009.

After that, my husband's family did not want to have anything to do with me. They did not welcome me when I went home to the family. They took the second wife and her children in to stay with them and left me outside.

Life is very difficult for me because I do not have a job. I only receive some small money from rents and I struggle to feed my child, who is now 3 years old. I miss my husband, the father of my child.





Marrying a second wife

By Anthon Ndzahulula, Mozambique/ South Africa

I was born in 1963 in Mambhone district in Mozambique. I arrived in South Africa in 1989. My mother separated with my father in 1974 and he demanded all his 'lobola' from his in-laws. He then took his 'lobola' plus me and my siblings with him, although it was unlawful because if a person takes back the 'lobola' he must leave the kids with their mother. From that time, I spent most of my youth without knowing where my mother was.

I grew up with him, until I married my first wife, in 1987. Although, I was not a rich person, I had my own business, a tavern where I sold alcohol. With this, I made enough money to support my family.

I would spend most of my profit on women outside marriage and my business fell apart. I lost all I had in a very short space of time. Not only was my business going down, but also everything I tried failed. My children were dying right, left, and centre. I was blessed with five children but now only three are alive.

As this was happening, I went to consult some elders and traditional healers. They explained to me that the reason my things were not going well was because I did not have a second wife. Initially, I was against polygamy and did not want to hear anything about it.

I did not want to marry two wives, but because things were not going my way, I felt I had no choice. They explained to me that the whole thing germinated from the fact that I did not honour and receive blessings from my mother's family; therefore, I ought to marry another wife to take the maternal name.

I went to speak to my first wife about my intentions to marry a second wife, following the bad events taking place in our house.

My wife agreed, and she gave me the go-ahead. It took me a year to find the right woman to be my second wife.

Again, I reported to my wife about my findings and she supported me in my decision. I then arranged to bring my second wife home in 2006. After I married my second wife, I miraculously found out where my mom was and took her to stay with me.

Being a polygamist is challenging, even more so for those married with ten wives or more, because each has her own ethics and policies and one has to channel that through infusing their ethics with those of the house. It is important that when the second wife arrives, she be given the ethics of the house, so that she knows what to do and what not to do.

However, I have to stress that for me having two wives is the same as having one wife because we have all committed ourselves to the ethics of the house.

However, some women are just interested in your wealth. If they realise that you have nothing to offer, they will force you to an argument, so that they can have an excuse to leave you. However, those that love you will stay no matter what.

In this relationship, I cannot be independent and I always have to be in the middle. It is dangerous to take sides because they will be jealous of each other. I don't feel this is my family, but my wives' and kids'. I am just a tool. While a man is married to his job, the wife is married to the family. My job entails listening to what they have to say and seeing what needs to be done. I do not own this family.

I make sure that I share the love I have with both my wives equally by making an effort to know them very well. If you live with a person that you know and they are open to you and visa versa, it's easy to see if they are happy or not. However, if one sees that their partners are not happy, and they refuse to let it out, they must look for an elderly person to help. The elderly know how to force the truth out of their hearts. In that way, things will be sorted out.

If a person wants to be a polygamist, he must let his wife know about his intentions and reasons for him to marry a second wife. This is done to avoid problems at a later stage and to show that you are a responsible man.

One thing I admire about this type of marriage is that it cuts down chances of men cheating because they will always be satisfied sexually and emotionally. For example, if you are having a bad day, your wives will respond differently and that helps revive your energy.

Conversely, if one of them is in a bad mood, there will be no need for you to go out and look for other women to keep you happy because the second wife would be there to give you happiness. This entire thing revolves around feelings. If today I'm in the first wives' room, tomorrow I'm in the second wife's, and in that way am forever satisfied; there is no need to go out.

Since I married my second wife, I have never cheated. I'm even very scared to go out. If I propose a lady, and she says yes immediately, I will never entertain that because I can never know if she has AIDS or not. And should I go out, I'll be putting my wives in danger of contracting STIs.

What I can say is that people must stick to their roots. That is following African culture and its customs. They must not follow these western cultures because they are misleading. People must seek understandings in the revelations brought out by our traditions because they have life. That is the reason young people nowadays are dying of sickness and lots of things.

This western history education, taught in schools, is all lies. For example, they say that a human being originates from gorillas. That is nonsense. God created a human being out of the soil and brought him a partner. He did not take a person out of baboons, but out of his own creation.

If one can look at statistics, there are more women than men. Logically that gives credence to men to become polygamists. Those that are criticising are far away from these things. Most have been westernised and don't understand the dynamics of traditions and cultures.

First, we need to understand where does polygamy germinate from? It started during the times of Abraham after his wife Sarah could not bear children. Therefore, he made his slave-girl Hagar the second wife. Hagar then gave birth to Ishmael, Abraham's first son. So, these things come a long way.

