early age to become a good wife and mother (Ocholla-Ayayo, 1980). According to the traditional marriage rules in those days, sexuality was strictly controlled through the institution of marriage and everyone was expected to submit to the social regulatory disciplines instead of "jumping the gun" outside the culturally-accepted normative framework. The spotlight on the girl was extremely tenuous, but collective.

Premarital pregnancy was rare and stigmatized and when a girl became pregnant before marriage she had to get married to an older polygynous man as one of his junior wives, because premarital conception devalued the girl. Similarly, marriage in those days was primarily based on practical considerations rather than emotional obsession with the mate. This means that most couples in traditional Africa got married not so much because they were 'in love' but because they wanted to meet a practical need and fulfill an important social obligation, legitimize intercourse and the offspring, continue the family name and lineage through procreation, and forge new family or clan alliances. Reflecting on the reasons for marriage in traditional African societies, Robertson (1981) notes that if love was a feature of traditional marriages at all, it was expected to be a *consequence* and not a *cause* of the union. Those were different times with different social conventions.

Most traditional African marriages were also negotiated and arranged either by the parents of the partners or through the involvement of a middle- man or woman (a "go-between") who knew the families of the bride and the groom quite well, often with little or no consultation with the partners or consideration of their wishes. However, the role of a traditional "go- between" has been delocalized and taken up by the present day "marriage broker" who brokers marital relationships mainly for personal fulfillment rather than social glory. In addition, there are several dating agencies which are doing good business in the urban areas trying to offer services to young people who are seeking partners to establish lasting relationships- a purely pragmatic set-up now even further enhanced by the internet.

The majority of clients who are registered by various dating agencies prefer calling and using what is commonly known as an interactive voice response (IVR). This technology has gained considerable popularity in the last few years. Other new dating techniques include the use of sms, clubs, raves and blind dates organized by friends and relatives. Some mainstream churches also organize various group activities around prayer, bible study, and public lectures to bring together young people in search of life partners. Making a distinction between the basis for marriage in traditional and modern societies, Robertson (1981:359) notes:

> In the traditional extended family, people rarely had expectations of romantic love with their spouses; marriage was a practical, common sense affair. In the modern nuclear family, far higher expectations exist, and if they are not fulfilled - and often they cannot be – discontent and unhappiness may result.

2.4 Marriage under Kenyan Law

There are five recognized forms of marriage under the Kenyan legal system. These are Christian Marriage, Civil Marriage, Islamic Marriage, Hindu Marriage and African Marriage. Marriage under Kenyan law is governed by any one of the following statutory provisions:

- **African Christian Marriage and Divorce Act (Cap 151),** that governs Christian marriages;
- ***Marriage Act (Cap 150),*** that governs Civil marriages;
- ***Mohammedan Marriage, Divorce and Succession Act (Cap 156),*** that governs Islamic marriages;
- ***Hindu Marriage and Divorce Act (Cap 157),*** that governs Hindu marriages.

The multiplicity of legal provisions regulating marriage has created disharmonies and lacune.

However, it is worth noting that currently there is no statute governing African customary law marriages nor is there a provision

for their registration; and the ongoing review of the marriage laws by the Law Reform Commission is expected to redress this *lacuna* (CEDAW, 2006).

The draft Marriage Bill, 2007 has collapsed and consolidated the five different statutes relating to marriage into a single regime, for harmony. The draft bill seeks to create a *single marriage law* in Kenya. The Bill takes a very liberal view of marriage, and recognizes equality of parties in a marriage, guaranteeing equal protection. Marriage under African customary law is also allowed, provided it conforms to all the social and cultural norms, and complies with the required rituals and cultural practices of the relevant community. The Marriage Bill was originally prepared in 1968, but was rejected by Parliament, mainly because it criminalized adultery, and did not recognize polygyny. The draft Bill recognizes both monogamous and polygynous marriages, as well as the equality of wives in polygyny; and it proposes that all marriages should be registered, regardless of form, including cohabitation which the law does not currently recognize. The registration of polygynous marriages is being proposed for purposes of granting children legal status needed for succession. However, the equality of co-wives remains a contentious issue, with some critics arguing, for example, that a wife who has been married for twenty years cannot have the same status with one who has only been married for two years. Under the current law in Kenya, a woman who gets married under African customary law, or the *Mohammedan Marriage and Divorce Act* is considered to have expressly given consent to a possible polygynous union.

