

FACTORS AFFECTING THE INTEGRATION OF POLYGAMOUS CONVERTS INTO SDA CHURCHES, ELDORET MUNICIPALITY, UASIN GISHU COUNTY

Abigail Gichaba¹ and Joshua Manduku^{2*}

¹ Women Ministries Director, GRVC, Eldoret, Kenya, abigailkerubo@yahoo.com

² Senior Lecturer, Dr., University of Kabianga, Kericho, Kenya, mandukujoshua@gmail.com

*Corresponding Author

Abstract

The study sought to investigate the factors affecting Polygamous converts in the SDA churches in Eldoret Municipality, UGC in Kenya. The study was concerned with the Biblical understanding of Polygamy. It sought to find out whether or not the practice of Polygamy is contrary to Biblical teachings. The study also sought to find out the effects of Polygamy as they relate to the individual's perception in reference to the SDA policy and practice. The bearing of the practice of Polygamy on Christianity was also traced and in selected SDA Polygamous converts in Eldoret Municipality, UGC. The study adopted the Social Exchange Theory to underpin the study and a conceptual framework drawn from the variables of the study. The study utilized a descriptive survey research design and employed the qualitative research paradigm so as to explore the issue at hand in the Biblical context. The target population was 2,462 church members, 143 Polygamous converts, 5 pastors and one Executive Director. The sample size of 464 respondents were used comprising 344 church members, 105 Polygamous converts, 9 elders, 5 pastors and one Executive Director. Data from the field was collected through interviews and self-administered questionnaires. The study also made use of simple random on the 344 church members and 105 Polygamous converts as sample respondents. Purposive sampling techniques were used when selecting the sample respondents of the 5 pastors, 9 elders and one Executive Director. This was used in order to minimize bias and to give each member an equal chance of being selected. The data was coded and entered in the computer manually and analysed through the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) program. Data from the field was analysed and presented descriptively through percentages, tables and figures. The study findings revealed that: 50% of Polygamous converts and church members agreed that the SDA Church should consider baptising Polygamous converts without discriminating them, they should also be allowed to be church members, and choose whether to partake the Holy Communion or not without exclusion. The study also found out that the Bible is silent on Polygamy and hence Polygamous converts should therefore not be discriminated against. The SDA Church should not discriminate against the Polygamous converts, but they should instead, accommodate them and show them the love of Christ. The SDA Church should initiate teachings regularly to its members about the ideal plan of God and Polygamy. This will help those who intend to be Polygamous realize otherwise.

Keywords: Polygamous converts, SDA churches

1. INTRODUCTION

The doctrinal basis of the Seventh Day Adventist Church would explain why they are so concerned with polygamous converts. The communities who live in Eldoret Municipality are Kalenjins, the Luos, the Abaluhya, the Agekuyu, the Ameru, the Akamba and the Abagusii. These communities migrated from different descents (Kirwen, 2005). The Abagusii oral tradition says that, they originated from Misri, moved and lived around Mount Elgon for several generations. Around AD500, they migrated to Nzoia River Valley and settled in Yimbo and Ramogi Hill and pushed to Kisumu by 1600 AD (Ibid, 2005). During the second half of the 18th Century they had settled in the fertile Kisii highlands. Due to the population pressure in Kisii highlands they migrated to other parts of Kenya to seek job opportunities and land for cultivation and settlement. Due to the population pressure they have migrated to other parts of Kenya and practice various forms of marriage (Mbiti, 1999). Polygamy was seen as the most honourable form of marriage, although monogamy was still valued. Polygamy was a practice not conceived nor accepted by the Church Missionaries stressed to convert the individual without the reference to his socio- cultural values (Ritchie, 2001). The Church is accused and criticized regarding the way in which it has handled the question of polygamous converts.

1.1 Statement of the Problem

The practice of polygamy in the Church is a controversial issue across Africa (Mailu, 1988). The Christian Church has officially opposed polygamy, but has taken widely divergent stands. All this raises the question of what should the attitude of the African Church be towards the practicing polygamist and his family. The SDA Church manual which is the policy that guides the Church on various issues affecting the Church is silent on this matter. Polygamous converts are not allowed to be baptized, have Church Membership or partake in the Holy Communion, unless they abandon their other wives. The polygamous converts in SDA Church have not been fully accepted as Church Members (SDA, Church Manual, 2010). Polygamous converts are in a dilemma as they have left the world to serve God with all their hearts. But, the Church where they are supposed to find fellowship has been closing its doors upon them. They are not allowed to hold any position in the Church and make them feel left out of the Christian fellowship (Ibid, 2010). Studies on polygamous converts in Kenya has not been done in the SDA Churches, Eldoret Municipality is not an exception.

