

Adult Children and Older People in Rural Malaysia: Religious Dimensions in Providing Family Supports

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Abstract —Although population ageing has long been studied in developed countries, it is a new research agenda in developing countries. There much needs to be explored about the ageing of the population. While research on population ageing in Malaysia is now a common effort, research on family support, however, receiving less attention. The objective of this paper is to explore the duty of children in providing support to elderly parents through Islamic perspectives. Using a single-case study, one former university professor has purposively been selected as a research participant to explore the issue. The results revealed that there are five related Islamic dimensions regarding providing family support: (1) the contentment of helping the weak, (2) parental care, the child's responsibility, (3) god's pleasure on parents' pleasure, the wrath of god on the wrath of parents, (4) parents are key to heaven for Muslims, and (5) Islam is a welfare religion.

Keywords —Population ageing; Older population; Family support; Religious dimensions

I. INTRODUCTION

There are many driving forces behind the writing of this article. First, from the previous study I have conducted, there is a wide range of information has been successfully collected. In particular, the present article builds upon my previous study whose part of its output has been published in the World Academic Journal of Management, Vol. 10, Issue. 2, June (2022) as well as in the International Journal of Scientific Research in Multidisciplinary Studies, Vol. 8, Issue, 7, July (2022), and Vol.8, Issue 8, August (2022). Some of the information gathered from that study is still kept and can be used to write various other articles. This article is in fact, parts of the said research output. Another driving force for the present article comes from the population ageing literature. Population ageing, although it has been thriving for a long time in developed countries [1], it is a new research area in Malaysia [2]. There is still a lot needs to be explored about the ageing of the population in Malaysia. In the developed countries themselves, research about the population ageing and related issue is still a major concern. Besides, I have also collected a lot of secondary information related to population ageing and support systems for older people for the use of various researches. This secondary information is very valuable that need to be shared and disseminate to other people as well. From this secondary information too, I have written many articles related to population ageing, which have already been published in various journals.

Family support is one of the major concerns in population ageing, and in fact, it can have a serious impact on the well-being of older people, being conducive to it for older people who have family members, while causing serious problems for those who do not [3]. While research on population ageing in Malaysia is a common effort, research on family support, however, receiving less attention. Therefore, further research is needed to explore children's sense of obligations in providing support to elderly parents. The focus of this paper is on the general issue regarding the religious dimensions of family support to elderly people. A religious dimension in this context is simply meant as integrating Islamic perspectives in the analysis of family support. In particular, this paper is concerned about the obligations of adult children and other family members in providing support to elderly parents as recommended in the Holy Quran. If adult children have parents, they have no other choice, except to provide support and care for their elderly parents, regardless of whether their parents are old or not [4]. If parents have more than one child, all these children are responsible for providing support and care for their parents according to their abilities. Elderly parents should never be left without support. Thus, the aim of this paper is to explore this issue from religious dimensions.

II. RELATED WORK

Because of people now live longer, the number of older persons in society is increased [5]. One of the current

demographic facts is that in many parts of the world, the number and percentage of elderly people are increasing [6]. Compared to the last century, especially before the 19th century, the number and percentage of elderly people today, that is the population aged 60 and over, has increased greatly. One of the main reasons why this prominent increased occurs is in fact, because people are living longer [7], that is to say that the life expectancy of the population has greatly increased globally leads to every human being born has the opportunity to live into old age.

The number of elderly people also increases due to other factors, such as the declining fertility rate [8] which has implications for the shrinking family size. The size of the family has important implications because in developing countries, the family is the source of care for the elderly [9]. Following the decrease in the number of children born which leads to the reduction of family sizes, and at the same time, the life expectancy of the population increases, then one of the inevitable facts is that, the proportion of elderly people in most societies is increased [10]. As the number of elderly people increased, there are many other problems related to the elderly in the family, such as, there is a possibility that elderly parents without children in the household will exist, or elderly parents who have children may not be able to get support because these children are likely do not live with them in the same household [11].

