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THE QUR'ĀN AND GERONTOLOGY: A COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS

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Abstract:

The global ageing population is expanding at an unprecedented rate, posing profound challenges on both societal and individual fronts. By 2050, older adults are projected to account for 16% of the global population, according to the World Population Ageing report. This demographic is often vulnerable to a range of physical, cognitive, and emotional challenges, further compounded by social neglect. Gerontology, the scientific study of ageing, provides insights into the biological, psychological, and social dimensions of this phenomenon. This research examines ageing through the unique perspective of the Qur'ān, exploring its ethical, spiritual, and societal teachings. By analysing Qur'ānic verses, the study highlights the moral and practical responsibilities outlined in Islamic tradition, such as compassion, respect, and care for the elderly.

A comparative analysis reveals significant parallels between Qur'ānic principles and contemporary gerontological frameworks, offering a compelling case for their integration. The Qur'ānic perspective not only underscores the importance of honouring and supporting the elderly but also positions their wisdom and experiences as valuable contributions to societal progress. Moreover, the findings stress the need for developing sustainable care systems that merge Islamic values with modern methodologies. This synthesis provides a holistic approach to elderly care, addressing both the spiritual and practical needs of older individuals, particularly amidst the rising demand for institutionalized support.

Keywords: *Gerontology, Qur'ān, Ageing, Elderly Care, Islamic Ethics.*

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Introduction

The increasing demographic shift toward an ageing global population poses profound societal and individual challenges. By 2050, it is anticipated that 16% of the world's population will be 65 years or older, emphasizing the critical need for extensive research on ageing (United Nations, 2022). Elderly individuals often experience physical and cognitive impairments, which are exacerbated by social neglect and isolation. Prevailing societal attitudes frequently marginalize this demographic, viewing them as burdens rather than contributors. For instance, the American Psychological Association (2021) indicates that more than two million older Americans face abuse or neglect each year, with numerous cases going unreported. The proliferation of facilities such as nursing homes and palliative care centers further underscores the demand for innovative strategies in elderly care.

Gerontology, the interdisciplinary study of ageing, seeks to address these issues by exploring the biological, psychological, and social dimensions of ageing. However, integrating ethical and cultural perspectives into this domain remains underexplored. The Qur'ān, a foundational text in Islamic tradition, provides significant insights into the ageing process, emphasizing principles of dignity, care, and respect for older individuals. Prophet Muhammad (PBUH), inspired by Qur'ānic teachings, advocated for compassion and responsibility toward the elderly, reshaping societal views on vulnerability.

This research paper endeavours to examine gerontology through the lens of Qur'ānic principles, exploring its teachings on ageing and comparing these insights with contemporary gerontological frameworks. It investigates essential questions such as: What guidance does the Qur'ān offer regarding ageing and care for the elderly? How do these perspectives align with or diverge from modern scientific approaches? By analysing these intersections, the study aims to propose a comprehensive model of elderly care that blends modern methodologies with enduring Islamic values. This investigation is particularly pertinent in the modern context, where the rise of institutional care among elderly Muslims raises pressing ethical and cultural concerns. By integrating the Qur'ānic ethics into gerontological practice, this study seeks to offer subtle solutions to ageing-related challenges and foster a deeper appreciation of the elderly's societal roles.

Perspectives on Gerontology and Ageing

Gerontology, the scientific exploration of ageing, investigates the physical, mental, and social transformations that individuals experience as they grow older. This discipline was first formalized by Russian scientist Ilya Ilyich Metchnikov in 1906 and has since addressed the biological, psychological, and societal dimensions of ageing (Metchnikov, 1906). Ageing is accompanied by various physiological changes that influence both personal health and societal roles. With the rise in ageing populations, there has been a notable increase in the establishment of nursing homes and palliative care centers to meet the needs of the elderly (WHO, 2015). Studying ageing is crucial for enhancing our understanding of older populations and improving support systems tailored to their unique challenges.

Ageing is a natural and inevitable process that brings about significant changes in both the body and mind, presenting both opportunities and challenges. In modern societies, there is growing scrutiny of whether current policies and societal attitudes adequately address the needs of older adults. This chapter aims to provide a detailed examination of gerontology, with a particular focus on elderly individuals in India, alongside an analysis of societal care policies and their implications.

Ageing vs. Old Age

The concept of ageing is complex and encompasses various biological, psychological, and social aspects. Although "ageing" and "old age" are often used interchangeably, they represent distinct phenomena. Ageing refers to the gradual process of becoming older, involving a range of internal and external changes in the body and mind. In contrast, old age typically denotes the later stages of life and is characterized by physiological decline and a greater reliance on medical and social support systems (WHO, 2018). Ageing is also shaped by cultural, environmental, and social factors. For instance, chronological age, which simply reflects the number of years a person has lived, does not necessarily correspond to their physical or mental condition. Two individuals of the same age may exhibit vastly different levels of health and functionality (Ansberry, 2017).

Old age is often viewed as the final stage of the human life cycle and is usually associated with physical decline and increasing dependency on others. Definitions of old age vary widely; for example, the United Nations (2017) defines elderly individuals as those aged 65 and older, while the World Health Organization (2018) applies a lower threshold of 55 years in certain regions, such as parts of Africa. Beyond chronological age, old age is frequently accompanied by emotional and social challenges, including feelings of isolation and the loss of personal and societal roles.

