

Performing Fairness in Polygynous Marriage: Material, Temporal, and Moral Economies of Justice among Urban Pakistani Men

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ABSTRACT: Justice (‘adl) is an ethical condition for Muslim family law, but how husbands define and apply justice is under-emphasised, as most studies document unequal outcomes and experiences between spouses. This article discusses how polygynous men transform the abstract demand for justice in a prosperous urban Pakistani context into everyday distributive practice. It is based on a qualitative phenomenological study of fifteen polygynous men in the Defence Housing Authority, Lahore whose accounts were collected using profound, semi-structured interviews and analysed with Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis, read by Role Theory and Social Exchange Theory. Men distinguished equality from equity and moved between strict parity and equity-foreseen logic; time was a moral currency governed by rotation, exceptions, and makeup regulations; and honesty was made manifest by micro rituals such as comparable gifts and documented publications. Justice was treated as fragile and fixable, leading to derailments justificatory repertoires of necessity, compensation, and religious accountability. The article further includes the concept of performative moral justice, which establishes honesty, looks at, tells, recovers, and takes into account implications for marriage supervision and family policy.

KEYWORDS: Polygyny, Justice (‘adl), Distributive Fairness, Performative Justice, Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis, Masculinity, Pakistan

Introduction

Polygyny occupies a rather unexplained position in current Pakistan. The Islamic Personal Law and the Muslim Family Laws Ordinance (Government of Pakistan, 1961) make it possible to practice, but it is becoming more and more controversial at the level of everyday life, especially in trained urban areas, which have parallels with religious traditions when they are exposed to globalised discourses of gender equality (Naqvi, 2023; Malik et al., 2021). Within this controversial area, the requirement of the Quran that one man treat multiple wives with justice is the ethical condition upon which the practice is founded. Classical interpretations position ‘adl as the cornerstone of polygynous marriage and suggest that a man who is afraid of not being fair should marry just one (Fahira, 2025; Ja’far et al., 2020). Justice, in this framing, is not a secondary feature of polygyny, but the thing that allows it. The polygyny scholarship has done a thorough job of documenting its structural drivers and costs. Studies about Sub-Saharan Africa, the Middle East and South Asia have traced the religious, economic and related reasons that support plural marriage, and a substantial amount of work has recorded the disadvantages fellow wives are suffering, including

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jealousy, unequal distribution of means and emotional neglect (Al-Krenawi, 2014; Chae & Agadjanian, 2022; Azam et al., 2023). The relatively thin picture remains of how husbands understand and operationalise fairness. Fairness is most often studied as an outcome that is measured and found wanting, rather than as a practice that men attempt, defend, and repair in the course of ordinary domestic life. The imbalance in evidence is the consequence of this. As most studies have dealt with equity from the time they were received, through partner testimony, or by aggregate indicators of resource allocation, justice appears to be mainly a deficit, a gap between doctrinal ideal and reported inequalities. What this situation cannot reveal is the work that is done by husbands themselves to produce fairness, to defend it when asked, and to rectify it when failure occurs. Men become either a source of injustice or a missing source of analysis, and the day-to-day reasoning with which they decide what a fair allocation is, taking into account their departure, is not being explored. A husband-centred account does not replace evidence of a marital disadvantage; it explains the mechanisms by which this disadvantage is created, moral and sometimes mitigated, and it is a precondition for any intervention which seeks to alter distributive conduct and not only to regulate the right to enter into marriage once again. That gap is relevant to both theory and practice. While justice is a moral loop of polygamy, understanding how it is exercised requires attention to the subjective strategies that men invest in money, time, and attention, and to the importance they attach to these strategies. While a cosmopolitan professional environment is studying the practice more thoroughly than would a traditional rural community, in particular, this is the case in an environment such as DHA Lahore, where an abundance of highly visible demonstrations of parity may be possible. In such a setting, honesty is not only an achievement of a private household service, but also of a public claim concerning the type of man and Muslim that a husband adopts himself. The choice of a rich, cosmopolitan institution reinforces this study instead of narrowing it. Many empirical records on polygyny are from agricultural, income-wracked or rural communities in Sub-Saharan Africa and the Middle East, where plural marriage is combined with subsistence, labour and related reproduction. DHA Lahore introduces a different configuration. Here, polygyny is practiced by educated, professional men by the means of supplying parallel households of comparable standards. It unfolds before an audience that is immediately religiously alert and attentive to globalised standards of gender equality. Material capacity makes visible parity feasible, and social control makes it necessary, and the two conditions put together make fairness something that must be seen, verified, and discussed, not only felt or intended. Studying justice where resources are not the binding constraint isolates fairness's performative and moral dimensions that tend to obscure material scarcity. This article deals with that gap by asking one question: how do polygynous men build and implement justice between material facilities, time allocation, and the day-to-day administration of multiple households? It is based on interviews with fifteen polygynous men in DHA Lahore and confines its analysis to their narratives of justice and equality. The key argument is that fairness in these households is at the same time a household practice, a religious obligation, and a task of responsible manhood, and that men have less in preserving the identity of a just husband than in producing, documenting, and repairing fairness over time by achieving exact equality. The study makes four contributions to the study's response to this question. First, it shifts the analytic vantage from the documented disadvantage of co-wives to the justice-work of husbands, an angle that remains underdeveloped in the South Asian literature. Second, it develops and names the concept of performative moral justice, in which fairness is enacted, witnessed, narrated, and repaired, and in doing so it extends Social Exchange Theory beyond a private calculus of costs and rewards into a public, audience-directed moral performance, while using Role Theory to show how routine converts role conflict into defensible fairness. Thirdly, it offers a mechanism-centric account that replaces unachieved equality's well-known judgement with a description of the specific devices, that is, strict parity, equity per need, time compensation, micro-rituals, and justificatory repertoires by which men keep the ideal and its deficiencies together. Fourthly, Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis applies to polygynous men, a population rarely investigated in a tradition of focused on women, and so it does in a prosperous urban location, with conditions of visibility giving unusual relief to the moral labour of honesty. The article goes further by studying the literature on equity in polygyny, sets forth the theoretical framework that

