

***Zina* and the Enigma of Reproductive/Sex Education for Muslim Youth in Indonesia.**

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Introduction

With a population of around 210 million people, ninety percent of whom are Muslim, Indonesia constitutes the world's largest Islamic country (although it is not an Islamic state). Indonesia also has a relatively young population with 20 percent of its people aged between 15 and 24. It is thus critical that the health education needs of Indonesian youth are addressed in a manner that not only protects their individual human rights, but that also protects those rights within the framework of the welfare of the *umma* (wider Islamic community). In this paper, I focus on the right of Muslim youth to receive comprehensive reproductive/sex education that is religiously appropriate. Reproductive/sex education is in itself a critical human right, which meets the desire of young people to understand their bodies, emotions and relationships, and provides them with the information needed to negotiate their reproductive and sexual health. It is thus linked with young people's rights to health, to their sexual rights, to their ability to negotiate marital rights, and to their rights to use contraception and control their fertility. Receiving appropriate education about their bodies and their sexuality also falls under the right of Muslim youth to comprehensive Islamic education (Sanjakdar, 2004: 144).

Initially, this paper discusses premarital sex among young Muslims in Indonesia and establishes the need for comprehensive reproductive/sex education in light of current patterns of sexual behavior and the reproductive health status of Indonesian youth. I then explore the Islamic notion of *zina* (illicit sex, or sex outside of marriage) to determine its significance for young people's understandings of premarital sex and the possibilities of providing Islamic reproductive/sex education. These earlier discussions inform the final section of the paper, which analyses the compatibility of Islamic thought relating to *zina* with the development of



religiously and culturally appropriate sex education for Muslim Indonesian youth. This analysis considers the moral framework of Islam in relation to education, reproduction and sexuality, as well specific topics that may be incorporated in an Islamic curriculum.

While many young Muslims in Indonesia maintain devout attitudes towards premarital sex (and *zina* in general), it is crucial that we do not ignore the ever-present gap between the social reality of Muslims and their religious doctrine, a gap that is present for all faiths. Moreover, there is rarely absolute consensus within any community or age group on the interpretation of the Qur'an and *hadith* with regard to sexuality, gender and human rights. The lack of consensus stems not only from the different power dynamics invested in the interpretations of key texts, but also from the limited religious education of many Muslims that is particularly salient for poor communities and those with low literacy rates. This means that the relevant textual sources need to be examined to reveal their potential for promoting the reproductive health and rights of young Muslims in specific cultural contexts.

Indonesian youth and sexuality

It is now widely established that the prevalence of premarital sex in Indonesian societies, particularly in large cities, is rising (Utomo, 2002). Estimates of the prevalence of premarital sex in contemporary Indonesia are as high as 42%, falsifying the claim that premarital sex does not occur in Muslim societies (Herartri, 2005). A significant number of studies on youth sexuality, both qualitative and quantitative, have established the reasons for increasing rates of premarital sex, as well as the health consequences of this (Beazley, 2003; Bellows 2003; Bennett, 2005; Sitmorang, 1999; Utomo, 2002). The impact of universal education and women's increasing participation in education, along with the Government of Indonesia's (GIO) promotion of later marriage, have significantly extended the single life of young Indonesians. When people marry later the number of relationships they are likely to have prior to marriage can also be expected to increase. With postponed marriage and growing aspirations in terms of education, career and economic security, the duration of courtship and the length of typical engagements for Indonesian youth are also tending to increase (Bennett, 2005). When relationships prior to marriage are extended many Indonesian youth now choose to explore sexual intimacy within those relationships, particularly when they feel confident that their relationships will eventuate in marriage. Other cultural influences on the shifting sexual attitudes and practices of Indonesian youth include their wider exposure to global



discourses of sexuality such as *seks bebas* (free sex) that do not oppose premarital sexuality. For middle class Indonesian youth who are affluent and have ready access to the global media and consumerist lifestyles the positive association between *seks bebas*, individual freedom and modernity appears to be strongest (Utomo, 2002).

