

The Perspective of Islam on Abstinence from Sex as a Correctional Measure in the Matrimonial Home

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Abstract

Misconception as well as misrepresentation of some terminologies in sexuality education coupled with complaints *cum* lamentations about sexual denial by some married individuals in their matrimonial home prompted this research. In particular, sexual abstinence is being used erroneously and interchangeably as sexual starvation as observed in the application of the terms in many reports. Somewhat, recourse to the scriptures for adequate contextual understanding of a reported scenario on this subject matter seems little considered.

Leveraging the tenets of Islam *viz-a-viz* sexual practices, the differences between both terms (sexual abstinence and sexual starvation) were stated in this paper for clearer picture of a reported scenario. It was established that aside being a naturally inevitable practice, sexual abstinence is also divinely revealed as a measure to correcting deviant behaviour. For correctional purpose, however, it must not only be devoid of emotional and psychological trauma, but also must be employed within a relatively short period. On no occasion is sexual abstinence admitted a measure for punishment or torture in Islam.

Some recommendations were made to reduce sexual denial minimally even as a correctional measure or avert it totally in the Muslims marital life. They include internalization of the tenets of Islam, conscientious discharge of marital responsibilities, communication and amicable settlement of conflicts to mention few.

Keywords: Islam; abstinence; sex; correctional measure; matrimonial home.

Received: 9/15/2024

Accepted: 11/15/2024

Published: 11/25/2024

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Purpose and Significance

This research was undertaken basically to examine the fundamental reason (why) sexual denial may thrive in a matrimonial home. Its significance lies in the fact that it would help fortify the relationship between the married couple thereby curtail sex-precipitated divorce.

Methodology and Limitations

This research aims to study the practice of sexual relation between married couples with focus on adoption of sexual abstinence as a correctional measure. Qualitative and quantitative methods were used. Facts garnered from existing related literature were confirmed further *via* interview and administration of questionnaires using simple percentage statistical analysis.

Although without the quality compromised or affected, some constraints were encountered during the research. These include insufficient time to cover large respondents, refusal of some individuals to honour scheduled interview, and some respondents declined responding to some questions on the ground of taboo and beliefs about sex.

1. Introduction

Sexual intercourse is one aspect that makes man a complex creature. Despite the divine guidance and orientation about it in the scriptures, it is still one of the few aspects of human life distorted by many. This manifests in the controversies on some matters bothering on sexuality education on the one hand, and the question of whose responsibility particularly between the school and the religious institutions to teach sexuality education on the other hand^[1].

The distortion is more palpable when the significance and purpose of sex is considered. To some individuals, owing to religious beliefs, sex is a hindrance to spiritual purity and elevation^[2]. Such individuals opt either for delayed marriage or celibacy. Conversely, amongst those that practice sexual activities however are individuals who seem to exhibit lack of self-control on the one hand^[3] and those who resort to long abstinence from it for some reasons including punishment on the other hand^[4].

There is no doubt that sexual relation is fundamentally the prerogative of the married individuals only. However, some of this category of persons lament sexual deprivation encountered in their matrimonial home. This social problem cuts across every religion and ethnic. Besides, it is trending in recent times for it is not a concern for young couples who have just spent few years in marriage alone^[5] but also couples whose marriage has been for decades as witnessed personally.

The complexity of sex itself necessitates that sexual denial be perused from diverse perspectives including legal, religious, psychological, and medical. Legally, sexual denial is a fundamental right issue for which redress can be sought in the law court. Thus, in the daily review of some National Newspapers on 92.9 FM and 107.5 FM, the report is often aired about disputing couples who sue each other on the ground of sexual deprivation. Should

deprivation persist and become detrimental, the affected partner and victim request the court should dissolve their marriage. Similarly, Abolarinwa, Obadofin, and Sadiku^[6] posit that sex starved relationship is one of the numerous sexual dysfunctions often attended to by sex therapists.

In support of the legitimacy of such a court suit or quest for therapy is the fact that sexual intimacy in marriage is religiously not a favour but rather a divine commandment^[7]. Therefore, it is a conjugal right that must not be trampled upon or handled trivially. No wonder most discussants on sex matters opine that regular sexual intercourse between married couples has numerous benefits; be they social, medical/ health, psychological or religious.

