Prenatal Genetic Screening and the Muslim Patient: From the Jurisconsults’ Bench to the Clinical Bedside
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ABSTRACT

The current standard practice in American obstetric care includes offering a panel of genetic screening tests to all pregnant women. Subsequent confirmative testing often involves invasive procedures that entail a risk of spontaneous abortion. The benefits of prenatal testing may outweigh such risks if the patient would consider terminating a pregnancy affected by genetic abnormalities. However for a patient who does not see abortion as a “therapeutic” possibility the harms associated with risk of abortion and the psychological distress associated with false positive screening tests may overshadow any posited benefits. In this paper we examine prenatal genetic screening through an Islamic ethico-legal prism, exploring the moral status of the fetus, and the conditions under which abortion is Islamically permissible. By providing insight into Islamic moral reasoning we aim to clarify how Muslim patients may engage in decision-making regarding this issue and highlight factors that clinicians must weigh when offering prenatal genetic testing. During the course of analysis we highlight differences between secular and Islamic framing of the ethical discussion with a particular focus on clinician and patient-level concerns.