As long as there is no quarrelling in the house and even if there is, talking is the best medicine. For me, I am happily married to both my wives.





Accepting a second wife

By Zabele Mirole (Ndzhukula), Mozambique/ South Africa

I arrived in South Africa in 1989 with my husband and have three kids, two girls and a boy. Two are in high school and one is in primary. I am the first wife in a family with two wives.

My husband is unemployed but he fixes television sets at home. Sometimes if he is not too busy, he joins us in the fields, to plough, so that we can provide food for the family.

Although I knew that my culture permits polygamy, I never thought I would share a man with another woman. However, due to problems we faced as a family, I took the decision to accept that my husband marries a second wife.

We were struggling and things were not going very well in the house. For example, my husband would get sick constantly and after some consultations with traditional healers, they advised that my husband marries a second wife, and we sat down together and discussed the whole issue.

I decided to support him in the move to marry another wife because I understood that the problems we faced were related to him not honouring his mother's family. And with proper consultations with traditional healers and the elderly, it was deemed relevant for me to allow him to marry another wife so that his mother's family could be honoured by giving the maternal name to the second wife.

He left to look for another wife. It was only after a year that he came back to me with the news that he found a wife of his choice. I then took a leading role and made sure that I meet his second in-laws. My husband gave me the 'lobola' and I went to the second wife's home to bring her home.

Now that she is married in this family, she will use my husband's mother's surname. In that way, we will be honouring the family so that our things can fall into place. And

since she came here, we have not had major problems because polygamy has been our culture since then.

Even though I see that sometimes my husband shows more interest to the second wife, I have no problem at all because I am the one who gave him the go-ahead to look for her. I absolutely have no problem with it also because she loves my kids as well. For example, when I'm away she takes care of them, gives them food, bathes them and gives them love. But I have no idea whether that will change once she starts having children. I am not sure if she will love them the same way as now or not. Also, I'm not sure if my husband will show different love between my kids and hers'.

Sometimes she does things that hurt me, but if that happens, I sit down with her and talk about it. I also understand that even if I was alone there would always be problems, and talking is the only solution.

A person who wants to be a polygamist must sit down and discuss it with his first wife, because if there is no agreement, there will forever be problems. Therefore, for this to work out, the second wife must receive blessings from the first wife because, not only would she be married to the husband, but also to the first wife.



Happy as a second wife

By Norah Masingi (Ndzhukula), Mozambique

I was born in 1986 in Mambhone district in Mozambique. My stepmothers raised me after my mother left my dad. My parents were always fighting and my mother left me while I was still young, at the age of seven.

I grew up in a polygamous family. This is where I learned that it is possible for one to get married to a polygamist because my mother never fought with the other wives, only my dad. Therefore, I realised that this thing is possible.

When Anthony Ndzhukula told me he wanted to marry me, I did not hesitate. I felt it in my heart that it was the right thing to do. I decided to move in with him and his first wife because they lived together in harmony.

That is the reason I did not have two minds when the opportunity to get married to this family came my way. However, when Mr Ndzhukula came to my family, my father did not want me to leave, only my stepmothers did. They said it was good for my growth.

So, I left Mozambique and moved in with this family in South Africa. Since I arrived in 2006, I have never had serious problems. Although there are some problems, just like in any other family, I have never seen anything that can tear my heart into pieces. Here I feel at home because it feels the same as at home. My father would give me whatever I wanted and here nothing has changed, and I am happy. I love my husband a lot because he does everything for me despite his first wife's presence.

It is good to be married with other women to the same man because when you arrive they will tell you the dos and don'ts. They will guide you with information about the husband's dislikes and likes. That helps you to do well in your marriage.

However, I can tell you that I will never allow my husband to marry another wife because I just think we are enough. I think he would struggle to support all of us. I know he is aware of that and will not even think of going that route.



Standing together in the face of abandonment

By Mubayandi Kwiima with Perpertual Sichikwenkwe, Zambia*

My name is Mubayandi Kwiima. I am 39 years old and a mother of five. I'm the second wife in the polygamous marriage of three wives. I work as a clerk at one of the government ministries in Zambia.*

My story started in 1989 when I got married to a man who presented himself to me as a single man. My parents accepted his gesture and allowed him to marry me after he had paid dowry as per our Tonga tradition.

Before we got married, he told me he was the father of two but that he was single. After the marriage, about a year later, the number increased from two kids to six.

One day, his mother-in-law (mother of his first wife) walked in my house and bluntly informed me that the man I called my husband was already married, separated from his wife, but that they were not divorced.

When my husband returned home, I confronted him on this issue and he apologetically confirmed the story. I knew I was in hot soup. I am a child born out of a polygamous marriage. My mother was a second wife to my father, so I was already familiar with the happenings in a polygamous marriage. Since I was already pregnant by then, and the fact that his wife was not back, I saw no point in leaving him.