Categories of Ageing

Ageing can be classified into several categories, each offering a unique perspective on how individuals experience growing older:

1. Chronological Ageing

Chronological ageing refers to the number of years a person has lived. Although it is the most common measure of age, it does not fully account for the biological, psychological, or social realities of ageing. For instance, an 80-year-old woman might be more physically active than a 70-year-old man, highlighting the limitations of chronological age as the sole metric (WHO 2018).

2. Biological Ageing

Biological ageing involves the internal physiological changes that occur over time, such as the decline in muscle mass, bone density, and cognitive function. These changes reduce physical capabilities and the ability to resist disease. Proper nutrition, regular exercise, and healthcare can help mitigate some effects of biological ageing (Comfort 1991).

3. Psychological Ageing

Psychological ageing refers to changes in mental faculties, including memory, cognitive abilities, and emotional regulation. While some elderly individuals retain sharp mental faculties, others may experience cognitive decline or mental health issues such as depression (Ansberry 2017). Social engagement and mental stimulation can play a crucial role in maintaining psychological well-being.

4. Social Ageing

Social ageing relates to the shifting roles, relationships, and societal expectations associated with growing older. These changes may include retirement, reduced social interaction, and feelings of loneliness. Societal norms often prioritize youth and productivity, which can marginalize the elderly and diminish their perceived contributions (Achenbaum 2015).

5. Functional Ageing

Functional ageing assesses an individual's ability to perform daily tasks relative to peers. This category emphasizes differences in functional capacity, as some older adults maintain high levels of activity, while others experience limitations earlier in life due to health conditions or lifestyle factors (Cumming and Henry 1961).

Classification of the Elderly

The elderly population can be categorized based on chronological age, health, and functional abilities:

1. Young Old (65–74)

This group includes individuals in the early stages of old age who often remain active in work and social activities, although they may face minor health challenges (Ansberry 2017).

2. Middle Old (75–84)

People in this category often experience health-related issues and may require assistance with daily activities, such as mobility, vision, or hearing impairments (WHO 2018).

3. Oldest Old (85–100)

This group includes those who face significant health declines and often require intensive care or reside in specialized facilities (Achenbaum 2015).

4. Centenarians

Centenarians are individuals who have reached or exceeded 100 years of age. Regions such as Okinawa, Japan, are renowned for their high concentration of centenarians, offering insights into factors that promote longevity (Willcox, Willcox, and Suzuki 2014).

Defining and Classifying Gerontology

Gerontology, derived from the Greek words "geron" (old man) and "logos" (study), is the multidisciplinary examination of ageing. First introduced by Ilya Metchnikov in 1906, gerontology addresses the biological, psychological, social, and economic aspects of ageing (Metchnikov, 1906). Unlike geriatrics, which focuses on medical care for older adults, gerontology provides a broader framework for understanding the ageing process.

1. Bio-Gerontology

Bio-gerontology examines the cellular and molecular mechanisms underlying ageing and explores treatments to promote healthy ageing and combat age-related diseases (Comfort 1991).

2. Social Gerontology

Social gerontology focuses on how ageing individuals interact with their communities, addressing issues such as caregiving, social roles, and isolation (Achenbaum 2015).

In conclusion, gerontology offers critical insights into the complex processes of ageing and the challenges faced by elderly populations. As the global population continues to age, the importance of understanding the biological, psychological, and social dimensions of ageing becomes increasingly clear. This field will remain essential in shaping policies and practices aimed at enhancing the quality of life for older individuals.

Qur'anic Understanding of Ageing: An Academic Overview

The modern science of ageing, known as gerontology, explores the biological, psychological, and social aspects of ageing. This field, established by Russian scientist Ilya Ilyich Mechnikov in 1906, addresses the transformations associated with ageing and their implications (National Institute on Ageing 2021). The Qur'ān, a foundational Islamic text, offers profound insights into ageing, emphasizing both the physical and spiritual journey of human life.

The Qur'ān encourages reflection on creation and life stages, as illustrated in verses such as: *"Allah is the one who created you from weakness, then made after weakness strength, then made after strength weakness and white hair"* (Qur'ān 30:54). This verse encapsulates the cyclical nature of human existence, from infancy to strength in youth and eventual decline in old age. The terms *Al-kibr*, and *Ardhl al-'Umr* used in the Qur'ān convey nuanced meanings of ageing, highlighting its physical, emotional, and social dimensions.

The Qur'ān also narrates accounts of the elderly, demonstrating their unique role in manifesting God's miraculous power. Moreover, it prescribes respectful treatment of the elderly, a principle reiterated in Prophet Muhammad's (PBUH) Hadith, which emphasizes the dignity and care owed to the aged, irrespective of religious affiliation. Despite these teachings, the growing number of nursing homes in Muslim communities raises concerns about adherence to these values.

The Qur'ānic discourse on human life extends to its origins and developmental stages. Verses such as *"We created you from dust, then from a drop of sperm, then from a clot of blood, then from a little lump of flesh"* (Qur'ān 22:5) provide a detailed account of embryonic development, affirmed by modern embryology. The Qur'ān's description of human creation in successive stages, alongside Hadith, corrected prevailing misconceptions in pre-modern scientific thought.

Additionally, the Qur'ān bestows upon humanity the title of *Khalīfat fil ārḍ* (ambassador on Earth), emphasizing the unique intellectual and social capabilities endowed by God. This divine appointment underscores the responsibility of humans to respect and care for one another, particularly the vulnerable and elderly. Thus, Qur'ān offers a comprehensive framework for understanding ageing and human development. Its teachings complement modern gerontological

insights, providing both spiritual and practical guidance for fostering dignity and care for the elderly.