Be that as it may, divergent opinions trail sexual denial as observed of variables such as terminology (sexual starvation or sexual abstinence), the cause(s), the goal or purpose, the end-receiver, rate of prevalence, and the effect(s). Whereas some speak in its favour having seen it a conditionally inevitable situation, others oppose it regardless the reason(s) that may have necessitated it.

There is no doubt that religion, especially the heavenly revealed religions, has some revelations concerning sexuality and sexual relations. Such revealed knowledge might have been either an intervention to some specific sexual related issues or a general commandment. It is in the light of this context this paper examines sexual abstinence as a correctional measure in matrimony from the perspective of Islam.

The topic is treated under the following subheadings: explanation of key terms, overview of sexual abstinence / starvation, Islam and sexual relations, Reality of sexual abstinence and starvation in Islam, and Basis for legally imposed sexual deprivation in Islam. It concludes with recommendations on how (legally imposed) sexual deprivation could be prevented in the Muslims' homes, and by extension every matrimonial homes.

2. Brief Explanation of the Key Words

The title of this paper comprises five key words namely Islam; Abstinence; Sex; Correctional Measure; and Matrimonial Home. Explanation of these words is pertinent to give clear direction and focus in the discourse. Each of them is explained as follow:

Islam: This is the religion that emphasizes absolute, sincere, and unalloyed compliance to the injunctions of Allah enshrined in the Holy Qur'ān and exemplified by the Prophet Muḥammad (pbuh) for his followers to emulate. It is also understood to be a total way of life^[8] for its tenets transcend religio-spiritual gamut but extend also to all other facets. Its aim is to ensure peace reigns supreme in the inter-relationship of its adherents not only with their creator (Allah) but also fellow human *cum* other creatures that constitute his physical environment.

Abstinence: Abstinence simply means an act of refraining or abstaining from doing something that is ordinarily normal, proper, and permissible. It is also an act of suppressing willingly or having self-control over the natural desire to do something that is naturally permissible and humanly desired.

In this context, it denotes morally justified abstention from sexual intercourse. Similar understanding is implied

for mild and moral sexual denial between married individuals. Albeit, abstinence is one of the few common descriptions of activities in respect of sex. The others are sexual gratification or intercourse, sexual starvation or deprivation, and sexual abuse.

According to Salisu^[9], abstinence can be lifelong, delayed, and periodic. Often times it is used connotatively as implying starvation / deprivation and celibacy. Although these terms may portend similar idea and notion for some of them are human inventions, their usage and application contextually cannot be overemphasized. For instance, unlike starvation and celibacy which are expressions in some religious quarters, abstinence is a systemic and logical religio-cultural practice.

More specifically, some distinctions can be drawn between abstinence and starvation. Abstinence is the generic expression with basis in the scriptures whenever absence of sexual relation is intended or discussed. It is a practice that is very important in marital life as sexual intercourse because it is naturally inevitable. Abused abstinence however results in starvation or deprivation, and hence, precipitates marital crisis. In addition, aside being adjudged the best pregnancy control option^[10], abstinence for birth control is reinforced culturally with certain preventive measures or items^[11].

More importantly, unlike starvation which is exclusive of matrimony, abstinence is practised both before marriage and during the period of matrimonial life. Therefore, abstinence is divinely dictated, natural, positivistic and humane. In a contrast, celibacy as well as starvation is orchestrated by man, anti-nature, negativistic, and reprehensible.

Sex: This is an act of private intimacy between two married persons of the opposite sex. It is divinely ordained, and practised for numerous reasons. Other words used for sex in this understanding are copulation, coitus, mating, and sexual intercourse.

Correctional Measures: These are the various ways or steps adopted by which deviant and wrongful acts or behaviours are addressed and improved purposely to prevent repetition of such abnormal behaviours.

Matrimonial home: This simply connotes the dwelling place and station of a married couple. It also means the abode of a married couple where they raise their own family. Expectedly, such a home would be characterized by love, mutual understanding, co-operation and fair play between the couple and all other members of the family for peaceful co-existence.

3. Overview on Sexual Abstinence / Starvation

Since time immemorial, abstinence from sex is religiously and culturally understood to be a natural and an inevitable act. According to Szreter and Fisher^[12] and McSweeney^[13], it is practised at various times and in varying degrees for reasons including chastity (prior to marriage), birth control (in matrimony), religio-spiritual discipline *cum* elevation, and behavioural modification. Total abstinence or celibacy under the guise of spiritual elevation, however, is repugnant because it results in extinction of the human race^[14]. SSalisu^[15] observes that though abstinence is usually discussed in relation to the adolescent and sexual intercourse, involvement of the adults too

in the practice and extension of abstinence to other aspects of life is indisputable.

