

Syrian Immigrant Women's Second Wife Culture: A Study on Psychosocial Consequences

Suriyeli Göçmen Kadınların İkinci Eş Kültürü: Psikososyal Sonuçları Üzerine Bir İnceleme

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ABSTRACT

Objective: This study was conducted to determine Syrian immigrant women's views on second-wife culture and its psychosocial consequences.

Method: This study was conducted between June and July 2024 through in-depth, face-to-face interviews employing a phenomenological design, one of the qualitative research methods. The sample consisted of women who were over 18 years of age, married, second wives, and able to communicate through an interpreter. Participants were selected using the "criterion-based sampling technique," a type of purposive sampling method. Data were collected using a semi-structured interview form and analysed through thematic coding.

Results: The study identified five main themes: Theme 1. Decision to marry as a second wife; Theme 2. Relations with the spouse; Theme 3. Relations with the second wife; Theme 4. Relations with children; and Theme 5. Desired changes in their lives. Cultural, familial, religious, and community-based factors were found to influence women's decisions to become second wives.

Conclusion: Syrian migrant women's awareness of becoming second wives is shaped by the family and society in which they live. These marriages cause women to experience psychological difficulties in their social lives and cannot create a sense of belonging. The factors compelling women into these marriages should be addressed and eliminated. It is important to strengthen the psychological aspects of women in these marriages and ensure their social integration.

Keywords: Syria, migration, woman, second wife, culture, social status, mental health

ÖZ

Amaç: Bu çalışma Suriyeli göçmen kadınların ikinci eş kültürüne ve bunun psikososyal sonuçlarına ilişkin görüşlerini belirlemek amacıyla yapılmıştır.

Yöntem: Bu çalışma Haziran-Temmuz 2024 tarihleri arasında nitel araştırma yöntemlerinden fenomenolojik desen kullanılarak derinlemesine yüz yüze görüşmelerle gerçekleştirilmiştir. Örneklem, 18 yaşından büyük, evli, ikinci eşi olan ve tercüman aracılığıyla iletişim kurulabilen kadınlardan oluşmuştur. Katılımcılar, amaçlı örnekleme yöntemlerinden biri olan "ölçüt temelli örnekleme tekniği" kullanılarak belirlenmiştir. Veriler yarı yapılandırılmış bir görüşme formu kullanılarak toplanmış ve tematik kodlama kullanılarak kategorize edilmiştir.

Bulgular: Çalışma sonucunda beş ana tema ortaya çıkmıştır. Tema 1 İkinci eş olarak evlenme kararı. Tema 2 Eş ile ilişkiler. Tema 3 İkinci eş ile ilişkiler. Tema 4 Çocuklarla ilişkiler. Tema 5: Hayatlarında neyi değiştirmek istedikleri. Kadınların ikinci eş olmalarında kültür, aile, din ve toplum temelli nedenlerin etkili olduğu görülmüştür.

Sonuç: Suriyeli göçmen kadınların ikinci eş olma bilincinin içinde yaşadıkları aile ve toplum tarafından kolaylaştırıldığı tespit edilmiştir. Bu evliliklerin kadınların sosyal yaşamlarında psikolojik sıkıntılar yaşamalarına ve aidiyet duygusunun oluşmamasına neden olduğu belirlenmiştir. Kadınları bu evliliklere zorlayan nedenler ortadan kaldırılmalıdır. Bu evlilikler içerisinde olan kadınların psikolojik açıdan güçlendirilmesi ve toplumsal entegrasyonunun sağlanması önemlidir.

Anahtar sözcükler: Suriye, göç, kadın, ikinci eş, kültür, sosyal durum, ruh sağlığı

Introduction

Due to political, economic, and social events around the world, many people are forced to leave their home countries (UNHCR 2019). In this process, individuals fleeing war and conflict zones, in particular, migrate to other countries in search of building a new life (Certel and Atasü Yopcuoğlu 2024).

Migration waves carry not only migrants but also their cultures to new regions. This situation leads to migrants' efforts to preserve their own cultures while simultaneously interacting with new ones. In particular, many individuals who were forced to leave Syria due to the civil war sought refuge in Turkey (Keysan and Şentürk 2021). This wave of migration altered Turkey's demographic structure and initiated the interaction between Syrian migrants and Turkish society.

