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AN ISLAMIC PERSPECTIVE ON ANTE-NUPTIAL AND PRE-NATAL PREPARATION FOR EFFECTIVE CHILD HEALTH

By

Rafiu Ibrahim ADEBAYO

Abstract

A strong determining factor of the health condition of a child is the parental factor. The compatibility or otherwise of the husband and wife, to a large extent, has one influence or the other on the child's health. Some precautionary measures are no doubt taken by Islam to ensure effective child health ever before the conception of such a child. This paper examines these measures as enshrined in the Qur'an and *Sunnah* of the Prophet in relation to some preventive measures against transmittable and inheritable diseases in the modern medical perspective. It concludes that the ignorance of the people on this provision has been responsible for their unwise decision to depend solely on their whims and caprices in designing their own programme against Allah's directives and hence breed unhealthy children. It thus calls for counseling centers on Islamic marriage where scholars of Islam and medical practitioners could collaborate for proper education of the youths before entering into marriage.

Introduction

At the creation of man, he was as innocent as a babe. Lodging in a serene and conducive environment, he enjoyed all the amenities in the Garden until he succumbed to the temptation of the accursed devil by taking the forbidden fruit and this subsequently landed him on the surface of the earth (Qur'an 2: 30-37). As part of His promise to be guiding man from time to time, prophets and revealed books were sent to serve as manuals for man to operate his affairs in accordance with His wish. The object of Allah on this is to restore him to the pristine purity and innocence in which he was created. It is however sad to note that rather than yielding to Allah's injunctions, man ignorantly or deliberately decides to depend solely on his whims and caprices in designing his programme of activities putting aside Allah's directives. The environment within which

he operates thus becomes dirty and filthy to the extent that Allah Himself confesses:

Mischief has appeared on land and sea because of the (deed) that the hands of men have earned. That (Allah) may give them a taste of some of their deeds... (Qur'an 30: 41).

The above verse shows the interaction between man and his environment. While he is given the ability to make changes in the environment, the environment in turn produces changes in the individual and in his behaviour (Barau. 2004: 9). This in essence means that an unfavourable environment makes negative impact on an individual, since one should not expect a good nut from a defect shell. By environment, we mean the total experiences an individual is subjected to, before, during and after birth, which consequently have one impact or the other on him throughout his life.

There are strong indications that many Muslims are still ignorant of the influence of the environment on child upbringing. As such, enough precautions have not been taken in the selection of partners, and non-adherence to Islamic ethics of marriage has been a serious cog in the machine of effective child development. Cases of unwanted pregnancies which lead to unwanted children, conflicting paternity of a child, single parent syndrome, apostasy and many others are endless results of the negligence of the parents in rearing their wards in a conducive Islamic environment. Also, the multi-dimensional nature of child-abuse in the society is an indication that many still lack adequate knowledge of breeding children in an Islamic manner and that effective child development could only be achieved in a conducive environment, as the potentialities and qualities of a child could only be tapped to the maximum advantage in favourable environment. It is on this note that this paper is out to consider the provision of Islam on how a conducive environment could be created for effective child development. This is essential in view of the fact that parents are like shepherd, while children are sheep. The parents would, on the long run be questioned on how successfully or otherwise they have reared their flock.

Ante-Nuptial Preparation

Women could be likened to a piece of land upon which a farmer wishes to plant his seed. A wise farmer will have to look for a fertile, virgin and cultivable land so that his efforts would not be unproductive due to the type of land he chooses. An appropriate search for land would equally involve acquisition of such land legitimately. Its illegal acquisition will raise doubt of his ownership

