

**THE EXPLORATION OF POLYAMY AND ITS EFFECTS IN LOLA SHONEYIN'S  
*THE SECRET LIVES OF BABA SEGI'S WIFES AND AYOBAMI ADEBAYO STAY  
WITH ME***

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BENIN CITY,**

**NOVEMBER, 2025**

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**A RESEARCH WORK SUBMITTED TO THE DEPARTMENT OF ENGLISH AND  
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## **CERTIFICATION**

This is to certify that this research work was carried out by ABIODUN GOODNESS OMOWUMI (MISS) with matriculation number ART 2100149 in the department of English and literature, faculty of arts, university of Benin, Benin City under my supervision.

## **DEDICATION**

This work is dedicated to almighty God for his grace and mercies towards me all these years.

This work is also dedicated to my parents Mr and Mrs Abiodun.

## **ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**

My sincere and humble gratitude goes to God almighty the giver of life and every good thing, for his love and faithfulness towards my life throughout the course of my study in the University of Benin.

My profound gratitude goes to my project supervisor, Mrs. D.L . Efofi for her guidance, patience and endless contributions to the success of this project. Also, I appreciate all my lecturers in the department of English and literature who have patiently guided me in this journey. I am indeed very grateful, may God bless you all.

To my supporting parents, who are always there to see me become successful in life, I say thank you. God bless you for me.

To my siblings, Deborah and Similoluwa for always encouraging me.

To Blessing, Chinasa, Elizabeth, Caleb, my roommates what shall I say? Friends turn sisters and brothers.

## CHAPTER ONE

### INTRODUCTION

This chapter covers the purpose, scope, theoretical background, review of related scholarships and thesis statements of the two texts for the study, Ayobami Adebayo's, *Stay With Me* and Lola Shoneyin's, *The Secret Lives of Baba Segi's Wives*.

#### **1.1 Purpose of Study**

The purpose of this study is to investigate polygamy in Lola Shoneyin's *The Secret lives of Baba Segi's Wives* and Ayobami Adebayo's *Stay With Me*, in order to provide insights on the reasons people go into Polygamous marriages and the psychological effects that emulate from such relationships. The aim is to dispute the idea of polygamy as a solution to family crises.

#### **1.2 Scope of Study**

This study will only be focusing on family life most especially polygamy which is an issue in society. In the texts, Lola Shoneyin's *The Secret Lives of Baba Segi's Wives* and Adebayo Ayobami's *Stay With Me*. After reading some books that can also be used for a topic like this, these two texts seem to be the best option for this research. One aspect that makes the novels different from others is the vivid portrayal of the clash that exists in a polygamous family that can be said to be incomparable in style. However, emphasis will only be placed on the traumatic and sociology influence of polygamy.

#### **1.3 Methodology**

The two novels will be analyzed in this study making use of qualitative research methods. This involves systematically interpreting the texts and gathering information from journals and articles from the internet and also from pdf materials.

This research is a text-based analysis that will be making use of comparative literary analysis. This entails; Firstly explaining what the topic is about. After this, focus will be on examining and analysing the texts in depth so as to identify each text portrayal of the topic. Another thing that will be done is that the texts will be compared in order to know how they portray the topic. With these a logical analysis is then done to present an insightful research.

#### **1.4 Theoretical Background**

The theoretical models that will be adopted in this study are Trauma theory and Sociological theory. In literary studies, trauma theory examines how traumatic events are expressed, represented, processed and responded to in literature. It explores how traumatic experiences are depicted in texts. Developed in the 1990s and pioneered by Cathy Caruth. The word "trauma" can be traced back to the 17th century medical pathology meaning, "a wound or external body injury". The theory was primarily driven by the need to understand the deeper and lasting psychological or social impact of traumatic experience. Trauma theory studies the effect of traumatic events or experiences on an individual, events such as accidents, abuse, death-related, or violence and how it impacts the brain, body and overall well-being, often leading to Post traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). Trauma theory explores how traumatic events can shatter a person's sense of self, reducing them to nothing, influencing their identity and worldview. Some of the tenets of trauma theory are; Firstly, the idea that trauma experience can be difficult to represent through language, leading to gaps, silences, and symbolic expression in trauma

narratives. Another tenet is the fact that trauma can't be expressed or processed at the time of action but after a series of the action being repeated, these repetition take the form of flashbacks, obsessive thoughts or nightmares.

Also, trauma leads to a rupture of identity. The “self” before the trauma is no longer the same as the “self” after, bringing about self loss or loss of identity, causing restlessness or irritability. Trauma theory in texts make use of fragmented narratives, repetition and gaps to mirror the experience of traumatic memory. Also, It makes use of non linear storytelling techniques in conveying the emotional and psychological impact of trauma.

Even with all these tenets, the theory still has its criticism which are; Firstly, critics criticize the heavy emphasis placed on unrepresentability or unspeakability of trauma .They argue that even though this is powerful, it may not be true for all forms of suffering or for all individuals. Also, they also argue that it focuses too much on individuals' memory and the unconscious whereby this can lead to overlooking what causes the suffering. Without doubt, this theory can be said to be the theory that can best analyse and understand the emotional suffering of each character in the texts. In Adebayo Ayobami's *Stay With Me*, Yejida is a character who suffers from the emotional pain of losing her children and becoming an image of herself. Also in Lola Shoneyin's *The Secret Lives of Baba Segi's Wives*, Bolanle can be said to be a victim of child molestation traumatised because of this leading her to lose herself.

So with this theory, we are able to uncover deeper meanings and also create a framework which is essential for the understanding of the texts.

