

ISLAMIC PERSPECTIVES ON BIRTH CONTROL

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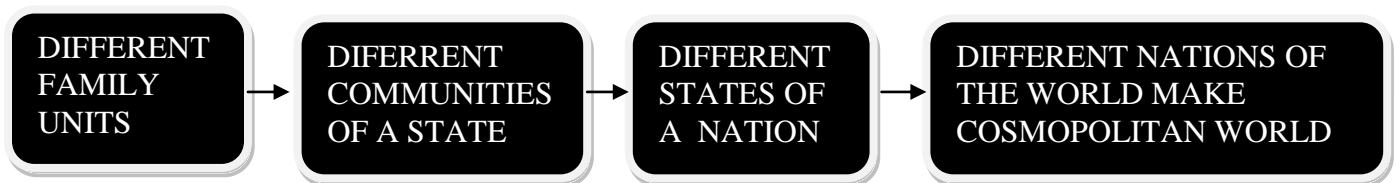
Abstract.

Birth Control has been misconstrued in the Muslim circle as a kind of innovation which has been developed to satisfy western understanding. Some Muslims see it as an attempt to justify family planning in the modern context. Others perceive it as a concept which is totally against the principle of Islam. Birth control has remained a burning issue which needs to be put at proper perspective. This paper therefore attempts to discuss the Islamic perspectives of birth control by x-raying available documents and scholarly opinions. The paper delves into the conceptual meanings of birth control, its historical review to show that the topic is not an innovation to Islam. It further discusses the modern Islamically approved approaches to birth control while also pointing out methods of birth control which cannot be adopted by Muslims. The paper concludes with proactive approach of taking enlightenment campaign of controlling births within one's resources limit to grassroot level.

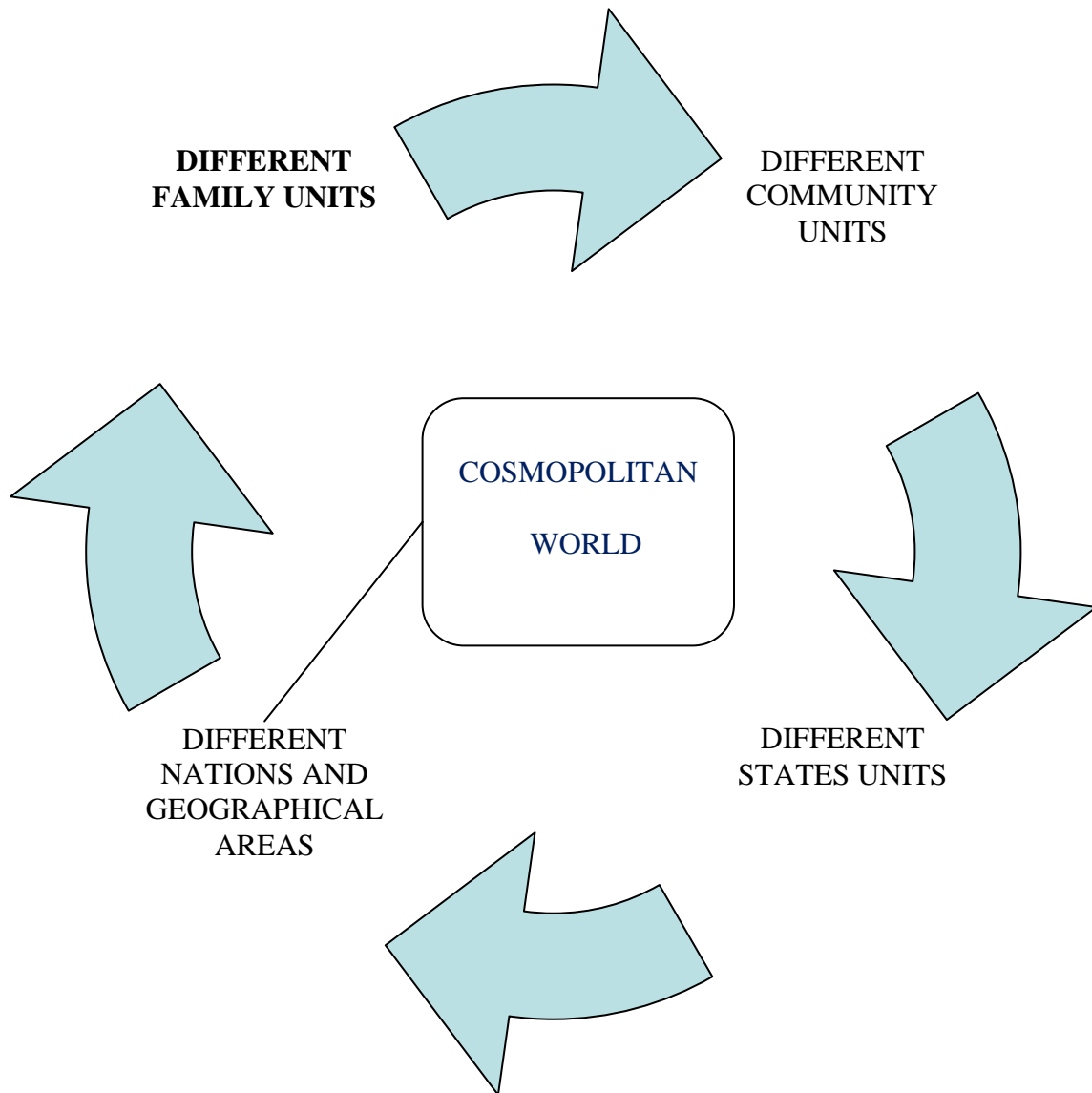
Key words: Islamic Perspectives, Birth Control Controversy.

