

# INTRA-FAMILY RELATIONS OF THE RESIDENTS OF PERTUBUHAN KEBAJIKAN WARGA TUA NURUL SAADAH, TERENGGANU: GUIDING PRINCIPLES FROM THE QUR'ANIC PERSPECTIVE

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## Abstract

*Elderly care centres primarily emphasizes social and personal requirements of senior citizens. The number of elderly being sent to elderly care centres in Malaysia has increased due to the rapid growth of the elderly population. Regrettably, a significant number of problems have been identified among the residents at these centres including children's refusal to take care of their elderly parents because of their limited abilities, time constraint, financial and health problems as well as responsibility in negligence. These problems are closely related to the intra-family relationship and have been identified as one of the contributing factors in the mistreatment of some elderly residents admitted to these centres. Thus, this study attempts to propose Islamic guiding principles in highlighting the responsibilities of children towards their parents in these centres by focusing on the residents of Persatuan Kebajikan Warga Tua Nurul Saadah, (PKWTNS) as a case study. The study will employ inductive method, observation and interview as the main methods for completing the research.*

**Keywords:** *intra-family, elderly, PKWTNS*

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## Introduction

Islam emphasizes respect for all elders whether they are parents, relatives or strangers. Being an elderly is a normal phase in the natural growing process of human life. Undergoing this phase is a matter of privilege as not everyone is guaranteed longevity in their lives. Death can unknowingly strike anyone regardless of their age, gender, or health condition. As reflected in the *Qur'an* (GhÉfir), 40: 67.

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*It is He, Who has created you (Adam) from dust, then from a Nutfah [mixed semen drops of male and female sexual discharge (i.e. Adam's offspring)] then from a clot (a piece of coagulated blood), then brings you forth as an infant, then (makes you grow) to reach the age of full strength, and afterwards to be old (men and women) – though some among you die before,- and that you reach an appointed term in order that you may understand.*

Islam also stresses the rights of parents to be treated with kindness, obedience, and honour, as mentioned in the *Qur'an* (Al-Isra<sup>Ö</sup>), 17: 23:

*And your Lord has decreed that you worship none but Him. And that you be dutiful to your parents. If one of them or both of them attain old age in your life, say not to them a word of disrespect, nor shout at them but address them in terms of honour.*

Thus, it is enshrined in the *Qur'an* that it is obligated to treat parents kindly especially in their old age. This is due to their reduced capacity and capabilities which requires further attention and care. Their sensitive feelings and emotions must also be aptly considered.

The obligation to be kind to parents is binding upon every Muslim, especially to mothers because a mother generally makes more sacrifices and endures pain than a father during her pregnancy and provides due care to the children day and night. This is the reason why Allah commands people to be good to parents, particularly to the mothers and treat them gently, patiently and respectfully.

“A man came to Allah's Messenger SAW and said, "O Allah's Messenger SAW! Who is more entitled to be treated with the best companionship by me?" The Prophet SAW said, "Your mother." The man said. "Who is next?" The Prophet SAW said, "Your mother." The man further said, "Who is next?" The Prophet SAW said, "Your mother." The man asked for the fourth time, "Who is next?" The Prophet SAW said, "Your father." (al-BukhÉrÉ, al-JÉmiÑ al-ØáÍÉÍ, vol. 8, ed. 2001: 5971).

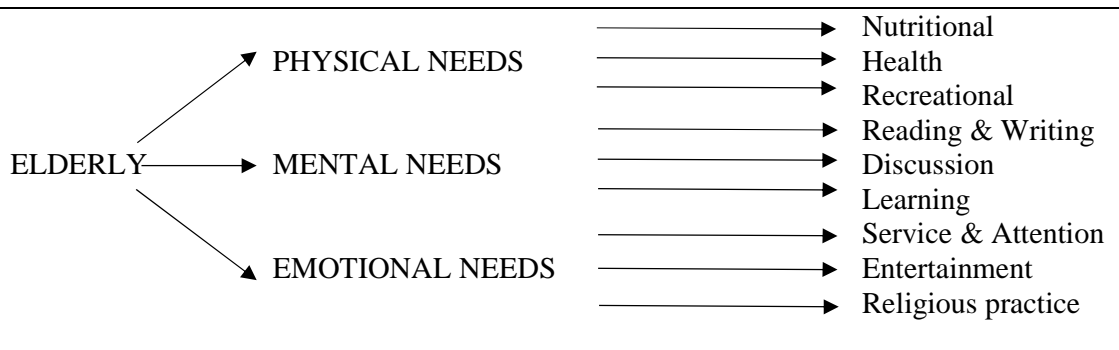
The Prophet SAW also declared disobedience to parents as a major sin as mentioned in the Hadith narrated by ÑUбайдullah b. AbÉ Bakr who said: I heard Anas b. MÉlik saying:

