

TYPE OF MARRIAGE AMONG THE ATYAP IN NIGERIA: EFFECT OF RELIGIOUS DENOMINATION AND RELIGIOSITY

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Abstract

This paper examines the relationship between the Christian religion (denomination and religiosity) and type of marriage (monogamy or polygyny) among the Atyap (Kataf) in Kaduna State. The purpose of this study is to establish the type of marriage and to explore its relationship with the Christian religion based on the Modernization Theory. The methodology includes a random selection of 600 eligible Atyap women, aged 15-49, including the 386 ever-married women whose data is analysed using logistic multiple regression models. Proportions in polygynous unions among the currently married Atyap women are low (26-28 per cent) compared to those of other groups in the country (40-50 per cent). The multivariate regression model reveals that religiosity has an inverse relationship with polygyny while religious denomination has no significant effect. The paper concludes that by curbing polygyny, religion possibly serves to enhance the health status of women and children and contributes to peaceful coexistence and development in Atyap land. It also emphasizes the need for intra-faith analysis in the study of type of marriage especially among the numerous predominantly Christian ethnic groups in Nigeria, for the purpose of formulating appropriate demographic and health policies needed for both regional and national development.

Keywords: *Religious denomination, Religiosity, Monogamy, Polygyny, Atyap*

Introduction

Type of marriage (polygyny or monogamy) is of interest to social science researchers because, beside its association with socioeconomic and cultural factors, it has grave health consequences (see Hadley 2005; Reniers & Watkins 2010; Wagner & Rieger 2011) and subsequently, development. Moreover, changing marriage patterns provide clues that other social changes are afoot and could further enhance the understanding of changes in other social spheres (Van de Walle 1993).

Researchers have employed economic ('female choice', 'male choice', and 'male compromise') politico-economic, or generally, evolutionary and/or modernization theories to explain the incidence of polygamy and/or monogamy in society. These theories generally tend to see society being traditionally

polygamous but become more monogamous. They argue that the incidence of polygamy and monogamy in society is determined by the existence or level of demographic factors such as fecundity, post-partum sex taboos, barrenness, levirate, sex ratios and age, socioeconomic conditions including income, sickness, family laws and religion or the Church, and other modernizing factors such as education and democracy (Grossbard 1980; Kaufmann & Meekers 1989; Minguela 2011; Gould, Moav & Simhon, 2008; MacDonald 1995 (see de la Croix & Mariani 2011; Bailey, Baines & Amani, 2010). This study seeks the establishment of the incidence of polygyny and monogamy and the role education and religion or the Church plays in determining them based on the assertions of some modernization theorists.

Modernization theory would lead us

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to expect that economic development and social change (such as the introduction of universal schooling) would usher in changes in Africa's cultures and societal institutions that subsequently generate changes in the internalised values concerning the cultural and social supports, and thereby reshaping, among other things, the marriage system. Caldwell and Caldwell (1987) considered provision of interpretive apparatus by Western education a major factor undermining ancient beliefs and thereby ushering in social and demographic change, and particularly, eroding the traditional importance of marriage for achieving status. The shift from kinship-based family organisation to individualistic courtship and family life, through the effect of Western type education, is seen as especially important in this line of reasoning. Both entry into marriage and type of marriage are reshaped in this process. Thus, in this classic 'modernization' perspective, with education being a major secularising and individualising force, monogamy should be more prevalent among the educated.

However, although Caldwell, Orubuloye and Caldwell (1992) reported that Western education and foreign religions (Christianity and Islam) have introduced some changes in the traditional family structures and relations in some parts of Africa, they argued that the institutions, such as descent lineage system and polygyny show little sign of change in West Africa. Adebola (1988) favours this assertion by pointing out that the survival of tradition in spite of the eroding effect of socio-economic modernization is best seen in the continued practice of polygyny. In this cultural-persistence perspective, education should have little effect on marriage.

A variant of modernization theory posits that modernization severs the links between social institutions and that the allegiance to the traditional religion by Africans steadily erodes after conversion to

another religion (see King 1970; Southwold 1973). Secularization effect of modernization factors also weakens the religious beliefs and practices of non-secular religions. However, although the decline of belief and religious practice undermines the influence of religion on the family, religion and the family remain closely linked institutions (Thomas & Sommerfeldt 1984; Thomas & Henry 1985; Thornton 1985). Thus, the influence of religion on the family institution could remain strong under modernization although its influence on other spheres of life weakens, coming to be felt as inappropriate or even intrusive. This suggests that religious people before the influence of modernization would probably behave very differently from religious people after modernization. Unfortunately, the data does not allow the direct evaluation of this idea.

