

## PREMARITAL SCREENING TESTS: AN ISLAMIC VIEW

Hasan Shammout<sup>1</sup>, Moawiah Khatatbeh<sup>2</sup>, Omar Al Omari<sup>3</sup>

1. Faculty of Islamic studies, Jerash University, Jerash, Amman, Jordan

2. Faculty of Medicine, Yarmouk University, Irbid, Jordan

3. College of Nursing, Fundamentals and Administration Department Sultan Qaboos University, Muscat, Oman

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### ABSTRACT

Despite the wide spread of many diseases, advancements in genetic engineering have led to considerable improvements in diagnosing these diseases. Therefore, pressure on prospective spouses to undergo premarital medical exams has increased significantly. Many Islamic countries have responded to this emerging need by making some premarital screening tests compulsory for a marriage. The adoption of these policies comes from the core message of Islam, which encourages counselling to protect future generations and to guarantee the continuity of worshipping God. However, some people reject the compulsory test, considering them against Islam rules. In this letter to the editor, the authors explore the view of Islam towards premarital medical tests.

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### Letter

Dear Editor-in-Chief,

Pre-marital lab tests are crucial in identifying potential health risks for couples intending to get married as well as for their siblings. Couples are tested for infectious, blood-transmitted and genetic diseases, the latter being especially important in consanguineous marriages (marrying a blood relative), since such marriages put partners at increased risk of having children with inherited disorders such as autosomal recessive disorders [1,2]. These tests have importance in places where consanguineous marriages are quite popular, such as in Arab countries [3,4]. Therefore, the need for premarital counselling is crucial. Although some countries like Jordan, Saudi Arabia, Iran, Iraq, Bahrain and Turkey have established centres to identify the possibility of having any blood disorders such as thalassemia among couples who intend to get married [5-7], some people are not aware to the importance of genetic testing [5-8]. One of the recommended methods to increase public awareness of genetic testing is by encouraging them by referring to Islam rules.

The elementary goal of Islam is to preserve what are called the five necessities: keeping faith, existing, royalty, the intellect and the continuity of humanity. In order to keep these necessities, people need to be in good health.

Muslims are encouraged to seek medical advice instantly when feeling sick.

When one of Prophet Mohammad followers asked him about the legitimacy of seeking medical treatment, he said, 'You should search for medical treatment, because God has let no ailment exist without accommodating its cure, except for one disease, namely, old age'. Therefore, Islam encourages its followers to seek medical treatment to keep people healthy and to be able to worship God.

Another method to guarantee the continuity of worshipping God is by marriage and giving birth to healthy babies who are able to carry the message of Islam that is worshipping God. Islam encourages people to prevent harmful events from occurring before they take place and to deal with their consequences [9]. Islam urges couples planning to wed to undergo premarital screening tests to prevent communities from having sick children and maximise the chances of having a new generation free of diseases. In fact, Prophet Mohammed encourages people to seek counselling, as he said, 'Religion (Islam) is sincere counselling and good advice' [10]. From another perspective, Islam considers the actions of couples that get married without undergoing premarital counselling as a kind of risky behaviour. Allah says: "Do not throw yourselves into destruction by your own hands" [Sûrah al-Baqarah: 195]. A couple could have a sexually transmitted disease and a premarital medical examination

\* Corresponding author: Omar Al Omari, Al\_omari2000@yahoo.com

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could identify it and prevent the spread of such diseases to his/her spouse. In addition, Islam prohibits sick people with inherited and/or genetic diseases from grouping together to prevent transmitting illnesses. The Prophet said, 'Do not gather healthy with sick people'. Most Muslim scholars have concluded from this that if people conduct premarital tests and the results of these tests indicate that there is a possibility of having a child with an inherited disease or the possibility of illness being transmitted to their spouse, the marriage should not be completed.

Mandatory premarital screening tests do not compromise individual freedom as some people say; rather, it protects individuals and society at large. Although the results of these tests might occasionally contribute to negative consequences for an individual, the juristic principles delineated by Islamic Law teach us to choose the lesser of two evils and to permit individual harm to occur in order to prevent greater harm.

To conclude, Islam encourages counselling to protect future generations and to guarantee the continuity of worshipping God. In fact, Islam considers couples who undergo premarital testing, get positive results for certain illnesses and then get married as sinful people.

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