“The Messenger of Allah SAW talked about the major sins, or he was asked about the major sins. Upon this he observed: Associating anyone with Allah, killing of a person, disobedience to parents...” (Muslim, ØáÍÉÍ *Muslim*, vol. 1, n.d: 144).

### **Definition of elderly from Islamic perspective**

Some social scientists divide the elderly into three categories; the “young old” range between the ages of 65 to 75 where they tend to live independently with a spouse or partner, enjoy relatively good health and financial security. While the “old old”, ranging between the ages of 75 to 85, suffer from many health and financial problems. The “oldest old” are aged 85 and above, suffer from the most acute health and financial problems (Michael Kimmel & Amy

Aronson, 2009). A study has been conducted and clarified the needs of the elderly into three categories (Awang Had Salleh, 1992), which include:



In the Qur’an, the word elderly has been used in different places directly or indirectly to describe the meaning of old-aged people such as the following:

1. **Al-Sheikh:** This word has been used in the Qur’an four times. As Allah said in the *Qur’an* (Hud), 11:72:

*She said (in astonishment): “Woe unto me! Shall I bear a child while I am an old woman, and here is my husband an old man? Verily! This is a strange thing!”*

From this verse, it is mentioned that Sarah was at the age of 99 while Ibrahim was at the age of 100 or 120 (al-ÛabarÊ, vol. 15, 2000). The verse signifies that both of them were at very old age or are to be considered as an elderly. Another verse from *Qur’an* (YËsuf), 12: 78 explains that ‘old man’ means old age or weak in terms of strength (Wahbah, vol. 13, n.d.):

*They said: “O ruler of the land! Verily, he has an old father (who will grieve for him); so take one of us in his place. Indeed we think that you are one of the MuÛsinÊn (good-doers).*

Another verse mentioning elderly in the Qur’an (Qasas), 28:23 provides enlightenment about the loss of physical strength, where most elderly cannot function at the same capacity of young people. For instance, the following verse informs about the father of both women who was too old and weak, and did not have the strength to water the flocks:

*And when he arrived at the water (a well) of Madya (Midian) he found there a group of men watering (their flocks), and besides them he found two women who were keeping back (their flocks). He said: “What is the matter with you?” They said: “We cannot water (our flocks) until the shepherds take (their flocks). And our father is a very old man.”*

Islam recognises ageing as a normal stage of life and this happens in accordance with His command, will and decree. It is a reality that all humankind must deal with (Ibn Kath r, vol. 8, 2003). Allah states clearly in the *Qur'an* (Gh fir), 40: 67:

*...then (makes you grow) to reach the age of full strength, and afterwards to be old (men and women) – though some among you die before, - and that you reach an appointed term in order that you may understand.*

2. **Al-Kibar:** This word has been used in the *Qur'an* six times to define the meaning of elderly or old age. For example in the *Qur'an* (Al-Baqarah), 2: 266, Allah explains the example of the disbeliever's condition where he will not have any good deeds to provide an excuse when he returns to Allah on the Day of Resurrection, like the man in this verse who had no strength to replant the garden (Ibn Kath r, vol. 2, 2003).

