

The Commitment of Older Persons in Nursing Homes in Religious Activities

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Abstract: The commitment of older persons in religious activities is in fact a responsibility of all *mukallaf* which starts as early as they reached adolescence age. Though at the older age, their responsibility to Allah is an obligation that should be fulfilled. There are older persons who allocate some of their time at older age to perform religious responsibilities and rituals, but there are numbers who are still busy with work and ignores the importance of later age to perform *ibadah* and good deeds. This article aims at scrutinizing the religious commitment of senior citizens who are residing in nursing homes in Malaysia. This study has chosen *Rumah Seri Kenangan, Cheras* as location of survey. Results of the study show that perform *du'a* (supplication) to Allah after every prayer is the most frequent activities conducted. A majority of older persons perform five times obligatory daily prayers. More than half complete their 30 days fasting in Ramadan. They also give out the required zakat fitrah. On a whole the older persons at nursing home seem do not neglect their religious commitment.

Key words: Older person • Population • Religious commitment • Welfare • Care

INTRODUCTION

This article presents the results of a cross-sectional survey of religious commitment of older persons who are residing in nursing homes. According to the Population and Housing Census of Malaysia [5], in the year 2000, Malaysia recorded 6.3% of her population was persons aged 60 years and above. In Malaysia, social welfare, which is normally covers a wide range of activities and services for the purpose of assisting individuals, groups and communities to cope with social problems [9], is under the responsibility of Social Welfare Department, Ministry of Women, Family and Community Development. Among the services are running the nursing homes for older persons, known as *Rumah Seri Kenangan*. The ministry offered 4 types of services; namely family and child care service, rehabilitation services for the disabled, reformatory service and social development service. For the family and child care service, there are 4 welfare institutions which provide such services, namely home for children, *Rumah Seri Kenangan*, *Desa Binadiri*

Pengemis and *Rumah Ehsan* [6]. There are nine *Rumah Seri Kenangan* which among their functions are to give care and comfort to the aged who are poor and needy. Number of the whole inmates of *Rumah Seri Kenangan* up to the end of the year of 2005 was 1 827 people [6].

In recent years there has been increasing interest in research on changes within the family, on family formation, family dysfunction, or on the interventional approach to address these changes [8]. Islam places extreme emphasis upon the family. The changes within the family are likely to affect the welfare of older persons. Elderly parents should be taken care of by their adult children. According to the Qur'an, Allah says in the Chapter al-Isra' (17), verses 23-24: "Thy Lord hath decreed that ye worship none but Him and that ye be kind to parents. Whether one or both of them attain old age in thy life, say not to them a word of contempt, no repel them, but address them in terms of honour. And, out of kindness, lower to them the wing of humility and say, "My Lord, Bestow on them thy Mercy even as they cherished me in childhood" [1].

The importance of religious in the 21st century cannot be denied [10]. In Islam the commitment of older persons in religious activities is in fact a responsibility of *mukallaf* which starts as early as they reached maturity age. Even though the persons are too old, they still have to fulfill this responsibility. Since our purpose here on this earth is to submit to Allah's Will in order to achieve true happiness and success in this life and the next [2; 4], it is the duty of all Muslims to fulfill all the religious activities.

There are numbers who are still busy with work and ignores the importance of later age to perform *ibadah* and good deeds. Should the older persons use the advanced age wisely, they are actually recognizing the "period of grace" granted by Allah which goes hand in hand with the *Hadith* narrated by Abu Huraira that the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) said: "Allah will not accept the excuse of any person whose instant of death is delayed till he is sixty years of age" [3]. Days of grace in this *Hadith* is the opportunity for older persons to brilliantly make use of extended time was given to them.

However, Abu Huraira also narrated that I heard the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) said: "The heart of old man remains young in two respects, i.e., his love for the world (its wealth, amusements and luxuries) and his incessant hope" [3]. In other *Hadith*, the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) also said: "The son of Adam (i.e. man) grows old and so also two (desires) grow old with him, i.e., love for wealth and (a wish for) a long life" [3]. In recent years, issues regarding older persons are becoming increasingly important. Since older persons receive attention in Malaysia in the past several decades, many of the issues of this population have been the target of research.