Research shows that whereas periodic abstinence from sexual relations between a couple for any reason whatsoever may be tenable, its gross abuse negates the philosophy of marriage. Grossly abused abstinence is tantamount to deliberate starving a partner sexually by the other. As a matter of fact, it is the grossly abused form (sex starvation) that is prevalent in recent times and dominant on media. Hence, quest for redress.

Peradventure, it is abstinence in the form of starvation and / or celibacy Alfred Kinsey, cited in Wikipedia^[16], sees a sexual dysfunction. Similar notion is held by Abolarinwa *and his colleagues* ^[17]. They see starvation as the corollary of sexual dysfunctions particularly of the psychological sexual disorders that have to do with desire.

Lisa Finn, cited by Hanafi^[18], relates sex starvation to 'dead bedroom' and thus describes it as temporary or permanent deviation by either of the couple from sexual norm agreed on. Similarly, Villines^[19] extends sex denial or starvation to include absence of physical contact such as conversation, romantic play, hug or cuddling which ordinarily are quintessential in matrimony.

According to Llewellyn-Jones^[20], many people consider deviation by either of the couple from agreed norms in respect of sex between them as sexual abuse. Similar position is held by Bidmos^[21] in his discourse on Some Critical Aspects of Reproductive Health from the Perspective of Islam. Therefore, he emphasizes the significance of physical, emotional and mental maturity of prospective marriage partners prior to wedlock.

From the foregoing it is obvious that good intent by the couple and mutual agreement between them are crucial in matrimony. These requisites shape every activity thriving between the couple including sexual relation. Besides, sex starvation would be a concern more for married couple living together than those living separately especially if there is no agreement between them *viz-a-viz* sexual activity. This will be so because, according to majority view, sex is a major factor that helps to sustain the wedlock.

Sex is an important way to finding a sense of community and belongingness says Lopez and Natfulin^[22]. Ibn Abdillah asserts that it is one of the best ways to settle marital disputes^[23]. Moris-Fishbein sees sex and life (and of course, let me add, healthy conjugal relationship) as inseparable for each is the origin and the end of the other^[24]. Sheryl Kingsberg, cited by Hanafi^[25], asserts that when sex is good there is 15 or 20% added value to a couple's relationship.

Sex is a medication to calm the body down of so many life challenges like stress, emotional sickness and it is a good exercise to keep the body relaxed and fit submits Okunna^[26]. Similarly, Dr Rachael Needle, cited by Lopez *and his colleagues* ^[27], remarks that having sex can be positive for people's physical and mental health. It helps to sleep better, decrease pain and lower stress.

Peradventure, in view of the numerous benefits of sexual intercourse, some non-Muslim medical practitioners suggest that unmarried individuals may practice masturbation with a view to experiencing ejaculation and orgasm like their married counterparts^[28]. All this notwithstanding, periodic abstinence for any reason whatsoever receives universal acknowledgement.

Therefore, degree of adaptability to period of sexual abstinence will definitely differ between couple who stay together and those living separately. So will it be between a matrimonial home where sex is planned *cum* regulated by the couple and where it is not. In the report of an Editorial Team for Sexually Transmitted Diseases check^[29], the life style of a couple is identified a key determinant of the extent they relate sexually.

According to Kokoski, the symptoms and effects of a sex starved relationship include sex used as reward and punishment / torture accordingly^[30]. In such a relationship thrive flirting, obsession flipping, depression and aggression he concludes. Ogbemudia opines that denial of sex for a long time can lead to stomach ache^[31].

The Editorial Team previously cited mentions symptoms such as obsessive thoughts about sex, increased irritability, and emotional disconnect to mention few. Dr Dulcinea Pitagora, cited by Lopez *and his colleagues*^[32], lists symptoms of long abstinence to be development of skin hunger and touch starvation. According to him, the effects include weaken immune system, high level depression and anxiety to mention few.

Other effects mentioned by Ibn Sa'eed are feeling of insecurity, isolation, loneliness, lowered self-esteem, seduction, and promiscuity^[33]. According to Ibn Abdillah^[34], sex starvation leads to greater evil and hypoactive sexual disorder (HSDD). Moreover, there is consensus opinion that unresolved starved relationship is one of the major reasons for divorce between married couple.