The increasing prevalence of premarital sex can in itself be seen as an issue of concern from an Islamic view point, because it contradicts the focus of Islam on promoting positive conjugal sexual relationships, and avoiding the negative consequences of sexual behavior when is not subject to social regulation. However, premarital sex that occurs without young people being equipped with the knowledge and skills to safely negotiate sexual relationships also represents a real and immanent threat to their health. The health consequences of early pregnancy and child birth are widely documented, as are the risks associated with unsafe abortion. While comprehensive statistics on the health burden of unwanted pregnancy are unavailable for Indonesia, it is estimated that between 15 and 20 percent of maternal deaths can be attributed to complications arising from unsafe abortion (Ministry of Health cited in Nurdiana et al. 2002: 137). Singarimbun has further approximated that 50 percent of induced abortions in Indonesia are in response to premarital pregnancy, and that up to 25 percent of all abortions performed are among young unmarried women (Singarimbun cited in Nurdiana et al., 2002: 125). Due to the illegality of providing contraceptives to unmarried people via the Indonesian Family Planning Programme the risk of unwanted pregnancy and abortion is exaggerated for young women (Bennett, 2001). Additionally, the lack of comprehensive reproductive/sex education for Muslim youth increases both the risks that they will have unsafe sex and the likelihood that they will make the decision to have premarital sex without being adequately informed of the possible consequences. Attempts to promote family based reproductive/sex education in Indonesia have been largely unsuccessful due to the fact that the majority of parents simply do not have the knowledge, skills or confidence to educate their children effectively (Utomo, 2003). Moreover, widespread intergenerational taboos concerning communication about sex have yet to be eroded (Bennett, 2000).

Recent research has established the high levels of false information Indonesian youth hold about reproduction and sexuality, as well as their explicit desire to better understand their bodies and the social and religious aspects of sexuality. Ethnographic research with young Indonesian women between the ages of 16 and 24 revealed that the majority had little or



incomplete understandings of puberty, menstruation, and the symptoms of common reproductive health problems that are not necessarily related to sexuality. These included conditions such as: reproductive tract infections, premenstrual syndrome, endometriosis, infertility and the various forms of cancer affecting the reproductive system. The majority of young women and men also fail to comprehend exactly how conception occurs, and do not know how to avoid pregnancy or disease, including the transmission of HIV.ⁱ Many youth do not understand actual technical definitions of female and male virginity, nor do they understand exactly what masturbation is. All of these issues were raised regularly by young women in education workshops conducted in a regional city in Eastern Indonesia (Bennett 2005: Chap 6). This lack of knowledge is problematic for young people regardless of whether they have premarital sex, as this information is essential to maintaining sexual health once they are married.

From an Islamic perspective, many young Indonesians also lack an understanding of core teachings about sexuality that relate to their rights and obligations as Muslims. For instance, many Indonesian youth do not have a strong sense that the stipulation against premarital sex applies equally to men and women. Among those who do, there is often an awareness of the unfairness of sexual double standards in Indonesian society that perpetuate the tolerance of male promiscuity and the hyper-regulation of female sexuality (Bennett, 2005). Additionally, many youth are not aware of Muslim women's right to sexual consent in marriage and men's obligation not to insist upon sex if their wives are unwell, tired or unwilling. This is partly perpetuated by the predominance of sexist interpretations of popular *hadith*, which actually contradict the inherent equality of women and men in the Qur'an and men's obligation to protect their wives from any harm (including possible violations of their rights within the family) (Idrus and Bennett, 2003). Another common gap in the Islamic knowledge of young Indonesians is that according to the Qur'an both partners are entitled to sexual satisfaction within marriage. Most alarmingly, many young Muslims do not understand the difference between *zina* and sex within marriage. They incorrectly translate the stipulations against *zina* to apply to conjugal sex. Consequently, they suffer from a negative attitude towards human sexuality as a whole. When acts that are *haram* (religiously prohibited) are misunderstood - it leads to their stigmatization. The stigmatization of sexuality leads to shame, guilt and denial, which is not how sexuality as a whole is represented in the Qur'an. For young Muslims to develop an accurate understanding of how Islam constructs and values human



