



Application of the Islamic Legal Maxim “Hardship Begets Ease” to Mitigate Hardship in the Religious Practices of the Elderly Muslims

تطبيق القاعدة الفقهية الإسلامية "المشقة تجلب التيسير" لتخفيف المشقة في الممارسات الدينية لكبار السن من المسلمين

Fatimah Karim⁽ⁱ⁾

Abstract

The elderly people occupy a revered status in Islamic tradition, with specific guidelines designed to protect their dignity and well-being. However, there is a significant gap in understanding how Islamic jurisprudence (fiqh) accommodates the physical and mental challenges that elderly Muslims face in fulfilling their religious obligations. This study aims to explore how Islamic law applies the maxim of *al-mashaqqah tajlib al-taysir* (hardship begets ease) to mitigate these challenges, enabling elderly individuals to maintain their spiritual practices without undue burden. Utilizing an inductive, descriptive, and analytical methodology, the study investigates how this legal maxim is applied in key areas of worship—*ṭahārah* (purification), *ṣalāh* (prayer), *ṣawm* (fasting), and *ḥajj* (pilgrimage)—to accommodate the specific physical and cognitive challenges faced by elderly Muslims. One important finding reveals that Islamic jurisprudence is both compassionate and adaptable, offering specific rulings and allowances that cater to the diverse needs of elderly Muslims. The significance of this study lies in its potential to enhance the understanding and application of Islamic jurisprudence in addressing the practical religious needs of the elderly, ensuring they can fulfill their obligations with dignity and ease.

Keywords: Islamic jurisprudence, elderly people, worship practices, difficulty, facilitation.

ملخص البحث

يشغل كبار السن مكانة مرموقة في الإسلام، حيث وُضعت إرشادات خاصة تهدف إلى حماية كرامتهم وضمان رفاهيتهم. ومع ذلك، لا يزال هناك فجوة كبيرة في فهم كيفية استيعاب الفقه الإسلامي للتحديات الجسدية والعقلية التي يواجهها المسلمون المسنون في أداء واجباتهم الدينية. يهدف هذا البحث إلى استكشاف كيفية تطبيق الشريعة الإسلامية لقاعدة "المشقة تجلب التيسير" لتخفيف هذه التحديات، بما يمكن كبار السن من المحافظة على ممارساتهم الروحية دون مشقة غير مبررة. وباستخدام منهجية استقرائية وصفية وتحليلية، يبحث هذا البحث في كيفية تطبيق هذه القاعدة الفقهية في مجالات رئيسية من العبادات، وهي: الطهارة، والصلاة، والصيام، والحج، بما يتناسب مع التحديات الجسدية والذهنية الخاصة التي يواجهها كبار السن من المسلمين. ومن أبرز نتائج الدراسة أن الفقه الإسلامي يتسم بالرحمة والمرونة، ويقدم أحكاماً وتيسيرات فقهية تراعي احتياجات كبار السن المتنوعة. وتكمن أهمية هذه الدراسة في قدرتها على تعزيز فهم وتطبيق الفقه الإسلامي في معالجة الاحتياجات الدينية العملية لكبار السن، بما يضمن لهم أداء عباداتهم بكرامة وتيسر.

الكلمات المفتاحية: الفقه الإسلامي، كبار السن، العبادات، المشقة، التيسير.

⁽ⁱ⁾ Assist. Prof., Dept. of Fiqh and Usul al-Fiqh, AHAS KIRKHS, International Islamic University Malaysia; fatimahkarim@iium.edu.my

Contents

1. Introduction	147
2. Elderly People in Islamic Jurisprudence	148
2.1 The Status and Treatment of the Elderly People in the Holy Qur'ān & Sunnah	149
2.2 Scholarly Approaches to Elderly People's Care in Islamic Jurisprudence	150
2.3 Practical Implications of Islamic Teachings on Elderly People's Care	150
3. Physical and Mental Effects of Aging from Fiqh Perspective	151
3.1 Physical Effects of Aging from Fiqh Perspective	151
3.2 Mental Effects of Aging and Religious Accountability	152
4. Contemporary Scholarly Perspectives and Community-Based Support	152
5. Worship Accommodations for the Elderly Muslims in Islamic Jurisprudence	153
5.1 Ritual Purity (Ṭahārah) for the Elderly Muslims	154
5.2 Prayer (Ṣalāh) for the Elderly Muslims	155
5.3 Fasting (Ṣawm) for the Elderly Muslims	155
5.4 Ḥajj and 'Umrah for the Elderly Muslims	156
6. Conclusion	156
6.1 Findings	156
6.2 Suggestions	157
References	157

1. Introduction

Islam places significant emphasis on honoring and caring for the elderly people, reflecting its core values of compassion, dignity, and justice. The Qur'ān highlights this moral imperative in the verse: *"And your Lord has decreed that you do not worship except Him, and do good treatment to your parents,"* [Al-Isrā': 23]. This command is echoed in the *Sunnah*, where the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) stated: *"He is not one of us who does not have mercy upon our young, nor knows the honor of our elders"* (Abū Dāwūd, 2008, 4: Ḥadīth 4943). These teachings emphasize the profound respect and care owed to elderly individuals, acknowledging their enduring contributions to family life and society. Within Islamic jurisprudence, the Qur'ān and *Ḥadīth* serve as primary sources that offer detailed guidance on how the needs of the elderly people are to be addressed—particularly within the framework of religious obligations.

