

# Determinants of Polygyny: A Cross-Cultural Analysis

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Polygyny is a topic that existed in a great amount of societies that are being investigated by anthropologist. In the Standard Cross-Cultural Sample (SCCS), 83.8% of societies are socially polygynous; 28% are coded as more than 40% of marriages being polygynous. However, the proportion of polygynous [marriage](#) could be small, especially in hunter-gatherer or foraging societies where people gather resources or wealth through collecting and accumulation. Under this condition, polygyny may thus be a facultative reproductive strategy that increased with defensible resources such as the human labor that could be used in food collection and tool making. Studies showed that this derives from animal behavior; for example, polygynous male birds compete for female birds by occupying a great piece of territory, which contains a large amount of vegetation to serve for breeding (Barber, 2008). When applied to human, the resource-defense theory indicates that polygyny achieve equivalent reproductive success or inclusive fitness, by sharing the resources of a wealthy man as they would through monogamous marriage to a poorer husband (Hames, 1996).

Even though the resource-defense explanation for polygyny is well supported by data on animal breeding system, some anthropologist, such as White (1998) questioned its relevance with to our species, even if some other anthropologists disagree. This research

introduced several resource-defense hypothesis and those of key rival determinants of polygyny. More specifically, scarcity of males resulted from male-male competition and severe climate, using data from the SCCS of women in polygynous or monogynous unions in 186 societies with data broken down into over one thousand variables.

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