Another theory that will be used in this study is sociological theory. This theory arises from the need to understand and explain the complexities of human social life. It is attributed to Auguste Comte, who coined the term “ sociology” in 1838.He is commonly referred to as the “Father of

sociology”. He developed sociology as a scientific discipline with a focus on the study of society and its development. But before this Emmanuel Joseph Sieyes had used the term “sociology “ in an unpublished manuscript. Later scholars like Karl Marx, Emile Durkheim and Max Weber further developed it. Sociological theory examines the relationship between literary works and the social context it is being created. It explores how literature reflects and shapes societal structures including class struggles, gender roles, culture e.t.c. It is connected to the social, economic and political realities of its time. With sociological theory,we can have an insight about how literature reflects society. The theory is not static, it evolves. It reflects why societies are structured the way they are, how they change and individuals interact with them. Some tenets of sociological theory are; Firstly, literature is a social reflection which mirrors society. Characters,plots, setting and themes all reflect the society. It's a framework that questions beliefs, provokes empathy, and inspires social and political change. The theory helps in challenging existing social hierarchies such as class structures, gender inequality and racial division. Literature embodies the values, beliefs and norms of the society. Examine how social problems are portrayed in literature and how they contribute to our understanding of society. With this theory, we will be able to understand some aspects, the do’s and why’s in the texts.

There are some criticisms pertaining to this theory. These are; Firstly, Critic argues on the overemphasis placed on social structures (class, culture, gender e.t.c) . They argue that why social context is important, individuals' character choices also play a crucial role in every narrative.

They also argue that with the fact that literature can reflect social issues,it is not always clear how much influence a specific social context has on the author's choice or the text's meaning. This theory will help in analysing the texts from the point of view of another theory. In Adebayo

Ayobami's *Stay With Me*, the social context portrayed in the text is a society in which a woman's worth is likened to her giving birth to children. Yejida goes through a lot of pain and insults because of her inability to give birth. And also Lola shoneyin's *The Secret Lives of Baba Segi's Wives*, the cultural background here, is a situation whereby a man's worth can be measured with how large his family is.

With each theory, understanding and analysing the texts will be made easier. With sociological theory, cultural expectations, gender and the society will be reviewed and analyzed. While with Trauma theory, the emotional struggles, pain and experiences of each character will be examined.

### **1.5 Review of Related Scholarship**

Scholars have been able to write about the practice polygamy, its causes and also its effects. Some which are; According to Thobejane Daniel, “ It is through cultural practices, beliefs and also on the individual's choice that people decide to be committed to polygamy lifestyles”. Polygamy is the practice of having more than one spouse at a given time. The article reveals how the practice is deeply rooted in our ancestors' lifestyle and also eighty three percent of human societies allow this practice. With the article we are able to know places which allow or do not allow polygamy. A place like Cameroon where polygamy is practiced due to economic factors. women and children are viewed as labourers and producers, wives ‘produced’ children and gardens, girl child produce dowry and personal service. The wife nurtures and produces goods which are sold at the market. The man also engages in this and if it is noticed that the income is not enough they seek other means of securing income which can be helping or encouraging the husband to secure other wives. The most common place polygamy is practiced

is Africa, particularly the western region. It is socially accepted. Like twenty percent to fifty percent marriages are polygamous. Here, it is encouraged by different factors.

Looking at it from the religious point of view, Muslims communities practice polygamy. Doing this they make reference to “Quran 4:3, which states that a man can marry up to four wives”. However not all Muslims communities practice polygamy, places like Tunisia, an Arab country banned polygamy in 1956. Turkey also banned polygamy in 1926 engaging in polygamy can attract a two years imprisonment among others. Places like Utah in the Western United States, do not allow the practice. Doing this attracts the penalty of a fine of \$750 unlike before whereby it is punishable by imprisonment. Canada does not also allow the practice.

It is believed by some people that polygamy can be used as a means to control overpopulation. In the world's population, it is studied that the female gender is much more than the male gender so they advised that a man getting married to more wives can make the population balanced. In a study conducted a small number of women would actually agree entering into polygamous marriage to find happiness and satisfaction. Actually, according to this article, it reveals what polygamy is all about, what influences people into getting into it and also places that allow or don't allow it, this will help the research in answering the question of polygamy.

However, with further research, the negative effects caused by polygamy on women and children is revealed. Shaiful Bahari discussed this in his research. Using a rigorous method to identify and access all things pertaining to polygamy and its impact specifically on women and children. In the research dominant household problems stem from polygamy such as jealousy and rivalry between co-wives over husband's affections and resources. Also a systematic review is done on children living in a polygamous family. Children here often suffer from physical and emotional abuse, especially the female children who witnessed their mothers' emotional pains.

The abuse of the children can lead to mental health problems, social problems and even having a lower academic achievement. However, despite these, it is revealed in the research that polygamy can have a positive impact. The warmth and affection in a polygamous family may provide a positive role model for the children's mental health and self esteem. Also it can play a major role in the development of children socially. With this article, the negative and also the positive impact of polygamy is revealed. This is one of the parts of what will be discussed in this study.

Furthermore, different scholars engage in writing articles about Lola Shoneyin's *The Secret Lives of Baba Segi's Wives* ; some of them are reviewed in this study. Starting with Olushola Ayodeji research work that analyse the novel with the feminist theory, snail sense feminism as professed by Akachi Ezeigbo. Defining the theory as a “model which advocates dialogue, negotiation, good education for women and also lays emphasis on individual empowerment.” It is noted that the theory is derived from the habit of a snail. In the research snail sense strategy is identified in the novel as displayed by each character. Bolanle is being attributed as the character who exhibits the qualities of the snail sense feminism the most. Her display of wisdom, resilience, perseverance and determination portrays this, as this enables her to survive within the family especially between her co-wives. Also, Iya Segi, the first wife, displays this strategy through effective dialogue, wisdom and negotiation in order to get what she wants. She is able to walk her way out with Baba Segi after she and her co-wives commits the offence of adultery. Iya Femi, the third wife, applies this strategy in persuading Baba segi into marrying her. In addition, Iya Tope who is the second wife's resilience enables her to be able to cope within the family. Although this research work evaluated the text using a feminist theory, this is good but the scholar did not investigate the main source of the problem which is polygamy. It should be noted that the reason for the unrest is because they are co-wives in the first place.