As individuals grow older, they face distinct physical and cognitive challenges that can significantly impact their ability to perform acts of worship. In the Malaysian context, for instance, approximately 70% of the elderly population suffer from at least one non-communicable disease (NCD), including hypertension, stroke, diabetes, and heart disease, all of which impair mobility and stamina. Furthermore, about 8.5% of elderly Malaysians experience dementia, which contributes to memory loss and impedes their ability to engage meaningfully in religious practices (Malay Mail, 2022; The Malaysian Reserve, 2023). Compounding these challenges is a widespread lack of awareness among elderly individuals and their caregivers regarding the religious accommodations and dispensations provided by *Shariah* law in such circumstances.

This study aims to address this pressing concern by examining the intersection between aging and religious practice in Islamic law. It explores how Islamic legal thought—both classical and contemporary—responds to the unique needs of elderly Muslims. It analyzes specifically the rulings related to ritual purity (*ṭahārah*), prayer (*ṣalāh*), fasting (*ṣawm*), and pilgrimage (*ḥajj* and *'umrah*), with the objective of highlighting the flexibility and compassion embedded within Islamic jurisprudence. This inquiry provides valuable insight into how *Shariah* facilitates continued religious engagement for elderly Muslims, ensuring their inclusion, dignity, and spiritual fulfillment within the faith community.

In order to present a holistic view, the study begins with an examination of how Islamic jurisprudence defines old age and identifies the specific physical and mental challenges associated with it. It then explores the status and treatment of

the elderly as portrayed in the Holy Qur'ān and *Sunnah*, followed by an analysis of the legal concessions applied to acts of worship. By addressing these topics collectively, the research bridges the gap between traditional Islamic legal theory and the lived realities of elderly Muslims today. The findings are intended to benefit not only scholars and legal practitioners but also families, caregivers, and religious authorities.

Existing literature reveals that Islamic jurisprudence is grounded in enduring principles of mercy, balance, and facilitation. Central to this is the legal maxim *al-mashaqqah tajlib al-taysir* (hardship begets ease), which underpins the permissibility of legal concessions for those facing difficulty. Foundational sources such as the Holy Qur'ān and *Sunnah* emphasize compassion and flexibility toward the elderly people, recognizing their physical frailty and cognitive decline (Al-Rum: 54; Al-Isrā': 23). Classical scholars like Al-Ghazālī and Ibn Qudāmah, along with modern jurists such as Yūsuf al-Qaraḍāwī, have elaborated upon these principles to formulate legal rulings that accommodate the elderly in matters of worship. Despite this rich tradition, there remains a lack of focused scholarly attention on the systematic application of these rulings to contemporary contexts—particularly in aging societies such as Malaysia. This study contributes to filling that gap by demonstrating how Islamic legal principles can be practically applied to uphold the spiritual participation and human dignity of elderly Muslims.

2. Elderly People in Islamic Jurisprudence

In Islamic law, the term *kibār al-sinn* (elderly) generally refers to individuals who have reached an advanced age, experiencing a significant decline in

physical and mental capacities. While the Holy Qur'ān does not explicitly set an age that defines old age, it describes the stages of human life, emphasizing the progression from strength to eventual weakness and vulnerability (Ahmad, 2003, 18: 19). Surah Ghāfir captures this process: "*Allah is the one who created you from dust, then from a drop, then from a clinging clot, then brings you forth as a child; then [He develops you] so that you reach maturity, and then become elderly, and some of you pass away earlier, that you reach a specified term, so that you may understand*" [Ghāfir: 67]. This verse outlines the phases of human existence and affirms that aging is a purposeful and divinely ordained aspect of life.

Similarly, Surat Al-Rum highlights the return to weakness in old age: "*Allah is the one who created you from weakness, then made after weakness strength, then made after strength weakness and white hair*" [Al-Rum: 54]. This verse reflects the cyclical nature of human strength and decline, with aging being a natural transition that calls for care and understanding. As an individual advances in age, they may reach a stage described in the Holy Qur'ān as *ardhal al-umur* (the most abject stage of life), where cognitive decline may render them unable to recall previously acquired knowledge: "*And Allah created you; then He will take your soul in death, and among you is he who is reversed to the most abject state of life, so that after having knowledge, he knows nothing*" [Al-Nahl: 70]. These verses collectively emphasize both the physical and mental challenges that accompany old age, laying the foundation for legal and ethical accommodations in Islamic jurisprudence.