sexuality they require comprehensive reproductive/sex education that is developed from and taught according to an Islamic perspective. In the following section of the paper I focus on defining *zina* in a textual sense to provide a theoretical foundation for understanding its salience in providing reproductive/sex education for young Indonesian Muslims.

***Zina* and the social regulation of sexuality**

A straightforward definition of *zina* includes all acts of sexual intercourse between a woman and man that occur outside of a religiously sanctioned marriage. *Zina* is also popularly referred to as fornication or illicit copulation within Islamic law (*shariah*). The term *zina* appears explicitly in the Qur'an, initially in the context of a general warning against adultery that translates as:

Nor come nigh to adultery: for it is a shameful (deed) and an evil opening the road (to other evils)
(Surah 17: Verse 32).

In dominant interpretations of *shariah*, *zina* is also understood to include the following acts: rape, incest, extramarital affairs, prostitution, premarital sex and statutory rape, and homosexual relationships. In the cases of rape (outside of marriage), statutory rape and incest, both the man and woman involved are considered to have engaged in *zina*, as it is the acts themselves that are forbidden. However when such violence is perpetrated by men, a woman or child who is coerced into having sexual relations against their will is not technically considered to be the guilty party, and therefore should not be punished for *zina*. According to the Qur'an, a man who has perpetrated these acts is the guilty party and should be punished as such.ⁱⁱ

The status of marital rape for Muslims remains highly contested, and is rarely considered to constitute a form of *zina*. This relates to the widespread reluctance to acknowledge Muslim women's right to refuse sexual intercourse within marriage, based on the belief that a woman's consent to marry is synonymous with her consent to have sex with her husband on request. The fundamental rights of Muslim women to sexual consent and bodily autonomy within marriage continue to be debated world wide and are strongly defended by Muslim activists, feminists and male Muslim reformists (see Masudi, 1997; Idrus & Bennett, 2003).



Muslim rights advocates and Muslim feminists in Indonesia argue convincingly that marital rape should be legally recognized under *shariah*, on the basis of their analysis of popular *hadith* and Qur'anic verses referring to marital relations. The most often cited *hadith* regarding women's sexual obligations in marriage is:

A woman who refuses her husband may be cursed by an angel until morning. (cited in Masudi, 2000:11)

The most sexist interpreters of this *hadith* claim that it establishes a woman's refusal of her husband's request for sex as a sin, and further that it is acceptable for a husband to strike his wife if she does refuse him (Idrus & Bennett, 2003: 45). More egalitarian interpretations of this *hadith* argue that it indicates a woman has the right to negotiate sexual consent with her husband if she has a reason not to engage in sex, for instance if she is unwell, tired or is menstruating. Men's right to physically punish their wives in the event of sexual refusal is strongly refuted by exposing the liberty taken when men falsely interpret the consequence of an "angels' curse" as giving them the right to strike their wives. This particular *hadith* is so highly contested that some interpreters suggest it has no significance at all in determining men's right to demand sexual compliance from their wives. They argue that the curse of angels cannot be understood to imply harsh or negative consequences due to the purity of angels and their closeness to Allah. Rather they interpret an Angel's curse as a lullaby intended to sooth marital discontent until morning when all should be forgotten (Bennett, 2005).

Another *hadith* less commonly cited, but one that explicitly defends women's right to sexual consent is:

The Prophet Muhammad said; "do not pull out your penis without your wife's consent" (Ibn Majah cited in Idrus, 2003).

