

POSTER

INVESTIGATIONS INTO CO-WIFE AGGRESSION AND COMPETITION ACROSS CULTURES

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ABSTRACT

Here I examine the dynamic of co-wife aggression through the lens of ethology, utilizing empirical evidence drawn from the eHRAF World Cultures database. My goal is to elucidate the underlying causes and strategies of competition among co-wives, who represent multiple women engaged in intense mating competition for the limited resources from one man. I propose that co-wife aggression is an adaptive response stemming from resource competition, specifically over male investment in one's offspring, and directly impinges on wives' reproductive success and inclusive fitness. Given the prevalence of polygyny in societies represented within the eHRAF database, the data set provides a fertile ground for the exploration of these dynamics. I employ a mixed-methods approach, combining quantitative analysis of eHRAF data with qualitative examination of ethnographic records. Searches were limited to records containing the terms polygamy and wives, with cohabiting, aggression, violent, or fight. Preliminary findings indicate a complex interplay of strategies used by co-wives that range from direct physical aggression to more subtle forms of manipulation (e.g., gossip, social exclusion, altering husband's perception), and alliance formation (i.e., to increase status and reputation), reflecting a nuanced understanding of social dynamics within polygynous households. In rare instances children are used to foster (and presumably win) competition. Further, they may also compete via differential reproduction, attempting to bear more children, thereby securing a larger portion of the husband's resources for their offspring. Mediation tends to involve the husband, the acknowledgement of hierarchy, and inclusion of sororal rather than unrelated co-wives. Directions for future research into women's intrasexual mating competition will be presented.