In 1994, his first wife started coming home and my husband asked me to accept her as part of the family, especially since she was the first wife and they were married. Looking at the misery that was showing on the first wife's face, I understood that she was going through a lot and I accepted that she move in with us.

Problems in my marriage started immediately because I was working but the first wife was not. Every time I bought anything or cooked food, mostly bought with my own money, the first wife would grab the food on grounds that the money was from our husband, accusing that the man was fond of me and not her.

The trend went on until in 1999 when our husband, who was a Human Resource Officer at a government ministry, decided to stop work and moved to his farm. By then, he had managed to get the first wife a job as a cleaner in the same ministry where I was working.

This was the beginning of serious problems for us all. After few months he came back home and told us that he did not want any of us to visit him at the farm, instead we should concentrate on educating and feeding our children because he was no longer going to be providing anything for us.

Before long, news reached us that this was because he had married another woman, to make it three wives. This angered both of us so much that the first wife decided to follow him with all her children to the farm. However, before the night was over, he chased her back.

Two days later, our husband came to our house and informed us that it was true that he had married another woman. He told us never to visit him at the farm without his permission. He reiterated that he is never going to provide food for us but that we should work hard to educate our children and provide for them.

It was at this stage that I confirmed that polygamy was a dirty game and, in reality, it was not marriage. I told myself that if I had to carry on with life, I had to be a strong by myself.

The first wife was devastated with our husband's behaviour and almost took her own life. Since problems had forced us to develop a good relationship between ourselves and our children for survival, I advised my friend against this move. I told her that there is no need to take her life over a man who does not provide anything for the family. I reminded her about her seven children that needed her attention.

I comforted her and told her that even if the husband does nothing, the fact that we were both working was fine, although our income was inadequate to cater for all our needs with our children. These problems forced us to develop a close relationship.

As if his mistreating behaviour was not enough, in 2001 our husband stopped having conjugal rights with both of us and just concentrated on the third wife. He completely stopped coming and even changed his phone numbers. We would only see him if there was an illness or sickness in the family. After a couple of years, he came back home and told us that we were still his and it was up to us to follow him to the farm.

We discussed the issue and vowed never to follow him for conjugal rights. We thought about HIV/AIDS and how many wives have died of the disease at the hands of polygamy.

I have always known polygamous marriage not to be good and very few people in such marriages have peace and enjoy life. There is so much unfaithfulness in polygamous marriage and that is the reason there are so many deaths among such couples in this era of HIV/AIDS.

There is always fighting and quarrelling among the wives. In situations where you find the wives becoming friends, they usually work together against the husband. In many cases, they encourage each other to have extra marital affairs and keep each others secrets.

Now there is nothing I can do because my husband has not officially divorced me. I am still living in the matrimonial house and have to look after my children, educate them so that tomorrow they can have a better future and look after both of us.

I do not intend to seek divorce as long as he does not do so. I want to maintain my title. For me, it is marriage for life, whether in polygamy or not.

** not her real name*



Jealous family

By Thulisile Myende, South Africa

My name is Thulisile Myende. I got married to Jacob Myende in 1981 in Pietermaritzburg when I was 21 years old. When I met him, he told me he had never married before, so I was his first wife. He paid 'lobola' and we had a wedding.

The family was very happy when we married and did not show any different feelings about me. We stayed together in Pietermaritzburg where I stayed at home with the family.

After some time, one of the aunties started beating and harassing me. She was evil and had no form of respect for me. I was unable to have any peace. I later realised that she was jealous that I was married and she was not.

I did not get pregnant right away and she would insult me, saying that I'm infertile, even though it was just a short time after we married.

In 1982, I fell pregnant with Makhosonke and he was born in 1983.

I think that one day an evil spirit got into my mother-in-law. She chased me away, back to my own family's place with Makhosonke, because she had found a girlfriend for her son (my husband). Under pressure, my husband paid 'lobola' for that other woman, but they only stayed together for two months.

Although I left that family because they chased me away, I would not have been able to stay with another wife. I think I could not have stayed with her because women can be very jealous.

My father also had two wives who stayed in different houses and did not get along well. They did not live nicely together. My mother and her sisters were always afraid of the second wife.

My father was an alcoholic and sometimes he would want to beat everyone in the house. When we would run away, he would move onto the other house to fight with them. We would only come back the next day.

My husband did not love this other girl and he came to look for me because he loved me. He spoke to my family and he realised that we should be together. We stayed together and I don't think he went to see the other wife any more. I gave birth to a second child, Sithembiso, in 1985 and then the third one, Ntombikhona, in 1988.

My husband left for Johannesburg in 1991 to work. At that time, I was also working and the children were staying with my family. In 1993, my husband's mother said I should go stay with my husband, and so I joined him in Johannesburg. We lived happily for a long time.