The meaning of this *hadith* is much clearer than the more popular reference to an angel's curse and is less open to co-option by those who seek to continue the historical denial of Muslims women's rights to sexual autonomy within marriage.

While the issue of marital rape is commonly dictated by the preference for emphasizing popular *hadith*, the Qur'an is the superior source of Islamic jurisprudence and should dictate over the *hadith*. It is when we examine the Qur'an in relation to marital rights and obligations



that the right of women to sexual consent is more clearly defended. Firstly, the Qur'an emphasizes the principle of *Mu'asyarah bil ma'ruf* which refers to Muslims obligation to care for anyone under their protection. According to this principle and other relevant Qur'anic verses, it is men and women's duty to care for one another, and that to cause harm to one's spouse is considered equal to causing harm to one's self - and is forbidden. This is highlighted in the following verse:

They (wives) are your garments and ye (husbands) are their garments (Surah 2: Article 187).

Idrus (2003) argues that this verse establishes that as one another's garments, women and men have a duty to provide each other with mutual support, comfort and protection. Further more, Idrus observes that garments have both public and private functions, and thus the obligations of men and women to one another are equally significant in both the private and public realms (ibid.).

A second principle that is highly relevant to sexual consent in marriage is that of mutual consultation between Muslims, emphasized in the following verse:

And those who harken to their Lord, and establish regular prayer; who conduct their affairs by mutual consultation (Surah 42: Article 38).

Idrus (2003) explains that the key word in this verse is consultation, and that its significance is in directing Muslims to conduct all their relationships – including marital relations – through a process of consultation. Consultation is valued as the ideal mode for Muslims to conduct their affairs as it is understood to prevent egotism and selfishness, whilst also ensuring that Muslims remain aware of and meet their obligations to others. The Qur'anic emphasis on rights and obligations provides powerful sustenance to the struggle to have women's right to sexual consent within marriage upheld and to have men's obligation to respect this right fully recognized. The issue of women's right to sexual consent in marriage is highly salient for young Muslims, and for the provision of Islamic reproductive education, precisely because it embodies the potential to either promote or deny the importance of gender equality within Islam.

The inclusiveness of the concept of *zina* is a critical issue mediating the sexual relations of young Muslims in contemporary times, as although *zina* technically refers to sexual



intercourse in the Qur'an, it is often interpreted to include non-penetrative forms of sexual contact. Acts such as kissing, embracing, hand-holding, petting, oral sex, mutual masturbation and other non-penetrative forms of sexual interaction are not explicitly mentioned in the Qur'an. They are however, often considered to fall under the concepts of both *aurat* (the private body) and *zina*. The concept of *aurat* relates to the modesty of a person's body and the requirement that the private areas of the body are not seen by others outside of sanctioned intimate relationships. Unmarried women are required to protect the private parts of their body from being seen or touched by any male who is not their guardian. For many Muslims, the concepts of *aurat* and *zina* are collapsed and the result is the belief that any form of sexual contact outside of marriage is *haram* (forbidden). Yet, young Indonesian Muslims who do engage in premarital sexual contact are also inclined to adopt less strict notions of *zina* in order to feel comfortable with their choices. For instance, young women who are sexually active prior to marriage - but refrain from intercourse, may explain their behaviour as acceptable because they have avoided penetrative sex and thus consider themselves to be virgins (see Bennett, 2005: Chapter 2). Young people's tendency to focus on sexual intercourse as the definitive act in the case of *zina* reflects it is most commonly associated with heterosexual sex.ⁱⁱⁱ

The consequences of committing *zina* need to be clarified for young people, and are equally as pertinent as the definition of *zina*. The Qur'an explicitly specifies the requirements for proving a person guilty of committing *zina* and the legal punishment for those found to be guilty of this crime. Due to the fact that the burden of proof, which requires four witnesses, is so difficult to establish - physical punishment for *zina* is rarely considered desirable or feasible in most moderate Muslim societies such as Indonesia. Surah 24 (Articles 2 to 13) are concerned with the importance of establishing charges of *zina* beyond any doubt, and with the imperative of avoiding false charges of *zina* against women in particular.

