231777 - Is Contraception Haram?

the question

I got married recently, and I previously asked you about my wish to have only two children, for example. One month ago my wife had her first baby by caesarean. She developed gestational diabetes during pregnancy, which had a great impact on her food and diet, and she needed to take insulin daily for three months.

When I previously asked you about not wanting to have more children in present-day circumstances, in which eighty percent of children have bad attitudes and bad upbringings, because of society and satellite channels, although all the hadiths speak of the virtue of having many children, you told me: I cannot be certain that they will be bad. But in fact you gave me a guarantee that they would not be evildoers!

If we understood the hadiths about having lots of children as you explain them, then there would be twenty of children in every household. Were the households of the Sahabah and Tabi'in like that?

I know that the fatwas say that it is permissible to delay a second pregnancy for a few years, such as in the circumstances mentioned, but I want a solution that an ordinary wife could cope with.

Am I to understand that it is obligatory to have a lot of children, and for the wife to spend nine months being pregnant, a year breastfeeding, another nine months pregnant, another year breastfeeding, and so on, until she has twenty children throughout her life, because if we stop having children when we have ten children, then the fatwas will not accept this, so long as it does not harm the mother?

We all know how difficult it is to raise children properly nowadays. Doesn’t the wife have the right to be able to give a proper upbringing to two or three children only for fifteen years of the marriage, for example? Or is it obligatory for her to produce ten children during that time? I am

not objecting to the texts, but I want to understand the hadiths in a logical manner. Why didn't the Sahabah and Tabi'in have twenty children from one wife? Isn't it unjust towards the wife to make her a child-producing and breastfeeding machine, when it is possible for her to get pregnant every year? How can she be free to teach the children, keep them clean, look after them and tend to them if they get sick? Will the Prophet be proud of our children on the Day of Resurrection, even if their religious commitment is not sound?

Summary of answer

Taking contraceptive measures is permissible in principle because the Companions (may Allah be pleased with them) used the method of 'azl (coitus interruptus) during the time of the Messenger (peace and blessings be upon him) and he did not forbid them to do that.

Detailed answer

Praise be to Allah.

Is it obligatory for a couple to produce children?

We hope that our brother will be certain that not one of the scholars said that it is obligatory for a couple to produce children, and that if they do not produce twenty children then they are sinning and deserve to be punished by Allah!

Similarly, not one of the earlier or contemporary scholars – as far as we know – has said that it is the fate of the wife to have a baby and breastfeed every single year, or that if the couple choose to delay pregnancy and having children, that is haram.

We mention these facts to you, and ward off doubts based on illusion, so that we can introduce the Islamic ruling, first of all, and so as to highlight that everything that you mentioned in your question is not an argument that has any sound basis, because the Islamic ruling is far removed from what you mentioned in your question.

Is it permissible to delay having children?

In fact, the Islamic evidence indicates that it is permissible to delay having children. As Jabir ibn ‘Abdullah (may Allah be pleased with said): “We used to engage in ‘azl [coitus interruptus, a form of contraception] at the time when the Quran was being revealed. (Narrated by al-Bukhari, 5208) and Muslim , 1440) ‘Azl (coitus interruptus) means ejaculating outside the woman’s vagina in order to avoid pregnancy.

Shaykh Ibn Baz (may Allah have mercy on him) quoted this hadith as evidence for it being permissible to space having children in order to give them a proper Islamic upbringing, when he said:

“If a woman has a lot of children, and it is difficult for her to give them a proper Islamic upbringing because they are so many, then there is nothing wrong with her taking something to space her pregnancies in order to achieve this important purpose, so that pregnancy will not adversely affect her or her children, as Allah has permitted ‘azl for this and similar purposes.” (Fatawa Nur ‘ala ad-Darb by Ibn Baz ed. by ash-Shuway‘ir, 21/394)

Is contraception haram?

Shaykh Ibn ‘Uthaymin (may Allah have mercy on him) said:

“Taking contraceptive measures is permissible in principle, because the Companions (may Allah be pleased with them) used the method of ‘azl (coitus interruptus) during the time of the Messenger (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him), and he did not forbid them to do that. But it is contrary to what is preferable, because having a lot of children is something that is prescribed and is desirable.” (Fatawa Nur ‘ala ad-Darb by al-‘Uthaymin, 22/2)

We have previously stated that it is encouraged to have a lot of righteous children .

