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# Care for Ageing Parents in Pakistan: Islamic Family Responsibilities and Intergenerational Social Solidarity

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**Abstract:**
Care for ageing parents in Pakistan involves decisions about income, residence, daily assistance and authority within the family. These decisions draw on Islamic commitments to kindness and material support as well as on arrangements shaped by gender, employment and migration. The article brings Qur'anic exegesis and classical jurisprudence into conversation with Pakistani family law and sociological research on intergenerational solidarity. It distinguishes filial kindness from financial maintenance and examines a Lahore High Court decision that recognised a forum for dependent parents' claims against sons while delimiting the use of the expedited procedure under section 17-A of the Family Courts Act, 1964. Pakistani qualitative studies illustrate how affection, religious conviction and social expectations can sustain care and also generate unequal demands on caregivers. The analysis argues that intergenerational solidarity depends on how relatives distribute money, time and decision-making, and on whether parents can influence the terms of their care. Reliable public and community services can help families sustain these arrangements as care needs change.

**Keywords:** ageing parents, Islamic family law, intergenerational solidarity, parental maintenance, unpaid care, Pakistan

## Introduction

There are parents who are older and have sufficient funds for their living expenses, and yet find that someone is needed to take them to a clinic. Another may be living with adult children and have very little input into their pension and their day-to-day activities. These situations are about various areas of care. One is about access to income, one about access to day-to-day assistance and the third about the older person's power to make decisions. In Pakistan, family research includes cases of families in which women take care of their household duties while also performing other duties, and of the older members of families whose transition to a shelter home was a consequence of hardship or poor family relationships. All these studies suggest increased scrutiny of the link between the expression of filial duty and the delivery of care. A family's willingness to assist differs from its capacity to make time available, organise transport and cover expenses as demands increase (Cassum et al., 2020; Sabzwari & Azhar, 2011; Shekhani, 2024; World Health Organization, 2015).

Islamic beliefs place certain responsibilities on children: to speak kindly to parents and help them in any way they can. Classical jurists also included maintenance of parents who are in need as a duty in certain circumstances. Sociological research introduces new questions of 'who pays what' at the level of the relatives' decisions, and 'how much' is a reasonable amount? A son sending money, a daughter making doctor's appointments and a daughter-in-law cooking the meals might all interpret the same arrangement in different ways. The article seeks to answer the question of what Islamic ethics and jurisprudence say about responsibility towards parents who are growing old, and what the Pakistani law says about material support in terms of certain claims, while considering sociological studies on the care of daily life. Its argument is that family solidarity must be maintained through arrangements which take into account the needs of parents, the time of caregivers, and the resources that are required of those who will contribute (Al-Sarakhsī, 1324–1331 AH, Vol. 5, p. 222; Bengtson & Roberts, 1991; Finch & Mason, 1993; Folbre, 2001; The Qur'an, n.d.).

## Sources and Method of Analysis

The sources of analysis are selected passages from the Qur'an, the hadiths, the classics of exegesis and jurisprudence, legislation, a reported judgment and published social research. The interpretation of the Qur'ān and fiqh are read in their context. The exegesis makes clear the conduct the scriptural passages require; and the juristic texts explain when kinship creates a material claim. The legal analysis is based on reading the judgment along with the relevant statutory provisions and separately analyzing the provisions of the Sindh and Islamabad Capital Territory welfare statutes. Pakistani studies of care offer local evidence and studies of intergenerational solidarity, negotiated family responsibilities and migration offer comparative concepts for the sociological analysis. The studies in Karachi bring insight into experiences in certain settings, while the study of the Pakistani community in Norway serves as an example of another welfare system. The article does not estimate the prevalence of any care arrangement (Bengtson & Roberts, 1991; Bowen, 2009; Cassum et al., 2020; Merry, 1988; Shekhani, 2024; Shrestha et al., 2024).

