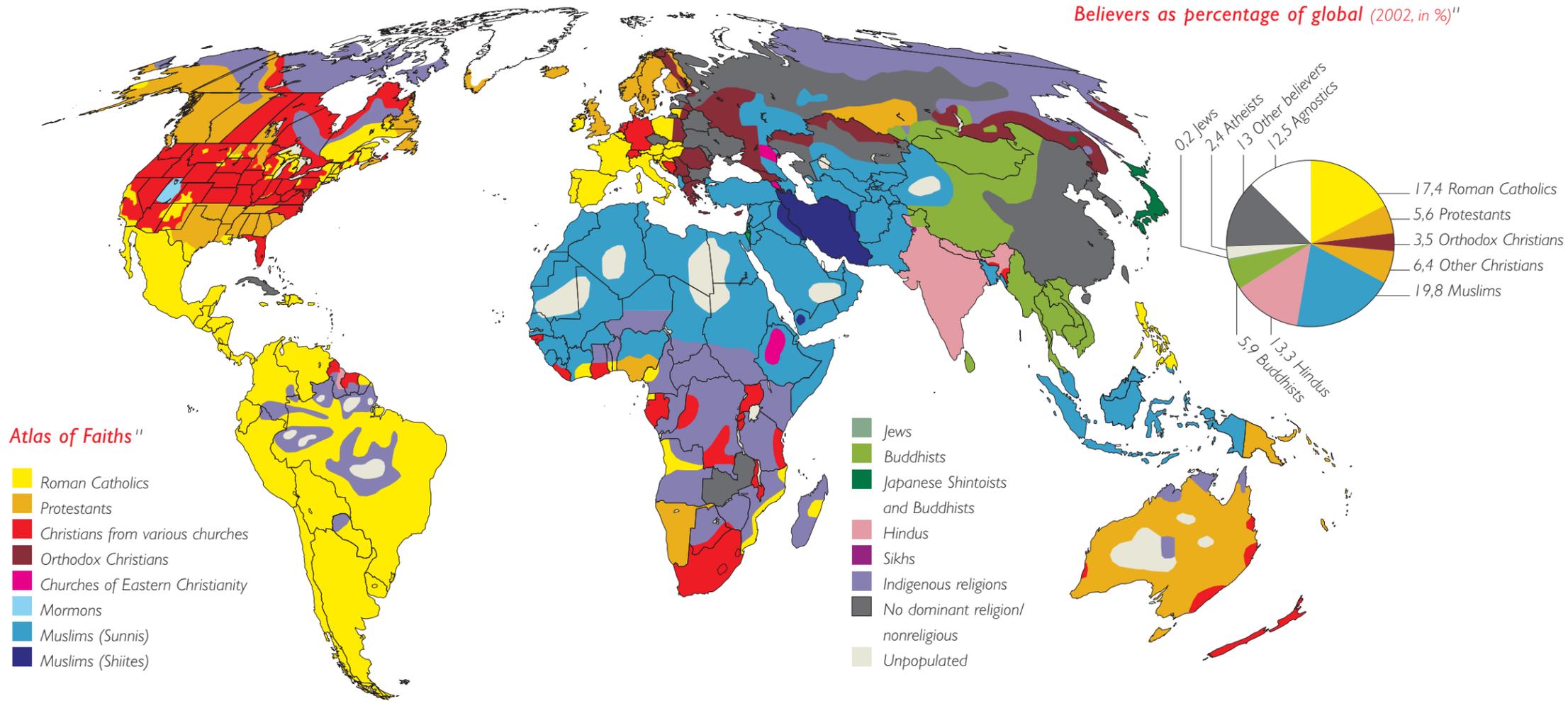


Believers as percentage of global (2002, in %)¹¹



reproductive health and religion



fact sheet

Religion in the crossfire between culture and society

Religions, as systems to explain the world and to cope with life, coin their surrounding cultures and are also influenced by them¹². Traditional societies advocate sexual education as a domain of the family. Religions do not deny the significant role that schools play in the field of sexual education, and they accept a comprehensive approach that tries to develop the personality of young people. As regards abortion, premarital or extramarital sexual intercourse, and homosexuality, confessions often strengthen the negative attitudes of traditional societies, which also manifest themselves in the respective legal system. Working together with religious organisations is of particular importance when it comes to the fighting of customs that are wrongly ascribed to religious commandments and that are harmful for women and their health.

