

Child's life and health in the Holy Qur'an

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SUMMARY

Besides discussing the fundamentals of Islamic conviction, the Qur'an comprises a number of scientific topics including child's life and health from conception and pregnancy to childhood.

Verses in the Qur'an show that a child's life starts with the union of the male's (father's) sperm in the seminal fluid with the female's (mother's) ovum in the fallopian tube to produce a zygote. It descends into the uterine cavity to be embedded into the endometrium.

This single cell continues to divide to look like a clot and then differentiates into different organs.

The embryo is surrounded by the amniotic fluid protected by three layers: amniotic sac, uterine wall, and mother's abdominal wall. After a predetermined period of about 9 months, the uterine contents are delivered as a child. The period may be shortened to deliver a premature infant or delayed to more than 42 weeks to produce a postmature infant.

The infant depends on the mother's breast milk for 2 years to survive.

Infants need good care. Also, child abuse should be avoided. The Qur'an emphasizes orphans' care. Some verses can be made use of in advising parents about child care.

Key words: Child's health, child's life, Holy Qur'an

INTRODUCTION

Child's life and health are among a number of scientific topics included in the Holy Qur'an and described in detail. In chapter (sura) 17:verse (aya) 89 (1), it is explained "We employed different ways to make people understand the (Message)," and a similar one in (18:54). "We have devised different ways in the Qur'an to make people understand its message :but man is extremely contentious by nature."

The creation of a child starts from a sperm "Allah created you from dust, then from a drop of sperm, then he made you into pairs," and in (77:20) "Did We not create you from a mean fluid." (77:21), which "We then placed in a secure repository" (77:22) "until an appointed time."

The origin of the sperm starts during embryonic life in the primitive gonads situated on the posterior wall of the abdominal cavity between the ribs and the spine. It descends gradually down to the lowest part of the abdominal cavity to leave it through the inguinal canal into the scrotum containing the testicles (2)(3)(86:5); "so let man consider of what he was created." (86:6) "He was created from a gushing fluid emanating from between the loins and the ribs."

The male's (father's) semen contains millions of sperms that enter the female's (mother's) body through the vagina to the uterine cavity, climbing the wall of the uterus to the fallopian tube. The female's ovum from the ovary descends into the fallopian tube to meet the sperm. Each of these two cells (the sperm and the ovum) contains half a number of chromosomes. It is one of these millions of sperms that succeeds in entering the ovum to fertilize it (4)(76:2); "Verily We created man out of a drop of intermingled sperm so that We might try him, and We therefore endowed him with hearing and sight."

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The fertilized ovum containing the full number of chromosomes descends to the uterine cavity to be embedded in the endometrium (75:37); "was he not a drop of ejaculated semen" (75:38); "then he became a clot, and then Allah made it into a living body and proportioned its parts" (75:39); and then "He made him a pair, male and female."

The fertilized ovum undergoes repeated divisions, increasing in size to a mouthful piece of flesh (23:12); "We created man from the essence of clay" (23:13); "then turned him into a sperm drop in a safe place" (23:14); "then changed the sperm-drop into a clot of blood and the clot into a piece of flesh: and then turned the piece of flesh into bones: and brought him forth as quite different creation (from embryo), so blessed, is Allah, the best of all creators."

In the first months of gestation, internal organs and bones develop and bones are covered by muscles. The head and limbs take shape. Also, male and female reproductive organs develop in an accurate manner (5).

The developing embryo is protected by three layers. The amniotic sac provides free movement in the amniotic fluid. The second layer is the uterine wall, and the third layer is the mother's abdominal wall. (39:6) "He is Who created you from a single being, and He is Who made from it its mate. He is Who created for you eight heads of cattle in pairs. He creates you in your mother's wombs, giving you one form after another in threefold depths of darkness That, then Allah, your Lord. He is the kingdom. There is no god but He, so whence are being turned astray."

Gestation is usually for a predetermined period of time, an average of 9 months (40 weeks). In a few instances, gestation ends earlier (abortion or miscarriage), taking place before or after the embryo becomes viable. The premature end of gestation results in a birth of a premature baby of small size and low weight that needs special care for survival. On the contrary, gestation may be prolonged to last for 42 weeks, giving rise to a postmature baby that is often larger in size and weight and may be associated with difficult labor and risk of injury. (13:8) "Allah knows what every female bears in her womb. He is fully aware of what is taking shape in the womb and also what decrease or increase occurs therein. Everything has its fixed measure with Him."

The pregnancy may be a period of suffering for the mother due to vomiting, slow movement, constipation, and other ill effects.

(31:14) "We have enjoined on man to be dutiful to his parents. His mother bore him in weakness and hardship upon weakness, and his weaning lasted 2 years (We therefore enjoined upon him): give thanks to Me and your parents, To Me is your ultimate return."

At the end of pregnancy, the child leaves the darkness of the womb and moves to the light of the world. (46:15) "We have enjoined man to be kind to his parents. In pain did his mother, bear him and in pain did she give birth to him."

The carrying of the child to weaning takes 30 months. When he (she) is grown to full maturity and reaches the age of 40, he (she) prays: "My Lord, dispose me that I may give thanks for the bounty that You have bestowed upon me and my parents, and dispose me that I may do righteous deeds that would please you, and also my descendants righteous. I repent to You, and I am one of those who surrenders themselves to you." (22:5) "You should know that We first created you from clay, then a sperm-drop of a clot of blood, then a lump of flesh, shaped or shapeless (We are telling you this) so that We make the reality plain to you. And We make that (sperm-drop) which will remain in the wombs for a fixed period, then (We nourish you) so that you may attain to your full youth)."

(40:67) "It is He Who created you from dust, then from a sperm-drop, then from a clot; then He brings you out as an infant, then causes you to grow further so that you reach an appointed term and that you understand (the Truth)."

After birth, the child is in need of the mother's care for survival depending on her breast milk for a period of 2 years or more. (1:233) "The mothers shall suckle their children for two whole years"

Parents have to look after the child for proper growth and development. The orphan, on the contrary, needs special attention. (17:34) "Do not go near the property of an orphan except for the best manner until he reaches the age of maturity."

The female children are more likely to be abused. (17:31) "Do not kill your offspring for fear of want: it is We Who provide them as well as you. Indeed their killing is a heinous crime."

Some of the aforementioned verses can be made use of by pediatricians in advising Muslim parents about child care such as breastfeeding.

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