## Islamic Ethics and the Maintenance of Parents

The Qur'an has devoted special attention to children's speech to their old parents (17:23-24). It incorporates prohibition of expressions of irritation and an instruction to address parents with respect and a prayer for mercy on them, which is a reminder of their care for the child in the past (The Qur'an, n.d., 17:23–24).[1] The prohibition is given by al-Ṭabarī in reference to certain matters of old age which could challenge the patience of the caregiver. He links the constraint that the child has to endure with the patience once exhibited by the parents (Al-Ṭabarī, 2001, Vol. 14, p. 545). By referring to previous care, this helps to explain the meaning of moral value in the context of patience, without reducing the relationship to repayment. This is the same concern for the relationship that is manifested in Qur'an 31:14–15, where thankfulness is followed by an instruction to remain good companions, even if one has a fundamental disagreement with the other over religion (The Qur'an, n.d., 31:14–15).[2] In the hadith on good companionship, the Prophet names the mother three times before naming the father (Al-Bukhārī, n.d., Hadith 5971, Muslim ibn al-Ḥajjāj, n.d., Hadith 2548a).[3] This focus presents care as a practice involving presence, attention and respect. The way assistance is given affects how it is received.

The material needs of parents are the topic of the juristic discussion, which asks a more specific question: Who is required to pay for a parent's material needs and under what circumstances? The Qur'an includes parents among the recipients of spending (The Qur'an, n.d., 2:215).[4] The Ḥanafī jurist al-Sarakhsī mentions the ban on causing distress, as mentioned in Qur'an 17:23, in his chapter on the maintenance of kin. He reasons that the lack of support for parents in need is more damaging than the irritation that is forbidden in the verse. Al-Sarakhsī (1324–1331 AH) stated that in the case discussed, a child of means is obligated to pay maintenance, even if the needy parents are capable of working (Vol. 5, p. 222). Al-Kāsānī examines the assignment of kin maintenance when more than one relative can be held responsible, making a distinction between those cases where one of the kin is responsible and those where the responsibility is shared (Al-Kāsānī, 1327–1328 AH, Vol. 4, p. 32). In the Ḥanbalī discussion, Ibn Qudāmah discusses the agreed obligation to support poor parents without earnings or property, and talks about the role of the mother with regard to the role of the father (Ibn Qudāmah, 1968, Vol. 8, p. 212). These formulations highlight the need and the resources available for meeting that need. Conditions should be mentioned when making an analysis of the texts in the current situation (Saleha, 2018).

[1] Qur'an 17:23–24 (excerpts). فَلَا تَقُلْ لَهُمَا أُفٍّ وَلَا تَنْهَرْهُمَا وَقُلْ لَهُمَا قَوْلًا كَرِيمًا ۝ وَقُلْ رَبِّ ارْحَمْهُمَا كَمَا رَبَّيَانِي صَغِيرًا Translation: "Do not say to them 'uff', nor rebuke them, but speak to them honourably" (17:23). "And say, 'My Lord, have mercy on them as they raised me when I was small'" (17:24).

[2] Qur'an 31:15 (excerpt). وَصَاحِبْهُمَا فِي الدُّنْيَا مَعْرُوفًا Translation: "Keep their company in this world with kindness."

[3] Al-Bukhārī, Ṣaḥīḥ, Kitāb al-Adab, Bāb man aḥaqqu al-nāsi bi-ḥusni al-ṣuḥbah, hadith 5971, narrated by Abū Hurayrah (excerpt). See also Muslim, Ṣaḥīḥ, hadith 2548a. يَا رَسُولَ اللَّهِ، مَنْ أَحَقُّ بِحُسْنِ صَحَابَتِي؟ قَالَ: «أُمُّكَ». قَالَ: ثُمَّ مَنْ؟ قَالَ: «أُمُّكَ». قَالَ: ثُمَّ مَنْ؟ قَالَ: «أُمُّكَ». قَالَ: ثُمَّ مَنْ؟ قَالَ: «ثُمَّ أَبُوكَ». Translation: A man asked, "Messenger of Allah, who is most entitled to my good companionship?" He replied, "Your mother." The man asked, "Then who?" He replied, "Your mother." He asked, "Then who?" He replied, "Your mother." He asked, "Then who?" He replied, "Then your father."

[4] Qur'an 2:215 (excerpt). قُلْ مَا أَنْفَقْتُمْ مِنْ خَيْرٍ فَلِلْوَالِدَيْنِ وَالْأَقْرَبِينَ وَالْيَتَامَىٰ وَالْمَسَاكِينِ وَابْنِ السَّبِيلِ Translation: "Say: Whatever good you spend is for parents, relatives, orphans, the needy and the traveller."