of the proceeds of the land. From this analogy, a man should carefully select a woman who will be the mother of his children, as a wrong choice may have undesirable effect on the children. Selection of a woman equally means that he seeks the consent of the parents of the woman and follows other Islamic marital rites as enshrined in the Qur'an and the traditions of the Prophet. Among such is the active involvement of the *waliyy* who must have adequate information about the health status of the couple. It thus becomes the prerogative of the *waliyy* not to conceal the defects of the couple which if known later may lead to dissolution of such marriage or may have adverse effects on the proceeds of the marriage if maintained. Fourteen of such defects are identified by Abdullahit-tidy (quoted by Sarkinfada, 2004: 12.). Five of them are exclusively for men, five for women and the rest four for both of them. The five that are restricted to men are ochildectomized person known in Arabic as *khisa'u* (person whose testis is removed; person with neither testis nor penis (*jubbu*); person with small penis (*al-inniy*); partially impotent person (*I'tirad*) and sexual inhibition (*hasru*). The five that are peculiar to females are vagina! atresia (*ratqu*) or blockage of the vagina; vaginal 'horn' or uterus didelphy (*qarri*); vesico vaginal fistula (VVF) (*afdha'u*); growth in the vagina or fibroid (*Aflu*) and offensive odour of the mouth and the vagina (*Bakhr*). Those that are common to both sexes are insanity (*junun*); Leprosy I (*Juzan*); Leprosy II (*Baras*) and the leakage of urine or faeces during sexual intercourse (*Azitat*).

Pre-marital intercourse before the marriage contract is tantamount to planting of seed in an unauthorized land, while extramarital intercourse means planting of seed beyond one's boundary, both steps, no doubt cause rancour in the society and as well breed illegitimate children. The fate of such children is appropriately described by Ibn Saheed (2002: 11-12) when he says:

Accursed by the illegitimacy of their conception, such children if they escape the fate of abortion are born to be reluctantly reared, if not outrightly rejected or abandoned by their parents. It is only natural that a pregnant woman would hardly be enthusiastic at the prospects of going through rigors and the pangs of labour to deliver a child whose father is unwilling to rear. It is also illogical to expect a man to be ecstatic at the thought of raising up a child whose paternity he is unsure of. This, coupled with the fact that the gratification

of their mutual lust and not the begetting of a child is the uppermost thing in the minds of fornicators and adulterers, makes the arrival of a baby doubly unwelcome.

A nasty experience of a Guyana school girl who became pregnant while still in school in 1988 was narrated by Akintola (2010: 217) to confirm the consequence of pre-marital intercourse. The girl hid her bulging stomach until her delivery was close, and after her delivery of a baby-boy, she abandoned him in a jungle. The boy after being nursed and nurtured by wolves for six years wandered into a village naked and was seized by the residents. His behavioural pattern was more or less like that of the wolves, as he barked like a wolf, ate raw food, cut ropes with his teeth and attempted to strangle other children who approached him.

It needs to be mentioned that the mother's womb is the first environment of the child. The Prophet thus warned that Muslims should seriously give this its rightful consideration. He declared: "Be selective of where you drop your sperm and do not drop it except in its equals (*akfai*)" (Abshayhi. 1988: 293). *Al-kafa'ah* according to Louis Ma'luf (1960: 690). is "a position in which one thing is equal to another thing". Hence, *al-kafa'ah* can summarily be put as equality. In order to provide an enabling environment for the proper development of a child, the Qur'an enjoins compatibility in the husband and wife and thus discourages a hussy to be married by a virtuous man. It encourages a virtuous man to look for a virtuous wife to marry and vice-versa. The following verses will drive home this assertion:

Impure women are for impure men. and impure men for impure women: and women of purity are for men of purity, and men of purity are for women of purity (Qur'an 24: 26).

Let no man guilty of adultery or fornication marry any but a woman similarly guilty, or an unbeliever. Nor let any but such a man or an unbeliever marry such a woman: To the believers such a thing is forbidden. (Qur'an 24: 3).

In other words, heredity as a strong factor that can affect child's health is a product of environment. Once a conducive environment is ensured, the child would inherit positive things from the

parents. Wrong and incompatible choice of wife may create bad 'nature' which may affect the child permanently. Stressing this, Sa'di opines that good 'nature' cannot be compromised in the following words:

Whenever native capacities are good, education, will make an impression, but no furbisher can give polish to iron of a bad temper. If you wash a dog in the seven seas, you cannot change his nature: and were you to take the donkey of Jesus to Mecca, upon his return, he would still remain a donkey. (Nakosteen. 1964:108).

