The Role of Religious Leaders in the Prevention of HIV/AIDS

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The Role of Religious Leaders in the Prevention of HIV/AIDS

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Preface

Human life on earth started as a simple, modest one. As human kind started to explore ways of making that life easier great discoveries and inventions were made. The Industrial Revolution in Europe changed the face of the world and labour-saving devices and luxuries only dreamt of before became realities. But along with, and in spite of, its many amazing achievements, mankind was also confronted with serious diseases.

HIV/AIDS is a complex and incurable disease which has engendered fear and helplessness throughout the world. Millions of children, men and women all over the world are dying as a result of this disease.

In Pakistan, people live according to Islamic teachings and values which encourage safe practices. The county’s minority communities also promote safe practices according to their faiths. Many people believe that Muslim countries are safe from this disease but, although HIV/AIDS may not appear as threatening in Pakistan as in Africa, India and China, there are an increasing number of cases here and in Indonesia. An epidemic of this disease can have serious social and economic repercussions. The fact that there has been an increase in Hepatitis B and C in Pakistan is also alarming as the modes of transmission are similar to that of HIV/AIDS.

To tackle the problem, the National AIDS Control Program (Ministry of Health), in collaboration with UNICEF, has taken the initiative to create awareness among general public with the help and guidance of religious leaders. This Info Kit sets out the basic facts about HIV/AIDS including modes of transmission and means of prevention. It also explains that the virus is not limited to the infected person but affects life partners and children. It is important to know how to help families faced with the prolonged illness or death of one member. In other chapters the social effects of HIV/AIDS are discussed alongside solutions to its problems seen primarily from a religious point of view.

Islam is a complete way of life and to follow its injunctions offers a means of protection against HIV/AIDS. Therefore, relevant examples from the Holy Quran and Hadith are given to enlighten all Muslim brothers and sisters.

In Pakistani society, religious leaders enjoy great respect and dignity in their communities. It is therefore hoped and expected that they would take all possible measures to live up to these expectations and help save society from this pandemic. The last chapter of this Info Kit includes proposals to be implemented according to given circumstances.

It is hoped that with the help of this kit, religious leaders and scholars will inform the general public about the dangers of HIV/AIDS and offer them possible solutions/suggestions for protection and enlist their help in the national and international campaign against the disease.
CHAPTER 1: BASIC FACTS ABOUT AIDS

What is HIV/AIDS?

- HIV stands for *Human Immune Deficiency Virus*. This is a virus which attacks and destroys the defence system of the human body. After a period of time, HIV weakens the body to the extent that it cannot defend itself against even minor diseases. Eventually symptoms of the disease appear in the infected person. These collective symptoms are called AIDS.

- AIDS stands for *Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome*; which means symptoms of deficiency in the body’s defence system. When a person develops AIDS, any disease can easily attack and become the cause of death.

- Globally, 75\(^1\) percent of people living with HIV/AIDS have been infected through sexual intercourse.

- Globally, more than 2.2 million people have died of AIDS.

- Globally, almost 4.2 million young people and children are living with HIV/AIDS.

- Almost half of those living with HIV/AIDS are women.

- Half of all those suffering from HIV/AIDS are young people between the ages of 15-24 years, with twice as many girls as boys infected. In some countries five times as many girls as boys are infected between the ages of 15 and 19 years.

- There are 1.43 million children under the age of fifteen who have become orphans due to AIDS. These children suffer malnutrition, drop out of school and become homeless, suffer malnutrition and are forced into labour or prostitution. They often suffer drink and drug addiction. In the absence of parents and guardians, they are highly vulnerable to physical violence and abuse.

How HIV/AIDS spreads:

- Sexual intercourse with an HIV-infected person.
- Injection using an HIV-infected syringe or the use of infected sharp tools/instruments.
- Blood transfusion, where infected blood, blood products etc. and HIV-infected surgical instruments are used in the transfusion.

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\(^1\) All figures quoted here have been derived from World AIDS Report , UNAIDS released in December, 2003.
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• From mother to child, when an HIV-infected pregnant woman transfers the virus through her uterus to her child during pregnancy, birth, or breast feeding.
• The chances of HIV infection increase 5-10 times with the presence of sexually transmitted diseases. People suffering from sexually transmitted infections are at greater risk of the virus.
• The HIV virus stays in the body and can be transmitted forever even though the infected person may appear healthy.

HIV/AIDS cannot be transferred by:

• Casual contact with people living with HIV/AIDS.
• Shaking hands
• Using each other’s utensils or eating together
• Sharing a bathroom and toilet
• Spending time with an HIV infected person at home or at work
• Mosquito bites

Characteristics of HIV:

• Unless diagnostic tests are performed, the physical appearance of a person does not reveal the HIV infection.
• The HIV infected person may appear to be healthy for 5-10 years or more.
• Healthy, well cared for people can live longer by delaying AIDS.
• A healthy lifestyle includes refraining from drinking and smoking, protecting against the disease and contacting a doctor immediately in the case of everyday illness.

Characteristics of AIDS:

• As HIV destroys the defence system of the body, even a minor infection can become a cause of death. People with HIV/AIDS often die from pneumonia, cancer, diarrhoea and TB (thirty percent of deaths due to AIDS are caused by TB.)
• A high proportion of HIV infected people go on to become AIDS sufferers. Those already suffering ill health, malnutrition or lack of appropriate treatment for minor illnesses fall prey to AIDS earlier.

Diagnosis of HIV/AIDS:

• HIV/AIDS infection can only be diagnosed by a blood test. If a person has the virus and has developed antibodies he or she is called HIV Positive. Initially, HIV is transferred to a person but cannot be diagnosed by screening during the first six to twelve weeks. During this time a blood, urine or saliva test may show
HIV negative even though the person may be HIV infected and capable of transferring the virus to others.

Methods of Preventing HIV/AIDS

Prevention of transfer through the sexual act

- Completely avoiding sex outside marriage (pre-marital, extra marital).
- Having sexual relations only with the life partner.
- In case of HIV infection, correct and consistent use of condoms with sexual partner.
- Treatment and prevention of all kinds of sexually transmitted diseases.

Prevention of transfer through injections

- Using tablets and medicine instead and avoiding unnecessary injections.
- Using only new and disposable needles and syringes / Never using used syringes and needles.
- Avoiding needle wounds. Used syringe needles should be disposed off quickly and safely.
- Using new needles for ear and nose piercing, tattoos (discouraged in Islam) and acupuncture.

Prevention of transfer from mother to child

- By preventing women and girls from acquiring HIV infection.
- By using measures to prevent pregnancy in HIV-infected women.
- By offering free counselling and confidential voluntary testing of pregnant women.
- By offering anti-retroviral (ARV) medicines to HIV Positive pregnant women (anti-retroviral medicines reduce the effects of the HIV virus and help the body’s defence system)
- By providing facilities for infection-free delivery (child birth) and observing universal safety precautions.
- By arranging, where possible, for healthy women to breastfeed the children of HIV Positive mothers.
- By providing all necessary help and care to HIV Positive women and their families.

Prevention of transfer through blood transfusion

- Avoid blood transfusions until absolutely necessary.
- Blood or blood products should be used only when cleared by an HIV test. (Testing for hepatitis B and C is also necessary)
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- New and disposable needles, tubes and bags should be used for blood transfusion.
- Professional blood donors should be avoided.

*With these guidelines in mind, religious leaders can help prevent the spread of HIV/AIDS by stressing positive ways of living and propagating solutions in line with Islamic teachings.*

The present situation regarding HIV/AIDS in Pakistan

Pakistan has a population of 150 million people, of which a very small portion appears to have contracted HIV/AIDS. Currently, 2,200 patients are recorded while other estimates show 70 to 80,000 thousands infected nationwide. The relatively small numbers do not mean that there is no danger in Pakistan where AIDS could spread rapidly due to ignorance about self protection. Research shows that general people are extremely lax about protecting themselves from this devastating disease. Extramarital sex exists in Pakistan along with ignorance about safe sex and other preventive measures. Hospitals do not follow infection prevention procedures and screened blood is not always given to patients. Poverty and unemployment lead to drug addiction and prostitution, which ultimately results in an increased number of vulnerable people and the spread of HIV/AIDS.