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Within this process of interaction, studies on the second wife culture among Syrian migrant women have gained importance (Certel and Atasü Yopcuoğlu 2024). The practice of second wifeliness is a widespread lifestyle, particularly in rural areas of Syria. It is commonly found among communities engaged in agriculture and animal husbandry and reflects a traditional way of life (Yılmaz et al. 2015).

The impact of this cultural practice on Syrian women who migrate to Turkey influences both their efforts to preserve their heritage and their integration into Turkish society. Research on the second wife culture among Syrian migrant women generally explores issues such as women's roles in society, family structure, educational attainment, and access to healthcare services (Certel and Atasü Yopcuoğlu 2024). These studies contribute to understanding both Syrian women's efforts to sustain the second wife culture in Turkey and the interactions between this cultural practice and Turkish society.

The results of studies on the second-wife culture among Syrian migrant women often reveal both their efforts to preserve their own culture and the challenges they encounter during the process of integration into Turkish society (Açıkgöz and Otrar 2024). These studies contribute to a deeper understanding of the experiences of Syrian migrant women and inform the development of policies and programs designed to support them. The findings enhance our comprehension of the difficulties migrants face throughout the integration process and aid in the creation of support mechanisms. In this way, policies and programs can be developed that more effectively address the needs of Syrian migrant women. Furthermore, the findings also help identify and overcome the barriers migrants face in integrating into society (Zhang et al. 2023). In this context, the importance and impact of such studies are considerable. Accordingly, the significance and necessity of research on the second-wife culture among Syrian migrant women are increasing today.

This article examines gender inequality and violence by analyzing women's experiences in polygamous marriages initiated by Turkish men. The effects of migration often disproportionately impact women, who struggle to maintain their traditions, ensure family continuity, raise their children, and cope with loneliness in an unfamiliar society. In Turkish society, marriages involving more than one spouse are not only illegal but are also generally disapproved of by the broader public. Such multiple marriages may result in exclusion without an understanding of the underlying causes. This study seeks to reveal the factors that drive women to enter polygamous marriages. Additionally, research in this area remains quite limited. Based on interviews conducted with Turkish and Syrian women living in three Turkish provinces bordering Syria, the study demonstrates that patriarchal practices exacerbate the violence experienced by women both before and during marriage. The legal status of Turkish and Syrian women, along with the legitimacy of their marriages, shapes their experiences of violence and their demands. Although polygamy is more prevalent in rural areas, this study conducted through a non-governmental organization to which women applied for assistance focused on women from low and middle socioeconomic backgrounds facing financial difficulties. Therefore, it does not reflect the situation of polygamous practices among migrant families with higher economic incomes. The study aims to raise social awareness and give voice to women by making gender-based violence more visible.

Method

This study was conducted from June to July of 2024. In-depth, face-to-face interviews were carried out using a phenomenological design, which is a qualitative research method.

Sample

The study population comprised Syrian women who submitted applications to a non-governmental organization in Diyarbakır province. The Social Assistance Rehabilitation and Adaptation Centre (SOHRAM-CASRA) in the Diyarbakır province is a community-based non-governmental organization (NGO). The organization provides educational, social, and psychological support to Syrian migrants. Researcher EYA volunteers as a reproductive health counselor in the association.

The study sample consisted of eight women who were contacted through the organization during the specified dates. All women who applied to the association during the relevant period and who were second wives were included in the study. The interpreter participated in the study in a manner that ensured the women did not recognize their presence and did not feel uncomfortable. Data were collected by EYA and an interpreter affiliated with the association. EYA has attended seminars on qualitative data collection and has previously participated in numerous similar studies.

In all cases, the spouses of the participants were married to two individuals ($n=2$) and were alive at the time of the study. The study included all women who applied to the association and whose husbands had more than one

marriage. Participants were selected using the criterion-based sampling technique, a purposive sampling method. Women who agreed to participate voluntarily in the study, were 18 years of age or older, were married, had a second wife, and agreed to communicate through an interpreter were included in the study.

Procedure

Ethical approval was obtained from Dicle University Social and Human Sciences Ethics Committee (Date: 26.06.2024, Number: E-14679147-663.05-730291). Verbal consent was obtained from the women who voluntarily participated in the study. Prior to the initiation of the study, written permission was obtained from the governing body of the association in which the study was conducted. The women were informed that the interview could be interrupted at any time and that no identifying information would be included in the data collection. The study was conducted in accordance with the principles of the Declaration of Helsinki.

