

Gerontological Social Work: The Islamic Perspective And Practice In Pakistani Society

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Abstract

Ageing is an emerging issue of Pakistani society. This research study investigates the relationship between the old age problems and declining Islamic values regarding the care of elderly parents in Pakistani society. Qualitative methodology has been adopted for this research study. This research study was conducted after the review of secondary sources in form of Islamic books, Hadith and research articles regarding old age. This study finds that the process of modernization in a society leads toward the decline of religious values. Decline of Islamic values are considered responsible in vanishing old age supporting environment. Islamic directives regarding the rights of parents got weakened due to materialistic attitudes and defective education of young generation. In addition, other socio-cultural changes in the form of family structure and migration also played important role in old age problems. Old age problems of elderly women are more severe than elderly men.

Keywords: Gerontological Social Work, Ageing, Westernization, Elder Abuse, Modernization.

تلخیص

ضعیف العمری پاکستانی معاشرے کا ابھرتا ہوا مسئلہ ہے۔ یہ تحقیق ضعیف العمری کے مسائل اور پاکستانی معاشرے میں والدین کی دیکھ بھال کے متعلق کمزور ہوتے ہوئے اسلامی اقدار کے تعلق کی تفتیش کرتی ہے۔ اس تحقیق کو پایہ تکمیل تک پہنچانے کے لئے کیفیتى طریقہ کار اختیار کیا گیا ہے۔ اس تحقیق کے لئے ضعیف العمری کے متعلق اسلامی کتابوں، احادیث اور تحقیقی مقالوں جیسے ثانوی ذرائع کا جائزہ لیا گیا ہے۔ اس تحقیق کے مطابق جدیدیت کا عمل اسلامی اقدار کے زوال کا سبب بنتا ہے۔ اسلامی اقدار کا زوال بزرگی کے متعلق دوستانہ ماحول کے خاتمے کا ذمہ دار

تصور کیا جاتا ہے۔ والدین کے دیکھ بھال کے متعلق اسلامی ہدایات نئی نسل کے مادہ پرستانہ خیالات اور غلط تعلیم و تربیت کی وجہ سے کمزور ہو گئیں۔ اس کے علاوہ اکائی خاندان اور ہجرت جیسے دوسرے معاشرتی تبدیلیوں نے بھی ضعیف العمری کے مسائل میں اہم کردار ادا کیا ہے۔ بزرگ عورتوں کے مسائل بزرگ مردوں کے مقابلے میں زیادہ سنگین ہیں۔

کلیدی الفاظ: بڑھاپے کے متعلق سماجی کام، بڑھاپا، مغربیت، بزرگوں کے ساتھ ناروا سلوک، جدیدیت

Introduction

Religion is considered a set of beliefs and practices. Religion is a set of belief in super natural power and relationship with the nature that is surrounding. Religion is a social phenomenon concerned with almost every aspect of human life. Man, being a social animal, is therefore, considered a religious being. Religion as an institution plays different roles and guide its followers, hence religious institution exist almost in all societies of the world (Charles, 2010). In all religions of the world, there is some provision to address different needs of the elderly population. Old age can never become a social problem and threat to the well being of elderly as long as people observe the religious directives regarding the elderly (Joseph, 2014).

In traditional societies religion plays a more prominent role. In traditional societies, the religious institution is more dominant in rural as compare to urban areas (Davie & Vincent, 1998). In rural areas, the situation regarding old age is better than urban areas. One reason of successful ageing in rural areas is that old people themselves observe religious practices which lead towards their successful old age (Ingrisch 1995). Senior citizens frequently participate in religious ceremonies, practices and other related activities. Religion helps the elderly people to face effectively with age based difficulties and losses. Religious practices serve as a shield for the elderly against the psycho-social problems in the form of isolation (Joseph, 2014). In addition, the rural population other than elderly people, also strongly follow religious directives (Nikkah, Nia, Sadeghi & Fani, 2015) which may facilitate successful ageing process. However as a society shift from traditional toward the modern one, certain socio-cultural changes take place in the society. One of the social changes which is considered the outcome of modernization is change of values regarding senior citizens in a society. Robertson (1981) also argues that in a traditional society where modernization is lacking, the elderly population avails a high social, psychological and economic support. In addition the elderly occupy a central position and avail high social status. Cowgill (1986) also

support the idea the modernization leads towards the improvement of health technology, mass education, urbanization and industrialization which ultimately affect the social status of elderly population in a society.