Classical scholars like Al-Ghazālī and Ibn Qudāmah explain that old age is marked by a decline in strength that makes performing daily and

religious tasks challenging. They generally consider the age of 60 and beyond as the threshold for old age, but they stress that Islamic rulings focus on a person's health and capacity rather than adhering to a strict age criterion (Al-Ghazālī, 2011, 3: 100; Ibn Qudāmah, 1983, 4: 30). Furthermore, the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) mentioned that the average lifespan of his *ummah* would range between 60 and 70 years: *"The lifespan of my Ummah will be between sixty and seventy years, and few will exceed that"* (Al-Tirmidhī, 2007, 4: *Ḥadīth* 3550). While this provides a general understanding of life expectancy, there is no fixed starting point for old age, as signs of aging vary based on individual and environmental factors.

In many Islamic rulings, an individual aged 60 and older is often considered within the framework of elderly rulings. This age-based definition simplifies matters for practical purposes, aligning with societal norms like retirement age in Malaysia, where 60 years is often the benchmark. However, the emphasis in Islamic law remains on accommodating the individual's condition rather than a fixed age limit.

2.1 The Status and Treatment of the Elderly People in the Holy Qur'ān & *Sunnah*

Islamic teachings, as conveyed through the Holy Qur'ān and *Sunnah*, provide profound and enduring guidance on the status and treatment of the elderly people. These sources establish a comprehensive ethical and legal framework rooted in compassion, dignity, and care principles that safeguard the well-being of elderly individuals and uphold their honored position within the Muslim community.

The Holy Qur'ān consistently emphasizes reverence for the elderly people and draws attention to the cyclical nature of human life. In Surat Al-Rum,

Allah states: *"Allah is the one who created you from weakness, then made after weakness strength, then made after strength weakness and white hair. He creates what He wills, and He is the Knowing, the Competent"* [Al-Rum: 54]. This verse highlights the inevitable return to physical weakness in old age, marked by outward signs such as white hair, and serves as a reminder of human vulnerability. It reinforces the communal and moral responsibility to care for the elderly people with gentleness and honor.

This responsibility is clearly articulated in Surat Al-Isrā', where Allah commands: *"And your Lord has decreed that you do not worship except Him, and do good treatment to your parents. Whether one or both of them reach old age [while] with you, say not to them [so much as], 'uff,' and do not repel them but speak to them a noble word"* [Al-Isrā': 23]. This verse conveys that parents and elders who reach advanced age must be treated with patience and kindness. Even minor expressions of frustration, such as saying 'uff', are explicitly prohibited, demonstrating the high moral standard Islam sets in interactions with the elderly people. Instead, believers are instructed to respond with dignified and respectful words.

The subsequent verse extends this ethical command with a heartfelt supplication: *"And lower to them the wing of humility out of mercy and say, 'My Lord, have mercy upon them as they brought me up [when I was] small'"* [Al-Isrā': 24]. This expression of humility reflects the reciprocal nature of the parent-child relationship in Islam, where the nurturing received in youth is repaid with compassion in old age. Al-Qurṭubī, in his *tafsīr*, explains that the phrase *"lower the wing of submission"* symbolizes the utmost humility and gentleness owed to aging parents, reinforcing the obligation to provide attentive, loving care (Al-Qurṭubī, 2006, 10: 406).

The *Sunnah* of the Prophet Muḥammad (peace be upon him) further reinforces these teachings through both words and actions. In a *ḥadīth*, he stated: "He is not one of us who does not show mercy to our young ones and esteem to our elderly" (Abū Dāwūd, 2008, 4: *Ḥadīth* 4943), emphasizing that honoring the elderly people is a defining trait of the Muslim community. In another narration, he said: "Part of glorifying Allah is honoring the grey-haired Muslim" (Abū Dāwūd, 2008, 4: *Ḥadīth* 4843), thus connecting respect for the elderly people to reverence for the Divine. Such teachings elevate the treatment of the elderly people from a social obligation to a form of worship.

The Prophet's own conduct offers a practical embodiment of these values. He would stand to greet elderly visitors and offer them his seat as a sign of deference and respect (Al-Tirmidhī, 2007, 5: *Ḥadīth* 3545). These acts demonstrate a timeless model of honoring and accommodating the elderly people that the Muslim community is encouraged to emulate in both private and public settings.

2.2 Scholarly Approaches to Elderly People's Care in Islamic Jurisprudence

Islamic scholars, both classical and contemporary, have elaborated extensively on the ethical and jurisprudential principles governing elderly care. Al-Ghazālī, in his celebrated work *Iḥyā' Ulūm al-Dīn*, discussed the moral imperatives of caring for the elderly, highlighting virtues such as patience, humility, and gratitude. He emphasized that such care is not merely a familial or social duty but also a means of spiritual development and divine reward (Al-Ghazālī, 2011, 3: 100).

Modern scholars continue to affirm and expand on these principles, adapting them to

contemporary realities. Yūsuf al-Qaraḍāwī, in his work *Fiqh al-Ṭahārah*, underscores the importance of preserving traditional Islamic values while integrating them with modern social care systems. He advocates for a holistic approach to elderly care—one that addresses both the spiritual and material needs of elderly Muslims—thus ensuring their continued well-being and full participation in religious life (Al-Qaraḍāwī, 2002, 215).