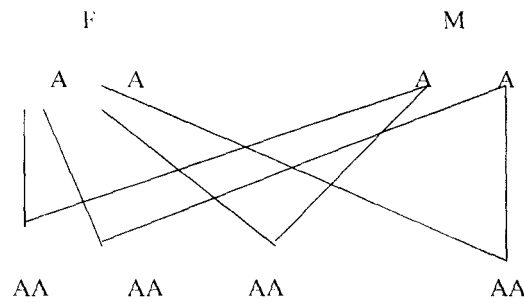
What we are trying to emphasize is that a male Muslim must be wise enough to be good to his children right before their birth by selecting a good wife who would consequently be a good mother to his children. Once, Abul Aswad ad-Duali was boasting of being good to his children, while they were young and when they were of age and even before their birth. The children who did not understand how their father was 'good' to them before their birth requested how he did that, to which he responded "I selected from women someone you would not be blamed through her." (Al-Abshayhi, 1988:293-294).

Still on pre-nuptial preparation and its influence on child health, the Prophet enjoined proper selection of a conducive environment for the child right from the womb. He discouraged the marriage of a foolish and feeble-minded woman and described keeping company of such a woman as an infliction or sign of tribulation and its proceed or product as a mark of destruction and perdition (Al-Abshayhi. 1988: 293). In line with this assertion. Speer (undated) in his research observed that feeble minded mothers normally give birth to either mentally retarded or feeble minded children (Quoted by G.M. Blair (et, al), 1975: 39). Thus, impoverished environment breeds children of low intelligence quotients. In addition, mother's disease condition can affect the health of the child. It has been medically asserted that a mother who suffers from diabetes mellitus in pregnancy lacks sufficient insulin to change the sugar she obtains from her diet to glycogen which may consequently damage blood vessels, and this increases the risk of the baby being stillborn. A woman suffering from rubella during pregnancy has the risk of passing to the baby inside her the virus causing the disease. The heart of such fetus may be damaged; the hearing impaired, the skull undeveloped and may as well develop eyes

cataracts and other serious complications. Another infection of the mother that can pass to the baby in the womb is syphilis which may either lead to madness of the mother if not properly treated or the child in the womb developing syphilis too while still in the womb (G.M. Blair, 1975: 39).

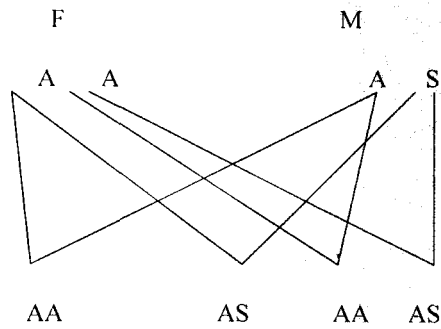
To ensure effective child health, modern scientific devices could be used to detect some abnormalities in the couples before contracting marriage. For instance, genetic counseling could be given by experts with respect to what marker for disease they have in their body and to determine their compatibility genetically. This will consequently help in minimizing problems in the children. Medically speaking, children are believed to have inherited their genotypes from their parents throughout life and that the only means of transferring sickle cell marker is from parents to children at conception (Nasir, 1421 A.II.: 51). Cases of sickle cell disease in children have been traced to the donation of haemoglobin gene from the father and the mother. An haemoglobin gene could be normal or abnormal, and each individual has two. A carrier of normal one has two AA, while those carrying one normal and one abnormal haemoglobin have sickle cell trait AS. Those with two abnormal haemoglobin have sickle cell disease SS. A clarification of this could be made through this illustration.

Fig. I



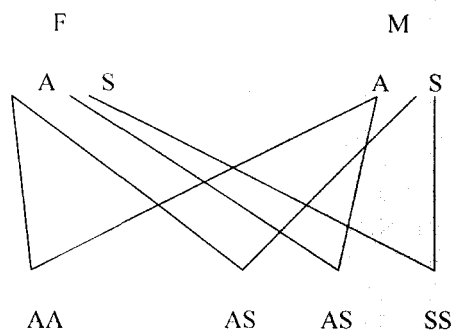
From the above illustration, the father (F) with normal haemoglobin and the mother (M) with normal haemoglobin are genetically compatible, hence all the children will have genotype AA.

Fig. II.