In Pakistan, the young generation is at most risk because they have little idea how of HIV/AIDS is transmitted or how to protect themselves.

HIV/AIDS spreads with tremendous speed; and information alone does not lead to avoidance of risky behaviours. International seminars and workshops have studied the roles of many members of the community and have found that religious leaders can play a most effective role in preventing HIV/AIDS. The reasons why are discussed in the following chapter.
CHAPTER 2: WHY RELIGIOUS LEADERS?

As the number of deaths from HIV/AIDS increases worldwide, leaders of many different religions have expressed grave concerns and are busy raising public awareness to fight the disease.

HIV/AIDS is a threat to the stability and prosperity of family life claiming the lives of many young men and women and leaving children, family and friends facing countless problems and hardships.

On a larger scale HIV/AIDS can have serious economic effects when countries lose their skilled and productive individuals on a large scale. Society is deprived of farmers, teachers, doctors, managers and even religious leaders and members of religious organizations. These people are a nation’s treasure and their removal affects the entire system of government and social order.

HIV/AIDS can defy the struggle to eradicate poverty. Increasing numbers of people require hospital facilities and families have to spend extra time and money on the treatment and care of patients. In order to control the spread of the disease, religious leaders must be given basic information about preventive methods that they can relay to the general public.

They can be instrumental in mobilizing communities to care for HIV/AIDS affected people, their families and carers and prevent discriminatory behaviour.

Many religious leaders may not be aware of the large number of religious organizations and social workers required to look after the sick and orphaned in the case of widespread HIV/AIDS. In these circumstances, religious leaders must work with courage and responsibility. Wherever religious leaders have cooperated with governments and shown moral courage and active participation in combating and preventing HIV, there have been great successes in curtailing and preventing HIV. Thailand, Senegal and Uganda are obvious examples in this regard.

In Muslim countries like Uganda and Senegal, Muslim ulema have played a leading role (e.g. declaring jihad/holy war against this disease) and have succeeded in their aims. They have used Muslim men and women volunteers to create awareness, raised funds for widows and orphans and arranged for the burial of AIDS victims.

Role of Religious Leaders in Prevention of HIV/AIDS

HIV/AIDS threatens human dignity and honour. Affected people hide their Positive status and avoid contact with health care providers out of guilt and in doing so may
transfer the virus secretly. Their wives and dependent children face the stress of long ill health and the death of their loves ones. They also face stigma, discrimination, exploitation and even, in many cases, the loss of property. Religious leaders have a moral responsibility to educate people about the prevention of HIV/AIDS. Many are willing to help but are unclear about their role and have incomplete knowledge of the disease. One of the biggest challenges is removing the stigma and discrimination surrounding HIV/AIDS. There have been many examples of maltreatment and humiliation of HIV-Positive people all of which hinders prevention efforts and care.

Many religious leaders/scholars feel shy or lack the skills to talk about sensitive issues such as sexuality, exploitation, prostitution, alcoholism and intravenous drug use. They can be made much more effective advocates by being provided with the right information.

Any rise in the numbers of sick people, widows and orphans will require help from religious organizations and ulemas.

Thus help from religious organizations is required, and the ulema need to work with commitment and responsibility. Wherever religious leaders, in partnership with the national governments have shown strong moral courage, political will and a commitment to act, there have been significant success in preventing HIV and alleviating sufferings of patients of AIDS -- as demonstrated in Senegal, Thailand and Uganda.

**What can religious leaders do?**

- Influence social and moral values/ traditions of the general public.
- Increase and influence public knowledge and opinion.
- Influence and support political attitudes, opinions, policy and laws.
- Reapportion existing charitable resources for spiritual and social care and raise new financial resources for care and support.
- Pave the way for public awareness-raising and promote action from grassroots up to national level.
- Convince people to live according to the Quran and Sunnah and thus protect themselves against risky behaviours.
- Religious leaders can end the silence that exists about the disease in many areas and convince people to discuss related issues and problems. Patients should not be regarded as sinners as this leads them to hide their status, failure to seek help and further spread the disease.
- As true representatives of God’s love on earth, religious leaders can help people with HIV/AIDS to live longer, more meaningful and dignified lives as opposed to stigmatizing them as sinners or criminals. This approach may help to change people’s attitudes towards people and offer a ray of hope to sufferers that they can lead a normal life.
Responsibilities of Religious Leaders

1. To inform people that HIV/AIDS is dangerous and tell them how to protect themselves and their loved ones.
2. To tell the general public how and why HIV/AIDS spreads and about its treatment and care as compared to prevention and its cost.
3. Promote tolerance and support to eradicate fear and suspicion.
4. Support the promulgation of correct information about prevention based on religious principles and spread this information to other political and social leaders.
5. Work for the promotion of religious values and marital fidelity. Include HIV/AIDS prevention messages in religious consultations for the eradication of violence against women, child abuse, drugs and intoxication.
6. To promote voluntary and confidential HIV testing and counselling services, the control of sexually transmitted diseases and their treatment, clean and safe deliveries, blood screening and the use of new needles.
7. To promote the provision of social and spiritual facilities to HIV/AIDS affected people and to reach those most vulnerable to the disease because of their social and economic conditions. To give special attention to the needs of people living with HIV/AIDS and their carers.
8. Work to prevent deterioration of economic and social conditions due to the HIV/AIDS. Religious organizations should adopt better measures to generate resources and eradicate economic inequality with the collaboration of the government, NGOs, private institutions and social organizations.

Strengthening social and moral values and policies:

- Discuss issues like HIV/AIDS in political and social meetings, religious gatherings and religious institutions. Spread the facts and promote religious moral attitudes. Coordination forums can be established.
- Alongside Quranic teachings and other holy books, international documents on human rights, women and children’s rights should also be studied. According to Islamic preaching, the elderly, the sick, the disabled, widows and orphans should be looked after.
- A national council should be established and existing institutes encouraged discussing the issue of HIV/AIDS. Religious organizations should be represented by their high level leadership. They should join local, national and international organizations or establish new organizations which can fight against stigma and discrimination.
- Support positive government policies, national projects and budget proposals for HIV prevention and care.
- The campaign against HIV/AIDS can help in eradicating hepatitis B and C as well.
CHAPTER 3: PREVENTING AIDS — AN ISLAMIC POINT OF VIEW

Islam is a religion of peace and promises prosperity for mankind. There are more than one billion Muslims worldwide and 57 countries where the majority of the population is Muslim. Many non-Muslim countries in the world also have Muslims as important minorities. The Muslim lifestyle is based on the faith on Allah and Muhammad (Peace Be upon Him) as His messenger along with belief in all the holy prophets preceding Muhammad (PBUH), the Holy Quran, all holy books and the Day of Judgment. The last divine book, the Holy Quran, sent by Allah fifteen hundred years ago, exists without change or amendment in its original form as it was revealed to the Last prophet Hazrat Muhammad (PBUH). The Holy Quran gives a complete code of living for Muslims. It guides in all moral matters and offers the best values and methods to deal with many social and economic aspects of human life. Islamic teachings promote peace and prosperity for all humanity. With regard to social issues related to HIV, Islamic guidelines are as follows:

Respect and preservation of human life, property and prestige:

Our Prophet Mohammad (PBUH) in His last Sermon on Hajjatul-wida (the last pilgrimage of his life); explained to the 1.2 million people assembled there the reason for his prophet hood and that of the 124 million prophets before him; the principles of Tauhid (believing in only one Allah), Namaz (prayers), Roza (fasting), Hajj (pilgrimage to Mecca) and Zakat (charity). He addressed not only Muslims but all mankind when he said:

Translation:
"Listen to me all humankind! Your blood, your wealth and your dignity should be as respectable for each other as this day’s respect, this month’s respect and this city’s respect.”

