

PREVENTING HEPATITIS B THROUGH ISLAMIC TEACHINGS: A FRAMEWORK FOR HEALTH ETHICS AND DISEASE CONTROL

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Abstract

Hepatitis B remains one of the world's most prevalent infectious diseases, posing significant challenges to public health systems, particularly in developing countries. The Islamic approach to disease prevention offers valuable ethical and practical insights that can complement contemporary medical strategies. Grounded in the principles of *Maqāṣid al-Sharī'ah* the objectives of Islamic law this study aimed to examine how Islamic teachings support preventive measures against hepatitis B. Islam's emphasis on cleanliness (*ṭahārah*), preservation of life (*ḥifẓ al-nafs*), and avoidance of harm (*lā ḍarar wa lā ḍirār*) provides a comprehensive framework for promoting health and preventing disease. Preventive practices encouraged by Islam, such as safe medical procedures, moral conduct, community education and vaccination, align closely with modern public health recommendations. The paper adopts a qualitative and analytical approach, combining textual analysis of Islamic sources with a review of contemporary medical and public health literature on Hepatitis B prevention. The study finds out that integrating Islamic ethical principles into hepatitis B prevention programs can enhance public acceptance, improve compliance with vaccination campaigns, and strengthen moral responsibility toward individual and community health. In conclusion, the Islamic preventive approach represents a holistic model that combines spiritual, moral, and medical dimensions to reduce the burden of hepatitis B and safeguard human life. Therefore, there is strong need for collaboration between health workers and Islamic scholars towards developing strategies of Hepatitis B prevention.

Keywords: Hepatitis B, Prevention Islamic Approach

Introduction

Hepatitis B virus (HBV) infection is one of the most serious global health problems, affecting an estimated 296 million people worldwide and causing nearly one million deaths annually due to liver failure, cirrhosis, and hepatocellular carcinoma.¹ Despite the availability of an effective vaccine, HBV continues to spread, particularly in regions with limited access to healthcare and poor awareness of preventive measures. Nigeria, along with other African and Asian countries, bears a significant portion of this burden². From an Islamic perspective, disease prevention is a moral and spiritual obligation rooted in the principles of *Maqāṣid al-Sharī'ah* the higher objectives of Islamic law. These objectives emphasize the preservation of religion (*ḥifẓ al-dīn*), life (*ḥifẓ al-nafs*), intellect (*ḥifẓ al-'aql*), progeny (*ḥifẓ al-nasl*), and property (*ḥifẓ al-māl*). Among these, the preservation of life is of paramount importance, making health protection a religious duty for every Muslim. Islam encourages proactive measures to prevent disease, cleanliness and hygiene, responsible behavior, and community, all of which align with modern public health principles. This paper explores the Islamic approach to hepatitis B prevention, analyzing the harmony between Islamic ethical teachings and biomedical preventive measures. It seeks to demonstrate that incorporating Islamic principles into health education and vaccination campaigns can promote greater community participation, reduce

stigma, and reinforce social responsibility in disease control. In a bid to create more public awareness about the disease, a little explanation has been made on it, its global statistics, mode of transmission and prognosis.

Hepatitis B

Hepatitis B is a potentially life threatening liver infection caused by the Hepatitis B virus (HBV). It is a major global health problem and the most serious type of viral hepatitis. It can cause chronic liver disease and put people at high risk of death from cirrhosis (scarring) of the liver and liver cancer³.

According to the World Health Organization (WHO) an estimated two billion people have been infected with the HBV and more than 240 million have chronic (long term) liver infection worldwide. About 600,000 people die every year due to the acute or chronic consequences of Hepatitis B⁴.

Hepatitis B is the most common serious liver infection in the world. It is more infectious than HIV/AIDS because it is very easily transmitted by blood with a single virus particle being able to cause the disease. Unlike HIV, the HBV can survive out of the body for at least seven days and it can still infect one if it enters body of a person who is not vaccinated⁵.

Based on the above statistics of WHO on Hepatitis B, there is therefore the need to explore all the possible ways in tackling the threat of this deadly disease. Islam as a universal religion that encompasses all the spheres of human life can immensely offer solutions to the menace of this deadly disease that threatens the well-being of mankind.