Introduction.

In Islam, marriage is the legal union between a man and a woman to become husband and wife. It is the joining together of a man and a woman in wedlock to be lawfully recognized as husband and wife. Marriage is the basis for family formation in Islam. The essence of marriage among other things is to legalize sexual intercourse between a man and a woman for the purpose of procreation i.e giving birth to children. Different families make a community, different communities make a state, different states make a nation and different nations of the different areas of geographical locations constitute the cosmopolitan world.

PROGRESSIVE STAGES OF WORLD FORMATION

FOMATION OF COSMOPOLITAN WORLD.



Since the family forms the basis of the nuclear composition of the world, the issue of birth control if it will affect the global world must start at the family levels. Hence, birth control is the spacing of child given birth to by individual nuclear family system within a reasonable period of time to enable the mother give adequate care and effective weaning to a child before another one is born. It is also referred to as the proper planning and structuring of a number of children a family unit will give birth to within a period of time.

Birth control and family planning are used interchangeably and the two words are like the two sides of a coin. While birth control may be taken as considering the number or reducing the number of children a person may give birth to, family planning is equally

perceived as scheduling or restructuring how to go about giving birth to a reasonable sizeable and manageable number of children by the individual family units.

The essence of birth control or family planning is to give birth to a number of children which the individual family unit system can cater for adequately so that such children may not constitute nuisance to the society.

The Concept: Birth Control.

Birth control or family planning in this sense does not refer to given birth to a maximum of four children as proposed by the Nigerian government a few years ago, but to give birth to a manageable and caterable number of children by individual family.

An X family may have the financial strength and all the resources to cater for ten children while a Y family may not have more than enough resources to cater for two children. So, while the X family is giving birth to ten children, the Y family should not go beyond two with the wrong notion that the government has said four children is the maximum.

Harmona and Hunye (2007, p. 173) explain how the New Riverside University dictionary defines birth control “as voluntary limitation or control of the number of children conceived especially by planned use of contraceptive techniques.” They perceive birth control in a general term to mean the prevention of pregnancy, which is also referred to as contraception.

Birth control refers to family planning according to Folorunsho (2007). Folorunsho (2007) quoting Manji Sees family planning as a way of thinking and living that is adopted voluntarily upon the basis of knowledge, attitudes and responsible decisions by individuals and couples in order to promote health and welfare of the family group and thus contribute effectively to the social development of the community.

Yusuf (2007) on his own sees birth control as a device to check conception in any way opposed to God’s intention. To him, “this device is a speedy measure of curtailing population which is abhorrent.” (Yusuf M.G. 2007, P. 184). Yusuf however recognizes that in a special case, birth control can be used in form of “Azl” which means coitus interruptus at the point of orgasm before ejaculation. This according to him must be done with the consent of the (wife) sexual partner who should not be denied of enjoyment at the peak of sexual intercourse.

Adeniji and Haidaina (2007) are of the opinion that it is not possible to give a satisfactory definition of family planning. According to them, definitions differ as the philosophies differ.

Adeniji and Haidaina (2007) quote Michael who defines family planning in two broad ways (a.) Natural Family Planning and (b.) Artificial Family Planning.

