

Editorial

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Health and Social Challenges of LGBT: Islamic Perspective

Transgender is a term relating to a person who does not conform to societal gender norms or roles. It is a rapidly growing phenomenon in Malaysia. According to available data, about 10,000 male to female transgenders were recorded in 2001. In Malaysia the population of male to female transgenders has been estimated about 24,000 in 2014 and the latest figure in 2016 is about 50,000. Large majority of this number are selling sex as a source of income. Current Ministry of Health data reveal about 24,000 sex workers.

Transgender people belong to one of the key populations at high risk of HIV infection. It is estimated that the prevalence of HIV among transgender individuals worldwide is about 19.1%. They are almost 50 times more likely to be living with HIV compared to adults of the general population. In Malaysia, based on the data from Integrated Biological and Behavioural Surveillance studies in 2012 and 2014, the HIV prevalence among the transgender community appears to be increasing from 4.8% in 2012 to 5.6% in 2014. The latest figure available in 2017 is 10.7%. Factors that contribute to the high prevalence were unprotected receptive anal sex, multiple partners, lack of knowledge in HIV/AIDS, negative attitude towards HIV/AIDS and poly substance abuse

Although this is a growing issue with deep societal and health issues, WHO has removed Gender Incongruence from ICD-11's list of mental illness. This is in contrast to less critical problems such as the addiction to video games which is now an official mental health condition.

Professional bodies like the American Psychiatric Association have stated that homosexuality is not a mental disorder and is not curable. Nonetheless, experience has shown otherwise; whereby homosexuality has been treated and cured a significant number of transgenders with an integrative Islamic aspect to the medical approach. They were not only good at compliance on Highly Active Antiretroviral Therapy, but also have stopped practicing anal sex, being transgender or gay. A few

of them have started a new life by getting married and having their own families. Some have moved into small businesses of their own. Similar to other countries, in Malaysia too transgenders face discrimination not only at community level but also in employment. As a result they experience financial instability. These issues are addressed to a large extent through NGO's like Persatuan Insaf Pahang in Kuantan. The NGO's also assist transgender in their physical transformation like removal of their breast implants. Transgender individuals who repent and show positive attitudes are invited to perform Umrah in Mecca and Madinah. Upon return, they become an instant celebrity and an icon of change.

As mentioned in the holy Qur'an, for every disease Allah provides a cure except death. LGBT is disease and the treatment must be very comprehensive. It must encompass not only physical, mental and a social approach, but also should concentrate on a spiritual dimension too. Islam offers essential teachings on the gender identity, as well as fundamental guidelines on health community relationship.

As regards to gender identity, it is clearly stated in chapter 49, verse 13, chapter 42, verse 50, chapter 75, verse 39, and elsewhere in the Qur'an. Islamic teachings recognize the existence of two types of genders; male and female (*al-zakaru wa al-untha*). This is to say that, by nature mankind is either male or female, sometimes described as *al-zakar wa al-untha* i.e., male and female, or as *al-rijal wa al-nisa*, i.e., man and woman. In the Qur'an and *Sunnah*, the former description (*al-zakar wa al-untha*) is mentioned mainly to describe gender identity, while the later classification (*al-rijal wa al-nisa*) is often used in association to state/describe the functions and social roles of these two genders in the society. Qur'an also describes these two genders as spouses, companions, mates or pairs (*azwaj*). Though as mentioned in chapter 16, verse 72, chapter 4, verse 1, and 75, verse 39, and elsewhere in the Qur'an, these mates, companions or pairs exhibit certain physiological differences, the existence of each of these two genders attests the

life of the other, the two genders complement each other, a due combination of which is set to carry life forward by means of having legitimate children and grandchildren.