Age Order of Humans in the Arabic Language: An Islamic Perspective

The Arabic language, in which the Holy Qur'ān was revealed, is widely regarded as one of the richest languages in the world. Its vast vocabulary encompasses nuanced terms for various life stages, providing insights into human development as observed through an Islamic lens. This part explores the Arabic terminologies related to different stages of life, with references to the Holy Qur'ān and Islamic traditions, illustrating the cultural and theological significance of these terms.

Terminology for childhood Stages

1. **Fetus (Janīn):** Refers to the unborn offspring after a certain period of gestation. The term highlights the sanctity of life even before birth, as emphasized in the Holy Qur'ān.
2. **Newborn/Neonate (Walīd):** This term denotes a newborn baby, symbolizing blessings and joy for parents (Hakeem Muzafir n.d., 270).
3. **Seven-Day-Old Baby (Svadī'a):** Although an exact English equivalent does not exist, this Arabic term refers to a baby seven days old. In Islamic tradition, specific rites such as 'Aqeeqah' are performed on this day.
4. **Breastfeeding Stage (Raḥī):** Refers to the stage where the baby is breastfed. The Qur'ān discusses breastfeeding and its significance, advocating a period of two years (Sūrat Luqmān, 31:14)
5. **Weaning (Fatīm):** Denotes the phase when a child transitions from breastfeeding to other forms of nutrition. This stage is also mentioned in the Qur'ān, emphasizing the two-year breastfeeding guideline (Sūrat al-Baqara, 2:233).

Adolescence and Youth

6. **Adolescence (Fatā)**: Signifies the age of youth, marked by physical changes such as the appearance of facial hair and hormonal development. The Qur'ān uses this term in the context of Prophet Ibrāhīm (PBUH) life (Sūrat al-Anbiyā', 21:78).

Old Age and elderliness

7. **Al-Shaykh**: refers to an individual advanced in age, often associated with wisdom and extensive knowledge due to life experience. The term *shaykh* is mentioned four times in the Qur'ān (Qur'ān, 11:72; 12:78; 28:23; 40:67).
8. **Al-Kahl**: describes a person over thirty years of age who has started to develop gray hair or, according to some interpretations, someone around forty years old. The word *al-kahl* has been mentioned twice in the Qur'ān (Qur'ān, 3:46).
9. **Al-'Ajūz**: used to refer to elderly women. While some scholars hold varying opinions, the consensus aligns with this interpretation. The term '*ajūz*' appears four times in the Qur'ān (Qur'ān, 11:72; 26:171; 37:135; 51:29).
10. **Ardhāl al-'Umr**: This phrase refers to the advanced stage of old age, characterized by significant physical and mental decline, akin to the helplessness of childhood. The term *Ardhāl al-'umr* is mentioned in two verses of the Qur'ān (Qur'ān, 16:70; 22:5).
11. **Al-Haram**: Frequently mentioned in the prayers of the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him), this term refers to the latter stages of life. The stages of old age progress through *Al-kahl*, *shaykh*, and finally *haram* (Ibn Kathir 2003). In medical contexts, old age is typically considered to begin at fifty and continue to the end of life. In sociology, the elderly are often defined as individuals over sixty years of age. Ibn Hajar (1984) stated that old age begins around sixty, marking the period when strength diminishes, accompanied by physical and cognitive decline.

Perspectives on Old Age in Islamic Texts

Islamic texts do not provide a precise age limit for when old age begins or ends, similar to how modern science lacks a definitive threshold for the onset of ageing. Old age is viewed as a gradual

deviation from earlier stages of life, often referred to as the "third age."

Below are key insights and interpretations from Islamic sources regarding old age: Ibn Manzur, in *Lisān al-‘Arab*, discusses the term *shaykh* (elderly person) and provides various age-related interpretations:

- Old age starts at 50 and continues until death.
- Some sources extend this from 51 until death.
- Another view limits old age from 50 to 80, beyond which it becomes more complex (Ibn Manzur 1993).

Imam Qurtubi, in his commentary on *Sūrat Ghāfir*, defines the term *shaykh* as referring to those over the age of 40 (Qurtubi 2006). Additionally, the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) mentioned that the typical lifespan of his ummah (community) would range between 60 and 70 years (Al-Bukhari 1987). At same time The Qur’ān references Prophet Noah (peace be upon him), who preached for 950 years, indicating significantly longer lifespans in earlier eras (Qur’ān, 29:14). So according to our time period Islamic anthropology divides old age into two stages:

1. **Mubakkira (60–75 years):** Considered an active phase of ageing.
2. **Al-Haram (75 years to death):** Marked by physical and mental decline, often referred to as a stage of dementia or significant frailty (Ibn Kathir 2003).

Ageing is an inevitable transition, much like interconnected loops in a chain, with each stage leading to the next. Despite advancements in modern science, it remains impossible to reverse ageing or restore youth. This aligns with the Qur’ānic perspective in *Sūrat Fāṭir* (35:11), which emphasizes human limitations in altering the course of life.

Physical and mental of Ageing in the Qur’ān

Old age is a significant period in human life, distinguished from other stages by unique characteristics. This phase often necessitates medical attention, psychological support, and social interventions. The Holy

Qur'ān highlights the peculiarities of old age, as explored in the following sections like physical changes includes.