The ruling on different considerations for delaying having children

So you may rest assured that if you and your wife decide to delay having children, as you

mentioned in your question, that is not regarded as a sin or disobedience in principle, unless there are other considerations that have an impact on this individual or personal choice, which may be dictated by present-day circumstances:

- If the decision to delay having children is widespread, at the societal, national or ummah-wide level, then in this case it becomes a destructive and negative choice, and in that case the ruling is that it is not allowed, because it has moved from being a permissible and natural matter to one that is imposed from without and will lead to negative consequences, and is therefore blameworthy.
- If the motive for delaying having children is fear for their provision and livelihood , then this reflects a serious doubt concerning our belief in the will and decree of Allah and our belief in the abundant provision of Allah and that He will help those who strive to earn a living in the land. It reflects an unjustified fear of the future and a failure to produce and strive. In that case it is blameworthy and is not allowed, and there are clear fatwas that speak of it.
- If the reason for not having children is arguments and conflict between the spouses , where one of them does not want children and the other one does, then the one who is refusing does not have the right to do so, because having children is a right of both spouses, and it is not permissible for one of them to refuse with no excuse or good reason.
- If the motive for delaying having children, or ceasing to do so, is to follow the cultural norms of non-Muslims and imitate them blindly, out of admiration for their culture and infatuation with their way of life, then undoubtedly the ruling in this case is that it is not allowed. One of the great principles of Islamic teaching is that the individual Muslim should be independent in his thinking and think within the framework of Islamic teaching; he should weigh up pros and cons objectively in the light of the circumstances that he lives in, and base his decisions on the Islamic principles in which he believes and with which he grew up, far removed from the illusionary psychological influences that are imposed by the media that represents the corporate powers that exist today, and should free himself from feelings of inferiority in the face of what he sees of the attitudes, customs and actions of the disbelieving nations.

- If the means of delaying having children is medicine or surgical procedures that will prevent having children altogether (sterilisation), so that the woman or her husband will lose the ability to ever have children, then this is a serious transgression and is ingratitude for the blessing of Allah that He has bestowed upon His slaves, and it is destruction of a great blessing that Allah has instilled and created in them on the basis of great wisdom.

The Prophet (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him) forbade such things. This is the case concerning which there is no difference of opinion among the scholars that it is prohibited, for it is the undermining of one of the most important aims of Shari`ah and a blatant violation of one of the five necessities that Islam came to protect, which are: religious commitment, life, honour, wealth, and offspring.

These five cases are what the scholars refer to when they speak about spacing or limiting the number of children . They are the reason why they spoke in strict terms in many cases, so that no one would take undue advantage of the fatwas which say that contraception is permissible .

That is why we have mentioned these five cases here, so as to draw attention to them. In any other case, where a couple takes an individual decision on the basis of a genuine need, there is no blame on them for that.

Anyone who reflects on the statement of the International Islamic Fiqh Council no. 39 (1/5), which has to do with family planning, will clearly understand that the way in which it is drafted is very careful and clear, as we have explained above. It says in the statement:

The session of the Islamic Fiqh Council held during its fifth conference in Kuwait, 1-6 Jumada al-Akhir 1409 AH/10-15 December 1988 AH.

After studying the research papers presented by council members and experts on the topic of family planning, and listening to the discussion that took place on the topic,

And based on the fact that one of the aims of marriage according to Islamic teaching is to produce children and preserve the human race, and that it is not permissible to undermine this aim,

because undermining it is contrary to the texts of Islam and their teachings which call for having a lot of offspring, protecting them and caring for them because protecting offspring is one of the five holistic principles that are promoted by Islamic teaching,

The council determined the following:

- Firstly: it is not permissible to promulgate laws restricting the freedom of couples to have children.
- Secondly: it is prohibited to completely eradicate the ability to have children in the case of either the man or the woman, which is known as sterilisation, so long as there is no necessary reason, according to Islamic standards, for doing so.
- Thirdly: it is permissible to use temporary methods of birth control for the purpose of spacing pregnancies, or preventing pregnancy for a specific length of time, if there is a valid reason, according to Islamic teachings, for doing so, according to what a couple decide on the basis of mutual consultation and consent, on condition that this does not lead to any harm and that the method used is Islamically permissible and does not cause harm to any existing pregnancy. End quote.

And Allah knows best.