Many other aspects of everyday life, including the family, housing and living arrangements, economy, work and retirement, health and health resources, and support systems also related to population ageing. Especially in developing countries, the issue of family support has become a major issue, because support and care of the elderly is the responsibility of the family [9]. The elderly people normally depend on family members. The elderly in industrialized countries on the other hand, are less dependent on their family members [9]. The function of the family support, although important, has taken over by the government [9]. Older persons are eligible to get income support through the pension system or the social security system when they reach the status of elderly [12].

In developed countries, the elderly people can live independently without having to live under the same roof with their children. They simply continue the relationship with family members in a new form of relationship, described by two sociologists, Leopold Rosenmayr and Eva Kockeis, as "intimacy at a distance"[13], a term refers to a continuous and friendly relationship between parents and children, even though they live far away from each other. They still keep in touch and visit each other.

One thing needs to bear in mind, however, although the state in developed countries has a large role in the welfare for the elderly, family members still bear the responsibility of providing care and health services to their parents who suffer from chronic pain [14]. This is because the bond of family members in the family institution is universal and remains mutual through old age [15].

III. METHODOLOGY

As stated in the introduction, the present study is written using a qualitative information gathered from my previous study using a single-case research design, originally to prepare for the articles entitled "population ageing: a friend or an enemy of da'wah activity?", Vol. 8, Issue, 7, July [16] as well as "older people in rural community: a neglected group?", Vol.8, Issue 8, August [17] that have been published in the International Journal of Scientific Research in Multidisciplinary Studies.

That is to say, qualitative information in this paper is the output of the same study. It was stated in those two articles that a single-case research design is a design using a single participant to get a detailed information through repeated observation on the same participant during a certain period of time [18]. Interviews were conducted one on one between a researcher and a participant. Interviews were directed to get a detailed information to answer the issues revolved around the religious motivations regarding rewards children derive from support of elderly parents. The flow chart of the process is shown in the Figure 1.

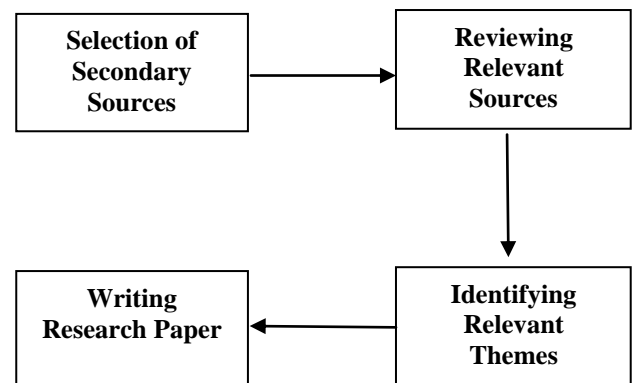


Figure 1: Flow Chart of Research Process

IV. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The discussion in this section is directly focused on the rewards children will derive from support and care of elderly parents. According to the research participant, among the related Islamic dimensions in providing family support are: (1) the contentment of helping the weak, (2) parental care, the child's responsibility, (3) god's pleasure on parents' pleasure, the wrath of god on the wrath of parents, (4) parents are key to heaven for Muslims, and (5) Islam is a welfare religion (Figure 2).

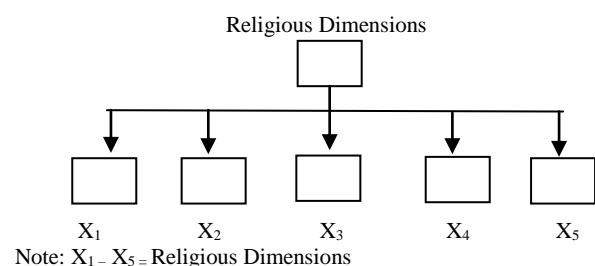


Figure 2: Religious Dimensions of Family Support

The Contentment of Helping the Weak

We must agree with the fact that older people are getting weaker. The research participant agreed that one of the natural and inevitable human traits are, the older the person gets, the weaker the person becomes. In addition to being critically ill, there are two stages in human development where humans need support from others, that are, during infancy or childhood, and old age. These two stages are accepted by most people as a stage where humans should depend on others. One of the human natures is, when we are able to help people, we will definitely feel satisfied.