describes the method that presents insights into material, temporary and emotional indexes, governance tools and repair stories that support them, and the implications of theory, consulting, and family policies.

Literature Review

One of the literature's most persistent subjects on polygyny is the question of co-wives' justice and equality. Islamic jurisprudence positions justice as the ethical cornerstone of plural marriage, instructing men to treat women equally in physical and non-material fields. The scholars read this fairness as encompassing separate homes, clothes, and maintenance, as well as the fair distribution of time, society, and emotional respect (Fahira, 2025). Pressing for justice as a spiritual and a practical condition distinguishes the regulatory practice from pre-Islamic Arabia from the unbounded arrangements and makes polygyny more conditional than absolute. However, empirical work often shows how difficult it is to realize equality in practice. Al-Krenawi and colleagues (2006) found that men often mention psychological issues due to the difficulty of coordinating material provision and emotional obligation, and that wives who were unbalanced were often described as experiencing frustration, guilt, and decreased marriage satisfaction in their study of Bedouin-Arab families. This body of evidence places justice in polygyny as a religious ideal which is lived as an ongoing struggle instead of an established achievement. Comparative research strengthens the point of differing social and economic conditions. Chae and Agadjanian (2022) demonstrate that polygyny tends to produce uneven distribution of household resources with impact on children's well-being and education, while cross-cultural studies associate practice with fertility imbalance and brothers and sisters rivalry as downstream effects of unequal supply. The importance of the justice system in polygyny overlaps with legal framework terms in South Asia. In Pakistan, the Muslim Family Laws Ordinance established that a man to apply for advice from the Arbitration Council before a new marriage was allowed, which was intended to be used in order to protect the interests of existing women (Shah, 2025; Government of Pakistan, 1961). The legal apparatus does more to regulate the procedure than the practice. Malik et al. (2021) point out that many marriages are contracted without formal registration, particularly in rural environments, so questions that are addressed under the law relate to permission rather than the conduct of truth in the house. According to the law, fairness works as an abstract compass. It is no guarantee that justice enters into force in everyday life. The studies that highlight the experiences of women frequently underline a lack of justice, with wives reporting neglect, economic inequality, and unequal attention as main features of polygynous unions (Azam et al., 2023; Yami & Satchit Prasun, 2025). These accounts are valuable, but they offer only a partial picture of how justice is navigated, because they rarely examine men's own perspectives for honesty, develop their husbands' strategies to balance competing demands, or the ways in which they take into account flaws when ideals cannot be met. In some contexts men describe rotating schedules, compensatory gifts or standardised routines as the tools for demonstrating fairness, but such reports remain not represented in the South Asian literature (Al-Krenawi, 2014). Justice in polygyny therefore arises as a deeply controversial and negotiated principle: based in teaching and strengthened by law on the one hand, and lived as a daily challenge characterized by material capacity, cultural norms and personal disposition on the other. This study is directly related to this negotiation and investigates how urban Pakistani husbands follow fairness in everyday life.