However, other works will shed more light on this. Patricia Nathan in her work using the novel reveals what brings about polygamous marriage. Starting with a quote, ‘Although some view polygamy as a ‘problem solver’,they end up worse than they went in”. Firstly, the paper discussed the cultural aspect of polygamy. In some cultures in Nigeria most especially polygamy is a way of knowing how prosperous and successful a man is. Also, His religion can influence him getting married to as many wives as he can. Christianity prohibits this while islamic encourages it. Also It is further explained that some women go into polygamy as a means of running away from their past. This is evident in Bolanle who gets married to Baba segi with the belief that it would swallow up her past. Discussing more on this Dora Nyuykighan explains this in her article titled “ Unveiling the Dark Underbelly of Polygamy” using the novel. In the article,Dora asserts that in African society polygamy is often portrayed as “ exotic and romanticised”. However, under this lies oppression, inequalities,hidden struggles, emotional and physical abuse for those involved in the practice. The article further explains the power dynamics which exist in polygamous marriages. In most African societies, a single woman is sometimes looked down upon when she is of marriageable age but she is not married. Now getting married her worth is linked to her ability to give birth if she does not meet this she is tagged worthless. Instances were shown in the novel where wives are addressed after their children's names earning the title “Iya” (Iya tope,Iya segi, Iya femi ) but Bolanle who has not given birth is called by her name and also not respected. In this kind of situation there is a form of power and respect designated for wives with children rather than a woman with no children. Another insight is on the man, whereby they hold authority and control over their wives exhibiting patriarchy. Baba segi wields power over his household having control over their lives. For someone like him, he is considered prosperous and successful because in an African society,a man's worth is determined

by the measure of his household. He makes sure that his wives are left helpless and emotionally dependent on him. Another issue that can arise in a polygamous home is the issue of infertility which will be explained in the next research.

Okpala victory examined the socio-cultural construct of infertility using the novel. Starting with a quote, “ a health concern that has affected practically all spheres of human societies, it is a gender neutral issue, although oftentimes perceived as women's problems”. It is explained in the article that infertility affects both genders but in our society blame is always placed on the female gender. In this article male infertility is focused on disputing the socio-cultural construct that places the burden on women. There is a societal expectation placed on women after marriage to have a baby and if the pregnancy is delayed or not forthcoming all attention is placed on her. Illustration is made from the novel where something like this happens and because of this the wives except Bolanle have to resort to extramarital affairs in order to have a baby which is later attributed to their husband in order to prolong their husband lineage. However, Baba Segi believes that Bolanle is the cause of her assumed Infertility, this validates the idea of women being blamed for infertility. Even going to the hospital, Baba segi boasts about his ‘bedroom poweress’ and the number of children he has, denigrating Bolanle asserting that her womb is the one with the problem whereas in reality he is the one with the problem. Bolanle’s inability to become pregnant creates social stigma for her, even her co-wives do not help matters; they make her feel worthless with every chance they get. Not only that, her husband uses a scornful word to address her. But this is brought to an end when the medical result shows that Baba Segi has no sperm cells which makes his case a difficult one.

From the research done by each scholar in analysing this novel we can see that they have been able to explain the inner truth about polygamy. This relates to this research because it helps in shedding more light to some part of this research.

Similarly, different scholars also did an analysis on Adebayo Ayobami's *Stay With Me*. This is discussed in this part. Josephine Olufunmilayo analyzed the book by firstly, appreciating the style used in writing the text. After this, analysis is done on the cultural beliefs displayed in the text. Yoruba culture believes that a man can only be a man if he has children to continue his lineage irrespective of his achievements in life and also a woman is incomplete if she is unable to give birth. Another aspect of culture that is discussed in the article is the name of each character which has its meanings. Iyejide, meaning a child whose mother died during or after childbirth, Akin meaning bravery, Funmilayo meaning give me joy, Olamide meaning my wealth has arrived among other names. The article also talked about some themes in the novel which are love, deceit, death, tragedy, polygamy, hope and infertility. Discussing more about infertility, Ophelia abianji-menang discussed at length about this in her analysis of the text.

“Infertility is a major reproductive health problem that brings shame and also leads to social exclusion of women in sub-saharan Africa.” Ophelia further adds that women are highly charged for being responsible for infertility. She is stigmatized, discriminated against and given all kinds of names for her inability to bear a child. It is further illustrated how yejide is stigmatized and belittled for her inability to bear a child whereas the problem lies with her husband. The article further explains the fact that love alone can not sustain a marriage in African society. It can ‘bend, crack or break’ because of childlessness because this is the situation in the novel. Yejide is disgraced and also traumatised because of her assumed infertility. The traumatic injury of this is further explained in the next study.

In this study, Amao Kehinde examines trauma from infertility, and emotional instability due to societal pressure in marriage. The study examines the attention placed on having children by the society on marriages and how one's identity and achievements can only be marked by that. This can be likened to one common cause of trauma especially for women as revealed in the study. The study further discussed how infertility is seen as a personal failure, this is shown in the novel where Yejide have to battle with the trauma of infertility and Akin have to experience trauma as a result of keeping patriarchal norms and social expectations. A woman may experience emotional abuse or seclusion if she is unable to give birth. Also, the study further explains how the institution of marriage has a close relationship with cultural values in many Nigerian tribes. The social expectation placed on marriage is childbearing instead of it being a personal decision. These conventions placed a lot of pressure on the couples' women especially doing everything or anything to conceive a baby even at the expense of their health. This is seen in the novel as Yejide assumed infertility results in psychological suffering and social rejection. It is noticed that the majority of scholars who did an analysis on this text discussed mainly on infertility which is one of the dominant themes in the novel. But this study will not dwell on infertility as a major focus but on infertility as likely reasons for polygamy.

