Plucking the Eyebrows

FIQH COUNCIL OF NORTH AMERICA

Question: What is the Islamic ruling on women plucking their eyebrows?

Answered by: Dr. Yasir Qadhi

Answer:

In the Name of Allāh ﷻ, the Most Merciful, the Most Compassionate. All praise is due to Allāh ﷻ, and may peace and blessings be upon His Messenger Muḥammad ﷺ.

The primary evidence cited regarding the prohibition of plucking eyebrows is a narration of Ibn Masʿūd (rḍa), where he mentions that the Prophet ﷺ cursed: women who tattooed and those women who have themselves tattooed, "al-mutanamiṣāṭ" (women who have their eyebrows plucked), and women who make spaces between their teeth for beautification, those who change the creation of Allāh ﷻ. [Muttafaq ʿAlayh][1]

From the earliest times, Islamic scholarship has exhibited a spectrum of views regarding this issue. Some scholars, following the literal meaning, believe the ḥadīth should be unconditionally applied, thereby deeming the act of plucking eyebrows as completely forbidden. This view is notably upheld by Ibn Masʿūd (rḍa), the narrator of the ḥadīth, who adhered strictly to its apparent meaning. Conversely, ʿĀishah (rḍa), despite also being a narrator of a similar version of this ḥadīth, permitted plucking the eyebrows, saying "You may remove anything that irritates you".[2]

It is important to look into the context behind such narrations. The curse (laʿnah) of Allāh ﷻ is found to only be associated with major sins, such as murder and idol-worship. This poses a question: Why would plucking the eyebrows be a major sin that is deserving of Allāh ﷻ's curse?

---

[1] Found in Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī 5948 https://sunnah.com/bukhari:5948 and Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim 2125a https://sunnah.com/muslim:2125a, among others.

[2] Fatḥ al-Bāri by Ibn Ḥajar al-ʿAsqalānī, Volume 10 https://app.turath.io/book/1673?page=6013

This question was asked by Al-Qarāfī[3] and Ibn ʿĀshūr, among other scholars. Ibn ʿĀshūr explains that these characteristics appear to be associated with the prostitutes of the time, who would do such things to show themselves off and advertise their profession.[4] That is why Allāh ﷻ's curse is associated with this act - prostitution is something that destroys the moral fabric of society. Ibn al-Jawzī, the famous Ḥanbalī scholar, also mentions three possible reasons: The characteristics mentioned in the ḥadīth were associated with immoral women, or were referring to women who changed the way they look to deceive potential suitors, or the curse is only associated with those specific acts that involve changing Allāh ﷻ's creation, such as tattooing.[5]

Ḥanbalī scholars such as Imām Aḥmad and Ibn Qudāmah mention that this prohibition is specific to plucking, but there is no issue with shaving the eyebrows.[6] Additionally, the great scholar ʿAbdul Qādir al-Jīlānī allows for shaping the eyebrows for the sake of the husband because there is a clear benefit to be gained from it.[7] This opinion is supported by scholars across all four schools; Al-Māwardī, Al-Ghazālī, and Ibn Ḥajar from the Shāfiʿī school and al-Qāḍī ʿIyāḍ and Al-ʿAdawī from the Mālikī school permit plucking the eyebrows to please the husband, and even in the Ḥanafī school, Fatāwā Hindiyyah allows it.

In conclusion, while many scholars did wish to stick with the explicit literal meaning of this hadith (and this religious spirit should be appreciated), it does appear that the real issue is not the plucking itself, but rather its association at the time with other immoral acts. Since this association no longer exists in our time, and based on the opinions of a number of authorities of the past, it would be permissible for a wife to beautify herself for her husband in this manner.

Disclaimer: *This fatwa is the personal opinion of the author and does not necessarily represent the opinion of every member of the Fiqh Council.*

---

[3] Al-Dhakīrah by Al-Qarāfī, Volume 13, Page 314-315 https://ia801606.us.archive.org/10/items/FPzakhira/zakhira13.pdf

[4] Al-Taḥrīr wal-Tanwīr by Ibn ʿĀshūr, Sūrah al-Nisā', Āyahs 117-121 https://app.turath.io/book/9776?page=2061

[5] Aḥkām al-Nisā' by Ibn al-Jawzī, Page 253 https://ia801209.us.archive.org/34/items/FP38344/38344.pdf

[6] Al-Mughnī by Ibn Qudāmah, Kitāb al-Ṭahārah https://app.turath.io/book/6910?page=187

[7] Al-Ghunyah by ʿAbdul Qādir al-Jīlānī, Kitāb al-Ādāb https://shamela.ws/book/17817/38