169979 - Can a Woman Be a Doctor in Islam?

the question

I am a 16 year old girl and am at the point of my life where I have to choose a career. My father wants me to go into a professional field. Thus I decided to become a gynaecologist since I see no fitnah in it as my patients will always be females. However, I will have to complete my MBBS course in order to take up the gynaecology field, in course of which I will have to look at and probably touch the private parts of both males and females. Is this permissible, or should I go for some other course (though I don't see one at the moment) which does not ask me to do anything against the principles of Islam?

Summary of answer

There is no doubt that one of the things that Muslim societies need is female Muslim doctors who can examine and treat Muslim women. Many Muslims experience acute embarrassment when there is a need for a female doctor to treat a wife, daughter or sister, but only a male doctor can be found. Hence if a Muslim woman studies this noble profession she will be fulfilling a major Shar`i interest. What is needed for the purpose of learning a profession, such as looking at or touching `Awrahs, is permissible in cases of necessity.

Detailed answer

Praise be to Allah.

Islamic Need for Female Doctors in the Society

There is no doubt that one of the things that Muslim societies need is female Muslim doctors who can examine and treat Muslim women. Many Muslims experience acute embarrassment when there is a need for a female doctor to treat a wife, daughter or sister, but only a male doctor can be found. Hence if a Muslim woman studies this noble profession she will be fulfilling a major

Shar`i interest.

Shaykh Muhammad ibn Salih Al-`Uthaymin (may Allah have mercy on him) said: There is no doubt that learning medicine is a communal obligation as the scholars stated, because the people's interests cannot be served except by means of it, and that which is essential to serving the people's interests comes under the heading of communal obligations even though it is not an act of worship. Hence the scholars said, when listing their general principles: Professions that people are in need of are communal obligations -- such as manufacturing, carpentry, blacksmithing, and so on. If there is no one to practise these professions so as to meet the needs of the Muslims, they become communal obligations upon the Muslims.

Based on that, it is obligatory for Muslims in Muslim countries to learn and practice medicine so that they will have no need of other doctors who are Christians and so on. (End quote from Fatawa Nur `ala Ad-Darb, tape 9)

Guidelines for Female Medical Students in Islam

The basic principle is that a female medical student should seek an environment that is not mixed and she should choose a serious academic environment. She should also adhere to Islamic rulings that pertain to her study with regard to looking at or touching `Awrahs (private parts). It is not permissible for her to do that except within the limits of study and learning. Although looking at and touching `Awrahs is basically haram, nowadays it is not possible to learn medicine properly except by means of theoretical and practical studies. In order to fulfil this Shar`i need for female Muslim doctors, it is permissible for a female student to look at and touch the private parts of men and women for the purpose of learning. This ruling applies equally to both male and female students.

The scholars of the Standing Committee was asked:

He is studying in the faculty of gynaecology and obstetrics, and there are some practical cases that the student is required to observe, and this is required in order to pass this subject so that he can move to the next stage. This causes problems for us. We hope that you can issue a fatwa on

this topic.

They replied:

The basic principle is that it is obligatory to cover the `Awrah for both men and women. The `Awrah for men is from the navel to the knee. In the case of a woman, her entire body is `Awrah apart from the face and hands when praying and when in ihram. If she can see non-Mahram men and they can see her, it is obligatory for her to cover her face and body, whether that is in prayer or in ihram for Hajj or `Umrah. It is permissible to uncover the `Awrah in the case of necessity and it is permissible to look at it if a Shar`i interest will be served by that. That includes female and male students looking at women during surgery that has to do with gynaecology and obstetrics, so that they can pass this subject and move on to the next stage, and so on until the students (both male and female) graduate. The Shar`i interest which justifies the view that this is permissible is having enough Muslim doctors, both male and female. If that is forbidden among the Muslims, it will result in a need for male and female doctors who are not Muslim, which will bring many negative consequences. Islamic sharee`ah seeks to achieve benefits and ward off harm. (End quote from Fatawa Al-Lajnah Ad-Da'imah, 24/411, 412)

(Shaykh `Abd Al-`Aziz ibn Baz, Shaykh `Abd Ar-Razzaq `Afifi, Shaykh `Abdullah ibn Ghadyan

Shaykh Muhammad ibn Salih Al-`Uthaymin thinks that looking at `Awrahs for the purpose of learning medicine is permissible because looking at `Awrahs is forbidden because of what it may lead to (and not in and of itself), and as that is the case it may be permissible in the case of need. And the need of Muslim societies for female doctors cannot be denied. So it is permissible for male and female students to look at `Awrahs for the purpose of learning medicine.

The Shaykh (may Allah have mercy on him) was asked:

What is the ruling on uncovering the woman's `Awrah for the purpose of finding out the symptoms of illness? What is the ruling on female students for whom the `Awrahs of female patients are uncovered for the purpose of learning?

He replied:

There is nothing wrong with a woman uncovering that which it is obligatory for her to cover, for the purpose of medical treatment, investigating symptoms and diagnosing disease, because that is a case of necessity, and necessity makes such normally prohibited things permissible. The well-known principle of the scholars is that what is forbidden for what it may lead to (and not in and of itself) may be permitted in cases of necessity, and what is forbidden in and of itself may be permitted in cases of extreme necessity. They (the scholars) gave several examples of that, such as looking at that which it is not ordinarily permissible to look at of a woman in the case of necessity; thus a suitor may look at that which it is not ordinarily permissible to look at for the purpose of marriage. The same applies in this case that our brother has asked us about. It is permissible for a male doctor to examine a woman in order to find out what the sickness is and diagnose its symptoms. (End quote from Fatawa Nur `ala Ad-Darb, tape 9)

To sum up, what is needed for the purpose of learning a profession, such as looking at or touching `Awrahs, is permissible in cases of necessity.

For more details, please see the following answers:

Can a Male Doctor Treat Muslim Women?

Ruling on studying medicine and working in hospitals where there is mixing

Advice concerning the issue of women and doctors

And Allah knows best.