

## Children's Mental Health from the Perspective of Traditions and Religious Texts

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### Abstract

**Background and Objectives:** Today, discussions on health have considered the spiritual – mental health on a par with physical health. A close relationship can be seen between two points, mental health and ethical, training issues, so that individuals who do not have spiritual virtues and religious training are not healthy individuals. Due to the considerable importance of moral and mental health about children, this study was aimed to investigate training issues and moral and mental health about children.

**Methods:** The main source used in this research was Comprehensive Al-ahadith software Version 3.5 provided in Islamic research computer center, which included more than 180 books of hadith in Arabic and Persian language. At the first, keywords about mental, health, child, and training were searched and all related data were collected. Then, data were categorized based on specific subjects and described.

**Results:** In a total classification, the training, moral and mental health education of children can be divided into two categories from the perspective of narratives, before and after the birth. A prenatal period includes before marriage, before the formation of the embryo, during the formation of embryo, during pregnancy and after birth period includes searching a fair name, promoting learning capacity, interplaying infant, and the main role of mothers in childhood and lactation period.

**Conclusion:** Childhood constitutes the substructure of individual's growth and the provision of mental health for each person depends on the way of child training. Islam has been based on the growth and completeness and has presented useful educations about child training and to carry out these instructions necessitates taking- effective steps for promoting mental health.

**Keywords:** Child, Mental Health, Traditional, Review.

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### Introduction

Human being, from the point of view of Islam, is a representative of God (on the earth) who has been created in order to achieve absolute perfection based on his inherent dignity. The most important factor to achieve this propose is being healthy. Today, moral and

mental health along with physical health have been considered together to achieve this important factor, since human existence has a place beyond the physical body. In other words, it can be told that one of dimensions of community and individuals' health has been moral, mental topics and promotion of human and finally the community (1).

Today's, mental health is of considerable importance. Mental health is a science for the welfare and health; Social welfare that is related to all processes of life from before birth to death and is accompanied with all aspects of life from family to school (2).

2001 was named the year of mental health by mental health organization and emphasized all nations should promote the level of their mental health in family and community. Mental health is an integral part of general health in which an individual is aware of his cognitive and emotional elements, as well as his ability to establish a relationship with others (1). Psychologists confirm a need for spirituality and regard moral and mental factors as health aspects of human being's life. So, it can be said that moral and mental health is necessary to achieve a comprehensive and total health. Since humans are social creatures and depend on others, a lack of a person's health damages other individuals in turn. The patient suffering from a spiritual –mental disorder will be likely to do harm to the community as well.

There is a close relationship between two topics of mental health and ethical and training cases, so that when an individual has a lack of ethical training, he is not considered a healthy individual. Mainly, having mental health is a pretext to entrance into a route of mental and ethical movement. It has been noted in traditions that once the Prophet passed by a place when he sees a gathering. He asks what has happened to the individual. They answer he is mad. He replies he is sick. A crazy person is one who goes with arrogance among others. Pride is stated in this tradition as a sign of mental illness and the lack of mental health. In mental health discussions, a child's mental health is of specific importance. An important section of health program is allocated to promote a child's mental health. An improvement in relationship between mothers and infants leads to corrective mental and social training in children in primary years (1).

In a study by Bingyan et al. on Chinese children, it was found that the most important risk factor of depression in children was parents' emigration. Finally, the researchers emphasized that increased social support for

children by parents and community is an important factor in the prevention of depression in children (3).

Hence, a great deal of attention has been dedicated to children's upbringing in Islam, hence a heavy task for parents to the extent that the result of this upbringing is a desirable child who is considered a charity for parents. One of parents' tasks is the child's training to provide moral and mental health of their child. Despite studies that have been done in the field of mental health, no study is available which has been carried out about the mental health of children from a religious point of view. Due to the considerable importance of moral and mental health about children, this study was aimed to investigate the upbringing and moral and mental health of children.