Natural Family Planning they define as a spirituality or way of life. It is also seen as an attempt to explore the full depths of all the relationships which constitute the family, and in particular to study the male and female physiology so that in union with creator, children may be safely born in love and adequately catered for.

Artificial family planning they define as simply meaning the use of any method for delaying pregnancy for a short or long time. “The common methods include the oral pill, the injection, the intrauterine devices, the condom, the diaphragm and the operation to tie tubes of the man or woman”. (Adeniji L.A and Hadaina P.T. 2007, P 211).

Donna Lee Brown (2004) on his own sees family planning as the process of the husband and wife mutually determining the number and spacing of their children’s births to promote the health of the mother and the children and to contribute to the social economic well-being of the family.

Islamic Historical Review of Birth Control.

Birth Control or family planning as interchangeably used was as old as the advent of Islam. The Arabs before the advent of Islam were said to have been practicing birth control in their jahilliyah days. After the advent of Islam, it was also practiced among the Muslims and Prophet Muhammad (SAW) was said to have approved it with moderation. The moderation he did was to approve the practice of ‘azl’ as a measure to birth control.

According to Donna Lee Brown (2004),

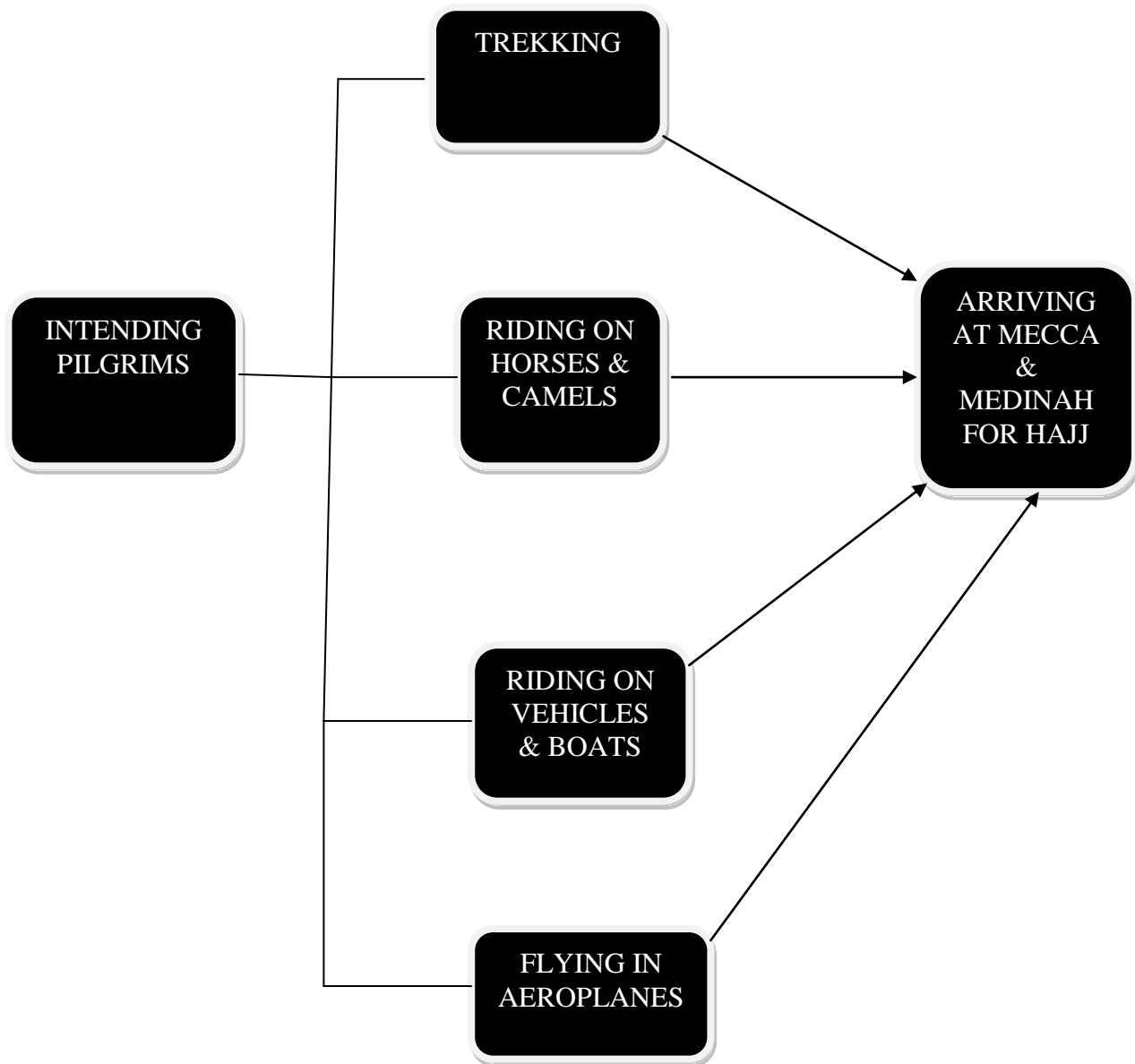
*'azl' is the only type of contraception mentioned in the jurisprudence texts.
'Azl' is the Arabic term for contraception which refers to withdrawal
before ejaculation or also known as coitus interruptus.
The jurists from the four major Sunni Schools follow this hadith which
indicates that 'azl' was allowed. In a hadith, "We (the companions
of the Prophet) used 'azl' during the time of the Prophet. The Prophet
came to know about it, but did not forbid us" (Muslim).*