After reviewing works done on the two texts, starting with Adebayo Ayobami's *Stay With Me*. As earlier said, more attention is placed by scholars on Infertility and likely psychological injuries that can affect individuals but this research will be looking at the text from another view which is polygamy, but it should be noted that infertility will also be discussed on in this study, but it will only be as a result of talking about the reason why some people go into polygamy as earlier said. Likewise, in Lola Shoneyin's *The Secret Lives of Baba Segi's Wives*. Analysis is done on the text mostly on polygamy by different scholars. However, this study will be placing

more of its attention on the impact, specifically the practice's negative impact and also its psychological effects on characters.

### **1.6 Thesis statement**

In Adebayo Ayobami's *Stay With Me* and Lola Shoneyin's *The Secret Lives of Baba Segi's Wives*, themes of Infertility, personal beliefs and societal pressure were seen to be the cause of polygamy, while the psychological effects were explicated in the themes of Self- doubt, emotional and mental distress, Inferiority complex and Insecurity.

## **CHAPTER TWO**

### **CAUSES OF POLYGAMY**

#### **2.1 INTRODUCTION**

This chapter examines the causes of polygamy in Adebayo Ayobami's *Stay With Me* and Lola Shoneyin's *The Secret Lives of Baba Segi's Wives*. According to Sociological theory, literature serves as a social reflection which mirrors the society. These two texts analysing them using the theory allows readers to understand some happenings in the society. Examination of those situations that lead to polygamy is revealed in this chapter.

#### **2.2 Exploration of Polygamy**

Polygamy is the practice of being married to more than one spouse at the same or different times. The word first used in the 1500's entered into English through late Latin. It originated from the

Greek word, “poly” meaning “many”, and “gamos” meaning “marriage”. Combining both words ‘Polygamous’ meaning ‘often married’. In contrast to this is monogamy, which also has Greek roots. It is derived from the combination of ‘monos’ meaning ‘one or single’ and ‘gamos’ meaning ‘marriage’. Monogamy is the act of being married to a spouse.

Polygamy is one popular practice in our society, a practice that is seen as normal. One popular novel that also portrays this practice in African society, specifically the Igbo community is Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart*, a novel that depicts the life of a polygamist. In the novel, polygamy is viewed as a normal and acceptable practice in the Igbo community. Here, a man's worth is usually measured by the number of wives and children he has. In the text, polygamy is more than a man getting married to more than one wife, but it symbolises wealth, fertility, and social position. Moreover, there are different conflicts that usually arise in a polygamous family among the wives which can be rivalry, jealousy and hatred among co-wives for the husband's attention and affection. Also, there can be some form of hatred and competition among the children in some cases. With a Sociological theory guide, this study will analyse the different causes of polygamy using Adebayo Ayobami's *Stay With Me* and Lola Shoneyin's *The Secret Lives of Baba Segi's Wives*.

### **2.3. Personal Beliefs**

Tenets of Sociological theory made us understand why characters behave in certain ways, how their actions are shaped by social factors. In Ayobami's *Stay With Me*, Yejide's father practiced polygamy as a way to escape loneliness and in case of unforeseen circumstances like kidnapping.

“Every time he married a new wife, my  
father would tell his children that family

was about having people who would look for you if you got kidnapped. He'd then add that he was doing his best to build an army just in case one of us did get kidnapped “. (63)

This is what he believes in so he ensures he has a large family even with the fact that he always tells Yejide how much he loves her mother.

In Shoneyin's *The Secret Lives of Baba Segi's Wives*, a character like Ishola popularly called Baba Segi is a polygamist. His lust for women creates him a pathway for polygamy. So instead of engaging in adultery, he is advised by the teacher to just get married to as many women as he can.

“Lust points its finger at every man and soon after I married, the women of Ayikara began to look like princesses and goddesses. I was happy to have these women on the side, but teacher said, “Two women at home are better than ten in a bush. They are Jezebels. A man whose house is full of birth will never want for mirth”. (154)

He further attests to his lustful act when sharing his point of view.

“What kind of human being rejects the

fullness of a woman ?, would the gods themselves not have been angered if I had forgone the opportunity to show mercy upon another human being?. I chose Bolanle, I cannot lie; I set my mind on her, the way a thirsty child sets his eyes on a cup filling from a spout. (154)

Likewise, Iya Segi attests to her husband's lustful desire for women.

“Women are my husband's weakness. He cannot resist them, especially when They are low and downcast like puppies prematurely snatched from their mothers' breasts”. (Pg. 82)

Engaging in polygamy, Baba Segi always feels superior to his wives. There is a form of patriarchy displayed in the novel through the character of Baba Segi.

According to the English dictionary, Patriarchy is a social system in which the father is head of the household, having authority over women and children and in which lineage is traced through the male line. Baba Segi always sees himself as lord over his wife's life as someone who controls their every life.

“Baba Segi's armchair faced the TV directly; his wives (except Bolanle, who hadn't earned her right to an armchair)

kept their seats at the angle their  
husband insisted on. Baba Segi liked  
observe their every facial expression:  
how widely they smiled at comedy  
sketched, how many tears they shed  
when they were gripped by agonizing  
dramas. The wives, knowing they were  
being watched, stared at the screen,  
never swiveling to look Baba Segi  
smack in her face”. (14)

This shows how he makes himself lord over their lives. He sees his wives as a mirror in which he can boast his superiority.

“I took a second wife, a peace offering  
from a desperate farmer. I took the third  
because she offered herself with  
humility”. (154)

This can only come out from a man who feels he's better than others.

Also, another character is Bolanle. She enters into polygamy as a result of rape. She struggles with low self esteem who doesn't see herself of any worth. She considered herself of no value. After losing her innocence she also lost herself becoming a shadow of herself who can't forgive herself. She feels guilty and also ashamed of her past.

“I came to get away from the feeling of

filth that followed me. If I stayed at  
home, I knew the day would come  
when mama would come to my room  
and find pools of blood at my wrist”.