Concerning the causes of sexual denial (starvation), responses received from the interviews conducted and questionnaires administered were not too different from the points this writer came across in relevant related literature. Succinctly, the causes are identified to be deliberate planning or not, health challenge, nature of either of the couple's job, and size of the family coupled with the stress of fending for them. Other causal factors enumerated by Wasman^[35] and Ibn Sa'eed^[36] are personal attitude born out of religious and cultural beliefs, old age, traveling for so long, and forced marriage.

By and large, sex denial could, Islamically, be attributed to some *Jinn* (Genes). Such *Jinn* share in copulation with the couple who fail to supplicate to Allah prior to sexual intercourse as earlier stated. Similarly, either of the partners might have subconsciously been experiencing coitus at intervals with some succubi and incubi in their dream while asleep as reported of some tempted saints by Abd al-'Ati^[37].

Consequently, the victim is afflicted with ailments that might not be possible to be diagnosed medically. Ibrahim states sexual problems as one of the kinds of sickness and harm caused by the *Jinn*^[38]. The only exception to this however is if the dream is of nocturnal emission which is the natural way to reducing the quantity of semen in the body^[39].

4. Analysis of Responses to the Questionnaire

Questionnaire was designed to elicit responses from respondents with a view to making the research more original. It is divided into three sections *viz* bio-data, marital status, and opinions on the subject matter. All questions are open-ended and simple percentage employed for the statistical analysis.

In all, fifty respondents were randomly selected. Of this sample, 10 (20%) were aged between 30 and 35 years, 18 (36%) between 35 and 40 years, and 20 (40%) between 45 and 50 years respectively. 2 (4%) respondents did not specify their age. The educational qualification of respondents goes thus, 2 (4%) did not go beyond the secondary school education. 22 (44%) are NCE / OND holders and 35 (70%) made it to the University. Nevertheless, in addition to their mother tongue, all respondents could speak and understand English in which the questionnaire was prepared. Impliedly, respondents educational background influences their response in no small measure.

Except 6 (12%) that are widow, all other 44 respondents (88%) have their marital union intact and live together with their partners. On frequency of sexual intercourse, 22 (44%) respondents responded on weekly basis or fortnightly, 15 (30%) chose monthly basis, and 7 (14%) answered once a while respectively. 6 (12%) respondents did not respond to the question.

It is fascinating that the quantity of respondents who asserted that the timing for sex is planned with their partners equates the quantity of their counterparts who submitted that the timing is not planned or agreed. Perchance, couple's nature of job might have influenced agreement on the timing or otherwise as evident in the respondents' responses viz-a-viz their partner's job. The spouse of 10 (20%) respondents are professionals in their own way but not civil servants, of 30 (60%) are public or civil servants, and so the remaining 10 (20%) are artisans.

By and large, all respondents do not only confirm the reality of sexual deprivation but also affirm its inimical effect. Succinctly, the causes of sexual denial listed by the individual respondents as well as their multifaceted effects especially where there is no agreement to that effect are not totally different from those already mentioned in various literature. Although in reality, 70% of the respondents are not aware that sexual denial is a measure to correcting the deviant spouse let alone having legal backing in Islam. Nevertheless, they were unanimous in their position that sexual deprivation between married couple is least expected. They equally posit that to resort to it a means for severe punishment is barbaric and uncivilized.

Moreover, 13 (26%) respondents affirm that the husband bears the brunt whereas 12 (24%) respondents claim the wife is the brunt bearer. In a contrast, 18 (36%) respondents opine that both partners bear the brunt and 7 (14%) could not pinpoint who bears the brunt.

5. Islam and Sexual Relation

Following creation of male and female, Islam recognizes urge for sex as one of the natural instincts or drives in some creatures including animals, mankind, and the *Jinn*. For this reason, it sees satisfaction of the urge as a fundamental right. It however promulgates that for mankind and the *Jinn* the satisfaction need be derived legitimately.

Marriage is the only avenue recognized by Islam through which sex gratification and sexual satisfaction are derived (Q 4 : 1 - 4, 30 : 21). Fundamentally, marriage between the opposite sex and within same group of creation is the general rule and more desirous. In other words, mankind should marry within their circle and the *Jinn* within theirs. However, rare exceptional circumstances are reported in which marriage between humankind and some other creatures particularly the *Jinn* in human-incarnate occurs^[40].

