MUSLIM CHILDREN OF MULTIPLE MARRIAGES: A PHENOMENOLOGICAL STUDY

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Abstract- The purpose of this study was to describe the experiences of Muslim children living in families of multiple marriages. Phenomenological approach using in-depth interview and focus group discussion were conducted to 17 children. There were four themes that emerged as experienced by Muslim children of multiple marriages, namely; distress and misery, satisfaction and pleasure, tolerance, and economic constriction. The participants of the study had different approaches in coping with the consequences and challenges brought by multiple marriages phenomenon through nonchalance, optimism, impetus, acquiescence, reliance in the Divine, and support system. Being children of polygamous family, they have their apprehensions like uncertainties and securities, sanguinity and discernments. Based on the results of the study, it came out that multiple marriages have impact to Muslim children in diverse ways. For many, it brings disadvantages including depression, sadness, anger, resentment, lack of love or attachment with the father, and inadequate resources to suffice the needs of the dependents. For some, the phenomenon does not adversely affect them despite the negative impact it brings, considering that the practice of multiple marriages is officially accepted in Islam.

Key Words:

Muslim Children. Children who are products of multiple marriages of Muslim couples.

Multiple Marriages. Basically, it is a form of marriage in Islam commonly known as polygamy. It is a marital relationship among Muslims such that a husband is married up to four wives. For the purpose of the study, it is interchangeably used for plural or polygamous marriages.

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Phenomenological Study. Phenomenology is concerned with the study of phenomena as actually experienced by individuals. It is reliving the experiences of the participants involved in the study, going deeper into their thoughts to surface complex issues, identifying the essence of the experience as described by the participants, through interviews and group discussions.

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INTRODUCTION

The practice of multiple marriages or polygamy by Muslim people is not new because it is dictated by the Islam religion. However, the impact of such phenomenon to children has not yet given importance for investigation in the local setting. Studies confirm that children from polygamous families are at an enhanced risk of psychological and physical abuse (Campbell et. al, 2005). Other research studies asserted that because polygamous families usually have many children, there cannot be enough and equal supervision and attention for all of them (Al-Krenawi & Lightman, 2010). Because of this, generation of acrimony, jealousy, favoritism, conflict and other sources of friction between children of different wives are likely to result (Slonim-Nevo, V. et. al., 2006) causing children's way of life and development to suffer.

Speaking of having a decent life, it is contrary to the experience of my cousin Abdul (not his true name) whose father was polygamous. His father had three wives and had children with them, a dozen with the first wife, five with the second, and none with the third. My cousin is the eldest son of the second wife and has his own children now. He wanted to get his share of his father's properties that he wanted to utilize as means of their living so that he can feed off his dependents. It was sad to note that he was not given any share. He had developed acrimony against his father. Consequently, he left and abandoned his own family taking the rifle carbine and shot gun of his father as he banished and joined in the MILF. He became one of the greatest MILF commanders then. He was arrested and put into jail. When he was given with amnesty and was released, he was still eager and optimistic to get his share of their father's property.

On his dismay, the eldest child of the first wife claimed it to be his property, telling him that the second wife's children have no right to claim or to be entitled with any portion of the property. Conflict and commotion took place between them to the extent that the father of the first wife's children was shot to death and Abdul's (pseudonym) three brothers were blamed and suspected by the first wife. The said three brothers are still in prison and the case is not yet settled. This incident confirms the idea of Fischer (2003) emphasizing the polygamy scenario is expected to have an impact on the children in providing access to a decent life or make their life miserable.

There is a few number of research papers came out all through this time, primarily focusing on the influence of polygamy on behavioral, emotional, and educational alteration of children (Elbedour, Onwuegbuzie, Caridine, & Abu-Saad, 2002). There were studies carried out in the Middle East indicating that children of polygamous families may suffer from emotional, behavioral, and physical problems, negative self-conflict, lower school achievement, and greater difficulties in social adjustment (Al-Krenawi & Lightman, 2000). Polygamous family life weakens the parent-child bond, thus reducing child's emotional satisfaction and psychological security. This characteristic tends to reduce the amount of supervision and parental attention received by each child, especially from the father (Elbedour, Onwuegbuzie, Caridine, & Abu-Saad, 2002).

In order to better understand scenarios among children of Muslim polygamous families in local settings, it is necessary to identify the gaps in the existing research. Most

of the existing researches related to the influence of multiple marriages to Muslim children are foreign-based. As a matter of fact, no related qualitative research is done specifically in the Philippine setting. Also, the existing research presents useful but outdated literatures on the impact of multiple marriages to the family system. Another identified gap is that much have been researched about the consequences of multiple marriages to the wives who are usually thought as the primary victims, and on the contrary, considerably less research has been done with respect to the children particularly of Muslim polygamous families.