One reporter of the tradition Sufiyan commented that if this were to be something prohibited, the Quran would have prohibited them from doing so. There are other traditions which support the practice of 'azl' as a way to control births by Muslims when Prophet Muhammad was alive. This is to show and establish the fact that birth control has been an issue right from the early days of Islam and not an innovation as a group of Muslims perceive.

Although other forms of medical contraceptives present today were not in existence during the time of Muhammad but this is not enough reason to condemn or object to their uses because a lot of other discoveries which are in existence today but which were not in existence during the Prophet's life have nothing to do with the direct faith of Muslims if such a discovery would bring ease and lessen the burden on the part of the people.

For instance, during Prophet Muhammad's lifetime, people trekked and rode on camels, horses and other animals from different parts of the world to Mecca and Medina to perform holy Pilgrimage which was and is still one of the fundamental pillars of Islam. Later, people rode on vehicles and the likes. The latest today is that Muslims from all the nooks and corners of the world fly in aeroplanes to Mecca and Medina to perform this same holy pilgrimage which people went to perform then during the lifetime of the Prophet on lands.

MEANS OF GETTING TO MECCA AND MEDINAH TO PERFORM HAJJ.



Whether one travels by land, trekking or riding on camel or riding in vehicles or traveling by air to Mecca and Medina for this same worship, what is unique and important is the journey to the holy house for the purpose of worship but it is immaterial how one gets there either by land or sea or air. This does not have direct dealing with the concept surrounding the worship in the holy land.

Therefore, the issue of birth control even though 'azl' was approved and used during the Prophet's time but if other medical contraceptions are now discovered today which are not dangerous to the man or woman and which will not bring permanent blockage to child

bearing, there will be nothing wrong to adopt and use them for all that we want to achieve is the same result as we shall get from the practice of ‘azl’.

Justification for Birth Control in Islam.

Birth control has been established to be as age long as the advent of Islam and throughout the stages of its development. It is therefore not a new issue or an innovation in Islam, but what may be new will be the modern trends and scientific approaches which have been adopted in carrying out birth control. If ‘azl had been practiced during the lifetime of the Prophet and approved by him, there is no doubt that the needs and necessities for its practice could as well been very expedient. This expediency as far back as during the life of the Prophet brings about the justification for birth control in Islam today.

First and foremost, the primary aim of birth control is to bring about wanted births. Many people hold a wrong view of birth control. What comes to their mind anytime they hear or come across birth control is that it refers to an attempt not to give birth to children or that pregnancy should be aborted. This is not correct.

Birth control is an attempt to plan for wanted or expected births i.e to make adequate preparation for the incoming child. This preparation includes what the mother will need, how to take care of the pregnancy to ensure its gradual and progressive development.

How to ensure that the pregnancy will not result into premature birth. To prepare for the safe delivery of the baby, its clothing and feeding, how the baby will be nursed and the likes. It is part of the preparation to make plan for the educational careers of the child so that at every stage of the child’s development, the child will not lack anything. It is this planning that Islam refers to as birth control or family planning.

When a family has made this kind of plan for a child, it is not enough. The family should equally plan for the good health of the mother i.e giving the mother some space intervals between one birth and another.