1.2 Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to examine the factors affecting the integration of Polygamous converts into Seventh Day Adventist Churches, in Eldoret Municipality, Uasin Gishu, County, Kenya

1.3 Research Objectives

1. To evaluate if polygamous converts are allowed to be members in the SDA Church
2. To examine the position of the SDA Church on Baptism of Polygamous converts
3. To assess the position of the SDA Church on partaking of the Lords Supper by polygamous converts
4. To suggest ways in which the polygamous converts could be accommodated in the SDA Church.

1.4 Research Questions

1. Are polygamous converts allowed to be members in the SDA Church?
2. What is the position of the SDA Church on Baptism of Polygamous converts?
3. What is the position of the SDA Church on partaking of the Lords Supper by polygamous converts?
4. How can polygamous converts be accommodated in the SDA Church?

1.5 Justification

This study sought to find out the position of the SDA Church as regards polygamous converts. With the breaking of the traditional fabric which allowed polygamous marriages and the coming of Christianity which advocated for monogamy (Kraft,1979).Many converts embraced Christianity but were not able to divorce their other wives despite Christianity advocating for monogamy. This has been a controversial issue and no clear guideline is given by the SDA Church on this issue (Elders Handbook, 1994). The researcher being a member of the Church board that is entrusted with the responsibility of vetting names of candidates who come for baptism, was touched by the fact that one requirement for baptism was to put away the other wife(s). This fact raised questions that begged for answers.

1.6 Scope and Limitations

1.6.1 Scope

The study sought to find out the factors affecting the polygamous converts in the SDA Church Eldoret Municipality. The study was delimited to the SDA people who are in polygamous marriages and located in Eldoret Municipality, Kenya.

1.6.2 Limitations

Seek answers to factors affecting polygamous conveamrts in the SDA Churches, Eldoret Municipality. Gather data based on specific conceptualizations of people and Churches. The study findings cannot be generalized to other populations. The respondents may be reluctant to give personal information concerning their married life. The researcher will reassure them of confidentiality.

1.7 Theoretical Framework

This study was underpinned by the Social Exchange Theory. Social Exchange theory is based on the fundamental assumption that human behaviour is socially learned. Sociological perspectives merely assert that the specific thoughts and behaviours exhibited by individuals are a product of social rather than biological forces (Emerson, 1976). Polygamy reduces cases of sexual immorality. People are portrayed as entering, staying in a polygamous marriage, based on the reward-cost balance experienced in them.

2. RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

Historical and descriptive survey research designs were employed in this study. Historical design was used to trace the biblical and the traditions of some communities found in the Eldoret Municipality on polygamy (Kombo and Tromp, 2006). Descriptive survey research design allowed the researcher to collect variables as they are found in a social system such as in a Church community. It also enabled the researcher to extensively describe, analyse and explore factors affecting polygamous converts in the SDA Church in Eldoret Municipality and also allowed for standardization of data, and comparison (Orodho, 2004)

2.1 Research Area

The study was located in the thirty SDA Churches that make up Eldoret Municipality, served by five Pastors. The Churches have a mixture of various tribes being situated in the environs of Eldoret town which is cosmopolitan in composition (Kenya Mpya, 2012).

2.2 Target Population

All the thirty Churches formed the target population. Which have a population of 2,462 church members, 143 Polygamous converts, 5 pastors and one Executive Director.

2.3 Sample size and Sampling Procedures

The sample size of 464 respondents was used, these comprised of 344 church members, 105 Polygamous converts, 9 elders, 5 pastors and one Executive Director. The study employed Simple random sampling technique in selecting the Church Members who were used as study respondents. Purposive sampling was used to select the five Pastors in charge of the 5 Church Districts and the Executive director. Krejcie & Morgan (1970) formula was used to determine the sample size (table 1):

$$S = X^2 Np(1-p)/d^2(N-1) + X^2 p(1-p)$$

Where; S= required sample size

X^2 = Chi-square for 1 degree of freedom at a desired confidence level (3.841).

