

## **Position of Islam on Family Planning and the Use of Contraceptives by the Muslim Women**

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### **Abstract**

**T**his paper examines the different nature of family planning in Islam and western ideology. Essentially, the paper focused attention on the position of Islam on family planning and the use of contraceptive by Muslim women. Although some people were of the opinion that family planning originated from the West not knowing that, family planning is not entirely a new concept, since Islam has long ago (about 14 centuries earlier) prescribed measures, limitations and responsibilities for parents with regards to family formation and child raising responsibilities. To highlights on this issues therefore, some verses of the Glorious, Qur'an, *Hadith* of the prophet (SAW) as well as sayings of the Muslim scholars and western philosophers were use respectively. Finally, the paper provides conclusion.

**Keywords:** *Islam, Family planning, Contraceptives, Muslim women*

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### **Background to the Study**

Islam provides guidance for Muslims in all the spheres of life, religiously, socially, economically and politically. This is why, Islam comprises set of norms, values and laws that make up the Islamic way of life. Among such norms, values and laws, is the family planning which emphasized the aspect of health education as it has to do with a process of transferring knowledge and skills that will bring about positive change towards a healthy living. Family planning increased level of health awareness among community members means that health problems can be prevented or dealt with at the early stage. This provides less social and economic constrains for individuals, families, communities and countries. As individual become better informed about health, they become better equipped for self reliance and self care. It is in this respect that the paper examines the position of Islam on family planning and the use of contraceptives by the Muslim women based on the following:-

### **The Concept of Family Planning**

Family planning in Arabic refers to “*Tanzimu- al-nasl*”. It is also known as “*Tahadid –al-nasl*” (Birth control or Birth limitation). In other conceptual definitions, family represents an association of man, woman and children with the attendant obligation, springing their form.<sup>1</sup> Hence, the family in a very narrow sense speaks of the husband the wife and children. In a broader sense it will include the grandparents and grand children. In the broadest sense it will include the Islamic community as a whole as a family. While, planning in this respect means a sort of arrangement of spacing between the birth of children by using contraceptive or something similar to it.<sup>2</sup>

Technically, family planning is defined as the measures taken by couples to plan the number, timing and spacing of the children that they want in order to promote the health and welfare of the family group. Various methods are used in the attainment of this goal ranging from abstinence, contraceptive devices and pills to surgical procedures involving mainly the female group.<sup>3</sup>

Family planning is in reality a long time tradition. But what are new are the modern methods which were not known before. The method of family planning used in earlier time were abstinence and coitus interrupts (*al-azl*) that is, withdrawal of penis from the vagina before ejaculation.<sup>4</sup> As in the *Hadith* of the prophet (SAW) which was reported by (Bukhari and Muslim) the companions (RA) explained how they practice family planning during the life time of the prophet (SAW) thus, we practiced *azl* (coitus interrupts) during the life time of messenger of Allah (the most high) the Qur'an was being revealed and the prophet (SAW) come to know about it but did not prohibit it.<sup>5</sup>

Also, in relation to *azl*, Abu-aziz in his book of *fiqh* defined it as a process whereby an individual prevent his penis to ejaculate in the vagina during the sexual intercourse so that his wife will not be pregnant or conceived.<sup>6</sup>

Some western philosophers also viewed family planning as the use of contraceptive method by husband and wife with mutual agreement between them, to regulate their fertility with a view to

ward off health social and economic hardships and to enable them to shoulder their responsibilities towards their children and society. It encompasses the following:

- i. Spacing of children to allow breast feeding and safeguard the health of the mother and child.
- ii. Timing of pregnancy to occur at a safe age.
- iii. Adjusting the number of children, not only the family's need but also its physical, financial, educational and child raising capabilities.
- iv. Assisting the fertile or sub-fertile husband and wife to achieve pregnancy.<sup>7</sup>

It is based on the above explanation therefore, some Islamic scholars regarded abstinence from insemination (*azl*) as a method of contraception used in the olden time. For this therefore, contraception and contraceptive are all modern aspects of family planning used under certain circumstances.<sup>8</sup>

Hence, contraception can be defined as the deliberate use of artificial methods or other techniques to prevent pregnancy as a consequence of sexual intercourse. The major forms of artificial contraception are; barriers methods, of which the commonest is the condom or sheath; the contraceptive pill, which contains synthetic; sex hormones while prevent ovulation in the female intrauterine devices, such as the coil, which prevent the fertilized ovum from implanting in the uterus, and male or female sterilization.<sup>9</sup>

Contraceptive (as now) a device or drug serving to prevent pregnancy<sup>10</sup>. Going by these two definitions, it appears that the two words have similar meanings. The definition of contraception is more detailed than the definition of contraceptive. More important, it seems like contraception refers to the act whereas contraceptive refers to the physical manifestation of the act.