2.5 Polygyny and its Benefits

Polygyny is a patrilineal and patriarchal practice which refers to the marriage of one man to two or more wives at a time. Polyandry – the marriage of one woman to two or more husbands -was very rare in traditional Africa. Traditionally, polygyny was neither perceived as a form of discrimination against women, nor as an oppressive institution to any of the parties involved. As a sign of respect and recognition, the first wife was always consulted and her consent sought by the husband before an additional wife was married. In his

study of family life among the Akamba of Kenya, Kalule (1987) notes that it was customary for a man who wanted to marry an extra wife to secure the consent of his father, uncle and first wife as a sign of respect. He adds that among the Kamba community, the first wife always enjoyed a powerful and privileged position and was responsible for guiding and supervising her junior co-wives.

Polygyny was very common in traditional African societies where plurality of wives was generally seen as a sign of wealth, a status symbol, a source of prestige, an alternative to divorce and a remedy for marital infidelity (Shorter, 1977). A man's worth was largely defined in terms of the amount of land and the number of wives, children and cattle he had. In an agrarian economy, having many wives and a large family was seen both as a social and economic asset because a typical traditional African man did not only value variety but also needed many wives and children to work the land and produce food. The practice also required substantial wealth to sustain it (Kilbride, 1990:64 - 65). Although polygyny transcends class, age and geographical boundaries, it was more appropriate in the rural areas where a large labour force was needed for agricultural production, and more popular among the elderly, the rich and those in positions of power and privilege. Shorter (1977) notes that, in Africa, a man's chances of becoming a polygynist improves, as he grows older and richer. In most parts of East Africa, for example, polygynous men were mainly older people with large herds of cattle who could afford to pay large amounts of bride wealth that was required for each wife. Ownership of a large piece of land was another requirement for polygyny, as each wife would have her house built either in a separate compound or share one large homestead with the other co-wives.

A study by Suda (1993) shows that about 60 % of the surveyed men in Ndhiwa Division, Homa Bay District, were polygynous with two or more wives each. Today, many rural families in Kenya still live in composite polygynous homes consisting of a husband, his wives and children. According to the 2003 Demographic and Health Survey (2004:90) 16 percent of the married women were in polygynous unions. The survey shows that polygyny is more prevalent in the rural than urban areas and that older, poor, less

educated and illiterate women are more likely than their younger, more economically empowered and better educated counterparts to be in polygynous marriages (Agwanda, 2004:90). In his discussion of polygyny based on the findings of the 2003 KDHS, Agwanda (2004: 90-92) reports that the practice of marrying multiple wives varies with age, place of residence, region, education and economic status. According to KDHS data, 17% of all the currently married women aged between 45 and 49 had a co-wife compared to 8% of those in their early 20s. Similarly, about 22% of the currently married 45-49 year old men had two or more wives (Agwanda, 2004:91).

In terms of regional distribution, North Eastern Province had the highest prevalence of polygyny with 19.8% of married men reported to have two or more wives, while Central Province had the least number of polygynously married men (2.4%). The prevalence of polygyny in North Eastern Province is mainly attributed to Islam which allows a maximum of four wives, while the low prevalence of polygyny observed in Central Province is primarily a function of *cost, Christianity, growing economic independence of women and their rising expectations of marriage*, among other factors (Mburugu and Adams, 2005:8). Ezeh (1997:356) used the 1988/1989 Kenya Demographic and Health Survey data to categorize Kenya into low–polygyny, mid-polygyny and high-polygyny regimes. The low-polygyny areas are the provinces in Kenya where less than 10% of all currently married women are in polygynous relationships. According to Ezeh's analysis of 1988/1989 KDHS data, Central Province is the only low-polygyny region. The mid-polygyny regimes consist of areas in which 10% - 20% of all currently married women are in polygynous unions and they include North Eastern, Nairobi, Eastern and Rift Valley provinces. The remaining provinces of Western, Coast and Nyanza are high-polygyny regimes where more than 20% of all currently married women have co-wives.