Despite a large number of studies to explore certain aspects of older persons, the nature of religious commitment is still relatively unexamined. Many questions about the religious commitments of this population remain unanswered. According to Rash [7], whether formal or informal nursing homes activities seemed uninspiring to older persons and seemed to be poor stimulants for socialization. In an attempt to fill the gap, this paper therefore aims at analyzing the religious commitment of older persons in religious activities in nursing homes.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

There are nine nursing homes for older persons in Malaysia. In exploring the commitment of elderly in religious activities in nursing homes, this study has

purposely chosen the nursing home in Cheras, Kuala Lumpur, namely *Rumah Seri Kenangan Cheras* as a study site. This quantitative study was conducted in 2007 and 2008. A series of visits were also conducted in 2010 and 2011 to further explore the changes and ascertain the continuity of the study. There were 78 elderly Muslims in nursing homes in 2007. A total of 36 persons were randomly selected as samples. This study used face-to-face interviews as the major tool in data collection. To explore religious commitment of these respondents, several related questions are asked to respondents. Data were analyzed using descriptive analysis.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Demographic Profiles: Rumah Seri Kenangan, Cheras provides care and custody to the elderly from numerous religious beliefs. Of the 36 elderly observed, 21 were male and 15 others were females aged between 60-90 years old. This study shows that 61.1% of the respondents are from the age group between 60-69 years old, 16.7% aged between 70-74 years old and 22.2% aged between 75-90 years old. It is found that respondents aged between 60-69 years old were still physically capable and yet fit to perform religious rituals. The elderly aged 70 years and over, generally are no longer capable physically to perform prayers in standing positions, attend religious lessons program and perform *zikir* in groups. A total of 20 elderly (55.6%) had attended formal education. The rest (44.4%) had never attended formal education. The highest was primary school level (36.1%), followed by secondary school (16.7%). Only one (2.8%) received college/university education. About half of elderly in a *Rumah Seri Kenangan*, do not have formal education. The majority of those who had formal education are just at primary school. The number of respondent who had formal education beyond primary school is not so significant in number.

Commitment of Older Persons in Religious Activities: Every normal Muslim individual who attains the age of adolescence, have certain duties to Allah. Though at the older age, this responsibility is an obligation that should be fulfilled. To ensure the elderly performs their responsibilities towards Allah effectively, *Rumah Seri Kenangan* has been organizing special religious activities for them, such as *du'a* (supplication), *salat* (prayer), fasting and zakat. There are also certain religious programs organized to raise the knowledge and

commitment of these elderly about religious responsibility. They are also being exposed to moral related activities.

Commitment in Du'a: Du'a is one of the important activities in Islam. All Muslims should perform *du'a* in times in life. Allah says in the Chapter al-Baqarah (2), verse 286: (Pray:) "Our Lord! Condemn us not if we forget or fall into error; Our Lord! Lay not on us a burden like that which Thou didst lay on those before us; Our Lord! Lay not on us a burden greater than we have strength to bear. Blot out our signs and grant us forgiveness. Have mercy on us. Thou art our Protector; grant us victory over the unbelievers" [1]. In the Chapter Ali 'Imran (3), verse 8: "Our Lord! (they say), "Let not our hearts deviate now after Thou hast guided us, but grant us mercy from Thee, for Thou art the Grantor of bounties without measure" [1]. In the Qur'an, there are a lot of verses directed Muslims to perform *du'a*.

Out of eight items, "to perform *du'a* to Allah after every prayer five times" is the most frequent *du'a* activities (77.8%) performed, followed by "*du'a* to God every time before and after meals" (75.0%), "*du'a* every time before and after sleep" (75.0%), "reciting *tasbih*, *tahmid* and *takbir* 33 times a day" (75.0%), "think of the greatness of God" (75.0%), "reciting three *Qul* before going to bed" (72.2%), "seek repentance to God every time before going to bed" (72.2%) and "pray for forgiveness 100 times a day" (72.2%). Approximately 22-28% who did not practice *du'a* frequently.

Commitment in Salat: Salat is the pillar of religion. It is a responsibility that has been commanded by Allah to all Muslims who have attained the age of maturity (*baligh*) and normal. In whatever conditions, all Muslim should perform this religious activity. Four items were presented to explore the activities of *salat*, namely; perform the five times daily *salat* during daytime and nighttimes; perform the five times daily *salat* in mosques; perform the non-obligatory *salat* before and after obligatory *salat* (*rawatib salat*); and perform *tarawih* completely.