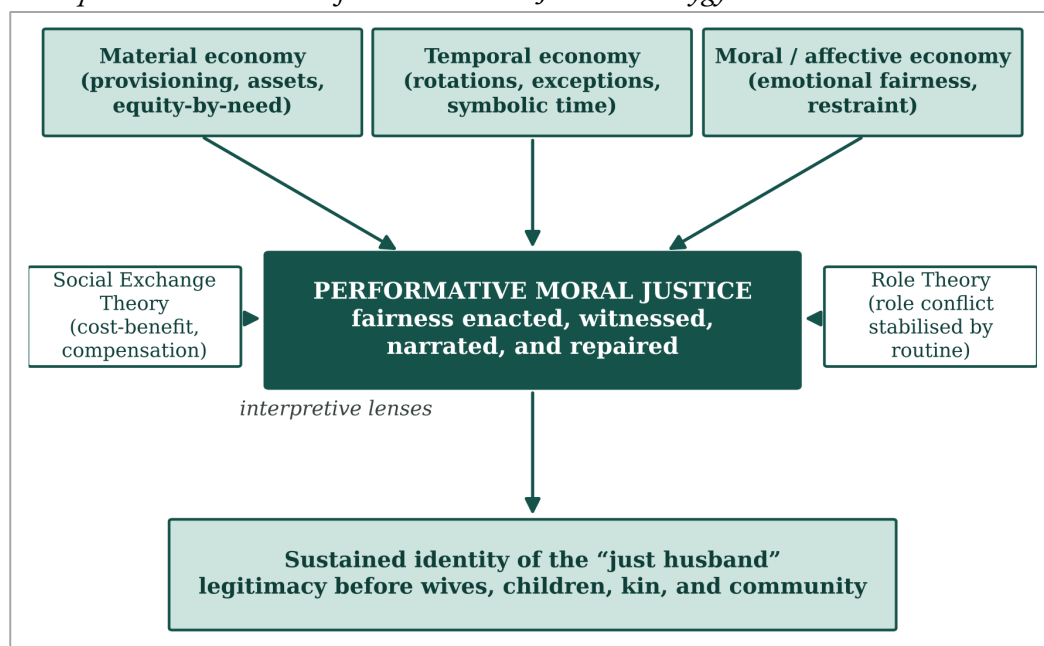
Theoretical Framework

The analysis was based on two sociological theories that jointly shed light on how men equate their demands for fairness with the realities of multiple households. Social Exchange Theory covers social behaviour as a calculus of costs, rewards and reciprocity (Homans, 1958; Blau, 1964). Applied to polygyny, it explains how men weighed the rewards of religious legitimacy, continuity, and society against the cost of financial provision, time and potential stigma, and how they tolerated tensions in one area when compensation could be offered in another. From this standpoint, justice has become a form of moral accounting in which asymmetries are now compensated by the promises of future parity. The Role Theory complies with contradictory obligations that a polygynous husband must fulfil together (Biddle, 1986). Each man had multiple roles at the same time, including provider, father, husband of

more than one wife, and a professional embedded in an urban middle-class world. These roles delivered expectations that could not always be met at the same time. Fairness practices worked to stabilise the resulting role conflict by transforming competing requirements into predictable routines. The provider role, in particular, framed justice as something that had to be deliverable and auditable, so that wives, children, and kin could recognise the husband as even-handed. The article will build the concept of performative moral justice in order to bring these perspectives together. The term includes a finding that fairness was not only distributed in these households, but also implemented, witnessed, told, and repaired. Men did not consider justice to be a static condition that could be achieved once and for all; they viewed it as a continuing achievement to be demonstrated by the audiences of wives, children and communities and restored whenever it slipped. This extends the exchange logic beyond a private cost-benefit calculation and demonstrates how role conflicts are mitigated by repeatable rituals which enable a man to remain a just husband in spite of inevitable inequalities in his own eyes and in the eyes of others. Figure 1 is a conceptual framework that provides an analysis guide.

Figure 1

Conceptual Framework: Performative Moral Justice in Polygynous Households



Methodology

The research was based on a qualitative phenomenological design that was based on the Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA). Phenomenology is concerned with the way in which people experience the phenomena of their living world: the (Van Manen, 2016) and the make sense, and this is the phenomenon that is examined, the reality of polygyny being lived, how men experience it. IPA is particularly suited for this aim because it relates to the dual hermeneutics in which the researcher tries to make sense of participants who understand their experiences themselves (Smith et al., 2009). The idiographic orientation, which investigates individual cases thoroughly before transferring into patterns in different cases, corresponds to a study seeking the personal ways in which men interpret and execute fairness in DHA Lahore instead of statistical generalization (Pietkiewicz & Smith, 2014). The research was conducted in DHA Lahore, an urban residential neighbourhood in which middle- to upper-class families with strong religious and cultural traditions live alongside exposure to globalised values. The combination of economic privilege and religious conservatism creates a clear point for DHA to study how men negotiate justice and identity in a modern urban environment. The target audience was married men who practice