Man possesses nothing except his life, wealth, prestige/dignity and Iman (faith). All over the world constitutions, law and rights are based on the preservation of these things. Hajjatul wida, the Last Sermon of the Holy Prophet, was not only a speech about rules of life and the respect of mankind but a charter of Islam’s perspectives and defining laws, penalties and basic protection offered to mankind. In an Islamic state if a person does not believe in Allah, it is not a crime; if a person does not believe in the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH), it is not a crime either; and he or she may live there paying “Jazia” (a special tax for non-Muslims in a Muslim state). But a murderer, a thief or a rapist cannot go without punishment in an Islamic state and there can be no concession made on the basis of social or economic status.

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2 Arabs generally and Muslims specifically respected the Holy day, month and place of Pilgrimage
3 In Islamic taxation system, Muslims pay zakat while non-Muslims pay jazia
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With reference to the sanctity of life the Holy Quran says:

Translation:
‘If anyone killed a person and it was not in retaliation for a murder, but to spread mischief in the land – 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. Al Maidah – 32

With reference to the sanctity of human property:

Translation:
“And (as for) the male thief and the female thief, cut off (from the wrist joint) their (right) hands.” Al Maidah 38

With reference to the sanctity of human property:

Translation:
“And those who accuse chaste women, and produce not four witnesses, flog them with eighty stripes, and reject their testimony forever. Al Nur – 4

Allah and His Prophet (PBUH) have given guidance and direction to mankind in every sphere of life. Therefore clear guidance is also given about how to protect one self from the social evils discussed in the next section.

The role of Islam in protection from social evils

HIV/AIDS is a grave threat to the life, wealth and prestige of a man. Islam does not allow anyone to attack the life, wealth and honour of another person but rather considers it a breach of faith. Muslims are bound to accept this and respect human life, property and dignity as an essential part of their faith. A Muslim is bound to refrain from things which go against these principles. As no attack on human life, property and dignity can be tolerated and thus no social evil deserves to be protected. This may be considered a hard-line approach but to truly protect people against HIV/AIDS we need to address the social problems that lead to risky behaviours.

As reasons always exist for human problems it is necessary to identify these reasons and discover a remedy or, in other words, find preventive measures and promote knowledge and social awareness. All this should be done keeping the focus on the causes; promoting healthy and positive lifestyles and care and love for those affected. Islam is a divine constitution of human well-being and following it allows the beneficiary to reap maximum benefits in this world and the next. This Divine Constitution cannot be discussed in any parliament, institution or through any contract; if it is deviated from, such institutions and departments (constructed by mankind) will cause the destruction of human society. If we understand this Divine Constitution, the world will become a place of health, peace and prosperity.
Islam does not permit any person, ruler, nor any democratic, judicial or health institution to endanger mankind. To harm human life, wealth and dignity is not only a sin but a crime and Islam has penal codes and laws preventing it. The Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) says:

“When obscenity and indecency flourish in any nation, those people become victims of diseases like plague, which were never there amongst their ancestors”. (Ibne-Maja)

(This is a general statement and does not mean that an individual gets a disease due to his/her deeds but apply to general trends in a society. Extreme care should be exercised to ensure that prevention messages should not stigmatize people affected by HIV/ AIDS).

Islamic point of view about human life and health

Life is a precious gift of Allah. According to Islamic teachings, no Muslim has a right to believe that he can do whatever he wants with his own life. Therefore we should not do anything which is harmful for our spiritual, mental and physical health. In this context, committing suicide is a sin and a crime and so is the deliberate indulgence in practices leading to ill health.

Discussion on issues related to sex -- right or wrong?

An Islamic point of view:

Whenever HIV/AIDS is discussed, sex and sex related subjects will also be discussed as the topics are related to each other. Islam declares human life as a gift of Allah. Islam encourages us to study ways to preserve our own and other’s lives. A balanced Islamic approach does not stop us from discussing sex and sex related subjects. From an educational point of view, it is necessary for us to realise that promoting awareness among the public can be done without showing pornographic/obscene materials. Sex education activities should be conducted in a decent manner. When the Prophet (PBUH) was alive, Muslims did not hesitate or feel embarrassed to seek guidance from him (PBUH), regarding matters related to marital life and the mutual rights of husband and wife.

Prophet Mohammad (PBUH) said: -

“Ansar4 women are lucky, who never hesitate to learn about their religions” (Bukhari& Muslim)

The Holy Quran teaches us clearly about the upbringing of children, family and married life and deals with private issues like women’s periods and male ejaculation. Islam is a complete code which throws light on every aspect of life and encourages education and

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4 The local Muslim population of Madina
study about it. HIV/AIDS is a threat to human life and, therefore, to save ourselves from it, it is not un-Islamic to acquire knowledge about it. But in doing so the use of obscene and indecent material should be avoided.

Some facts about sexual perversion and the presence of HIV/AIDS among the Muslim Ummah

Islam only allows sexual relations between husband and wife. But we must accept the reality that people who do not believe in the teaching of Allah and His Prophet, (PBUH), do not restrain themselves in this respect. In many non-Muslim countries extramarital relations and homosexuality are socially and legally accepted. In Muslim countries foreign imported culture and obscene literature is affecting our present generation with the process of modernization, taking us far beyond our moral and spiritual norms with obvious results. Through pornographic literature such as Playboy magazine, blue films and internet love affairs, obscenity has entered our homes and is seriously damaging our values and the character of our youth. Advertisements for ‘cures’ to improve sexual performance in the newspapers and graffiti also have a serious negative effect on our youths. Sexual and cyber addiction are other problems fast becoming the norm.

Immediate measures need to be taken by Muslims to inform and educate people on preventive measure and awareness of the dangerous consequences of high risk behaviour. It is time to admit the reality that people infected with HIV/AIDS are to be found in every Muslim country. We should focus our attention on developing understanding about the disease and strengthening prevention efforts.

Islamic teachings and the use of drugs and intoxicants:

Allah Says:

Translation:

“O you who believe! Intoxicants (all kinds of alcoholic drinks), and gambling, and Al- Ansab, and Al Azlam (fortune-telling and gambling, respectively) are an abomination of Shaitan’s (Satan) handiwork. So avoid (strictly all) that (abomination) in order that you may be successful.” Al Maidah – 90

The Quran and Sunnah have restricted every Muslim from using drugs, alcohol or any intoxication which renders someone senseless. These things are declared Haram (prohibited). The Prophet (PBUH) says:

Translation:

“Every intoxicant is forbidden.” ( Muslim)

Drugs are a serious social curse in Pakistan with many members particularly of the younger generation addicted to heroin.

In our country, there is a tendency to take medicines by injection and this practice must be put a stop to. Moreover, the same syringes are used repeatedly ( also syringe sharing
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among IVDUs\(^5\), which is highly dangerous and one of the main reasons for the spread of Hepatitis B and C along with HIV/AIDS.

It is common for IVDUs to sit together and inject drugs using the same needle. This unhealthy practice is a major mode of transmission of HIV virus from one drug user to the other through blood.

According to a report\(^6\), there are many intravenous drug users affected by HIV/AIDS in Asia, and specifically in our country. Pakistan has more than five million drug addicts with around 75,000 injecting drug users, a number which is increasing every day.

**Protection from humiliation and accusations**

HIV/AIDS-affected families often have to face humiliation. In this connection we should keep in view the sayings of Islam. Islam gives great importance to human life and dignity thus Muslims and their religious leaders can play their role in global efforts for HIV/AIDS prevention and care.

Our prophet Muhammad (PBUH) insists upon the sanctity of human life and honour.

