481783 - Is Using Artificial Wombs Permissible in Islam?

the question

If there is a woman that cannot have children due any reason, would it be permissible to use an artificial womb to have children.

"An artificial womb or artificial uterus is a device that would allow for extracorporeal pregnancy by growing a foetus outside the body of an organism that would normally carry the foetus to term."

In this case the sperm and the egg is taken for the husband and wife but the baby grows and develops outside of the womb.

So is it halal to use them

Summary of answer

The use of artificial wombs in Islam is not clearly permissible or prohibited due to the current lack of evidence and scientific certainty. However, if such technology is proven safe and adheres to strict Islamic guidelines, it may be considered permissible. Key conditions include: ensuring the procedure is free from harm, using only permissible tissues from the husband and wife, and that traditional methods are not viable.

Detailed answer

Praise be to Allah.

Islamic Perspective on Artificial Insemination and Test-Tube Babies

If the wife is not able to get pregnant in the natural manner, there is nothing wrong with using artificial insemination or what is known as “test-tube babies ”. This refers to fertilising the egg in a test tube, then implanting it in the wife’s uterus. That is subject to the condition that the sperm

and egg come from the husband and wife respectively, and the fertilised egg is not implanted in the womb of another woman (surrogate pregnancy).

The Concept of Artificial Wombs in Islamic Jurisprudence

It says in a statement issued by the Islamic Fiqh Council during its seventh session in 1404 AH:

“The third method is that in which the semen and egg from a man and woman who are married to one another are taken and fertilisation occurs externally, in a test tube, then the fertilised egg is implanted in the uterus of the wife, from whom the egg was taken. This method is acceptable in principle from an Islamic perspective, but it is not completely free of problems that could give rise to doubts concerning the procedure and the circumstances in which it is done. So it should not be resorted to except in cases of extreme necessity, after all the conditions referred to above are met.”

These conditions include:

“C. In the case where uncovering the `Awrah of the woman is permitted for a legitimate reason in front of someone with whom sexual intercourse is not permissible, the one who is providing treatment should be a Muslim woman, if possible. Otherwise, it should be a non-Muslim woman; if that is not possible then it should be a trustworthy male Muslim doctor; and if that is not possible, it may be a non-Muslim male. This is the order of preference.

It is not permissible for the treatment provider to be alone with the woman whom he is treating; rather her husband or another woman should also be present.

The Council has affirmed that the need of a married woman who cannot have children and the need of the husband to have children are regarded as legitimate needs that make it permissible to treat the woman in a permissible manner, using one of the methods of artificial insemination." (Qararat Al-Majma` Al-Fiqhi bi Makkah Al-Mukarramah, p. 149)

Scholarly Views on the Permissibility of Artificial Wombs

If it is not possible to implant the fertilised egg in the uterus of the wife because she is suffering from uterine cancer, for example, then there comes to mind the idea of an artificial womb.

Dr. Muhammad ibn Ha'il Al-Madhaji said: The idea [of the artificial womb] may be summed up as allowing the fertilised human egg to settle in an artificial womb by re-creating the natural environment of the woman's uterus in a plastic incubator to enable the foetus to go through all the stages of development until it reaches the point of birth, whereby the foetus is placed in artificial fluid and its blood is supplied with oxygen. The foetus remains in that incubator, which guarantees all that is required for life and survival outside the uterus, until it is fully developed and the time comes for it to emerge." (Ahkam An-Nawazil fil-Injab, p. 587)

Dr. Al-Madhaji researched the ruling on this issue and mentioned different scholarly views, noting that most contemporary scholars who researched this issue were of the view that it is permissible. He quoted the evidence given by the two groups, and reached the following conclusions:

- This idea is something that could never happen, because it is not possible to produce an environment that may be described as {a safe repository} [Al-Mu'minun 23:13] like the natural womb, for the foetus to grow in. Even if science were able to produce such a thing, it is unlikely that the foetus would be safe and free from harm.
- The view that it is prohibited is more likely to be correct, because it is contrary to the natural way that has been decreed by Allah, and there is great potential for harm.

Dr. Al-Madhaji mentioned that the goat foetuses that were subjected to experiments of this nature died a few days after birth, even though they grew in their mothers' wombs except for the last three weeks before birth. (Ahkam An-Nawazil fil-Injab, p. 862)

In conclusion, The method of artificial wombs has not yet been proven to have been tried on humans as far as we know, let alone having been proven to be free of harm.

What appears to be the case is that if the method of artificial wombs is proven to have been tried

on humans, then in order for it to be permissible, the following conditions must be met:

1. It must meet the conditions of artificial insemination referred to above.
2. The tissues that are used to create the artificial womb must be permissible tissues and not prohibited; they should not be taken from anyone other than the husband and wife.
3. The procedure must be free of anything that could harm the foetus.
4. It should be not possible to implant the fertilised egg in the wife's womb.

We re-affirm that surrogate pregnancy is prohibited, as stated previously in the answer to question no. 22126 .

And Allah knows best.