There is evidence of changes in type of marriage - from being generally polygamous to being more monogamous - in some societies of Sub-Saharan Africa (Lesthaeghe et al. 1989; United Nations 1990; Isiugo-Abanihe, Ebigbola & Adewuyi 1993; Isiugo-Abanihe 1994a; 1994b; Van de Walle 1993) and religion, among other factors, has been found to determine it (see Hayase & Liaw 1997). Islam and African Traditional religions allow polygyny while most Christian denominations strongly encourage monogamy, therefore, Christianity is said to have monogamy as its norm (Bygrunhanga-Akiiki 1977; Lesthaeghe et al. 1994). In particular, MacDonald (1990; and 1995) is cited as asserting in his evolutionary "male compromise" theory that the Church, acting as a powerful institution for imposing monogamy, is one of three main factors responsible for emergence of monogamy in medieval Europe (de la Croix & Mariani 2011). However, the Catholic Church in Africa has been found to condone polygyny more than the orthodox Protestant denominations

(Gatara 1982) although the Catholic doctrines mainly support monogamy. Therefore more Catholics can be expected to be or have been in polygynous unions than their protestant counterpart although the difference may be blocked or cancelled by the fact that the Baptist and Anglican Protestant denominations in Atyap land are also known, to a lesser extent, condone polygyny (Avong 1999). Nevertheless, the predominantly Christian and Protestant Atyap can be expected to be largely monogamous. Regarding religiosity, since both Catholic and orthodox Protestant denominations officially reject polygamy, more religious women, regardless of denomination, are more likely to be or have been in monogamous unions.

Most studies and theories have largely built on data from peoples other than the Atyap, although there is evidence that at least some parts of Africa have been experiencing a shift towards a modern nuptial pattern, particularly monogamy, much work remains to be done in assessing the universality of these changes, their magnitudes among different African peoples, and crucially, the connection between these changes and modernization of other spheres. It is also noteworthy that the Christianity, which swept the Atyap and to which they have enduringly adhered to, did not engender secularisation from all aspects of their Traditional religion (Avong 1999). Furthermore, although modern education is pursued equally by both sexes in the study area (Avong 1999) its impact as a secularisation factor might not be much as observed for the entire West African region (Caldwell et al. 1992; Adegbola 1998). Thus, polygyny, traditionally more prevalent form of marriage among the Atyap (Avong 1999) as found among other African groups (Mair 1969), can be expected to persist, but at a much lower level than existed before the arrival of Christianity and Western education in the early twentieth century (Avong 1999).

Research Questions

1. What is the incidence of polygyny and monogamy among the Atyap?
2. Are there differentials in polygyny or monogamy based on religious denomination and religiosity?

Purpose of study

This study aims at:

1. Examining the incidence of polygyny and monogamy among the Atyap.
2. Exploring social differences in the marriage unions within the Atyap with reference to the role of religious denomination and religiosity. This is done within the context of the modernization theoretical perspective.

Hypotheses

1. Catholic women are more likely to enter polygynous unions than Protestants.
2. Less religious women are more likely to enter polygynous unions than more religious women.

Research Methodology: Procedure, Instruments and Analysis

The survey, the first of its kind in the area, covered 10 villages of varying sizes in Zonzon District of Atyap (Kataf) Chiefdom. The target population was all women aged 15-49 and from the randomly selected 657 eligible women, 600 women were successfully reached and interviewed using a comprehensive structured questionnaire lifted from the World Fertility Surveys. The sample comprised of 599 Christians and one Muslim because the Chiefdom is predominantly Christian and the District of the study is almost 100 per cent Christian.

The module on religious beliefs,

drawn from the International Social Survey Program (ISSP) religion module, was used to obtain the religion data. Items on religious beliefs such as the belief in God, heaven, life after death, the Devil and hell, creation and miracles as described in the Bible and participation in various religious activities such as frequency of prayers, partaking in Holy Communion, Bible reading or study, attendance at church services were used to derive the religiosity indices.