A total of 61.1% of the older persons perform five times obligatory *salat*. Only 37.8% who accomplish the five times daily *salat* at the mosque. More than half did not perform it at the mosque. When asked about *rawatib* non-obligatory (*salat* before and after the obligatory *salat*), 47.2% perform these *salat*. Similarly, when asked about *tarawih*, about half (50.0%) said they perform *tarawih*. Overall, this study shows that most of the older

person livings in old folk's home are concerned about the obligatory and non-obligatory *salat*. However, the numbers of those are not concerned about the obligatory and non-obligatory *salat* are also quite substantial, between 30-50%.

Commitment in Fasting: Fasting is one more an obligatory in Islam. All Muslim who have reached adolescence age have to perform this activity. In the Qur'an, Chapter al-Baqarah (2), verse 183 Allah says: "O ye who believe! Fasting is prescribed to you as it was prescribed to those before you, that ye may (learn) self-restraint"[1]. Allah has directed Muslim to perform the obligatory fasting once a year in the month of Ramadan. Allah says in the Qur'an, Chapter al-Baqarah (2), verse 185: Ramadan is the (month) in which was sent down the Qur'an, as a guide to mankind, also clear (Signs) for guidance and judgment (between right and wrong). So every one of you who is present (at his home) during that month should spend it in fasting, but if anyone is ill, or on a journey, the prescribed period (should be made up) by days later. God intends every facility for you: He does not want to put you to difficulties. (He wants you) to complete the prescribed period and to glorify Him in that He has guided you; and perchance ye shall be grateful"[1]. Fasting in this study is the obligatory fasting performs in the month of Ramadan and non-obligatory fasting activities. There are three items on the fasting activities were asked; I have always completed the 30 days fasting in Ramadan; I have always completed the six days fasting in Syawal; and I have always fasting on Monday or Thursday. Results show that most of them do not neglect the obligation of Ramadan fasting, where 69.5% of them complete the 30 days fasting in Ramadan and only 25.0% of them fasting six days in Syawal. There are only 27.7% of respondents always fasting on Monday or Thursday.

Commitment in Zakat and Charity: The older persons in nursing homes are normally do not have income. This situation led to some question whether the elderly in *Rumah Seri Kenangan* is capable to offer charity or give alms (*sadaqah*)? There are two items that were asked on zakat and charity activities, which are: I will pay obligatory zakat fitrah as required; and I participate in charity activities if needed. The elderly are involved in both activities. A total of 72.2% of them pay out the required zakat fitrah and approximately 30% are unable to pay the zakat fitrah personally. In the charity activities, 52.7% of the elderly participated in the charity, if needed.

Commitment in Religious Program: For most of older persons, later life is a time of loneliness. To avoid loneliness, older persons should participate in any social or religious activities. For most of the respondents, *Rumah Seri Kenangan* should create programs to attract the inmates to perform their religious activities. There are many religious programs are asked, namely; I joined all the programs set by *Rumah Seri Kenangan*; I joined a public lecture held; I participate in weekly religious classes every two times a week; I participate in monthly talks; and I joined the Parents Day. The highest religious program followed is Parents Day (55.5%), followed by the weekly religious classes two times a week (52.8%), monthly talks (47.2%) and public lectures (38.9%). The least activity followed by was the monthly public talks and lectures.

Commitment in Moral Activities: Moral or akhlak in this study is referred to the relationship between an elderly and peers. There were three items asked: I visited friends to bridge the relationships; I give advice to those having problems; and I helped other elderly in whatever matters within the capacity I am capable to. It shows that "I helped other elderly in whatever matters within the capacity I am capable to is 55.5%, followed by visiting friends to bridge the relationships (52.7%); and giving advice to those having problems (41.6%). Only a few who are active in moral activity, others did not care about visiting friends, giving advice to the needy and help for the needy.

CONCLUSION

In recent years, the family members are likely to be facing problems in fulfilling their duties to be parts of caregiving system, a provision of care to older persons. The placements of the elderly in the welfare homes are one of the strategies to ensure their welfare is taken care. The commitment of older persons in religious activities is in fact a responsibility of *mukallaf*. Though at the older age, this responsibility is an obligation that should be fulfilled. There are older persons who allocate some of their time to perform religious activities, but there are numbers who are still busy with work and ignores the importance of later age to perform *ibadah* and good

deeds. *Rumah Seri Kenangan*, Cheras has chosen as a location for this study. Research reveals that older persons that participating in the religious activities are younger older persons. A majority of elderly shows a strong commitment in *du'a*, prayers five times a day, fasting in Ramadan and paying the zakat fitrah. Commitments of the elderly in other type religious activities are moderate.

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