#### **Methods:**

This study was a review research to explore the mental health, ethical principles and children's upbringing, especially by using religious sources from Imams (PBUH). The most important source used in this research was Comprehensive Alahadys software Version 3.5 provided in Islamic research computer center including more than 180 titles of hadith books in Persian and Arabic languages. At first, keywords about mental, health, child, and training were searched and all relevant data were collected. Then, data were categorized based on specific subjects and described. Subsequently, subjects and traditions were classified based on detailed subjects and stated as will be explained below

#### **Results and Discussion:**

Based on an overall classification, training, moral and mental health topics for raising children can be divided into two categories from the perspective of traditions in the period of before and after birth.

The first section: before birth

In the religious approach, planning for mental health and ethical training of children begins before birth and even before marriage of parents. In this section, some issues are worth noting .

A: Before marriage: One of the points we are advised to pay attention to in selecting a wife is

the generation and children created from this marriage. One hadith has quoted the prophet saying: Choose the right location for your sperm and select a wife of your peer individuals. He also said: look at where you put your child because the effect of sweat is perpetual (4). An interpretation of sweat noted here is the genes that transmit physical characteristics. According to the importance of physical, biological, and spiritual features used in upbringing the children, it can be interpreted that choosing a wife should be performed carefully for the sake of child's health .

Islam has emphasized Kofvial for wife selection. Kofvial means being at the same level in all respects like economic, social, cultural and religious factors. If the couple (groom and bride) are not at the same level, they will face disorders and problems, leading to challenges in the family. Therefore, there would not be a suitable situation for the child. Regarding the importance of considering some criteria for choosing a wife, one point is illustrated here; Sadegh Imam has stated anyone who weds his daughter to wine-drinker, he has broken up family relationship (5).

B: before dropping sperm: Imams have mentioned some recommendations with regard to the formation of sperm and embryo growth. One of the most obvious and important instructions is the creation of Zahra (PBUH). Before the formation of sperm for the birth of Zahra (PBUH), the Prophet (PBUH) was assigned forty days to keep away from Khadija and be busy fasting and praying. This also shows the importance of spiritual purity for couples, especially the man in the formation of embryos. The role of nutrition has been considered in the formation of embryos. In one narrative, it is stated that whoever eats unlawful food, his prayers will not be accepted for forty days. This is forbidden because of its impact on the soul and spirit of man, which is blocking it from connecting to God. It is obvious that impure and harmful effects can damage the embryo during its growth. This is a counsel to parents that both during life and even before the formation of sperm to the effect that they should be far away from unlawful foods. Moreover, when they aim for a new baby, they should take

care of its nutrition, especially in the first forty days. Another important point about Zahra's birth, which ethics scientists emphasized, is the role of father before the formation of sperm, embryo, and the important role of mother after embryo and during pregnancy .

C: Embryo formation time: Some customs and recommendations have been stated regarding the embryo formation time. Among them, mention can be made of a tradition of prophet as quoted by Amaly Sheykh Sadough pointing to several conditions about this matter. In this tradition, place, time and the situation of couples are but some factors that play a role in the formation of embryo. Intercourse has been recommended on some days and nights and prohibited on some others. Lying toward and opposite Qiblah and nakedness of couples have been prohibited and uttering the expression "In the Name of Allah, the Compassionate, the Merciful" before the intercourse have been recommended instead. Imam Sadegh (PBUH) has been quoted saying that couples at the time of their relationship for new child read this prayer: " Oh God, bless me with a son and make him clean his creation is not in the increase and not decrease and its consequences to the best" (6).

D: Pregnancy: The role of mothers at this period is very important. Normally, the baby remains as a guest in the womb for 9 months. It grows on mother's blood and flesh and takes on mother's mental and spiritual manners. Therefore, the fetus is directly affected by all physiological, nutritional and psychological characteristics of the mother. According to narratives, prosperity and adversity begin during embryonic time. Therefore, the mother has a very important role in mental health and upbringing of the embryo during pregnancy. With respect to the importance of the moral and mental health of the fetus during pregnancy, the following are stated in in religious texts and traditions.

1. Nutrition: The discussion about the role of food and unlawful food discussed previously is in order here. Imam Sadiq (PBUH) has said that food for the child is provided in the womb from whatever the mother feeds on. If the food is doubtful, or forbidden, the blood and flesh of

fetus will grow with it. Quran says: those who unjustly eat up the property of orphans eat up a fire into their own bodies: they will soon be enduring a blazing fire! Eating up orphans' wealth is considered a Haram act. A pregnant woman whose food comes from the forbidden sources puts the fire in her abdomen and her baby will grow with fire .