### **Family Planning and the use of Contraceptive by the Women in the Sight of Islam Opposition to Family Planning**

Muslim scholars were of the opinion that, family planning which has to do with birth limitation due to the family or society overpopulation is not permissible in Islam, because it is not a wise judgment to call the limitation of birth while Qur'an and the *Sunnah* as well as human nature call for reproduction and the growth of humanity. The sources of legislation urge people to marry and generate so that they may keep the human race from extinction.<sup>11</sup>

Allah has given you wives from among yourselves, and through them He has granted you sons and grandsons. He has provided you with good things.<sup>12</sup> Among the prophet's commandments in his saying:

*Marry and generate; for I shall be proud of you among all nations on the Day of Judgment. He is not one of us who abandons marriage because he is afraid of getting children.*<sup>13</sup>

The above verse and *Hadith* advocates claim that a large population is ordained by the religion and that failure to achieve it deviate from the right path. Therefore, it is quite fair to consider the call for a general limitation of birth as evil as any subversive idea and through this also a small number of Islamic Jurists and other Islamic group oppose family planning and contraceptive use on two grounds; first, they believe that withdrawal or any practice that prevents pregnancy is infanticide which is repeatedly condemned and prohibited in the Qur'an.<sup>14</sup> For instance, Allah (the most high) says:

*Kill not your children because of property; We Provide sustenance for you and for them.*<sup>15</sup>

Second, the opponents of birth control believe that the larger the number of Muslim and the higher their population growth rate, the greater their power. They find support for their views from the above verse and *Hadith*. Hence, they oppose family planning especially if it becomes community or government policy. They also claim that birth control programmes, having originated in the west represent a conspiracy to reduce the number of Muslims and diminish their power.<sup>16</sup>

Furthermore, some Muslim scholars oppose family planning when it comes to the use of contraceptives as they commented that, it is like all other drugs, contraception also has some unwanted side effects like abnormal vaginal bleeding, discharge weight gain and occasionally abdominal pain which directly affect the purification state of a woman and her *Ibadat* in general. These contraceptives are being used by women and they encounter such aforementioned side effects.<sup>17</sup>

### **Permissibility of Family Planning**

Among the objectives of Islamic *shari'ah* is that Islamic rulings can change with changes in time and place, and the rulings should choose the lesser of two harms and preserve the public interest. Muslim scholars consider these principles when discussing issues related to family planning and contraceptive.<sup>18</sup> They opine that the Qur'an treated the cases of harmful things to the individual and to the society as something that must be avoided

Do not with your own hands cast yourselves into destruction.<sup>19</sup>

'Do not kill yourselves; Allah is indeed merciful to you.'<sup>20</sup>

Family planning is also allowed in the case of women who have sucking babies because this may weaken the health of the babies born- as well as the unborn. Usamah bn Zaid reported that a man came to the prophet and said

*'O messenger of Allah, I abstain from insemination in my intercourse with my wife.'*

The prophet said:

*'why should you do that?'*

'The man said:

*'I am worried about the children.'*

The prophet said:

*'There is no harm in such an act If it is so, it would have harmed the Persians and the Romans. (Muslim).'*<sup>21</sup>

It was also reported by Jabir and transmitted by al-Bukhari and Muslim that under certain circumstances some men when they communicated sexually with their wives abstained from insemination. On hearing of such an action, the prophet did not object. Abstinence from insemination was the only means of contraception at that time. From the tradition quoted above it is clear that the prophet did not object to that method of contraception because:

- a. The circumstances necessitated the family planning
- b. It was exercised individually
- c. The method did not cause the suppression of the fetus at any of its stages.<sup>22</sup>

According to some schools of law, such as that of al-Imam Ahmed, abstinence from insemination may be permissible if the wife agrees with it. She has right of both begetting children and enjoyment. It was reported that Umar bn al-khattab, the second caliph in Islam, forbade that method if it was practiced without the wife's consent.

Due to this broad-based legal permissibility of contraceptive in Islamic law, Muslim physicians in the medieval period conducted in depth investigation into the medical dimension of birth control, which are unparalleled in European medical until the ninetieth century. *Ibn sina* in his *Qanun* listed 20 birth control substances while physicians like Abu-Bakr *al Razi* in his "*hawi lil fatawi*" listed 176. The permissibility of contraceptive practices in Islamic history at the level of theory and practice is abundantly evident in birth its medical and legal legacies.<sup>23</sup>

Hence, contraception is legal as long as it is done according to the *Shari'ah*. The first valid reason for employing contraception is the fear that the pregnancy or delivery might endanger the life of health of the mother. This can be indicated by the first experience or the opinion of reliable physicians.<sup>24</sup>

Almighty Allah says:-

.....*And do not be cast into ruin by your own hands.*<sup>25</sup>

Another valid reason is the fear that the new pregnancy or a new baby might harm a previous Suckling child, and in our modern time new methods of contraception are available which help a father and a mother to delay the pregnancy so that they may not harm their now Suckling baby.<sup>26</sup>