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Photos

- Title A commemorative stamp promotes religious tolerance at a National Museum in Zanzibar; © 2005 Alfredo L. Fort, Courtesy of Photoshare
- People in Lalibela, Ethiopia, dress in white for a celebration of the day that the Virgin Mary returned to Ethiopia; © 2006 Greg S. Allgood, Courtesy of Photoshare
- Lama children (also called Dawa) have their midday meal at the Kie monastery, in Kaza (Lahulspiti), India; © 2005 Mrityunjay Awasthy, Courtesy of Photoshare
- In Syria, a man prays at an Armenian Orthodox church on Good Friday; © 2006 Elisabeth Kvernen, Courtesy of Photoshare
- A woman brings a baby for "religious cleansing" in the waters near Kathmandu, Nepal; © 2005 Eric Thompson, Courtesy of Photoshare
- A young Muslim girl attends class 5 at Zan Yari Primary School in Duhok, Kurdistan, Iraq; © 2005 Anthony Legg, Courtesy of Photoshare
- Rural church choir during a community ceremony; © 1998 Njamburi/Cabak ELS, Courtesy of Photoshare
- An elderly rabbi walks in Jerusalem, Israel; © Eric Thompson, Courtesy of Photoshare

The basis of this fact sheet are conversations with representatives of the respective religions. The contents of these conversations were summarised, and subsequently authorised by the respective conversational partners.

Positions of the various religions compared¹²

	Sexual education	Contraception	Desire for children	Abortion	STIs
Buddhism	through parents, religious leaders and school	self-responsible decision	all methods in consultation with the partner	self-responsible decision	condoms, abstinence, prevention
Islam	through parents, religious leaders and school	no abortive methods	homological insemination	accepted under specific circumstances	condoms, abstinence, prevention
Judaism	through parents, rabbis as teachers and school	not allowed: vasectomy/sterilisation, condoms	all methods in consultation with the partner	accepted under specific circumstances	abstinence, prevention
Catholicism	through parents and school	no abortive methods	adoption	not accepted	abstinence, prevention
Orthodoxy	through parents and school	no abortive methods	homological insemination	not accepted	condoms, abstinence, prevention
Protestantism	through parents and school	methods with anticonceptive effect	homological and heterological insemination	accepted under specific circumstances	condoms, abstinence, prevention

imprint

Editor

Austrian Society for Family Planning (ÖGF)
Homepage www.oegf.at

Cooperation Partner

International Planned Parenthood Federation European Network (IPPF EN)
Homepage www.ippfen.org

The publication was prepared with UNFPA financial support, but without UNFPA taking responsibility for content.

Die Österreichische Gesellschaft für Familienplanung ist Mitglied der International Planned Parenthood Federation European Network (IPPF EN)

Special thanks for the photograph to Photoshare
Homepage www.photoshare.org

The Austrian Society for Family Planning is a member International Planned Parenthood Federation European Network

Published in 2008

Translation Margit Rabl

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fact sheet

reproductive health and religion



Buddhism¹

Gender relationship The status of women depends on the surrounding culture that also coins their rights and possibilities. In spite of the culture-related fact that women do not have any rights, they still possess the right to inherit to be financially secured.

Marriage Women do not owe obedience to their husbands, but the surrounding culture might demand that they obey their husbands and that they give birth to a certain number of children. Before a divorce (in civil jurisprudence), it has to be seen to that the family is sufficiently secured.

Sexuality and sexual satisfaction are a part of life. Practicing premarital and extramarital sexual intercourse depends on one's own decision.

Comprehensive sexual education might be disapproved of by some cultures. **Homosexuality** Practicing homosexuality depends on one's own decision. In Asia, homosexuality is often practiced due to culture-related commandments (virginity, etc.).

Contraception The use of contraceptives depends on the respective culture and on the partner's consent. It is not mandatory to have children, and everyone can freely decide if s/he wants to have children or not.

Abortion Having an abortion depends on a woman's own decision; it should be discussed with the partner and can be decided together.

Desire for children The modern methods of reproductive medicine are acceptable if having a child is important for a person's wellbeing. Talking about it with the partner is necessary for taking the decision.

STIs/HIV/AIDS Any kind of protection is recommendable, harming oneself or another person is to be disapproved of.

In buddhism, everyone carries individual responsibility for one's own life. Every action and each thought has consequences everyone has to deal with themselves. Not buddhism itself has developed explicit positions regarding sexual and reproductive health, but the cultures where buddhism has spread.

The Orthodox Churches⁶

Gender relationship There is no difference between men and women. The participation of women in pastoral life is important. The ordination of women priests has hitherto been forbidden, but is currently a matter of discussion. **Marriage** is a sacrament that has to serve the people. Married men can be ordained deacons and priests. Marriage or remarriage after ordination is not allowed. The church advocates singular marriage, but in the case of marriage failure, a religious divorce is possible twice. Divorce is performed by a bishop. **Sexuality** is the private matter of a couple, except if pastoral advice is sought. God's instruction to be fruitful and to multiply has already been fulfilled. According to Saint John Chrysostom, sexuality shall "satisfy the lust of the flesh". Premarital and extramarital sex are disapproved of. Sexual intercourse between people who intend to marry is tolerated. **Homosexuality** Homosexuals are not condemned, but they cannot be ordained priests. Homosexual marriages are not advocated.