(18)

She is hurt and broken from the experience.

“How could I tell her that I had failed to  
preserve my dignity? I was too  
ashamed to let her see the fickle shell  
I’d become. Inevitably, it became  
unbearable.”. (18).

We can see how destabilized she is after the incident. She lost her innocence four months before her sixteenth birthday and since then she is never the same. Locking it up inside herself without revealing it to anyone, not even her family. This also reveals how victims of rape are not able to speak out their pain to others because of the fear of being judge.

“I wanted to be your perfect daughter. I  
didn’t want to disappoint you.”. (116)

She revealed this to her mother,when she can no longer cope.

“I am ruined, damaged, destroyed. I am  
all those things you ever said. My life  
was wrecked and I didn’t know how to

fix it. I still don't know.”. (116)

This reveals brokenness.

“Mama, you were living with an empty shell. Everything was scraped out of me. I was inside out.”. (116)

This reveals what victims like her experience allowing them in making the wrong decisions, like the option Bolanle chooses.

“somehow, it all made perfect sense when I met Baba Segi. At last, I would be able to empty myself of my sorrow. I would be with a man who accepted me, one who didn't ask questions or find my quietness unsettling. I knew Baba Segi wouldn't be like younger men who demanded explanations for the faraway look in my eye. Baba Segi was content when I said nothing.

So, yes, I chose this home.

I chose this family to regain my life, to heal in anonymity” (19)

From this extract, we can see that she can't get over her past. Marrying into a polygamous family is just a form of escape from her reality and the best solution at the moment. Even with the disconsent from her family, she still goes ahead with it. Always replying,

“ I'm doing what is best for me, Mama”.

(33).

Likewise, Iya Femi becomes Baba segi's third wife as a means of survival. After years of suffering and maltreatment at grandma's house. She married Baba Segi out of desperation to leave the hell she is living in.

“I didn't waste time in telling Taju I was looking for a man to marry me. I was desperate; I didn't want Grandma to come back and find me.” (100).

## **2.4 Societal Pressure**

Societal pressure refers to the influence or expectations a society has on an individual to act in a certain way to meet specific standards. It can manifest as a feeling of obligation to perform in a particular way. This can originate from friends, family and government institutions. It can bring about positive or negative impact. Furthermore, people tend to engage in polygamy after much pressure from society. With a Sociological theory framework, readers are able to have an insight about how literature reflects social reality. In Ayobami's *Stay With Me*, Akin is always pressured by his mother of his duty as the first son to have children. With this, his mother brings in different women to his office urging him to accept one as a wife.

“After I’d been married to Yejide for two years, my mother began to show up in my office on the first Monday of every month. She didn’t come alone. (22)

Each time, she brought a new woman with her, a potential second wife. She never missed a first Monday. Not even when she was ill. (23)

So, he eventually agrees to get married to Funmilayo. And also, as a way of him protecting his wife from embarrassment.

“We had an agreement. As long as I continued to let her bring the women to my office, she would never embarrass my wife by showing up at our home with any of her candidates.” (23)

With this extract, we can see how couples are often pressured into the practice of polygamy.

In Shoneyin's *The Secret Lives of Baba Segi's Wives*. It is revealed that at a certain age a lady is expected to get married. This is the condition of Iya Tope, Baba Segi's third wife.

“I was twenty-three years old, I remember. It was later in the year that my older brother declared that I was ripe for marriage. My mother did not

tell him to mind his mouth. Instead,  
without raising her face from the heap  
of melon seeds, she added, “Truth be  
told, she is bordering on decay.”(64)

Eventually, she is offered as a ‘peace offering’ for a bad harvest by her father.

“I was compensation for the failed  
crops. I was just like the tubers of  
cassava in the basket. Maybe  
something even less, something  
strange—a tuber with eyes, a nose,  
arms and two legs.” (67)

Even Baba Segi refers to her as a peace offering.

“I took a second wife, a peace offering from a desperate farmer”. (154)

## **2.5 Infertility**

Another factor that can lead to the practice of polygamy is infertility. It is a condition in which an individual or couple's inability to have a baby. Both genders can be the cause of this implying that the problem is not always with the female gender which is always believed to be so. This is vividly portrayed in Ayobami's *Stay With Me*. The couple, Akin and Yejide, do not like the idea of polygamy. The plan is a monogamous family, but after years of their inability to birth a child,

another woman has to come into the picture. There is this belief that if the second wife gives birth this will enable the first wife to also have a baby.

“Well, our wife, this is your new wife. It is one child that calls another one into this world. Who knows, the king in heaven may answer your prayers because of this wife. Once she gets pregnant and has a child, we are sure you will have one too,” (13)

Also, whenever a couple is experiencing infertility the blame is always shifted on the wife. Actually, in the novel this is disputed because the problem lies with Akin who is unable to impregnate a woman. This is later revealed to Dotun, his brother during their university days.

“It was during that year that I told him I’d never had an erection”. (214)

However, because of the pressure placed on Yejide. She developed a psychiatric disorder called ‘pseudocyesis’ which is the delusional belief of being pregnant with significant physical symptoms and signs that mimic a real pregnancy. She strongly believes to be pregnant whereas she is not. Apart from the fact that some people actually love the idea of polygamy family, majority enters into the practice because of infertility. This is the main cause of polygamy in *Stay With Me*, depicting the helpless state of couples.

## **2.6. Conclusion**

In this chapter, we have been able to examine the causes of polygamy from the texts. With each cause being analyzed, we have a better understanding of what brings about polygamy. Reasons why couples engage in polygamy even when they do not like the practice. However, we have been able to see from the two texts why people engage in polygamy which can be pressure from family and friends, love for a large family or polygamy as a last option. It depends on those involved.

## **CHAPTER THREE**

### **EFFECTS OF POLYGAMY**

#### **3.1 INTRODUCTION**

This chapter examines the negative effects of the practice on the characters. In this chapter it is revealed how traumatising and devastating the practice can have on individuals especially the women who are most likely to get affected by the practice. The impacts are examined in light with trauma theory which will serve as a guide in this chapter.