In the population ageing literature, elderly people are weak, is not a new issue. The older the person is, the weaker their physical condition will be, and of course they need support to be able to continue their daily life perfectly. As we age, the need for support will increase due to changes in physical and social [19] as well as changes in health and psychological aspects [20]. Support can come from a variety of sources, and family support is a support provided by family members or relatives.

It is mentioned that the older our parents are, the weaker they will become [3]. Because they are weak, especially physically, children need to take care of their parents' needs so that their physical weakness does not interfere with their daily lives [21]. Because the whole life of a Muslim is to achieve the pleasure of Allah, then everyone is required to help others according to their ability to be able to dedicate our lives to Allah [22].

Parental Care, the Child's Responsibility

Taking care of parents, as told by a research participant, is an obligation for every Muslim. He said there are many verses in the Quran that explain the responsibility of children to their parents. Similarly, providing family support to parents is normal for all family members, as Hashimoto and Kendig stated that wherever the family persists, family support persists [15]. Our research participant said, we need to help our parents to educate and nurture our children, so that someday they can provide care to us because they are used to it before. Parents need to be taken care of because it is through them, we are born, nurtured and raised so that we become human beings as we are today. Although many elders are able to take care of and manage their own needs, they will go through a stage where they have to depend on others for care [23].

Many elderly people are facing serious problems in getting support for themselves in old age. They need support to live with dignity. In Malaysia, the government is providing certain incentives, such as an allowance of RM300 (USD100) per month for the elderly, as well as other income tax reduction incentives for adult children who care for elderly parents, but the task of caring for elderly parents is the responsibility of children and other family members. Because of that, many elderly people in rural areas who do not have children and family members face serious problems in everyday life. Although this amount is small, it gives great meaning. Living in the village is not as

difficult as living in the city. Many food items do not need to be bought; it can be obtained from the house compound. Vegetables do not need to be bought. Fish can be obtained for free from rice fields. Neighbors also always provide other food for the elderly. They help each other.

God's Pleasure on Parents' Pleasure, the Wrath of God on the Wrath of Parents

For those who believe in God, they believe that all human beings need God's love to live happily, both in this world, as well as in the hereafter. Without God's love, our lives will be problematic. Of course, we may be able to live happily in this world, but in the hereafter, we will have problems [4]. In one Hadis, it is mentioned that God's pleasure comes from the parents' pleasure, while God's wrath comes from the parents' wrath. This means that in order to gain the pleasure and the love of God in our lives in this world, and of course in the hereafter as well, we need the pleasure and the love of our parents. In order to get the pleasure and love from our parents, we must behave well with our parents.

We must not behave badly towards our parents. If our parents are satisfied with our lives and behaviour, then God will give us His love. God's love is of course in many forms that we may not be aware of. We are given good health, also a gift from God. Even if we are not rich, but healthy, it is a precious gift.

Parents are Key to Heaven for Muslims

The ultimate goal of all human life, as stated in the Holy Quran, is to achieve God's pleasure [4], and when we all die, we hope to meet our Creator in Heaven. Research participants agreed that there are many ways a Muslim can go to Heaven, namely through piety to God and by doing righteous deeds. The most valuable good deed in the eyes of God is doing good and obeying both parents [4]. On the other hand, if we disobey our parents, God imposes a great sin. All children are forbidden to do anything that causes parents to be discouraged [4].

The responsibility of the child remains unchanged even if there is a possibility that the child has converted to Islam, while the religion of their parents remains as non-Muslim. In other words, any children must always be good to their parents, whether or not parents are pious people or even whether or not they are believers [24].