The two religiosity indices (religious belief and participation in religious activities) were based on a 100-point, 0 to 100, rating scale ranging from strongly agree to strongly disagree, with higher numbers indicating greater level of agreement. The scores on all the items, for each respondent, were averaged to form the index score which ranged from 25 to 100. The higher the score, the more religious a respondent is considered to be. In addition, both focus group and in-depth interview substantive guides were used for collecting the qualitative data for this study. Various analytical approaches including bivariate and multivariate analyses have been employed in this study. To assess the separate impact of religious denomination, beliefs and participation on marriage pattern, logistic multiple regression analysis was employed. The logistic regression model that was used is:

$$\ln\left(\frac{P}{1-P}\right) = b_0 + b_1X_1 + \dots + b_kX_k + e$$

Where P is the probability of the outcome given the array of independent variables, $X_1 \dots X_k$; b_0 is a constant, $b_1 \dots b_k$ represent a series of unknown coefficients to be estimated using the maximum likelihood method, and e is an error or residual term.

Operational definition of key variables

Religious denomination is the group of local Christian Churches with the same beliefs, practices and church government. Those denominations found in the study area and presented in this study include Catholic, Anglican, Baptist and ECWA while religiosity is measured by religious participation and beliefs. Monogamy is the marriage of a man and one woman while polygyny is the marriage of a man to two or more women. Thus, woman or respondents who reported having no co-wives are in a monogamous union while those who reported having co-wives are in a polygynous union.

Results and Discussion

Type of marriage

Question 1: What is the incidence of polygyny and monogamy among the Atyap?

About 28 per cent of ever-married Atyap women and 26 per cent of currently married women had been or were in a polygynous union in 1995, making monogamy rather than polygyny the norm (Tables 1 & 2). These proportions are lower than the 37 per cent observed among married Yoruba women (Kritz and Makinwa-Adebusoye 1994:6), and 50 per cent in 1990 (FOS and IRD/MI 1992:58-9) and 42 per cent in 2008 (NPC & ICF Macro 2009:92) of currently married women in the Northwest.

Education seems to have a negative impact on polygyny. Polygyny among the educated is lower than observed for those with no education and the proportions in polygynous unions decrease as the level of education rises or years of schooling increase (Table 1). The proportion of those in polygynous union decreased from 49 per cent for women with no education to 14 per cent for women with secondary or higher education. Education can be assumed to be

The other two factors are, "political activity of lower status males" and "political activity of females and their relatives" (de la Croix & Mariani 2011:3).

Type of Marriage among he ATYAP in Nigeria: Effect of Religious Denomination and Religiosity

Table 1: Percentage of ever -married and currently married women in polygynous unions by some background characteristics, Zonzon Atyp, 1995

	Ever-married	n	Currently married	n
15-24	9.0	89	7.4	81
25-34	19.2	120	18.6	113
35-49	42.7	178	40.5	153
Educational				
None	49.0	194	46.2	93
Primary	29.0	107	27.5	91
Secondary/Higher	14.2	176	12.9	163
Years of schooling				
None	49.0	104	46.2	93
1-6	27.8	97	25.0	84
7+	15.6	186	14.7	170
Socioeconomic Status				
Low				
Medium	27.3	121	27.4	106
High	26.1	199	23.0	183
	32.8	67	31.0	58
All	27.7	387	25.6	347
Catholic	30.5	105	29.7	91
Other Protestant	30.0	90	26.3	80
ECWA	25.1	191	23.4	175
All	27.6	386	25.6	346

Source: Zonzon Atyp Women Survey (1995).

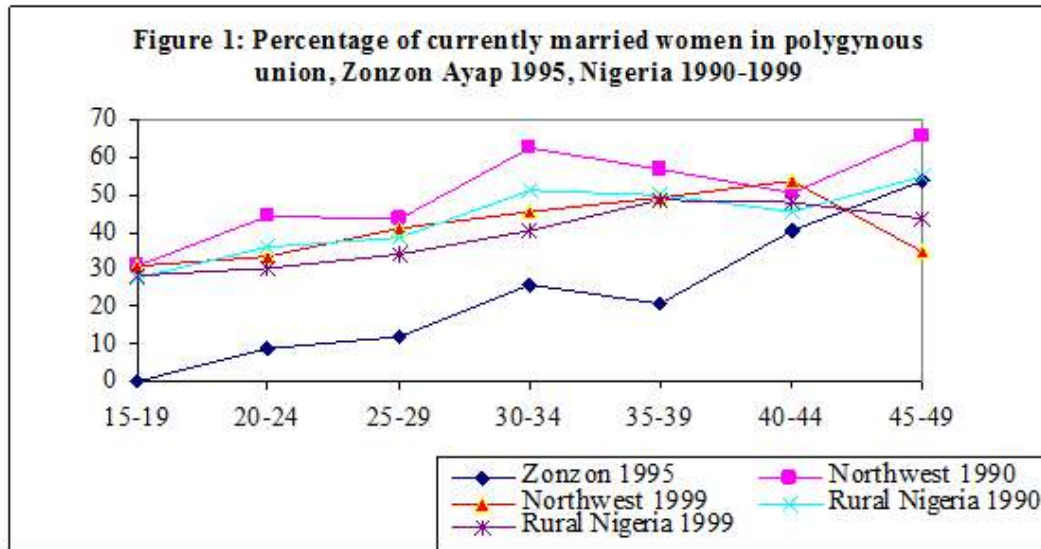
The likelihood of entering into a polygynous union does not decrease with increase in years of schooling. Fenske (2012) found missionary education or colonial schooling, rather than modern female education, reduce polygamy. The missionary education stressed the value of monogamy as a religious and social value.