Contraception Modern contraceptive methods are allowed, and couples may receive individual counselling through a priest by request. **Abortion** is not tolerated and leads to the exclusion from sacraments – from which depends on the respective situation. **Desire for children** Children should be the fruit of the love between husband and wife; thus, both sperm and egg should stem from the couple. There is no official positions as regards sperm and egg donation or surrogacy. Preimplantation diagnostics is a kind of selection – the church is still seeking a position that corresponds to both the church doctrine as well as the reality of society. **STIs/HIV/AIDS** People have to be sensitised to the responsibility towards themselves in order to prevent infection. Protection through condoms is the safest way to prevent infection with STIs and HIV/AIDS.

The Orthodox Churches try to find solutions for the problems of their members by means of individual conversations.

Islam²

Gender relationship Men and women are equal, and their relationship is determined by mutual responsibility. The Koran knows the obligation to protect women, and in some migrant communities – caused by the situation that their members represent a minority – this is manifested as paternalism. Wearing an Islamic headscarf – a commandment that is derived from the Koran where it says that women should wear "scarfs that fall down on the shoulders", and from statements of scholars – is not important in the presence of other women or the husband, as well as of other male persons when it would be theoretically not possible to marry them.

Marriage is a civil contract with a moral dimension. In the case of divorce, the woman can keep the morning gift and she has to be financially secured. Should the situation arise, the religious divorce must be allowed by the husband. **Sexuality** Women have the right to a fulfilled sex life. During menstruation and 40 days after childbirth, penetrative sex is forbidden, afterwards, a ritual bath is obligatory. During Ramadan, sexual intercourse is allowed only after sunset. Premarital and extramarital sex are forbidden.

Homosexuality is not regarded as an illness, but practicing homosexuality is disapproved of and it is considered a sin. (These statements are particularly related to male homosexuality.) Homosexual marriage is not allowed. **Contraception** In most cases, the woman decides which contraceptive method to use. Sterilisation/vasectomy is only acceptable if medically indicated. As regards emergency contraception, no position is taken.

Abortion Human life has a high value. Abortion is tolerated if the pregnancy puts the woman's life at risk or if it is a psychological strain for her (e.g. if the pregnancy is the result of war-related rape, for example in Bosnia) **Desire for children** Children have the right to know who their biological parents are. Sperm donation or egg donation of strangers are forbidden. As regards surrogacy or preimplantation diagnostics, no position is taken. **STIs/HIV/AIDS** All measures to prevent infections are advocated.

The Koran does not know stoning as a punishment for adultery, FGM, child marriages or a preference for sons.

The Protestant And Reformed Churches⁷

Gender relationship Men and women are equal. In most Protestant churches, women are allowed to obtain clerical positions. **Marriage** According to Luther, marriage is a "worldly thing" and not a sacrament. A marriage lasts for a lifetime, but divorce is tolerated to prevent harm and is accepted for reasons of mercy; the civil act of divorce is sufficient. Members of the clergy are allowed to marry. **Sexuality** serves not only the purpose of multiplication, but is also important to strengthen the bond of togetherness. Premarital sex within stable partnerships is accepted, extramarital sex does not correspond with the concept of marriage.

Homosexuality, as well as blessing ceremonies for homosexual couples that are performed by some churches, are currently controversial matters of discussion in the Protestant and Reformed Churches. The initial point of this discussion is the love between two people, promiscuity is not advocated. Discrimination against homosexual people is disapproved of. There is also no discrimination against homosexual priests. **Contraception** as well as premarital or extramarital sexuality are a matter of each couple's choice and decision. Sterilisation/vasectomy and the use of intrauterine devices are accepted. There is no official position as regards emergency contraception. **Abortion** is the killing of an unborn child and not a method of contraception. Terminating a pregnancy is tolerable only if the pregnancy puts the life and the mental and physical health of the woman at risk. Being pregnant with a disabled child must not be considered a damage.

Desire for children Methods of modern reproduction medicine are accepted, but as regards egg donation and surrogacy, reservations are expressed. Final positions as far as preimplantation diagnostics, supernumerary embryos and stem cell research are concerned, are matters of current discussions. **STIs/HIV/AIDS** Responsible sexual behaviour and comprehensive sexual education programmes are necessary.