#### **3.2 MENTAL DISTRESS**

Mental distress is a state in which the mind is troubled. It is a discomfoting and troubling experience which usually disrupts the victims physical and internal life. It is a mental suffering

that manifests due to an unpleasant situation which affects the individual's mind interfering with their relationship with others. If precautionary measures are not taken the victims are always left shattered becoming a shell of themselves, this is portrayed in the two texts. One of the tenets of trauma theory is that it explores how traumatic experiences are depicted in literature, with the use of fragmented narratives which entails using nonlinear story telling techniques in conveying the emotional and psychological impact of trauma.

One of the major techniques used in *Stay With Me* is fragmented narratives which entails a nonlinear story telling technique which does not follow a straight order in narration. It jumps back and forth in time making use of flashbacks. Starting from the first chapter which is filled with uncertainty and ambiguity, readers are left with a feeling of doubt.

“I must leave this city today and come  
to you. My bags are packed and the  
empty rooms remind me that I should  
have left a week ago”. (8)

Reading these lines brings out suspicion from the readers. Also, this

“There’s a house waiting for me in Ife,  
right outside the university where you  
and I first met.”. (9)

This also reveal something;

“The road stretches before us,  
shrouded in a darkness transitioning  
into dawn as it leads me back to you”.  
(9).

Without even thinking too much, there is a touch in the heart of the readers, there is a feeling of curiosity about what has happened to the narrator here. These touch emotions. Further, The use of multiple narratives is employed in order to reveal the subconscious mind of the characters. Both Akin and Yejide's inner minds were both revealed to the reader in order to show their insights about their situation.

“Before I got married, I believed love  
could do anything. I learned soon  
enough that it couldn't bear the weight  
of four years without children. If the  
burden is too much and stays too long,  
even love bends, cracks, comes close  
to breaking and sometimes does  
break. But even when it's in a  
thousand pieces around your feet, that  
doesn't mean it's no longer love.”.

(22).

This brings about the feeling of doubt, if love does not really hold a marriage.

Also in Shoneyin's novel, the fragmented narratives techniques are also made use of here. Characters tend to reveal their past experience to the readers. With the techniques, Bolanle's inner mind is revealed, the secret which she locked up in her heart gets revealed to the readers. Reasons why she acts the way she does is revealed. With the use of flashbacks, it is revealed she is a victim of rape and also, once engage in abortion.

“Don’t get me wrong, I didn’t only come here to get away from my mother; I came to get away from the feeling of filth that followed me. If I stayed at home, I knew the day would come when Mama would come to my room and find pools of blood at my wrists.”.

(18).

This not only reveals the reason why she chose polygamy but also reveals her inner turmoil.

With the techniques, we can see how the characters' inner minds are portrayed creating the feeling of intimacy and emotions between the readers and the characters. The readers are no longer reading through but they are now directly into the mind of the characters, making it feel as if they are both experiencing the pain and outburst of emotions together.

Another tenet of trauma theory is that trauma brings about the feeling of insecurity in its victims. In the texts the characters who are victims battle with anxiety, always getting worried. In *Stay With Me*, the moment Funmilayo comes into existence in Yejide’s marriage she starts battling with Insecurity, a fear of potential threats perceiving Funmi as the threat. Being left alone has always been Yejide's biggest fear since childhood, losing her mother at birth has always brought this feeling of loneliness.

“And, it was not just that I did not have a mother, but the one I once had, the one who died seconds after she had pushed me out into the world, was a

woman without lineage!”. (33)

This is revealed by her father that her mother ,

“had been part of a nomadic Fulani  
group when she got pregnant by him  
and refused to travel on with her own  
people.”. (63)

Making matters worse, She lost her father before she got married to Akin, so, no one to look up  
to.

“But I wanted to believe him. I had no  
father, no mother, and no sibling. Akin  
was the only person in the world who  
would really notice if I went missing.

(68).

If there is something Yejide is scared of, it's loneliness, which she has always struggled with  
since childhood. She further revealed this when she is soliloquizing.

“I did not really want to fight with him,  
to explain that I was afraid that he  
would leave me and I would be all  
alone in the world again.”. (37)

In addition to this,

“These days I tell myself that is why I  
stretched to accommodate every new  
level of indignity, so that I could have

someone who would look for me I went missing.”. (68).

With these statements, we can see how deeply she dreads the feeling of loneliness even to the point of sacrificing her peace.

So Funmi's existence in her marriage triggers this nightmare because she feels that will enable Akin to leave her. This triggered a feeling of insecurity and anxiety in her. Moreover, for someone like Yejide whose father is a polygamist having four wives before his death, She is experienced about the rivalry and hatred that always stems from the family, so she already has a great aversion for the practice. Obviously, after Funmi and Yejide first meet, taking Funmi back to her house, Funmi has to sit together with Akin in his car at the front seat, this infuriated Yejide, having the urge to drag Funmi from the car and beat her but she caution herself. Furthermore, she starts getting hypersensitive to every little thing that reminds her of Funmi and starts doing the unthinkable. Once seeing Funmi's nails painted hibiscus red, the same colour of the matching mugs, she used with Akin in drinking coffee, she just lost her mind.

“I had slammed each hibiscus-red mug against the kitchen wall as the cuckoo clock in the sitting room chimed at midnight.”. (36)

“...I had swept the broken pieces into a dustpan, put them in a small mortar and pounded them until I was sweating from every pore and wondering if I had lost my mind.”. (36)

This shows how broken and hurt she is becoming, just because of having another woman in her house, revealing how disturbing this practice can be on some women.

