

Abortion, Miscarriage & Other Pregnancy Outcomes

Resources for Muslims



Defining Birth Outcomes

There are a number of experiences one can go through with regards to birth outcomes. There is miscarriage which is defined as the spontaneous loss of a pregnancy before 20 weeks. The medical term for a miscarriage is “spontaneous abortion.” An abortion is a medical procedure that ends a pregnancy. This is an elective procedure. You could have an abortion for medical reasons which is also referred to as a termination for medical reasons (TFMR). A stillbirth is categorized as a fetal death or intrauterine fetal demise after 20 weeks. Another birth outcome could be a birth but demise shortly after birth resulting in infant loss. Almost all of the methods used to manage miscarriages and stillbirths are identical to those used in therapeutic abortions. Therefore, the clinical training necessary to safely treat a patient experiencing a pregnancy loss is very similar to that needed to perform abortions.

Islamic Texts Regarding Fetal Development

These are some of the verses in the Quran and sayings of the Prophet Muhammad (S) that have influenced Islamic rulings and ethics regarding the permissibility of abortion in traditional Muslim contexts.

Quranic Verses

He creates you in the wombs of your mothers
In stages, one after another
In three veils of darkness
Such is Allah, your Lord and Cherisher

(Q 39:6)

We created the human being from a quintessence of clay
Then we placed him as semen in a firm receptacle
Then we formed the semen into a blood-like clot
Then we formed the clot into a lump of flesh
Then we made out of that lump, bones
And clothed the bones with flesh
Then we developed out of it another creation
So Blessed is Allah the Best Creator

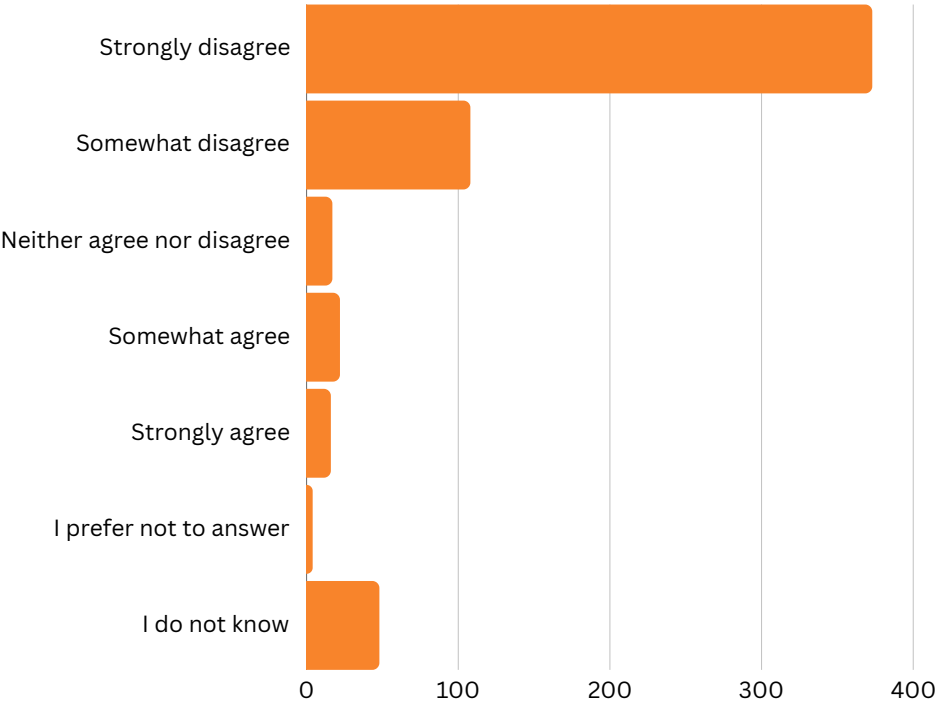
(Q 23:12- 13)

Hadiths of the Prophet (S)

Each of you is constituted in your mothers womb for 40 days as a nutfa (semen), then it becomes an alaqa (clot) for an equal period, then a mudgha (lump of flesh) for another equal period, then the angel is sent and he breathes the ruh, (spirit) into it.

Sahih al-Bukhari 3208
Book 59, Hadith 19

HEART asked survey respondents a question regarding their views about the Islamic permissibility of abortion in 2020. These were the responses.