The fact that my relatives and I are Muslims with co-author who was also an agent of development are incognizant of the risks brought about by multiple marriages, it is suggested that more researches are necessary in order to better inform other Muslim adults practicing the multiple marriages about the difficulties or problems faced by children. This is why I, as the researcher, am very much interested in exploring the experiences of the children of some Muslim polygamous families in a particular locality where multiple marriages exist.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this phenomenological study was to describe the consequences of polygamous marriages on the part of the Muslim children and whether polygamous marital structures are beneficial or harmful to children. In particular, this study envisioned on documenting the risk characteristics experienced by Muslim children of multiple or polygamous marriages that potentially contribute to their vulnerability. It presented evidences about the participant's personal activities, experiences, desires, views, and their capacity to handle psychological problems brought about by multiple marriages. Furthermore, it is my purpose as a researcher to listen and grasp the untold stories of the participants as they will narrate their experiences particularly on how they manage themselves to cope with their unpleasant experiences and reach their present status.

Research Questions

This study sought to answer the following questions:

1. What are the experiences of Muslim children of multiple marriages?
2. What are the coping mechanisms of Muslim children from multiple marriages lived in a normal life?
3. What are the hopes, fears and dreams of Muslim children of multiple marriages?

METHODOLOGY

This section presents the research design, role of the researcher, the research participants, data collection procedure, analysis of the data, trustworthiness and ethical considerations employed in this investigation.

Research Design

In this particular study, phenomenological qualitative research was employed whose primary objective was to explicate the meaning, structure, and essence of the lived experiences of a person, or a group of people around a specific phenomenon (Christensen, Johnson, and Turner, 2010) where special events that happened could be understood better through lengthy discussions (Speziale and Carpenter, 2007).

In addition, Tolentino (2014) supported these ideas that phenomenology is concerned with the study of human perception of events or phenomena from the actual happenings in the real world, reliving the experiences of the participants involved in the study and going deeper into their thoughts, identifying the essence of the experience as described by the participants, through lengthy discussions. This research methodology uses the personal experiences of individuals which are carefully described, recorded and examined (Antonsen, 2003). The analysis of the personal experience often reveals structures and themes that are similar among individuals who share a common lived experience.

We believed that this would be the most appropriate to research design because the major concern of the research was to know how Muslim children made sense out of their lives. As researchers, we wanted to be acquainted with the participants' thinking about their experiences living in a family of multiple marriages. As a matter of fact, our focus of the study was likely to determine the participant's assumptions, motives, reasons, hopes, fears, and dreams about what they felt and encountered in their lives. We really tried the best we could to capture the participants' thinking as accurately as possible.

Furthermore, we preferred to use this type of research design because it produces clear and exact descriptions of what it is like for an individual to experience the situation being studied to extract a common theme from the experiences of the subjects, convert these experiences to a description of the universal essence of the phenomena and grasp the very nature of the thing.

Role of the Researcher

It is not new to us that polygamy or multiple marriages nowadays is becoming more prevalent in our country. However, there is a dearth of literature about the experience of Muslim children of multiple marriages. It is for this reason that we undertook this study, to discover the poignant scenarios of the children living in a polygamous family. Our role here as a researcher was to gather information and evidences of how these children adjust and manage themselves to reach their present status.

Since this study had a personal meaning for me for I am a Muslim, I conducted personal interviews to the identified participants, with co-author as mediator of transformation. We asked assistance to some colleagues to help us in note taking during interviews, transcribing, translating and typing or encoding the gathered data from the audio / video recordings and placing them orderly in themes as described in the stated subtopics. After coming up with the findings, we approached to a professional expert or

analyst for data analysis and interpretations and thereafter, formed or structured my personal insights.

Research Participants

Seventeen Muslim children living in polygamous families were involved in the study. Each of these 17 children came from each of the 17 different families in the municipality of Alabel, Province of Sarangani whose fathers are practicing multiple marriages. Some of the participants were my nephews, nieces, and relatives while others were children of my friends whom we chose through purposive sampling based on pre-selected criteria relevant to the research study (Speziale and Carpenter, 2007).

We opted to get just a considerable number of participants for my research with 10 Muslim children with varying age ranging from 10 to 25 years old, adequate to give credible information and significant results and findings. Researchers like Giorgi (2009), and Tolentino (2014) mentioned that central figures in the development of psychology such as Freud, Piaget and Skinner developed their theories based on research, involving only a minimal number of subjects and without depending on statistical analysis. In addition, Tolentino (2014) borrowed the idea of Creswell (2009) recommending that researchers could adopt 5-25 individuals who had experienced the same phenomenon for in-depth interviews. In this study, 10 out of 17 children underwent in-depth interview while the remaining 7 underwent focused group discussion (FGD). This was to ensure the authenticity and reliability of answers from the participants to the open-ended questions during the interview.

Data Collection

Prior to the conduct of actual data collection, ethical considerations were observed because of its essence in the research. To establish positive rapport, trust and good understanding (Tolentino, 2014), we set preliminary meeting with the research participants to ask their consent before the actual interview to make them understand that everything was in confidentiality. It was in this setting that the participants were asked to review the research questions. By doing so, it gave the participants time to dwell and ponder on their experiences and aided the researcher in getting a richer description during the interview without the researcher having to ask too many questions (Englander, 2012).