*Would any of you wish to have a garden with date-palms and vines, with rivers flowing underneath, and all kinds of fruits for him therein, while he is stricken with old age, and his children are weak (not able to look after themselves), then it is struck with a fiery whirlwind, so that it is burnt? Thus does Allah make clear His Ayat (proofs, evidences, verses) to you that you may give thought.*

Ibn Kath r defines the meaning of al-Kibar in the *Qur'an* (Ali- mr n), 3: 40, where Prophet Zakariyy  had become an old man, his bones feeble and his head full of grey hair (Ibn Kath r, vol. 2, 2003). This explains the physical characteristics of the elderly.

*He said, "O my Lord! How can I have a son when I am very old, and my wife is barren?" (Allah) said: "Thus Allah does what He wills".*

From *Qur'an* (Ibr him), 14: 39, it is enlightened that Allah has rewarded Prophet Ibr him with two sons, namely Prophet Ism  l and Prophet Is q, during his old age. Ibn  Abb s said: Allah granted Prophet Ibr him a son Prophet Ism  l at 99 years old and another son Prophet Is q at 112 years old. Meanwhile, Sa  d bin Jubair said Prophet Ibr him received good news of the birth of a wise son, Prophet Is q, at the age of 110 (Al-Qur b , vol. 9, n.d.).

*"All the praises and thanks are to Allah, Who has given me in old age (Ishmael) and Is q. Verily! My Lord is indeed the All-Hearer of invocations.*

Prof. Dr. Hamka discusses in his tafs r the meaning of *al-Kibar* as mentioned in the *Qur'an* (Al- ijr), 15: 54:

*[Ibr him (Abraham)] said: "Do you give me glad tidings (of a son) when old age has overtaken me? Of what then is your news?"*

He explains that Prophet Ibr him at the time was 100 years old, while his wife, Sarah, was old and barren (Hamka, vol. 13-14, 2008). Another example from the *Qur'an* (Al-Isra'), 17: 23 also refers to older people or elderly as follows:

*...And that you be dutiful to your parents. If one of them or both of them attain old age in your life, say not to them a word of disrespect, nor shout at them but address them in terms of honour.*

The word al-Kibar in the Qur'an (Maryam), 19: 8 has been explained by Ibn Kath r where Prophet Zakariyy 's wife was an old woman, barren and had not given birth to any children in her entire life. Similarly, Prophet Zakariyy  himself had become old and advanced in years; his bones had become feeble and thin, with no potent semen or vigour for sexual intercourse (Ibn Kath r, vol. 6, 2003).

*He said, "My Lord! How can I have a son, when my wife is barren, and I have reached the extreme old age"*

3. **Al-ŃAj z:** This word has been used in the Qur'an twice to signify elderly or old people, for instance from the *Qur'an* (Hud), 11: 72:

*She said (in astonishment): "Woe unto me! Shall I bear a child while I am an old woman, and here is my husband an old man? Verily! This is a strange thing!"*

Sarah was an old woman who had never given birth to a child and the news of her delivery of Isaac was extremely surprising. Any woman, especially a sterile one, would be overjoyed by such news (Al-Ūabar , vol. 15, 2000). In another example from the *Qur'an* (Al-Dh riy t), 51: 29, Allah mentions:

*Then his wife came forward with a loud voice: she smote her face, and said: "A barren old woman!"*

4. **Ardhal al-ŃUmr :** This word has been used in the Qur'an twice in referring to the elderly, for example in *Qur'an* (An-Nahl), 16: 70:

*...and of you there are some who are sent back to senility, so that they know nothing after having known (much). Truly! Allah is All-Knowing, All-Powerful.*

The word of Ardhal al-ŃUmr in this verse refers to physical weakness. It is because people may reach a stage where he knows nothing due to weakness of mind as a result of old age and senility (Ibn Kath r, vol. 5, 2003). Another example from Qur'an (Al-Haj), 22: 5 reads:

*...then We bring you out as infants, then (give you growth) that you may reach your age of full strength. And among you there is he who dies (young), and among you there is he who is brought back to miserable old age, so that he knows nothing after having known...*

In this verse, Allah highlights the condition of people who live until old age. It is because at this stage, older people will become children-like in terms of feelings, knowledge, reactions, awareness, dealings and management, even though they were knowledgeable, wise and matured before. Nonetheless at this stage, the marked decline in mental capacity will affect their information and knowledge retrieval, to a point that will lead them to arguing

about God and His existence, which is far from their consciousness (Sayyid Qutb, vol. 12, 2006).