Secularization theory also supports the idea that modernization brings negative impact on the social significance of religion in different spheres of life. Religious decline has close association with modernization in a society. Modernization in the form of technological advancement and economic growth bring changes in the notion of religious beliefs, concepts and ideas. The cultural significance of religious practices that exists in pre-modern society, get decline after modernization (Masoom & Sarker, 2017). In some families, there are violations of parental rights. The reason is either lack of Islamic knowledge on the part of family members or the prevailing social changes make it difficult for the family members to take care of the old parents.

In Pakistani society religion is considered the most effective source of successful ageing. However, on one side the religious directives are getting weaker while on the other hand the elderly population is increasing rapidly which create hurdles in the way of successful ageing process. Regarding the population of senior citizens, Pakistan is ranked as the 6th most populous country in the world. In the year 2000, 6% of the total population consisted of senior citizens, while currently the elderly people constitutes 7 % (12.5 million) of the total population (British Council and Help Age International, 2019).

Various factors are considered responsible for the decline of old age supporting religious values. Pakistani culture is in the process of transition. Different socio-cultural changes took places in Pakistani society as an outcome of industrialization, urbanization as well as economic growth. Generally religion decline as a result of westernization, modernization, liberalization, urbanization, environmental and demographic changes, breakdown of the social system, development of science. These changes caused the decline of traditional cultural practices. Joint family system was a popular cultural practice in Pakistani society which is replaced by nuclear family set up. The psycho-social support, which the elderly availed in joint family system, is gradually declining. In contemporary Pakistani society the elderly are unable to exercise their authority as they did in the past. Modernization has brought negative consequences on the social status of elderly persons in Pakistani society (Malik & Azam, 2018).

Western culture is famous for the old age problem. The influence of Western culture caused the decline of Islamic perspective regarding old age. Westernization of culture refers to the process where western cultural values

replace the local cultural values which lead to decline of religious values of the local people. Westernization also refers to cultural trends like dressing, speaking, talking and other indicators of living style. The influence of western culture on a particular culture and the resultant religious decline took place as a result of the influence of western electronic and print media as well the social interaction with the western (Charles, 2010). Furthermore, the introduction of modern technology, urbanization, modern education system, globalization, secular and liberal policies and different cultural exchange programs organized at different level leads to the decline of religious values in traditional and less modern community. As a result of such facilities the people in a village are pushed toward the western culture. Westernization disrupt the social institutions like political organizations, economy and kinship and marriage. Moreover westernization has disrupted significantly the structure and functioning of the new socio-cultural system including the old age supporting traditional socio-cultural systems (Charles, 2010).

Religions restrict the promotion of materialism in a society. However, in developing countries the non materialistic thinking of middle class has changed significantly. Now the middle class focuses on the acquisition of, goods and property, financial prosperity and high social status, as it is considered necessary for good life. Economic development and modernization of social institutions led to the development of ‘culture of consumption’, and the thus materialistic attitudes spread among the people. When materialism becomes a dominant value then people usually ignore the secondary values in the form of sense of belongingness as well as religious directives regarding the parental rights (Masoom & Sarker, 2017).

Objectives of the Study

- 1- To highlight the role of Islamic directives in successful ageing
- 2- To know about the about the relationship of declining religious values and social status of senior citizens in Pakistani society
- 3- To dig out the socio-cultural changes which lead to change in social status of senior citizens

Review of Literature

Research studies show that there is a close association between religion and well being of elderly. Noronha (2015) supported the idea that old age usually brings different problems for the elderly people in the form of retirement, physical disability and infirmity. Such social changes create hurdles in the way of

successful ageing and the elderly people need services for their well being. MCFaddeen (2010) argued that religion is considered an important tool for the well being of elderly people in two ways. The first explanation is that the elderly people themselves strongly believe upon religion and religious practices than any other age group. The observance of religious practices promotes the sense of well being and satisfaction among the elderly. Elderly people, who participate in religious ceremonies and practices, have better level of physical and mental health. Noronha (2015) claimed that religious and spiritual beliefs can provide relief to the elderly people. The counsellors apply the technique of religious therapy to those clients who believe upon God.

The second explanation of religion and well being of elderly is that churches and synagogues provide various services for the well being of elderly people. Religious motivation of biblical injunctions to show kindness and do justice, pushed the Christians and Jewish to establish homes for the elderly people in United States (MCFaddeen, 2010).