Another reason for birth control in Islam is to guide against unwanted births. Some families do get into unwanted births which they did not adequately prepare for. This at times they say is as a result of mistake or carelessness on their part or on the part of their wives. When they find themselves in this situation, it affects every thing they do and may alter their other plans completely. It may sometimes lead to losing golden opportunities which they may not have the opportunity of gaining again.

If such family is carrying out a house Project for instance, it may obstruct work on the project which may be difficult to accomplish any other time. It may and has sometimes affected the schooling of such unwanted births or others. There is no doubt that unwanted births have resulted into serious problems and sometimes have caused damages and disasters in the families where such occur.

Birth control is also a necessity in Islam to regulate intervals during which pregnancies are to be conceived. Medically, it has been proved that pregnancies should be spaced to give the mother a long lifespan as it has been proved that pregnancies at short intervals endangers the life of the mother and put health of the children at risks. Birth control and Religion (2008).

Quran 13, verse 11, supports this move as it says verily, ‘‘Allah will never change the condition of a people until they change it by themselves’’. Folorunsho (2007) interpretes this verse to mean that man should plan for his livelihood as in the case of birth control.

Another Quranic verse talks about the spacing of births and pregnancies and in this case two years is fixed as a period for weaning and breastfeeding of a child.

Another reason why birth control may be expedient in Islam can be attributed to the inability of responsible parenthood. To Folorunsho (2007), Muslim children have a right to be born into a family that is fully prepared to receive them, raise them in Islamic way of life and to also protect them from the insecurity of the future. Therefore, Folorunsho quoting Balogun opines that, the fulfillment of these children’s right puts a constraint on the number of children which a family can bear.

Quran 2, verse 184 says, ‘‘Allah wants to ease your problems. He does not want to be harsh upon you.’’ As a result, if the father who is the head of the family does not have the financial capability to maintain his family due to its large number, the jurists recommend birth control for such a father. Maguire (2003) expressses support for this view also. According to him,

‘‘Muslim countries have been forced to acquire debt, import food and rely on foreign aid to cope with the needs of the growing population. The result is a vicious circle of poverty, ill health, illiteracy, overpopulation and unemployment being compounded with social frustration, extreemism and social unrest’’.

Farzameh Roudi-Fabini (2004) is of the view that the Quran prohibits not birth control nor does it forbid a husband or wife to space pregnancies or limit their number. Dr Omran (2004), expresses the view that birth control is necessary to preserve the wife's beauty and physical fitness to enable her remain attractive to her husband always. Also to avoid economic hardship of caring for a larger family which may compel parents to resort to illegal activities. To avoid the danger of children being converted from Islam in any enemy territory. To avoid producing children in times of religious decline. Birth control is necessary to enable parents prepare separate sleeping arrangements for boys and girls when they reach the age of puberty.

Muslim scholars have interpreted the Quran's recommendation of two years of breastfeeding and the Prophet's recommendation against pregnancy during lactation as an endorsement for child spacing. Within this two years, rather than avoiding intercourse which could bring hardship on the couple, they are allowed to use contraception.

Birth control helps to prevent maternal and infant deaths which result as a result of short interval pregnancies and child deliveries, USAID (2005).

The Assembly of Darul Ifta realizing that birth control could indeed improve the quality of lives of the people launched a fatwa- a juristic decision in support of birth control on March 10, 2004. USAID (2005).

Birth Control Measures and Methods Approved by Islam.

Consequent upon the established approval of birth control by Prophet Muhammad (SAW), the following have been identified as the medically birth control methods approved by Islam.

(i). **'Azl- Withdrawal before Ejaculation:-** Azl refers to the coitus interruptus. This is the withdrawal of the man's genital organ from the vagina of the woman when the man reaches orgasms before ejaculation to prevent sperms from being deposited into the female's ovary organ. The rationale for this method is that for pregnancy to come into being it requires the meeting together of the male's sperms and the female's discharge in the ovary. But where this is prevented, pregnancy is not likely to result.

Folorunsho (2007) joins the other Muslim scholars to observe that this method was approved by the Prophet and it seemed to be the only method of birth control that was available during the lifetime of Prophet Muhammad (SAW).

(ii). **Safe Period:** Safe period according to Adeniji and Hadaina (2007) is known as the calendar rhythm method. It is about the oldest method. This method is based on the menstrual circle of a woman. A woman who has attained the age of puberty is to naturally experience bloodshed through her private part if she does not conceive when she does not have any meeting with a male counterpart.