In July 2002, my husband began to have mental problems. One night while we where all asleep he disappeared in the middle of the night. Until today, I have been looking for him everywhere but to no avail.

I reported the case to the police and to the Sowetan newspaper but, up to now, I have not heard anything. I wish I could find someone to help me find him.



Advice from my mother

By Pedro Nhavate, Mozambique

My name is Pedro Nhavate. I am a 60 year old who lives in Maputo's neighbourhood of Zimpeto. I'm a retired government worker with three wives and 15 children.

As a young man growing up in a family where I was the only boy, I always imagined having brothers. My situation was worsened when my sisters married off and I was the only child living with my parents until I married my first wife.

My mother encouraged me to have a big family and until now, I do not regret her advice. Currently I have three wives and all of them are like my mother. I cannot remember the last time we had a fight or an argument because we are just one big family.

My first born has also followed in my footsteps and now has two wives and I can see that one or two more of my sons will have more than one wife, because they enjoyed growing up in a big family where there are no problems.

I managed to live peacefully with my wives by avoiding what other men usually do when they marry more than one wife. When you are married to more than one wife, the best idea is to live with them in the same house or build their houses in the same compound.

When you separate them, it will create problems because when you are visiting the other, there will come jealousy. However, when you are in the same house it's easy because none of them will miss you, unless you travel to a far away place.

My children have learnt to call all my three wives as their mothers without distinguishing that this one is their real mother or whatever. I have also given advice to some people who want to marry a second wife and most of them have had successful marriages.

Although most people shun the idea of having more than one wife, I have found it to be a good idea. After all, in this country, we have more women than men and, to balance this, more men need to think about having a second wife.

Also, what I have seen is that most people who shun the idea of marrying a second wife have affairs with girlfriends. This idea is very bad because it promotes promiscuity and the spreading of diseases like the incurable HIV/AIDS pandemic.

However, if one is married to more than one wife it would not be normal for him to have girlfriends and getting into other affairs. I will be happy to see all my sons having more wives, its does not only create a big family but it also promotes peace in the family.



He knows how to care for his family

By Kgomotso and Siphamandla Malatsi, South Africa*

My name is Kgomotso Malatsi. I am 25 years old. I married my husband at the age of 17 and this is our eighth year together. Together we have a 2 year old son and I have a 6 year old daughter from another relationship. She stays with my mother in Kwazulu Natal (KZN), because my mother did not want to stay alone.*

I am originally from KZN and I now stay in Johannesburg. My husband is 27 years old. He is also originally from Kwazulu Natal but now works in Johannesburg.

My husband's second wife stays in his house in KZN and they have been married for two years. We stay together here in Johannesburg.

Two years ago, I heard from other people that he decided to take another wife. I was very angry because he did not tell me first.

My husband decided to take two wives because he was dividing his time between Johannesburg and KZN. He says that when he decided to propose to the second wife, he made it clear to her that he already had a wife and that she would be the second wife. She accepted the situation and moved in with him. He married a second wife because he thought it was good for the house, as we would share responsibilities.

He says the reason he did not to ask for my permission is that he knew I would not like it. He says that although in the old days, if you want to take another wife, you would send the first wife to propose for you, today things have changed.

It made me sad for about two months. I was very jealous and surprised, because I did not think that he would take another wife.

He tried to explain to me what was going on in an effort to ease the pain I was feeling. He explained how it felt to only have one wife and that he needed someone at home to take care of things. For example, sometimes he would send things home to KZN that needed to be taken care of.

It was very hard but I tried to understand the situation. I was also worried that should he take a second wife, my child would suffer. However, I later accepted the situation and continued with life.

To be honest, at first, I did not love him but only stayed with him for the sake of our child because I did not want my son to grow up without a father. After a while, he started begging me to stay. I then realised that he loved me.

Now I love him because he is a good man and he knows how to take care of his family. When I asked him about when he proposed to the second wife, he told me. He decided that we should meet so we could live a peaceful life.

I also told him that I wanted to see that woman, and he agreed. I pretended to be happy when I saw her for the first time, but deep in my heart, I was not very happy.

However, I realised that she knew that I am the first wife. I also realised that she was very scared to see me. Even though I felt bad about the situation, I also did not want her to feel bad. Even if she did not like me, I would go to my husband so he could sort out the problem.

In the last two years, my life has changed although it is not easy when we visit the other wife. I still feel unhappy about the situation. Nevertheless, the fact that we stay in different places makes life easy for both our husband and us.

My husband says that, according to our culture, being married to two wives is not a problem at all. It is not difficult to have polygamous relationship, as long as there is understanding amongst the partners.

I think my husband is a good man and he will take a good care of both families. At the moment, I don't think it would be a problem for my husband to marry another wife because I have accepted already that he has another wife.