Although religion stress upon the rights of elderly people, however the religion is gradually losing its control over its followers. Various factors are considered responsible for the decline of religious values. In this regard Menhas, Umer, Akhtar & Shabbir (2015) found that modernization and industrialization led to decline of religious values. The world is becoming more secular and open to changes in the religious context. In addition to decline of religious values, modernization cause decline of traditions. Like other societies of the world, modernization brought changes in Pakhtun social structure. Modernization led to changes in Pakhtun cultural identity in the form of dress, language, symbols, traditions, family structure and religious beliefs.

Rathor, Khattak & Yusof (2019) argued that Islam being a religion stress upon the rights and successful processing of ageing of elderly people. Islam being a religion, grant a high social status to the elderly people. In Islam, there are divine directives regarding the rights of elderly people. Religion may be a source of satisfaction for elderly people who experience multiple challenges in the form of diseases, widowhood, weak physical condition, loss of social roles and poverty along with other problems. Elsaman & Arafa (2012) also claimed that Islamic teachings direct the Muslims that children should take care of their elderly parents, instead of sending them to old house. In addition, it was found familial obligation to take care of the physical, mental and emotional comfort its elderly members. They further argued that traditionally, the structure of Muslim family is joint rather nuclear. Change of traditional joint family initiated different problems

for the elderly people. Amiri (2018) claimed that family nuclearization is considered a major cause of the problems of elderly people.

In Islam, it is considered an obligation to satisfy the basic need and expectations of their elder parents and family members and children. Old age require more attention to be given by family members and society. If the care of elderly people is ignored it cause different psycho-social issues among the elderly (Ravan, 2015). Other researchers like Elsaman & Arafa (2012) also argued that Islam stress upon the rights of parents particularly at old age.

Ravan (2015) argued that parents have eighty rights over their children. Forty rights of parents need to be granted by children before death while forty rights to be granted at the time of parents death. The forty rights which children need to grant to parents before death are further divided into four categories i.e. the rights about body, tongue, heart and rights about property. Each of these categories consists of ten rights. Parental rights regarding their body include serving and respecting, to follow their order and avoid their orders only if religion allowed it, sitting in front of them, to walk behind them whenever there is no source of threat for them in the form of ice or dark, to stand in respect of them and set when they allowed it, not to travel without their permission, fast for good deed by permit of them and to look toward them with kindness (Ravan, 2015). Parental rights in tongue include: to speak softly and politely, never to speak loudly in front of them, never show rude behaviour towards them and calling them by their names, not to interrupt them, not to reject their ideas, never disobey them, pray them and demand them to pray about you. Parental rights about heart are to be kind towards them, love them although they are in economic hardship, if you think they misbehave you, and if they never be kind with you, be happy by their happiness, never irritate by their misbehave and speech, never oppress them if they oppressed you, never complain about them if they hit you, act for their content and demand God they have long life. Parents have property rights insist upon children to provide them clothes and food before the fulfilment of their need, to pay their debates, to pay the expenses of their journey send them to hajj (Ravan, 2015).

Religious values play a prominent role regarding the rights of elderly people. However, the process of modernization is viewed responsible for the decline of religious values and resultantly the old age problems. Generally education, urbanization and egalitarianism are considered the major indicators of the process of modernization. Modernization of one institution may cause changes in other social institutions as well. For instance the modernization of political and economic institutions caused the decline of religious institution in Europe.

Modernization as a process of change influence almost all field of life in a society (Hatun, 2018).

Methodology

For this research study a systematic review of literature was carried out from March 25 to August 30th, 2019. Different websites including such as Google Scholar, Scopus, Yahoo and various website having Islamic information were visited. Religious books and Quranic texts and research articles were reviewed for this study. Literature on the internet, regarding the relationship between Islam and Gerontological social work was searched while using the singular or combination forms of the following keywords were used: “Quran”, "Sunnah”, “Hadith”, “old age” and “Duties of children toward parents”. Moreover, the religious scholars were also consulted regarding the rights of parents in Islam particularly at old age.

Results and Discussion

Islamic Perspective about the Economic Rights of Elderly and Economic Situation of Elderly in Pakistan

In developing countries including Pakistan, poverty is an outstanding issue. In the context of Pakistan, a significant proportion of the population lives below the poverty line. In 2013, 29.5 percent of the population lived below the poverty line. 58 out of every 200 persons were poor and unable to meet their basic requirements (Idress, 2017). Elderly people were also included among poor. Both elderly men and women faced poverty in Pakistan (Alam, Ibrar & Khan, 2016). However, women faced poverty because there are cultural practices in the form of gender discrimination. Moreover, women have limited access to labor market and low level of education, which promote poverty among them (Asian Development Bank, 2002). However, elderly widows frequently face poverty, unemployment, lack of old age pension and inheritance in property, (Begum, 2009). Former UN secretary General, Kofi Annan on the international year of older person also stated about the poverty of elderly women as “Women comprise the majority of older persons in all but a few countries. They are more likely than men to be poorer in old age and more likely to face discrimination” (United Nations, 1998).