Table 2: Percentage of currently married in polygynous union, Zonzon 1995, Nigeria 1990 and 1999

Age	Zonzon	Northwest		Rural Nigeria	
	1995	1990	1999	1990	1999
15-19	0.0	31.0	31.1	27.8	28.2
20-24	8.7	44.1	33.3	35.8	30.0
25-29	11.9	43.8	40.9	38.2	33.8
30-34	25.9	62.3	45.6	51.1	40.6
35-39	21.1	57.0	49.1	49.6	48.7
40-44	40.4	50.4	53.5	45.5	47.9
45-49	53.4	65.8	34.6	55.1	43.6
All	25.6	50.0	40.3	-	37.7

Sources: Zonzon Atyp Women Survey (1995); FOS & IRD/MI (1992:58-9); NPC (2000:74).

See Hosmer and Lemeshow 1989; Retherford and Choe 1993.



Source: Field Study (2013).

Year of birth better reveals decline in polygamy and is more intuitive than current age. However, analysis by age has also been commonly used and for comparison purposes, it is used for the analysis of the Atyp data. At all age groups, except age group 45-49 in 1999, incidence of polygyny is lower among the Atyp in 1995 than in the Northwest and Rural Nigeria in 1990 and 1999 (Table 2 & Figure 1). Moreover, the proportion with experience of polygynous unions declined from the 36 per cent found among currently married Atyp women in 1986 (1988:41) to the 26 per cent in 1995. National studies have also revealed that polygyny is widespread in Nigeria but it seems to be on the decline. It has declined from 36 per cent in 1999 (NPC 2000:74) and 2003 (NPC & ORC Macro 2004:84) to 33 per cent in 2008 (NPC & ICF Macro 2009:93). The low and declining level of polygyny among the Atyp may partly explain why the survey respondents consider it to be a dying institution in their community, contrary to the assertion that it is a flourishing institution in Sub-Saharan Africa (Ware 1983; Oppong 1992).

Very low levels of polygyny have been attributed to Christianity in Ghana (Aryee 1978) and to long and intense Christianisation in South Africa (Orubuloye, Caldwell & Caldwell 1993). Furthermore, Caldwell and Caldwell (1981) observed lower levels of polygyny in urban than rural areas of Western Nigeria, and maintained that polygynous unions are rare where the wife has been to school, consistent with modernization hypotheses. Thus, the practice of polygyny among the Atyp was expected to be very low or extinct as a result of the influence of Christianity and Western education. This expectation is proved wrong since polygyny is still being practiced and still relatively high. However, another study may reveal a decline from the level observed in 1995.

The lower level of polygyny among the Atyp than the Northwest and rural regions of the country may have been partly achieved through the practices of some Christian denominations, especially the ECWA, who consider polygyny to be a sin (see Okorie 2002). These denominations exclude those in polygynous unions (except the first

wives) from church membership or activities such as holding any post in the church, partaking in Holy Communion and preaching during church services. The Catholic Church, though it condones polygyny, only weds a man with one woman even when he has many women as wives. Similarly, most Christian religious leaders among the Yoruba were also reported to oppose and preach against polygyny (Orubuloye et al. 1993), explaining that Christianity has monogamous indissoluble marital union as its ideal and cited the creation of one man and one wife teachings in the New Testament to support this view (see also Wilson 1971). Thus, in contrast to the assertions by Caldwell et al. (1992) earlier mentioned, the Christian religion discourages the traditional practice of polygyny.