The woman and the man guilty of adultery or fornication, flog each of them with a hundred stripes. Let not compassion move you in their case, in a matter prescribed by Allah, if ye believe in Allah and the Last Day: and let a party of the believers witness their punishment (Article 2).

Let no man guilty of adultery or fornication marry any but a woman similarly guilty, or an unbeliever, nor let any but such a man or an unbeliever marry such a woman: to the Believers such a thing is forbidden (Article 3).

And those who launch a charge against chaste women, and produce not four witnesses (to support their allegations)-flog them with eighty stripes; and reject their evidence ever after: for such men are wicked transgressors (Article 4).



Unless they repent thereafter and mend (their conduct); for Allah is Oft-Forgiving, Most Merciful (Article 5).

And for those who launch a charge against their spouses, and have (in support) no evidence but their own-their solitary evidence (can be received) if they bear witness four times (with an oath) by Allah that they are solemnly telling the truth (Article 6).

And the fifth (oath) (should be) that they solemnly invoke the curse of Allah on themselves if they tell a lie (Article 7).

But it would avert the punishment from the wife, if she bears witness four times (with an oath) by Allah, that (her husband) is telling a lie (Article 8).

And the fifth (oath) should be that she solemnly invokes the wrath of Allah on herself if (her accuser) is telling the truth (Article 9).

Why did they not produce four witnesses? Since they produce not witnesses, they verily are liars in the sight of Allah (Article 13).

The articles in this verse establish not only the ideal proof of and punishment for *zina*, but also the vulnerability of female sexual reputation to slander and the undesirability of false accusation of sexual misconduct against Muslim women. The punishment for falsely accusing a woman of *zina* is not mild, and yet is an aspect of the teachings on *zina* that is too commonly ignored. Thus, the prevalence of sexual gossip, and the damaging social consequences of such gossip for the sexual reputation of young Indonesian women, is a serious issue that can be explicitly addressed in reference to the Qur'an.

Another critical observation of contemporary Muslim scholars regarding this verse is the tendency to ignore the full burden of proof required when charging individuals with the crime of *zina* (Quraishi 2004: 4). Quraishi (1994) asserts that the evidentiary rule of quadruple testimony before a Muslim court requires nothing less than the actual witnessing of penetration during sexual intercourse. Moreover, she argues that Islamic law requires all four witnesses to be mature, sane and of upright character, and that eyewitness accounts of *zina* must not be attained by violating a defendant's privacy (ibid). The likely hood of establishing four credible eye witness accounts of sexual penetration between an unmarried woman and man thus becomes miniscule, and should be further discouraged by the fact that the punishment for unsubstantiated slander is not mild. Because most sexual activity is conducted in private away from the public eye, the majority of sexual unions (whether they occur within or independently of marriage) cannot be lawfully established as *zina*. Consequently, many Islamic scholars have come to emphasise the crime of *zina* as one of offence to public indecency rather than being concerned with private sexual acts (Minaret College, 2003: 61). The defence of public decency has become heavily invested in Muslim notions of modesty,



and often underlies Muslims discomfort with the overt and sexually explicit nature of much of western popular culture.

Nowhere in the Qur'an is there mention of pregnancy or sexually transmitted infections as constituting proof of *zina*. Neither of these physical consequences of sexual relations can be determined as proof of *zina*, because they do not infer that the both sexual partners were willing parties. The fact that there is no textual reference to these physical conditions as proof of *zina* in the Qur'an is significant - particularly for women, for if pregnancy was widely considered to be acceptable proof of *zina* women would be rendered even more vulnerable to false accusations than men (Quraishi, 2001). In addition, according to the Qur'an women who have been found guilty of *zina* are excused from the physical punishment of lashing if they are pregnant, in order to protect their health and that of their child (Masudi, 1997).