The method used for data collection was interview which phenomenological research usually employs, giving much attention to details and importance of the emotional content to open up an array of human experiences of the subjects. Specific methodologies were conducted such as in-depth interview to elicit a vivid picture of the participant's perspective on the research topic (Tolentino, 2014), and focus group discussion (FGD) which offers qualitative researchers the opportunity to interview several respondents systematically and simultaneously (Babbie, 2011).

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Analysis of data

After the data were collected, analysis followed. This time, we, with assistance from our colleagues, tried to explore all the information gathered to better understand the lived

experience of a specified phenomenon (Smith, 2004). It is where analyzing and summarizing of mass data collected and presenting the results in a way that communicates the most salient features were undertaken. The methods used in the analysis of data included the bracketing and data reduction to reveal pure descriptions and meanings of the live experiences. Bracketing was used to mitigate the potential deleterious effects of unacknowledged preconceptions related to the research and thereby to increase the rigor of the study (Tolentino, 2014). Moreover, Drew (2004) posited bracketing as 'the task of sorting out the qualities that belong to the researcher's experience of the phenomenon'. Also, Gearing (2004) explained bracketing as a 'scientific process in which a researcher suspends or holds in abeyance his or her presuppositions, biases, assumptions, theories, or previous experiences to see and describe the phenomenon'.

Furthermore, Starks and Trinidad (2007) noted that the researcher 'must be honest and vigilant about her own perspective, pre-existing thoughts and beliefs, and developing hypotheses, engage in the self-reflective process of bracketing, whereby they recognize and set aside (but do not abandon) their a priori knowledge and assumptions, with the analytic goal of attending to the participants' accounts with an open mind'.

On the other hand, through phenomenological reduction, the researcher and a professional data analyst simply reduced the realm from how it was perceived naturally, with all biases and judgment to a realm of pure phenomena, allowing the essence of the phenomena to surface (Tolentino, 2014) and letting the participants' own words be used throughout the process of data analysis and phenomenological description.

Trustworthiness

Four components were observed in this research study to establish trustworthiness. These are the following: credibility, conformability, transferability and dependability.

Ethical Consideration

Considering the fact that this study involved Muslim children who were hesitant to reveal information and withhold some data, all efforts were made to ensure that the research is guided by ethical principles like respect for persons, beneficence, justice, consent, and confidentiality (Tolentino, 2014). Each individual participant was assigned to a pseudonym used in all write-ups of the findings.

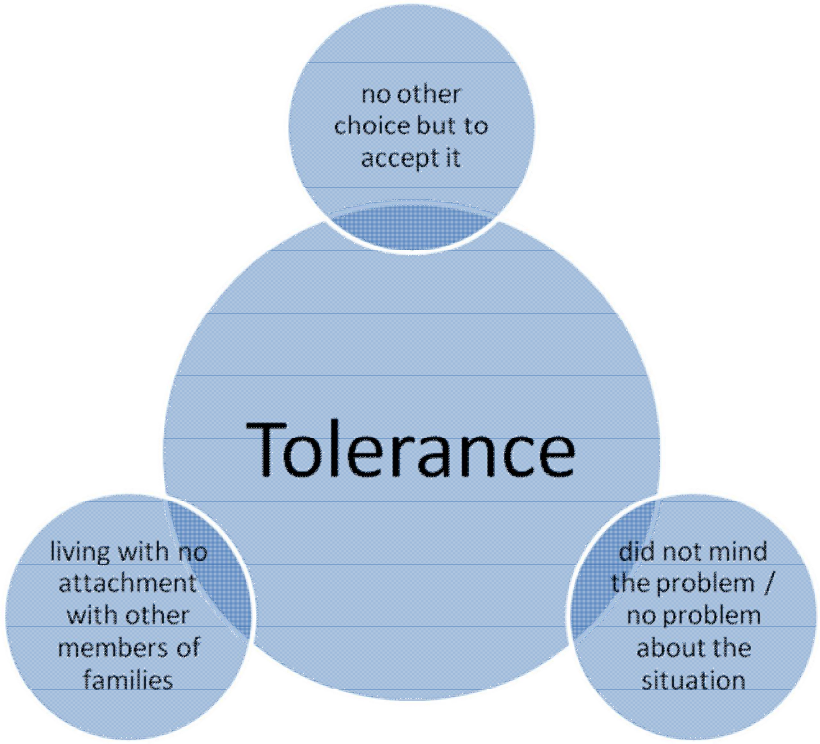
RESULTS

This portion of the study presents and discusses the results of the data provided by the participants based on their lived experiences gleaned through in-depth interviews and focus group discussion. The generation of data from the informants was made possible through the following main research questions:

1. What are the experiences of Muslim children of multiple marriages?
2. How do Muslim Children from the multiple marriages cope with the challenges?
3. What are the hopes, fears and dreams of Muslim children of multiple marriages?

