

Population Aging and the Potentialities of Islamic Values of Support and Care for the Elderly

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Abstract

The urgent quest for alternatives to address the gap globally experienced in eldercare and social support, follows a series of challenges posed by population aging. This paper postulates that, for Muslim communities, there are institutions, values, and levels of care that can be of high potential in addressing these challenges. These institutions under the main umbrella of Islamic charity includes, zakat, Sadaqah, waqif and 'Beitul-Mal' among others, while the levels of care are; care by progenies and care by the community. These institutions and levels can be mobilized and strengthened based on the teachings of the Quran and Sunnah as exemplified by the Prophet Muhammad (SAW) and the 'Rashidun'. Using the functionalist sociological orientation, the paper, has demonstrated that, Islam is highly endowed with values in which the Elderly and excellence of old age can be upheld. The paper recommended the restoration of historically viable Islamic welfare schemes to cater for the contemporary needs and interest of the elderly.

Keywords: population aging, Islamic institutions and values, care of the elderly

Introduction

There exists an urgent quest for options that might readily address the gap globally experienced in social support provision, and care for the elderly in Muslim societies. This follows a series of challenges posed by population aging, in relation to care and social support needs of the elderly. This paper postulates that, the solutions lie ponderously in Islamic values and institutions, because Islam is endowed with high regard for the elderly, and excellence of old age. Long standing Islamic practices like *zakat*, *Sadaqah*, *waqif*, filial obligation and community care, have the potential of tackling most of the challenges of elderly social support, related to the population aging crises. This paper is timely as societies across globe are experiencing hard economic times, causing the provision of social protection to be more difficult, especially for developing countries.

Clarification of Concepts

Aging: Aging has been considered as a process that refers to constant changes in the tissues or organs of an organism. The changes gradually reduce the functions and efficiency of an organism's bodily functions, which eventually leads to death. Common characteristics of ageing include skin rigidity, weakness of the muscles, hair loss and low immunity. It is normally the period after the average life span of human beings which ends the human life cycle. Like childhood, old age is a period associated with the need for different types of support including instrumental and relational supports.

Population ageing: Population ageing occurs as a result of changes in fertility, mortality and migration. Such changes always occur because of both demographic and epidemiologic transitions. Population aging, is basically determined by decline in fertility and mortality rates and to some extent, international migration. In a nut shell, decreased fertility, increased longevity, and the attainment of old age by large birth cohorts, increases the size of elderly persons as a share of the total population.

Islamic values and institutions: Islamic Religious values and institutions refers to all the visible, and organized manifestations of practices and beliefs at a given point, within social and historical contexts. These institutions are created through identities and representations, and in turn, determine attitudes,

emotions, and behaviour. Long standing Islamic institutions like *zakat*, *Sadaqah*, *waqif* and the two levels of care and support of the elderly, are examples of institutions and values.

Eldercare: Eldercare refers to all the spiritual, supportive actions, assistance and acts of facilitating wellbeing in favour of the elderly person. The expectation within this conception covers both instrumental and cognitive dimensions. Eldercare should cover the basic needs in terms of access to basic food shelter, housing medication, physical support, social inclusion, respect, proper community status and spiritual fulfilment.

Overview of Population Aging and Implied Challenges on Eldercare

Across the World, both percentage and total figure relating to the elderly segment of the population, are greater than any point in the history of population demographics (Troisi, 2001). This phenomenal growth in the size of elderly population implies an iconic, yet, historical example of a large and rapidly expanding cohorts of older adults, as a dominant trend of this century (Coleman, 2001). The influence of this on demand for social support, public health and national economies will be dramatic in some countries. In addition, most developing countries have not prioritized the issue of elderly social protection in terms of policy and budget (Help Age, 2015). Thus, there exist gross inadequacy and in most cases, a complete absence of statutory formal Social protection for elderly persons in most countries (Bloom & McKinnon, 2013; Mohanty, 2011), implying a violation of the United nations recommendation for increasing priority, to promote the well-being of the growing number of older persons (United Nations Report, 2013). It is the contention of this paper that the answer to availability of support and care for the elderly in Muslim communities, might remain the consolidation of Islamic sources of care for the elderly. Therefore, in predominantly Muslim societies, resorting to the teachings and practices of Islam about eldercare can enable appropriate responses to these challenges posed by population aging.