The data were collected using a semi-structured interview form developed by the researchers in accordance with the extant literature. The interview form contained a series of 12 inquiries concerning demographic characteristics, marital status, and the experience of being a second wife. A set of 12 semi-structured inquiries was directed at immigrant women, seeking to elicit their perspectives on a range of subjects. These questions focused on their understanding of traditional cultural structures, their beliefs, their thoughts on second wives, the status of women and men in such relationships, the status of the other spouse, and the status of the children. A preliminary interview was conducted with one woman to assess the applicability of the interview form.

Some of the questions in the form are as follows:

- *How did you meet your spouse? (arranged marriage or by love) How did you decide to get married? (family or yourself)*
- *What do you think about being a second wife in marriages? How did you accept bigamy?*
- *What reasons do you think a man who has two marriages might have? What is the reason for your wife's second marriage?*
- *What is your relationship with the other spouse?*
- *Is there ever any competition between you and the other spouse?*
- *What is your and the other spouse's attitude towards having children? What does having children mean to you?*
- *How do you think your spouse's communication and relationship with the other spouse is?*
- *How do you feel in this marriage?*
- *What would you like to change in your life?*

Statistical Analysis

The data were analyzed using the theoretical thematic analysis technique, a method commonly employed in qualitative research, following the six-phase process outlined by Braun and Clarke (2006). (1) After each interview (within 24 hours), the audio recordings of the in-depth interviews were carefully listened to and paused as necessary prior to transcription. Eight separate Word documents were created, one for each participant. The printed documents were reviewed and analyzed multiple times, with initial analytical notes written alongside participants' statements. This process achieved the goal of familiarization with the data. (2) Data items from all documents were coded. For example, participant statements such as "...my brother wanted me to get married" and "...my mother did not want me at home" were coded under categories like "family" and "family desire." (3) Related codes were grouped to form preliminary themes. For instance, codes such as "family" and "family desire" were thematized under "family pressure." (4) The clarity and comprehensibility of the generated themes were evaluated. A descriptive analysis (code map) was conducted using MAXQDA software. (5) In the final stage, the researchers interpreted participants' perceptions through the generated themes. The results were reported by assessing whether the selected vivid and striking quotations appropriately illustrated the relevant themes. To protect participants' privacy and the confidentiality of their identity information, code names such as P1, P2, etc., were assigned.

In the study, the findings regarding migrant women's views and experiences of becoming a second wife were analyzed by organizing them into themes and sub-themes. (Table 2).

The participants' descriptive information was analyzed using the IBM SPSS Statistics 25.0 program, and frequency, percentage, mean, standard deviation, and minimum-maximum values were used.

Results

The mean age of the participating women was 45.50 ± 12.535 years (range: 35–71). All women were married, with 75.0% reporting a middle income, and the mean duration of residence in Turkey was 10.75 ± 1.164 years (range: 9–12). A total of 87.5% of participants had children, with an average number of 3.25 ± 2.121 children (range: 0–7). It was found that 87.5% of the women had migrated due to war, and the spouses of all participants were married to two individuals ($n=2$). Additionally, 66.6% of the women were their husbands' second wives. The socio-demographic characteristics of the women are presented in Table 1.

Case Number	Age	Education status	Marital status	Income status	Duration of residence in Turkey (years)	Having a child	Number of children	Reason for Migration	The order of marriage
P1	38	Middle School	Married	Middle	12	Yes	2	Marriage	2
P2	47	Primary School	Married	Low	10	Yes	7	War	2
P3	35	High School	Married	Middle	10	Yes	3	War	2
P4	37	High School	Married	Middle	9	No	-	War	2
P5	57	Primary School	Married	Middle	12	Yes	5	War	1
P6	71	Not literate	Married	Middle	11	Yes	4	War	1
P7	38	Primary School	Married	Middle	12	Yes	3	War	1
P8	41	Primary School	Married	Low	10	Yes	2	War	2

The main themes and sub-themes identified after thematic analysis following the interviews are presented in Table 2.

Main Themes	Sub-Themes
1. Decision on Marriage as Second Wife	1.1. Family pressure 1.2. Religious view 1.3. Roles of women
2. Relationships with husband	2.1. Meeting 2.2. Husbands' relationship with their first wives
3. Relationships with second wife	3.1. Jealousy 3.2. Acceptance
4. Relationships with children	4.1. The future of their children 4.2. Motherhood to the children of the first wife
5. Things she wants to change in her life	5.1. Back to square one

Decision on Marriage as Second Wife

All of the women stated that they were second wives, and those who played decisive roles in becoming second wives (family pressure and religious command) were divided into sub-themes.