2.3 Practical Implications of Islamic Teachings on Elderly People's Care

The ethical and legal guidance provided by the Holy Qur'ān, *Sunnah*, and Islamic scholarship has far-reaching implications for families, communities, and institutions. At the family level, Islam encourages providing comprehensive care—emotional, physical, and financial—to elderly members, recognizing their enduring contributions and upholding their dignity in all aspects of life (Al-Ghazālī, 2011, 3: 100).

At the community level, the responsibility extends to establishing supportive environments, including elder-friendly infrastructure in mosques and public spaces, access to religious education about concessions in worship, and tailored services that reflect Islamic values of mercy (*raḥmah*) and facilitation (*taysīr*). These actions collectively embody the prophetic model of inclusivity and support for the elderly people.

In addition to moral guidance, Islamic law offers specific legal concessions to accommodate the common challenges associated with aging. These include the permissibility of using assistive devices during prayer and pilgrimage, performing *tayammum* in place of *wuḍū'* when water poses harm, offering *fidyah* in lieu of fasting for those

unable to fast, and appointing a proxy for *hajj* (pilgrimage) if one is physically incapable. Each of these rulings reflects the flexible and compassionate nature of Islamic jurisprudence, designed to ease burdens while preserving religious commitment and dignity.

3. Physical and Mental Effects of Aging from Fiqh Perspective

Aging is a natural process that brings about profound physical and cognitive changes, and Islamic jurisprudence (*fiqh*) thoughtfully addresses these realities through a framework grounded in compassion and practicality. Recognizing that aging often leads to a decline in strength, endurance, and mental acuity, *fiqh* offers a range of accommodations that ensure elderly individuals can fulfill their religious obligations without facing undue hardship. Central to this is the legal maxim *al-mashaqqah tajlib al-taysir* (hardship begets ease), which serves as a guiding principle in adapting religious duties to suit individual capacities (Al-Zuhayli, 1984, 1: 115–118). Through this lens, Islamic law preserves the spiritual connection of elderly Muslims while alleviating the burden of physical and cognitive limitations (Al-Qaradāwī, 2002, 215).

3.1 Physical Effects of Aging from *Fiqh* Perspective

In Malaysia, approximately 70% of the elderly population suffers from at least one non-communicable disease (NCD), including hypertension, diabetes, stroke, cancer, and chronic respiratory illnesses (Malay Mail, 2022). These health conditions often result in reduced mobility, fatigue, or pain, all of which make acts of worship—such as ablution, prayer, fasting, and pilgrimage—more challenging. Islamic law responds to these

limitations with a variety of legal concessions that reflect both mercy and practicality.

For example, when performing *wuḍūʿ* (ablution) becomes difficult due to illness or physical weakness, the elderly people are permitted to perform *tayammum* (dry ablution using clean earth), thereby maintaining ritual purity without endangering their health. This dispensation is affirmed by scholars like Al-Qarāfī, who explains the permissibility of substituting water when its use causes harm (Al-Qarāfī, 1969, 3: 137).

Similarly, in the case of *ṣalāh* (prayer), the physical demands of standing, bowing, and prostrating may become unmanageable for elderly individuals. Classical jurists such as Al-Nawawī outline that in such cases, prayer may be performed while sitting or, if necessary, while lying down, ensuring continued engagement in obligatory worship regardless of physical condition (Al-Nawawī, 1996, 4: 220).

Fasting (*ṣawm*), particularly during Ramadan, may also pose serious health risks for the elderly people, especially those suffering from chronic illnesses. Islamic law accommodates this by allowing individuals who cannot fast to offer *fidyah*—a form of compensation—by feeding a poor person for each missed day. Ibn Qudāmah notes that this alternative fulfills the intent of fasting while preserving the individual's health (Ibn Qudāmah, 1983, 4: 30).

The pilgrimage (*hajj* and *ʿumrah*), as one of the most physically demanding acts of worship, also presents challenges for elderly Muslims. For those unable to perform it due to physical frailty, Islamic law permits *hajj badal*, whereby another person may perform the pilgrimage on their behalf. Additionally, the use of assistive devices such as wheelchairs is fully sanctioned to facilitate participation in

pilgrimage rites without compromising safety or well-being (Al-Nawawī, 1996, 7: 391).

These juristic rulings illustrate the dynamic and compassionate spirit of Islamic law in responding to the realities of aging. Rather than excluding the elderly people from religious obligations, *fiqh* facilitates their full participation by tailoring requirements to individual capacities, thereby preserving their spiritual dignity.

3.2 Mental Effects of Aging and Religious Accountability

In addition to physical decline, many elderly individuals face cognitive challenges that can affect their capacity to fulfill religious obligations. Mental health conditions such as dementia and depression are increasingly prevalent among aging populations. In Malaysia, approximately 8.5% of the elderly population is reported to suffer from dementia, a condition that impairs memory, reasoning, and overall cognitive function (The Malaysian Reserve, 2023). These impairments can significantly reduce an individual's ability to engage with religious practices in a consistent or meaningful way.

