

ISLAMIC ARGUMENTATION ON BIRTH SPACING

Family Planning within Islam

SUMMARY OF MAIN IDEAS FROM THE ISLAMIC ARGUMENTATION



In the Name of Allah, the All Merciful, the Very Merciful.

The Islamic Argumentation on Birth Spacing addresses six points:

- The context in Islamic teachings
- The family planning situation in Senegal
- Definitions of family planning according to Islam
- Circumstances that can justify family planning
- Methods of contraception
- The position of Senegalese religious leaders and ulamas

The Meaning of Our Existence

Islam is a religion of progress that cares for humankind in all aspects of life, places humans above all, and puts all the universe at their disposition. God says in the Holy Qur'an: **"Do you not see that Allah has made subject to you whatever is in the heavens and whatever is in the earth?"** Luqman/verse 20

The presence of humans on Earth has two fundamental objectives:

1. Love the Lord: **"And I created not the jinn and mankind except that they should worship Me (Alone)."** Sura 51/verse 56
2. Populate the Earth and make use of it judiciously. The Holy Qur'an tells us: **"He brought you forth from the earth and settled you therein."** Hud/verse 61

The Family and Children's Rights

Islam is a global and dynamic system that views the family, the base of society, as an emanation of the legal union (according to sharia) of man and woman. Both have rights and responsibilities toward themselves and toward their offspring. Children have the right to good living conditions that allow them to thrive, as well as the right to have a quality education.

Islam is a religion of ease and not of constraint. This is what emerges from the words of the Prophet (PBUH) when he says: **"Render things easy and render them not difficult. Attract and reject not."**

The Family Planning Situation in Senegal

The **situation** of maternal and child health as it pertains to reproduction is a great concern in Senegal. The under-5 and maternal mortality rates are too high: 75 of every 1,000 children die before they reach age 5, and there are 392 deaths of women for every 100,000 live births.

These numbers could be reduced if the potential of family planning was better known and accepted by populations that currently think, wrongly, that it is contrary to religion and that the practice is a method of encouraging youth to abandon their morals.

Senegal lags behind many majority-Muslim countries, such as Bangladesh, Indonesia, Iran, Pakistan, and Morocco. These countries have all had high rates of success with their family planning programs. They all mobilized their religious leaders on the question. Senegal, keeping in mind its specificities, should draw inspiration from their experiences.

The Definition of Family Planning

Family planning is defined as the use by a legally married couple, in full agreement and without constraint, of a legal and safe method to delay or to facilitate a pregnancy. This must be done by taking into account the couple's medical, social, and economic situation, as well as their responsibilities to their children and themselves.

Family planning is exclusively the business of a legally married couple. The State cannot and should not promulgate a general law that would limit the liberty of two spouses to procreate. Birth limitation, sterilization, and voluntary interruption of a pregnancy (abortion) are excluded from family planning in Islam.

The legality of family planning in Islam is based on a number of texts drawn from the Qur'an and the Sunnah. Examples include :

The Qur'an: Allah says, "The mothers shall give suck to their children for two years, for those who desire to complete the term of suckling." Al Baqara/verse 233

The Sunnah: Djâjir said: "We practiced coitus interruptus (Azl: العزل) when the Qur'an was being revealed, yet the Prophet (PBUH) did not forbid it to us."

The Prophet (PBUH) says: "**Beware of al Ghayl** (breastfeeding while pregnant) **because it will overtake the rider sooner or later and throw him from his horse.**"

It is evident that if a couple wants to breastfeed for two years and at the same time avoid pregnancy as the texts recommend, they will necessarily be obliged to use **coitus interruptus** (Azl: العزل) if they do not have other methods.

From Azl to Modern Methods

Azl is a contraceptive method whose **objective is to prevent pregnancy** in order to space births. Therefore, the ulamas see, by analogy, that the use of other methods able to lead to the same results is permitted if **the conditions of temporality (reversibility), safety, and consensus are met.**

As such, the following methods are authorized under the conditions above:

"**Contraceptive pills, IUDs inside the uterus, planned relations** that are at the beginning and end of a woman's cycle rather than in the middle, etc..."

Conditions Justifying Family Planning

The conditions that can justify family planning are:

For reasons of Health:

The fear of becoming pregnant while breastfeeding, fear for the health of the mother and baby, fear for the health of the children and for their education.

For social reasons:

The existence of a legally constituted family, parents' fear of not being able to protect their children, desire to safeguard the beauty of the wife, and the search for balance and social well-being.

For economic reasons:

When parents do not have sufficient means to raise and look after several children, and the fear of financial difficulty that could drive an individual to reprehensible practices in order to care for a large family.

Position of Religious Guides on Family Planning

All of **the religious guides** of Senegal that the *Cadre des Religieux pour la Santé et le Développement (CRSD)* met with stated their agreement with **family planning, understood as birth spacing**. Serigne Abdoul Aziz Sy Al Amine, Cheikh Ahmad Tidiane Ibrahimia Niassé, Seydina Issa Laye, Thierno Madani Tall, the *Khalife Général* of Leone-Kanene, Imam El Hadji Moustapha Gueye, etc... all agreed upon the legality of family planning in Islam under certain conditions. They highlighted the difference between "**limitation**" and "**organization.**" Islam is favorable to organization and rejects birth limitation.

From this, it is important to remember that:

1. Family planning as birth spacing is permitted in Islam for legally married couples;
2. All traditional and modern methods that conform to the conditions of legality, safety, and temporality established within Islam are authorized;
3. A legally married couple must discuss the question and be **in complete agreement, without coercion, on the use of a legal and safe contraceptive method;**
4. Religious leaders have the responsibility to speak about the question to clarify the position of Islam. It would be good to train imams on the content for sermons on family planning.

Practicing family planning in conformance with Islam will enable us to achieve the objectives, but avoid falling into the other extreme: an aging population.