One subsection that is of special importance to the distribution of care in al-Sarakhsī is his discussion of parental maintenance by offspring who are well provided for. He reports a leading Ḥanafī report in which they share the maintenance equally, and another report in which, by analogy with inheritance, males contribute twice the share of females (Al-Kāsānī, 1327–1328 AH, Vol. 4, p. 32; Al-Sarakhsī, 1324–1331 AH, Vol. 5, p. 222). The presence of both reports demonstrates why a "one size fits all" approach to calculating inheritance shares as a proxy for all kin maintenance is inadequate in accounting for the school's rationales. It also demonstrates the inadequacy of seeing the role of support as solely a son's responsibility, as the passage shows. Both reports refer to a ‘material obligation' related to a particular family connection. An expectation that a daughter-in-law provide daily help in a joint household is another sociological question regarding the allocation of work in families. When a daughter-in-law (or anyone else who helps) is recognised, families can then think about who has time and means to do other things. It also ensures that, when a customary arrangement of tasks leaves one person with an excessive amount of care (Agarwal, 1997; Merrill, 1993; Shekhani, 2024), that person's needs are kept in mind.

Moral and material responsibility is used to explain situations which are hard to compare. Even parents who do have good income might feel isolated or face difficulties getting out of the house. Companionship or making transport available would address such needs even in the absence of a claim for material maintenance. On the other hand, having good relations with their adult children can go hand in hand with struggling financially with the basics. Abdullah's research on Islamic kinship care explores the role of religious perceptions of family in the social care with older Muslims (Abdullah, 2016). It proposes a form of inquiry around help that is both respectful of religious convictions and open to multiple types of help. In the Pakistani context, one must be careful in using theological and legal language. Kindness is meaningful in the relationship and the juristic discussion of maintenance offers some rules for evaluating a material obligation. The state, community, or paid workers' support can provide a broader spectrum of ways in which a family can act in response to these issues (Ibn Qudāmah, 1968, Vol. 8, p. 212; The Qur’an, n.d.; World Health Organization, 2015).

## Parental Maintenance and Senior Welfare in Pakistani Law

In Azhar Ijaz Khawaja v. Additional District Judge (2025, paras. 7–12), the Lahore High Court considered a mother's application for maintenance from her sons and the manner in which the Family Court had acted. On reading section 5 of the Family Courts Act, 1964, and the maintenance entry in Part I of the Schedule, the High Court decided that the Family Court has jurisdiction to grant maintenance to a mother or father who lacks means from their sons. The Court referred to Islamic law authorities and gave special consideration to section 17-A. In that section, an expedited procedure for interim monthly payments to a wife or child is provided; in case of failure to pay, the defence is struck off (Punjab Family Courts (Amendment) Act, 2015, § 12). The High Court ruled that the summary procedure in the section did not apply to the mother's suit. It separated that process from the Family Court's jurisdiction to grant interim relief in a parental claim. The Court accepted the concept of interim maintenance as ancillary to the determination of final relief and pointed to section 21-A and the powers inherent in the Family Court in the context of enforcement. It quashed the impugned orders and remanded the matter for

fresh adjudication. Its decision leaves questions about claims against daughters and the distribution of a final award unresolved.

Needs of parents and public welfare are similar, but are met by different institutions. The right to basic necessities of life for citizens who are unable to earn a living due to certain conditions such as infirmity has been placed in the Principles of Policy under Article 38(d) of the Constitution. Article 30 restricts the use of those principles as a basis for striking down a law or action (Constitution of the Islamic Republic of Pakistan, 1973, arts. 30, 38(d)). In Sindh, provisions have been made under Senior Citizens Welfare Act for a council, medical provisions and for establishment of old age home. The Islamabad Capital Territory Senior Citizens Act, 2021, also provides a welfare framework for Islamabad (Islamabad Capital Territory Senior Citizens Act, 2021; Sindh Senior Citizens Welfare Act, 2014). The statutory provisions for geriatric services and day-care centres in Sindh, and the welfare framework in the Islamabad Capital Territory (ICT), provide examples of local arrangements. They define legislative duties; the delivery of services requires separate evaluation. Even if a family can help a parent with their costs in a private maintenance agreement, they may still need a public clinic and may need assistance with transport to the public clinic or temporary assistance at home. Thus, the maintenance remedy and the welfare framework can be assessed based on the different needs they are able to meet (Saleha, 2018; World Health Organization, 2020).

**Intergenerational solidarity and division of care**

Bengtson and Roberts (1991) separate dimensions of solidarity: affection, contact, agreement, practical exchange, norms of obligation, and opportunities for family interaction provided by the family structure. In Pakistan it is helpful to be able to make the distinction because support may be high in one area and low in the other.