Figure 2
Experiences of Muslim Children in Families of Multiple Marriages

Satisfaction and Pleasure
felt accepted, well-treated, happy and thankful
in good terms with father's other wives' children
helping one another
taken good care by father's other wives
received ample / more support and attention from dad


Tolerance
no other choice but to accept it
did not mind the problem / no problem about the situation
living with no attachment with other members of families

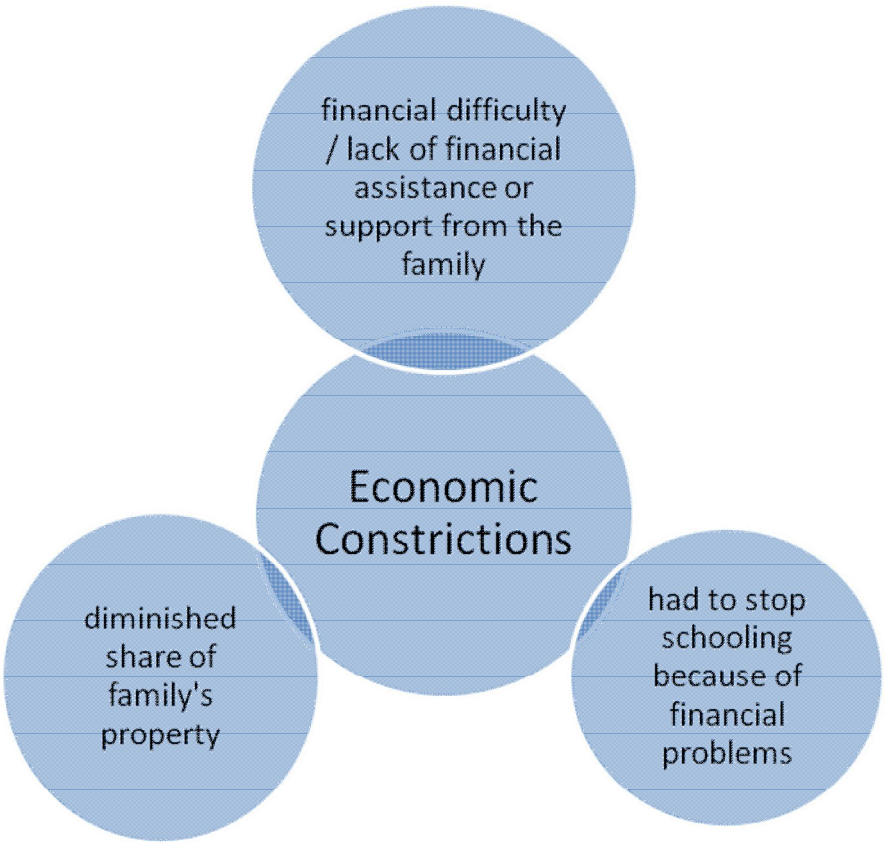
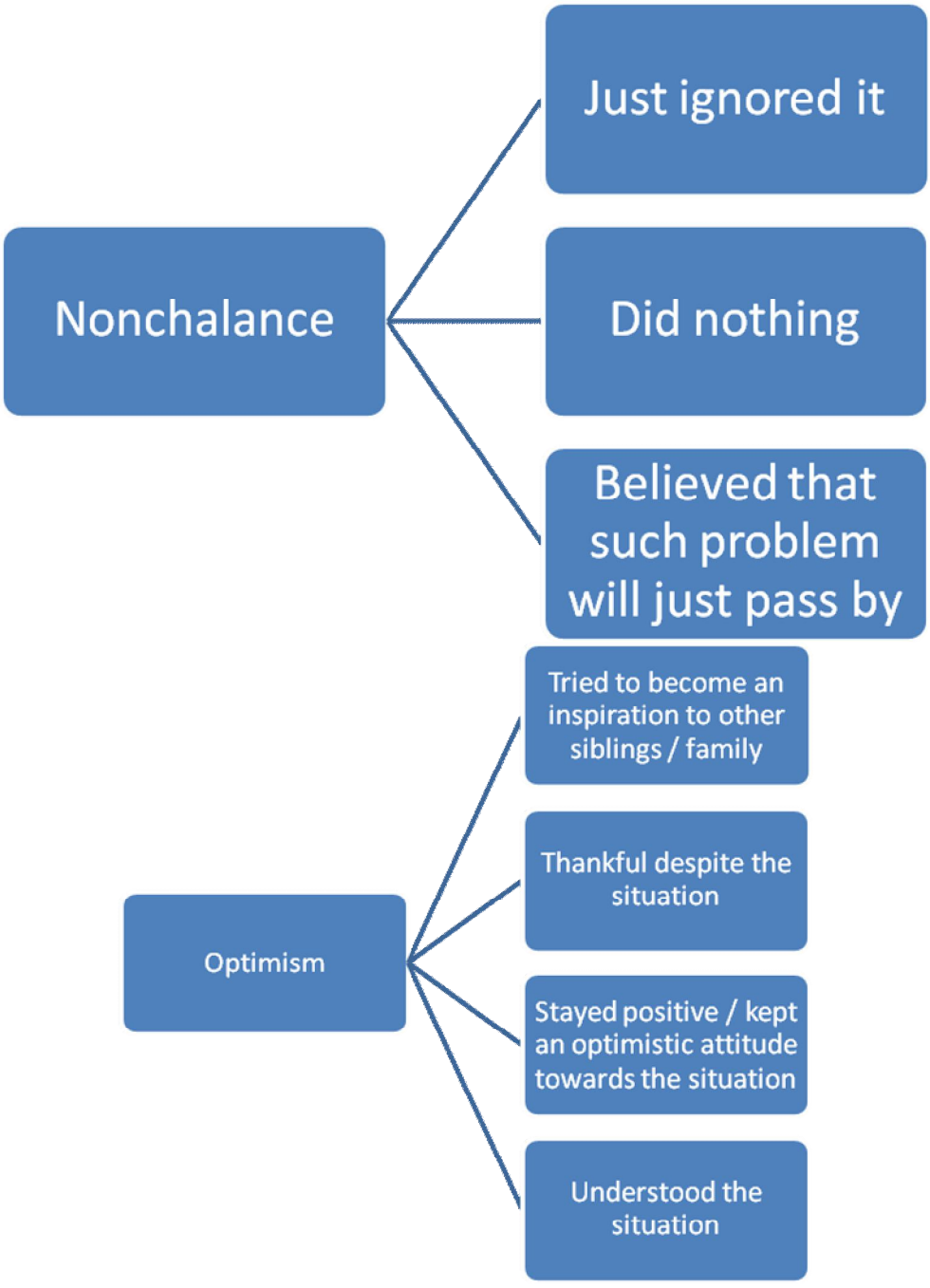
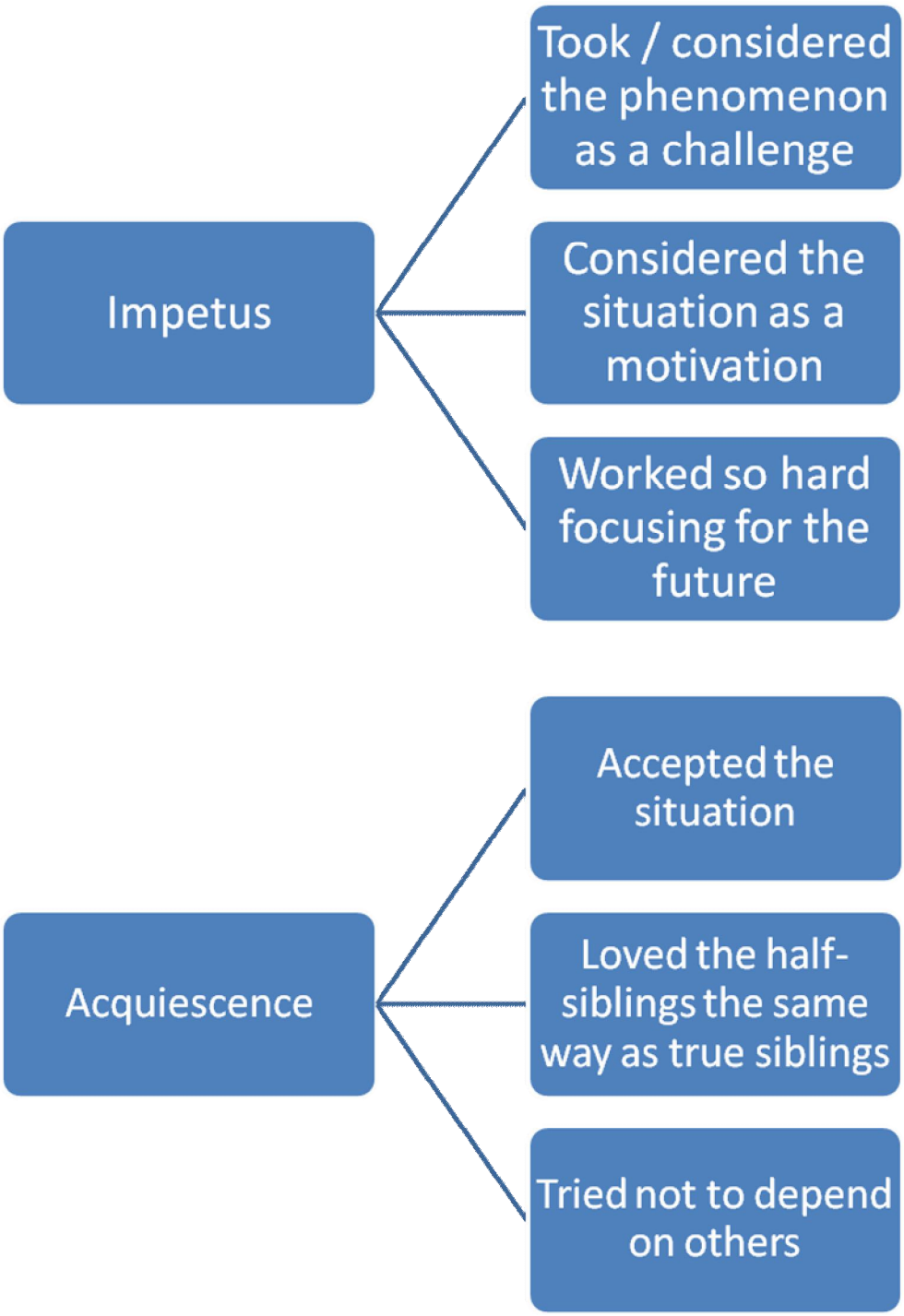