The fundamental purpose of the prohibition of *zina* is understood to be the regulation of sexual relationships for the protection of the *umma* (Muslim community). The considered benefits of this regulation include clarity of paternity, which then has numerous perceived advantages in terms of determining inheritance rights, child support, preventing incest and ensuring the appropriate transmission of skills, status and roles from one generation to the next. Prohibiting adultery is also thought to prevent emotional injury, and result in greater social harmony and familial stability. In terms of the first of the five pillars of Islam, which is complete surrender to Allah, the prohibition is in itself extremely significant because it is decreed by Allah and therefore must be followed as a demonstration of faith.

From an historical perspective, the social regulation of sexuality in the time of the Prophet (6th Century AD) throws significant light on how critical the stipulations on *zina* and marriage were for the protection of women and children. Prior to Islam, there were no widely recognized laws to protect women from forced sex. Thus in its historical context, Islam's insistence that sex be confined to marriage and that marriage requires mutual consent of women and men, can be seen as significant commitment to establishing women' right to sexual consent. Moreover, the prevalence of slavery in the time of the Prophet was also associated with the exploitation of women slaves by their male slave owners (Ali, 2005). By insisting that sexual unions with women slaves were legitimated by marriage, the *shariah* provided the first grounds for such women to claim the same financial support for themselves



and their children that were previously only available to free women. The stipulation of *zina* is also understood to have been motivated by the concern for orphans, who were unable to identify their fathers due to the lack of sexual accountability in pre-Islamic society. A thorough explanation of the benefits, both historical and contemporary for respecting the principles behind the stipulation for *zina* should be an integral aspect of Islamic reproductive/sex education.

Islamic reproductive/sex education for Indonesian youth

There is extensive evidence from both non-Western and Western settings that comprehensive reproductive/sex education delays the age of sexual initiation for youth, and also significantly reduces the incidence of unplanned premarital pregnancies and STIs among youth (WHO, 1997). This evidence fortifies the argument that reproductive education can assist young Muslims to abide by the religious ideal of premarital abstinence, rather than encouraging them to have premarital sex. The dominant moral preference among Muslims for premarital abstinence is not necessarily in conflict with the provision of reproductive education. The moral imperative of preventing reproductive and sexual morbidity among youth, which is strongly emphasised by advocates of reproductive education, compliments Islamic stipulations against premarital sex for the purposes of protecting the *umma*. The significance attributed to the welfare of Muslim women as mothers in the Qur'an also supports the moral imperative of a preventative approach to maternal and reproductive health, which is most effectively achieved through early education. Moreover, the perceived social benefits of prohibiting *zina* such as clarity of paternity, and the promotion of harmonious families and social relations, are highly compatible with Indonesian state ideology.

Whilst there are numerous examples of how comprehensive reproductive/sex education better equips young people to take responsibility for their reproductive health and sexual relationships, there is also extensive proof that over-simplified approaches that aim to reduce premarital sex – such as the “just say no” campaigns in the United States - are not effective (Salter, 2001). Campaigns that merely instruct youth, without educating or empowering them, fail to have any impact on delaying premarital sex or improving the health status of youth who do engage in premarital sex. The Islamic imperative of protecting the *umma* is thus



fundamentally compatible with an approach to reproductive/sex education that equips young Muslims with the knowledge, skills and personal confidence to make responsible decisions.

Discussion, teaching and learning about sex, sexuality and sexual health, are not taboo or opposed in Islam. In fact, given the centrality of sexuality in human affairs, in both private and public spheres, sexuality occupies a prominent place in Islam (Sanjakdar, 2004: 144).