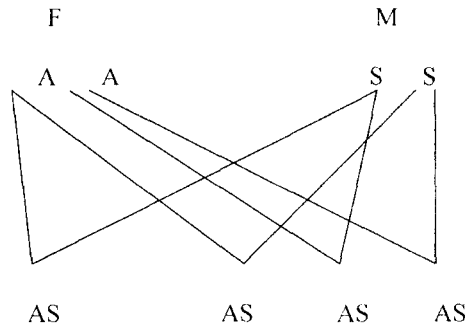
From Fig II above, the father has normal haemoglobin (AA), while the mother has sickle cell trait (AS). In this case, the children will have either genotypes AA (normal) or AS (sickle cell trait). In other words, the children may be AA or AS, or some may be AA, while others are AS.

Fig. III



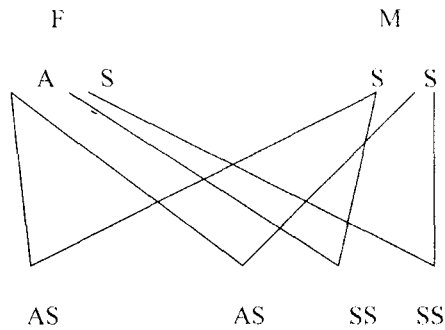
In fig. III above, both the father and the mother have sickle cell trait (AS). Here, there is 50% chance of the children having sickle cell carrier (that is, AS). 25% AA and 25% SS. As God will have it, all the children may be AA, AS, or SS in different proportions.

Fig. IV



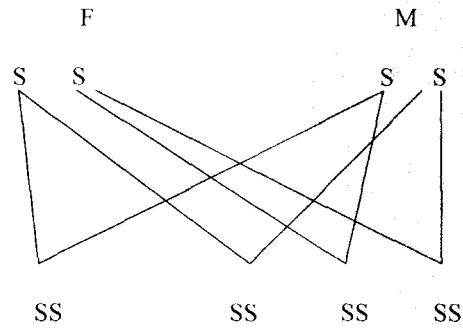
In fig. IV above, the father has normal haemoglobin (AA), while the mother is a pure sickler (SS). There is 100 percent assurance that all the children are carriers of sickle cell as they have the haemoglobin gene one each from both parents.

Fig. V



In the figure above, the father has the trait of sickle cell (AS), while the mother is a sickler (SS). Here, the possibility of the children being AS or SS is high, or rather some can be SS. while some are AS. Further still, it may not be outrageous to see all the children SS or AS.

Fig. VI



In the above figure, it is clear that a sickle cell father and a sickle cell mother combine together to give birth to nothing but sickle cell children and this may be calamitous.

The essence of this illustration is to emphasize the need to embark on pre-marriage medical test for the determination of typology of genotypes each intending couple is having. The type of pain a sickler experiences, coupled with the financial and psychological trauma the parents of such child experience inform that necessary precautionary measures need to be taken to avert such experience. After all, the Qur'an enjoins that we should not cause destruction to ourselves.

It is sad to note that rather than paying adequate attention to the issue of genetic compatibility, some Muslims erroneously give preference to ethnicity, or rather, social and economic compatibility. Many parents are ready to go at any length to ensure that their daughters marry from their town.

While considering pre-nuptial environmental factor, we should not lose sight of religion as an important factor. The Qur'an explicitly discusses this when it reads:

Do not marry unbelieving woman until they believe: a slave woman who believes is better than an unbelieving woman, even though she allure you. Nor marry (your girls) to unbelievers until they believe; A man slave who believes is better than an unbeliever, even though he allure you (Qur'an 2: 221).

While commenting on the above verse, Ali writes:

As religion is a real influence in life to both parties or to either party, a difference in this vital matter must affect the lives of both more profoundly than differences of birth, race, language, or position in life (Ali, 1978:95).