polygyny and live in or close to DHA Lahore. A purposive sampling strategy was used, which is consistent with the epistemological commitments of phenomenology and the emphasis in IPA on participants who know about the explored phenomenon (Palinkas et al., 2015). Fifteen men participated, a number that corresponds to IPA recommendations in favour of small homogeneous samples that permit detailed individual examination before a cross-case interpretation takes place (Smith et al., 2009). For the age group, the criteria for inclusion require that the participants be married to more than one wife at the time of the study, live within DHA Lahore or in its immediate neighbourhood, and be between 30 and 65 years of age, including both joint households and separate households. Men who divorced except one woman and those who didn't want to discuss their marriages openly were excluded, since IPA depended on whether participants could understand their experiences in the light of their experience. Data were collected by means of thorough semi-structured interviews which were conducted using a schedule of open-ended questions organised around the study thematic domains, including motivations, justice and equality, emotional connection, and social identity. The schedule provided a consistent structure that enabled the researcher to study and track the lead of the participant as provided by the idiographic emphasis of IPA (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2015). The interviews lasted between 60 and 90 minutes, being performed more as one-to-one, as the topic was sensitive, than in groups. The interviews were conducted in Urdu, the language in which participants could express the most comfortable thoughts, emotions and culturally embedded references, and were held in the settings of participants who choose to protect privacy and comfort. The interviews were recorded on audio, via transcription and an English-based analysis, where they were agreed, taking into account the meaning and circumstances of the facts of what was said. The analysis followed the steps which were taken by IPA. Each transcript was read repeatedly; first, notes were taken on descriptive, linguistic, and conceptual characteristics, and emerging themes were developed for each case before patterns were sought in various cases (Smith et al., 2009). For this article, coding for the right-and-quality domain focused on provisioning and assets, time rotations and exceptions, compensatory practices, micro rituals of fairness, panties, and repair stories. It then organised super- and subordinate themes to show how men interpret and introduce fairness into material, temporal, and moral records. In reporting on such topics, analysis follows the interpretative convention of describing qualitative repetition rather than numerical frequency, whereby sub-topics which were typical of the accounts were differentiated from those which were variant or occasionally in the sample (Smith, 2011). This ordinal reading maintains the idiographic character of IPA and gives the extent to which a pattern has been enlarged, and informs the summarised figures that are reported with findings and discussions (Figures 3 to 6). Considering the sensitivity and possible stigma of polygyny in an urban environment, ethical safeguards were central to the design. The participants received a clear overview of the purpose of the study and gave their consent with knowledge of the facts, and were assured that participation was voluntary and could be withdrawn at any time. Names and identification details were removed and pseudonymous participant numbers were used everywhere, and data was stored securely (Orb et al., 2001). Trustworthiness was ensured through the depth and consistency of the interview process, careful consideration of the context in transcription and translation, and a reflexive recognition that the analysis is being co-designed between the participants and researchers (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Participants are only identified by the number indicated below.

Findings

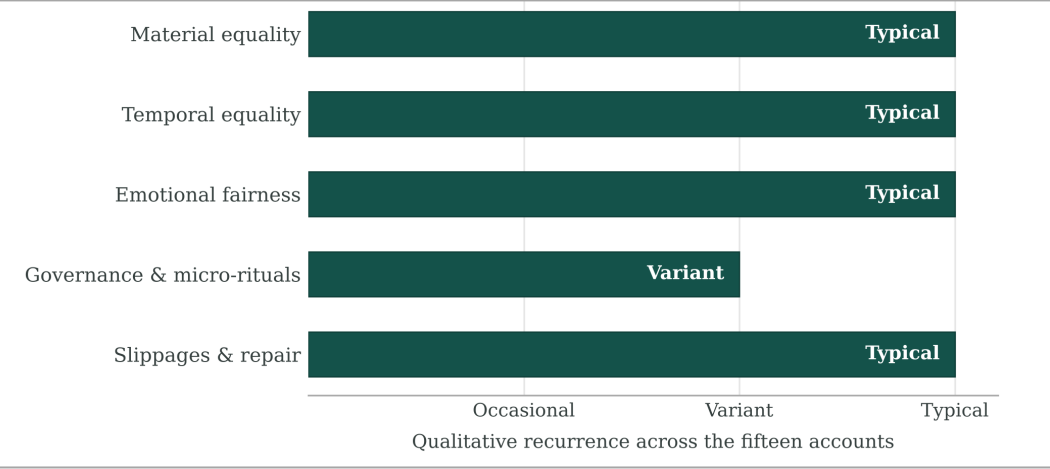
Justice was the main moral concern in the interviews, and the participants found it most difficult to satisfy. Men did not define fairness in abstract or theoretical terms; they described how they were trying to implement it in three domains where their ability to act as good spouses and suppliers was most tested, namely physical provision, time allocation, and emotion management. The following sections present the findings under five headings that emerged from the analysis: material equality and equity-by-need; temporal equality; emotional fairness; the governance tools and micro-rituals of 'adl; and slippages, strains, and justificatory repertoires. Figure 2 sums up the thematic structure.

Figure 2
Thematic Structure of the Superordinate theme of Justice and Equality



Figure 3 maps these five sub-themes with the above-mentioned ordinal recurrence scale. Material equality, temporal equality, emotional fairness, and the slip-and-repair narratives were typical of the sample, recurring in most accounts, while the formal governance tools, such as written ledgers and calendars, were a variant practice of a subset of men who preferred fairness documentation.

Figure 3
Qualitative Recurrence of the Five Justice Sub-themes Across the Fifteen Accounts



The participants have consistently pushed material justice as the most apparent validation of their polygynous arrangements. In most cases, fairness in capacity to supply comparable material goods began with similar accommodation, equivalent monthly allowances, and parity in large and small expenditures, including children's education and medical costs. This visibility played a part because it allowed women, relatives, and a broader community to see that a man did not violate the Qur'anic command of justice. The males spoke of maintaining parallel households of similar size, quality, and equivalence to such visible assets as motor vehicles and gifts.

