

Family Structure

by Sophia



WHAT'S COVERED

This lesson answers several questions: What is the makeup of family in some of the religions of the world? How is family organized? How are the values of that organization expressed? Specifically, this lesson will cover:

1. Judaism
2. Christianity
3. African Muslims
4. Homosexuality

1. Judaism

In the Jewish and Christian faiths, there's a long and varied history concerning marriage and partnerships. In general, **monogamy**, marriage between one man and one woman, and **polygamy**, usually marriage between one man and more than one woman, in these two Abrahamic traditions has a complex background with a broad range of interpretations.

For support of the monogamous union, some practitioners of Judaism refer to this verse in the book of Genesis, in the Hebrew Bible: "Therefore, a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and they shall become one flesh."



TERMS TO KNOW

Monogamy

Marriage between one man and one woman.

Polygamy

Marriage between one man and more than one woman, or (rarely) marriage between one woman and more than one man.

2. Christianity

There are references to childbearing and different spiritual values attributed to this in the different traditions, as well. In the Roman Catholic tradition that was most authoritative early in the Middle Ages, the institution of marriage was described and put forth as the union between one man and one woman.

There are, however, some Christian groups that recognize and practice polygamy. Some practitioners of Mormon fundamentalism have more than one wife in the context of what is called plural marriage. This is associated with certain ethical and spiritual commitments of the faith. With this, there is a wide range of interpretation and tolerance concerning the Church of Latter-day Saints, as well as the legal and civic recognition of the practice.



DID YOU KNOW

The Church of Latter-day Saints, in 1890, officially stopped recognizing polygamy. Yet, certain branches of Mormonism still today recognize and practice polygamy.

3. African Muslims

In parts of Africa with significant Muslim populations, there's a range of interpretation and recognition with levels of tolerance to the polygamist family structure.

In North Africa, the practice of having more than one wife or husband is generally more accepted, yet it is not widespread or very common. Again, it varies a bit from country to country. In other areas of Africa, such as Kenya, where approximately 10% of the population is Muslim, polygamy was officially recognized in 2014.

4. Homosexuality

Within all the religions that you've been looking at there has been, and continues to be, a wide range of interpretation, recognition, and acceptance of alternative family structures. **Homosexuality** is an example.

In the Roman Catholic Church, it is almost universally understood that marriage is a sacrament to be enjoyed by one man and one woman. However, certain Protestant denominations have approved, either officially or in principle, the right for individuals of the same gender to partake in the sacrament of marriage. There continues to be debate about this from within and between denominations.

This debate also affects civil life. It brings up ongoing questions of the separation of church and state, issues of individual freedom, and how civic life and religion are related or not.



TERM TO KNOW

Homosexuality

The sexual preference for, or the engaging in sex acts with, a person of the same sex.



SUMMARY

In **Judaism** there is a varied history with regards to the structure of marriage. The book of Genesis is referred to for support of monogamy. In **Christianity** there are varying values as well. In the Roman Catholic tradition, only monogamy is accepted. Other Christian groups do practice polygamy. For **African Muslims** there are varying degrees of acceptance for polygamy. **Homosexuality** also has varying degrees of acceptance in different religions.

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