Essentially, sex is encouraged in matrimony for biological, social, sociological, health and religious reasons. Specifically, it is avenue for reproduction, strengthening love and conjugal bond, improvement of the mental health and psychological well-being of every individual married couple. In addition, it helps to reduce and curtail illicit sexual relationship thereby prevent contact with and spread of Sexually Transmitted Diseases (STDs). Above all, Islam sees sexual intercourse between the married couple as act of worship and thus attracts reward^[41].

Imam Ibn al-Qaiyim al-Jauziyah^[42] asserts that sexual intercourse is meant to achieve three essential goals *viz*; reproduction and the preservation of mankind ..., expelling the water (semen) which would cause harm if it remains inside the body, and satisfying sexual desire and enjoying sex and the bounty that it represents.

According to Q 2 : 187, couples are described as garment and thus expected to be supportive of each other. Although the verse cited above is particular about the sexual aspect, its application to the entire aspect of marital life to consolidate, preserve, and sustain the union cannot be overemphasized. Therefore, Lisa Finn, cited by Hanafi, is right when she remarks that

“...no one can hold up and say anything less than in dead

bedroom. It (coitus) has to be decided by a couple,

especially when a partner feels grossly short-changed”^[43].

Except through the vaginal (Q 2 : 222), oral and anal sex are vehemently prohibited in Islam^[44]. Prohibited also is masturbation^[45]. Similarly, sex is forbidden for the couple while on *Ihrām*, *Hajj Qiran* and *Ifrād* (Q 2 : 197), during *Iṭikāf* (Q 2 : 187) and menstruation (Q 2 : 222). Other times it is forbidden also are when the birth-blood (*Nifās*) still flows, and *Iddah* for death of the husband^[46].

According to Palanpuri^[47], it is advisable that the couple should refrain from sexual intercourse on the days referred to as *Ayām Bid* (bright days). In a contrast, Imam Ghazali, cited by Ghazi *and his colleagues* ^[48], opines that the first, the fifteenth, and the last day (of the lunar months) are the three nights sexual intercourse is detestable because Shayṭān is on the prowl these nights.

Research unveils that drive for sex is generally and largely more intense in men than women^[49]. According to Ola-Samuel^[50] and Burrows^[51], this is because of the body chemistry or hormonal make-up which makes sexual condition of man erectional and the woman emotional respectively.

Furthermore, medical experts posit that, all things being equal, men produce semen and are sexually active until they are very aged^[52] whereas the quantity of ova in women is fixed right from birth^[53]. For this reason, menopause heralds and signifies exhaustion of ova though without preventing the women from reaching orgasm and enjoying sexual union.

Justifiable therefore is the prophetic advice that if a man sees in the public a woman that arouses him, he should quickly come to his wife^[54]. In another Hadith, the wife who rejects her husband's invitation to sexual intercourse is cursed by the angels or would incur the wrath of the angels^[55]. Moreover, strong sexual urge in man is one of the major reasons (why) polygyny is permissible in Islam^[56]. This however does not imply the husband should see his wife as mere object for sex or see sex as sport.

By and large, there is no categorical statement in the primary source on Islam specifying how frequent coitus should take place between the couple. It does not discourage them from regulating it either. Albeit, moderation in every endeavour is encouraged, sexual relation inclusive. Nonetheless, Villines posit that factors that determine the frequency of sex are age, fluctuation in sex drive, and relationship status^[57]. Medical conditions, medications, mental health, and testosterone levels are other factors suggested by Nippoldt^[58] and Whittaker^[59].

The couple are exhorted to engage in fore play or romantic play (Q 2 : 187) as well as employ any method convenient for them and Islamically permissible for the purpose of sexual satisfaction (Q 2 : 223). Like proposal for marriage, it is worth mentioning that demand for intercourse can be advanced by either of the couple as circumstances warrant.

In Islam couples are advised to supplicate to Allah before engaging in the act especially if the purpose is pregnancy^[60]. This is to protect them as well as the "fruit" from the 'touch' of Shayṭān. In the same vein, they are advised to minimize talking and should not be in a state of total nude during intercourse^[61]. More so, it is obligatory that they perform the ritual bath (*Ghuslu Janabah*) after copulation (Q 5:6). According to Prophet Muḥammad (pbuh), it is detestable that either of the couple should recount their sexual experience in the presence of a third party^[62].