Men also describe situations where the equal division does not make any sense, especially with regard to health requirements or the education of a child in addition to strict parity. In those cases, justice had been reconsidered by them as the need for equity, to give more where needed and to convince the other wife that compensation would follow. One of the participants explained his thinking given the imbalance:

My other wife's son had this surgery that was expensive. I spent more there, but I told my first wife I would pay the same thing when the college money came for her daughter. It's not just an exact figure at a given moment that is a matter of long-term balancing. (Participant 10).

This account demonstrates that fairness is treated as an active and current process rather than a simultaneous settlement of accounts. When parity could not be produced immediately, men described plans for incremental compensation and delayed acquisition, so justice was framed as an ever-changing process rather than a static condition. The following second participant illustrates the same deferred parity logic for long-term assets:

The second time I was married, I couldn't give her a car like I gave my first wife. But I promised, and I bought one two years later. So that way, both people know that I'm trying to be fair, even if not at the same time. (Participant 3).

Following reading on Social Exchange Theory, visible material parity worked as a public good. Housing, cars, and fellowships were not only practical necessities but symbolic demonstrations of adherence to religious and cultural standards. Through preserving equivalence in these visible areas, men guaranteed legitimacy at home and in the wider family community. When resources were tightened, men turned to temporary supply, staggering purchases or the spread of support over time, thereby keeping a self-image as competent providers, even when money became a limiting factor. For men of greater means, justice was experienced as something achieved and tested, something that women could recognise and examine in relatives; for less wealthy men, the same demand was a strain that required narrative work to justify delay by promises and symbolic gestures. Material justice thus functioned as the cornerstone of legitimacy, justified by strict parity, moderated by equity per need, and extended by time compensation.

If material provision could be measured in stipends and housing, time was a more fluid and more emotionally charged form of equity. Participants indicated temporal justice, in most cases, through rotation of regimes for nights, weekends, and holidays. These regimes were represented as predictable, transparent, quasi-rule systems. The equitable distribution of time between households was one way to institutionalize fairness and to provide visible assurances that no wife was preferable.

Men also stressed that the exceptions were structurally inevitable. A birth, a sick child, a pregnancy, or the demands of parents and parents-in-law often disturbed what was planned. Instead of denying these disruptions, the men described them in apologetic terms and stressed the need for compensation. One participant explained how he was dealing with this exception:

I spent more days in my younger son's house when he was ill. I said this firmly to my other wife, and I allowed her to add another time later. They both know I'm keeping track, and I'll never forget the track. (Participant 5).

This was why temporal justice was not managed as strict simultaneity, but dynamically. Justice was not perfect, but an effort to restore balance to an exception. In addition to daily rhythms of rotation, participants attach special weight to symbolic time: the equal distribution of key occasions such as Eid, anniversaries, and the graduation of a child. A more unequal distribution of these charged events was felt than a variation in routines in the normal week, and attentive attention to them helped to obtain a greater sense of moral balance. One participant put it directly:

Even if I can't be here every day, I'm going to make sure I'm fair on the big days. Eid, birthdays, anniversaries, it's important. If I divide this equally, they will know that I try to be just. (Participant 14).

In reading through Role Theory, time allocation became the point in which the conflict of roles was most striking. It was supposed that a husband would be present, care for his children as a father, travel or work as a professional,

and those expectations clashed frequently. Rotational plans were designed for rule-like devices that provided for an accusation of preference, while exceptions were carefully explained, allowing an aberration from the schedule to be seen as a sign of justice instead of treachery. In order to keep up with any written or mental account, to notify every household of adjustments, and to ensure ritual honesty in predictable routines were integrity practices capable of converting inescapable asymmetries into responsible long-term fairness. Time became not only a logistical but an ethical resource that was exchanged for services offered to households and reputational standing in these accounts.

Emotional justice is the most contentious and morally troubling area of justice. Men have consistently distinguished between their inner feelings, which they could not control, and the behaviour they could have led, and they have rationalised this differentiation with a principle reiterated during interviews: one can be equal not in the heart, but in treatment. This principle would enable men to match their possibilities to instinctively view a wife and to insist that they comply with the requirements of religious and ethical justice.

The participants described a prolonged tension between the affection they felt and the responsibilities they had to discharge. Many have said that while they could not control the heart, they could command behaviours and that fairness was achieved by standardising the external affection. Mechanisms such as the granting of similar compliments and similar gifts, as well as equal treatment of wives with their children, were cited as tools for ensuring that justice was considered even where personal feelings were uneven. One participant openly captured this duality:

Right, well, I feel closer to my first wife; we have more history. But I'll make sure I never show it. I give the same gift. I take both out and treat them with the same treatment in front of children. My heart may lean, but I need to be in balance in my actions. (Participant 8).

In the present report, it is clear that a boundary was indeed established between internal emotions and external actions. Justice was targeted as a kind of conduct, even where the heart could not be ruled. The latter was directed towards the management of appearances in a vigilant urban environment. The restraint of comparative emotions, the avoidance of public preferences and the control of what was shared online were treated as signs that kept domestic relations calm and protected the man's reputation. One participant explained his approach to visible even-handedness:

Unless I have the same image for another, I never put photos of one wife on social media. Okay, it may sound a little bit tiny, but these things matter. People might speak. There is jealousy. (Participant 13).