Family Pressure

Women reported that they were subjected to pressure and violence from their families and that they saw marriage as a way out.

P2. *'My mother did not accept it easily. For six years, I was taking care of my mother, taking care of her. My brother talked to her; she was too old. "Let her get married now". My brother told my mother, "You will die, you will go away, the girl will be alone, let her get married so she will not be alone." That is how he convinced her. I do not accept it; neither should I be on anyone, nor should anyone be on me, but it happened once. I was also getting older.'*

P3. *'I got married by force. My brother was constantly beating me and cursing me in front of the bride. That is why I accepted this man to get rid of him, not out of love, I mean... I got married out of obligation. I was having so much difficulty; I was constantly experiencing violence, constant bad behavior, bad words from the bride; I was saying I will accept the first one who comes...'*

P4. *'My mum didn't like me since I was a kid. She ostracised me. They educated my sister and she was always favoured. But I was always on the outside. She was happy when I left home, but she never wanted me when I wanted to go back.'*

Religious View

Women stated that marriages as second, third, and fourth wives are possible in their communities due to their religious beliefs.

P1. *'Men are greedy. I cannot say anything else; there is no other problem, and I know that. The hodja issues a fatwa, and the Sharia, the religion, says you can marry four halal women. You can marry two or three. No, they are using religion. Our Prophet married a girl at the age of nine because she was orphaned so that she could stay with him without ablution so that no one would do evil. However, that was not marriage. However, it is one thing there and another thing here; these people turn it into their own selfishness.'*

P6. *'My husband was an imam in the village. He and I both know that if one woman cannot take care of the house, the second woman is halal. My foot has been crippled for 45 years, but I did not raise my voice because I could not do my job.'*

P7. *'My husband fell in love with this woman when he was working in the garment industry. There was no other reason. He brought her to our house. I resisted a lot, but she wouldn't leave. My husband didn't give up on me or her. It is already said in our religion and culture that women should accept this.'*

P8. *'Some men get married for no reason at all, some people say religion commands them to get married, some people have a reason and get married that way.'*

Roles of Women

Women reported that men marry more than one woman because women do not fulfill their domestic roles sufficiently.

P3. *'His first wife did not take good care of the children, my husband. My mother-in-law always cooked for them. She said, "Why should I do it? Why should I tire myself? It is the same with cleanliness and order. If my husband does not change his clothes, she does not tell him to take them off and wash them. My husband cannot feel any respect or emotion. If a man is craving food, if that woman does not know how to cook, if she says, 'Let my sister-in-law cook, let my mother-in-law cook,' it is normal for that man to get married again... Because that man cannot be happy.'*

P2. *'It is a difficult thing. My husband was single for seven years. I mean, he was separated from his wife; he was actually single, and that is how he got married. His ex-wife and his children knew everything. He married me to raise his children. He was sick and could not take care of the children, so I was going to take care of them... His wife passed away in Syria...'*

P4. *'My husband's first mate is ill. She faints all the time. She takes care of her children but cannot fulfil my husband's wishes. My husband's aunt's daughter is his first wife and my husband regards her as a trust and does not leave her.'*

P6. *'I'm a complete woman. Whether it's the work of my house or the care of the children, it's all done. But men have dirty souls. Once they get used to another woman, they don't come home.'*

Relationships with usband

Women's relationships with their husbands were categorized under two sub-themes ("meeting" and "relationship with her first husband").

Meeting

All women stated that they met through intermediaries such as relatives and neighbors.

P1. *'My husband and I met through an intermediary. We had a relative in Mardin who brought him, and we met face to face... My husband and his intermediary came to Syria, and we got engaged there. I saw him then, maybe I liked him. I was 25 years old at the time. I liked him, I liked him, he liked me, we agreed.'*

P3. *'When my husband was in Syria, he opened a shop. My brother and my father were always going to their shop. They were close to my brother. Then he came to our house, and that is how we met.'*

P2. *'We were living in Lebanon; my father passed away before the war. When we went to Lebanon, my mother did not like it there and wanted to return to the village. My husband came to the village and told the neighbors that he was looking for a girl. The neighbors told us about it.'*

P6. *'My husband was an acquaintance of our relative in our village. When I was 14 years old, my father called me and said 'There is a suitor for you'. I didn't make a sound. I never saw my wife until she appeared before the imam. I saw what this man looked like there.'*

Husbands' Relationship with Their First Wives

Women reported that their husbands' relationship with their first wives was either bad or very good.