**Translation:**

“No doubt your blood, your character and your dignity is honourable for each other, like today (9 Zil Hajj) and this city, (Makkah and Kaaba) and month of Zil-Hajj.” (Tirmazi)

Allah says in the Quran:

**Translation:**

‘If anyone killed a person not in retaliation of murder, but to spread mischief in the land – 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. (Al Maidah – 32)

Honour, like life, is also an important issue. When people abused Maeza Salma (RA) who was punished for adultery, our Prophet (P.B.U.H) accused them of backbiting (as the person had already received his punishment). Indicating a donkey lying dead in a field, the Prophet PBUH said: “Talking about your brother with hatred (in his absence) is worse than eating the flesh of this dead donkey”.

That is why it is clearly instructed in Surah Al-Hijrat, not to find fault, criticise(in person’s absence), find out secrets or invade people’s privacy. Do not look out for people’s defects and do not interfere in their affairs. Referring to personal letters, the Holy Prophet (PBUH) said: “He who peeps into others’ matters, has peeped into hell.” To listen to private conversations, spy on your neighbour’s home and interfere in others’ lives is prohibited.

Allah says in this regard:

**Translation:**

“O you who believe! Avoid much suspicion; indeed some suspicions are sins. And spy not, neither backbite one another. Would one of you like to eat the flesh of his dead

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\(^5\) IVDU: Intra Venous Drug Users
\(^6\) UNODC; Report on Drug Abuse in Pakistan
brother? You would hate it (so hate backbiting). And fear Allah. Verily, Allah is the One who forgives and accepts repentance, Most Merciful. (Al-Hujurat 12)

Translation:
Hazarat Abu-Hurera says that the Prophet PBUH said: “Do not be suspicious of others because being suspicious is the worst character trait and don’t spy on each other and don’t highlight others’ flaws and don’t have malice and live as brothers”. (Bukhari).

The Islamic point of view can show us how to approach prevention and care with regard to HIV/AIDS. Youth can act as the driving force to promote these Islamic values with the active cooperation of the religious leadership. The next chapter discusses in detail how youth can play a more effective role.
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CHAPTER 4: YOUNG PEOPLE AND HIV/AIDS

The Prophet PBUH says:

Translation: Value five things in life before you lose them: youth before old age, health before illness, prosperity before adversity, spare time before occupied time and life before death. (Tirmizi)

The importance of youth, health and life can be judged by this hadith. Youngsters are neither good nor bad as people tend to label them but it is rather the environment which determines their behaviour. Young people have always had an important role in reformist movements and revolutions. Our Prophet (PBUH) himself brought a peaceful Islamic revolution, some 1500 years ago and its entire vanguard consisted primarily of youth. This indicates the significance of their role and their potential.

The majority of people with HIV/AIDS are young people. If they are prepared for Jihad (holy war) against HIV/AIDS their energy and enthusiasm can bring about positive results protecting themselves, their peers and society at large.

Our Prophet Muhammad PBUH says:

Translation: “Youth of Quraish! Do not be immoral (illicit sex) because if Allah the Great (helps) preserves the youth of someone he will enter Heaven”

More than half the AIDS sufferers in the world are between 15 and 24 years of age. This is increasing at the rate of 6000 newly diagnosed HIV Positive people daily. In this respect, Pakistan is especially vulnerable with 63 percent of its population aged 25 and under.

Young people and the situation of AIDS in Pakistan

The first case of HIV/AIDS in Pakistan was diagnosed in 1986. Until the 1990s HIV/AIDS was not considered a threat, because it was considered to be the ‘disease of foreigners’ with a belief that ‘our religious, social and cultural values protect us from such diseases.’ But this did not happen and the virus of HIV/AIDS continued to spread. Whatever the cause, it is an accepted fact that the threat of AIDS is now being realized in Pakistan. As of today, less than 1 percent of the population is affected with 2224 registered cases of HIV up to July 2004. Out of these, as many as 42 percent were caused by heterosexual transmission. According to an estimate, 80,000 individuals are infected with HIV in Pakistan. Adding to these alarming figures is the fact that very little is known about the attitudes and risky behaviours of young people.

7 The tribe in Mecca
8 Numbers are deceptive as very few people get tested for HIV.
The Role of Religious Leaders in the Prevention of HIV/AIDS

It should also be kept in mind that the rapid increase in hepatitis in Pakistan also sounds the alarm about the potential spread of HIV/AIDS. Analyzing the situation in Pakistan, we should consider the following issues:

**Unnecessary delay in marriage:**
According to Islam, delay in marriage increases the trend of illegitimate relationships and homosexuality. The Holy Prophet PBUH says:

*Translation:*
“When a child is born to a person, he should give him/her a good name, education and when he/she grows up, he/she should be married. If his father does not get him/her married after his/her maturity, the burden will be on his/her father.” (Baihqi- Shub-ul-Iman)*

Unnecessary expenditure on dowries, weddings and valimas⁹ are economic hurdles to timely marriage and creates many social problems.

**Social and economic deprivation**

The youth suffers frustration caused by poverty, unemployment, social and economic deprivation in Pakistan.

**Disparities on the basis of religion, culture and gender**

Pakistan is especially vulnerable to HIV/AIDS because of specific conditions including inaccurate religious interpretations (unnecessary restrictions on information), cultural traditions, local practices, taboos (not related to religion) and wide gender disparities with regard to health, education and economic opportunities. The social and cultural environment in Pakistan is not conducive to young people seeking information about religiously approved sexual practices.

**Issues of children and young people**

Children and youth because of their tender age, lack of knowledge and experience are always at risk. Cultural taboos deprive them of access to information about their health (especially sexual) either from their parents and society. Fuelling this silence are illiteracy, poverty and disruption of the family unit.

**Alarming changes in behaviour patterns**

Like other countries in the world, Pakistan is also confronted with issues such as the use of drugs and the visible and invisible sex trades. People involved in dangerous behaviour

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⁹ Wedding Feast from the bridegroom

* Please note that medically girls under 18 face severe health problems and complications during pregnancy and delivery and age of marriage for girls should be considered in light of this fact.
risk their own life and health as well as contributing to the wider spread of HIV/AIDS. As well as an increase in drug abuse and intravenous drug users, homosexuality between men which is totally un-Islamic, is also increasing. There is also an increase in homosexual relationships between men and boys, which is a worrying trend as more men than women\textsuperscript{10} are carriers of the virus. To keep away from these dangerous trends we should refer to clearly stated Islamic teachings in this regard. Allah says:

\textbf{Translation:}

“Verily, you practice lusts on men instead of women. Nay, but you are a people transgressing beyond bounds. (By committing great sins).” (Al-A’raf 81)

Prophet Muhammad PBUH says:

\textbf{Translation:}

“I am warned by the act of Quam-e-Loot (sodomy) in my Ummah, for this sinful act Allah punished Quam-e-Loot which is an example for the world forever.”

\section*{Protecting young people from AIDS - a challenge}

- In small cities, towns and villages there is inadequate awareness about the methods of protection. Although the situation is slightly better in larger cities, there remains much to be done and it essential to use the mass media in a positive way to create awareness.
- Open discussions on sexually transmitted diseases are considered taboo in our country and illegitimate sexual relationships and sexual relations between men occur.
- National and international organizations have not been able to control HIV/AIDS in Pakistan despite the provision of the best resources because of lack of awareness among the general public.
- We need to inform the public and especially young people about this disease. The attitude of “No information-No problem” is self-deception.
- People in Pakistan have little opportunity to play an active role in their social and economic betterment mostly due to illiteracy and lack of access to correct information.
- Broader social and economic exploitation amongst social classes is also manifested as discrimination on the basis of gender and age.
- There is a dire need for an effective political, social and religious leadership in the country to confront and tackle the situation as regards HIV/AIDS on a priority basis.