About whether the marriage with Jews and Christian women is permitted or not, the Qur'an, without mincing words, allows it. However, some conditions are laid down by the jurists of the four schools of Islamic jurisprudence for its permissibility. In the opinion of Abdullah! Ibn Umar: "Allah has forbidden to marry polytheists, and I do not understand anything other than greater polytheism when a woman says that her Lord is Isa who is a servant from the servants of Allah." (cited by Doi, 1984: 135). In his own, Doi, (1984: 135-136) observes the exemplary characters, piety and righteousness of the early *sahabah* as some of the reasons why they were permitted to marry *ahl al-kitab* ladies. To demonstrate the incompatibility of the two in the contemporary period, Doi, (1984:135) discovers the shortcoming in such marriage, when he says:

I have seen in many such marriages the food problem, when mother even at times brings forbidden food and children partake of it. Likewise, she would sip wine as part of her religious ritual, and the habit slowly finds its way into the house. In some houses. I have even seen Christmas and Muslim festivals celebrated simultaneously. In extreme cases, boys of such marriage bear Muslim names, while girls bear the names common among the Christians and Jews.

He continues by advising that:

If there are a good number of Muslim women to get married with in any given country, it will be considered unlawful according to the *Ijtihad* of certain '*Ulama*, to marry the *kitabiyah* women. Since Muslim women cannot marry the *kitabiyah*

men, who will marry them in those circumstances?
It is better then that Muslim men marry Muslim
women (Doi, 1984: 135-136).

The illustration below elucidates more on the implication of
religious incompatibility of a couple on the products of such marriage.

Fig VII

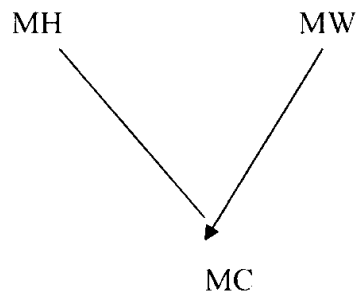


Fig. VIII

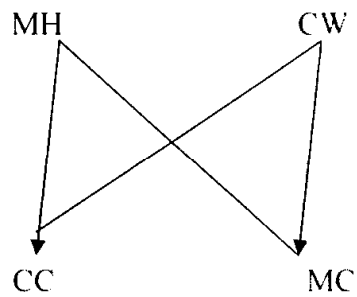


Fig. IX

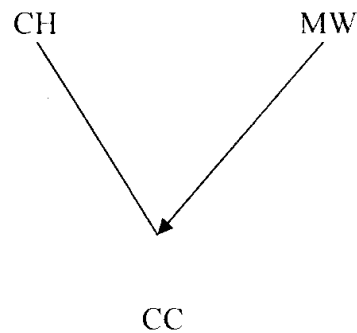


Fig.VII above indicates a situation where a Muslim husband (MH) marries a Muslim wife (MW). From all indications, the combination will give birth to Muslim children (MC), and this shows the products of such desirable compatibility. However in a situation where a Muslim (MH) marries a Christian wife (CW), there is every likelihood that the products of such marriage will either be Christians taking after their mother (CC) or some of them follow the religion of their father (MC). The danger there is that even those who belong to the religion of their father will be at the verge of their mother's religion that takes care of them and always stays with them at home. The case is as bad as asking a wolf to take care of cattle. This is why some scholars are not favourably disposed to Muslims marrying Christians as wife in spite of the fact that the Quran allows it. The last fig. indicates a situation where a Christian (CH) marries a Muslim wife (MW). The product of such a marriage will no doubt be Christians as the father is considered the owner of the children. Meanwhile, it calls for serious concern that Muslim fathers who have Christian wives could not hold their family to the extent that most of the products of such a marriage end up professing religion of their mother and not as the case of a Christian fathers.

By means of extension, the rule of *hadanah* (guardianship) in Islamic family law seems to have favoured women (Ali.1973: 532). The question of *hadanah* arises from dissolution of marriage be it through divorce or natural death of the husband or wife, especially when dispute arises about who is to take care of the child, be it minor or major. Although difference of religion is an impediment of the mother to the guardianship of the child, this is hardly followed in a multi-religious society. That apart, experience has shown that many Muslims who married to Christian ladies normally end up becoming Christians. The confession of someone who has not fallen victim of this is that his wife who, though claimed to have accepted Islam, used to leave her head uncovered, abandon the normal five time ritual prayers and sing Christian songs whenever there is any misunderstanding between him and the wife. One then wonders what will be the consequence of that family should the husband die before the woman.