Throughout the teachings of the Qur'an and *Sunnah*, these two genders are addressed as moral agents (*al-mu'minun wa al-mu'minat* or *al-Muslimuna wa almuslmat*), whose duty is realization of the Divine Will (*khalifah*) in terms of managing and improving the conditions of economic, political, educational and social aspects of life. As mentioned in chapter 9, verse 71, and elsewhere in the Qur'an, the social functions of man and woman is to work as guardian of each other (*wa al-mu'minuna wal-mu'minatu ba'duhum awliya' ba'din*), whose task is to assist each other in promoting and commanding good as well as in prohibiting bad in the society (*ya'muruba bil al-ma'rufi wayanhawna 'an almunkari*). As mentioned in chapter 30, verse 21 and chapter 2, verse 187, Islam teaches that, properly guided and regulated union between these two genders, by means of marriage, is where social comfort and tranquility (*mawadah, sakinah and rahmah*), as well as health and dignified intimacy are achieved (*huna libasun lakum wa antum libasun lahuna*).

It is clearly stated in chapter 23, verse 7, seeking to fulfil sexual desires beyond these two genders and within these two genders by illegitimate means, such as adultery, is considered as a deviation and "transgression" of nature (*al-fitrah*) as well as disobedience to the rules of the divine orders (*fa ula'ika hum al-'adun*). This transgression and offence against the nature and the divine rules, result punishment; either by means of legal punishment or by means of divine retributions in the form of diseases such as the spread of HIV AIDS.

Among the deviant social behaviour that violates the nature of man and woman is homosexuality and LGBT. As stated in chapter 7, verses 80-84, chapter 29, verses 28-37, chapter 26, verses 160-173, and elsewhere in the Qur'an, the behaviour of achieving sexual desires with the same gender, be in the form of LGBT or homosexuality, is associated with abnormality and loss of sense. In these verses in which the Qur'an presents the story of *Qowmu Lut*, i.e., People of Lut, the Qur'an illustrates various important lessons about LGBT and homosexuality. It mentions that homosexuality began with the People

of Lut; whereby it was not known to the communities prior to Qowm Lut (*masabaqakum biha min ahadin mina al-alamun*) (7:80). In this sense, homosexuality was not known to humanity before the time of people of Lut, a behavior that constitutes a deviant tendency, a sin, an offence and crime (*mujrimin*) (7:84).

It is stated in the Qur'an that homosexuality is due to transgressing beyond limits of nature and the divine order (*bal anmum qawmun musrifun*) (7:81). It is also mentioned that the behaviour of avoiding females, the natural spouses (*azwaj*) of male (*ma khalaqa alkum rabukum*), and approaching males by other males with sexual desires is associated with the loss of sense; a type of mental disorder that leads to exceed all honoured limits and normality (*bal antum qawmun 'adun*) (26:166)

As reflected in verse 82, chapter 7 of the Qur'an, LGBT and homosexuality are described as unhealthy and unhygienic conduct, that would result in a disgraceful life and perhaps severe and far reaching retributions (7:82, 26:172-173, and 29: 34). The Qur'an also mentions that LGBT and homosexuality are due to unjust (*zulm*) and corruption of nature (*mufsidun*), embedded with mental condition of being wickedly rebellion (*fasiq*) to nature and to that of the divine order (29: 30-31 and 34). In chapter 27, verse 55, homosexuals and LGBTs are attributed to gross ignorance (*qawmun tajhaluna*), which results in misjudgement due to the absence of true knowledge on the proper approaches of fulfilling sexual desires.

Homosexuality and LGBT is deemed to be a mental sicknesses of being ignorant (*jahl*), transgression (*'adun*), extremism (*israf*), loss of rational sense (*a'inakum lata'tuna al-rijal shahwatan*) and the culture of adopting unhealthy life style (*qawmun yatadaharun*),

It is imperative that respective authorities, agencies and individuals address and heal these social illnesses by all curative means such as conventional and spiritual education, consultations and legislation. Like other types of social illnesses, LGBT and the behaviour of homosexuality must be duly tackled and corrected for the wellbeing of the nation and the ummah.

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Assoc. Prof. Dr. Samsul Draman

Assoc. Prof. Dr. Abdurezak A. Hashi

International Islamic University Malaysia (IIUM)

Kuantan Campus, Pahang, Malaysia