5. **Al-ÑAḌam:** This word has been used indirectly in the Qur'an in referring to the physical weakness of elderly. For instance in the *Qur'an* (Maryam), 19: 4 reads:

*He said: "My Lord! Indeed my bones have grown feeble, and grey hair has spread on my head, And I have never been unblest in my invocation to You, O my Lord!"*

6. **Al-Shaybah:**

*Allah is He Who created you in (a state of) weakness, then gave you strength after weakness, then after strength gave (you) weakness and grey hair. He creates what He wills. And it is He Who is the All-Knowing, the All-Powerful (i.e. Able to do all things).*

Al-Shaybah or white hair is a clear sign of ageing and sometimes occurs in young people. Meanwhile, in the *Qur'an* (Ar-Rūm), 30: 54, "al-Shaybah" means people who have been growing old.

7. **Al-Dhañf:**

*"...then after strength gave (you) weakness and grey hair..."*

In this Qur'anic verse (Ar-Rūm), 30: 54, it is highlighted that this weakness applies to the whole human constitution. Old age is a decline into a childhood-like phase in all aspects. It may be accompanied with psychological decline due to weakness of will. An old person may have an urge similar to that of a child without having the willpower to resist it (Sayyid Qutb, vol. 13, 2006).

Meanwhile, in the Prophetic Tradition, there are many alÉdÊth related to elderly, for instance:

1. Prophet SAW said: "He is not one of us who does not show mercy to our young ones and esteem to our elderly." (al-BukhÊrÊ, al-Adab al-Mufrad, ed. 1998: 164). Prophet SAW emphasizes that paying respect to elders and honouring them are characteristics of Muslim society.
2. This has been recorded in a report when AbË Bakr brought his father, AbË Quhafah to the Prophet SAW to embrace Islam. When the Prophet SAW saw him, he said to AbË Bakr: "Why didn't you leave the old man at his house and I would've gone to him there" AbË Bakr said, "You are more deserving of him coming to you than he is of you going to him". The Prophet SAW seated AbË Quhafah in front of him and honoured him. Then he passed his hand on AbË Quhafah's chest and asked him to embrace Islam and AbË Quhafah did (Al-HaithamÊ, MawÉrid al-Úam'Én ilÉ ZawÉid Ibn ÷ibban, vol. 5, ed. 1992: 1700). Prophet SAW as the best exemplary of the Ummah already guided us on how to treat the elderly with gentle and passion.
3. The Prophet SAW said: "Glorifying Allah involves showing honour to a grey-haired Muslim and to one who can expound the Qur'an, but not to one who acts

extravagantly regarding it, or turns away from it, and showing honour to a just ruler.” (Abū Dāwūd, Sunan Abū Dāwūd, vol. 4, n.d.: 4845). This hadith emphasizes that showing respect to elders in a gathering or events as well as being kind and gentle to them are equated with glorifying the Almighty Allah (Muhammad Asyraf, *ŅAunul MaŅbĒd Ņala Syarhi Sunan Abi DaĒd*, vol. 13, ed. 1994).

### **Issues of the elderly in Malaysia**

Malaysia is expected to reach aging nation status by 2030. As in other parts of the world, the population of Malaysia also shows signs of ageing, where the older population is growing rapidly due to declining fertility rates and mortality rates and extended life expectancy. The number of people aged 60 and above is projected to be nearly 2.6 million or about 9.7% in 2015 and 3.2 million or 11.3% in 2020 (United Nations, 1991).