Pre-Natal Preparation

By this we mean the environment in which the fetus resides before coming down to the world the mother's womb. At least, under normal condition and in some exceptional cases a child spends about nine months in this environment where he develops from one stage to the other. The Holy Qur'an stresses the phases through which child development passes in the mother's womb when it reads:

Man we did create from a quintessence (of clay) then We placed him as (a drop of) sperm in a place of rest, firmly fixed; then We made the sperm into a lot of congealed blood; then of that clot We made a (foetus) lump; then We made out of that lump, bones and clothed the bones with flesh; then We developed out of it another creature. So blessed be Allah, the best to Create (Qur'an 23: 12-14).

Speaking in the same vein, the Prophet gave vivid and appropriate stages with fixed time specification of the developments of pre-natal stage in the following statement:

Lo! The creation of each one of you is composed in the womb of his mother (first) as a *nutfah* (mixed drop of sperm and ovum) for forty days then after that he transforms to *'alaqah* (a clot of congealed blood) for a similar term, then he transforms to *Mudgah* (a lump of flesh), and then an angel is sent to blow the spirit into him....(Abdul, 1973 : 25-26).

From the above, it could be seen that the period of pregnancy is very crucial that proper care and attention must be taken in Order to ensure itch free development. The agony and hazards of pregnancy are equally confirmed by the Qur'an where it .says:

We have enjoined on man kindness to his parents, in pain did his mother bear him and in pain did she give him birth (Qur'an 46: 15).

And we have enjoined on man (to be good) to his parents: in travail upon travail did his mother bear him....(Qur'an: 31-14).

Apart from the minor problems that a- pregnant mother can suffer from along the way, such as early morning sickness, urinary symptoms, salivation, nausea, fainting, constipation, leg cramps, edema, lethargy and backache, many things can equally go wrong with her, and these may adversely affect the life of the baby. The journey of

the fertilized egg to the womb may be obstructed by a number of things. The fertilized egg may get stuck in the fallopian tube or oviduct; the pregnancy may occur outside the womb, and the placenta may be placed too near the entrance of the womb. Ectopic pregnancy, excessive bleeding, hypertension and shortage of blood, '- all may endanger the life of the mother and the baby (Home Doctor, May-June, 1991: 8-11). From this, it is quite evident that the child in this environment needs special attention, while the expecting mother too should be attended to promptly. As such, ever before 'planting' the 'seed' in the 'soil', the Prophet enjoined Muslims to pray before copulation so that the child born will be guarded against the evil of satanic forces. The recommended prayer is: "*Bismillahi, Allahuma Janibna Shaytan, Wajanib Shaytan ma razaqtana.*" "In the name of Allah, O Allah! Distance us from Shaytan and distance Shaytan from what you have provided for us" (Al-Jibaly, undated: 28).

Also, the Prophet enjoined decency and privacy while having legal sexual cohabitation with one's wife. Some scholars also discouraged sexual intercourse during eclipses, earthquake, hurricane storms and other frightening natural phenomena for fear of deformity in the children conceived during such period (Ibn Saheed. 2002: 21). The *Qala Shaykh* of Al-Ilori (undated: 12-13) also quoted an *hadith* attributed to the Prophet teaching Ali on periods and time one should not cohabit with one's wife and the resultant effect of those who violate such directives on the child. For instance, the *hadith* forbids having sexual intercourse with a woman in the first of *Muharram*, or else she gives birth to an insane child. A child who would always love to disobey God and the Prophet is likely to come out of a pregnancy that results from a cohabitation that takes place in the last Wednesday of every lunar month. Similarly, a blood shedder will be the product of a pregnancy that Occurs as a result of an intercourse that takes place on *'id al-adha* day or night. A woman that conceives as a result of cohabitation during the sighting of stars is likely to give birth to a liar, while a woman whose hum and cry during intercourse was heard by passers-by is likely to give birth to a fool or stupid child if conceived. A child conceived as a result of forced cohabitation with the woman is said to likely be a disobedient child. Also, a woman cohabited with during the course of her menstruation is liable to give birth to a leper if conceived. However, since these assertions have not been critically and scientifically proved or disapproved, it will be a great dis-service to scholarship and learning to embrace or condemn them by us, We therefore commend an examination of these taboos to experts in the field of astrology, astronomy and geography. That not withstanding, one