The Protestant and Reformed Churches emphasise the freedom of consciousness as an integral part of a person's identity.

Judaism³

Gender relationship Men and women are equal, but they have different tasks to fulfill. Jewish women care for the following of a religious lifestyle within the family at home, while Jewish men are responsible for religious duties outside the family. They share the responsibility for both their family life and their religious life. Men and women are usually educated separately to avoid sexual contacts before marriage. **Marriage** is a contract that financially secures women in the case of divorce. Children are desired. Divorce is not desired, but tolerated and it is carried out by a rabbinical court. Married women are obliged to cover their hair in the presence of strangers. **Sexuality** The husband has to give his wife sexual pleasure. Extramarital sex is intolerable, and premarital sex is forbidden, but not considered a "sin". Married women are obliged to take a ritual bath (Mikvah) to achieve ritual purity after menstruation or childbirth. Abstaining from sexual intercourse is demanded during and seven days after menstruation, on Yom Kippur (Day of Atonement) and on Tisha B'Av (commemoration of the destruction of the temples in Jerusalem). **Homosexuality** is forbidden, homosexual marriage is not an issue. **Contraception** The contraceptive method chosen should not affect sexual pleasure – therefore, abstinence is not practiced to prevent unwanted pregnancies. The use of diaphragms is currently discussed; sterilisation/vasectomy and the use of condoms/femidoms are forbidden. Methods that prevent egg implantation are accepted. **Abortion** is justified if the pregnancy endangers the life and/or the health of the woman, or if the fetus is seriously mentally or physically disabled. **Desire for children** Sperm or egg donation – unless anonymous – and surrogacy (the "mother" is the woman who gives birth to the child) are accepted in special cases. Stem cell research is accepted, but preimplantation diagnostics are accepted only under strict conditions. **STIs/HIV/AIDS** Since the use of condoms is forbidden, abstaining from sexual intercourse is recommended; for couples in which one partner has AIDS, separation is recommended.

Judaism considers the preservation of health and the preservation of life as premier values.

Other Christian Religions

The Old Catholic Church⁸ leaves decisions regarding family planning to their members, remarriage in church is possible under specific circumstances, homosexual couples are treated with respect and tolerance, ordaining women as priests is allowed, abortion – no justified method of family planning – is tolerated in certain cases, using condoms for protection against HIV/AIDS is advocated, in-vitro fertilisation is seen positively, but there are differentiated positions as regards preimplantation diagnostics.

The Anglican Church⁹ tolerates abortion under specific circumstances, allows remarriage in church, tolerates homosexuality, accepts contraception, takes a positive view of reproduction medicine, and approves the ordination of women.

The Evangelical Movement¹⁰ is a collective name for conservative Christians who often have rigid attitudes towards sexual and reproductive health. Most groups (especially in the US) disapprove of premarital and extramarital sex, sexual education, reproduction medicine and modern methods of contraception. Some groups fight militantly against abortion, homosexuality and homosexual marriage.

The Catholic Church^{4,5}

Gender relationship Women and men have the same dignity and should dedicate themselves to marriage and family. The ordination of women is regularly debated but not accepted. **Marriage** should protect the status of the family and is a sacrament which can be only annulled or dissolved on the grounds of criteria defined by church law. Remarriage without such a dissolution leads to the exclusion from sacraments – at pastoral level, solutions are sought. **Sexuality** is an important dimension in the life of every human being. The purposes of marriage are both the procreation of children and the intimate relationship and love between the couple. An intimate marital life strongly contributes to marital fidelity. Sexual intercourse is thus only to be practiced between husbands and wives. **Homosexuality** Homosexuals are requested to consciously assign their sexuality according to human values and objectives, and thus to act responsibly and to prevent negative consequences for others. A homosexual partnership does not equal heterosexual marriage. **Family planning** Contraceptive methods should be used without external force and not because of egoism. Methods of natural family planning are accepted; couples may use artificial, non-abortive methods if they can reconcile using the respective method with their conscience. Permanent methods such as sterilisation are not allowed. **Abortion** As it is the case with selective fetocide, abortion is also considered killing of innocent human life. If the mother's life cannot be saved by any other means than terminating the pregnancy (vital indication), "it remains a matter of conscience for the doctor in charge to decide whether to perform an abortion or not." **Desire for children** Having children is important, but the desire for children should not be pursued at all costs. The unities of parenthood and of marriage are to be preserved; methods of artificial insemination are to be disapproved of. **STIs/HIV/AIDS** People should be careful with their own health and with the health of their partners. Abstaining from sexual intercourse is the best protection against STIs/HIV/AIDS; if abstinence is not possible, the above mentioned criteria are to be used.