Empirical evidence across Africa indicates that different countries and cultures deal differently with polygyny. For example, Cote d'Ivoire has passed a law against polygyny while Uganda, Tanzania and Cameroon have laws which support it. Much of the earlier

literature on polygyny tends to emphasize its advantages, whereas the more recent studies have tended to pay relatively more attention to its dynamic character.

Although there are cultural variations with respect to the benefits of polygyny, many traditional African societies viewed polygyny as an alternative to divorce (although it does sometimes lead to divorce), and a remedy for loose morals, and therefore valued for its contribution to reductions in prostitution. Other most commonly cited advantages of the practice include co-operation among co-wives, particularly with regard to sharing child- rearing and husband- caring roles and responsibilities; provision of a large number of children, spacing of births; reduction in the total number of children born to each woman, and extension of family networks due to the fact that one man is related by marriage to more than one family - except in those cases where a man marries two sisters as the Luo tend to do (Shorter, 1977).

More broadly, the main reasons for polygyny are classified as economic, political, social and psychological. Writing about the increasing workload for grandparents as care-givers to their grandchildren among the Abaluyia communities of Western Kenya, the Kilbrides underscore the traditional value of polygyny in a contemporary but increasingly delocalized rural economy. They state:

> The majority of people continue to be oriented to an agrarian lifestyle and depend, for the most part, on their own labour for subsistence foods and cash crops. Women and children are, as in the past, the most important source of farm labour. For this reason large families are still desired by both men and women, and polygamy is seen as a means of increasing family size and thus providing additional free labour (Kilbride and Kilbride, 1997:210)

According to Kilbride and Kilbride (1990:203-204) and Mburugu and Adams (2005:8) plurality of wives has the economic advantage of providing a large labour force to produce more food for family consumption and marketing without the use of hired labour. It also enhances the personal and political power of the husband and gives

men an emotional advantage over women. The Kilbrides further note that having many wives and children makes a husband famous and politically more influential, at least locally. In traditional African societies, a man with several wives enjoyed a higher status than a monogamist because, ideally, polygyny was mainly practised by wealthy men and was a symbol of power and prestige. They have also noted that a man with several wives feels emotionally more secure because he has access to a significant range of women within the family for conjugal relations. He would also have reserve wives as care-givers for his children if one of the wives died or left. It was expected, for example, that if one of the wives fell sick, travelled, died or left, her husband and children would still be cared for by other wives (Whyte, 1980).

This justification for polygyny applies equally, or with some local modifications, to other African countries and cultures. In Ghana, for example, Degbey (2007:2) reports that the two or more wives are, in most cases, rivals only in name because in the traditional system they all complement the efforts of the man in keeping the children irrespective of who their mothers are. Women in polygynous unions did not, however, equally enjoy this emotional support. Although polygyny was associated with several advantages, and viewed as an important social - support system, most of the reasons given for its preference and prevalence in Africa were more valid in a rural, rather than urban environment, and more suited to an agrarian economy where a large agricultural labour was required.

In his analysis of polygyny and reproductive behaviour in sub-Saharan Africa, Ezeh (1997) notes that high-polygyny regimes maintain a value orientation that encourages high reproductive performance. Although this pronatalist force works equally for men and women, men in high- polygyny areas attain their reproductive goals by marrying multiple wives, while women do so by maximizing their reproductive capabilities by, for example, marrying early, and not using contraceptives.

There is overwhelming cross-cultural evidence which points to the fact that the failure of the first wife to bear children is one of the most important reasons for a man to marry an additional wife,

rather than divorce the barren one. This implies, therefore, that polygyny is advantageous to a barren woman who could still be accommodated in her husband's home and given the support and the respect she deserves rather than be divorced for childlessness. Perhaps this is why Price (1996:421) refers to polygyny among the Kikuyu of Muranga District as "a strategic response to childlessness (usually sonlessness)", and points out that in a number of such cases the senior wife supports her husband's decision to marry a second wife. This decision by husbands in monogamous, childless unions to become polygynous, is often the result of sustained social pressure on and criticism of the husbands and their barren wives.