1. Weak Bones

The Holy Qur'ān describes ageing as a phase of weakness and decline, symbolized through the example of Prophet Zakariya: *"My Lord! Indeed, my bones have grown feeble, and gray hair has spread on my head"* (Qur'ān, 19:4)

This verse illustrates physical frailty and ageing-related changes. Medically, bones reach peak density at 35 years and then begin to weaken, with men losing bone mass at a rate of 2% per year and women at 1% (National Osteoporosis Foundation 2022). Bone loss contributes to reduced height and increased susceptibility to fractures and osteoporosis, which also leads to tooth loss in the elderly. The correlation between the Qur'ānic reference to weak bones and modern medical findings underscores the profound understanding of ageing in the Qur'ān.

2. Gray Hair

Gray hair is a hallmark of ageing, marking a shift in life stages. The Qur'ān states: *"Then Allah made after strength weakness and white hair"* (Qur'ān, 30:54)

Scientifically, gray hair results from reduced pigment production in hair follicles, often accelerated by stress and hormonal changes (American Academy of Dermatology 2021). The Qur'ān further emphasizes the psychological and spiritual connotations of gray hair, associating it with wisdom and proximity to the end of life. Additionally, it symbolically describes the Day of Judgment as a time so severe that even children would turn gray-haired (Qur'ān, 73:17).

3. Menopause in Women

Menopause, signifying the cessation of menstruation, is described in the Qur'ān as a stage of despair: *"And those who no longer expect menstruation among your women—if you doubt, then their period is three months, and also for those who have not menstruated"* (Qur'ān, 65:4).

Medically, menopause results from decreased hormone secretion, leading to infertility and other ageing-related changes (North

American Menopause Society, 2020). The Qur'ān narrates the stories of Prophet Ibrahim and Prophet Zakariya, emphasizing divine intervention in granting children to their wives despite advanced age, thus affirming the omnipotence of God (Qur'ān, 11:72).

The Holy Qur'ān also addresses the mental challenges of old age, described as *Ardhal al-Omr* or the worst phase of life: *"And of you are some who are sent back to the worst age, so that they know nothing after having known much"* (Qur'ān, 16:70). The Qur'ān highlights the psychological transformations that occur in old age, drawing parallels between the conditions of a child and an elderly person. For example, in *Sūrat Ya-Sīn*, it states: *"And whoever We grant long life, We reverse him in creation"* (Qur'ān, 36:68). This signifies a psychological state resembling childhood, emphasizing dependency and sensitivity.

This stage often involves memory loss and cognitive decline, paralleling conditions like dementia in modern medicine (Alzheimer's Association 2023). Tafsir al-Qurtubi defines this phase as one marked by significant psychological and intellectual impairment (Qurtubi n.d.). The Qur'ān draws parallels between the cognitive states of childhood and old age, highlighting the inevitability of physical and mental decline with advancing years (Qur'ān, 36:68).

4. Loneliness and Psychological Challenges

The elderly often face loneliness due to physical limitations or societal shifts like nuclear families. The story of Prophet Yusuf's father in the Qur'ān illustrates the sorrow and isolation of old age: *"And his eyes became white with sorrow, for he was suppressing [his grief]"* (Qur'ān, 12:84).

5. Feeling of Hopelessness and Boredom

Old age can bring feelings of hopelessness, particularly when physical weaknesses prevent routine tasks. As the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) advised: *"No one should desire death, for if he is a doer of good, he may increase his good deeds, and if he is an evildoer, he may repent"* (Sahih al-Bukhari n.d.). This highlights the spiritual perspective on enduring the challenges of old age with patience and faith.

So, the Qur'ān provides a profound understanding of ageing, blending physical, psychological, and spiritual dimensions. Its descriptions align with modern medical findings, emphasizing the natural progression of life stages and the inevitability of decline. The Qur'ānic perspective serves as a reminder of human limitations and the importance of seeking divine guidance throughout life.

Factors that Differentiate the Conditions of the Elderly

1. Age Group

Ageing is a prolonged process, with age incrementally advancing daily. The conditions of the elderly differ significantly across age groups. The initial phase of old age is distinct from the stage referred to as *Ardhal al-Umr* (the most decrepit old age) in the Qur'ān. As the Qur'ān states: *"And among you is he who is reversed to the most decrepit old age so that he will not know after having known much"* (Qur'ān, 16:70). For example, the conditions experienced by a 60-year-old differ from those of a 90-year-old. Understanding these differences is crucial for tailoring care and support for the elderly.

2. Mental and Individual Differences from Youth

Mental health in old age is closely tied to an individual's activities, diet, sleep, and exercise during their youth. For instance, individuals with intellectually stimulating careers, such as scientists, often show slower declines in memory and cognitive abilities in old age compared to others (Alzheimer's Association, 2023).

3. Organic Disorders

Organic brain disorders, particularly dementia and Alzheimer's disease, affect the elderly differently. The Qur'ān reflects these conditions: *"And among you is he who is reversed to the most decrepit old age so that he will not know after having known much"* (Qur'ān, 16:70). This verse aligns with medical observations of dementia, including symptoms like memory deficits, cognitive decline, and social impairments (Alzheimer's Association, 2023).

Is Ardhal al-Umr Good or Bad for the Believer?

Ardhal al-Umr (the stage of old age) is often described as the most challenging phase of a person's life. At this stage, individuals may suffer from physical illnesses, memory loss, and a decline in overall cognitive functions, which makes assistance from others necessary. This phase can be difficult for both the elderly person and their caregivers. The Prophet Muhammad (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) emphasized the significance of old age, particularly Ardhal al-Umr, seeking refuge from it in several prayers. A hadith narrated by Sa'ad bin Aṭwākhas (may Allah be pleased with him) states: "*O Allah, I seek refuge with you from the age of senility.*" The Prophet prayed on another occasion not to be afflicted with Ardhal al-Umr (Al-Bukhari 2001).