Islamic Perspective Regarding Parents’ Financial Rights

Islam protects the economic rights of parents. In this regard Quran says:
 "They ask you, [O Muhammad], what they should spend. Say, Whatever you spend of good is [to be] for parents and relatives and orphans and the needy and the traveler. And whatever you do of good - indeed, Allah is knowing of it." (Al-Baqra 2/215).

A man came and said to the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH), "O Messenger of Allah, my father asks for my property." Then the Prophet (PBH) said, "Both you and what you possess are your father's." (Ibn Majah)

In Hadith, Prophet (PBUH) instructed to *sahaba*¹ to do ten things by saying, "First, Do not associate anything with Allah even if you are killed and burnt on that account. Second, don't be disobedient to your parents even if they command you to abandon your family and your property" (Tirmizi 14).

Although Islam is the major religion of Pakistani society and Islam discourage materialism through its teachings. However, as a result of decline of religious values the attitude of majority of young generation towards parents are materialistic. In the eyes of children, parental respect and care depends upon their economic status. Sometimes children do not hesitate to wrench the parental property. In a recent case of elder financial abuse in Pakistan, the Governor of Gilgit Baltistan Mir Ghazanfar was registered a complaint against his sons who sold his property by fake signature of father i.e. Governor of Gilgit Baltistan Mir Ghazanfar (Irfan, 2018). Similarly, Dildar, Saeed & Sharjeela (2012) in a research study found that children do not hesitate to steal and wrench property and cash from their parents.

Elder Abuse in Pakistani Society

In Pakistan official data regarding elder abuse is lacking because the concerned quarters have not developed proper mechanism for the protection of human rights of elderly men and women. However, small scale research studies identified that senior citizens face different types of abuses in Pakistani society. 90% respondents of research study faced financial abuse while 85% respondents reported psychological abuse in the form verbal abuse such as harsh words, calling names and humiliation. Majority of senior citizens feel lonely and feel social isolation. Elderly women faced more physical violence than elderly men. Another study also found that 22 % of respondents reported discrimination against them. They are usually ignored in decision making by their family members. Moreover according to 38 % respondents they face discrimination in access to health services as compare to the young family members, while 18 per cent suffered verbal abuse in the family and 22 per cent of the respondents believed they were living alone as their sons separated from them because of their physical and mental weakness (British Council and Help Age International, 2019). Some abuses are associated with aged women, vary from inadequate and inappropriate diet to substandard living arrangements and the most exploitative is the matter regarding property inheritance. The elderly population cannot avail proper health services, both in rural and urban areas. In rural areas elderly

population face health problems due to lack/deficiency of health services. However, in Karachi which is urban settlement, a significant number, i.e. 33 percent of older people could not arrange medicine to treat their hypertension. The health expenditure of most of the elderly people is afforded by public on humanitarian ground (British Council and Help Age International, 2019).

Islamic Perspective about Parental Right to be Respected and be Kind to Them

Regarding the polite treatment of parents, Allah, says, “Your Lord has decreed that you worship none but Him, and that you be kind to parents. Whether one or both of them attain old age in your life, say not to them a word of contempt (disrespect), nor repel them but address them in terms of honor. And, out of kindness, lower to them the wing of humility, and say: My Lord! Bestow on them Mercy even as they cherished me in childhood” (Al-Isra17/ 23-24).

In another verse Allah says "And We have enjoined upon man, to his parents, good treatment"(Al-Ahqaf 46/15).

Regarding affectionate behavior towards parents Allah says “Worship Allah and associate nothing with Him and to parents do good, and to relatives, orphans, the needy, the near neighbor, the neighbor farther away, the companion at your side, the traveler, and those whom your right hands possess. Indeed, Allah does not like those who are self-deluding (proudy) and boastful” (An-Nisa 4/36).

Prophet (PBUH) also said. "It is one of the greatest sins that a man should curse his parents." It was asked (by the people), "O Allah's! How does a man curse his parents?" The Prophet said, "The man abuses the father of another man and the latter abuses the father of the former and abuses his mother." (Bukhari 8/4).