2.6 How Polygyny Empowers Women

Although being in a polygynous union is not entirely an individual woman's choice – at least not for first wives in polygynous unions– several studies have shown that women also benefit from polygyny, in terms of increased power and security (Clignet, 1970; Mburugu and Adams, 2005:14; Kilbride and Kilbride 1990:204). A Kenyan study by Mburugu and Adams (2005:14) reveals, for example, that women's political power tends to increase with the number of co-wives in a marriage. They found, for example, that men with several wives tend to spend less time with each wife who subsequently gains more influence, autonomy and control over her life, children and resources. In his study of the Kanuri of Northern Nigeria, Cohen (1971: 143) confirmed that the senior wife in a polygynous union is an authoritative figure, and her superior position makes her more of a winner than a loser in a competitive marital relationship. In her case study of the relationship between polygyny and divorce in Nigeria, Gage-Brandon (1992: 291) concludes that:

> Polygyny is often advantageous for the senior wife who in many cases exercises considerable authority and control over the junior wives. Sometimes, she is instrumental in helping her husband select an additional wife to assist her with childcare and domestic and economic activities. In such a situation, the husband's marriage to a third or fourth wife on the basis of "romantic love" or other considerations may

be against the better interests of the existing polygynous unit.

In most polygynous unions, subsequent wives tend to be much younger than the husband and the senior wife. The age- difference between the polygynous husband and each of his junior wives may, in some situations, contribute to sexual dissatisfaction on the part of the younger wives. A study by Garenne & van de Walle (1989) on polygyny and fertility among the Sereer of Senegal observed that part of the reason for the social and sexual costs of sharing a husband is that the age of the husband not only contributes to lower male fertility but is also associated with less frequent coitus, and that this could lead to extra-marital relationships.

Given that polygyny is more prevalent in rural than urban areas, male urban migrant- workers who are physically separated from their wives for long periods of time tend to have segregated conjugal roles. For this reason, such couples tend to lead separate social lives and become much less dependent on each other. Thus, the rural-urban residential patterns of polygynously married men and women may lead to or be relevant in the understanding of extra-marital relationships. A similar study by Ssenyonga (1997) on polygyny and resource- allocation in Rusinga Island and Lambwe Valley in the Lake Victoria Basin also shows that there is a significant gap between the mean age of a man and his subsequent wives, as well as the ages of older and younger co-wives. This age-differential also tends to give the senior wife more power over her junior co-wives. Ssenyonga writes:

> ... The mean age of a man marrying his fifth wife is forty-eight years, while that of his bride is about fifteen years. There is also a parallel widening gap between the ages of older and younger co-wives. ..... These findings are in conformity with the cultural norm that each subsequent wife should be younger than any of the wives already married to the husband (Ssenyonga, 1997:270).

Ssenyonga's study further shows that, among the Luo and Abasuba of the Lake Victoria Basin, a woman's access to and control over resources depends on her rank in a polygynous union. The first wife

usually owns and controls more resources in the family than junior wives, particularly when the husband dies or migrates to the urban areas. Senior wives also assume the responsibility of managing conflict and enforcing discipline in the family. The other advantage of polygyny which was cited by some women from Samia and Nzoia in Western Kenya is the feeling of being physically protected and secure by virtue of living in a large extended family, and the possibility of solving their own problems without involving "outsiders" (Kilbride and Kilbride, 1990:204). This feeling of security reinforces the positive view of polygyny as a support system which cushions family members, particularly those who are marginalized and more vulnerable.

2.7 The Value of Children

In his study of marriage and related customs among the Kamba of Eastern Kenya, Kalule (1986) reports that in traditional Kamba society, children were highly valued, they belonged to everyone and were not only brought up by the extended family but even by the clan in which the nuclear family was embedded. The ideal in nearly all traditional African societies was to have as many children as was physically and socially possible. First, children were seen as the strongest cord that ties married couples and families together, and it was mainly for their sake that many unhappy marital relationships were endured. Secondly, children were, and still are, highly valued in Africa and variously viewed as a blessing from God and the ancestors, a status symbol and a source of identity, security and wealth. Traditionally, the flow of wealth was from the children to their parents. As Bahemuka (1992: 130) has pointed out, male and female children in East Africa were valued differently, and young children were socialized to believe that boys were preferred over girls. The girls were valued mainly because they brought in bride-wealth to their families. The value of male children was derived from the expectation that they would provide security to their aged parents, and be part of the family work- force, because they remain with their parents when the girls are married off.