Another contributory factor is the decline in the practice of levirate marriage which has since been reported to be waning in Nigeria, especially among the younger generations (Isiugo-Abanihe 1994a). Although levirate was still practised in 1995, the elders reported that it was currently held in so much contempt that the younger generations do not practise it. The Christian churches, particularly the ECWA, also teach that levirate is a sin when it results in polygyny. The persistence of polygyny among the Atyp, in spite of the strong stance taken by some of their Christian denominations against it, may be a result of the influence of some Christian churches in Africa who perceive polygyny as not being in conflict with Christianity (Burnham 1987; Okorie 2012). It could also be a result of secularisation effect of modern Western education which weakens religious beliefs and practices (see Fenske 2012) thereby making polygyny tolerable and acceptable by those who no longer hold dear the tenets of their Christian faith.

Religious denomination and type of marriage (Polygyny and Monogamy)

Question 2: Are there differentials in the incidence of polygyny and monogamy based on religious denomination and religiosity?

The proportion of Atyp Catholics in polygynous unions does not differ much from the proportion of Protestants in such unions although, as already pointed out, the Catholic Church in Nigeria, as also observed in Kenya (Gatara 1982), accommodates polygyny. About 27 per cent of Protestant women and 31 per cent of Catholic women had been in polygynous unions (Table 3). The Baptist and Anglican denominations in Atyp land, as already pointed out, are also known to condone polygyny (Avong 1999) possibly resulting in the similarity in the incidence of polygyny in the Catholic and Protestant denominations. The firm stance against polygyny by the ECWA denomination warranted a check on the behaviour of the ECWA women. About 25 per cent of ECWA women had been in polygynous unions compared to 30 and 31 per cent for Other Protestants and Catholic women, respectively. A similar pattern is observed among the currently married women. Controlling for age, the proportion of ECWA women who ever entered polygynous unions is similar to the figures for other denominations at the earlier ages. But, by the end of their reproductive life, the proportion of ECWA women ever entering a polygynous union is lower than that of the Catholics, while the Catholics and Other Protestants had similar proportions (Table 3).

Table 3: Percentage of ever-married women aged 15-49, ever in a polygynous union, according to religious denomination by age, Zonzon Atyap, 1995

Ever-married women	All women	Religious Denomination			Total
		Catholic	ECWA	Protestant Other Protestants	
15-19	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0
20-24	10.5	17.4	8.1	6.3	7.5
25-29	11.3	12.5	10.7	11.1	10.9
30-34	27.6	21.4	33.3	21.4	29.5
35-59	23.9	27.8	18.2	33.3	21.4
40-44	41.8	47.1	36.1	50.0	40.0
45-49	56.9	76.9	44.1	66.7	51.9
All	27.7	30.5	25.1	30.0	26.7
Number of women	386	105	191	90	281
Currently married women					
15-19	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0
20-24	8.7	10.5	8.6	6.7	8.9
25-29	11.9	13.3	11.1	11.8	11.4
30-34	25.9	23.1	28.6	23.1	26.8
35-59	21.1	28.6	11.1	33.3	16.7
40-44	40.4	50.0	35.5	41.7	37.2
45-49	53.4	75.0	43.8	57.1	47.8
All	25.6	29.7	23.4	26.3	26.7
Number of women	347	91	175	80	255

Source: Zonzon Atyap Women Survey (1995).

The multivariate analysis measuring the likelihood of ever being in a polygynous union among women 15-49 years old show that there is no difference between Protestant and Catholic women in the proportion in polygynous union (Table 4). Therefore, the research hypothesis that religious affiliation has significant effect on polygyny is rejected.

Table 4: Logistic regression estimates of the likelihood of being in a polygynous union, ever-married women aged 15-49, Zonzon Atyp, 1995

Variable	B	S.E	Odds ratio	n
Religious denomination				
Catholic	0.457	0.292	1.58	103
Protestant (RC)			1.00	279
Religious participation	0.046	0.014	0.95	382
Religious belief	0.005	0.013	0.995	382
Age at first marriage	0.151	0.053	0.86	382
Years of schooling	0.032	0.037	1.03	382
Age	0.114	0.021	1.12	382
Constant	1.030	1.677		
Reduction of X ²	86.15			
d.f.	6			

Source: Zonzon Atyp Women Survey, 1995

Notes: RC= Reference category; * p<.05; ** p<01 or p<001

Non-ECWA women are significantly more likely to be in polygynous unions than ECWA women only at the 10 per cent level (not shown). The significance of the effect of the ECWA denomination's strict stand against polygyny may be better reflected when higher order wives in polygynous unions or men are the subjects of the study.