2. Choosing a name for fetus: One of the most important points about child rearing is choosing a name for fetus during pregnancy (7). Imam Ali said: Choose a name for your baby before the birth and if you don't know exactly about their being male or female, use a name that is common for both of them. Choose a name for abortions, because on resurrection day when you see them without a name, the abortion child will communicate to his father; "why have not you given me a name?" The Prophet named Mohsen before birth (8). It has been recommended that mothers talk to their fetuses. This hadith indicates spiritual acceptance, conception and awareness of the fetus during this period .

3. Mental factors: The fetus during 9 months of his residence as a guest in mother's uterus is affected by the mother's entire characteristics. So, all feelings like anger, grief, emotions, malice and cynicism, as well as faith and piety, pure heart and benevolence of the mother, all characteristics of human beings, virtues and vices, and moral and mother's spiritual distress or psychological comfort directly affect the fetus. It has been illustrated in Khesal book that a child enters into mother's abdomen in a form of very small creature and starts his rapid development into the world of human being. His attachment to his mother is the first step of promotion. He feeds from the breast of his mother to be shaped into a human being, and puts on a dress with the fairest stature. Then, God breathes of Hid soul into his body to create new human being. So blessed be Allah, the best to create! Whatever children have, mothers have granted them. Pure talent and good route are established in child's nerves and in his veins with his blood and breast milk. Mother's ideas, her feelings, and her thought appeared in the child's actions and thoughts. Today, children who are good, pious and brave have mothers

who are knowledgeable well trained in behavior and good existence (9).

Hence, it has been advised that pregnant women protect themselves against sins and contaminations and perform religious practices, constantly hold their ablution, cite specific verses of Quran during different months of pregnancy. She gets comfortable by remembering and noting God. All of noted cases will lead to mother's purity of her soul. Consequently, it will lead to the health of fetus's soul and mind .

One concrete indication about comprehension and reception of fetus is a tradition that is applied to facilitate pain of delivery. It was quoted in traditions for women during delivery that is recited this Aye of Quran: it is he who brought you forth from the wombs of your mothers when ye knew nothing; and he gave you hearing and sight and intelligence and affections: that ye may give thanks (Nahl, 78)

Then, it was addressed to fetus: So you are free to leave by ordering the Lord. This is a sign of reception in fetus (10).

Part II: issues of mental health and Upbringing child after birth.

One: Choosing a good name: the name of a human being is something by which he/ she is known or recognized during his/her lifetime. Names are influential in the formation of personality. It has been said to choose a good name for the children. Imam Reza (PBUH) said: The first gift of parents to their child is to choose a desirable name (7). In another hadith, Prophet stated: Choose a desirable name because you are called the same name on the day of resurrection (11).

Two. Paying attention to infant's learning ability and receptivity

Quran states that we created, at birth, learning tools, ears, eyes, soul for human being. This shows that infants have the ability for learning and can understand things. Therefore, it is recommended to utter call to prayers in the right ear of child and pre-prayer recitation in his left ear. Prophet said" When an infant is born, Say prayers to his right ear(Azan) and Eghameh to the left ear, they have left in the infallibility of the accursed Satan (12).

Let the infant's first discourse to hear be in the name of Monotheism. He is familiar to these voices because Prophet stated that each of creatures is born based on his God-seeking nature, to recite *la ilaha il-lal lâh* (13).

Another important point which shows infant's receptivity is that parents should not make love in the presence of the infant. Interesting to say that this action is emphasized to be avoided even when the infant is asleep. Prophet and Sadegh Imam, pointing to this issue, narrated these two hadiths. "The man should not have intercourse with his wife in the house, lest the child will inherit adultery (Zina)". Man and his wife should not have intercourse even in the infantile period in the presence of infant because there will follow a risk of appearance of Zina (14). The emotional excitement during intercourse affects infant, and will cause behavioral disorders. The infant and child's physical and mental health is associated with the calmness of parents and the family environment.