Regrettably, a salient number of problems have been identified among senior citizens in Malaysia including welfare, financial and health issues. Family size becomes an important issue relating to the welfare of senior citizens as currently, many adult children in Malaysia have migrated to urban areas and are separated from their own family because of marriage, education or economic reasons. As a result, the elderly parents are losing source of care, sustainable income and the ability to live independently (Zainab & Wan Ibrahim, 2014). The National Population and Family Development Board’s (LPPKN) Fourth Population and Family Survey, when compared with the 2010 population and housing census, showed that about 23% or 538,000 out of 2.4 million senior citizens in Malaysia faced empty nest syndrome (Bernama, 2015). Empty nest syndrome refers to the emotional feeling of the parents such as loneliness, sadness and grief when their children leave home. To make things worse, some elderly are neglected and forced to endure homelessness or stay at elderly care centres despite having many children. The spike in the elderly population has led to the rise in establishment of elderly care centres during the past ten years in different provinces in Malaysia. It is based on the report from the Department of Social Welfare (DSW) Statistics Report 2014 that stated the number of residents registered in elderly care centres were 5714 in 2014 (Department of Social Welfare, 2014).

Meanwhile, a study has found that less than 10% of elderly in Malaysia live in poverty, 6% received Bantuan Orang Tua (BOT) scheme or Old Age Assistance Scheme (Saidatulakmal, 2014) and 675,000 elderly parents aged 60 and above have been abandoned and deprived of financial support from their children (Syuhaeda Aeni & Azhani, 2015). This financial problem among the elderly has also become a matter of concern because of the burgeoning living expenditure year by year. Furthermore, getting older can eventually lead to various physical and psychological health problems. Thus, the increase in the ageing population in Malaysia is inevitable and appears to constitute a matter of deep concern from the government, non-governmental organizations, private sectors and also the community.

### **Intra-Family Relations from Islamic Perspective**

According to Steinberg (2001), “intra-family relationship is a relationship that individuals experience within the family members such as the kinship relation between children with

father, mother, and siblings and family environment with regards to their relationship with entire members of the family.”

Meanwhile, intra-family relations from the Islamic perspective are mentioned numerously in the Qur’an as well as in the Hadith. Parents should be revered throughout all stages of their lives. In this respect, Allah declares and emphasizes the importance of being good and kind to parents (*wabilwÉlidain iÉsÉnÉ*) four times in the Qur’an directly after the command to worship Him alone. This indicates that honouring and respecting parents are extremely important in Islam. The *Qur’an* (Al-Baqarah), 2: 83 says:

*...Worship none but Allah (Alone) and be dutiful and good to parents, and to kindred, and to orphans and Al-Masakin.*

*And your Lord has decreed that you worship none but Him. And that you be dutiful to your parents. If one of them or both of them attain old age in your life, say not to them a word of disrespect, nor shout at them but address them in terms of honour.*

Ibn KathÉr remarks on this *Qur’anic verse* (Al-Isra), 17: 23, to be good to parents; not even utter “Uff” which is the mildest word of disrespect; not do anything horrible to them; and speak and behave gently, kindly, politely, with respect and appreciation (Ibn KathÉr, vol. 5, 2003). While ŃAĪa’ bin AbÉ RabÉh explained “...do not repel them...” as “do not raise your hand against parents” (Al-ŪabarÉ, vol. 17, 2000).

Imam Muslim recorded that ŃAbdullah witnessed the Prophet SAW said:

“The best of the deeds or deed is the (observance of) prayer at its proper time and kindness to the parent” (Muslim, vol. 1: 137).

MuĪammad FÉÉd ŃAbdul BÉqÉ explains kindness to the parents (*bir al-wÉlidain*) as being good to parents and showing homage to their friends (Muslim). Therefore, the above revelations clearly establish the concept of intra-family relationships particularly the parent-child relations from the Islamic perspective.

### **Intra-Family Relations at PKWTNS**

PKWTNS has been registered under the Care Centres Act 1993 and is situated at Kampung Tok Dor, Jerteh, Terengganu. This organization was built in stages starting from 1988. At the beginning, there were only 12 residents and this number increased to 20 residents in 1989. In 1990, 28 houses were built due to the increasing number of the residents. This organization is established to accommodate senior citizens (single mothers) aged 55 years and above, who possess an interest in learning, acquiring and exploring religious education with more depth. In 2016, there are currently 71 residents registered at PKWTNS.