Theoretical Orientation

Structural functionalism and theory of Religion

The functionalist theory focuses on the role of religion from the contribution it makes to the social order. Such roles include among others, guidance to what life should be as the purpose of man's existence, emotional comfort, building and sustaining social cohesion, and explanations regarding eternal prosperity or peril (Henslin, 2004). According to Riis and Woodhead (2010), Simmel acknowledges that, religion possesses a social character and goes beyond ritual gatherings, to a broader range of social situations. Theorizing within the framework of Durkheimian analysis of religion, both Parsons and Malinowski shared a position in which they see religion as the basis of social solidarity and its maintenance (Parsons, 1960). Similar to Parsons, O'Dea (1966) postulated that religion is useful as coping mechanism against uncertainty and misfortunes arising from varied circumstances in life (Garrod & Jones 2009; Watkins, 2011). The position of functionalism on eldercare practices is therefore, a modernist approach, an approach in which there should be constant adjustment and further adaptations in eldercare values and practices.

The functionalist approach sees lack of social support, care and protection for elders, as a manifestation of a disfunction because parts of society are not working properly. To fix the disfunctions, Muslim societies must revive the long-standing institutions and practices to be adaptive, and responsive to contemporary issues. (Henslin, 2013.) In this regard, emphasis on population aging and the challenges it poses to the elderly.

Islamic Institutions and Values of Social Protection

Islamic societies have the potentials of utilizing the structures under the umbrella of charity, in coping with the challenges of global aging across various countries. A cross review across societies proved severe disfunction in these institutions, because little or no attention has been given on the need to capture global aging problem of social support for the elderly.

The Institution of Charity

Charity is the broad umbrella under which a functional social support can be based in Muslim societies. All Muslims believe that the entire wealth, asset and natural resources on earth belong to Allah, and people in different social situations can directly or indirectly benefit from Allah's abundance. In Surat of Baqarah (29), it is stated that, "It is He Who hath created for you all things that are on earth; then He turned to the heaven and made them into seven firmaments; and of all things He hath perfect knowledge" (Q2,29). In Surat of Jathiyah (verse 13) it is stated that: "And He has subjected to you, as from him, all that is in the heavens and on earth; behold, in that are signs indeed for those who reflect" (Q45,13). Again, in Surat Al-Hadid, Allah says:

"We sent aforetime Our messengers with clear signs and sent down with them the Book and the Balance (of right and wrong), that men may stand forth in justice; and We sent down iron, in which is great might, as well as many benefits for mankind, that Allah may test who it is that will help, unseen, Him and His messengers for Allah is full of strength, Exalted in Might" (Q57:25)

Charitable institution can function as the basis for coping with the aging crises, since Muslims believe that, all human beings can utilize Allah's bounty through Hiba, Zakah, Sadaqah, inheritance and waqf. (Arif, 2012). Quran, Surah al-Baqarah, verse 215, reads:

"They ask thee What they should spend (In charity). Say, Whatever Ye spend that is good, is for parents and kindred And Orphans And those in wanting and for wayfarers. And whatever ye do That is good-Allah Knoweth it well".

Similarly, evidence abounds in Hadith of the Prophet in Volume 1, Book 2, Number 7 of Sahih Bukhari; "Narrated Ibn 'Umar;

"Allah's Apostle said, Islam is based on (the following) five (principles), to testify that none has the right to be worshiped but Allah, and Muhammad is Allah's Apostle; to offer the (compulsory congregational) prayers dutifully and perfectly; to pay Zakat (i.e. obligatory charity); to perform Hajj (i.e. Pilgrimage to Mecca); and to observe fast during the month of Ramadan".

Charity has consistently been emphasized as an act of righteousness in Islam, with multidimensional benefits that covers spiritual, social, economic, social justice, and collective good (Mawdudi, 1948; bin Man, 2011). As such, the potentiality of charity in functioning towards the needs of the elderly is vast. In addition, the Quran provides a wider perspective of charity to include smiles, withdrawal of harmful objects, ensuring justice between people, greetings and salutation, uttering good words, offering a glass of water to those in need, making steps to the Masjid among endless others. Khan (2016), further explains that charity is of two types, the obligatory and voluntary type, made up of Zakat, Waqf, Sadaqah, Hiba and Wasiyyah.

Current Position of Scholars on the role of the Waqf on Social Justice

Currently, a consensus exists among a significant number of contemporary scholars of Islam on the potentialities of the Waqf institution. In this regard, the Waqf is seen as a highly potent institution, which function as a source of redress for socio-economic inequalities.

Weiss (2002) pointed that, recently there has been increased attempts by Muslim scholars to reflect on the possibility of providing social welfare in Muslim societies. Such attempt with special reference to Muslim countries in Africa, is based on the need to widen the possibilities of enabling states to provide basic needs to their subjects. The main reason is the painful state of welfare services, that has become evident in most developing African states. Another reason given for the upsurge in interest in Waqf revival is due to the emergence of Islamism, and the critical position of clerics on the secular state. Such criticisms are currently prevalent throughout the Muslim world. The need to revive Islamic economics has been the broad concept under which the debate on Waqf revival thrives (Weiss, 2002). Based on the pressing need for welfare

experienced in most Muslim societies, Sait and Lim (2005), opined that there is no reason why a new and modern responsive rule of waqf cannot emerge, to confront current situation within Islamic jurisprudence, principles, and modern management techniques.