These practices show that fairness was shifted from the emotional inside, which men considered oddly accepted, to a performative exterior which they could influence. A sentiment is necessary to replace behaviour: through disciplined behaviour, men protect their sense of being a right husband and indirectly acknowledge the inequality of inner feeling. However, participants agreed with the limitations of this approach, noting that wives often had a major tendency despite taking precautionary measures into account. Emotional fairness was thus both a place of limitation and a demonstration of conscientious moral work, available but not at the level of feeling.

The participants described a number of governance tools and micro-rituals, which translated the immaterial ideal from 'adl into repeatable practice. Men discussed tracking budget pages where household categories were recorded, planning equivalent upgrades such as devices or furniture, using identical steps for birthday celebrations and Eid, and maintaining calendars to keep important data in mind. Distributive fairness was not abandoned by memory or spontaneity, but by routines of moral importance. The value of limiting justice to these procedures was that improvisation often accused men of being court-appointed, particularly when women or children compared notes. By using practical tools such as accountants, calendars, and routines that are prescribed, men have reduced interpretative space that may lead to suspicion. One participant explained:

I've got a little notebook where I write what I spend every month on each wife. It's not for them to see; it's for me. In that way, I know that I don't prefer the other one, and if anybody asks, I can show the record. (Participant 1).

Governance instruments are used both for self-observation and as a possible demonstration of fairness. Pursuing expenses was less about efficiency than a moral record that showed that conscientious justice was sought. After reading the Role Theory instrument, they stabilised the expectations of a fair supplier by including equity in the procedure: the calendar has formalized the husband's role as time-equitable, and the budget statement tested the supplier's role for himself and for others if required. In this way ritualising fairness minimises the ethical burden of improvisation, thus creating greater transparency and transparency between the demands of women and the self. By applying Social Exchange Theory, the same tools as commitment devices were used, which lower the cost of suspicion in fragile relationships by setting a common benchmark at home and a common standard for celebrations. The gestures were often small but repeated, and they built reliability that was relational of character instead of reduced to economic costs.

Micro-rituals also formed one's own living experience of men's justice. Some of the participants described how to repeatedly act upon equality seemed not only good but arrived to feel good, so that practice and moral self-perception strengthened each other. One participant is considering this internalised dimension:

Every time I buy a gift for one wife, I think I will buy another. It has become a habit. I only feel peace when I know that both are treated equally. (Participant 15).

Justice in this account is described less as external demand than as internalised discipline. Repetition of fairness gestures promoted an embodied sense of moral integrity that indicated how practice and perception reinforce each other. The management tools and micro rituals became a means by which people realized the ideal of justice, reduced distrust and instability of roles, maintained an identity as a just provider, and at the same time maintained an internal conviction that they are good husbands in the first place.

In spite of proceduralisation of honesty via rotational schedules, budgeting boards and ritual equality, participants were able to easily admit that slippage was possible and sometimes internal to honesty. These losses occurred most often at the beginning of the new marriage, during the time of acute illness or under economic constraint, when the time, resources or emotional energy became apparent in a single household. The way in which men have described these imbalances is striking. Rather than diagnosing them as failures, they used justificatory repertoires to transform slip pages as one-time, repeatable, and ethically defined departures.

The requirements concerning necessity were the first repertoire. Men justified an imbalance in addressing a unique and compelling circumstance. Thus, unequal distribution is presented as a situation-based necessity rather than as a preference. One participant explained:

After expecting my second wife, of course, I spent more time with her. But it was a necessity and not a preference. I told my first wife this was for her health and for the safety of the baby. (Participant 7).

A second repertoire embraced the form of promises of compensation, whereby men recognised an asymmetry, but committed themselves to eliminating it in the future, usually as a direct promise to give time back or provide delayed material support. A participant described the pledge, made in a time of financial hardship:

I left the store during the lockdown, and could not manage both households on the same basis. But I promised them if things had improved, I would pay it back. Now, slowly, I fulfil that promise.

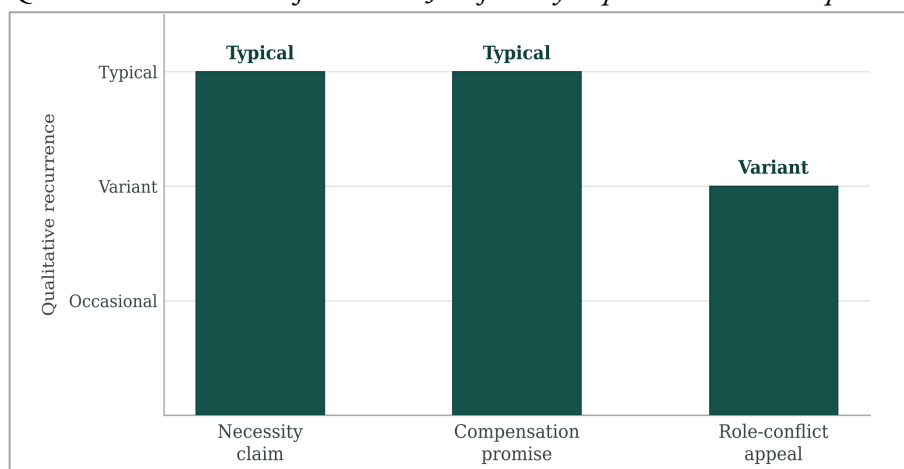
The third repertoire is the role-conflict appeal in which men relied on work obligations or external demands to justify disruptive schedules, meaning that unequal time or attention appeared to be the inevitable result of the emptying of other legitimate roles. One participant shared:

I had to travel at the same time for my job when it was my first wife's turn. I told her it was beyond my control. I spent my extra days here when I came back and made up the time I spent. (Participant 2).

