The Islamic Approach in Mitigating HIV AIDS

Faisal Ibrahim

Community Health Department, Faculty of Medicine and Health Sciences, Universiti Putra Malaysia, 43400 UPM Serdang, Selangor, Malaysia

*Corresponding author: Faisal Ibrahim; email: faisalupm@upm.edu.my

ABSTRACT

In response to the devastating impact of HIV AIDS, Islamic approach to mitigate the epidemic is explored based on evidences acquired from Al-Qura’n and Sunnah (Prophet’s hadith, PBUH).

These evidences cover the aspect of prevention, treatment, counseling, care and support, which are fundamentally required for alleviating the spread of HIV AIDS infection and its dreadful sequences on people infected and affected with HIV AIDS.

Key Words: HIV AIDS, Islamic approach, Shari’ah, Prevention, Care and Support

1.0 Introduction:

The Human Immunodeficiency Virus (HIV) infection that causes Acquired Immunodeficiency Syndrome (AIDS) is one of the worst pandemics affecting humans. It is almost 33 years since the first case of HIV was detected and the deadly virus continues to spread across the world. The scale of the epidemic is paramount where no continent was untouched and almost all countries in the world reported HIV infection. As of Dec. 2011, it has been estimated that more than 60 million individuals have succumbed to HIV infections across the world, and 25 million have since died. In 2012 alone, there were 35 million people still living with HIV. Of these, 17.3 million were women, and 2.3 million were children under the age of 14. The number of children orphaned by this disease has now reached 15.2 million.

In Malaysia, after more than 25 years into the HIV epidemic, the cumulative reported cases of HIV infection hit a high of 95,000 people. Of these, 81,000 are still living with HIV AIDS (PLWHA), including 9,100 (11.2%) women, and 14,000 have already died. For 2012 alone, there were 10 new infection / day, and seven of those infected were young people aged between 20 to 39 years.

Experiences from countries that have been most affected in Southern Africa, with prevalence rates between 20-33%, revealed that there are abrasive lessons to be learnt about the devastating impact this disease is having on families and communities, as well as socio-cultural and economic development, especially in terms of stigma and discrimination. If the world is to achieve the Millennium Development Goal for HIV AIDS, that is to halt and reverse the spread of HIV by 2015, a great deal of comprehensive effort needs to be done to address these devastating impacts. HIV AIDS is not just a health problem, it is also an ethical
and moral problem. Therefore, intervention to stem the spread of HIV infection should not just rely on giving correct information about HIV transmission, providing appropriate preventive measures, and imparting practical skills that enable individuals to reduce their risk of HIV infection, but should also focus on moral and spiritual values which are instrumental to maintain healthy lifestyles for individuals and society. All of these joint approaches can be examined as being basically what give rise to Islamic principle in mitigating HIV epidemic.

2.0 The Principle of Islamic Approach

Social service, in terms of alleviating suffering and helping the needy, constitutes an integral part of Islamic teaching. Praying to God and other religious acts are deemed to be incomplete in the absence of active service to the needy, hence the glorious Qura’n states; "We sent you not (O Muhammad), but as a MERCY for all mankind" (Surah Al-Anbia; Ver-107), which implies that Islam is principally the religion of mersy for all mankind. Accordingly, the glorious Qura’n further emphasizes that “If anyone killed a person not in relation of murder, or to spread mischief in the hand – it would be as if he killed all mankind, and if anyone saved a life, it would be as if he saved the life of all mankind” (Surah Al-Maedah; Ver-32). These Qura’nic statements provide a clear motivation for providing a sense of courteous, understanding, Attentive, Responsive, Friendly, Respectful, Showing care and concern, to those inflicted with HIV AIDS, irrespective of the disapproval of their life styles which caused them to acquire the infection.

As the HIV virus has no boundaries and does not distinguish between class or religion, care and support in Islam too never discriminate those who are in need of care and support. This is clearly evicenced by the following glorious Qura’n statement; “Nor defame one another, nor insult one another by nicknames” (Surah Al-Hujurat; Ver-11), which implies that a proper understanding of any issue, is imperative in order to ensure it is correctly and accordingly addressed.

With regard to the obligation of inquiring scientific (sound) knowledge about HIV AIDS, the basic rulings in Islam is to acquire an unambiguous knowledge about any issue before deciding to take remedial action. This is what is clearly stated in the glorious Quraan (Surah Al-A’nbia; Ver-7); “Ask the expert if you do not know”, which implies that a proper understanding of any issue, is imperative in order to ensure it is correctly and accordingly addressed.

3.0 Rule of Prevention in Islam

There are specific Shari’ah principles in Islam that provide a clear cut guidance in preventing and controlling the harm; The rule of avoidance of causing Harm, or not to be infected and infect others; لا ضرر ولا ضرار، and the rule that testifies, harm should be removed, however if it cannot be removed completely then it should be removed by lesser Harm; "إذا اجتهد الضرر فعليكم باخفض الضررين, are the most appropriate examples of how the spread of HIV virus should be prevented and controlled. Furthermore, even the controversial use of condom as a preventive device could be endorsed by the rule of necessity, which particularly testify that “Necessity permits the forbidden” However, the Islamic approach is not just going for Abstinence, Be faithful, and Condom use, but rather Abstinence from sex outside marriage, Be faithful in one’s marriage bond, And; Condom does not justify adultery. In other world, it is going for; Save Sex, rather than Safe Sex.
4.0 Implementing the Legitimate Purposes of SHARI’AH