Modes of Transmission of Hepatitis B

Hepatitis B is caused by Hepatitis B virus (HBV) which is primarily transmitted through blood and other body fluids. HBV can be found in blood, saliva, semen, breast milk and vaginal secretions and can be transmitted through mucus membrane and breaks in the skin⁶.

According to WHO, the modes of transmission of HBV are the same as those for HIV except that HBV is 50 to 100 times more infectious. The organization identifies common modes of transmission of Hepatitis B in developing countries as follows:

- Unsafe injection practices.
- Unsafe blood transfusion
- Unprotected sexual contact.

In developed countries however, such as Western Europe and North America, according to WHO, the majority of infections are transmitted during young adulthood by sexual activities and abuses in injection of drugs.⁷

According to Najib (2013) tattooing is another important factor in transmission of Hepatitis B because a contaminated needle or instrument from an infected person can transmit the disease to a healthy person getting tattooed with the same needle or instrument.⁸

In the foregoing, it is clear that ignorance and immorality play a vital role in spreading Hepatitis B. In developing countries ignorance and negligence could be the reason for the spread of Hepatitis B considering the modes of transmission as disclosed by WHO such as unsafe blood transfusion, unsafe injection practices and close interpersonal contact with infected household contacts among others. While in developed countries immorality is the main reason for the spread of Hepatitis B as it is mostly spread through sexual activity and drug use.

Prognosis of Hepatitis B

Hepatitis B infection may either be acute (self-limiting) or chronic (long standing). Patients with acute infection clear the infection spontaneously within weeks or months. Children are less likely than adults to clear the infection. More than 95% for people who becomes infected as adults or older children will stage a full recovery and develop protective immunity to the virus. However, this drops to 30% for younger children and only 5% for the new born that acquire the infection from their mothers at birth. This population has a 40% lifetime risk of death from cirrhosis or cancer of the liver⁹.

There is no definite cure for people infected by HBV, even though there are medications available to treat its chronic infection, which work only for certain categories of people. The long term effect of Hepatitis B without vaccination results in chronic infection occurring in 90% of infants infected at birth, 30% of children infected between the age of 1 and 5 years and 6% of persons infected after the age of 5. Death

occurs in 15-25% of chronically infected person. That is why prevention is of paramount importance. Hepatitis B vaccine is available for all age groups for this purpose.¹⁰

Islamic Views on Hepatitis B

Just like in the case of other infectious diseases such as HIV/AIDS, immorality and ignorance play an essential role in the transmission and spread of Hepatitis B.

Hepatitis B could be directly related to immorality because of its widespread among prostitutes, homosexuals and drug addicts. With regard to prostitution, Najib says, Prostitutes are one of the main sources of spreading the disease because they have one of the highest carrier rates of Hepatitis B and C and also HIV. It varies from 9-12%.¹¹

Najib further asserted that “It is well known that homosexual behavior is a major risk factor in transmission of Hepatitis B and C. Chronic Hepatitis B and C are more common in gay men when compared with general population. This behavior also, leads, to transmission of other diseases including STDs and HIV”¹².

While on drug addiction Najib says. “Main line addicts have very high prevalence of Hepatitis B and C and they significantly contribute to the pool of chronic hepatitis in the West and America”¹³

Islam warns against immorality in several places in the Qur’an and Traditions of the Prophet (PBUH) and various consequences await those who refuse to act in accordance with the sacred teachings of Islam. These consequences include poverty, famine and diseases among others. This has been illustrated in the subsequent pages of the paper.

Islamic Approach to Prevention of Hepatitis B

In spite of advancement in medical sciences, there is no definite cure for Hepatitis B. Prevention remains the best option in tackling the scourge of the disease. Even though vaccination plays a vital role in its prevention, however, adopting measure to avoid risk factors of transmission can be of utmost importance. According to Najib (2013), Muslims can play a major role in preventing the spread of Hepatitis B by preaching and practising the teachings of Islam. Most of the major risk factors of transmission are preventable. If the general public is encouraged to practice Islamic principles it will have a tremendous impact on prevention of Hepatitis B and other deadly diseases. By doing so, it will not only help Muslims in this world but Allah (The Exalted) will also reward them for this on the day of Judgment¹⁴. Allah (The Exalted) loves His creation (human beings) so much that He declared in the noble Qur’an:

... and if anyone saved a life, it would be as if he saved the life of all mankind. (Qur’an 5:32)

This verse does not mention of saving the life of a Muslim only but that of a human being, be he/her a Muslim or non-Muslim. Thus, Muslims should propagate the message of Islam about preventing hepatitis. If this message reaches some people and is practised even by a few of them, it will help in reducing or curbing prevent hepatitis and save at least some human lives.¹⁵

The Prophet (PBUH) also said.