In understanding, the verse related to Ardhal al-Umr, it raises the question: Does it imply that a person's intellect will be entirely lost at this stage? Does this apply to both Muslims and non-Muslims? Imam al-Razi (2001) explained that for a Muslim, this stage of life can be a blessing and a source of spiritual reward. This is supported by verses in Surah At-Tin, which emphasize that righteous believers will not be relegated to the lowest of the low, regardless of their age. Imam Ikrimah (may Allah be pleased with him) noted, "If anyone recites Surah At-Tin, they will not reach Ardhal al-Umr" (Al-Razi 2001).

The Qur'an broadly addresses human age, and its message applies to all people, regardless of faith. The condition of human age described in the Qur'an is meant to reflect the innate nature of humanity. Imam al-Razi argued that for Muslims, old age is not seen as a state of being "reduced to the lowest of the low" (*Asfal Sāfilīn*), a term more often associated with the conditions of Hell (Al-Razi 2001). Thus, those who worship Allah sincerely during their youth and health will continue to be rewarded in old age, as Allah will treat them as they have used their time in their prime years.

Benefits of Mentioning Old Age in the Qur'an

The Qur'an addresses old age in multiple contexts, highlighting the duties of caregivers, the challenges faced by the elderly, and offering spiritual lessons for both the elderly and those around them. Several purposes for mentioning old age in the Qur'an are outlined below.

To affirm God's ability to resurrect us after death

The stages of human age—youth, maturity, and old age—are part of a cycle that reflects God's creative power. The Qur'an states: *"O humanity! If you are in doubt about the Resurrection, [consider that] we created you from dust. Some of you may die young, while others are left to reach the feeblest stage of life"* (Qur'an, 22:5). This verse illustrates that the ability to create and resurrect after death is evident in the natural stages of human life (Al-Razi 2001).

To inform readers about the vast knowledge of Allah

Human knowledge is inherently limited, but God's knowledge is infinite and flawless. The Qur'an says: *"And among you is he who is returned to the most decrepit age, so that he knows nothing after [once having] knowledge. Indeed, Allah is Knowing and Competent."* (Qur'an, 16:70). This description of old age serves to contrast the imperfection of human memory with the perfect, unchanging knowledge of God (Al-Razi 2001).

Motivation to do good deeds throughout life

Old age serves as a reminder of the approaching end of life, which is why it is crucial to maximize one's good deeds throughout life. The Qur'an urges people to make the most of their lives before they reach old age: *"Did we not give you long enough lives so that whoever would be reminded could be reminded?"* (Qur'an, 35:37). This verse encourages people to act righteously throughout their lives and highlights the significance of age in preparing for the afterlife (Al-Bukhari 2001).

To take care the parents

The Qur'an places great importance on caring for one's parents, especially as they age. The Prophet Muhammad (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) emphasized the sanctity of honoring elderly parents, saying: *"Paradise lies at the feet of the mother"* (Sunan an-Nasa'i 2001). This teaching emphasizes the mercy and respect due to elderly parents, as well as the importance of fulfilling one's duties to them.

Old age is highly respected in Islam, and the Qur'an provides numerous teachings on how to care for and respect the elderly. One

significant teaching is found in Surah al-Isra, where Allah instructs believers to treat elderly parents with utmost kindness: *“And lower to them the wing of humility out of mercy, and say, ‘My Lord, have mercy upon them as they brought me up [when I was] small!’”* (Qur'an, 17:24). This verse stresses the importance of maintaining respectful and gentle conduct towards elderly individuals, especially parents.

Prophetic Narrations on the Elderly

The Hadith literature further elaborates on the Islamic approach to old age. The Prophet Muhammad (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) frequently emphasized the importance of honoring the elderly. For instance, he said: *“Whoever honors an old man in his youth, Allah will appoint someone to honor him in his old age”* (Al-Tirmidhi 2005). This highlights the reciprocal relationship between how one treats the elderly and how they will be treated in their own old age. Young people are urged to show respect to the elderly, as demonstrated in the Hadith: *“If someone honours an old man in his youth, Allah will appoint someone to honor and respect him in his old age”* (Al-Tirmidhi 2005). The Prophet's teachings bridge the generation gap by fostering mutual respect between young and old.

Islam offers practical guidelines for respecting the elderly. For example, the Prophet Muhammad (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) recommended that younger individuals greet the elderly first: *“The younger people should greet the elderly first”* (Sahih Muslim 2001). The Prophet also emphasized the importance of listening to the advice of older individuals, given their wisdom and experience, and ensuring that their physical needs are met.

So, The Qur'an and Hadith provide a comprehensive framework for understanding old age. Old age is not simply an inevitable decline but an opportunity for spiritual growth and fulfilment. The Qur'an emphasizes that old age is a phase in which believers can continue to earn rewards for their good deeds. Moreover, Islam teaches that the elderly should be treated with kindness and respect, recognizing their contribution to society and their spiritual significance. By examining the life of the Prophet Muhammad (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) and his teachings, we learn the importance of honouring the elderly in all aspects of life—whether it is through physical care,

emotional support, or moral respect. Islam encourages the younger generation to care for their elders, viewing it as a means of earning Allah's favour and a way to cultivate a compassionate and just society.