N= the population proportion

D= the degree of accuracy expressed as a

Proportion (.05)

Table 1 Table showing the sample size used in the study

Category	Target Population	Sample Size
Church members	2,462	344
Polygamous converts	143	105
Elders	9	9
Pastor	5	5
Executive Director	1	1

2.4 Data Collection Instruments

The questionnaires were administered to Church members and polygamous men in the thirty Churches. The questionnaires had both open and closed ended questions and divided into three sections. The researcher also used structured interviews on the Executive Director of Western Kenya Conference, Church Elders and Pastors to capture information not covered by the questionnaires. Interviews were used because they provide in-depth data and it's easy to clarify confusing questions which may not have been possible through the use of questionnaires. The researcher referred to several documents which included; Holy bible; SDA Church policy; SDA Church manual; A Biblical Exposition of Fundamental Doctrines of SDA Church and the Elders handbook.

2.5 Validity and Reliability of Instruments

A pilot study was done outside the research area and 20 questionnaires were administered to 20 Church members and 10 polygamous converts to ascertain reliability of the questionnaires. Lecturers and supervisors in the Department of Religion and Social studies from two local universities as well as, a pastor from outside Eldoret Municipality were asked to confirm that the items would solicit the required information. Their comments and suggestions were used as a basis to modify the items and make them more adaptable to the study so as to improve the validity of the instruments. The test-retest method to test reliability of the research tools was carried out (Kothari, 2008). Pearson Product Moment formula was employed to calculate the coefficient of the correlation in order to establish the extent to which the items in the questionnaires were consistent every time they were administered. In this case the instruments were considered reliable because it yielded a reliability coefficient of 0.70 (Kombo, et al, 2006)

2.6 Data Collection Procedure

A reconnaissance visit was conducted in April 2013 for familiarization. The piloting of the instruments was done outside Eldoret Municipality Churches. A research permit was obtained. The actual collection of data that was done between May and June 2013

2.7 Data Analysis Procedure

The data was coded manually and entered using SPSS Version 20, for purposes of interpreting and analysing them. The data was analysed descriptively using frequencies and percentages. Interviews were analysed qualitatively using content and themes. Tables and figures were used to present the data for purposes of interpretation.

3. BACKGROUND INFORMATION OF THE CHURCH MEMBERS

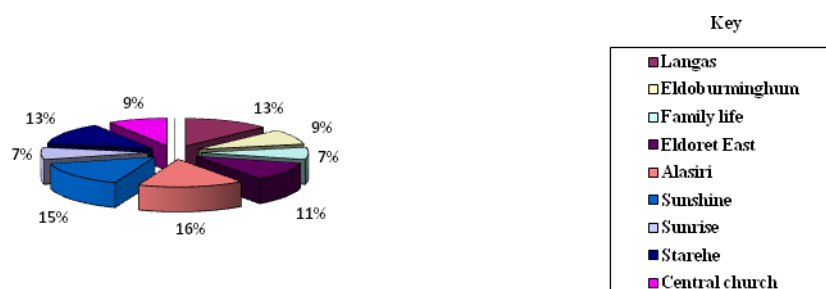
The background information of the church members centred around five aspects that the researcher felt were important to understand as this would have a bearing on the responses given. These aspects were: the church where the members attended, the age of the respondent, the gender, how long the respondent had been a church member and finally if the church member was familiar with the SDA polygamous converts in their churches.

Table 2 Background Information of Church Members

CHARACTERISTIC	F	%
1.Churches		
Langas	51	16
Eldoret East	35	11
Family life	22	7
Sunshine	26	14
Eldo burmingham	48	10
Starehe	45	13
Alasiri	42	13
Central church	29	9
Sunrise	22	7
2.Gender		
Male	195	61
Female	125	39
	320	100.00
3.Age		
Below 40 years	187	58
41 – 70 years	131	41
Above 70 years	002	1
	320	100.00
4. Duration of membership		
1-10 years	80	25
11-20 years	86	27
More than 20 years	154	48
	320	100.00
5.Familiarity with SDA		
Polygamous converts		
Yes	320	100.0
No	0	00.0
	320	100.0

Having knowledge where the church member attended his/her church services was important because the respondents were supposed to be from selected Churches only as the study focused on Eldoret Municipality churches. Knowing the age of the respondent enabled the researcher to see if the age difference of the respondent affected the way he/she viewed certain aspects involving polygamous converts.