Islamic jurisprudence responds to such challenges with clarity and compassion. If an elderly individual suffers from dementia or significant cognitive decline, he is no longer held accountable for acts of worship such as *ṣalāh*. Al-Nawawī, in *al-Majmūʿ*, explains that religious obligations are only binding upon those who possess the mental capacity to comprehend and perform them. Once that capacity is lost, the obligation is lifted (Al-Nawawī, 1996, 4: 300). This reflects a fundamental principle in Islamic law: accountability is contingent upon ability, and worship is never meant to become a source of undue burden.

Moreover, for elderly individuals experiencing milder forms of memory loss or cognitive delay, scholars have permitted the use of practical aids such as written reminders or recorded recitations to assist in performing religious duties. These accommodations help elderly Muslims maintain their spiritual connection without facing unnecessary stress or confusion, thereby ensuring that worship remains accessible and fulfilling despite cognitive challenges.

4. Contemporary Scholarly Perspectives and Community-Based Support

Modern Islamic scholarship continues to emphasize the centrality of *taysīr* (ease) and *rukhsah* (concession) within Islamic jurisprudence, particularly concerning the needs of the elderly. Yūsuf al-Qaraḍāwī, in *Fiqh al-Ṭahārah*, advocates for adapting Islamic rulings to contemporary realities faced by aging Muslims. He underscores the importance of community support and infrastructure that enables the elderly to fulfill their religious duties with dignity and comfort (Al-Qaraḍāwī, 2002, 215).

Scholars and Muslim communities have identified several key areas for enhancing support for the elderly people:

First, religious facilities should be designed or retrofitted to accommodate elderly worshippers. This includes equipping mosques and prayer areas with ramps, handrails, non-slip flooring, and adequate seating to facilitate mobility and ensure safety. Such modifications are practical reflections of the Islamic imperative to remove hardship and promote accessibility in acts of worship.

Second, community-based programs can play a pivotal role in supporting elderly Muslims.

Initiatives such as home visits, social engagement circles, and volunteer caregiving networks help prevent social isolation while fostering a sense of inclusion and belonging. These programs align with the Prophetic model of community care and reflect the ethical obligation to ensure no segment of society is neglected.

Third, the development of healthcare services that align with Islamic values is essential. This includes offering gender-sensitive medical care, providing halal-certified medications, and ensuring respectful treatment that considers religious sensitivities. Access to such care allows elderly Muslims to receive necessary medical support without compromising their faith practices or moral comfort.

Contemporary *fatawa* have also addressed new challenges posed by medical technology. Scholars have issued permissive rulings on the use of pacemakers, insulin pumps, and similar life-sustaining devices during fasting, clarifying that such aids do not invalidate the fast. For elderly individuals whose health is endangered by fasting, scholars such as Ibn Bāz and the Permanent Committee for Islamic Research and *Ifta* have affirmed the permissibility of exemption from fasting and the substitution of *fidyah*—feeding a needy person for each missed day (Ibn Bāz, 2002, 15: 240; Permanent Committee, 1996, 10: 150).

In addition, modern legal opinions have covered the permissibility of undergoing surgeries, receiving vaccinations, and utilizing non-invasive diagnostic tools without infringing on religious principles. These rulings ensure that elderly Muslims can benefit from advancements in healthcare while maintaining their religious obligations.

Through these contemporary perspectives and evolving scholarly responses, Islamic

jurisprudence continues to demonstrate its flexibility, inclusivity, and moral sensitivity. It upholds the fundamental principles of mercy and ease, ensuring that elderly Muslims are supported not only in their worship but also in navigating the broader challenges of aging. This dynamic adaptability underscores the enduring relevance and compassionate core of Islamic law in addressing the needs of elderly populations in today's world.

5. Worship Accommodations for the Elderly Muslims in Islamic Jurisprudence

Islamic jurisprudence (*fiqh*) adopts a holistic, compassionate, and adaptive approach to addressing the unique physical and cognitive challenges faced by elderly individuals in fulfilling their religious obligations. As Muslims age, they often encounter limitations such as restricted mobility, chronic illness, or memory decline, which may hinder their ability to maintain acts of worship such as *ṭahārah* (ritual purity), *ṣalāh* (prayer), *ṣawm* (fasting), and *ḥajj* (pilgrimage). Recognizing these realities, Islamic law incorporates a set of principles rooted in mercy, flexibility, and facilitation to ensure that worship remains spiritually meaningful without causing hardship or harm.

The foundational basis for these accommodations is found in the Holy Qur'ān, which repeatedly affirms that religious obligations are not meant to be a burden. Allah says: "*Allah does not burden a soul beyond that it can bear*" [Al-Baqarah: 286], and "*He has chosen you and has not placed upon you in the religion any difficulty*" [Al-Ḥajj: 78]. These verses establish a divine precedent that the practice of Islam is inherently considerate of individual capacity—especially relevant for elderly Muslims who may no longer be physically or mentally capable

of performing worship in its standard form. This theological underpinning directly relates to the study's core issue: ensuring elderly Muslims can uphold their religious duties in ways that reflect their capabilities.