financial difficulty / lack of financial assistance or support from the family
Economic Constrictions
diminished share of family's property
had to stop schooling because of financial problems

Figure 3
Mechanisms on How Muslim Children from Multiple Marriages Cope with the Challenges




Impetus
Took / considered the phenomenon as a challenge
Considered the situation as a motivation
Worked so hard focusing for the future
Acquiescence
Accepted the situation
Loved the half-siblings the same way as true siblings
Tried not to depend on others

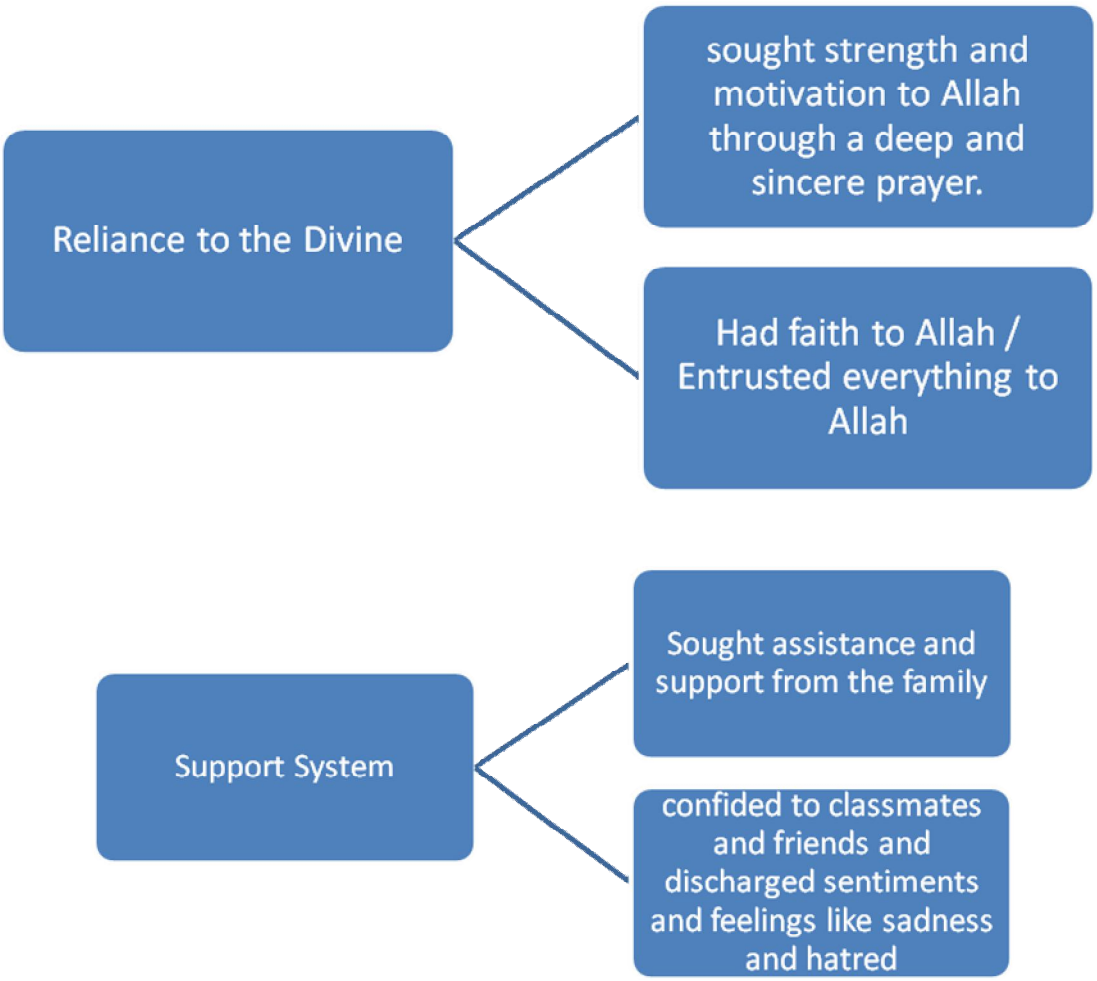
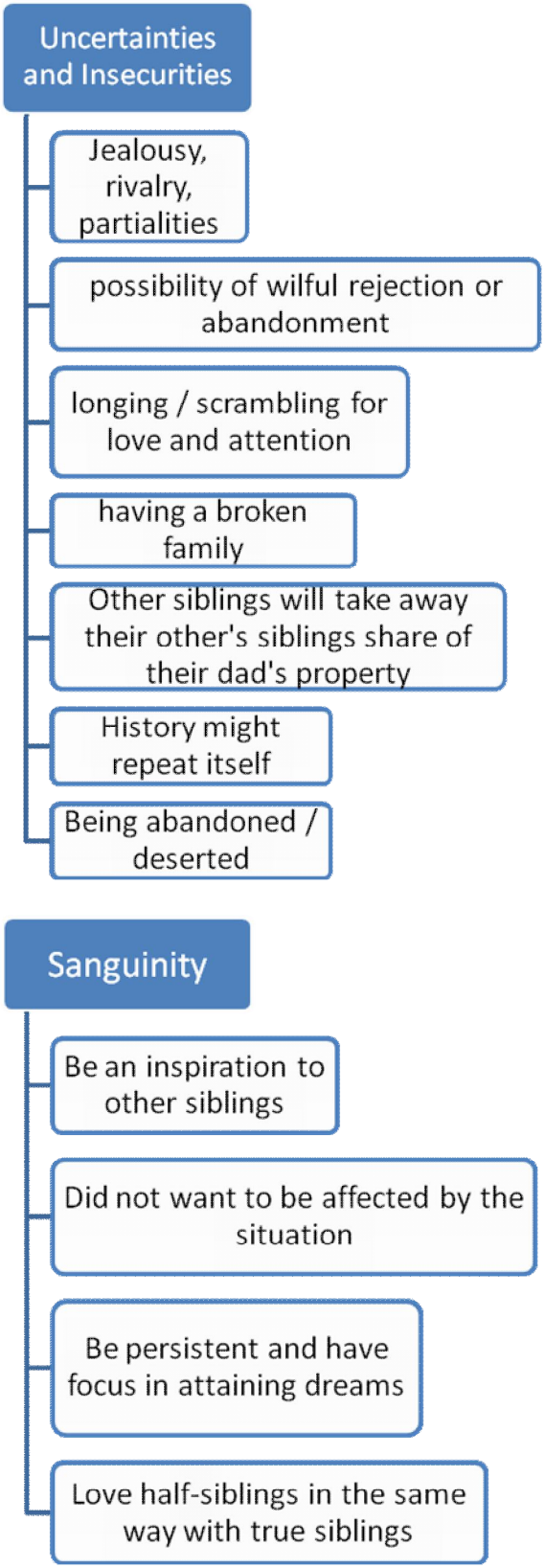
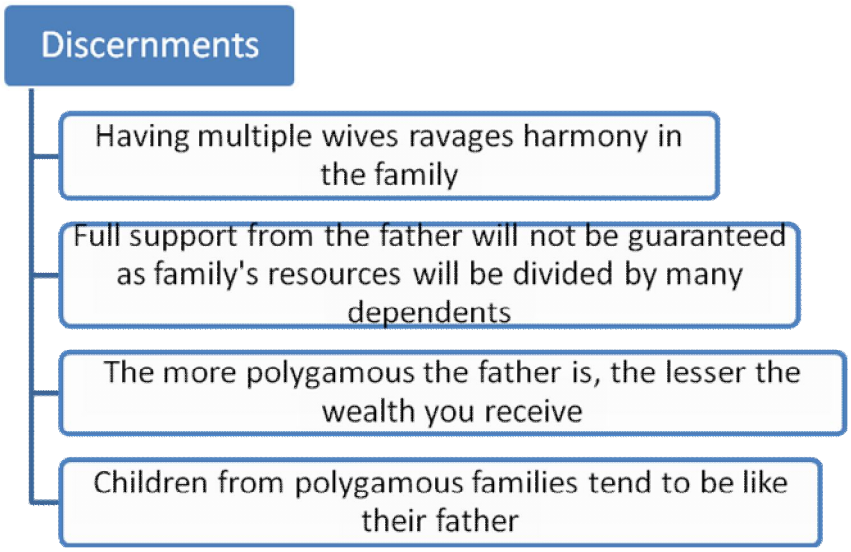