\textsuperscript{10} Current ratio of male versus female Positive people in Pakistan is 7:1
The Role of Religious Leaders in the Prevention of HIV/AIDS

Measures for protection from HIV/AIDS:

Several measures should be taken in view of the situation in Pakistan especially to protect the youth. The situation can not be resolved by paying it lip service only. Any practical measure can only be beneficial when young people are included and made aware of the danger. Unemployment has to be decreased to give our youth a chance to channel their energies in to healthy and productive activities. Providing employment to a large number of young people needs strategic planning. The economic development of the nation should involve the public and private sectors as well as self-employment. According to a recent research, the majority of the country’s working youth is engaged in agriculture. Young boys are also employed in factories, while girls carry out stitching and embroidery work mostly at home. Most of the vocational teaching centres in cities consist of computer centres and auto workshops, to which only 5 percent of young boys have access. To improve the creative capabilities of young people, they should given the opportunity to learn skills so that they can earn a living. In addition to socio-political leaders, religious leaders can play a key role in this regard.

Every country of the world has hopes and expectations of its youth. The religious leadership may use the services of the younger generation to strengthen HIV/AIDS prevention activities in the country. They can be saved from the pandemic by preaching good morals and preservation of sexual dignity (Iffat and Hiya). Information can be provided by discussion around these issues and creating awareness amongst them that they can share with friends.

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11 Pakistan Youth Survey, Population Council, 2001
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CHAPTER 5: MOTHER, CHILD AND HIV/AIDS

Islam considers the husband/wife relationship as sacred for the security of humanity. Allah has given wisdom and intelligence to all human beings to protect him from internal and external dangers. But flawed human intelligence means man may act from his own selfish motives and as a result he suffers loss. Some individuals prize the fulfilment of their momentary desires over the preservation of religious and moral values and in doing so create problems for all.

A large number of innocent people, most of them housewives, are also infected with HIV by their husbands. These HIV/AIDS infected women can then transmit the infection to their children (born after the time mother became HIV Positive).

Mother to child transmission of HIV/AIDS

According to an estimate, 90% of HIV-Positive children under 15 years of age were infected through their mothers mainly due to lack of knowledge about care and prevention. As a result HIV/AIDS is transferred to one in three babies born to AIDS-infected mothers.

- Five percent of infants are infected in their mother’s wombs.
- Fifteen percent contract the virus during the process of birth. There are certain precautions during delivery and the baby should be protected from unnecessary operation and wounds.
- If the mother or father is infected the possibility of transfer of HIV can be reduced by half if the mother uses anti-retroviral medicines.
- The provision of better food and environment and immunization can protect HIV Positive infants and children from developing AIDS.
- Healthy food, a loving environment, care and better treatment can be a basic factor for longer life for HIV/AIDS infected persons. An HIV Positive woman also has a right to live in a better environment. A pregnant mother’s health is crucial for the health of the baby.

Precautions

HIV/AIDS is a disease which can be controlled by following the teachings of Islam. Religious leaders, preachers and young organizations can play a vital role for spreading the message of marital fidelity. Remaining faithful to one’s spouse is the best protection against HIV/AIDS. This is true for men and women both. The Prophet (PBUH) says:

Translation:
If a woman prays five times a day, keeps fast in Ramadan, takes care of her dignity and chastity and is faithful to her husband, she can enter paradise from any door she likes.
Unfortunately, many women despite being faithful become HIV positive due to transmission from their infected husbands. HIV infected women should avoid pregnancy, if possible (due to chances of spread to baby). However, if they chose to become pregnant they should consult their doctor for advice. They should also avoid intoxicants and smoking, eat better food and continue offering prayers and fasting and participating in religious programs. They should keep in touch with their doctor.

**Determination of mutual rights:**

The provision of human and religious rights to all members of society is basic to its correct functioning. Girls and expectant mothers should be provided with a peaceful and loving atmosphere in homes, social programs and worship/religious activities. It is a proven fact that the mother’s condition directly affects the child and it is our duty to promote a better and loving atmosphere for the next generation of boys and girls. It is also necessary for their proper upbringing as good Muslims.

The latest medical practice advises that not only pregnant mothers but others in the house like husbands, and mothers-in-law should all try to make a pleasant atmosphere at home. Muslim women should be instructed by their elders in religious aspects with the emphasis on guiding them to rely on Almighty Allah’s benevolence and mercy. Prayer and reading of Quran should be given importance to establish strong relations with Allah and gain spiritual strength and positive ways of living. A mother is the first teacher of her child and this investment leads to the better upbringing of children who can become useful citizens.

**The importance of women’s education**

Islam gives great importance to education. To control social problems and increase awareness about basic human rights and especially women’s rights, literacy and education should be for all. It should be included in our basic duties to provide basic facilities at every level. Education for all is the first step to creating awareness about the rights of men and women.

There are frequent and repeated messages in the Holy Quran and Hadith stressing the importance of education. The Holy Quran’s first divine revelation was the word *Iqra*, which means “to read”. Our Prophet PBUH says that “it is the duty of every man and woman to get an education” (Ibne-Maja)

Therefore it is necessary to educate girls and women as well to make them responsible members of society and able to differentiate between good and bad. As a result they can protect themselves from the social evils and HIV/AIDS. Special attention should be given to girls’ education. Educated and pious mothers are the key to a pious society.
Islam is concerned with the welfare of human beings. Islam means security, respect and dignity of all human beings including non-Muslims. An individual’s weakness should be kept private and all appropriate measures taken to help people in distress according to Islamic teachings. That is why Muslims in general and religious leaders in particular are prepared to play their role in the prevention of HIV/AIDS and providing care to the needy. It is our religious, moral and human duty to help those who are infected or affected by HIV/AIDS. Families, orphans and their children especially need our care and attention.

Specific issues related to orphans and other vulnerable children:

Those orphaned or made homeless by HIV/AIDS pose an enormous problem for society. The security of orphans, their health, education, participation in society and rights are very important.

1) Globally, there are 143 million children under 15 years of age who have lost one or both parents to AIDS. And the numbers are increasing. Most of these orphan children live in Asia and Africa and everything must be done to prevent Pakistani children becoming victims too.

2) Presently half of all children orphaned due to HIV/AIDS are less than 12 years of age while twelve percent are less than five years old. These young children need our special attention.

3) A large number of orphans spend their lives in traditional family care systems. Relatives take care of orphan children in many parts of the world.

4) Orphan houses are not the ideal option and should be used as a last resort. Children need contact with close relatives, care and cultural links; this provision is only possible in the family or society. Therefore it is necessary that religious leaders persuade society to keep orphans in the care of their relatives.

5) HIV orphans are threatened by stress, poverty, dismissal from school, malnutrition and illness, fear of losing property, fear and loneliness, sexual and mental ill-treatment and of becoming HIV Positive themselves.

6) Orphans become victims of poverty, homelessness and forced migration. The worst affected children are often subject to violence and sexual abuse. In addition, they have to take care of their sick surviving parent and sometimes engage in hazardous labour. They are subject to disease, illiteracy, mental stress and inadequate physical and mental growth.