Comparison between Qur'an and gerontology

In contemporary culture, the elderly often experiences isolation and hardships within their families. The establishment of old age homes and nursing facilities has become increasingly common as a solution to alleviate the challenges faced by the elderly. However, some organizations use these facilities for motives other than the welfare of the elderly.

In contrast, Islam places the responsibility for elderly care in the hands of children or close relatives, ensuring that the elderly are not left to suffer in their old age. This duty is a personal obligation for every individual, rather than a mere moral value. Unfortunately, in some Muslim communities, the increasing trend of placing parents in old age homes is concerning. The Qur'ānic methodology for treating parents is crucial to address this issue. If society were to adopt this Qur'ānic approach, many elderly individuals could experience happiness and fulfilment in their later years, and fewer old age homes would be necessary.

Islam on the Protection of the Elderly

One of the remarkable aspects of Islamic legislation is its consideration for human vulnerabilities, especially during childhood and old age. Islam guarantees the protection of all members of society, including the poor and the elderly. In particular, Islam offers specific guidance on the care of the elderly, recognizing that two critical stages of a person's life require the help of others: childhood, when parents are responsible for safeguarding their children, and old age, when children are expected to safeguard their elderly parents (Al-Rūm, 30:54).

A significant concern is how to care for elderly individuals who have no children or whose children have passed away. Islam addresses this

in two ways: individual care (by children and relatives) and community-level care (through societal institutions).

1. Care By Individuals

The primary responsibility for the care of the elderly falls on their children, as emphasized in both the Qur'ān and Hadith. The Qur'ān advises children to treat their parents with kindness and respect, particularly when they reach old age. In Surah al-Isrā' (17:23), Allah says, *“And your Lord has decreed that you not worship except Him, and to parents, good treatment. Whether one or both of them reach old age [near] you, say not to them [so much as], ‘uff,’ and do not repel them but speak to them a noble word.”* The Qur'ān specifically instructs children not to show irritation (even through the word "uff") towards their parents and to treat them with mercy and respect, as they did during the child's own upbringing.

In this context, the role of children is clearly defined: they are obligated to care for their elderly parents. This duty is not merely a social recommendation but a binding moral responsibility.

2. Care at the Community Level with Relatives

While children are given the primary responsibility for elderly care, Islam also emphasizes the role of the extended family and the wider community. Relatives are encouraged to step in when a person has no children or when the children are unable to provide adequate care. For instance, during the Battle of Tabūk, the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) permitted a wife to care for her elderly husband, Hilāl bin Umayyā (RA), when he was unable to take care of himself (Ibn Hajar 1997). This hadith underscores the importance of family support in times of need.

Moreover, the Qur'ān encourages the entire Muslim community to respect and honor the elderly. As the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) stated, *“He is not one of us who does not have mercy on our young, respect our elders, enjoin what is right, and forbid what is wrong”* (Al-Tirmidhī 1996). Islam stresses that the elderly are integral members of society and must be treated with dignity and reverence. Failing to do so is considered a serious offense, with the Qur'ān warning that those who fail to respect their parents will face severe consequences.

3. Elderly Care By Community Institutions

In Islamic tradition, the family unit is central to elderly care. However, Islam also recognizes the role of social institutions in providing care for the elderly, particularly in cases where family support is unavailable. One of the hallmarks of Islamic society is its emphasis on social solidarity, which includes providing for the elderly who cannot rely on their immediate family.

The Qur'ān encourages the establishment of social support systems for those who are vulnerable, including the elderly. The financial difficulties often faced by the elderly are addressed through mechanisms such as zakat (charity), which is distributed to those in need, including elderly individuals who do not have family support (Al-Baqarah, 2:177). Islamic scholars have long held that providing shelter and care for the elderly who are unable to be supported by their families is a communal responsibility (Al-Qurṭubī 2000).

Today, as family structures have become more fragmented due to urbanization and globalization, the need for such communal institutions has grown. However, it is crucial that these institutions remain focused on serving the elderly with dignity and respect, rather than becoming commercialized or exploitative.

Diversity of the Elderly and Two Modes of Care

While caring for the elderly is a social obligation, managing their care effectively requires different approaches. As a result, elderly care can be categorized into two main models: comprehensive residential care and open social care. These two models reflect the diverse needs of the elderly population.

1. Comprehensive Residential Care for the Elderly

Comprehensive residential care refers to institutions that provide full housing, sustenance, and all the necessary services for the elderly, including physical and mental health support. These institutions ensure that the elderly receive continuous care in a supportive and secure environment. However, it is important for authorities to assess whether a family member can take on the responsibility of caregiving before placing an elderly individual in such a facility. In some

regions, especially in certain Arab countries, these institutions not only serve heirs but also accept non-heirs and profit from providing these services (Al-Mazrouei 2015).

2. Open Social Care for the Elderly

Open social care institutions provide elderly individuals with essential services while offering opportunities for social interaction, cultural engagement, and health-related activities. These facilities allow the elderly to interact with others who may be facing similar challenges due to old age, thus fostering a sense of community. In this model, elderly individuals can continue to experience social, religious, and cultural connections, all while maintaining ties to their families at home. For instance, in Saudi Arabia, the Prince's Center for Social Care offers a daily service for elderly individuals, combining social care with a sense of community involvement (Al-Dosari 2018). Numerous charitable organizations and community initiatives are actively involved in such efforts today.