It is actually not difficult to serve parents. Our parents, when they reach old age, they don't need money from us. Money, for them is not so important anymore because they don't buy much in their old age. What is necessary for children is, the frequency of visiting and taking care of their hearts and feelings. Their psychological needs are more important. They, in old age, need emotional support more than physical and financial support. Wise children, always observe the psychological state of their elderly parents and they always provide comforting treatment.

In any culture, respecting and caring for parents is the duty of children. It is illogical if any of the children, when they grow up are rebellious and hostile to their parents. Acts like this are not accepted in any society in the world. So, helping and caring for parents is a noble act, not only from a cultural point of view, but also from a religious perspective. Therefore, it is appropriate if we say that parents are the key to Heaven.

Islam is a Welfare Religion

Another reason why family support from children needs to be given to the elderly is to fulfill the demand of the teachings of Islam itself, where Islam was revealed as a blessing to all mankind. Every human being is kin to every other [25]. Every human being has been created as a unique individual, and at the same time, he is a social creature, having a strong urge to live in a community with other human beings [24]. Similarly, all Muslims are brothers; and helping other Muslims is thus the responsibility of all Muslims [4]. Muslims are not only required to help Muslims only. Everyone, regardless of religion, needs to be helped according to Islamic teachings.

Islam, which means as the welfare religion, is a religion that emphasizes life together. This togetherness is shown through the attitude of helping each other and caring about the needs of others, especially neighbors. Attitudes such as prosocial, altruism, for example, are important to practice in the life of every Muslim. But the reality of Muslim life now is the opposite. They do not care about the Muslim brotherhood. Many of them live individualistically, without helping others in need. Many of them are also deviated from the true teachings of Islam, and are hostile to non-Muslims [26]. Actually, Islam is a way of life, which is called *ad-din*. The term *ad-din* is a term that embracing all the facets of human life [27], which is a way of life of complete surrender to God [28]; [29]. All human beings who hold the title of Muslim must submit themselves completely to Allah [30].

The best people to help are our own parents. In this context, our research participants told that Imam al-Ghazali has explained that if we help others, we will get a lot of good in the hereafter, among them are, get a reward like the reward of those who fight to defend religion, we can be freed from the torment of hell, we will be rewarded with 70 good deeds and freed from 70 evil deeds, our sins can be erased and will return as a clean child without sin, if we die in a state of helping others, we have the opportunity to enter Heaven without reckoning. Such that is the great benefits if we help or provide support to parents or other people who are in need as stated in the Holy Quran.

V. CONCLUSION AND FUTURE SCOPE

This paper is concerned with the duty of adult children towards their elderly parents. Research on adult children and older people, particularly on family support is primarily a new agenda in Malaysia. Family support is not only a critical aspect in gerontology, but it is also one of

the important aspects of Islamic teachings. Here, this paper has discussed the rewards children will derive from the support and care they provide to their elderly parents based on an Islamic perspective. There are many verses in the Quran and Hadith explain the duty of children towards their parents. In one of the popular Hadith is that God's pleasure comes from the parents' pleasure, while God's wrath comes from the parents' wrath, and in order to gain the pleasure and the love of God; we need to get the pleasure and the love of our parents.

Among the rewards, as told by our research participant, including rewards, such as: (1) the contentment of helping the weak, (2) parental care, the child's responsibility, (3) god's pleasure on parents' pleasure, the wrath of god on the wrath of parents, (4) parents key to heaven for Muslims, and (5) Islam is a welfare religion. Our goal behind this explanation is to uncover the general Islamic teaching so that the younger generation understands that the duty of taking care of their parents is a religious duty. Children raised in such a family will not only appreciate love and security, but will also learn to relate to all kinds of people of different ages, genders, and individual characters, they will develop patience, respect, tolerance and cooperation in their lives when they become adults.

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