As Sanjakdar argues above, Islamic understandings of reproduction and sexuality are inherently compatible with the provision of reproductive/sex education, regardless of cultural sexual taboos that may be overlaid onto local understandings of Islam. Sexual taboos can be countered by educating Muslims to appreciate that according to Islam sexual energy and human sexuality are considered to be innately positive (see Mernissi, 1987). Sexual relationships within marriage are not justified exclusively by the reproductive imperative, as is the case with Catholicism. Sexual relations within marriage are understood to fulfil the human desires for physical pleasure and emotional intimacy, and not as exclusively for the purposes of procreation. This differs substantially from popular Catholic understandings of sexuality as innately sinful. According to Islam the human infant is born without sin, while according to Catholicism the human infant is the result of the original sin.

Progressive Indonesian scholars concerned with reproductive/sex education have identified the importance of adopting a “sex positive” approach when teaching young people about their sexuality (Pangkahila, 1997). The rationale for this approach is that representing sexuality and the human body in positive terms encourages young people to value themselves and their future partners. It also reduces shame and young people’s reluctance to discuss reproductive/sexual health concerns and to access health services. A sex positive approach embodies the potential to dispel the stigma many youth attach to sexuality when they misinterpret the stipulations against *zina*, and conflate the notions of *zina* and sexual intercourse. Just as importantly, a sex positive approach also establishes a sense of entitlement to sexual expression and sexual satisfaction, which resonates comfortably with Muslim understandings of the importance of sexual satisfaction for both partners within marriage (see Othman, 2000: 88). Emphasising the benefits of abstinence prior to marriage and the attainment of a healthy conjugal relationship should be equally as important as demonstrating the risks associated with premarital sex for young Muslims. The prohibition of unsubstantiated accusations of *zina*, and sexual gossip in general, should also be stressed in



Islamic sex education and has the potential to lessen both the personal and social injury so often caused in Indonesian societies by unsubstantiated sexual slander.

In terms of the actual topics that are suitable for inclusion in an Islamic reproductive/sex education curricula, cues can be taken both from the Qur'an, *hadith* and successful examples of educational material currently employed within the religious and personal development programs of *pesantren* (Islamic schools). Topics widely addressed in Islamic schools include interpretations of *zina*, sexual consent; the right to marriage and divorce; men's and women's rights with regard to polygamy; spousal rights and obligations in marriage (including the right to sexual satisfaction); the rights to contraception, family planning and abortion; and access to quality reproductive health services. The standard reproductive/sex education topics of puberty, human reproductive physiology, body image – including personal modesty, conception and fetal development, child birth, and pre and antenatal care are also highly appropriate and can be taught in a manner that reinforces Islamic family values and the status of women as mothers. Fetal development in particular, is a subject where Qur'anic knowledge is extensive and parallels bio-medical understandings, which provides a strong grounding for young Muslims to feel that their religion is innately concerned with human reproduction.

The prevention of STIs - including HIV/AIDS and blood borne viruses, has been one of the strongest public health justifications for providing young people sexual health education. In light of Indonesia's rising HIV prevalence rates, and the fact that the primary mode of transmission is heterosexual sex, the inclusion of STI education is imperative. Conservative arguments, that falsely claim that Muslims are not vulnerable to HIV, can be viewed as morally objectionable for two reasons. Firstly, because such an argument directly contradicts the evidence that Muslims are being infected with HIV at an increasing rate and is thus based on untruth. Secondly, the argument ignores the moral imperative of protecting the *umma* and ensuring the survival of humanity, as denial of the problem will not prevent further infection nor will it meet the needs of those Muslims who are already HIV positive.

In addition to those subjects that are explicitly connected with health, there are a broad range of issues for Muslims that engage directly with sexuality in areas such as prayer, fasting, bathing and performing the *haj* (Sanjakdar, 2004). Thus, a comprehensive approach to Islamic reproductive/sex education should incorporate the Islamic worldview and lifestyle in its



curricula. The duty of fostering an ideal Islamic character among Muslim youth should also be integrated into the teaching of reproductive/sex education. Fostering personal qualities such as modesty, kindness, honesty, fairness, forgiveness and faith are a central concern of Islamic education, as well as a prerequisite for marital and family relationships that are equal and harmonious.