Central to this legal flexibility is the concept of *rukhsah* (legal concession), which allows for specific relaxations in religious rulings under conditions of hardship. In the context of aging, *rukhsah* manifests in various practical dispensations: elderly individuals who are unable to fast due to weakness or chronic illness are permitted to break their fast and offer *fidyah* (a compensatory act such as feeding the poor) instead (Ibn Qudāmah, 1983, 4: 30). Those with physical limitations may perform *ṣalāh* while sitting or lying down, depending on their capacity (Al-Nawawī, 1996, 4: 220). Similarly, those who are unable to use water due to illness or frailty may perform *tayammum* (dry ablution) to maintain ritual purity. These rulings are not exceptional or marginal; they are embedded within Islamic jurisprudence as part of a broader legal ethic that prioritizes ease (*taysīr*) over difficulty.

The jurisprudential maxim *al-mashaqqah tajlib al-taysīr* (hardship begets ease) serves as a guiding principle in this regard. As articulated by classical jurists and supported by Qur'ānic injunctions and prophetic traditions, this maxim ensures that legal obligations adjust in proportion to human limitations (Al-Zuhaylī, 1984, 1: 115–118). This dynamic responsiveness reflects the legal system's attentiveness to human diversity, particularly in old age.

The *Sunnah* of the Prophet Muḥammad (peace be upon him) further reinforces this approach. He advised: "*Make things easy for the people, and do not make things difficult for them; make them calm (with glad tidings) and do not repulse*

them..." (Al-Bukhārī, 1997, 1: *Ḥadīth* 573). Moreover, in a *ḥadīth* narrated by 'Ā'ishah (RA), it is reported: "*The Prophet (peace be upon him) was never given a choice between two things, but he would choose the easier one...*" (Muslim, 4: *Ḥadīth* 2465). These teachings form the ethical foundation for legislative compassion in Islamic law, encouraging a framework that actively seeks out the path of least hardship, particularly for the elderly people.

Therefore, the legal accommodations provided for elderly Muslims in acts of worship are not just permissible exceptions—they are manifestations of Islam's deeper legal and ethical philosophy. By prioritizing ease, honoring human dignity, and recognizing individual capacity, Islamic jurisprudence empowers elderly believers to continue their worship with dignity, devotion, and confidence, even in the face of physical or cognitive decline.

5.1 Ritual Purity (*Ṭahārah*) for the Elderly Muslims

Maintaining ritual purity (*ṭahārah*) is a fundamental prerequisite for many acts of worship, particularly *ṣalāh* (prayer). However, elderly individuals often face health-related challenges that hinder their ability to observe the traditional forms of purification. Islamic jurisprudence addresses these challenges through various accommodations that ensure that elderly Muslims can continue their religious obligations with ease and dignity.

For instance, elderly individuals experiencing continuous ritual impurity (*dā'im al-ḥadath*), such as incontinence, are permitted to perform ablution (*wuḍū'*) at the beginning of each prayer time after cleansing themselves. Imam al-Nawawī compares this ruling to that applied to women with prolonged non-menstrual bleeding (*istihādah*), allowing the

person to proceed with prayer even if the impurity continues during *ṣalāh* (Al-Nawawī, 1996, 2: 541).

The use of sanitary aids—including adult diapers, urine bags, or colostomy devices—is likewise accommodated within Islamic law. After cleaning the affected area to the best of one's ability, one may proceed with *wuḍūʿ*, and the prayer remains valid. This position is supported by scholars such as Al-Kharshī and affirmed in contemporary *fatawa* issued by JAKIM (Al-Kharshī, 1997, 1: 98; JAKIM, 2004, 43).

In situations where water use is harmful or impractical—such as for bedridden individuals—*tayammum* (dry ablution using clean earth) is permitted. Scholars like Al-Qarāfi and Rāghib al-Dallu underscore that this alternative upholds the principle of *taysīr* (facilitation) and is especially relevant for elderly Muslims with serious health conditions (Al-Qarāfi, 1969, 3: 137; Rāghib al-Dallu, 2009, 33).

These rulings reflect the flexibility of Islamic law, guided by the Qurʾānic principle: “*Allah does not burden a soul beyond that it can bear*” [Al-Baqarah: 286]. The legal maxim *al-mashaqqah tajlib al-taysīr* (hardship begets ease) further anchors the permissibility of such modifications in ritual purification.

5.2 Prayer (*Ṣalāh*) for the Elderly Muslims

Prayer (*ṣalāh*) is one of the five pillars of Islam and a daily spiritual obligation for Muslims. Recognizing the physical limitations that come with aging, Islamic jurisprudence provides several accommodations that allow the elderly people to continue observing their prayers without difficulty.

The Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) stated: “*Pray while standing; if you cannot, then*

sitting; and if you cannot do that, then on your side” (Al-Bukhārī, 1997, 2: *Ḥadīth* 1117). This foundational *ḥadīth* establishes a hierarchy of positions according to one's ability. Classical scholars such as Al-Nawawī affirm that the validity of *ṣalāh* is preserved when performed while seated or reclining, provided that standing is not possible (Al-Nawawī, 1996, 4: 300).