Reliance to the Divine
sought strength and motivation to Allah through a deep and sincere prayer.
Had faith to Allah / Entrusted everything to Allah
Support System
Sought assistance and support from the family
confided to classmates and friends and discharged sentiments and feelings like sadness and hatred

Figure 4
Hopes, Fears and Dreams of Muslim Children from Multiple Marriages





Chapter Summary

From the results of the study, the following issues were identified:

On issues related to the experiences of Muslim children living in family of multiple marriages, four themes emerged, namely, distress and misery, satisfaction and pleasure, tolerance, and economic constrictions. General responses were focused on economic constriction as well as on satisfaction and pleasure. Only few responses were observed on tolerance.

On issues related to how the participants cope and deal with the challenges of the phenomenon, six major themes emerged. Namely, these were nonchalance, optimism, impetus, acquiescence, reliance to the Divine and support system. The ideas gathered about this issue were evenly emphasized on all themes except for nonchalance having variant responses.

Finally, on issues related to the hopes, dreams and fears of the respondents, there were three major themes emerged which happened to be the uncertainties and insecurities, sanguinity, and discernments. All of these themes had almost equal and typical responses.

During the in-depth interviews and FGD, Muslim children as the participants of the study showed varied manifestations of what they had encountered as product of multiple marriages, how they managed themselves to cope with the consequences or diverse challenges they encountered and what hopes, dreams and fears they had in mind which they could share to other children living in a polygamous family.

The participants felt different emotions as they unveiled their different stories. But most of them expressed that they would do their best to protect their own family from the harm of multiple marriages. They hoped that the sad stories they had would not happen to their own family. They did not want that their children to be victims like them of family break-up, abandonment and prejudice which may develop the feeling of insecurity, depression and helplessness (Aktar, 2011).