6. Reality of Sexual Abstinence and Sexual Starvation in Islam

It would be reiterated that Islam places a high premium on sex in the marital life. It sees it as an indispensable and inevitable activity that takes place between the couple. For this reason, it leaves sex matters in the hands of the couple. However, it provides some guidance *via* rules and regulations where and when necessary. The guidance depicts acts that are prohibited, permissible, encouraged, and those that need to be enforced in respect of sexual relation between married couples.

Fundamentally, the prohibited acts relate largely to spiritual, hygiene / health, and medical aspects of sexual relations. Thus, they are stipulated for the couple's own goodness. Heeding the precautionary advice *via* abstinence would be in their own favour and vice versa.

Obviously, the duration for abstinence in this regard is too short (*i.e.* between 7 and 10 days) for the Muslims that they would not be able to endure it. This is so considering the fact that the duration for menstruation spans between 5 and 7 days^[63], and Ḥajj or *Iṭikāf* in Ramaḍān spans 10 days only. All things being equal, abstinence at most can be for one and a half month^[64] or thereabout using *Nifās* as parameter.

Unlike the divine restrictions that justify abstinence, every other injunction on the subject matter are being a

response to some uncivilised and inhumane sexual practices that represent sexual starvation for which some interventions are necessary. An instance is, like in many other primitive societies, the practice of prolonged sexual abstinence among the Jahiliyyah Makkan Arabs. It was ruthlessly practised under the pretext of *Ilā'* (Vow of Abstinence) and *Zihār* respectively either in a move towards divorce and / or out of extreme anger^[65]. It was pronounced by the husband. Thus, the wife was usually at the receiving end.

Islam did embrace *Ilā'* as a kind of divorce. However, it makes some modifications in respect of it including postulation of four months respite for the husband (Q 2 : 228) possibly for a change of mind. Logically, the rationale behind the four months respite is not only to give room for reconciliation but also to show probably as being the maximum duration mankind could endure deprivation without being harm. Unresolved dispute beyond four months can be harmful sexually as pointed out in a *Fatwa* on a related matter^[66].

Furthermore, to corroborate this position are the principles of Islam on *ʿIddah* on the one hand. For the *ʿIddah* for *Ṭalāq* (divorce) is three months (Q 2 : 228), and for death of the husband four months and ten days (Q 2 : 234) respectively. The only exception is if the divorced wife or widow is an expectant mother the *ʿIddah* of which elapses after she must have delivered the baby (Q 2:228, 65:4). It is pertinent to note that during *ʿIddah*, the wife should remain under the roof of the husband (Q 65 : 1 - 2). Pending completion of the *ʿIddah*, he is obliged to feed and clothe her to the best of his capability (Q 2 : 231-232, 65 : 6).

On the other hand is submission of some writers (to corroborate the four months maximum duration as previously mentioned) irrespective of their religious affiliation. While emphasizing the importance of striking a balance between the spiritual and physical or material needs of the couple, Eugene Mormon remarks thus,

Starving to death is discouraged for it is overdoing...

Likewise, if a spouse is suffering from 'lack of consortium' (a wonderful ridiculous term for not getting enough sex), the other partner should help them out.

Otherwise, if they agree to abstain to focus on spiritual matters, that is between them^[67].

Similarly, Wasman posits that the original law of *Ilā'* is *Makruh* (disliked or offensive act). For this reason, an *Ilā'* will in his view be unlawful if the aim is to mime his wife and to let her live in a state of limbo but permissible if it does not cause damage or poverty to the wife^[68].

Concerning *Zihār*, three actions were spelt out (to choose one) as expiation for the man who was guilty of it but wished to go back to his wife (Q 58 : 2 - 4). Until the expiation is carried out the husband is not permitted to resume sexual relation with his wife.

All this divine intervention is established with a view to controlling his anger, serving as deterrent for others, and preventing re-occurrence of the behavioural abnormality. Essentially, Islam sees abstinence as a means to an end and not an end itself. Therefore, in practice, it does not in the name of abstinence give room for infliction of any pain or injury whatsoever on either of the couple.

7. Basis for Legally Imposed Sexual Denial in Islam

Noteworthy from the aforesaid is that intermittent sexual abstinence or denial is inevitable in marital life. Its significance is as germane as sexual intercourse. However, contrary to seeing it a measure for severe punishment or spiritual purity, Islam sees it in a more pragmatically different perspective.