needs to say that the Qur'an forbids having sexual cohabitation with a woman in her courses until she becomes clean, and she purifies herself though no consequence is apportioned to its violation (Qur'an 2: 222). Also, the Qur'an stresses the fact that wives are as a tilth unto their husband, which should be approached when, and how they will (Qur'an 2; 223). However, we are contended to believe that a seed is sowed in order to reap the harvest; hence the need to choose an appropriate time and mode of cultivation. A serious and wise farmer will not "sow out of season nor cultivate in a manner which will injure or exhaust the soil" (Yusuf All's commentary on Qur'an 2: 223).

In order to create a conducive Islamic environment for the child in her womb and to prevent evil manifestation in the child, a pregnant mother is enjoined to abstain from looking at, talking about, listening to, thinking of, or doing evil. She should frequently embark on light *nawafil*; *tilawatul Qur'an*, *dhikr*, *Ta'awidh* and constant prayers for safe delivery and to guard against prolonged obstructed labour and birth asphyxia (Ibn Saheed, 2002: 40-41).

Apart from the above, it should be noted that the type of food and drugs taken by the mother while she is pregnant affect the child's physical development in the womb. A pregnant woman who is a drug addict stands the risk of giving birth to babies with disorders. As such, provision of good and adequate food, modest accommodation and good healthcare must be ensured so that the fetus could feel comfortable inside. If a pregnant mother is deficient in the quality and quantity of her diet, the fetus in the mother suffers the consequence, as it fails to have the cells and structures of the brain properly developed. Anything that can tamper with the fetus should be avoided, and she should not be exposed to too much hardship. It has been scientifically discovered that excessive exposure of the fetus to radium can cause mental or physical abnormalities in children (Emiola & Bojuwoye, 1992: 137).

Proper medical attention for a pregnant woman is highly essential in order to ensure a conducive environment for the fetus. This is because infections of the mother could be passed to the baby in the womb. Such infections include syphilis, rubella, herpes simplex and toxoplasmosis. Even bacteria infections, such as pneumonia, typhoid and tuberculosis, gain more ground in pregnant women than in other people. Though parents may be compatible, these infections of the mother could lead to abnormalities in the child if not properly treated.

Lastly, it has been observed that pregnant women put up strange behaviours during the period, including reacting to simple

questions sharply, excessive eating, preference to stick to one type of food, excessive demand for, or rejection of sexual intercourse and unnecessary complaints. Husbands of pregnant women must understand the nature of their wives and treat them accordingly. Sharp responses and reactions from them may lead to emotional disturbances, and this may result to giving birth to a baby with high sensitivity (Emiola & Bojuwoye, 1992: 136).

Recommendations and Conclusions

The foundation stone of a healthy child can be laid right before the conception of the child. The ignorance of some Muslims in realizing the teaching of Islam on marriage and child-upbringing as entrenched in the Quran and sunnah is largely responsible for the menace of unhealthy children they are rearing. Their ignorance is further reflected in their decision to multiply children with no regard for their care. As such, the present writer strongly recommends that counseling centers on Islamic marriage be set up by scholars who have in depth knowledge on the subject matter. These centers, if set-up, will be saddled with the responsibilities of advising young Muslims on:

- i. Modality of choosing a compatible life partner;
- ii. Issues relating to medical check-up before marriage;
- iii. Islamic manner of sexual cohabitation;
- iv. Islamic manner of care of pregnancy;
- v. Issues relating to divorce or separation of marriage;
- vi. The manner of setting up an ideal Islamic family;
- vii. Upbringing of children in an Islamic manner.

In addition to the above, both private and public maternities must, as a matter of duty, emphasize more on the need for potential mothers to ensure they take proper care of themselves and report any case of abnormality to appropriate quarters immediately. Enlightenment programmes on both electronic and print media on pre-natal and anti-natal preparation as a prerequisite for sound child health must be mounted regularly. Young ones must be properly educated to ensure strict compliance with the rules of Islam on marriage before they finally enter into it.

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