7) The cost of providing for orphans in orphanages is greater than caring for them in a family.
Islamic teachings and the rights of orphans

Care of orphans is of extreme importance in Islam being mentioned 23 times in the Holy Quran. Allah says:

1. Translation:
“Therefore, treat not the orphans with oppression.” (Ad Duha-9)

2. Translation
(And kind people) feed the poor, orphans and prisoners in the love of Allah (Al Dahar-8)

3. Translation:
Take care of an orphan who is near of kin. (Al Balad-15)

4. Translation:
And come no near to the orphan’s property, except to improve it, until he (or she) attains the age of full strength. And give full measure and full weight with justice. We burden not any person, but with that which he can bear. And whenever you give your word (i.e. judge between men or give evidence), say the truth even if a near relative is concerned and fulfil the Covenant of Allah. This He commands you that you may remember and follow. (Al-In’am-152)

5. Translation:
They ask you (O Muhammad PBUH) what they should spend. Say: Whatever you spend of good must be for parents and kindred and orphans and Al Masakin (the poor) and the wayfarers, and whatever you do of good deeds, truly, Allah knows it well. (Al-Baqarah 215)

6. Translation
And they ask you concerning orphans. Say: “The best thing is to work at what is best for them. If you mix your living and expenses with theirs, there’s no harm as then they are your brothers. And Allah knows him who means mischief (e.g. to swallow their property) and him who means good (e.g. to save their property). And if Allah had wished, He could have put you into strict codes. Truly, Allah is All Mighty, All Wise.” (Al- Baqarah 220)

7. Translation:
And give unto orphans their property and do not exchange (your) bad things for (their) good ones; and devour not their substance (by adding it) to your substance. Surely, this is a great sin. (An- Nisa-2)

In the interpretation of this verse Urva bin Zuhair asked Ummul Mo’mineen Hazrat Aisha Siddiqua: (RA) Mother what is meaning of this verse? She replied:
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Translation:
My nephew, this verse is about an orphan girl who is being brought up by a guardian/caretaker (Wali). Fascinated by her beauty and wealth, he wants to marry her, but fixes a very small amount in mehr (bride money to be paid to the bride herself). This kind of marriage is prohibited. However, marriage is permitted where the full mehr is fixed/ paid. (Note: agreement of both partners is a must for any marriage)

8. Translation
Verily, those who unjustly eat up the property of orphans, they eat up only fire into their bellies, and they will be burnt in the blazing fire. (An-Nisa-10)

Prophet PBUH sayings about orphan children:
“Beware of seven sins, which destroy people. O Prophet which are these sins? He (PBUH) replied: (believing in Gods other than Allah) with Allah; magic; to kill someone; to take interest/mark-up; to take orphan’s money; to withdraw against the enemy; to blame/accuse innocent chaste Muslim women.” Quotes Hazrat Abu Huraira

Translation
“A person who provides financial support to an orphan will be beside me in heaven.” He indicated towards his first and middle finger with some space in between them. Quotes Hazrat Sahal Bin Sa’ad

Translation:
“A person who accepts the responsibility of an orphan and shares his meal with him/her will surely enter into Heaven; except that he did not commit an unpardonable crime.” Quotes Hazrat Abdullah bin Abbas (reference Rawa Al Tirmizi)

According to Hazrat Abu Huraira, “a person requested a cure for highhandedness and harshness in his attitude. The Prophet (PBUH) advised him to pat an orphan affectionately and provide food to the needy.” (Reference Masnad Ahmed)

Another quotation of Abu Huraira that the Prophet PBUH said, “The best Muslim family of all is the one where members are kind hearted/affectionate towards orphans. And the worst Muslim family is that where an orphan is maltreated.”(Reference Ibne-Majah)

Let us review some questions which emerge mind in the light of the Quran and Sunnah:

1. Why it is necessary to protect orphans and homeless children from fear, humiliation, violence, poverty, insult, exploitation including mental torture and unhealthy environment in view of our religious teachings?
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2. Why it is essential to find out the root causes for AIDS and other reasons of risky sexual practices?
3. What behaviour should the Muslim community adopt towards infants who lose their parents at the time of birth?
4. Should bad actions be rejected? How fair is it to hate a human being? What is the Islamic point of view about hatred and discriminatory attitudes, back biting etc?
5. What does Islam say about future strategies for saving the next generation from disastrous consequences?

There is only one reply to all the above questions - these are all our religious duties. The whole universe has been created to obey Allah and earn His goodwill. In Pakistani society, people living with HIV/AIDS are looked down upon and avoided. This is all forbidden in Islam and Allah disapproves of these discriminatory actions. AIDS-affected orphans need our special attention and sympathy. In our country religious institutions are already supporting orphans. With the coming of HIV/AIDS and its related issues we should strengthen the tradition practiced by them.

The role of religious leaders in the care of orphans

1. Try to find out the present situation of poor and orphan children in our society and how can they be helped effectively.
2. AIDS orphans are ill-treated, mentally, spiritually, economically, socially and physically when their parents fall ill or die. A strategy should be found with philanthropist organizations to change this.
3. Address and make speeches to the organizations and committees looking after orphans and marginalized children. Make efforts to resolve issues concerning various family problems and orphans through NGOs.
4. Find out how AIDS has increased the number of orphans and vulnerable children both at the national level and in some segments of society? This issue must be discussed at different forums so that support can be provided to these orphans.
5. Modern life is selfish and individualistic with the good values of support in an extended family system on the decline. We should examine how orphans can be looked after following good religious traditions and how families can be motivated to care for them.
6. Children of HIV infected parents are generally ill-treated in society. To protect children from this discriminatory attitude, strong religious leadership is imperative. Make sure that all orphan children are welcomed and can equally participate in religious congregations and other social welfare programs so that they can enjoy the company of other children without any inferiority complex.
7. Generally orphanages and social welfare institutions do not care for AIDS orphans. Therefore, these organizations should be motivated to take the responsibility which has the approval and promise of reward from Allah Almighty.
8. Educate families, communities and likeminded religious people about the sufferings of AIDS orphans who have lost one or both parents.
9. It is important to sensitize people to their particular set of problems and special care.

10. To fulfil their social responsibilities; orphans and their guardians require spiritual advise, special education, service and cooperation. Only well wishers and social workers like religious leaders can provide this.

11. Quranic verses and sayings of the Prophet PBUH) relating to avoiding risky behaviours in the light of Islam should be discussed in every meeting so that the general public improves health seeking and sexual practices in line with the Quran and Sunnah.

12. Religious leaders should raise awareness among government organizations and charity institutions that orphans should not be sent to orphanages. Efforts should be made to resolve their problems on a family level because environment most orphan houses do not help children to become responsible citizens.

13. Those orphans who do not belong to the same tribe, racial group and are not blood relations should be adopted without reservation according to Islamic teachings. Islam has stressed that all needy children be treated equally. Religious leaders can themselves become role models in promoting care of orphans through their religious institutions.

There are some factors which act as bottlenecks preventing adequate orphan care in a society/community. These are incomplete information about the rights of orphan, weakness of faith, greed for wealth or selfishness and poverty. We should talk more about the rights of orphan, spread Islamic teachings and help orphans morally and financially. In addition, participation in activities related to poverty alleviation and income generation would reduce the core problems. We can encourage support for orphans so that more and more individuals and families can take part in this good work.
CHAPTER 7: HELPING WIDOWS - WHY AND HOW?

Rights of widows:

If man represents one half of humanity woman represents the other. Any plan for the development of mankind which alienates woman is incomplete. No society can be conceived of without women.

A woman plays multiple roles in our social system as mother, daughter, sister, wife and also widow. All of these roles are equally respectable and considered reflections of love, dignity and honour.

According to our Prophet (PBUH) “paradise is under a mother’s feet.”\(^{12}\) In addition a mother’s rights are three times that of a father. This shows the position which a woman holds according to Islam. Besides, our Prophet (PBUH) says: ‘the one who educates his daughters in the light of Islamic teachings, will accompany me in heaven like two fingers of a hand.’

Islam is the only religion of the world, which grants complete respect and honour to women (our traditions and customs which go against this teaching are our fault and not a deficiency of the religion). Muslims and Hindus have been living together for more than one thousand years in the subcontinent. Some prevalent Hindu traditions and customs at that time also crept into Muslim society.