Whoever removes the pain and trouble of another believer Allah will remove his trouble on the Day of Judgment. (Sahih Muslim 2, 2126,)¹⁶

Based on the evidences above, a Muslim needs to extend the message of Islam to his fellow Muslims as well as non-Muslims in order to bring harmony and stability to mankind. In this regard, Islam’s contribution to prevention of Hepatitis B has been discussed in the following pages.

It has been established scientifically that the use of unsafe injections predisposes to Hepatitis B. As earlier indicated, this is mostly practised in developing countries due to ignorance and poverty. In many parts of developing countries, particularly in rural areas, people who are not trained in any healthcare professions are practising medicine. This leads to quackery that breeds various health hazards such as use of unsafe injections and unnecessary exposure to germs which cause Hepatitis B among others. In Islam ignorance

is not an excuse especially when it comes to handling human life. It was narrated from Amr Ibn Shu'aib from his father from his grandfather that the Prophet (PBUH) said:

The one who practices medicine when he is not known to be a doctor is liable.¹⁷

In line with this, Imam Al-Khattabi said, "I do not know of any difference of opinion concerning the practitioner; if he oversteps the mark and the patient dies, he is liable, and the one who practices (medicine) when he has no knowledge of it is a transgressor".¹⁸

Moreover, according to Ahmad, Muslim Jurists unanimously agreed that the ignorant doctor or pretender who deceives people and causes harm should be prevented from practising medicine. They unanimously agreed that if an ignorant pretender gives sick person the false impression of having knowledge of medicine and the patient gives his permission to treat him and dies or is harmed as a result of this treatment, then the doctor is required to pay *Diyyah* (compensation) for damages, but no *Qisas* (retribution) is required because there was prior consent.¹⁹ Ignorance therefore should not be tolerated in the practice of medicine in Islam, because human life is considered sacred which should not be wasted anyhow.

Another major cause of Hepatitis B in Europe and America is through sexual indulgence. It is to be noted that Islam permits sexual contact only between legally married couples. It prohibits premarital dating, extramarital affairs, prostitution and homosexuality which are all ways for spreading Hepatitis. In the West and America these sexual behaviors are not only allowed but are also encouraged in the name of human right. If the message of Islam on strict prohibition of all illegal sexual relations should be adhered to, human society will be free of Hepatitis B scourge.

In order to avoid falling into abnormal sexual temptations that destroy man's life, Islam forbids not only illegal sex but also activities that lead to it. Allah (The Exalted) says.

And come not near to Adultery and fornication for it is a shameful deed and evil, opening the road to other evils.²⁰

In another verse of the Qur'an, the good sexual behavior of Muslims is described as a standard form in the sight of Allah (The Exalted) while the opposite is labeled as transgressors. Allah (The Exalted) says,

Successful indeed are the believers... And those who guard their chastity except from their wives or that their right hands possess – for them, they are free from blame. But whoever seeks beyond that, then those are transgressors.²¹

Islam also condemns homosexuality in a strong term. Allah (The Exalted) says:

And Lut when he said to his people: Do you commit the worst sin such as none preceding you has committed in the Mankind and Jinn verily to practice your lusts on men instead of women. Nay, but you are a people transgressing beyond bounds.²²

All abnormal sexual behaviors that predispose man to Hepatitis B, are prohibited in Islam. Islam prohibits anal sex with one's wife which equated to sodomy. The Prophet (PBUH) says:

Allah (The Exalted) has cursed any person who commits anal sex with his wife.²³

In another narration the Prophet (PBUH) says:

The one who performs sex with a menstruating woman or did an anal sex it is as if he does not accept the teachings of Muhammad.²⁴

According to Najib, main line drug addicts have very high prevalence of Hepatitis B and they significantly contribute to the pool of chronic hepatitis in the West and America.²⁵

Addiction in all forms is forbidden in Islam. In the Qur'an Allah (The Exalted) says;

O you who believe! Intoxicants and gambling (dedication of) stones and (divination by) arrows, are an abomination of Satan's handiwork: eschew such abominations that you may prosper²⁶.