Many African women were, and still are, expected to continue with child- bearing until they produce at least a boy. Patriarchy is the

main reason for the preference for boys. The search for boys has always been one of the reasons for the persistence of polygyny and large families in many parts of Africa, particularly in the rural settings and low- income urban households. In his study among the Luo of Kenya and the Bena and Hehe of Southern Tanzania, Swatz (undated) states that the value of children, particularly boys, in these communities had a lot to do with their families' expectations of what the children could do to their parents in old age, including the expectation that a son would bring back his estranged mother and build a house for her in her matrimonial home as part of an effort to re-build and restore a fractured marital relationship. It was therefore on the basis of what children could do or bring to their family, that the differential value of boys and girls was derived. This utilitarian view of children had implications for the overall status of girls and women in traditional Africa.

2.8 Disadvantages of polygyny

Studies on polygyny in various African societies show that while some men and women fit well and find satisfaction in polygynous unions, others seldom find personal fulfillment and are dominated by a sense of estrangement (Karanja wa Wambui, 1987; Nagashima; 1987). Those who are critical of polygyny emphasize its inherent conflictual and competitive nature which tends to undermine marital stability. In their study of bridewealth and polygyny among the Kikuyu, Adams and Mburugu (1994:160) identified envy and hatred among co-wives and their children as the major disadvantage of polygyny. These feelings are often the result of favouritism or inequality in the allocation of the husband's love and other resources to his wives and children. Another disadvantage of polygyny reported by Kilbride and Kilbride (1990: 203-204) is the magico- religious activity which is often expressed in the form of witchcraft. These and many other negative aspects of polygyny are still discernible in most polygynous unions throughout Africa. Co-wives often compete over family resources and accusations of witchcraft are still rampant. Children from polygynous marriages occasionally see their parents fight, they see fights between their own mothers and stepmothers, and they also fight or compete with their step-brothers and sisters over resources.

Contributing to the debate on the merits and demerits of polygyny, Kilbride (1994) reports the recollections of one Ugandan woman and a Kenyan man who grew up in polygynous families. In his personal interview with both, Kilbride reports that the Ugandan woman gave a favourable account of polygyny and emphasized caring and sharing among co-wives and their children. The recollections of the Kenyan man, whose father had four wives and 31 children, were full of complaints and sad memories of how he was bullied and beaten up by his step-brothers on their way to school. The man also remembered how his step-mother denied him food and did not like his friends to visit him at home. These abusive experiences interrupted the man's formal education as a child. The Kenyan man also remembered jealousy, conflict, tension, rivalry and violence between the co-wives and their children.

One of the main arguments against polygyny in contemporary Africa is that it requires substantial resources in the form of time, love, money, land and livestock all of which are expected to be distributed equally or equitably to all the wives and children in the interest of fairness and social justice. However, these and other resources are usually not enough to go round, but even when they are, there tends to be some level of inequality in the way they are distributed, which makes co-wives feel jealous and begin to compete. Although jealousy, hostility, competition and conflict between co-wives make many modern polygynous unions generally unstable, men aggravate this situation when they gossip about their senior wives with the younger ones or try to play one wife off against another.

In their discussion of family life in Africa, Kayongo-Male and Onyango (1984) point to the fact that the presence of many young wives married to wealthy elderly men, some of whom were several years their senior, often contributed to marital infidelity and instability. Another common argument against polygyny is that it increases the spread of HIV/AIDS, because of the involvement with many sexual partners. However, a counter- argument is that a monogamous relationship where unsafe sex is practised may be

more risky than a polygynous union where multiple partners practise safe sex.