To make use of this method as a measure for birth control, the woman's menstrual circle is to be studied for about six months. The probable period of her fertility and infertility is to be calculated and based on this calculation. Adeniji and Hadaina (2007) consent to the fact that ovulation will always occur in women two weeks before the onset of the following menses.

This perhaps is what prompt some scholars to express the view that a woman will naturally be within her safe period two weeks before menstruation and two weeks after menstruation. By this, it is believed that, if a man has sexual intercourse with his wife within this period, the wife is not likely to conceive, hence it serves as a good method to birth control. Other scholars have however expressed the view that to be on the safe side five days before the menses and five days after menses could be a better safe period because some women do react faster to others.

The bottomline of discussion here is that there is what is called safe period through which a couple could have some meeting and yet even if the man ejaculates in the woman's vagina, she is not likely to get pregnant because the eggs to fertilize the sperm from the man would not have been formed. And if the eggs are not formed, the sperm will drop out.

With this method of birth control, maximum enjoyment is achieved by both parties and no one is at any disadvantage.

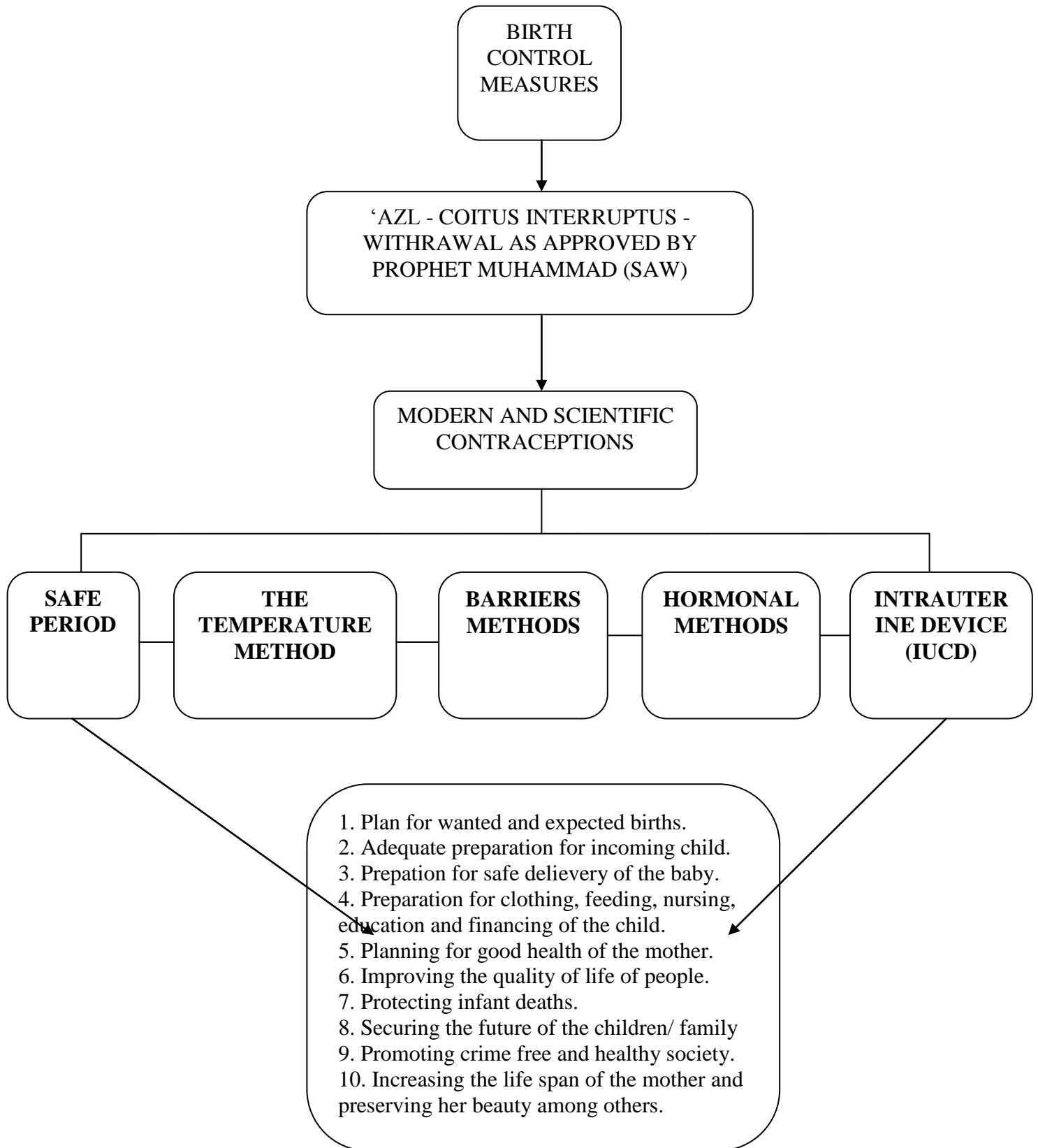
(iii). **The Temperature Method:** Adeniji and Hadaina (2007) describe temperature method as a method which depends on the fact that a woman's temperature taken before rising each morning is normally 0.20 to 0.40F higher after ovulation, and remains high until the next menses. It is a very good indication that ovulation has taken place and shows the late infertile days which start after the third rise in temperature. Adeniji and Hadaina (2007 p. 213) submit that, 'it has a success rate of about 99.5%''.