A total of 9 residents were successfully interviewed in this study. However, only 5 respondents were selected due to their clear and direct answers while others were not. This interview represents 7% from the whole residents of PKWTNS. In general, the study showed



that most of the respondents in this study have to rely on non-formal financial resources because of their low-level of education. One of the respondents reported that her grandchildren always come and visit her but only to ask for the pocket money. Another respondent said that she does not want to burden her son because of his unstable financial income in supporting and sustaining his own family.

One of the respondents reported that for the past few weeks, she fell down and received treatment at a private clinic nearby. She also said:

*“My children called and asked if I want to go to the clinic, then they will come to PKWTNS, but I did not want to burden them because all of my children are busy working and will take time to come here. So, I just said I will go by myself...after that incident, none of my children come and visit me to see my condition, but they always call and ask about my health. Once a month, my children will bring me back home for a few days.”*

Another respondent said:

*“I have 9 children and most of them live in Kelantan...but only my daughters have called and asked about me, meanwhile my sons rarely call me.”*

The rest of the respondents said that their children would come and visit them only during vacation. Some would bring their parents back home. The limited availability to allocate some time with their parents is due to the changing life phase where most children migrate to urban areas and are occupied with marital, economic and education matters.

Almost all respondents stated that the main reason for living in PKWTNS is their awareness of acquiring religious education. One of the respondents said:

*“Before this, I am too busy working and take care of my family until do not have time to learn religious education and now Allah give me a second chance to change for the better.”*

Most of the respondents willingly chose to come and stay at PKWTNS because this centre systematically provides the means for them to enhance and increase their spiritual preparations for life in the Hereafter by involving in spiritual activities such as congregational prayers, voluntary night prayers (qiyémullail), tajwêd class and many others. All these activities can be difficult to be done at home alone due to time constraint in taking care of the family and work. One of the respondents reported:

*“If I stay at home, I will feel depressed because of the children are too busy working and some of them have migrated to other states due to marriage and economic reasons. However, when I came here, I feel peaceful.”*

Hence, this study revealed that among the intra-family problems in PKWTNS were the lack of care and concern by the children in the well-being of the parents in the time of need. Moreover, financial and economic factors contributed to the decline in the intra-family relationship where some children were unable to visit their parents regularly. In fact, some

were also found to be financially dependent on the elderly despite only receiving a fixed monthly income of RM300 from Bantuan Orang Tua (BOT) Scheme.

### **Conclusion and Solution**

Islam promotes the maintenance of a good relationship with elderly parents by honouring and respecting them as stated in the Qur'an and the Hadith. The existence of elderly care centres primarily emphasizes social and personal requirements of senior citizens and it is not a place for children to send their parents and neglect their responsibilities towards them. The needs of the senior citizens are not the duties to be attended only by the organizations, but should also be fulfilled by their own children. Their emotional needs require further attention and care as the elderly have sensitive feelings and emotions. It is to make sure that the elderly does not feel isolated and the relationship with their children will remain in good condition although they are living apart.

There are various ways for children to care for their elderly parents, such as calling them regularly, giving presents and frequent visits, among others. By doing so, elderly parents will feel more appreciated and comforted knowing that their welfare is well attended by their own children. At times, a simple call is valued more than anything else. Therefore, in order to preserve family ties, children must realize and fulfill their duties towards their parents despite being placed in elderly care centres.

In addition to obedience, reverence and submission towards parents, Islam also stresses and encourages children to prioritise their parents' financial needs. It is because parents had faced a lot of hardships and made many sacrifices in raising their children. Thus, being kind to elderly parents does not only by speaking and behaving well towards them, but also includes giving them financial help as stated in the Hadith narrated by ÑAisyah, Ummul Mu'minÊn:

The Prophet SAW said: "The children of a man come from what he earns, rather they are his pleasantest earning; so enjoy from their property." (AbÊ DÊud, vol.3: 3531).

Besides that, it is suggested that the government and stakeholders should build more elderly care centres with appropriate and complete facilities to fulfil the needs of the elderly such as mosques, medical services, laundry services, cafeterias, recreation centres, hotels or homestays for the children and families. These facilities will ease the children, especially those who are from urban areas to visit their parent regularly and have some activities together comfortably.

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