3. FAMILY TRADITIONS IN TRANSITION: SOME BROAD TRENDS

The traditional African family system is undoubtedly in a state of constant and considerable flux. The extended family system is gradually weakening, and many of the pillars that were found in this system are being systematically eroded and constantly challenged by new pressures, re-evaluated against emerging values and replaced by new arrangements which were unknown to earlier generations. Some of the major forces of change which have contributed to the emergence of new marital arrangements and family forms include *formal education, Christianity, urbanization, industrialization, rapid population growth, globalization, exposure* to what is happening in other parts of the world, *changes in gender roles and relations,* as well as the *high occupational mobility* and *geographical movement* which tend to divide people along the lines of age, gender, class and residence.

These factors have conjointly contributed to the transformation of traditional African family systems, and to the delocalization of marital arrangements, as well as the moral decadence which is evident in most parts of Africa today, particularly in the urban areas. Commenting on the delocalization process and the erosion of traditional family values in East Africa, the Kilbrides note that:

> Through a process of "delocalization", traditional ideas about "proper" behaviour are frequently replaced by moral imperatives from "outside". At the same time, economic delocalization has also weakened the moral power of the clan, extended family and other social groups (1990: 54).

These changes are part of a global trend and have led to an obvious clash of values and the creation of new alternative family arrangements, some of which are 'customized' to meet individual needs. Indeed, there is a growing body of cross-cultural empirical evidence, which indicates the existence of a broad range of family

forms in the urban areas which have emerged to accommodate individual needs and interests (Kearney, 1996). Several studies have shown that some of the changes in marriage patterns and family arrangements have created new opportunities for many people, but other trends have undoubtedly had a distinctly negative impact on everybody – women, men and children (Suda, 1996; Kilbride, 1994; Whyte, 1980). It has been argued, for example, that some of the new alternative family arrangements tend to be more fragile and unstable, and therefore less capable of sustaining a supportive social infrastructure.

In virtually all parts of Africa today, we can recognize the weakening of the extended family system, the erosion of the social fabric, the rise in single-parenthood, the deterioration of economic conditions, and rampant individualism as some of the trends brought about by the pressures of wider social, cultural and economic change. Due to these continuing pressures, more and more people in the contemporary setting do not involve their families in the selection of a marriage partner; skip some of the elaborate pre-nuptial rituals and practices which were intended to stabilize marriages in traditional societies; elope, and choose to live together or cohabit, before marrying, or, indeed, instead of getting married. Many others are opting for formal monogamy, which is often practised alongside informal, or "clandestine" polygyny, involving a relationship with an "outside wife" or a mistress. Reflecting on the continuing changes, and emerging trends in family life in Africa, DK (http://www.marginalrevolution.com 2006:19) had this to say:

> .... we have gone from extended families to nuclear families to a combination of nuclear families, divorced families and single mothers and fathers. I think this trend will continue. .... I also think that in future we will see more people living alone and visiting people for social interaction rather than living with them. Although children will live with a parent they will spend much more time interacting with electronic devices than people, a trend that started with the introduction of radio and television. .... I think most people will live alone and some will have ongoing sexual relationships with several people....

Two important consequences flow from these broad trends in family life in Africa. First, we expect to see many poly-relationships occurring in fact, if not in law, as more individuals create new family arrangements which meet their personal needs, and offer them an opportunity to live a life they desire and deserve. Second, the growing intolerance for husband- sharing, and the emphasis on companionship in marriage, make formal polygyny socially unattractive to the vast majority of well-educated professional women.

3.1 The Decline of Polygyny

According to Ezeh (1997:356), there has been a gradual decline in the overall level of polygyny in Kenya although the regional variations are still maintained. One of the reasons why polygyny is losing much of its traditional appeal is because it has become too expensive in the modern economy, particularly in the urban areas where companionship and quality time between husband and wife receive greater emphasis. Polygyny has also become less attractive to many well-educated and economically- independent women who have developed a strong desire for commitment and loyalty in exclusive heterosexual, monogamous unions, and zero- tolerance to husband -sharing.