(iv). Barriers Methods: Ugwu (2007) describes barriers methods as methods that prevent pregnancy by keeping the sperm from reaching the egg e.g use of condom (for men and women), the diaphragm (for women), spermicide (contraceptive foam, tablets, jelly or cream). Harmona and Hunge (2007) describes the diaphragm as a soft rubber dome stretched over a flexible ring, the dome is filled with a spermicidal cream or jelly. This diaphragm is inserted into the female part and placed over the cervix no more than 3 hours prior to intercourse.

(v). Hormonal Methods: These are methods that prevent woman's ovary from releasing egg, makes it harder for the sperm to reach the egg and keep the lining of the womb from supporting a pregnancy; According to Ugwu [2007] they are pills, injections and implants. Harmona and Hunye (2007) are of the opinion that the administered pill, patch, shot or ring in hormone medications contain manufactured forms of the hormones estrogen or progesterone. They expressed the three ways through which hormonal methods work such as preventing a woman's ovaries from releasing an egg each month, causing the cervical mucus to thicken making it harder for sperm to reach and penetrate the egg and thinning the lining of the uterus which reduces the likelihood that a fertilized egg will implant in the uterus wall.

(vi). Intrauterine Device IUD (IUCD, Copper T, The Loop): This is a birth control method which prevents the man's sperm from fertilizing the woman's egg. The IUD is a small object or device that is inserted in the womb by a specially trained health worker. Harmona and Hunye (2007, p 174) says, "The IUD does not stop the sperm from entering the uterus, but rather it changes the physical environment of the reproductive tract thereby prevents the egg from being fertilized and implanted in the uterus".

MODERN METHODS OF BIRTH CONTROLS APPROVED BY ISLAM AND THEIR MERITS



Apart from the birth control methods discussed above, it has to be pointed out that there are a few others which are not acceptable to Islam because of their permanent nature because using them will be tantamount to trying to change what Allah has created.

Unisalmic Methods of Birth Control.

Sterilization: Donna Lee Brown (2004) sees sterilization as the permanent loss of fertility. All the schools of thoughts in Islam go against sterilization. This is because some jurists equate sterilization to castration. Donne expressing Al-Khayyir's view who is of the opinion that classical jurists have considered sterilization as a crime that is punishable by law and likened it to a murder act which requires that blood money would be paid.

The argument put across by some scholars is that castration will lead to celibacy and this contradicts the teaching of Prophet Muhammad (SAW) that says, "there is no celibacy in Islam". A group of believers who adopt celibacy and consequently undergo sterilization are of the opinion that getting married and rearing children will distract their attention from the worship of their God. So, their intention is to fully concentrate on the worship of Allah and if possible settle in a quiet place where they would not have anything to do with the people. They believe that raising a family will not give them free hand to fully concentrate on their worship. They have however made up their mind and have closed door to reopen raising of family.

Islam does not support that one either a man or woman should by his hand block his reproductive system for whatever reasons. And so this is the reason why Islam has not approved sterilization as a method acceptable for birth control.

Abortion: Abortion is termination of a formed foetus, it is the termination of pregnancy by a deliberate act to get rid of such pregnancy. Abortion is used by some people as a method of birth control and family planning. This is not approved in Islam for the Quran has said, "And kill not your children for fear of poverty. We (Allah) shall provide for them and for you. Surely, to kill them is great sin." (Quran 17, verse 31).