Implications for Practice

Based on the findings, the following implications for practice were offered:

On the relationship between the children and father*.* The less attention or totally absence of the father in supporting his children of multiple marriages described in the study is a factor hindering them to continue their study. Because of the inability of the father to attend his children's needs, he would possibly leave or abandon them. This is a manifestation of disobedience to the conditions of polygamy as viewed by Islam that it is religiously permitted for the father to be polygamous, marrying up to four wives, provided that he can provide the needs of his wives as well as his children (Yani & Jani, 2013). For this reason, it is imperative for the Shariah Court to strictly review and evaluate the set agreements on practicing polygamy to include the educational plan for their children until college. Their education must not be hampered due to the inability of the father to support, thus, the Shariah Court must attend such needs of the children of polygamous family by passing a bill protecting the rights of these children to education.

On the relationship between siblings of polygamous families. In view of the relationship between children of multiple marriages and their siblings from their father's other wives, some of the participants in the study reported to have a conflict tension with their other siblings especially with the first wife's eldest child, in which they were treated differently causing them to be less self-esteemed because their sense of belongingness is weakened. A weak self-esteem produces feelings of inferiority and helplessness which in turn give rise to discouragement (Green, 2000).

For this reason, the involvement of adult members in the family by engaging their children through counseling or dialogue is a very essential strategy to encourage open line communication so that understanding among or between siblings will take place at home.

On the relationship between the children and their father's other wives. With regards to the treatment they received from their father's other wives, they vary in their experiences. There were participants who were treated and cared well by their father's other wives. On the contrary, only few participants experienced to have dispute with one of the wives which made their father got mad at them. This has resulted for them to get ill with their father, losing their trust for him. Because of hostility of their father's other wife, they used to leave home and go to groups of people whom they could exhaust their sentiments. This is an indication that the children may be prone to or tend to be defiant which could further exhibit to aggressive and antisocial behavior, conduct disorders, communication difficulties, adjustment problems, poor self-concept, drug abuse, and alcoholism (Eldebour et. al., 2002). In view of this, it may imply that the father should act

as the mediator if conflict arises between the co-siblings, co-wives, or wives and the children. He should be responsible enough to take charge and deal such situations in order to avoid family break-up.

On coping mechanisms to deal challenges of multiple marriages. Although there were participants reported to be nonchalant and optimistic about the challenges or consequences of multiple marriages in a family, the result of the study still implies that the Shariah Court may need to provide a support system for these children who had unpleasant experiences living in polygamous households. Such support system may be a formation of unions consisting of religious experts, psychologists, and counselors which will offer several approaches to give assistance to the children who have traumatic experiences living in a family of multiple marriages. Ensuring self-care and social support is especially important which means taking time off, trying not to take the experience personally, and spending time with trusted others (Tolentino, 2014).

Since it is clear that the polygamous system generates an entire chain of consequences, engendering family conflict and violence leading to multiple violations of the rights of children and women (Conseil du statut de la femme, 2010), this implies that the Shariah Court may need to educate the Muslim men who desire to be polygamous and also the women who will involve themselves to polygamy through a values development program and seminar focusing on the consequences and the challenges that polygamy may bring in the family. Primarily, for the welfare of the Muslim children as participants of the study, the results of the coping mechanism they employed to deal the harms of multiple marriages also imply that the Court may provide counseling services to those children who had bad experiences and suffered from consequences of such phenomenon.

Implications for Future Research

In as much as this study is limited to a few participants, the Muslim children living in families of multiple marriages in some barangays in Municipality of Alabel, the following implications for future research are advanced:

Since the findings of this particular study are not generalizable beyond the 17 participants, future research may be conducted investigating the experiences of children living in polygamous households with another group of participants to confirm and reinforce the findings of the study.

Considering that there is a dearth of local researches about polygamy focusing on the children, future researchers may replicate the study and conduct it in other Muslim community areas in the province of Sarangani or even in other parts of the country where practice of polygamy is prevalent to supplement research base, adding more information and insights related to it. This research methodology would give a better opportunity to generalize the study findings.

Another future research may be undertaken to determine whether the views and perceptions of the previous participants have changed or not over a period of time by interviewing them again. Also, further research may be carried out to investigate similar

phenomenon but for this time among Christian children whose parents have been engaged to plural marriages.

The findings of this study were viewed from the lens of the Muslim children. It would be valuable as well to conduct further research to determine the fathers' or wives' viewpoints about the impact of polygamy to their children to substantiate the findings.

Concluding Remarks

From the findings of the study, we have concluded that the impact of multiple marriages to the participants of the study is shown to be diverse. For many, it appears that living in a polygamous household negatively affects the individual as substantiated by Yang (2003) showing that polygamy brings disadvantages to the children including depression, sadness, anger, resentment, lack of love or attachment with the father, and inadequate resources to suffice the needs of the dependents. For some, it is clear that they were not adversely affected by the phenomenon. Since polygamy is officially acceptable in Islam; some children tend to be nonchalant and acquiescent to its consequences despite the negative impact it brings to them.

It can also be concluded and hoped for the children who have lived in families of multiple marriages to seek support and gain the help that is necessary and that future research is conducted.

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