Additionally, for elderly individuals who experience difficulty in performing ablution multiple times a day or who suffer from fatigue, Islamic law permits the combining (*jamʿ*) of two prayers—*Zuḥr* with *ʿAṣr*, and *Maghrib* with *ʿIshāʿ*—to reduce the frequency of performance (Ibn Qudāmah, 1983, 2: 103). Contemporary guidance from JAKIM also allows the use of chairs and walking aids during *ṣalāh*, aligning with the principle of accommodation for those with physical limitations (JAKIM, 2004, 70–72).

Exemption from congregational and Friday prayers is also well-established for the elderly people. Scholars unanimously agree that individuals facing illness, paralysis, immobility, or frailty are excused from attending the mosque. This consensus reflects Islamic law's prioritization of safety and well-being, particularly in one's later years (Rāghib al-Dallu, 2009, 51; ʿAwāwdah, Samrī Muḥammad, 2015, 12: 108).

5.3 Fasting (*Ṣawm*) for the Elderly Muslims

Fasting during the month of Ramadan is a central act of worship, yet it can become burdensome for elderly individuals, especially those with chronic illnesses. The Holy Qurʾān provides a compassionate concession: “*...As for those who can fast only with difficulty, they have to feed a poor person [as compensation]...*” [Al-Baqarah: 184]. Based on this verse, jurists have ruled that elderly Muslims who are

permanently unable to fast are permitted to offer *fidyah* (compensation) instead.

Ibn Qudāmah states that elderly individuals who are physically weak and unable to fast are not obliged to do so and may fulfill the obligation by feeding a poor person for each missed day (Ibn Qudāmah, 1983, 4: 30; Al-Sarakhsī, 1993, 3: 124). In addition, they are encouraged to engage in alternative acts of devotion, such as increased *dhikr* (remembrance of Allah), *du'ā'*, recitation of the Holy Qur'ān, and giving *ṣadaqah*, allowing them to maintain a strong spiritual presence during Ramadan (Al-Qaraḍāwī, 2002, 220).

Modern *fatawa* by scholars such as Ibn Bāz and the Permanent Committee clarify that the use of medical devices such as pacemakers or insulin pumps does not invalidate the fast, as these do not constitute food or drink. If fasting endangers one's health, *fidyah* remains a valid and sufficient alternative (Ibn Bāz, 2002, 15: 240; Permanent Committee, 1996, 10: 150).

5.4 *Hajj* and *Umrah* for the Elderly Muslims

The rites of *Hajj* and *Umrah* involve considerable physical exertion, including walking long distances and standing for extended periods. These demands can be especially challenging for elderly pilgrims. Islamic jurisprudence offers clear accommodations to ensure the participation of elderly Muslims in these sacred rituals.

Elderly individuals who cannot perform *Hajj* due to physical incapacity may appoint a proxy (*hajj badal*) to perform the pilgrimage on their behalf. This ruling is supported by classical jurists including Al-Nawawī and Ibn 'Uthaymīn (Al-Nawawī, 1996, 7: 60; Ibn 'Uthaymīn, 2001, 382).

Those who are able to attend in person but require support may use wheelchairs, walkers, or be assisted during *ṭawāf* and *sa'ī*. Practical measures such as taking shorter routes, resting frequently, and delegating physically demanding acts like stoning the *Jamrah* to a representative are also encouraged by scholars (Al-Māwardī, 1999, 5: 105; Rāghib al-Dallu, 2009, 118).

These accommodations are grounded in the Qur'ānic assurance: "He has not placed upon you in the religion any difficulty" [Al-Ḥajj: 78] exemplifying the legal maxim *al-mashaqqah tajlib al-taysīr* (hardship begets ease), and reflecting Islam's commitment to making the spiritual rewards of pilgrimage accessible to the elderly people while safeguarding their health, comfort, and dignity.

6. Conclusion

This study has underscored the comprehensive and compassionate approach of Islamic jurisprudence toward the elderly, addressing their unique needs through both classical and contemporary perspectives. By exploring the application of the Islamic legal maxim *al-mashaqqah tajlib al-taysīr* (hardship begets ease), the research has demonstrated that Islamic law is deeply rooted in principles of mercy, flexibility, and human dignity. It affirms that *Shariah* is not a rigid system, but one that evolves in response to individual circumstances, especially for vulnerable groups such as the elderly people.

6.1 Findings

The study finds that Islamic law upholds the principle of *al-mashaqqah tajlib al-taysīr* (hardship begets ease) to ensure that elderly individuals can

fulfill their religious obligations without facing undue difficulty.

The Holy Qurʾān and *Sunnah* consistently emphasize the importance of respect, care, and support for the elderly, thereby establishing a framework that prioritizes their dignity and well-being.

Practical solutions, such as the use of sanitary aids and *tayammum* (dry ablution), are available to help elderly people maintain ritual purity despite physical challenges. Modifications in prayer positions and the allowance to combine prayers further accommodate the physical limitations faced by many elderly individuals. For those who are unable to fast due to age or chronic illness, Islamic law permits them to pay *fiḍyah* (compensation), allowing them to fulfill their religious duties in a manageable way. Similarly, elderly individuals who are unable to undertake the pilgrimage are permitted to have *ḥajj* performed on their behalf, reflecting the compassionate and flexible nature of Islamic jurisprudence.