Frequent contacts can help maintain a relationship across distance. One of the parents' relatives who lives nearby may help practically without sharing the parent's treatment preferences. An adult child can receive a heavy burden of responsibility for caring but little time off work. Finch and Mason (1993) view family responsibilities as something that is negotiated over time and based on family histories and judgements about what family members can do. Intergenerational ambivalence also helps account for the possibility of both gratitude and frustration (and disagreements on independence) in the same relationship (Lüscher & Pillemer, 1998). These frameworks serve as a way to analyze Pakistani readings which recognize expressions of devotion as meaningful and consider the context in which commitments are harder to live up to (Rossi & Rossi, 1990; Silverstein et al., 2006).

Shekhani (2024) conducted interviews with seven daughters and three daughters-in-law who were helping older relatives who needed support for at least two activities of daily living in Karachi. Women were from relatively wealthy families, and their experiences involve situations where paid assistance was available. Daughters cited the significance of the enduring relationalities and the role reversal. The daughters-in-law also spoke about their expectations from the marriage and kinship. Participants mentioned that they were under stress due to constant care demands and the need to juggle multiple demands. Some reported greater self-mastery. These results provide information on the value placed by caregivers on their work and

the burden associated with the work. The study used a small, socially selected sample. Other caregivers, such as women with fewer resources and those outside of major cities, may have other constraints (Gubrium, 1991; Merrill, 1993; Pearlin et al., 1990).

In household bargaining studies, the tendency for unequal division of household labor even when siblings agree a parent should be cared for is explained. Payments can be recorded and counted. It's more difficult to gauge the time a caregiver spends listening during the night or staying home to meet with a visiting nurse. Having people nearby is one way to make it more likely to offer help, and then expect it. Some of the factors that influence the possibility of a woman to raise these issues are the control she has over her own time and income, and whether others in her family acknowledge the work. The Time Use Survey 2007 of the Federal Bureau of Statistics (FBS) is the historical data source for unpaid household and care work in Pakistan (Federal Bureau of Statistics, 2009). Elder care allocation is still a question of fact. Studies of siblings would have to take account of recurrent time demands, such as being available to respond at night or cover during a caregiver's vacation, as well as direct costs (Addati et al., 2018; Agarwal, 1997; Folbre, 2001; Kabeer, 1999; Kandiyoti, 1988).

## Residence, Migration and Parents' Participation

Living together makes it easier to provide meals, monitor changes in health and respond to an emergency. It can also introduce further decisions regarding visits, who controls the spending in the household and privacy. Research on transnational care documents the exchange of practical and emotional care that may be transmitted via remittance, call, visit and/or coordination between people in multiple locations (Baldassar & Merla, 2014). Financial support from a migrant family member can cover transport and/or treatment. If a plan goes astray, a sibling in Pakistan might need to locate a service provider and come along with their parent and be on call. There is research for Pakistani-origin families in Norway for comparison. In that context, caregivers spoke about the significance of helping older adults in their homes and the importance of trust in formal services (Shrestha et al., 2024). These accounts have been created in Norway's service system and in a certain migrant community. Their relevance lies in the questions they raise about combining family and professional care in a manner that is acceptable to older people and caregivers (Lamb, 2009; World Health Organization, 2015).

When decisions are made based on safety or convenience, parents' views are more important. Cassum et al. (2020) interviewed 14 older persons in two shelter homes in Karachi and identified diverse pathways to the shelters, ranging from family disagreements to low levels of emotional and financial support, to moving with varying degrees of freedom. It does not provide a means for determining the rate of abandonment, nor can it determine what would occur in another service environment. The emphasis of capability and healthy ageing is on an older person's ability to perform in a particular place. For a useful conversation about residence there should be a discussion of the parent's choice of residence, the social support network that is familiar to them, their mobility or immobility, and the availability of worship or community activities, where they have them, and the level of privacy. Questions of consultation may start with tangible ones, like who gets to see the parent, what kinds of things the parent wants in close proximity,

how they would like their family members to act if they had a health change (Sen, 1999; Tronto, 1993; World Health Organization, 2015).