P1. *'They argue all the time. Always for the children... They could not find a solution; those girls were ruined. They are in a bad way. The woman interferes in everything for the children. And the children say that "our father did not understand us... We could not live our childhood."*

P3. *'Their relationship is always great, with the other woman... He never says anything to his first wife, not even a word. When he gets angry with the children, he takes it out on me and yells at me, but he never says anything to the other woman.'*

P4. *'They're on good terms, alhamdulillah. I'm not in marriages. She's a decent woman.'*

P8. *'They are no longer husband and wife, but brothers and sisters. They didn't separate because they were related, so they got used to it. That's the way they are.'*

Relationships with the Other Wife

Women stated that there is jealousy between wives.

Jealousy

P1. *'But I do not want my husband to go there; I do not want him to be side by side with the other woman... I am jealous. For example, I hear the other woman saying to her children, you are two siblings; look after each other as if our children are not siblings.'*

P2. *'He had been married in the past, and when he wanted to marry me, I accepted it when he came to ask for my hand in marriage. They told me that you would take care of the children. The children loved me very much and even started calling me mom. His first wife was very jealous of his children. My husband went to Syria to take the children; his first wife did not allow him to take the children; she did not want to send the children... I mean, I am the second, but as I said, I am not above the others. Right now my husband bought gold and clothes for the one in Istanbul, but not for me (crying)... My husband loved that woman; there were quarrels in the house.'*

P3. *'When my husband came to marry me, he came with his first wife. She and my husband made a deal. When this girl comes, let her cook for us, take care of us, clean, and so on. And we will take care of ourselves. When I came, I understood their agreement, and I accepted it, so I did not have a problem. But when I came, the first agreement was broken... When my husband saw me like this, his opinion changed completely... When I first got married, he treated me very well (first wife). Then he revealed his badness. It took him only five days to treat me well.'*

P4. *'Some days he stays there. In their house, his first wife, children, parents, siblings are all in the same apartment. I am outside, I am alone, my family is not with me, I have no children. I only have cats and I hug them. They have become my children, my family. For example, I am alone on holidays, I want him to stay with me, but he is usually there. I have been like this for years, for example, I don't want any holidays.'*

Acceptance

Women stated that it was difficult to be a second wife, but now they accept it and devote themselves to their children.

P2. *'There were constant fights at home. The neighbors were disturbed. Sometimes we had fights because he was not working... I am tolerating it now; I do not fight with my husband anymore for my children. For my children...'*

P1. *'No, you know, the word 'second' is heavy. I knew that my husband had been married, but I did not know that he had three marriages. He told me about the first one but not the second one. He had separated from his first wife, but... It is a bad thing to live with two women together. I hate it, nothing else. I do not want to think about it.'*

P3. *'...I mean, we were like a mother-in-law and a daughter-in-law. But now I do not care if he stays with her 24 hours a day because now I have my children; they are the most important ones for me.'*

P5. *'At first I cried a lot. Why did this trouble happen to me? Now I'm used to it. I'm with my children and grandchildren. I'm devoted to them. Time is the cure for everything.'*

Relationships with Children

The women's relationships with their own children and second wives' children were categorized under two sub-themes (the future of their children mothering the children of second wives).

The Future of Their Children

Women stated that they strive to ensure that their children receive a good education and have a good future.

P3. *'I have three boys, and the other woman has seven children. At first, I wanted to have a daughter, but now I do not want that either. I just want to give my children a good education and raise them well.'*

P2. *'I just want to raise my children; I want them to have a profession... I endure for my children. I do not say anything so as not to deprive the children of their father. Sometimes I say "I will divorce you here and take my children," but I cannot do that for the children.'*

P7. *'I have only one wish... I don't want my children to go through what I went through. I want them to have a job, to have a good family, to live in a nice house... That's it...'*

P8. *'I take care of my children. I try to help them with their studies. I don't know what we will become, at least their education should be good. Let them not be ignorant like us.'*

Motherhood to the Children of the First Wife

Women stated that they felt compassion for the children from their first wife.