However, in Shoneyin's novel this is entirely different, Insecurity brings about rivalry. Iya Femi, Baba segi's third wife despised Bolanle's existence because Bolanle is the wife after her, this creates the feeling that Bolanle has replaced her in their husband's heart, making her feel insecure about her position. For instance, the first time Bolanle meets Iya Femi, Bolanle innocently appreciates Iya Femi's dress but because of how insecure Iya Femi is she replies disdainfully.

“Uneducated women wear good things  
too,”. (22).

Because of how insecure she feels, she can't even accept a compliment. Even Iya Tope, the second wife, attest to this.

“Iya Femi's head was hot. She wanted  
the blood of this new wife who had  
taken her place as the newest,  
youngest, freshest wife. (42)

This shows how the practice often brings about the feeling of insecurity in women especially.

Another effect of polygamy is that it brings about an Inferiority complex to women especially. A situation whereby they doubt their worth, feeling lesser of themselves. Bolanle's presence in the family creates self doubt in both Iya Segi and Iya Femi. They feel small.

“Don't you see her high brow and  
unconcerned eyes? She thinks we are  
beneath her. She wants our husband

to cast us aside as ‘the illiterate  
ones,’”. (45).

Even Iya Femi does not help matters.

“Iya Segi is right. She walks around as  
if she owns this house. Who made her  
queen over us?”. (46)

This signifies inferiority. Even with the fact that Bolanle always keeps to herself not minding others, they still find it deceptive. Every scheme is done to make her feel hated. Just to make her feel worse, Iya segi manipulated Baba Segi into forbidding Bolanle's friends from visiting her. Another instance to further show their aversion Iya Segi and Iya Femi planted a fetish charm inside Baba Segi's bedroom leaving some of its traces in Bolanle's room making it look like it was done by her. But Bolanle is able to defend herself. To further portray their dislike of her, they go as far as deliberately destroying her books.

“So deep-seated is their disdain for my  
university degree that they smear my  
books with palm oil and hide them  
under the kitchen cupboards. I have  
often found missing pages from my  
novels in the dustbin, the words  
scribbled over with charcoal.”. (23) This reveals how little they feel around Bolanle except Iya tope, who sees her not as a rival but as a family.

Iya Femi is a character who struggles mostly with Self doubt. She is portrayed as a character who can go out of her way just to be referred to as the most beautiful even to the point of

bleaching her complexion. In order to be regarded as the most beautiful, the family once get to be invited to a 'neighbour's birthday' party, Iya femi is asked by Baba Segi to sew 'Aso Ebi' for the entire household. She makes sure that all the other wives' clothes are in ruin while her clothes fit perfectly. All these shows how inferior Iya Segi and Iya Femi feel with the different instigation against Bolanle.

Likewise in Adebayo's novel, Yejide also struggles with an Inferiority complex. The practice brings about self doubt to her mind. She feels she is inadequate to be the woman of the house. The idea of being called Iyale, (A Yoruba name given to the first wife in a polygamous family) dreads her greatly.

"I shuddered when Iya Martha referred to me as Funmi's iyale. The word crackled in my ears, iyale—first wife. It was a verdict that marked me as not woman enough for my husband.

(15).

For some women the name can trigger the feeling of inferiority where they feel little about their existence.

It doesn't just end there, after the meeting with Funmi, she could not stop thinking less about herself and also about her worth.

"Funmi broke into my thoughts in moments like that, in the moments that did not submit themselves to my routine. And the idea that I too had

become one of those women who  
would eventually be declared too old to  
accompany her husband to parties  
would flutter into my mind.”. (29).

She is starting to get shattered. To further portray this, she also reveals;

“Or do you have another wife that I  
don’t know about?” It was an idea I  
had not been able to shake since  
Funmi had left my salon the previous  
day, the possibility that there could  
have been other wives out there—in  
Ilesa, in any other city—other women  
that he could love, other women who  
made him less mine.”. (37).

This happens when an individual starts doubting themselves. Polygamy can bring about Inferiority.

### **3.3 EMOTIONAL DISTRESS**

Emotional distress is a condition of mental suffering that happens as a result of traumatic experience. The reactions are negative. It brings out symptoms like hopelessness, sadness, worry, guilt, feeling detached, insomnia, social isolation and a lot more. Also, it can manifest in various ways affecting a person's emotional, physical, and behavioural well being.

In *Stay With Me*, these symptoms are portrayed in Yejide's characterisation because she's a victim of emotional distress. Going through the pain of child mortality, living in a marriage built on a lie, being a subject of societal pressure and even hurt with the drama of polygamy, she eventually became a victim of emotional trauma, a character who struggles with detachment becoming an empty shell. However, she tried to outrun her reality by residing in Jos.

“ I boarded a bus that was heading to Jos.

Jos because I had heard it was the most  
beautiful city in Nigeria and I had always  
wanted to go there.”. (221)

She stays here for a period of fifteen years

“This is it then—fifteen years here” (9)

However, this doesn't guarantee happiness because even after residing there for that long period of time she's still hurt by her past.

“Although sleep stays away, every night

I shut my eyes and pieces of the life I  
left behind come back to me. I see the  
batik pillowcases in our bedroom, our  
neighbours and your family which, for a  
misguided period, I thought was also  
mine”. (9)

This conveys hurt and sadness. Because of this she suffers from Insomnia; inability to sleep.

“So, every night for a week now, I've  
tossed about on this bed without a

television to shorten my insomniac  
hours. (8)

No matter how the victims try to run away from the pain, it still finds a way to hunt them down. There are still some pieces left in the victim's memory that refuse to disappear, no matter how much they fight it.

“My Olamide would have been about  
their age; she too would just have been  
leaving university about now. When I  
read about them, I think of her.” (9)

Olamide is her first child, she died five months after birth.

Also, Yejide becomes socially withdrawn, an individual who doesn't find happiness or purpose in anything. She does not find meaning to life.

“It's not that I've become attached to  
this place. I will not miss the few friends  
I made”. (8).

With this revelation we can see how detached she is, even with the fact that she has been living there for a period of fifteen years, she is still socially isolated.