Three. The important duty of the mother in breast-feeding: Infants in breast-feeding period like fetus period depend on their mothers for physical, spiritual, and mental nutrition. So, all points that were stated about fetus period are applied to the infant period. The milk changes the nature of child. Ali Imam said "Do not choose faulty women to breast-feed your infants, because that milk changes the nature of your infant (7). Moreover, Imam Baqir stated that Prophet said "Do not choose shortsighted women for wet nursing, because they affect the baby's desire, i.e.: feebleness, stupidity, and all behaviors are inherited (15).

Several traditions have emphasized that a woman who breast-feeds a baby should avoid drinking wine. In addition, it was emphasized if a mother is not able to breast-feed his baby, she should consider two features to choose an individual to feed infant: First, she is not an enemy of Imams and second, if she even is not a Muslim, she avoids drinking wine. A believer will abstain from drinking wine. Imam Baqir (PBUH) said, in case of emergency, Christians or Jewish women can give your child breast-milk. He was asked whether these women could be used for breast-feeding. He said yes, but they should avoid pork and drinking wine. He was

asked again whether it is true that it was requested whether Jew, Nazarenes, or Magianism can breastfeed in their own houses; Imam said the child in your home is better, whether she is Nazarenes or Jew. You prevent her from drinking alcohol and eating whatever has been forbidden like pork and do not allow your child to be taken to their home (15). These traditions show the important role of breast-feeding in the mental health of the child. When an individual who temporarily breast-feeds a child can have such an impact on children, it is natural how much nutrition and temperament of a mother who breast-feeds for two whole years can affect the baby.

It is true that these explicit exemplifications do not exist in society, or can rarely be verified but all these issues show the role of mother's nutrition, beliefs, and thoughts in children's moral and mental health. Educational and moral books recommend that lactating women try to breastfeed the child with ablution and sit in front of the Qibla. At and during breast-feeding she should mentioned the name of God

Four. Childhood: childhood is a very important and sensitive period in one's life. Maintaining mental and spiritual health and training of children is of paramount importance and delicacy. Speaking of health-related issues, children are categorized into vulnerable groups. With respect to issues about child rearing, there is a well-advised statement saying training in childhood is like a sign on an engraved stone that is, everlasting and permanent. A beautiful hadith by Ali (PBUH) says: a child has a right that you have bestow mercy on him and try hard for his training and education. Overlook his mistakes and conceal his childhood sins and help him. It will make him to return to the right route. Tolerate him and do not challenge him. This method is more suitable for his growth and guidance (16).

Some points can be deduced from this Hadith;

1. Child training is a right and a duty of parents. Prophet stated that you respect your child and train him very good (8).
2. Education is important along with training. An important point that is emphasized is education should be performed gradually and in terms of child receptivity .

The following hadith narrated by `Abdullah ibn Fazl from the fifth or sixth Imam is very significant to understand: "When a boy reaches 3 years of age, teach him to recite la ilaha il-lal lâh seven times.

Then leave him till he is 3 years, 7 months and 20 days old; then train him to say Muhammadun rasu-lul lâh.

Then leave him at that till he completes 4 years, then teach him seven times to say sal-lal lâhu `ala Muhammadin wa âli Muhammad.

Then leave him at that till he reaches the age of 5; then see if he can distinguish between the right and the left hand. When he knows the difference, then make him to face qiblah and tell him to perform sajdah.

This is to continue till he is 6 years of age. Then he should be told to pray and taught ruku` and sajdah.

When he completes 7 years, then he should be asked to wash his face and hands, and then told to pray.

This will continue till he reaches the age of 9, when he should be taught proper ritual ablution for prayer and proper salât.

When he learns proper wudu and salât, Allah forgives the sins of his parents (8)

3. Training should be accompanied by mercy. Mainly, training is incompatible with anger and violence. So, parents should utilize their compassion, mercy, and leniency. Qur'an which considers the main aim of sending prophet to be cultivating and training says: It was by that mercy of Allah that you (prophet, muhammad) dealt so leniently with them. Had you been harsh and hardhearted, they would have surely deserted you. Therefore, pardon them and ask forgiveness for them. Take counsel with them in the matter and when you are resolved, put your trust in Allah. Allah loves those who trust .