Religiosity and type of marriage (Polygyny and Monogamy)

Participation in religious activities has a highly statistically significant effect on type of marriage. Women who are more active participants in religious activities are less likely ever to be in a

polygynous union (Table 4). Thus, the research hypothesis that less religious women are more likely to enter polygynous unions than more religious women is confirmed. One interpretation could be that active participation in religious activities exposes the participants more often and more deeply to the teachings of the Church regarding marriage. But another effect may also be at work here. It is also possible that women in monogamous unions experience better relations within marriage thereby having greater inclination to participate in religious activities, especially those outside the home. The 1995 Zonzon Atyp qualitative research suggests that both of

these effects occur (see Avong 1999).

In contrast, religiosity based on religious belief has no statistically significant relationship to the likelihood of being in a polygynous union. Men may marry more than one wife without the consent of the first wife, therefore, the religious belief or religiosity of the men may determine the pattern of marriage in which a woman, particularly a first wife, finds herself. This indicates the need to control for religiosity of husbands when that of wives is examined in relation to the likelihood of women being in a polygynous union. Data on the religiosity of husbands were not collected during the 1995 Zonzon Atyap Survey. It is also worth noting that the influence of adherence to the more practical teaching of the Church may be captured by the religious participation effect. The finding of no effect of belief suggests that once adherence to practical teachings is taken into account, there is no extra effect of believing in an active God.

Conclusion and policy implications

The analyses have revealed that the incidence of polygyny is lower for the Atyap than ethnic groups in other regions of the country, where it ranged between 30 per cent in the predominantly Christian Southeast and 50 per cent in the predominantly Muslim Northwest in 1990 (FOS & IRD/MI 1992:58). Western education, often seen as an important secularising or modernising factor, was expected to have a significant adverse effect on the practice of polygyny as hypothesized by modernization theorists. However, it had no significant inverse

relationship on polygyny after the control of the confounding effect of other variables suggesting the need for studies to go beyond bivariate analysis in examining the education-marriage type relationship.

There is no variation in polygyny by religious denomination net of the effect of other confounding factors. However, the more frequent the participation in religious activities, the less likely an Atyap woman is to have ever been in a polygynous union. This suggests that regardless of the strength or weakness of the Churches' position on polygyny, they still have some effect on preference for a specific type of marriage (monogamy). Religious belief showed no significant association with polygyny suggesting the need to take into consideration the religiosity of husbands when that of wives is examined since the marriage pattern is most likely to be determined by the religiosity of the men rather than that of the wives in polygynous unions.

Religion might make a greater difference for earlier or older cohorts of women than younger cohorts of women of today. Therefore, a future similar study of type of marriage (polygamy and monogamy) in this community should pay attention to the differences in political, social and religious contexts of the time of the cohorts of women. An important cohort story that could have been brought out in this study was not possible due to the nature of the data which were not meant for a thorough study of polygyny but fertility.

Polygyny is of interest to researchers for its effect on fertility and the health and general wellbeing of both

women and children in polygynous family units (Tabi, Doster & Cheney 2010). It is reported that polygyny increases spread of STIs including HIV (Bove & Vallengia 2008; Reniers & Watkins 2010), affects children's growth, educational performance and health (Hadley 2005; Al-Krenawi & Slonim-Nevo 2008; Wagner and Rieger 2011), increases childhood mortality (Oni 1996; Gyimah 2005; Ukwuni 2012), affects mental and emotional health by increasing psychological problems (Al-Krenawi & Graham 2006; Adewuyi, Ola, Aloba, Dada & Fasoto 2007), affects children's school performance (Al-Krenawi 2001), and invigorates the cycle of poverty (Tertilt 2005), especially in Africa. The Christian religion among the Atyap curbs the practice of polygyny and consequently indirectly contributes to the health status of women and children. Thus intra-faith studies to establish the role of religion in determining polygyny and monogamy should be encouraged especially among minority ethnic groups. Furthermore, a healthy population is necessary for development, therefore, policies which also encourage religious practices that enhance the health of especially women and children are necessary in the numerous Nigerian communities similar to the Atyap.

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