Another instance;

“I decided to shut down my salon and  
the jewellery shop before I even knew  
what I would do next”. (8)

This reveals a life filled with sadness, aimless existence and emptiness, portraying the negative impact of emotional distress on victims.

However, it should be noted that there's a feeling of Yejide already foreseeing this after her first encounter with Funmilayo.

“I did not feel better. I would not feel better for a very long time. Already, I was coming undone, like a hastily tied scarf coming loose, on the ground before the owner is aware of it.”. (20)

Here, she feels trapped without any form of escape. It's as if she is informing the readers what is to come. How badly this is going to hurt her .

Likewise, in *The Secret Lives of Baba Segi's Wives*, Bolanle exhibits social isolation. A family is a nurturing environment where love, care, and support exists. A family provides a sense of belonging and identity to people but in the case of Shoneyin's novel, this isn't the case. Here, rivalry, hatred and jealousy define the order of the day.

Bolanle once thought that the family will accept her the way she is but is surprised to be treated as a rival, so because of this she withdraws from the family, always finding solace in the confines of her room.

“Tears made the back of my eyes ache but I was determined to shed them in the safety of my bedroom”. (93)

Even her biological family is not exempted, here, she feels empty and detached. Her mother who should have been her confidant is not. Her mother is too hooked up in her own world to realise how fragile and shattered her daughter had become.

Another feature of emotional distress to be noted is the feeling of helplessness. This is a situation where one feels powerless. A situation where an individual can't control their current situation. After experiencing traumatic events they are often left with the feeling of emptiness, a state of being devoid of any feelings.

In Adebayo's novel, Yejide experiences this feeling, she struggles with emptiness. A feeling she can't get rid of. Even after making a living for herself in Jos, she still feels empty. This depicts how material things or wealth can not relieve the pain from traumatic events nor can it lead to happiness.

“There are seventeen bags here, ready  
to be carried into my car. I stare at the  
bags, recalling the contents of each  
one. If this house was on fire, what  
would I take? I have to think about this  
because the first thing that occurs to me  
is nothing”. (9).

For instance, when this kind of question is directed at someone else who is not a victim of trauma, “If your house is on fire, what would you take first?”, their first answer might be their children or their material thing depending on the person the question is directed to. But to Yejide it's “nothing”. Even after spending years establishing herself, she still can't get over the feeling.

### **3.4 CONCLUSION**

With each effect being examined and analyzed, we can see that polygamy does more harm than good to those in the family, especially the female gender. From the mental distress to the

emotional distress that has been analysed we can see how devastating the practice can be, stemming from rivalry to hatred emerging from the co-wives. However, it should be noted that even the women are not in support of the practice. For instance, In Shoneyin's novel, Iya Femi rejected this for her second son Kole, when her husband wished for the practice in his son's life.

“My Kole must grow big and strong so he  
can marry many wives and bear many  
children.”. (14)

“...no one heard Iya Femi whisper, “God  
forbid,” under her breath.”. (14)

This shows how women don't wish for the  
practice on their children because they are aware of the drama in the family so they don't want  
their children to also go through the same thing.

## **CHAPTER FOUR**

### **CONCLUSION**

This study has been able to reveal what the practice called polygamy entails and also the psychological effects it can have on individuals. Starting from the first chapter which introduces us to what to expect in the study, guiding readers with the theories that will be used to analyse the two novels, which are; Sociological theory and Trauma theory.

With Sociological theory, we are able to easily analyse the study because the practice is what happens in human society meaning the practice is not abstract but a practice that reveals human society. Trauma theory is used because the study will not only be examining just the practice but also the psychological effects that stem from it . Further to the next chapter, causes of polygamy are revealed. Years ago, polygamy was seen as a form of economic prosperity whereby a man's worth can be determined by the size of his family. It can also be a source of giving birth to more children in case there is war and high mortality rates of men. Also, as revealed in the texts, it can be a personal reason or a societal pressure from family, it all depends on the circumstances.

However, the two novels were able to portray each view on the practice differently. In Shoneyin's novel, Bolanle enters into polygamy because she feels her presence will be something insignificant but is surprised to be treated as a rival. In Adebayo's novel, Yejide enters into a relationship with Akin because he assured her of getting married to her alone but this is not so because funmi has to come into the picture leading to polygamy. Also, Bolanle's mother's greatest wish is for her daughters to be traditionally married to their husbands, this to her is a pride she loves to have but Bolanle and her sister never did. But on a second note, Yejide is traditionally married to her husband but is met with the shock of her life when she realises that her marriage is built on a lie. With the two female protagonists in the two novels, we can say that the future can't be predicted.

However, the effects of the practice is revealed in the third chapter,whereby it can lead to hurt,pain, emotional and mental distress on individuals, most especially the women leaving them sometimes broken. The women's desperation in the novels to either meet societal expectations or their husbands desire actually leads them into doing things that can actually cost them their happiness. Yejide's desperation leads her into having a mental illness named pseudocyesis which

somehow destabilizes her. Iya Femi, Iya Segi and Iya Tope engage in adultery in order to fulfil their husband's desire of having a lot of children and also to secure their place in his heart. A secret that can not be revealed.

Above all, a family shapes the society and the society, in turn, influences family, they both depend on each other. The family is the fundamental building block of society. It provides essential emotional support to their members, stabilizing individuals. It is only when the members (citizens) are stable mentally can they contribute positively to the society. A family that is filled with toxic relationships is most likely to have a negative impact on the members most especially the children because it is said that children are the leaders of tomorrow, but in a situation whereby the children are exposed to jealousy or rivalry this is more likely to affect them.

Lastly, the novel portrays the occurrences in a typical African home especially the Yoruba society.

In conclusion, this research has provided another avenue for the understanding of polygamy. And the two novelists were able to write on polygamy drawing from different circumstances but they were still able to get to the same conclusion that polygamy should not be seen as a family solution.

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