Decision making and communication skills are widely understood as critical components in reproductive/sex education curricula and are highly compatible with an Islamic approach to communication which stresses mutual consultation. Teaching such skills ensures young people's ability to maintain their reproductive health, to negotiate premarital relationships in a manner that allows them to choose abstinence, and to foster satisfying conjugal relationships. Issues of gender equality are central to Muslim discussions of decision making, as are the issue of exercising rationality and personal autonomy. For young Muslims who experience significant generational and cultural differences with their parents, improved communication skills are also likely to improve family relationships.

In the Indonesian context, qualitative research with young people has also indicated what modes of reproductive/sex education are most compatible with their learning preferences and cultural styles of communication (Utomo, 2003; also see Bennett 2005: Chap 6). These preferences include single sex classes, teachers of the same sex, teachers who are specifically trained in the facilitation of reproductive/sex education, and opportunities for peer-education activities that involve problem solving and interactive styles of learning with friends. There is also general consensus among Muslim teachers and sex education providers that reproductive/sex education should be commensurate with age, maturity and physical development. There is also a widespread concern that the images and material used in reproductive/sex education should respect Islamic notions of modesty by illustrating human bodies and reproductive physiology in a manner that does not include crude or personalised images (Sanjakdar, 2004). In practice, this requires the avoidance of sexuality explicit photographs or films, and a preference for medical drawings and images in which specific individuals cannot be identified.

To conclude, Islam can no-longer be used as a scape goat in Indonesian society, by those who claim that the Islamic preference for the confinement of sex to marriage contradicts the need



for young people to receive comprehensive reproductive/sex education. In fact, Islam can best provide a moral framework for the provision of such education under the umbrella of Islamic education, which applies a holistic approach to the physical, moral and spiritual development of the person. The existing educational programs of *pesantren* and Islamic women's groups in Indonesia that provide reproductive/sex education for youth according to Islamic principles and using Islamic texts, demonstrate the compatibility and benefits of such an approach, which should be expanded at the national level.

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Endnotes

i In 2001 approximately 120,000 Indonesians were estimated to be living with HIV/AIDS and cumulative HIV/AIDS cases rose by 60% between 2000 and 2001 (MAP 2001).

ii This understanding of zina in the context of sexual coercion and violence against women is regrettably ignored under fundamentalist regimes that promote the punishment of innocent women accused of zina by condoning punishments such as stoning and honor killings (see Manji, 2003; MWL, 2004). However, such interpretations of zina are unpopular in Indonesia, and violence against women committed under such a false pretence is illegal according to the application of shariah in Indonesia.

iii Verses that refer to *zina* in the Qur'an do not explicitly refer to homosexual relations or acts commonly associated with homosexuality such as anal sex. However, homosexuality is widely interpreted as *haram* for Muslims, Surah 7, articles 81 to 84 refer explicitly to homosexuality as practiced by men and do not mention same sex relationships between women.

For ye who practices your lust on men in preference to women: ye are indeed a people transgressing beyond bounds (Surah 7: Article 81). And his people gave no answer but this: they said, 'Drive them (homosexuals) out of your city': these are indeed men who want to be clean and pure (Surah 7: Article



82). And we rained down on them (homosexuals) a shower (of brimstone): then see what was the end of those who indulged in sin and crime (Surah 7: Article 84).

One of the central lines of defense taken up by gay and lesbian Muslims and those seeking to argue for their right to freedom of sexuality, is the innate contradiction that the Qur'an at once denounces homosexuality, while simultaneously declaring that Allah alone "makes excellent all he creates" (cited in Manji, 2003: 26). Thus, many Muslim gays and lesbians understand themselves created as they are by Allah, and therefore argue that they possess the innate right to exist as they are.

