

Islamic Gerontology, Importance of Localizing Aging Studies in Iran: A Review of Quran and Hadith

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Abstract

Background and Objective: Discussion of localizing sciences in all fields of humanities is a contentious issue in Iranian academic settings and has its supporters and opponents. Among new branches of sciences developed in the 20th century, the science of biological, psychological, and social aspects of older adults, known as gerontology, is a recent one. Like other modern sciences, this field of study has an occidental origin. In recent years, it has also found its place in academic settings in Iran. The present study aimed to discover the theoretical, Islamic, and ideological origins of gerontology in oriental and Islamic society.

Method: This library-based study was an attempt to review available resources. To this end, Quranic verses, hadiths, and historical documents about the elderly were consulted. Keywords such as the elderly and old age were used to search for these resources. All ethical issues were observed in the study and the researchers declared no conflict of interests.

Results: According to the available resources of Islamic jurisprudence, it seems that the current situation is appropriate for localizing gerontology through referring to Quranic resources, Islamic hadiths, ancient history of Iranian culture, and documents on Islamic jurisprudence.

Conclusion: Considering the thorough and eternal nature of Islam and its dominance on human's existential structure and his real needs, it is necessary to design the curriculum of gerontology, which is a newly established discipline, based on Islamic principles and standards.

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Summary

Background and Objective: In accordance with the definition of the Department of Gerontology in the Ministry of Health, "The main mission of the field of gerontology is to educate trained human personnel in various social, mental, and health dimensions, in order to use these forces and in order to provide educational and research programs." The policy advice and planning for the elderly are related to institutions and organizations. This field was reviewed in the second half of the twentieth century by approved American universities and later in Europe. It has developed into three main fields as social science or sociology of aging, biomedical gerontology and geriatrics, and psycho-gerontology. However, at present, in most of

the great academic centers of the world, this field is in the form of integrated institutions adopting a comprehensive view to the elderly and their problems. The present study aimed to discover the theoretical, Islamic, and ideological origins of gerontology in oriental and Islamic society.

Method: This bibliographic review was conducted using the first-hand sources of Islam and Shi'ism and the use of related keywords such as the elderly, aging, older people, "Sheikhokha (Ar.)", "Sheikh (Ar.)", and the aging of the hadiths, narrations, quotes and texts of the Islamic jurisprudential sources. Maximum effort was made to extract texts from sources that were first mentioned and identified by early thinkers of Islam. Therefore, the consensus and relevance of the texts were mentioned and interpreted with the subject and purpose of the article. The length of the extraction of

texts from the main sources began in August, 2017, and until the time of writing and finalizing the manuscript in mid-December, 2017. Regarding validity and reliability of the texts (content validity), two Arabic language and literature specialists and three experts in the field of Islamic sciences were recruited in both main branches of Islam, Shi'ism and Sunnism.

Results: In the field of anthropology and philosophy in Iran, old age is divided into two periods: the first one, which is known as "Mobkereh", begins at the age of sixty and lasts until the age of seventy. The second is "Motaekhreh", which begins at the age of seventy and lasts until the end of its life. (1) The "Harem", which is an old person, refers to someone who has reached the peak of weakness and disability as a result of aging. (2) In the definition of "Ardhal-al-Omr" in the commentary of al-Qortabi (1273 AC.), it reads: "Ardhal-al-Omr" is the final point of life, who has reached the end of his/her life and has lasted so long that he/she has suffered dementia, mental and physical deterioration". (3) The term "Kohl" in the commentary of Al-Mounir (1990) meant: a man who has reached full-fledged development and who reaches 40 years of age or above. (4) In the explanation of the "Sheikh-al-Kabir" in the commentary of Al-Murraqi (1883 AC), it means that someone who is weakened and cannot alone feed the livestock. (5) Also, Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) said: "show mercy to children and respect older adults to be my Companions (Al-Ashab)" (6).

According to the verses, the traditions and Islamic hadiths mentioned, it is clear that God has emphasized that children should be kind to their fathers and mothers and do their best to fulfill their needs. Therefore, God has commanded that the elderly parents should be well-fed, so that Allah does not abandon the old age alone. Do not slay them from your house, do not give them bad sayings, talk with them with respect, meet them, be humble before them, and always pray for them; so that the day when it comes to you, your children will behave in the same way. At the same time, one can look at the issue from another angle, and it is essentially a matter of the worldview and attitude that Islam has towards the world and the human being. In Islam and other divine religions, human life does not end with its death, but death is in fact the end of a stage of life and the beginning of another stage (7,8). When such an attitude is presented, the elderly never feel that they have reached the end of life, and no old people needs to be young in their desire and none of them feels depressed when remembering the past. In simple terms, seniors do not suffer from depression and anxiety (9). The elderly with this worldview can enjoy their aging as a part of human life and continue to live with a calm imagination (10,11).

Conclusion: Considering the thorough and eternal nature of Islam and its dominance on human's existential structure and his real needs, it is necessary to design the curriculum of gerontology, which is a newly established discipline, based on Islamic principles and standards.

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