In all accounts, claims for necessity and promises of compensation have been a typical repertoire of men that was used to account for omissions, while role-conflict appeal has been presented as an option of the form which was involved in professional travel and external liabilities. Figure 4 gives a summary of its relative frequency.

Figure 4

Qualitative Recurrence of the Three Justificatory Repertoires used to Repair Fairness.



By reading IPA, those repertoires can't be rejected as simple apologies. They were sense-making devices through which men upheld their identity as righteous husbands. By distinguishing between the episodic disparities, the specific cases that could be rectified and the structural favouritism they did not want to recognise, participants maintained a moral threshold that had considered justice eternal even when the direct outcomes were unequal. Social Exchange Theory reads these repertoires as moral accounting: an argument of necessity justifies the present imbalance in investing in higher-order goods such as health care and safety, and future compensation's promise has turned justice into a currency to be paid later. That timeliness of justice has made it possible for men to maintain their trust and legitimacy when faced with temporary inequalities. Role Theory shows the same slippages as manifestations of the clash between competing roles of husband, father, provider, and employee; categorising an imbalance as role conflict's outcome rather than preference preserved men from injustice's charge and maintained coherence across their multiple identities. By means of these stories, men also protected their reputations among women, relatives, and society in an environment where polygyny had already aroused criticism. Hence, the report on the misdeeds shows both the fragility of the justice system in polygynous life and the power of the justificatory practices with which it was gained, and confirms that justice was performed discursively as an ongoing process and not as a complete success.

Discussion

The results show that in DHA Lahore, men had not experienced justice as a permanent condition, which could be achieved and then set aside. It was experienced as a continuous achievement, which had to be produced in material, temporary, and moral registers and demonstrated to others. This ensures that existing literature is supported and expanded in three ways.

First, the study confirms that equality in polygyny is difficult to achieve in practice, with conclusions from Bedouin-Arab and Sub-Saharan contexts taken over to document the pressure of co-ordinating material and emotional liabilities (Al-Krenawi et al., 2006; Chae & Agadjanian, 2022). What it adds is a mechanism-centred

report on how men respond to this difficulty. Instead of achieving parity or giving up the ideal, the participants transformed fairness into a repertoire of routines: strict parity where it was visible and affordable, justice as needed where circumstances were required it, and temporal compensation where present parity was impossible. Justice was told and rehearsed as much as given, which qualified accounts that treat fairness only as a measurable outcome.

Second, the study contributes to the performative moral justice concept. Justice in these households wasn't just a distributional ethical issue but also a performative repertoire, where men were trying to perceive themselves and feel fair. Material parity operated as a publicly visible asset to women, children, and family; symbolic time bore disproportionate moral weight; and micro rituals like ledgers and calendars transformed an intangible obligation into auditable practice. This appearance reminds us that justice was both an ethical ideal and a source of reputation for upholding justice, serving both as a maintenance of peace within the family and as a protection of male dignity in the urban society under our vision. The emphasis on visible action also illustrates how emotional inequalities have been treated: where the heart couldn't be balanced, behaviour and behaviour were replaced by disciplined restraint for feelings.

Third, the study shows how role conflict is stabilised by routine. Read together, Social Exchange Theory and Role Theory show men computing justice as a ratio of expenses and compensation, while simultaneously maintaining the competing demands of man, father, vendor and professional reconciliation. Rotation schedules, budget statements, and promises of compensation are the tools by which these competing demands were retained together, thereby allowing men to maintain coherence in all of their identities. Justice in this regard has been a vital rhythm of budgeting, rotation, compensation, and repairs through which men have remained moral actors even if absolute equality has not been achieved. The slippage narratives are the key points in the accounts: the rearrangement of the estate to the workers and to men's demands, or compensation or role conflict, created imperfections in the moral economy of honesty rather than allowing them to discredit their identity as just husbands.

Figure 5 indicates how powerful each lens is in its five sub-themes. Social Exchange Theory is the primary lens for material provision, where visible parity acts as an interchange of legitimacy, while Role Theory is primarily for temporal allocation, in which rotation controls role conflicts. Both lenses are especially related to governance tools and slippage and repair stories, in which the two exchange logics and role disputes work together and are both secondary to emotional fairness, which men frame less as calculation than of disciplined behaviour.