Utilizing the Waqf for Social Support in Eldercare

According to Khan (2010), capitalist instruments are not successful in reducing Income Inequality. In this case, Waqf can be one of the vital alternatives alongside Zakat, because Zakat and Waqf have played key roles in reducing poverty in Islam. Hence the need to revive these institutions. Therefore, starting a worldwide Waqf movement is indispensable. This position is supported by Ahmad & Yakubu (2015) who see the need for a shift towards the utilization of the Waqf system for financing the needed social services, and education in sub Saharan Africa. This can be achieved by exploring historical and practical applications of the waqf in funding education across the continent. Such a model can also be extended to include support for the elderly as a response to the population aging crises. (Ahmad & Yakubu (2015). Other models worthy of consideration for eldercare, are the models for education found in some selected universities like Al-Azhar and number of Malaysian universities, funded through the Waqf institution.

Potentials of Zakat in Social Protection

Zakat which implies wealth purification, is the third pillar of Islam. Payment of zakat is mandatory for all Muslims who possessed the required financial resources to fulfill this obligation. Zakat can also be offered in cash or in kind, depending on the category of zakat being paid. According to Htay *et al.*, (2014) the fundamental goal of zakat is to attain socio-economic justice. The wealth accrued from Zakat is spent for the specifically classified beneficiaries. The listed eight categories of beneficiaries of Zakat are 1).al-fuqara' (the poor), 2). al-masakin (the needy), 3). al-amilin (those who collect zakat), 4). almuallafah qulubuhum (those whose hearts are being reconciled), 5). al-riqab (emancipation of slaves), 6). al-gharimin (people in debt), 7). fi sabillah (for the cause of Allah) and 8). Finally, ibn alsabil (travellers) (Hassan, I'ffah Binti, & Nasir, 2016).

In line with the advocacy and position of this paper, the eighth category of Zakat recipients, travellers, is being reworked in response to a growing refugee population in Egypt (Atia, 2011). Again, recently in Egypt, contributions to the building of the new Egyptian Children's Cancer Hospital qualified as Zakat recipient. Earlier, in 2005, the ulama at the International Consultation on Islam and HIV/AIDS, approved the use of funds from Zakat for HIV-positive people in need, regardless of their religion or how they contracted the virus. Therefore, there is at least some interest amongst the ulama towards expanding the net of activities covered by zakat. As appealed by the UNCHR, Zakat can also be used to support emerging problems, like refugees and displaced people, prisoners, and to help relieve debt from overburdened microfinance recipients (Atia, 2011). In this regard this paper sees the need for the elderly to be included.

The Value of Sadaqah

The concept of Sadaqah is generally the sincere giving of charity only to the underprivileged and deprived, without expecting any recompense. Sadaqah can take many different forms, material and nonmaterial. The main difference between Zakat and Sadaqah is that Zakat is obligatory while Sadaqah is voluntary charity. Sadaqah has many of the same purposes as Zakat. The main objectives are; social solidarity, social cohesion and the strengthening of sense of unity and brotherhood among Muslims (Atia, 2011; Omar, 2003). Since Sadaqah is much more general and open, it can be utilized as a means of reviving volunteerism, especially among pious youths. Sadaqah can be a popular way of articulating one's piety, and voluntary charity amongst the middle and upper classes to the socially disadvantaged. (Atia, 2011; Mittermaier, 2014). In this regard, much can be mobilized from Sadaqah towards the needy elderly in society who lack basic needs.

Recommendations and Conclusion

From such exemplary lessons, a few recommendations can be made. The Waqf can be established and implemented as charitable trust, system. The aim should be to ensure that, a minimum standard of income benefits the elderly. The manner of administration should be like the approach obtained during the time of the Rashidun, where it was ensured that, no citizen across the empire suffers from hunger and invalidity. Worthy of being restored are also pensions and services to the needy including money for the poor, guides for the blind, and servants for the crippled. Pensions should also be expanded to cover all disabled people so that they would never need to beg. Furthermore, Elder care in Islam can still be sustained through the social institutions of zakat waqf Beit el mal and Sadaqah. In line with this position on welfare, the challenges of aging needs to be tackled by strengthening these institutions.

In conclusion, excellent examples abound historically from various welfare programs that were introduced by the Islamic Caliphate up to the Rashidun era. These include social security, unemployment insurance and retirement pensions provided to elderly.

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