A family's division of labour can change quickly if a family experiences a change in health. Sometimes a parent's increased need for supervision or information about appointments can cause difficulties for a household that has been used to handling occasional shopping. Balouch et al. (2021) conducted a study on beliefs and barriers to dementia in Pakistan, which highlights the challenges faced by individuals in understanding dementia symptoms and accessing the needed support. Studies conducted in Karachi around depression among older people also highlight the importance of emotional health as part of a description of care (Bhamani et al., 2013). Causal explanations require caution, given the depression study's cross-sectional design. These studies provide a justification for questioning the responsiveness of the care arrangements to changing needs. An appointment may be arranged by someone with money to provide occasional paid assistance or someone with flexible work to arrange the appointment at short notice. An extended physical care regime may not eliminate social contact from the older person's life. A family's ability to reengage commitments following a health change is one way to maintain the parent's security and the caregiver's ability to continue (Pearlin et al., 1990; World Health Organization, 2020).

Help may have different social connotations at different stages in the life of a family. An older person who has been providing care for and/or shelter for the child may feel that helping is a continuation of the relationship. Although a child may have been nearby for years, he or she could see a new request through the work of others. An older parent who doesn't want to accept assistance may be attempting to hold on to a role they have in the family. The reason these interpretations are important is that an agreement may seem very favorable for the person who makes the offer, and restrictive for the person who may accept it. Obligations across the life course and obligations of diaspora families provide the language for talking about these tensions. It also values a wider understanding of solidarity, as there can be differences of opinion regarding the conditions of care. The importance of intergenerational support should not be overlooked, and attention should be paid to the context of older parents' needs for support, as well as what they continue to contribute (Lamb, 2009; Finch & Mason, 1993; Lüscher & Pillemer, 1998; Rossi & Rossi, 1990; Sen, 1999).

## Implications for Families and Institutions

From the religious and sociological evidence, there are three issues that families can talk to each other about with the older parent. The first is material sufficiency - savings and the ability to cover essential costs. The second is the distribution of daily work and responsibilities of arranging relief. The third is inclusion in decisions regarding residence, private and shared activities. A family may consider these questions after a family member has been discharged from hospital, after a brother or sister has moved or if there has been a major change in the parent's mobility. It is important that those involved are aware of who to approach, have an idea of the work involved and the parent can communicate preferences. In religious education, the importance of speech and companionship in the Qur'ān provides an opportunity to talk about these decisions within the context of the responsibility of a son/daughter towards their parents.

Ability and need inform material contributions from juristic and economic perspectives (Al-Sarakhsī, 1324–1331 AH, Vol. 5, p. 222; Bengtson & Roberts, 1991; Finch & Mason, 1993; The Qur'an, n.d.; Tronto, 1993).

The institutional level of discussion points to value in linking services that are typically used to meet a single need. A welfare office can assist a parent to locate services available. A clinic may be able to create a treatment plan that's easier for the parent and caregiver to comprehend. Community organisations can assist people to access transport services, social contact or brief relief. Studies of caregivers reveal that the professional service/caregiver relationship is influenced, in part, by the way professionals view the roles and situation of family members. The law analysed here helps to look at some of these issues in specific jurisdictions such as provision of medical and day services in Sindh. Questions remain unanswered in the available local studies. Research interviewing older persons, resident caregivers and non-resident siblings from the same family would provide insights into disagreements that are not uncovered through interviewing one family member. Current time-use evidence, along with careful information on the type of care provided, would also help to provide a clearer picture of who can make use of services and who continues to incur high costs privately (Addati et al., 2018; Islamabad Capital Territory Senior Citizens Act, 2021; Sindh Senior Citizens Welfare Act, 2014; Twigg & Atkin, 1994; World Health Organization, 2020).

## Conclusion

Islamic values for the care of parents extend to the physical aspect of care through the concept of material assistance, as well as kindness, patience and companionship. The classical jurists provide a foundation for discussing the extent and the time of financial maintenance and the possibility of having more than one child involved. The Lahore High Court's view on the jurisdiction of the Family Court in Pakistan demonstrates the application of the issues discussed in this legal framework in the case of a dependent parent. A care arrangement will also have to address practical issues which extend beyond the payment. Somebody needs to make appointments and provide company and be there for a parent when his/her situation changes. These contributions can be made visible in sociological research, and are understood to be the reasons why proximity and household expectations can focus care in specific hands. Intergenerational solidarity sustains these contributions when family members acknowledge and value them, public services are available and older parents can influence decisions that affect their daily lives.

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