# The Small House Phenomenon and Polygyny in Zimbabwe: A Problematic Context for Child Socialisation and Development

by

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## Abstract

The study juxtaposes the small house marital relationship with polygyny and explores the former as a context for child socialisation and development. This study was conducted in units O and N residential suburbs in Chitungwiza, Zimbabwe. The purposive sampling technique was adopted to acquire research participants. In collecting the qualitative data, in-depth interviews and document analysis were used. The juxtaposition of the small house phenomenon with polygyny illuminated numerous continuities and discontinuities of the traditional polygynous marital practice. The study reveals that polygyny remains a contested terrain, although women would like to ensure its total demise; and in contrast, men clandestinely perpetuate polygyny albeit disguised as the small house. However, the general perceptions were that polygyny is no longer compatible with the contemporary political and socio-economic dispensations. The study also established that the small house family structure tends to be a problematic context for child socialisation and development as a result of absent fatherhood and lone parenthood and that the girl child's situation is worse-off, and thus, children from such households tend to experience a myriad of challenges at school, culminating in poor academic performance.

**Key Terms**: polygyny, *small house,* hegemonic masculinity, absent fatherhood, lone parenthood.

## Introduction

The study juxtaposes the *small house* phenomenon; an emerging family structure in the Zimbabwean contemporary society with the traditional polygynous marital practice among the Shona people. This juxtaposition exposes quite numerous continuities and discontinuities between the two phenomena in the context of the Shona culture. Apparently both husbands and wives are uneasy with this juxtaposition.