The decline in polygyny has been attributed to the combined impact of the high and rising cost of living, inability to pay high bridewealth, scarcity of land, limited employment opportunities, Christianity, exposure to western values through formal education, the internet, the media, the threat of HIV/AIDS, and the availability of alternative living arrangements, among other factors of change. In her Nigerian case study on the link between polygyny and divorce, Gage-Brandon (1992: 285) found that the high cost of living has made it more difficult for men to maintain several wives simultaneously, and that land shortages are increasing the resource constraints of most polygynous households. She concludes that, under conditions of poverty, polygyny tends to contribute to conjugal instability, and, in cases of significant age differences between the husband and his younger wives this practice is often associated with relative sexual dissatisfaction. In his book on *Plural*

lower the value of polygyny. They point out that many modern, well -educated African women no longer find polygyny acceptable, not only because of the growing perception and the cross-cultural evidence that sharing a husband is oppressive and demeaning, but also because modern polygyny is designed to be inherently competitive, conflictual and disruptive, regardless of the rank of the wife.

Bahemuka articulates the change in educated women's attitudes towards polygyny when she writes:

> It is also clear that with women being economically independent, it is not easy to convince a woman to marry a man who already has a wife (1992: 128).

One of the reasons for this concern is that most women in polygynous marriages have little control over access to their husbands because the men tend to rotate visits between their wives at their own convenience. Other reasons for the resentment include the irresponsible practice of this arrangement by many African men; changes in women's roles and status; and changes in women's expectations about marriage. This resentment is part of the reason why, even in South Africa where there is a husband –crisis, and the marriage rates are relatively low compared to other sub-Saharan African countries, more women than men support monogamy (Amoateng, 2006).

According to a feature story in the *Sunday Nation* entitled **The Husband Crisis**, Bertha Kang'ong'oi reports: "63% of Kenya's 2.5 million single women say they cannot find someone suitable to marry". (*Sunday Nation*, December 24, 2006:1). The newspaper article identifies failure to get a husband as the latest social problem facing many Kenyan women aged between 24-43. Many of these women are single and searching. In this article, Kang'ong'oi explains the shortage of husbands mainly in terms of the biological imbalances in the sex ratio:

> Purely from a biological point of view, girls are playing the marriage game at a disadvantage. Right from birth, there are slightly more girls than boys, according to government

lower the value of polygyny. They point out that many modern, well -educated African women no longer find polygyny acceptable, not only because of the growing perception and the cross-cultural evidence that sharing a husband is oppressive and demeaning, but also because modern polygyny is designed to be inherently competitive, conflictual and disruptive, regardless of the rank of the wife.

Bahemuka articulates the change in educated women's attitudes towards polygyny when she writes:

> It is also clear that with women being economically independent, it is not easy to convince a woman to marry a man who already has a wife (1992: 128).

One of the reasons for this concern is that most women in polygynous marriages have little control over access to their husbands because the men tend to rotate visits between their wives at their own convenience. Other reasons for the resentment include the irresponsible practice of this arrangement by many African men; changes in women's roles and status; and changes in women's expectations about marriage. This resentment is part of the reason why, even in South Africa where there is a husband –crisis, and the marriage rates are relatively low compared to other sub-Saharan African countries, more women than men support monogamy (Amoateng, 2006).

According to a feature story in the *Sunday Nation* entitled **The Husband Crisis**, Bertha Kang'ong'oi reports: "63% of Kenya's 2.5 million single women say they cannot find someone suitable to marry". (*Sunday Nation*, December 24, 2006:1). The newspaper article identifies failure to get a husband as the latest social problem facing many Kenyan women aged between 24-43. Many of these women are single and searching. In this article, Kang'ong'oi explains the shortage of husbands mainly in terms of the biological imbalances in the sex ratio:

> Purely from a biological point of view, girls are playing the marriage game at a disadvantage. Right from birth, there are slightly more girls than boys, according to government

> statistics. Because of this, and projecting from the 1999 census, there is a natural shortage of 325,525 husbands in the current marriage-age generations simply because there are more women than men. That is to say that if all women aged between 24 and 43 were to get a man each, there would not be enough men to go round (*Sunday Nation*, December 24, 2006:4).