In the past the custom of \(\text{“Satti”}\) was very common amongst Hindus, when a wife would burn herself with her dead husband, because there was no place left for a widow in society. She was considered a burden. This attitude towards widows need to be changed as Islam provides respect and security to widows. Allah says:

Translation:
O you who believe! You are forbidden to inherit widow women (Al-Nisa-19)
It means that the widow should not be considered the property left behind from the husband when he dies. A widow is free after \(Iddat\)\(^{*}\) (the 4-month 10-day period after a husband’s death) to marry anyone she likes according to her own free will. Allah says:

Translation:
Those who die, their widows should wait at least for four months and ten days. After the specific time (\(Iddat\)) they have the right to get married again as they deem best for themselves. You have no responsibility in this regard. (Al- \text{Baqr} – 234)

\(^{12}\) Salvation lies in being submissive and caring for one’s mother.
\(^{*}\) Logic of this period is to establish paternity if women is pregnant.
**Translation:**
And marry those among you who are single i.e. a man who has no wife and a woman who has no husband. (An-Nur: 32)

The best favour with a widow is to find a good partner for her. A husband as a partner can be the best guardian, protector and helper.

In the above Quranic verses, the rights given to a widow are incomparable to any other religion/theology of the world.

The Prophet (PBUH) says of the prestige and respect of widows:

**Translation:**
“A beautiful woman with a noble family background; whose husband died but she did not marry for the sake of bringing up her children will be closer to me on the Day of Judgment. (in Heaven)” (Abu Dawood)

Among the wives (RA) of our Holy Prophet (PBUH) only Hazrat Ayesha (RA) was unmarried, while the remaining were all widows.13

Following the way of the Holy Prophet (PBUH), *Sahaba’e-Karam* (Contemporaries of Holy Prophet and successors) also facilitated the marriage of widows or married them and gave them respect and honour instead of leaving them at the mercy of circumstance.

In the Hindu society of the subcontinent Muslim religious scholars came forward for the security of widows and to revive the sunnah (practice of Holy Prophet PBUH) and practices of their forefathers. In this regard, Shah Ismail Shaheed started a movement in India when he motivated his widow sister to remarry. He is also quoted as going to a prostitute and convincing her to take another means of livelihood.

The current tragedy is that widows are deprived of their legal rights by one excuse or the other. Islam has given the rights of inheritance of her husband’s property to a widow. Along with men, women are also eligible to share property and other inheritance from their parents.

Allah says: -

**Translation:**
In that which you leave, their (your wives) share is a fourth if you leave no child; but if you leave a child, they get an eighth of that which you leave. (An-Nisa–12)

According to the Islamic law of inheritance both men and women have the right to own property, whether moveable or immoveable. We should eliminate the menace of dowry

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13 Some consider Prophet’s (PBUH) having more than one wife after prophet hood was the best way to propagate Islamic teachings amongst women in other wise gender segregated Islamic society.
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and instead give due shares of inheritance to children (especially girls) according to the Islamic laws.

It is imperative to give legal rights to widows in Pakistani society so they can live with dignity and respect. Though our family system has been adversely affected by the breakdown of the family unit and other cultural influences from abroad, there exists an opportunity to strengthen the family system and provide security to the widows.

Inadequate medical facilities often leave people to suffer in government hospitals even for the treatment of common ailments. They cannot afford costly treatment for complicated diseases. The HIV/AIDS epidemic has now turned towards the developing countries of the third world after causing havoc in Africa. The flood of HIV/AIDS is heading towards Pakistan and other countries where there is a lack of adequate medical facilities and awareness. If a person dies because of HIV/AIDS, nobody has sympathy with his widow. Even blood relations are seen to withdraw and avoid the family of the victim. After the death of the HIV/AIDS-affected husband, it can be difficult for his widow to afford food and education for her children.

Different ways should be found to engage AIDS widows in productive work. AIDS widows can prove to be a very useful human resource by carrying out HIV/AIDS-related social work provided religious leaders motivate them and guide them. This would not only resolve the economic problem of widows but help in the eradication of the disease.

Religious leaders and their organizations can build on their existing roles in the care of orphans and widows. They can also play a pivotal role to reduce discrimination.

Helping and taking care of widows

Islam strongly emphasizes the care and support of all orphans and widows and these teachings are equally applicable to AIDS orphans and widows. According to Hazrat Abu Huraira the Prophet (PBUH) says:

Translation:
“For any person who supports a widow or any poor, needy person it is like doing Jehad. But I believe that he is equivalent to a person who worships at night and fasts during the day.”

AIDS and issues related to widows

Every widow has problems but widow of an HIV/AIDS infected person suffers more because people suspect her of also having the disease and shun her as a result. We should acknowledge this reality and teach our communities that these widows demand special care rather than discrimination.
CHAPTER 8: CARING FOR PEOPLE LIVING WITH HIV/AIDS: AN ISLAMIC PERSPECTIVE

All Muslims are brothers. They should help each other and share each other’s grievances and sorrow in difficult times.

Translation:
“All Muslims are like a human body. When one individual feels pain in any part of the body it affects the whole body.” Therefore, the suffering of one Muslim is the suffering of all.

The Holy Prophet (PBUH) says:
Translation:
Allah will say on the Day of Judgment: “O son of Adam I got sick, and you did not come to see me’. Man will say, ‘My Lord, you own the whole Universe, how should have I come to see you?’ Allah will say: ‘A certain human being was sick and you did not go to see him/her. If you would have gone there, you would have found me there and all my benevolence would have been for you.”

Translation:
Abu Huraira quotes the Prophet (PBUH) as saying: ‘One Muslim has five rights/entitlements to be fulfilled by other Muslims. And one of these rights is that if he is sick the other should go to see him and take care.” (Mushkat)

Scientific and technological developments have enabled human beings to do things never imagined before. But at the same time many diseases have been discovered for which there is no cure and HIV/AIDS is one of them. We must put an end to discrimination against people living with HIV/AIDS who are also our brothers, sisters, daughters, sons, mothers, fathers, friends, relatives and children.

People are apprehensive about getting themselves tested for HIV, although it is imperative to find out if someone has the disease (especially where there is a history of risky behaviours or exposure to unsafe injections/blood). When someone knows they have the virus they can adapt their behaviour patterns to protect others from HIV/AIDS. If they test negative they should continue with safe behaviours and protection.

Religious leaders need to know that it can take 5 to 10 years or more for HIV to develop the symptoms of AIDS, if the infected person decides to adopt a healthy lifestyle. Those who have a healthy diet and take care of themselves (i.e. refrain from smoking, drinking alcohol and seek timely treatment for other diseases) can delay the onset of AIDS.
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It is perfectly safe to live and work, go to the mosque or to school with people with HIV/AIDS. Eating, sharing utensils, towels, books, benches, chairs, telephone, office goods or washrooms with a HIV Positive person does not spread the disease. HIV is not spread by shaking hands, hugging, touching, talking or sitting together. Coughing and sneezing do not transmit the infection either.

HIV/AIDS affected people can be looked after at home provided suitable health and hygiene measures are adopted. A clean and healthy home environment coupled with good safety precautions can protect HIV/ AIDS affected people and families (e.g. toothbrushes and shaving razors should not be shared with the Positive person)

People living with HIV/ AIDS can be treated at local clinics and health centres equipped with proper facilities. A person with the virus who has a cough, rashes, diarrhoea, mouth swelling or wound infection, should be treated immediately. Patients need correct information, proper consultation on antibiotics, anti-retroviral and pain relief tablets as well as post delivery care for mothers and babies available at the nearest health centre.

With proper advice and cooperation HIV/AIDS patient can better prepare their families for the future. Parents can make a will and the necessary arrangements for someone to take care of their children. They can prepare themselves for death in a better way and protect their loved ones. Children need to be told about the disease and, after the death of their parents, need guidance to adjust to the new reality. Elders and religious leaders can help in this area.

There is no treatment for HIV/AIDS but anti-retroviral drugs can delay onset of AIDS and prevent mother to child transfer. Anti-retroviral drugs and a positive lifestyle can delay the onset of AIDS.