Muslim scholars hold two views on abortion. The Maliki school states that abortion is absolutely forbidden while the Hambali school states that abortion could be carried out if it is done within the first 120 days that the woman conceives. This school bases its argument on the premise that it is after 120 days that the soul enters the foetus. Quran 22, verse 4, says'

“O mankind, if you are in doubt as to the resurrection, that we have created you of earth; then of semen; then of a blood clot, then of a lump of flesh, formed or not formed, so that we may demonstrate to you (our power) and we establish in wombs what we will, till a stated term then we bring you out as infants.”

The stages of development expressed in the above verse has been identified to be three by Donna Lee Brown, (2004). He says,

“the three stages listed beyond the earth or clay stage-semen, blood clot, lump of flesh-were each assigned a 40-day duration by a hadith text; which further goes thus, “The Prophet said; Each of you is constituted in your mother’s womb for forty days as semen, then it becomes a blood-clot, for an equal period, then a lump of flesh for another equal period, then the angel is sent, and he breathes the soul into it.”

Following this reasoning, the jurists hold the belief that aborting the foetus within the first 120 days would be permitted. A few of the jurists hold the belief that aborting the foetus will be permitted within the first 40 days.

It has to be pointed out that whether it is done within 40 or 120 days, it should not be used as a measure for birth control or family planning. It can only be done where there are certain cogent reasons like the following:

Donna Lee Brown, (2004) expressing Omran’s views states that abortion is generally permissible if the health of the mother is at risk. It is further added that under a compelling reason such as threat to the mothers life, harm to the child or a deformed foetus, abortion can be performed anytime.

Khalid Farooq Akbar (2004) expressing the views of the Hanafi scholars which permitted abortion until the end of the four months says,

“According to them, a pregnant woman could have an abortion without her husband’s permission, but she would have reasonable grounds for this act. One reason which was mentioned frequently was the presence of a nursing infant. A new pregnancy put an upper limit on lactation, and the jurists believed that if the mother could not be replaced by a wet-nurse, the infant would die.”

So, even though abortion is not approved in Islam but where the lives of both the mother and foetus is in danger, Islam permits that it should be undertaken for the safety of the mother so as not to lose two souls at a time.

Conclusion.

Birth control or family planning as it is so called is not a concept or an issue just coming into existence. It has remained a burning issue from the advent of Islam as it is today. It is a concept for all people and all nations of the world irrespective of people's religious alienations. Birth control if we failed to adopt can have disastrous effects on the society. And when these effects manifest, all the people will feel it irrespective of their religious inclinations. It has been established that when a family gives birth to more number of the children they can cater for, some of them will be abandoned. These ones that are abandoned from different families constitute nuisance to the society. They form the group of drop outs who could not complete their education, some of them turn to thugs at motor parks, some turn to armed robbers and they get addicted in drugs. They form the group which politicians use as political thugs. These are the people who are easily initiated into secret cults under one guise or the other. They unleash terror on innocent members of the society, perpetrating one evil or the other. They go about carrying out daylight robbery in our banks with sophisticated weapons and forcefully collecting people's property from them. At times, they go to the extent of killing innocent armless members of the society and throw many families in sadness and sorrow.

A little random survey (interview session) conducted confirmed that majority of our young ones who are found in polygamy and who have given birth to about (8) eight children or more from one, two or more, wives have found themselves in this situation not because they wanted it but because they were careless and carefree and they could not discipline themselves to stay with their wives alone.

Interviews sessions conducted with some of them who were teachers, lecturers, (okada) motorcycles riders and taxi drivers confirmed that it was when they had illicit intercourse outside their matrimonial homes and those they met with became pregnant that they were forced into polygamy.

Meanwhile, when they were asked if they actually had resources which could finance their family. They confessed that if they had option, they would dare not get into it. When asked if they had the knowledge of what birth control or family planning is? Their response was that, they only hear of the terms on radio and television but that they did not understand what it means at all.

It was also observed that this practice was very common, popular and is on the high rate among the illiterate people. One hereby draws a conclusion that for the practice of birth control to be well adopted and put into practice, there will be the need to carry out enlightenment campaigns for members of the society. Each religious group or denominations should take up the task to educate the followers of benefits to be derived in it and the dangers if not adhered to. Seminars and workshops have been done on this topic and should be further intensified within the academic environments.

Lastly, imams of different mosques should make Birth Control their topical issue during daily prayers and on Fridays when large congregation is in attendance. It is believed that this could change the perception and orientation of Muslims in particular and people in general so that they could have a change of attitude and exploit the benefits embedded in birth control.

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