6.2 Suggestions

Based on these findings, it is recommended that educational campaigns be implemented to raise awareness about the rights and religious accommodation available to the elderly people, particularly among families, caregivers, and community leaders.

Religious authorities should also be encouraged to actively promote understanding of the flexibility within Islamic law when it comes to elderly worship practices.

Furthermore, mosques and community centers should be equipped with appropriate infrastructure—such as ramps, seating, and

accessible ablution facilities—to better support the physical needs of elderly worshippers and enhance their inclusion in communal religious life.

References

- Abū Dāwūd, S. A. (2008). *Sunan Abī Dāwūd* (Vol. 4). Dārussalām Publishers.
- Aḥmad, F. ‘A. M. (2003). *Ḥuqūq al-musinnīn wa-wājibātuhum fī al-Islām ma’a bayān al-ḥimāyah al-nizāmiyyah lahum bi-Mamlakat al-‘Arabīyyah al-Sa’ūdiyyah*. Majallat al-Sharī’ah wa-l-Qānūn, 18.
- al-Bukhārī, M. I. (1997). *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī* (Vol. 1). Dārussalām Publishers.
- al-Ghazālī, A. Ḥ. M. M. (2011). *Iḥyā’ ‘ulūm al-dīn* (Vol. 3). Dār al-Ma’rifah.
- al-Kharshī, M. A. A. ‘A. (1997). *Sharḥ mukhtaṣar Khalīl* (Vol. 1). Dār al-Fikr.
- al-Māwardī, ‘A. M. A. Ḥ. (1999). *al-Ḥawī al-kabīr* (Vol. 5). Dār al-Kutub al-‘Ilmiyyah.
- al-Nawawī, Y. S. (1996). *al-Majmū’ sharḥ al-Muḥadhdhab* (Vols. 2, 4, 7). Dār al-Fikr.
- al-Qaraḍāwī, Y. (2002). *Fiqh al-ṭahārah*. Maktabah Wahbah.
- al-Qarāfī, A. I. S. D. A. ‘A. (1969). *al-Furūq* (Vol. 3). Dār al-Ma’rifah.
- al-Qurṭubī, M. A. A. ‘A. (2006). *al-Jāmi’ li-aḥkām al-Qur’ān* (Vol. 10). Dār al-Kutub al-‘Ilmiyyah.
- al-Sarakhsī, M. A. S. D. A. B. (1993). *al-Mabsūṭ* (Vol. 3). Dār al-Ma’rifah.
- al-Tirmidhī, M. Ḍ. (2007). *Jāmi’ al-Tirmidhī* (Vol. 5). Dārussalām Publishers.
- al-Zuhaylī, W. (1984). *al-Fiqh al-Islāmī wa-adillatuhu* (Vol. 1). Dār al-Fikr.
- Alzheimer’s Association. (n.d.). *Dementia meaning*. Retrieved August 8, 2024, from <https://www.alz.org/alzheimers-dementia/what-is-dementia>
- ‘Awāwdah, S. M. (2015). *al-Rukhaṣ al-shar’iyyah li-kibār al-sinn fī bāb al-‘ibādāt*. Majallat Jāmi’at al-Shāriqah li-l-‘Ulūm al-Shar’iyyah wa-l-Qānūniyyah, (1).
- Ibn Bāz, ‘A. ‘A. ‘A. (2022). *Majmū’ fatāwā Ibn Bāz* (Vol. 15). Dār al-Waṭan.
- Ibn Qudāmah, M. D. ‘A. A. (1983). *al-Mughnī* (Vol. 4). Dār al-Kitāb al-‘Arabī.

- Ibn 'Uthaymīn, M. Ṣ. (2001). Fatāwā arkān al-Islām. Dār al-Thurayyā.*
- Jabatan Kemajuan Islam Malaysia (JAKIM). (2004). Panduan bersuci dan bersolat bagi pesakit. Attin Press Sdn. Bhd.*
- Malay Mail. (2022, September 21). Malaysia's ageing population rises. Retrieved September 2, 2024, from <https://www.malaymail.com/news/life/2022/09/21/as-malaysias-ageing-population-rises-experts-highlight-ways-to-tackle-abuse-of-elderly/29371>*
- National Cancer Institute. (n.d.). Cognitive impairment meaning. Retrieved August 8, 2024, from <https://www.cancer.gov/publications/dictionaries/cancer-terms/def/cognitive-impairment>*
- Permanent Committee for Islamic Research and Ifta. (1996). Fatāwā al-lajnah al-dā'imah (Vol. 10). General Presidency of Scholarly Research and Ifta.*
- Rāghib al-Dallu, H. M. (2009). Aḥkām al-musinnīn fī fiqh al-'ibādāt [Master's thesis]. al-Jāmi'ah al-Islāmiyyah bi-Ghazzah.*
- The Malaysian Reserve. (2023, November 13). Healthcare system needs enhancing. Retrieved September 2, 2024, from <https://themalaysianreserve.com/2023/11/13/health-care-system-needs-enhancing-to-address-rapidly-ageing-population/>*