Narrated by Abdullah Bin Masucl, may Allah be pleased with him: I asked the prophet (PBH) "Which deed is the dearest to Allah?" He replied, "To offer the prayers at their early stated fixed times." I asked, "What is the next (in goodness)?" He replied, "To be good and dutiful to your parents" I again asked, "What is the next (in goodness)?" He replied, "To participate in Jihad (religious fighting) in Allah's cause." Abdullah added, "I asked only that much and if I had asked more, the prophet (PBH) would have told me more." (Bukhari 1 /505; Muslim 0151).

"A man came and sought permission for Jihad (in the way of Allah). The prophet (PBUH) asked him: "Are your parents living? The man said" yes, Sir.' He said, then carry on Jihad in service to your parents as this is as good as Jihad." (Bukhari 8/3).

The Prophet was asked about the great sins. Prophet (PBUH) said, "they are:-To join others in worship with Allah, to be undutiful to one's parents, To kill a person (which Allah has forbidden to kill), And to give a false witness." (Bukhari 3-821). The Messenger of Allah (PBH) said, "Whoever shows disrespect to his parents, he who reminds recipients of his charity to them and he who addicts to wine will not enter Paradise" (Ad-Darimi, Ahmad, An-Nisa'i & Hibban).

Elderly Women Face More Problems in Pakistani Society

Old age brings different complications with itself. One among these is the variation in the social status of elderly women, particularly, after widowhood (Meera, 2008). It is the common norm of the patriarchal societies that the social status of a woman depends upon the social status of her life partner. Consequently, the social status of the elderly widows is adversely affected due to her husband's death (Archibald, 2010). In this connection, Pakistani society is not the exemption, where elderly widows face decline in social status. An indicator of the declining social status of elderly women and widows is the declining authority and escalating economic dependence (Rehman & Mohyuddin, 2015; Zahidi, 2015). The trend of declining socio-economic status adversely affects health status of elderly widows. Resultantly disabilities other and other diseases are higher among elderly women than men (British Council & Help Age International, 2019). Elderly women face more health problems in the form of diabetes, heart diseases, and hyper tension as compare to elderly men. For example, a study found that in Pakistan, the prevalence of heart disease is higher among elderly widows compared with those who are married, divorced or separated as well as those who have never married (Qureshi, 2005).

Different factors contribute toward the problems of elderly women. Illiteracy is one of the factors which enhance the intensity of elderly widows' problems. Global statistics reveals that 30 per cent old women are illiterate as compare to 19 per cent old illiterate men (UNO, 2015). Moreover, the participation of women in labor force is 22 percent while the participation of men in labor force is 68 percent. The low level of literacy and the low socio-economic status of women across their life course leave older women in a vulnerable situation. Widowhood adversely affects the socio-economic status while widowhood is higher among elderly women because women marry older men. Moreover the trend of remarriage is also very rare among elderly widows. In 2013, 19 per cent of older men were widowers against 52 per cent of elderly widows (British council & Help Age International, 2019).

In Pakistani society, elderly population especially women face other problems in the form of emotional isolation. A research study found that elderly women wish

their children and grand children to share their feelings with and to teach them the cultural values. However, inspite of the desire of elderly women, the young generation does not share their feelings with them (Malik & Azam, 2018).

Islam Emphasis the Rights of Elderly Women

Islam protects the rights of elderly women. In this Abu Huraira narrated (may Allah be pleased with him): A man came to Allah's Apostle and said, "O Allah's Apostle! Who is more entitled to be treated with the best companionship (Service) by me?" The prophet said, "Your mother." The man said, "Who is next?" The Prophet said, "Your mother." The man further said, "Who is next?" The Prophet said, "Your mother." The man asked for the fourth time, "Who is next?" The Prophet said, "Your father" (Bukhari 8 /2).

The Messenger of Allah (PBH) said, "Paradise lies beneath the feet of mothers." (Tirmidhi, Ahmad, Nasa'i and Bayhaqi, in Shu'ab al-Iman).

Conclusions

In Pakistani society literacy level is gradually improving and the resultantly modernization is emerging in Pakistani society. Modernization brings different changes to Pakistani society. These changes include the decline of religious values, breakdown of joint family system and the emergence of nuclear family set up. The prevailing social scenario in the form of materialistic attitudes of young, empowerment of young women push the young generation to ignore the rights of their elderly parents. These social changes adversely affect the lives of senior citizens in Pakistani society. The elderly people face poverty and abuses. The Islamic directives can address the socio-economic and psychological problems of the elderly population, however there is lack of religious motivation on the part of young generation towards the elderly parents.

Endnotes

- 1 The Muslim who experienced the company of Prophet Muhammad (S.A.W)

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