Kang'ong'oi's article represents what Shorter (1997) describes as a misleading but popular idea that polygyny is common because there is a surplus of women. According to Shorter (1977), this idea is misleading because although any normal population will have more women than men as Kang'ong'oi's article asserts, it is mainly because women live longer than men but some of the women who outlive men are not necessarily marriageable. Shorter therefore argues that a more plausible explanation for polygyny is that most African women are married at a much younger age than men who tend to delay their marriage until much later after puberty. This means that by the time such men who have delayed their marriages decide to marry, some of them can have more than one wife at a time.

Commenting on the declining ratio of marriageable men to marriageable women and the concomitant husband- crisis, Michael Vassar (2006:15) argues that the crisis leaves most women with three options. One of the options available to women who cannot find suitable men to marry is to **marry down** even if they are well educated and professionally highly qualified. However, this option may only be acceptable if the parties involved and their families are willing to overlook the status incongruency between a wife and a husband for the sake of getting married, otherwise it might be considered socially- inappropriate in families or communities where women have been socialized and are expected to **marry up,** as an unchanging rule, no matter the consequences. The second option is to enter into a polygynous relationship with a reasonably high-profile man whose economic and political status make up for some of the deficiencies in his educational background. The third alternative is **not to marry at all**, but to opt for a single lifestyle. A large number of women who are single parents fall into this category and, depending on their personal, social and economic

circumstances, some of them, paradoxically, engage in informal and often clandestine relationships with married men, if the arrangement offers significant utility-benefits. As Adams and Mburugu (1994:164) report, it is the availability of such alternative relationships which accounts, in part, for the *decline in formal polygyny*, as many married men in the urban areas today seem to prefer *informal relationships* with girl-friends, to marital relationship with a second wife.

The African family system is not only changing in its basic form and essential features, but also in terms of the expectations that its participants currently have towards one another. For example, many in Africa today are concerned about the increasing numbers of poverty – stricken street families, female-headed households in the urban areas, and socially-isolated older people in the rural communities. These, and other related social phenomena, are the product of over-stretched and stressed -support systems which were integral to the traditional African social fabric.

3.2 Changes in Child-Rearing Practices

Child-rearing practices have changed considerably with the contemporary trends of modernization, urbanization and delocalization. The traditional care-giving, home-making and nurturing roles of women in the African family which formed the basis of their identity as wives and mothers are changing as they become increasingly more involved in new roles and relationships, in and outside the home. Although African women remain concerned about the quality of child- rearing, many of them are now involved in the labour force outside the home. As a result, many children of working parents spend much of their time away from home or in environments where the parents or guardians have little or no influence over what they do or learn. A growing number of mothers in the formal wage- employment sector leave their infants with baby-sitters, when they go to work. The older children go to school and return to lodge themselves in front of televisions and, very often, many parents hardly know what programmes they watch. Concerned about the limited amount of time many career -

women spend with their children, one of the female respondents interviewed by Obbo, commented:

> I feel that many children are neglected by parents who are too busy advancing their careers or making ends meet (1987: 268).

3.3 Changing Conception and Perception of Marriage

There has been a major shift in the traditional conception and perception of marriage; marriage is viewed less as an alliance between two families, and more as a relationship between the two individuals concerned. The new conception of marriage is shifting the focus from the *family* to the *individual* and this betokens a movement from collective responsibility to individual accountability, in mate-selection. This shift in the focus of marriage from a family relationship in which people share their joys and sorrows together, to an alliance between two individuals, is not only diminishing the parental and family role in the marriage process, and weakening the sense of community, but also re-defining the basis for, and the order of priority in the marriage enterprise. Modern conceptions of marriage emphasize the importance of *companionship, communication, collaboration, commitment, intimacy, personal fulfillment* and *satisfaction* between *partners* as the basic pillars of a successful relationship.

Owing to increased moral and economic delocalization, many young people get married without the knowledge or consent of their parents. Some parents may get to know only after the marriage of their children has taken place. This trend reflects a decline in parental authority, and loss of respect for the elders which prevailed under the traditional family system. It also reinforces the view that the traditional moral influence of the family on its members has been severely weakened. Today many families are facing serious moral dilemmas because of conflicting conceptions of what is 'right' and 'wrong', owing to a general lack of consensus on acceptable standards of marital behaviour.