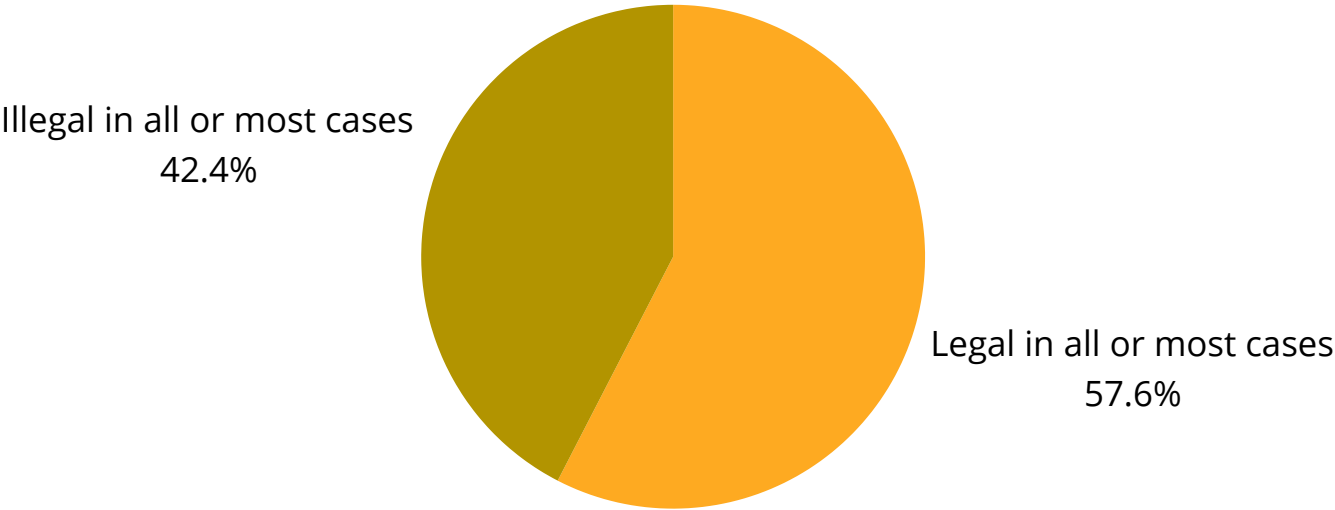


Q6I

Abortion is not allowed in Islam under any circumstance

Source: HEART Burden Study Survey, 2020

Views on abortion among Muslims*



American Muslim Poll, 2022, Institute for Social Policy and Understanding (ISPU)

Islamic Ethical Considerations for Abortion

The threat of harm/endangerment to the mother, including:

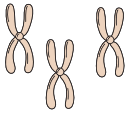


Physical Health



Mental Health

The presence of fetal anomalies, including:

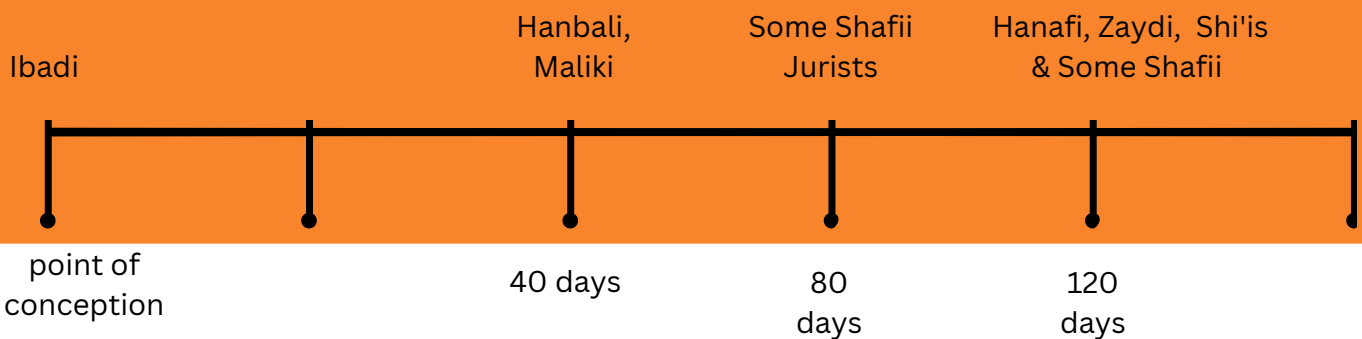


Trisomy 13
Trisomy 18

The motivation or reasoning to terminate, including protecting living children



The point that the soul enters the fetus. Each madhab determines this differently, but generally it is as follows:



Sources:

- Bowen, D.L. (2006). Reproduction: Abortion and Islam: Overview. Encyclopedia of women & Islamic cultures.
- Al-Matary and Ali: Controversies and considerations regarding the termination of pregnancy for Foetal Anomalies in Islam. BMC Medical Ethics 2014 15:10.

Questions to ask when trying to decide to terminate:

Resources for Muslims



Medical Information

- What existing medical conditions are you navigating? How might pregnancy impact your body?
- What stage of pregnancy are you in and what are your options for termination? What would the medication or procedure entail?
- If you have received a diagnosis regarding the fetus and the doctor has named termination as an option, what medical information do you need to understand the full scope of the diagnosis?
 - For example, consider getting a variety of perspectives: from obstetricians to pediatricians, genetic counselors and other specialists who can provide you with the necessary context of what to expect if you choose to take the pregnancy to term/point of demise in utero vs. terminate.

Religious & Spiritual Guidance

If you want to gain a deeper understanding of whether your decision is aligned with your religious and spiritual values, consider seeking an opinion from a trusted spiritual guide (or several!). Think about the imams, scholars, shaykhas, and chaplains at your disposal. If you are unable to connect with a trusted religious guide, reach out to HEART and we can connect you to our chaplain network & offer feminist Islamic scholarship on the topic.

*Note: We recognize not all religious guides are equipped to understand abortion and the complexities in one's life that may lead to this decision. Be mindful of biases and privileges based on gender identity, sex, and lived experiences that may show up in consultations.

Politics & Geography

- Think about the current laws in place for your state. Some states have stricter laws around abortion. For more information around the legal landscape of abortion access, check [here](#)!
- Is safe and affordable access to abortions limited in your region? What is the closest city to you where abortion is available?

Support System

Who are your people? Who are your trusted family and friends that can hold space with you as you make a decision around terminating a pregnancy, without judgment, and with full trust in you that you know best?

What support systems do you need moving forward, whether postpartum after a pregnancy, or postpartum after termination?