Islamic approach, entails implementing the legitimate purposes of shari’ah, which implies preserving the five necessities, namely; religion (deen), life (nafs), Progeny (nasl), wealth (mal) and mind (aql). These purposes of Shari’ah provide a holistic relationship to preserve sanctity, dignity and safety of mankind, thus preventing the spread of HIV means;

- Preserving religion by moral and religious capacity building by avoid any behavior that lead to adultery. This is clearly asserted by the Glorious Qura’n statement (Surah Al-Isra’; Ver-32); ولاتقربوا الزنا أنه كان فاحشة وساء سبيلا “Do not come near to adultery. It is a shameful deed, an evil, opening the way to other evils”.
- Preserving life… as there is no drug that can kill the HIV virus
- Saving off-spring through Preventing mother-to-child transmission by applying the rule of necessity "لا ضرار ولا ضرر"
- Saving money (wealth) by focusing on preventive measures to avoid the heavy burden of treating AIDS patient, and;
- Preserving mind (mental health) by mitigating the psychosocial impacts of stigma and discrimination connected with people living with HIV AIDS

5.0 Interacting with Those Infected and Affected with HIV AIDS

Islamic principle in interacting with those infected and affected with HIV AIDS can be visibly guided by the following Glorious Qura’n statement (Surah Al-Imran; Ver-104); ولكن منكم أمة which instructs us to firstly; invite them to all that is good…. “Advocating for healthy behavior, along with moral and spiritual value”, secondly; wisely Apply Shari’ah Guidelines to adopt what is right and proper, Balancing of natural human instincts and desires, with Shari’ah approved social structure, including marriage, and thirdly; hinder what is wrong and harmful through “Viable legislations and regulations”.

6.0 Counseling in Islam

It is equally important for people living with HIV AIDS to have access to professional counseling. However, such counseling should not be restricted to merely making them cope with the disease, but should also incorporate an element of Islamic ethos, and instilling in them hope of the mercy of Allâh.

The Islamic principle in counseling can be guided by the following Qura’nic version (Surah Al-Nahl; Ver-125); ادع إلى سبيل ربك بالحكمة والموكعة الحسنة وجادلهم بالتي هي أحسن which call for Inviting (mankind) to the way of ALLAH with wisdom, and; Fairly preach, and argue with them in a Way that is better and convincing. Other way of providing counseling is evidenced by the following Glorious Qura’n (Surah Al-Imran; Ver-15); فأعف عنهم واستغفر لهم وشاورهم في الأمر فآذمهم فتوقل على الله إن الله يحب المتولهين which shows a clear testimonial to gently deal with those who need counseling, not to be Severe and harsh, otherwise they would have broken away from you. Pass over their faults, and ask forgiveness for them. Consult them in the affairs, then when You have taken a decision, put your trust in Allâh. Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) encourages Muslims to sincerely advise each other as it is evident from the following Hadith: الدين النصيحة which means “Religion is sincere advice”
7.0 Care and Support in Islam

People living with HIV/AIDS need the loving care of their family members and the people around them. This can be inferred to the following Hadith: “the believers, in their love and sympathy for one another are like one body; when one part of it, is affected with pain, the whole of it responds in terms of wakefulness and fever”. The prophet (PBUH) also emphasized that, meaning that “ALLAH will not bless the soul of ruthless people”, while kindness and compassion is part of Islamic obligation.

8.0 Right to be treated

HIV-positive patients cannot be refused access to medical care. They should therefore be given both moral and financial support to be in a position to gain access to antiretroviral treatment (ART). Therapeutically, there is clear Islamic guidance to seek remedy and cure from all ailments: “Seek cure, for ALLAH has not established a disease without establishing its remedy”.

9.0 Stigma and Discrimination against People Living with HIV/AIDS

Islam is against stigma and discrimination as evidenced by the following glorious Qur’an statement (Surah Al-Hujurat; Ver-10): “those who believe should not defame or be sarcastic to each other”, and from a hadith which emphasizes on “Treat others as you like to be treated”; thus, it would be unbecoming of Muslims to discriminate against their counterparts who are HIV positive. Instead, they need to be reassured that Allah is most forgiving, and to be encouraged to strengthen their bond with their Creator, and to seek inner peace through sincere repentance.

10.0 Islamic Messages

for those who are not yet infected; The Glorious Qur’an warns: “And do not destroy yourselves, for indeed Allah has been to you Most Merciful” (Surah Al-Nisa’a; Ver-29).

For those who are living with HIV/AIDS; Be hopeful… despair not of mercy of ALLAH (Surah Al-Zamur; Ver-53):

And back to ALLAH with sincere repentance; the best of those who make mistakes are those who repent (Hadith narrated by Muslim).

11.0 Conclusion

Islam has demonstrated practical solutions to mitigate the HIV epidemic. We probably could not make this world a HIV/AIDS free one, but we certainly can make it less prevalent with less orphans if we seriously take up the Islamic approach as a way of life.
References


HIV/STI Section, Ministry of Health Malaysia, Malaysia (2012), Global AIDS Response Country Progress Report


Faisal Ibrahim (2013), Harm Reduction: The Islamic Perspective, Drug Law Reform in East and Southeast Asia, Lexington Book, Chapter eight, 107-112


Al-Bukhari, Muhammad ibn Isma’il. N.D., Sahih al-Bukhari., Dar al-Sha’b, Cairo (1987)