**Also, Islam allowed birth control in the following cases:-**

- i. Inheritable diseases which are proved medically to have carried by the man or the woman.
- ii. It is also allowed when the family of a very little income is burdened which children whose sustenance and up bringing may be unbearable.
- iii. Birth control may also be resorted to if the children are being born so mentally deficient or retarded that the begetting of more children will cause more agony and misery to the parents and society.<sup>27</sup>

In addition to all of these opinions discussed, Usman Faruku commented in his book that Islam laid-down procedures that would lead on individual (male or female) to do family planning whenever it is needed for one reason or the other, such procedures includes:-

**i. For fear of certain diseases or illness:-**

This applies to woman who have hereditary diseases and it is feared that the diseases will be passed on to the new baby of this woman eg:- if the woman has a mental case. This is an example of disease which will be inherited by the new baby. There are many others such inheritable disease.

**ii. For fear of inheriting sickle cell or hemophilia:-**

Where doctors have confirmed that both the mother and father are positive carriers of this disease, there is likelihood that their offspring's will be a double carrier. Sickle cell causes a child to die within 24months from birth while hemophilia is a disease of inability of blood to clot. Thus, when the sufferer sustain open injury, he is likely to bleed to death unless prefer medical care is obtained immediately. Hence, if doctors know that both parents are carries it, is available to discourage birth from the mother.

**iii. For fear of crippling disease:-**

This applies to certain women who are afflicted by certain malignant or crippling illness in such a way that if she continues to bear children one day pregnancy may be the cause of further complication or result in her death. In such a situation, stopping her from further pregnancy is most desirable.<sup>28</sup>

**iv. Narrowness of pelvic girdle:-**

Where on doctors' examination it is discovered that the woman's pelvic bones are too narrow to permit normal delivery of a baby, in this case the woman can only have children by means of operation. But since this type of delivery is not health for the mother, doctors always recommend that the number of children she will bear should not exceed four.

**v. Early conception after birth:-**

This means, if she continues like this, the spacing between the children would be short as to affect the health of the mother as well as the children's health upbringing. In such a situation permissible measure will be taken to provide the necessary spacing. In Islam a child is expected to suckle his mother up to a maximum period of 24months before a new pregnancy.<sup>29</sup>

**Legal Method for Family Planning**

Thus, we understand that abstinence from insemination as a method of contraception is not forbidden under certain circumstance, though it may not provide ample satisfaction to both parties. Therefore, modern harmless methods of such as contraceptive pill are quite lawful, provided these methods are performed in the individual cases which require contraception.

Family planning, like any other emergency institutions such as divorce and polygamy, may be exercised in special circumstances. It should be borne in mind that not every method of family planning is acceptable by Islam. Any method that kills the fetus at any of its stage in the

mother's womb is considered a crime in the sight Allah, and therefore is absolutely forbidden. The only method permissible is that which prevents pregnancy, provided such prevention is not taken place after the unity of the man's sperm with the woman's ovum and that such a control is not practiced as a general rule.<sup>30</sup>

In order to distinguish between the prevention of pregnancy which may be permissible and the suppression of the original cell that is forbidden, we should bear in mind that the prevention of pregnancy may either affect the woman's ovum alone or the man's sperm alone, not both combined. It is medically stated that a normal woman produces one ovum monthly. If this ovum is prevented from being united with the man's sperm, there will be no pregnancy during the course of purity. The man's sperm will die spontaneously if it does not find any ovum to unite with. Contraceptive pills taken by women give that effect.<sup>31</sup>

This is just an example of the lawful system of family planning. Its legality is organized only because in it contraception does not cause the killing of a fertilized cell in any of its stages.

**Other Lawful Method include:-**

- i. Sucking woman will not be conceived or pregnant during sexual intercourse with her husband as one of the method of family planning or contraception permitted in Islam.
- ii. To avoid sexual intercourse with a woman who get purity from her menstruation period until after some days
- iii. Family planning is only permitted based on mutual agreement between husband and wife.<sup>32</sup>

**Conclusion**

From what has been discussed so far in this paper, it was found out that Islamic scholars have justified contraception in several ways. They have generally argued that Islam is a religion of moderation and point to the principles of “*liverty*” and “*permissibility*”. Therefore, limitation of birth in its general meaning cannot be accepted by the Qur'an and *Hadith*. Islam rejects any attempts that may lead the whole world to stop at a certain number of populations. The solution of the problems that face the whole world now does not be solely in the increase of the number of population there is a lot of problem which have been waiting for a solution for many years, such as poverty, ignorance and diseases.

However, the great majority of Islamic jurists believe that family planning is permissible in Islam based on conditions as highlighted in the paper.

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