Figure 5

Emphasis of the Two Theoretical Lenses Across the Five Justice Sub-themes

Theoretical lens emphasis by sub-theme		
	Social Exchange Theory	Role Theory
Material equality	Primary	Secondary
Temporal equality	Secondary	Primary
Emotional fairness	Secondary	Secondary
Governance & micro-rituals	Primary	Primary
Slippages & repair	Primary	Primary

The focus of two theoretical lenses over five Justice sub-themes. Figure 6 presents the same picture as a radial profile, so it is easier to compare the complementary range of the two lenses, with the exchange lens extending to the highest of material provision, the role lens to temporal allocation, and the two converge on the governance tools and the work of repair.

Figure 6

Radial view of Theoretical Lens Emphasis Across the Justice Domain

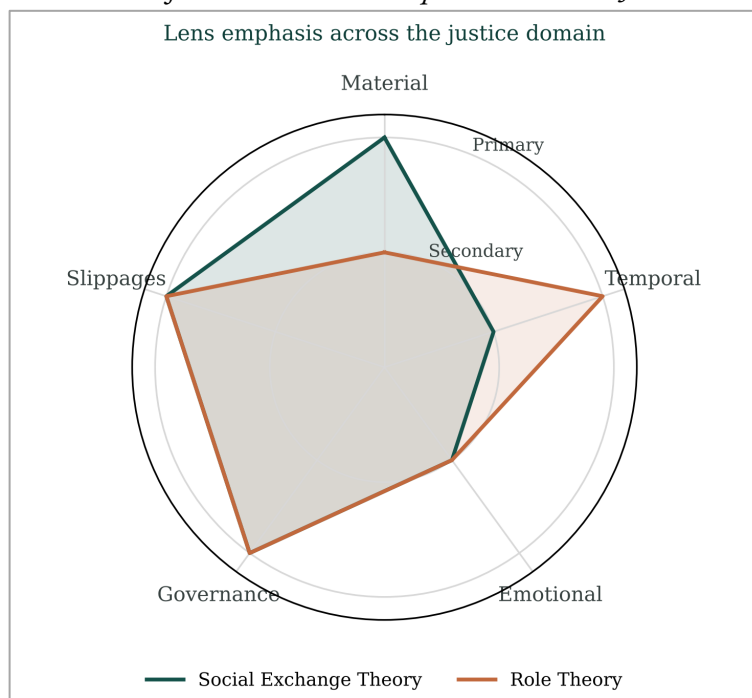


Figure 6. Radial image of the theoretical lens highlight in the field of justice. Together, these findings reposition polygyny in this rich urban environment as a negotiated moral practice instead of an uncontrolled expression of patriarchal privileges. This is not to deny the asymmetries of power that structure plural marriage or the disadvantages of co-wives documented in wider literature. It is to show that from the standpoint of the men living in it, honesty constantly demanded ethical labour, and that the identity of the just husband was maintained by the determination, documentation and restoration of justice over time.

Implications

The account has practical implications for marriage advice, religious supervision and family policy. Being fairness in these households is translated through concrete allocation practices, judging justice in polygynous families would benefit from joining the actual distributive conduct, including the allocation of time, maintenance, and housing, and the repair mechanisms that were used by men when balance slips, rather than just making a legal or self-reported intent. Counselors working with polygynous families may consider it useful to make these routines clear, as the study suggests that predictable, transparent practices reduce the suspicion and instability of roles. Religion and parish leaders who emphasize that the authorisation to marry again depends on the performance of distributive and emotional justice would reinforce a standard to which the participants themselves have referred. With regard to politics, the findings suggest that the general framework which is related to the welfare of women and children should go beyond the fact of registration by living the practiced behaviour of fairness in which the tensions between ideal and practice are the most rigorous.

Limitations and Directions for Future Research

Several limitations qualify these findings. The study is based on the accounts of 15 men in a wealthy urban district and the objective, homogeneous sample supports the depth of interpretation rather than statistical generalisation. The analysis is based on their own stories of men who themselves are addressing actions of justice to a public that involves the researcher; the perspective of co-wives and children, who would describe the same arrangements quite differently, was off the radar. Interviews were carried out at Urdu and translated into English and certain nuances could change in translation. Future research could explore the same households from the perspective of women and children, compare wealthy and less prosperous institutions to test how class forms the repertoire of justice, and follow families over time to observe how fair practices and restoration stories evolve in the course of life of a polygynous marriage.

Conclusion

This article aims to understand how polygynous men in DHA Lahore builds justice and delivers it on a daily basis. It was found that men separated equality from equity, shifted between high equality and equity in security, governed time as a moral currency by rotation and compensation and took emotional justice from uncontrolled feelings in controllable conduct. Honesty was shown and controlled by micro rituals like ledgers, calendars and comparable gifts. It was treated as fragile and repairable so slipping out justificatory repertoires caused necessity, compensation, and religious accountability instead of a confession of failure. Working with these strands, the article describes the concept of performative moral justice: In these households, fairness was not just divided, but determined, witnessed, told and repaired. Understand in this manner, polygyny in a rich urban Pakistani setting is less uncontrolled exercise of privileges than a continuous moral project where men work to stay, in their own eyes and in the eyes of their households, just spouses.

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