Personal Health & Anxieties

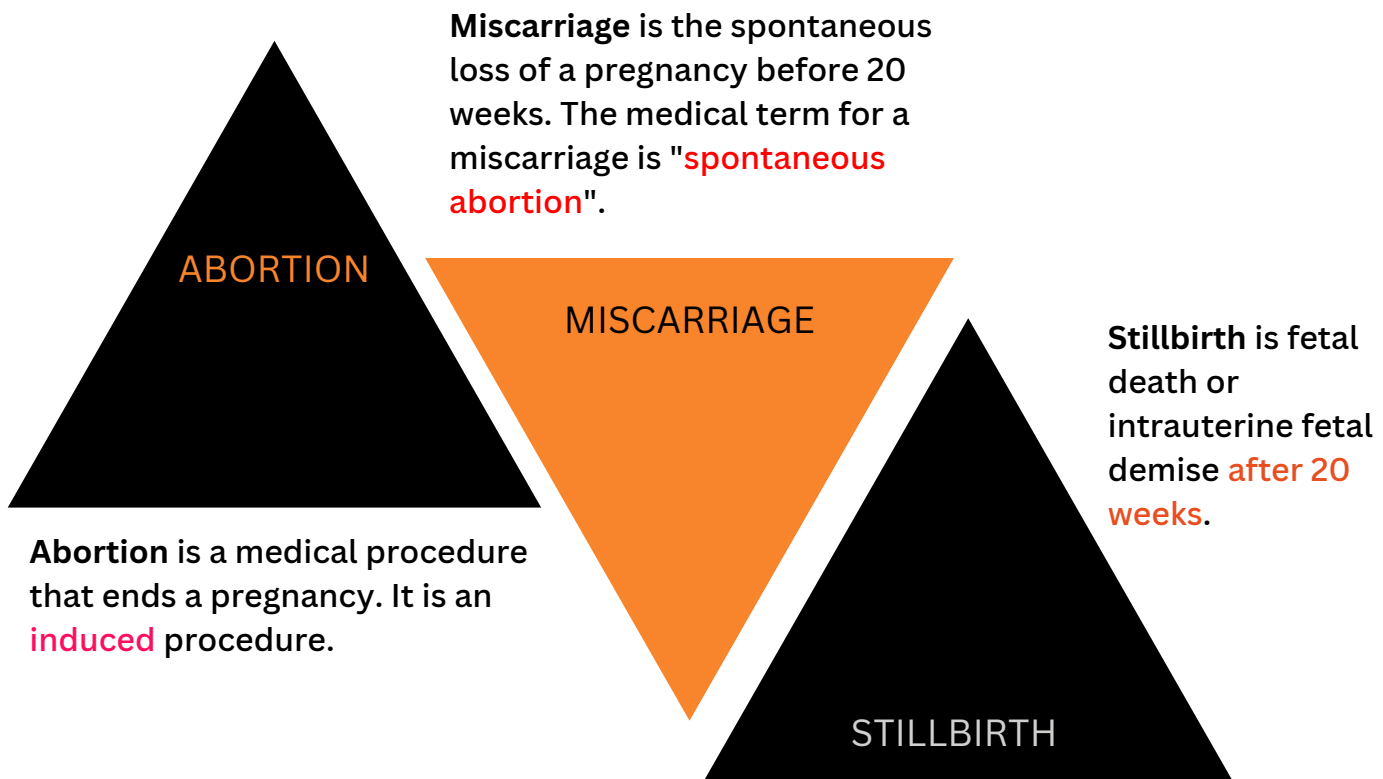
How will the decision impact your personal mental, spiritual and physical health? Would it help to discuss what anxieties you are holding around the decision and discuss potential scenarios with a trained mental health professional?

Pregnancy After Loss

Navigating a pregnancy after loss can also bring its own challenges and anxieties; it is important to remember that every pregnancy is different and your decision making process may be very different in subsequent pregnancies. Consider talking to a trained mental health professional that can help you navigate the simultaneous emotions of grief and joy that you may feel in subsequent pregnancies.

Pregnancy Outcomes

General Information

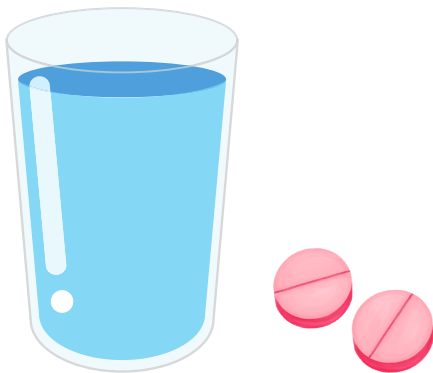


Almost all of the methods used to manage miscarriages and stillbirths are identical to those used in therapeutic abortions. Therefore, the clinical training necessary to safely manage a patient experiencing a pregnancy loss is very similar to that needed to perform abortions.

Source: Kaiser Family Foundation

MEDICATION ABORTION

UP TO 13 WEEKS



1

One mifepristone is taken with

Water. Mifepristone blocks progesterone, causing uterine lining to destabilize and stops the progression of pregnancy.

Source: Hey Jane, Jan 2024



2

After waiting 24-48 hours, four misoprostol pills are either placed inside the vagina or between the cheek and gum for 30 minutes.

Misoprostol softens the cervix and causes contractions.

STATE RESTRICTIONS

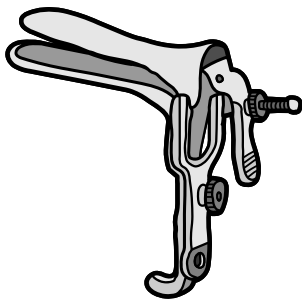
- Mandated in person visits
- In person dispensing
- Only MDs allowed to dispense
- Waiting periods
- Required counseling with misinformation
- Criminalization of pregnant persons who self manage abortions