Figure 1 Pie Chart showing Church Membership of the various Churches



4. CONCLUSIONS

1. Although polygamy is not the ideal, there 'is no direct order from God that a Polygamous husband... 'shall

upon conversion be required to change his status by putting away all his wives save one, before he shall be considered eligible for baptism and church membership' as is required by present SDA Church Policy.¹ According to the SDA Ministers Handbook, baptism entails an individual's choice when to be baptised. Although in real practice, the individual is delayed to be baptised. The experience of Phillip and Ethiopian treasurer indicates the immediacy of the choice of Baptism found Acts 8:36-38.

2. Polygamous husbands should be baptised into membership of the SDA Church since, 'there is no biblical prohibition or theological hindrance' for doing so, but should not hold church office such as that of an Elder or Deacon as indicated in I Timothy 3:1-2. This view is supported by a study conducted by Rodney Reed & Chinyama Lilema who argues that many people take the position of being opposed to full membership for polygamists as a means of "gate keeping" so that polygamists will not qualify for leadership positions in the Church. This is convenient, but is it biblical?

3. Polygamous converts should partake the Holy Communion since the SDA Church Manual does not exclude anybody. Adventists practice open communion, inviting any who have committed their lives to Christ to participate. The Bible does not out rightly forbid polygamy; it actually endorses it for the levirate institution. Many patriarchs in the OT like Abraham, Jacob, King David and Solomon, just to mention a few, were polygamous. We first see the institution of polygamy after the fall and sin coming to the world in Genesis chapter four with Lameck being the first polygamist.

4. Though the Old Testament gives us a detailed account of men who were righteous in the eyes of God, yet they were polygamous, most of these marriages did not attain the divine ideal. Many times there were resentments, hatred, envy, and impersonal relationships experienced in these marriages. The Bible is therefore just being objective by giving us an account of what happened without necessarily endorsing polygamy.

5. Polygamous converts should not be discriminated against when they come to the SDA Church. They should rather be accommodated and received with open arms. The SDA Church Policy, giving a condition of putting away all the others save for one, for you to be eligible for baptism and church membership, makes the church look as a separating institution of children and parents. This brings even more sufferings and jealous feelings towards the chosen wife.

6. The material support supposed to go to the children and abandoned wives may be limited and inadequate. This will bring more pain and suffering, yet the church should be a rehabilitation centre leading people to Jesus with love and without conditions. The argument of the Secretary Executive Director of the Western Kenya Conference, that polygamous converts are better off because they have come to the open and declared their condition genuinely whereas there are church members who are worse off because they have one or two mistresses out of wed lock without the knowledge of the spouse and church while being well accommodated in church, including partaking the sacraments and given leadership roles.

5. RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the findings of the study, the following are recommended:

1. The SDA Church should consider baptising the polygamous converts without discriminating or telling the polygamous husband to put away all the others save for one for him to qualify for baptism and consequently church membership.
2. Polygamous converts should be allowed to be members of the SDA Church but they need to be continuously taught so that they can come to realize God's ideal when it comes to marriage and His purpose in their lives.
3. Polygamous converts should choose whether to partake the Holy Communion or not without exclusion. Let one be exempted by his/her own conscience but one should not be compelled by anyone, may it be a pastor or church elder, to do otherwise.
4. The Bible does not prohibit polygamy and hence polygamous converts should therefore not be discriminated against.
5. The SDA Church should supplement the General Working Policy with the African Church Policy especially for those people who Christianity finds them while polygamous.

6. The SDA Church should not discriminate against the polygamous converts; they should instead accommodate them and show them the love of Christ. To facilitate the proclamation of the gospel among people with entrenched Polygamy the 2011/12 SDA General Conference working policy should be revised. Such a revision should imply that a responsible church committee designate such societies in which families experience intractable difficulties in an immediate transition from institutionalized polygamy to monogamy.
7. The SDA Church should initiate teachings regularly to its members about the ideal plan of God about marriage and polygamy. This will help those who intend to be polygamous realize that it is against God's Plan. Those in marriage will stick to their marriage vows and realize that adding another wife does not solve marital problems but it instead adds to the problems.

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