Q 4 : 34 does not only establish the necessity for sexual denial or abstinence but also contains implicit salient lessons to derive therefrom. Addressing correction of a deviant wife, this verse enumerates three steps the husband could adopt one after the other accordingly. These are *Wā'iz* (admonition), *Hujrah fii al-Maḍāji*^c (desertion in the bed), and *Darb* (whipping). *Hujrah fii al-Maḍāji*^c is the focus here.

Different interpretations have been given of the expression by exegetes of the Qur'ān. These include, *inter alia*, leave them alone in the beds^[69], share not bed with them^[70], and turn your face away from them in bed^[71]. In spite of the exegetes' divergent interpretations of the expression (as well as the other options), what is certain is that deprivation of sexual intercourse is implied. Ibn Kathir cites Ali bin Abi Ṭalhah who reported that the expression means "not having sex with her"^[72].

The *Sabab Nuzūl* (Condition for Revelation) of the verse in question corroborates the fact that it is a correctional measure devoid of infliction of psychological / emotional trauma as well as physical injury. For, in correcting the Prophet Muḥammad (pbuh) who hitherto suggested the wife should retaliate slapping her by the husband, Allah revealed verse 34 of chapter 4^[73]. Therefore, the verse was revealed not only to correct the Prophet Muḥammad (pbuh) himself but also to establish non-injurious beating by the husband. Moreover, alongside beating, mild abstinence from sex and admonition were revealed as steps to correcting the erring or deviant wife.

Unarguably, the extent denial would lapse in the context of the verse in question is dependent on readiness of the wife to yield to correction. That itself is contingent on the reason behind the deviant behaviour and its effects. Without much ado, therefore, it is only if sexual denial failed to yield the desired result that beating would be resorted to or severe abstinence (*Ilā'*) as pointed out by Abd al-'Ati^[74].

It is pertinent to note that though the verse empowers the husband to adopt deprivation as one of the correctional measures, the same can as well be employed by the wife should cogent reason or circumstance necessitate it. As a matter of fact, of the three steps stated in the verse, both partners may employ two (admonition and sexual deprivation) to correct a noticed misbehaviour. For it is not only unethical but also religio-culturally impermissible that the wife should raise her hand against her husband even if the latter was at fault.

So, for the sake of moral justice and fairness, what is good for the goose should also be for the gander. It would be reiterated that behavioural modification is the target here, not responsibility sharing or role specification.

Therefore, suffice reasons the wife may morally turn her back at the husband in bed are same that graciously permit her to file for divorce (*Khul'*). Such reasons include, amongst others, moral laxity and cruelty on his part, refusal to provide for the wife, and incurable impotence [75].

8. Recommendations

In view of this discourse, this writer recommends as follow:

- i. Re-orientation on terminologies such as abstinence, starvation, and marriage for more understanding by all and sundry and for appropriate contextual application.
- ii. Pre-marital counseling for prospective couple with particular reference to the essence of sexual deprivation as correctional measure in the marital life.
- iii. After thoughtful considerations of necessary factors, married couples should plan and agree on a sexuality blueprint that can work effectively for both of them to avert lopsidedness and avoidable conflicts.
- iv. Conscientious discharge of their marital responsibilities by both partners to forestall marital gridlock.
- v. In time of conditional or unavoidable exigencies / emergencies, the partners need to show mutual understanding, co-operation, tolerance, perseverance and utmost sincerity to sustain their relationship.
- vi. For workers in the public and private sector that are on inter-State transfer, a law should be promulgated that would allow them to visit their family at least twice or thrice within four months.
- vii. Promulgation of a law that will ban a married individual from traveling alone out of their place of domicile beyond four months.

9. Conclusion

In conclusion, it is apparent from the discourse that in line with the overall aims and objectives of Islam and marriage, there is no sexuality terminology that can be more obtainable and practicable in the matrimonial life of mankind than abstinence. Aside being naturally inevitable *cum* being the only desirable practice, there are divine injunctions for its necessity at specified times.

Thus, following the unflinching familiarity with it, it is the only trauma-free correctional measure that can be instituted in matrimony and adopted to reform the deviant partner. Awareness of the legitimacy of abstinence (deprivation) as a correctional measure in the matrimonial home would enable the couple perform their responsibilities conscientiously and guard their relationship *cum* marital union jealously.

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