Source: Kaiser Family Foundation, 2023

SUCTION CURETTAGE ABORTION

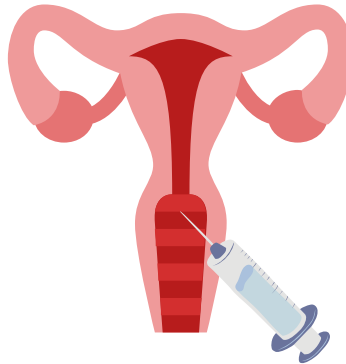
AKA D&C (14-16 WEEKS)

Source: UCLA Health, Jan 2024



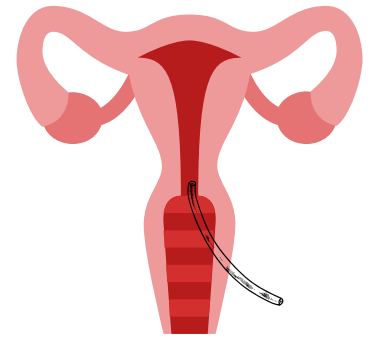
1

Use a speculum to view inside your vagina



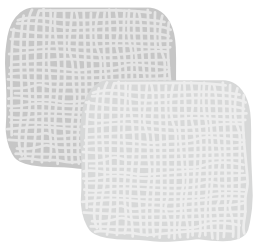
3

Apply numbing medication to your cervix



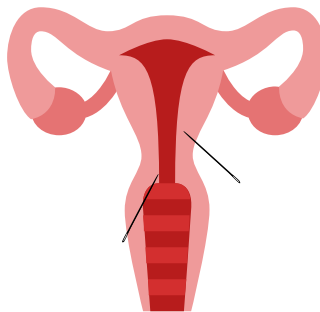
5

Insert a narrow flexible tube into your uterus



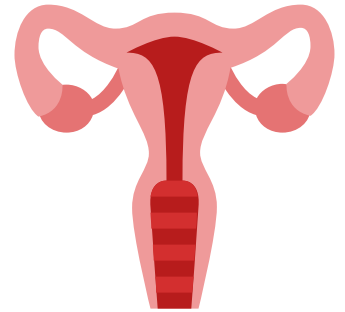
2

Clean your vagina and cervix with gauze soaked in soap



4

Dilate (open up) your cervix (the tight opening to your uterus) a small amount with thin metal rods



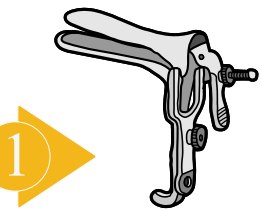
6

Use gentle suction to the other end of the tube to remove all of the pregnancy tissue

DILATION & EVACUATION ABORTION

AKA D&E (14 TO 23 WEEKS AND 6 DAYS)

PRE-OP APPT



1

Use a speculum to view inside your vagina



2

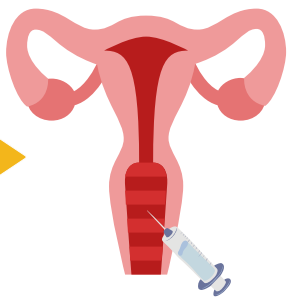


Clean your vagina and cervix with gauze soaked in soap



3

Apply numbing medication (local anesthesia) to the cervix



4

Insert laminaria (or Dilapan) into your cervix, the opening to the uterus. The laminaria insertion takes about five to 10 minutes

SURGICAL APPT



5

Medication will be administered intravenously (IV) in your arm to induce anesthesia or loss of consciousness



6

Gentle suction and gynecological instruments used to empty your uterus, with ultrasound guidance

Source: UCLA Health, Jan 2024

POINT OF INTEREST

Abortion in the pre-modern period (before Western imperialism) was a decision that often did not include religious scholars, men, or the state. The decisions were generally between pregnant people and their providers.¹⁶⁴ Scholars have documented that there were numerous classic Islamic texts in the 9th-11th centuries that explained in detail ways to prevent pregnancy and induce abortion.¹⁶⁵ Most abortions occurred at home with women being the ones to implement the procedures, and the “knowledge of these medicines and procedures gave women the power to determine their fertility to some extent.”¹⁶⁶ Despite this, there were male scholars in the past that did attempt to “use religious discourses to reassert male authority over reproduction in rejection of the previously held exclusivity of women caring for women in childbirth.”¹⁶⁷ Yet this exclusive female control over maternity no longer exists in contemporary Muslim societies, due to the introduction of colonialism and medicalization of reproduction, and now instead “the Islamic decision-making process which discusses permissibility of abortion is carried out by male jurists and scholars.”¹⁶⁸



Source: HEART Sex Talk Book, 2022

Abortion: Applying the RAHMA Principles

RAHMA: Compassion

You can apply the HEART RAHMA principles if you are supporting a loved one who is making a decision regarding abortion, has just experienced one, or is disclosing a prior abortion experience.