Qur'ānic Methodology on Caring for Elderly Parents

The Qur'ān provides valuable guidance on how elderly individuals should be cared for. From Surah al-Isrā' (17:23), we can infer the kinds of care and attention that elderly people may desire, which includes both physical and emotional support.

1. Readiness for Physical Service

In the aforementioned verse, the term *'indaka* ("with you") underscores the importance of children directly participating in the care of their elderly parents. As individuals age, their physical disabilities increase, making even basic tasks difficult to accomplish. In such cases, reliance on others becomes necessary, and children's physical assistance is crucial. According to Islamic law (Shari'a), it is the responsibility of children to perform the final rites and burial duties for their deceased parents (Al-Qurṭubī 2000).

2. Patience and Control of Words

The Qur'ān's command, "*Do not say to them [so much as], 'uff,'*" (Al-Isrā' 17:23) highlights the importance of patience when caring for elderly parents. It teaches that one must not express irritation or frustration through words, which can be harmful. This advice also

reflects a broader principle: children should remain patient and compassionate, as they were nurtured with love and care during their own childhood. Losing patience is a sign of moral failure, and the Qur'ān warns against this behaviour. Thus, the teachings encourage kindness, respect, and a gentle approach when interacting with elderly parents (Al-Tabarī 1999).

3. Remember Your Obligations to Them

Caring for the elderly also involves reflecting on the care and love provided during one's own childhood. As people age, they become more vulnerable, and it is essential to show empathy. One of the most powerful acts of care is to pray for one's parents, as the Qur'ān encourages. The prayer "*O Allah, have mercy upon them as they brought me up [when I was] small*" (Al-Isrā', 17:24) is a way to show continual emotional support, even if physical care is not possible (Ibn Kathīr 2000).

Key Features for Islamic Ageing Care

Islam provides specific instructions on how to interact with parents, especially in their old age. The methodology outlined in the Qur'ān focuses not only on moral responsibility but also on the idea that everyone will eventually experience old age. Islam encourages a system of mutual respect and care for parents, which fosters societal harmony.

1. Verbal Manners

When it comes to dealing with parents, there are two key aspects to consider: communication and actions. In terms of verbal interactions, Islam emphasizes politeness and kindness in speaking to parents.

2. Be Polite When Addressing Parents

The Qur'ān repeatedly emphasizes the need to speak with kindness and avoid words that may hurt or disrespect parents. The severity of this instruction is clear from the repeated warnings in the Qur'ān to maintain a respectful tone. The teachings underscore that verbal harm can be just as damaging as physical harm (Al-Qurṭubī 2000).

3. Pray for the Parents

Praying for one's parents is one of the most honourable actions in Islam. The Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) emphasized the importance of praying for parents, particularly after their passing, as their children's prayers continue to benefit them. According to Imam Rāzī (2009), praying for parents implies success in this world and the Hereafter. The Qur'ān cites the prayer of Prophet Nūḥ (Noah), who prayed for the forgiveness of his parents. This highlights the spiritual connection between parents and children, which continues even after death (Al-Tabarī 1999).

4. Caution in Actions

Islamic teachings caution believers to be mindful in their actions towards their parents, ensuring that their needs are always prioritized.

5. Prioritize Their Needs

According to Islamic principles, meeting the needs of parents takes precedence over many other responsibilities. The Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) was asked by a companion, "What is the most pleasing act to God?" The Prophet replied, "Prayer at its appointed time," and when asked about what comes after, he said, "Taking care of one's parents" (Sahih al-Bukhārī 1997). This emphasizes that, in Islam, ensuring the comfort and well-being of parents is of utmost importance, even above other noble acts such as warfare or social service.

6. Provide Financial Assistance

Islamic jurisprudence stresses that children should provide financial support to their parents when they are in need. This duty is affirmed by scholars across different Islamic schools of thought (Ibn Hajar 1997). In addition to caring for parents, children are also responsible for showing kindness and respect towards their grandparents. The Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) instructed a companion to honor his father's friends after his father's death, showing that familial respect extends beyond one's immediate parents (Sahih Muslim 1998).

Therefore, Islam provides a comprehensive and ethical framework for elderly care, emphasizing the importance of both physical care and emotional support. The Qur'ān and Hadith together form a guideline

for treating elderly parents with dignity, kindness, and respect. The teachings encourage believers to be patient, show gratitude, pray for their parents, and prioritize their needs. Through these principles, Islamic teachings foster a society that values its elderly and encourages a system of mutual care and respect.

The Qur'ānic Attitude to Non-Muslim Parents

Islam does not make religious distinctions between parents. The mother who gave birth and the father who met his necessities are both honoured and respected in Islam. According to Islamic teachings, everything we do, provided it is not blasphemous, should be done with pleasure, as it is the responsibility of children to care for their parents as they grow older. Moreover, it is their duty to provide any financial assistance their parents may need. As stated in the Qur'ān, *"And We have enjoined upon man goodness to his parents"* (Al-'Ankabut, 29:8).

Islam encourages kindness and respect towards elderly individuals, including non-Muslims. Abu Bakr (may Allah be pleased with him) once brought his elderly father to the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH), who inquired, "Why did you bring him here? I would have gone to him." This reflects the compassionate attitude Islam advocates toward the elderly. If society adopts these principles, it can transform into an age-friendly community, fulfilling its moral obligation to support its elderly members. If these Islamic guidelines were followed rigorously, there would be no need for nursing homes or old-age homes. Only a small portion of the population lacks children or family to care for them. It is crucial to convince the global community, especially in developing nations, of these Islamic views. Governments and social workers should be more diligent in their efforts to protect the elderly and ensure their care.