In addition the Prophet (PBUH) says:

All drinks that produce intoxication are forbidden²⁷

If people desist from taking hard drugs as ordained by Allah (The Exalted) , one of the means of transmitting Hepatitis B, through sharing of needles or instruments will be blocked. The wisdom of Islam in prohibiting intoxicants therefore needs to be explored to proffer solution to Hepatitis B. disease.

Tattooing which is another important factor in transmission of Hepatitis B. has been forbidden by the Prophet (PBUH). He (PBUH) cursed the one who does it. It was narrated from Abu Juhaifah (R.A):

That the Prophet (PBUH) forbade the price of blood, the price of dog, the earnings of a slave woman and he cursed the woman who does tattoos and the woman who has them done, the one who consume *Riba* (interest) and the one who pays it, and he cursed one who makes images²⁸,

In another narration by Abu Hurairah (RA), the Prophet (PBUH) said:

May Allah curse the woman who does hair extensions and the woman who has done it, and the woman who does tattoos and the woman who has them done²⁹

The above mentioned strategic teachings of Islam can protect human beings from Hepatitis B. Therefore there is need for Muslims to extend this gesture to the entire world so as to assist humanity in curbing the menace of Hepatitis B. which threatens the existence of man on earth.

Islamic Position on Premarital Counselling and Testing of Hepatitis B.

Due to the fact that Hepatitis B infection can be prevented through premarital testing, it is important to discuss it here. However the test involves a lot of psychological feelings that may affect the wellbeing of a man, therefore, intending couples will not just be instructed to undergo premarital testing of Hepatitis B. But they need to be prepared both spiritually and psychologically to accept the outcome of the test. This is done through proper counselling and good advice by the experts in relevant fields so as to allay the fear and anxiety of those undergoing the test. It will also prepare them to accept whatever is the outcome of the test, either positive or negative. This can assist them to plan their life, on either to go ahead with the marriage contract or not. As can be seen, premarital counselling on Hepatitis B and other infections such as HIV/AIDS is very important before carrying out the test. This is in line with the teachings of Islam. The Prophet (PBUH) said;

The religion (i.e. Islam) is a sincere counselling and good advice.³⁰

As Muslims who believe in destiny, whether good or bad, if properly counselled and advised, the prospective partners can accept the result with good faith. Therefore it is good in Islam to prepare the minds of those to undergo premarital medical examinations especially Hepatitis B and HIV/AIDS which involve a lot of anxiety due to fear of the unknown and the stigma attached to the diseases.

In Islam marriage contract is a serious business that needs thorough investigations for mutual benefits of the intending partners. The criteria in choosing a good spouse in Islam are religion and good moral conduct. The Prophet (PBUH) Said:

If a man comes to you whose religion and character pleases you then let him marry³¹.

On the basis of the teachings of this *hadith*, scholars including *sheikh* bin Baz asserted that the Prophet did not speak about the health of the spouse. Therefore it is to be assumed that in the absence of any visible evidence to the contrary that a person is healthy, made the Prophet (PBUH) to mention a person's religion and character³².

Certainly, Islam commands its followers to have good faith and trust in their fellow believers and not to harbour unnecessary suspicion against each other. However, considering the present situation in our societies where religious teachings have less impact on people's life, Islamic law is relegated and Western culture characterized by immorality is promoted. Prospective couples should be allowed to take all necessary measures to protect themselves against Hepatitis B and other serious infections. Kutty in this regard states that: "There is no doubt in Islam that marriage candidates are allowed to probe and ascertain the integrity and compatibility of their will-be life partners before deciding to marry them". This is generally understood from the sources and traditions and the *Salaf As-salih*.³³

Kutty further explains that HIV/AIDS as well as similar highly contagious diseases are deadly disease conditions, therefore a prospective spouse has every right to insist on a medical test. It is for the protection of oneself and protection of the fruits of the union.³⁴ He based his statement on the principle of *Shariah* as narrated from the Prophet (PBUH):

Do no harm, nor return harm with harm³⁵.

