

Within each religion, views on contraception can vary a lot — some believers accept its use, some don't.

Contraception Prevents a Woman Becoming Pregnant

Using contraception is sometimes called 'family planning'.

- 1) **Contraception** is also known as birth control and is used to stop a woman conceiving. It can be temporary (e.g. the contraceptive pill or condoms) or permanent (sterilisation).
- 2) Most atheists and humanists have no objection to contraception. They think it's better if people only have children if they really want them. Contraception allows people to choose when to have sex, by limiting the risk of pregnancy. Some types also reduce the risk of STIs (sexually transmitted infections).
- 3) People applying situation ethics look for the most loving option — they would be likely to support contraception if it means only children who will be loved are born, and people are protected from STIs.
- 4) Some Christians, Muslims and Jews object to forms of contraception that might destroy a fertilised egg, such as the morning after pill — this is because they see it as being the same as abortion (see p.51).
- 5) Many religious people don't believe in sterilisation, which prevents people ever having children.

Christian Denominations have Different Opinions

- 1) The Catholic Church says anything 'deliberately contraceptive' is 'intrinsically wrong' (Humanae Vitae 14). Married couples should 'transmit human life' (Catechism of the Catholic Church 2367), i.e. have children.
- 2) Many individual Roman Catholics disagree with this stance, especially because of concerns about STIs.
- 3) The Church says contraception may lead to promiscuity (p.37) and sees some methods as abortion. It does allow natural contraception — only having sex at the less fertile times in a woman's menstrual cycle.
- 4) Other Christian Churches have different views. The Anglican, Methodist and Presbyterian Churches are in favour of contraception, suggesting that it lets parents plan their family in a responsible way.

Orthodox and Progressive Jews tend to have Differing Views

- 1) Judaism traditionally teaches that a child is a gift from God, and contraception interferes with God's plans to bless couples with children.
- 2) Most Orthodox Jews only accept contraception for compassionate reasons, e.g. if pregnancy could be physically or psychologically harmful to the mother or an existing child.
- 3) Some find contraception within marriage acceptable if the couple do plan to have children later on.
- 4) Progressive Jews find contraception more acceptable and leave the decision to each individual.
- 5) Sex should be as natural as possible so hormonal contraceptives like the pill are generally preferred to barrier methods like condoms. But some agree with barrier methods as a means of preventing STIs.

"A man shall not abstain from [propagating] the race unless he already has children."
Talmud Yevamot 61b

There are Different Attitudes to Contraception within Islam

- 1) Some Muslims see contraception as wrong — they might refer to the hadith Sahih al-Bukhari 34:432, which says conception is Allah's will and suggests people shouldn't try to avoid it. Other Muslims believe that another hadith, Sahih al-Bukhari 62:136, supports the use of contraception.
- 2) It's the right of both husband and wife to try for children, so both partners must agree to contraception.
- 3) Reasons for using contraception are usually focused on whether another child may cause harm to the mother, any existing children or to the potential child, e.g. if the family can't afford to feed another child.
- 4) Only 'reversible' methods are allowed, though — sterilisation and vasectomies are usually not accepted.

Remember that religious views focus on marital sex...

Have a go at this exam-style question using the information you've learnt on this page.

Explain two contrasting religious beliefs about contraception. [4]