Jurisprudential Concessions for the Elderly

Islam offers special concessions to individuals who are weak or suffering, particularly the elderly. Islamic law does not prescribe actions that are burdensome or difficult for anyone to endure. Instead, it encourages ease and moderation. The Qur'ān emphasizes this by

stating, "*Allah does not burden a soul beyond that it can bear*" (Al-Baqarah 2:286). The principle that "difficulty leads to ease" is fundamental in Islamic jurisprudence. Consequently, several exceptions are made for the elderly, who may suffer from various illnesses or conditions. Some of these exceptions include:

- **Permission for the elderly to appoint a representative for Hajj:** Due to their age and disabilities, elderly individuals may appoint someone to perform Hajj on their behalf. A woman once approached the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) and asked if she could take the place of her elderly father, who wished to perform Hajj but could not due to his age. The Prophet approved this request, as the father was elderly.
- **Permission to break the fast-during Ramadan:** The Qur'ān allows the elderly, who may be incapacitated, to break their fast-during Ramadan. Both the sick and travellers are excused from fasting, and there is an option to offer a ransom if one is unable to fast due to illness (Al-Baqarah, 2:184).
- **Exemption from the Islamic veil for elderly women:** Surah An-Nūr (24:31) addresses the special rights of women and their dress, noting that as individuals age, it may no longer be required for elderly women to observe the same dress code. As their physical appearance no longer attracts others, the strict requirements of veiling are relaxed in old age.
- **Simplification of prayer rituals:** The Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) advised that prayers should be shortened when led by an imam, particularly if there are elderly or ill members in the congregation. He said, "*If someone prays with people, let him keep it short, for among them are the weak, the sick, and the elderly*" (Sahih al-Bukhārī, 1997).
- **Recognition of the elderly as leaders and sources of wisdom:** In Islam, the elderly are considered valuable sources of experience and knowledge. Their input is given special consideration when making decisions or seeking advice. For instance, the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) instructed that the elderly could assume leadership roles, such as becoming imams or prayer leaders.
- **Exemption from the jizya tax for elderly non-Muslims:** Islam ensures that not only elderly Muslims but also elderly

non-Muslims are treated with respect and care. There is no distinction in terms of the physical or mental hardships that elderly individuals experience. Therefore, Islam mandate that elderly individuals, regardless of their faith, should be treated with dignity and receive the necessary support.

It is essential to create policies that ensure the protection and care of society's most vulnerable members, including the elderly. Providing financial benefits and other reservations for the elderly does not absolve them of their responsibilities, but it emphasizes the collective moral duty to safeguard their well-being.

Conclusion

The growing elderly population presents significant challenges to modern societies, particularly in terms of ensuring the care and well-being of the aged. This research aimed to explore the ethical framework for elderly care as outlined in the Holy Qur'ān and to compare it with contemporary gerontological approaches. By reviewing traditional texts, contemporary research, and real-world observations, this study identifies both shared principles and key differences between the Qur'ānic perspective on elder care and modern gerontological practices.

One of the primary findings of this research is the alignment between the Qur'ānic understanding of aging and the scientific approach of gerontology. Both emphasize aging as a natural and inevitable process, recognizing the physical, mental, and emotional challenges associated with it. However, the Qur'ān provides a more comprehensive and ethically grounded approach by emphasizing the moral, social, and spiritual responsibilities of children and communities toward the elderly. In the Qur'ān, elder care is not just a medical or social task, but also a deeply moral and spiritual duty that involves respect, compassion, patience, and gratitude. These teachings highlight the importance of family and community support in maintaining the dignity of the elderly, contrasting with some modern gerontological practices that, while making great advances in care models, often prioritize institutionalization, sometimes neglecting the elderly's emotional and spiritual needs.

The study also reveals a significant contrast between the Qur'ānic ethical framework and contemporary gerontological practices. While gerontology has made important strides in developing healthcare

systems and improving the physical well-being of older adults, it often falls short in addressing the psychological, emotional, and spiritual dimensions of aging. The Qur'ān, on the other hand, offers clear guidance on how to treat elderly individuals with kindness, patience, and respect. The principle of honoring one's parents, especially in their old age, is central in the Qur'ān and stresses that this responsibility extends beyond providing material support, encompassing emotional care and maintaining strong familial bonds. This is at odds with modern care systems that sometimes focus more on clinical needs, with less emphasis on the relational and spiritual dimensions of elderly care.

Furthermore, the Qur'ān encourages a family-centred approach to elder care, with a strong emphasis on filial piety and community involvement. Unlike some modern gerontological models, which sometimes promote the separation of the elderly from their families, the Qur'ān advocates for integrating elderly care within the family unit. This approach, while still allowing for professional medical support when needed, ensures that elderly individuals maintain their sense of belonging, dignity, and emotional security within the context of their loved ones. This family-centric model of care stands in stark contrast to the institutionalization trends observed in many parts of the world, which can inadvertently isolate the elderly, depriving them of essential emotional connections and community ties.

The findings of this research suggest that integrating the ethical principles found in the Qur'ān with modern gerontological practices could lead to a more holistic and compassionate approach to elder care. By combining the Qur'ānic values of respect, empathy, spiritual care, and family-oriented caregiving with the advancements of modern healthcare, a more comprehensive framework can be created that addresses both the physical and non-physical needs of the elderly. Such an integrated model would not only promote the physical well-being of older adults but also uphold their dignity, nurture their emotional health, and ensure their spiritual fulfilment.

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