P3. *'...His children always stay with me. From morning till night. I have everything: food, clothes, everything. I feel like a mother to their children, too. She sits at home and does nothing... The children are with me; the children want it that way, but I do not want it. I do not want to hurt the children, but I want to have a separate house. Because I treat the children well... I do whatever they want. I wash their clothes. This woman (the first wife) did not do these things before; if she did, my husband would not have remarried.'*

P2. *'My husband's ex-wife is a bit old-fashioned. If she had agreed, if she had sent the children here, the children would have worked here, and we would not have been so poor. And I would take care of your children.'*

P5. *'It's not the kids' fault. What can they do? Nobody chooses their parents. But there's jealousy between them and my kids. Their father gave that woman's children the attention, love and value that he didn't give to my children.'*

P6. *'The children are all married, they are old now (laughs). They call me mum and they have never broken my heart. I am their mother too. They are like my daughters.'*

Things They Want to Change in Their Life

What women want to change in their lives is grouped under a sub-theme.

Back to Square One

All of the women stated that they would have given up on this marriage if they had gone back to the beginning.

P1. *'I have always treated him like a valuable human being, but why can't he find an excuse to spend time with me? I always try to understand him, but I am a human being and not a robot. He is very uninterested in me... I wish he would change. I love him. I love my husband. If I were his first wife, I would not want him to have another marriage. If I did not have children, I would be crazy. If I did not have one, two, three, I would have left him long ago.'*

P3. *'... It is still a difficult thing for me; it was wrong at first. Now I have no chance to fix it. When there is an incident, they immediately say you are the second wife; shut up, and do not comment. Despite this, I want to be peaceful and separate no matter what, even if I am the second wife... If I had my mind now, I would not have married like this. I would have wanted to marry for love. I neither love nor hate him now because he is the father of my children.'*

P4. *'I wouldn't marry. I'd like to be the only woman in the house. I gave up my family because of this marriage. I look back and I'm stuck, but it's too late. There's nowhere to go.'*

P5. *'What if I was in my right mind right now? I didn't choose to get married. It wasn't my choice. If we go back to the beginning, it'll be someone who wasn't my choice again. If my parents had sent me to school, this wouldn't have happened.'*

Discussion

This study summarizes findings regarding the psychosocial consequences of second wife culture among Syrian immigrant women. Family pressure and religious beliefs influenced women's decisions to become second wives, and some perceived it as a means of escape. It was observed that women in second-wife positions experience both jealousy and acceptance, with some struggling to adjust. Concerns were also expressed regarding their children's futures and the second wife's role as a mother to their children, along with a desire to be the sole wife. These findings contribute to a broader understanding of migrant integration challenges and support the development of more effective support mechanisms.

This qualitative study exploring Syrian migrant women's experiences of polygamous marriages reveals significant findings, particularly regarding the deep-rooted nature of gender inequality. The underlying reasons for agreeing to polygamous marriages often include religious beliefs, family pressure, and economic dependence, all of which reflect limitations on women's autonomy. Al-Krenawi and Graham (2011) found that religious and cultural norms, economic obligations, and family pressure are the primary reasons women consent to these marriages. Similarly, Zahra (2016) emphasizes that women in Pakistan are often coerced into such marriages due to religious beliefs and economic dependence. Additionally, Idris and Abdelgadir (2020) argue that women in the Middle East engage in "patriarchal bargaining" to preserve their limited autonomy. However, polygamous marriages have been found to contribute to depression, anxiety, and financial and moral hardships (Al-Krenawi 2013, Zahra 2016). Therefore, patriarchal structures must be critically examined to promote gender equality (Certel and Atasü Yopcuoglu 2024).

The study found that polygamous marriages lead to jealousy, competition, and emotional inequalities, all of which negatively impact women's mental health. Women experience significant psychological stress, anxiety, and depression (İdris and Abdelgadir 2020, Yilmaz and Wyngaarden 2020). Al-Krenawi and Graham (2011) observe that women in the Middle East are economically and emotionally marginalized, resulting in heightened rates of depression, anxiety, and stress. Similarly, Zahra (2016) reports high rates of psychological problems among women in polygamous marriages in Pakistan due to jealousy, competition, and inequality. Yilmaz and Wyngaarden (2020) further document that Syrian migrant women in Turkey suffer from emotional and economic neglect, as well as physical and sexual violence. Likewise, Idris and Abdelgadir (2020) highlight that economic hardship and social exclusion contribute to depressive symptoms among women. In particular, spousal imbalance and injustice significantly diminish women's quality of life (Al-Krenawi and Graham 2011). Addressing the psychosocial consequences of the second-wife culture is crucial. Health and social service providers must understand the unique challenges faced by migrant women and develop targeted support mechanisms (Kahraman 2020).