Kutty concluded that Islamic law, based on the teachings of the above *hadith*, takes into account circumstances of life and encourages Muslims to take all possible precautions in order to avoid harm and injury. Therefore in our present situation, medical test in such cases should be highly encouraged and advocated. Among the major goals of marriage is to have peace of mind with love and compassion. Allah (the Exalted) says,

Among His signs is that He has created spouses for you among yourselves so that you may dwell in tranquility with them, and He has planted love and mercy between you; in that are signs for people who reflect³⁶.

How one can have a peace of mind after marriage to discover his/her spouse is HIV positive or A. Wasi and I Ahad reactive to deadly HBV antigen. More so, if one truly loves his/her prospective spouse then why should one refuse medical test. After all if the results turn out to be negative, it will strengthen their bond and add trust between them. As a result, they would have a tranquil mind and peaceful home³⁷. If one hides any such disease he/she is a sinner or cheater. So the other party has the right of demanding annulment of the marriage if the marriage contract took place without his/her prior knowledge of the disease. This is the opinion of the majority of Muslim scholars. Scholars have limited the defects that allow the annulment (*faskh*) of the marriage into two types; first, the defects that prevent having sex and the second, the defects that make one abhor someone or transmitted diseases such as leprosy, vaginal fester that excretes discharges HIV/AIDS, Hepatitis B. e.t.c.³⁸. It is difficult for one to discover that, his/her prospective spouse is a HIV patient or chronic Hepatitis B patient and accept to marry her/him. If that is the case, then HIV/AIDS or Hepatitis B can make one to abhor marriage.

However, with the discovery of vaccines for all ages in early 1980's³⁹, the tendency for a would-be partner to infect his/her partner would highly be minimized if premarital test is done before the marriage. The uninfected partner can be protected by the vaccine and will not be infected by his/her partner even if they make up their minds to go ahead with the marriage, even if the other prospective partner is infected. This still shows the necessity of undergoing premarital test to prevent transmission of this infection through marital union.

Generally speaking, premarital counseling and testing of Hepatitis B and other disease conditions that may spread through marriage, is viewed in Islamic Jurisprudence under the *fiqh* of *Muwazanat* (balancing benefit and harm). That is, the Muslim jurists consider which one between benefit and harm outbalances the other. As earlier discussed in the previous chapter, scholars are not contemplating its legality, but debated on making it mandatory for prospective partners. However, even if premarital medical examination is not made mandatory, at least it should be encouraged among the Muslim *Ummah* especially in this period when immorality becomes widespread even among the Muslims. Islam permits prospective partners to enquire about the whereabouts of each other before the marriage so as to avoid all trends that would lead to disaffection and conflicts after marriage. And any enquiry made by a partner must be answered if it is pertaining to the wellbeing of their marriage. Thus, it is mandatory upon a

prospective partner not to hide any disease he/she suffers to the other partner. It is then left for him/ her to accept or reject the marriage contract. If one refuses to do so, he is considered in Islamic law as a sinner.

Conclusion

The Islamic approach to hepatitis B prevention presents a comprehensive ethical and practical framework that complements modern medical science. Rooted in the Maqāṣid al-Sharī'ah, particularly the preservation of life (ḥifẓ al-nafs), Islam views disease prevention not merely as a medical necessity but as a moral and spiritual duty. Teachings of the Qur'an and Sunnah strongly encourage cleanliness, avoidance of harm, responsible behavior, and Vaccination, hygiene, and behavioral restraint are therefore not foreign to Islamic values but deeply embedded within them. The Islamic emphasis on moral conduct, family stability, and community responsibility provides natural barriers to the spread of infectious diseases such as hepatitis B. When preventive health initiatives are framed in line with Islamic ethics, they can inspire stronger community participation, dispel misconceptions, and encourage compliance with vaccination and screening programs.

Ultimately, the synthesis of Islamic ethical principles and biomedical prevention offers a holistic model for promoting health and protecting life.

Recommendations

Faith-Based Health Education: Collaboration between relevant agencies such as government and other health organizations with Islamic organizations to design programs that present hepatitis B prevention in light of Islamic teachings.

Involvement of Religious Leaders: there is need to train Imams and community leaders to communicate accurate medical information and Islamic perspectives on vaccination. So as to help in public awareness.

Integration of Islamic Ethics in Public Health Policies: There is need to include Maqāṣid al-Sharī'ah principles in health policies emphasizing life preservation and harm prevention.

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