At the core of RAHMA is showing compassion and holding space for the directly impacted person who is sharing with you. Here is how you can do that:

R

espond by listening

Let the impacted person take lead on the conversation with how they're feeling and what they are thinking about

A

ffirm & believe

Provide validation that their feelings are grounded in truth and their experience is real

H

onor cultural & religious context

Regardless of your own personal religious perspective on the issue, support them with resources that will help them with their decision making in a non-judgemental manner. Hold their values with respect

M

aintain privacy

This is a often personal and private decision that should be kept confidential at all times. Support the impacted person in sharing with who they want to on their own timeline

A

ssist with providing resources

What information are they looking for to make a decision? Can you support them with finding clinics with services? Do they need access to abortion funds? Would they like to connect with a religious leader to talk more about their options?

Abortion: Practical Support

Breaking Down the Logistics

With the changing landscape of abortion access, we recognize the barriers people face. We encourage all to consult with abortion hotlines and funds as they plan out their abortion journey. These are some considerations and resources to help you plan an abortion:

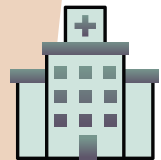
Location + Transportation



If I am in a state with restricted abortion access, where do I need to travel to in order to get an abortion? Check the interactive map [here](#). To get to the closest clinic, how long will it take me? How much gas do I need? There may be abortion funds that can support with arranging transportation.

Clinic Selection

Which providers and clinics offer abortion services? Check [here](#) and [here](#) as a starting point or call a hotline for support. Do clinics in the state where I am accessing an abortion require a [mandatory waiting period](#)?



Housing + Recovery



Do I have a safe place to stay during a waiting period and/or after my abortion? Recovery ranges from days to weeks with regards to bleeding, cramps, and emotional health. Rest as much as possible. Eat warm foods and those that will help you restore energy. Place a hot water pack on your body when you experience cramps. Massage your body and take pain medication as needed.

Funds

How can I pay for this? Check to see if your insurance plan covers abortions and if so, which clinics are covered. For transportation, housing, aftercare, and the procedure itself, create a rough budget. Look up abortion funds [here](#) for support to cover the costs of your abortion.



Abortion Resources

ABORTION SUPPORT

[National Network of Abortion Funds](#)

[National Abortion Federation](#)

[Jane's Due Process](#) (Texas)

[Exhale](#) (Post Abortion Care)

[All-Options](#)

[ReproCare Healthline](#)

[HEART Reproductive Justice Fund](#)

FOR MORE INFORMATION

[Guttmacher Institute](#) (Interactive Travel Map, Resources and Analysis on Abortion Bans)

[Kaiser Family Foundation](#) (Abortion Statistics and Policies)

[Planned Parenthood](#) (What to expect, Find a Clinic)

[Center for Reproductive Rights](#) (Litigation, Policy Advocacy)

EXTERNAL READINGS

Bowen, D. L. 2006. "Reproduction: Abortion and Islam – Overview." Encyclopedia of Women and Islamic Cultures, Volume III: Family, Body, Sexuality and Health. Leiden and Boston: Brill

Mattson, Ingrid. "Gender and Sexuality in Islamic Bioethics." Islamic Bioethics: Current Issues and Challenges. 2018.

Al-Matary and Ali: Controversies and considerations regarding the termination of pregnancy for Foetal Anomalies in Islam. BMC Medical Ethics 2014 15:10.

Zucker, Jessica. Why so many women are forced to lie about terminating wanted pregnancies. 13 Oct 2020. Available at: <https://www.instyle.com/beauty/health-fitness/terminating-pregnancy-for-medical-reasons>. Content warning for pregnancy loss and termination.