Women also expressed concerns about living in a foreign environment, limited educational opportunities, and uncertain future employment prospects. They stated that they do not want their children to experience lives similar to their own. Barın (2015) notes that Syrian migrant women in polygamous marriages worry deeply about

their children's well-being and the inequalities between stepchildren. Taha (2024) similarly shows that although women in Syria aspire to secure a better future for their children, polygamous marriages often hinder this goal. Women's familial and religious values often conflict with the reality of these marriages, intensifying concerns regarding child welfare. Therefore, the support and guidance that women require must be adequately addressed by society and institutions. Efforts to empower women and protect their rights through initiatives focused on combating domestic violence, improving access to education, and enhancing employment opportunities are essential. Increasing social awareness and creating platforms for women's voices will enable them to better cope with these difficulties and shape their own futures.

A recent study on Syrian migrant women in Turkey reveals that economic hardship and family pressure frequently force women into polygamous marriages, despite their desire to act according to their own free will (Tan Eren 2020). Participants reported experiencing economic and social exclusion, unmet emotional needs, and deep concerns for their children's well-being. Similarly, Taha (2024) illustrates that women in Syria endure patriarchal oppression and question gender inequalities but feel unable to reject polygamy due to traditional roles and beliefs. A study conducted in Egypt also highlights that patriarchal structures compel women to consent to polygamous marriages, although they still seek to exercise free will, emphasizing the ways in which gender inequality exacerbates their situation (Louden-Cooke 2024). These recent studies collectively demonstrate that while economic hardship, family pressures, and patriarchal structures push women toward polygamous marriages, women continue to demand respect for their autonomy and free will (Tan Eren 2020, Louden-Cooke 2024, Taha 2024). This study also underscores that socio-economic challenges, alongside cultural and social pressures, significantly influence Syrian migrant women's entry into polygamous marriages.

This study has several limitations. First, the relatively small sample size limits the generalizability of the findings. Conducting future research with a larger and more representative sample may enhance the reliability and robustness of the results. Additionally, the study focuses solely on the experiences of Syrian migrant women, thereby excluding the perspectives of Syrian migrant men. Given the gender dynamics inherent in the second-wife culture, examining men's perspectives may provide a more comprehensive understanding of the issue. Another limitation stems from the study setting, as it was conducted within an aid organization. As a result, participants primarily consisted of women from low- and middle-income backgrounds.

Another limitation is related to the data collection method. The use of interviews may have made it difficult for participants to fully express themselves regarding sensitive issues. Employing alternative qualitative data collection techniques, such as observation or visual methods, could contribute to diversifying the findings and providing deeper insights. Finally, the study's focus on a specific region and time period underscores the need for comparative studies across different geographical and socio-cultural contexts. Such research may facilitate a more comprehensive understanding of the impact of the second-wife culture within the context of migration.

Conclusion

The results of this study indicate that family pressure and religious views play significant roles in Syrian migrant women's decisions to become second wives. It was determined that women's being a second spouse negatively affected their social life. On the other hand, it was also determined that women's mental health was negatively affected due to being a second wife and that they devoted their lives for the lives of their children. Many women perceive second marriages as a means of escape, yet they experience various emotional difficulties in accepting their position as a second wife. Additionally, concerns about their children's future and the second wife's involvement in raising their children are prevalent among the participants. The findings also highlight the challenges migrant women face regarding their roles in society, family dynamics, education levels, and access to health services. This study offers valuable insights into the needs of Syrian migrant women during the integration process by providing a detailed examination of their experiences with the second-wife culture. It supplies crucial information that can enhance the effectiveness of policies and programs aimed at supporting these women. Therefore, it is recommended that relevant stakeholders develop inclusive policies and programs that more effectively address the needs of migrant women. Furthermore, the study sheds light on the behaviors of migrants as they align with their own cultural norms, suggesting the need for further research into the legal and social challenges that migrants may encounter in their host countries.

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