4. Forbearance towards the children is the basis of child training. A beautiful hadith by Ali (PBUH) says: a child has a right on you to have mercy on him and strive towards his training and education. You overlook his mistake and conceal his childhood sins and help him. It will make him to return to the right route. You tolerate him and don't challenge him. Parent should put themselves in the childhood situation. Parents can communicate and show a

behavioral relationship towards their children, that places them in childhood manner and this is a very beautiful discourse that Prophet (PBUH) said" Each of you has a child, he himself be a child for that child (8)

There are other issues about child training that have been recommended in traditions: to avoid breach of one's word and telling lies to the child. Ali (PBUH) said: "lies are desirable neither in the kidding nor in serious manner. If an individual promised something and did not keep his word, it would be unfavorable (17). One of the best training ways is by your activities and your behaviors. He narrated that you invite people by your activities and your behaviors rather than speaking. The issue finds more importance in dealing with children whose speech and actions are always accompanied by frankness and honesty. When a parent lies to his/her child or does not keep his/her word, the good-natured child treats it as a permissible act . It means that one can sometimes tell lies or may not keep his/her word. In this case, these two obscene actions in the child are established.

Another point in child training with respect to traditions is justice. We have been advised to bestow a fair share of attention in our kindness. It was narrated an Individual had two children and kissed one of them more than the other one. The Prophet looked at him and told him why you did not act justly between the two. He said" Observe justice among your children as you like them to do the same.

The interesting point is that between boys and girls, girls are in priority. Prophet (PBUH) said: "Whoever enters the market, and buys a gift, he at first should it to his daughter and then give to his boy. Whoever makes his daughter happy is like someone who has freed one of children of Ismael and whoever makes his boy happy, it is as if as if an individual has cried for God and God puts him in paradise (8).

In another part, sexual health of children is a problem that has not been investigated and studied sufficiently, while due attention has been paid to it in religious recommendations. It has been noted that children are conscious about their sex and after 6 years old, they can precisely recognize their opposite sex. It is advised that parents separate the children's bed from 6 years

old on (Even though they are two girls or two boys). Prophet said: When children are 7 years old, they asleep separately. The fifth Imam has been quoted saying that when boys and girls are 10 years old, their beds should be separate (18). These differences are due to people who had asked this point which Imams had advised them to separate their beds from that moment onwards. There is another probability that children's age of recognizing things was different. It is narrated of Sadegh Imam that when a girl is 6 years old, the baby boy should not kiss her, and when a child's boy is seven, a non-intimate woman should not kiss him. Moreover, Imam Bagher is reported saying that "washing her daughter's private parts at 3 years of age is a manifestation of adultery (19). In addition, he reports intercourse of a mother with her 6-years old girl is a part of fornication (11).

The final point in the training of child is paying respect to the child and attention his ego. In this part, three points are noteworthy. First, the messenger of God advised salutation (greeting) to children. He does it consequently. He states greeting to children will be continued to the end of life. Second, participating children in social affairs and providing preparation for them is for this purpose. In contest of prayer of Najranian, Hassan and Hossein Imam were participated by Prophet in this social and religious important affair. Third, child's community and individual personality is of a high degree of importance in groups that no one should dare remove a child from a gathering even though he/she is in an outstanding situation. This is the end of blessing and value that a school can bestow on a human being ,though a child.

If we ponder more on this issue, several points can be certainly found regarding child training and health in point of view of tradition and religious texts, but to avoid a long discourse, it is sufficient to stop short at this point. In the one word, Islam is a manifest religion whose manifestation is found in Quran and Prophet's tradition looks at mental and spiritual health of child as a route for growth and exaltation of a being that should be representative of God (on His earth). It is clear parents' duty is very heavy and risky.

## Conclusion:

Islam is a living religion and has a health model to maintain and improve the mental health of children. In this training program, parents are the most important actors in the implementation of educational programs and, it not only starts before birth, but also starts before marriage. Certainly, obeying this program protects children's health, and plays an important role in promoting his spiritual advancement. In order to achieve practical results, this study recommends training before, during pregnancy and after delivery to parents, especially mothers. It is necessary that health officials especially those in charge of health education pay attention to achieve this important point.

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