What religious leaders can do for AIDS patients

- Talk to HIV/AIDS patients, their families, guardians and listen to them sympathetically.
- Religious scholars should address students, people coming to offer prayers, AIDS affected persons and their family members, welfare organizations, nazimeen (local representatives), councillors, health workers and nurses.
- Pray for the health of people living with HIV/AIDS and seek forgiveness from Allah for those who have died of it.
- Talk to HIV/AIDS-affected people individually and in groups to understand their needs and problem.
- Gather information and necessary data as to how many people are living with HIV/AIDS and find out the number of guardians and families responsible for their care.
- Discuss in the Friday khutbas (sermons) how other societies of the world, people living with HIV/AIDS are leading a normal life. They can work, feed their families and are part of the social development process.
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- Explain how a person living with HIV/AIDS can be supported at the domestic and social level.
- Tell the public that HIV does not spread with normal interaction with each other.
- Discuss what kind of facilities and information are required by HIV/AIDS patients, their families for their spiritual, mental, and physical help.

To provide services and cooperation, religious leaders can do the following:

- Deliver lectures in the mosques and the madrassas, care for and nurse people living with HIV/AIDS at home; help establish clinics for them and facilities in hospitals and setup welfare organizations.
- Support the provision of facilities and basic medical aid to HIV/AIDS patients.
- Visit and show sympathy to the patient which is like following the Sunnah (practice) of Prophet (PBUH). You can revive this Sunnah and ask others to follow.
- Sympathize with the patient because the Holy Prophet (PBUH) used to boost the morale of patients and pray for their welfare.

**Translation:**

According to Hazrat Ali, the Prophet (PBUH) says that if a Muslim goes to see his ailing Muslim brother in the morning, 70,000 angels pray for him until the evening, and if he goes to see the patient in the evening, 70,000 angels will pray for him until the next morning. (Al Tirmizi- Abu Dawood)

**Translation:**

On every Muslim who advocates patience to his Muslim brother in agony and distress, Allah will bestow great respect on the Day of Judgment”. (Reference: Mazahir Haq).

As per Sahee Bokhari, “Hazrat Abu Musa Al Ashan quotes the Prophet (PBUH) who once said: ‘feed the hungry, look after the sick and try to set free the prisoners (especially of war when money is to be paid for their freedom)”

**Role of religious leaders in strengthening social/ moral values and policies:**

- Involve people living with HIV/AIDS in planning, execution of facilities and related programs/activities.
- Remove discrimination against HIV/AIDS patients in the religious congregation, access to advice and treatment to them, their families and guardians.
- Provide protection to the property, land, rights of people living with HIV/AIDS.
- Give moral support to HIV/AIDS patients, their families and improve their social image to enable them to visit special clinics for guidance and support of NGOs.
Following are some prayers for the sick, related to the Holy Prophet (PBUH) which can help in spiritual well being and speedy recovery and which can be used by HIV/AIDS patients as well.

**Dua:** “I pray to Allah Almighty to cure and recover from all those things which hurt you and also from any person who is jealous of you. In the name of Allah, I pray for your complete health.”

**Dua:** In the name of Allah who is Greatest amongst the great, I seek protection and solace of Allah from every evil and damage from the fire and its heat.”

**Dua:** O Lord, the feeder, give strength and relieve this patient from pain and agony, it is only you who can bestow health upon him. And absolute health, which only you can with your kindness and blessings.

**Dua:** Quotes Hazrat Ibne-Abbas (RA) whenever the messenger of Allah (SAW) visited a patient, he used to sit on the head side of the patient and recite the following prayer seven times:

The Prophet said: ‘Recite this verse, for sure with this, the patient will regain health, except in the case of his death call.’

**Translation:** I beg Almighty Allah The Great, the sole owner of this universe, to cure you. (Reference Mishkat Shareef)
CHAPTER 9: GUIDE FOR ACTION

Pakistan is the only state in the world which came into being in the name of Islam. The founder of the nation described it as the practical field to implement Islam in its true spirit for the welfare of Muslims. Thus, religious leaders in Pakistan have a dual role and responsibility i.e. to guide and to facilitate implementation. Only religious leaders can play this important role.

The role of religious leaders in social and moral development:

- Using their pivotal role, religious leaders should convince the country’s highest authority and people in power about the need to mitigate the effects of HIV/AIDS through practical steps.
- Discuss the problem in religious institutions and ensure that the reaction and outcome of this discussion is based on sympathy, spiritual values and tolerance and a favourable/supportive attitude instead of condemnation.
- Sympathetic language should be used while addressing religious gatherings and words should be chosen which do not encourage any stigma or discrimination.
- Religious organizations should analyze the effects of HIV/AIDS on different segments of the population. Information should be exchanged on good/safe behaviour patterns. The outcome in terms of spiritual and physical reactions should be documented.
- On the occasion of International AIDS Day (December 1st) or any other relevant occasion, awareness should be created in the light of Islamic teachings amongst religious circles to influence public opinion.
- Budget allocations by the government for health, education, consultation etc. should be reviewed carefully and efforts be made to extract extra funds for prevention of HIV/AIDS.
- As far as possible, assume the role of a leader, using your status and position as preacher and guardian; think how you can plead the case effectively.
- In creating AIDS awareness, religious gatherings and congregations for namaz, marriage funeral ceremonies on child birth and other festive occasions and events of jubilation, the topic of HIV/AIDS orphans, children of people living with HIV/AIDS should be discussed.
- Discuss issues related to HIV/AIDS during religious, social and other functions such as weddings, birthdays, etc.
- Lead the discussion on HIV/AIDS talking about prevention, treatment and care of HIV/AIDS and solicit public opinion.
- On the occasion of marriage and at the time of the nikah, subjects related to married life, sexual relations, faithfulness to spouse etc. should be discussed in the light of Quranic teachings.
The Role of Religious Leaders in the Prevention of HIV/AIDS

- People living with HIV/AIDS should be encouraged to live according to religious ethics and to nominate a guardian for their children and prepare a will.
- Orphans, widows and widowers should be consoled and proper advice/guidance be given to them.
- People should be encouraged to help those living with HIV/AIDS, their widows, orphans, guardians, married couples, and young people and AIDS affected. Volunteer groups should be formed to assist families.
- Concerned people including non-government, government and business groups should be encouraged to cooperate with each other.

Proposed activities for religious leaders:

- Raise awareness on HIV/AIDS in prayers, speeches and administrative gatherings.
- Discuss prevention of HIV/AIDS and avoid discrimination against HIV Positive people.
- Help AIDS patients at home, meet widows and orphans and motivate patients and their families to offer prayers (namaz).
- Arrange for the training of social and welfare organizations in the light of religious teachings. (explore ways of cooperation)
- Encourage the formation of social and welfare organizations through which health facilities, education and consultation should be offered to AIDS affected young men, women and orphans.
- Raise the profile of HIV/AIDS issues with the help of local and national leaders including politicians, eminent personalities and opinion formers of the community and create an effective strategy to prevent HIV/AIDS in the light of the Holy Quran. Play an effective role in formulating national policies on HIV/AIDS and laws on human rights and ethics. Guide national, international and non-governmental organizations as to how to create awareness and provide necessary information in accordance with Islamic teachings.
- Discuss HIV/AIDS and its prevention and the reasons for its spread in the electronic and print media.
- Make an effective use of mass media in raising awareness on HIV/AIDS epidemic and promoting moral values.
- Write letters to editors or contribute to religious magazines along with articles in the national press.
- Protect the young generation by thoroughly reviewing TV and cable programs for obscenity and violence.
- Through lectures and speeches persuade people to avoid obscene programs and guide children and youth at home.
The main message of this Info Kit

This Info Kit has been designed to help you view the many issues surrounding HIV/AIDS in the light of teachings from the Holy Quran and Sunnah and identify your role as a religious leader. It is your responsibility to use this information to carry out a jihad against HIV/AIDS. Your role should be to spread awareness about prevention and care starting from your home to your street, village, town, and city and throughout the country. If you rise to the occasion, considering that to save a human life is to save the whole of humanity, we are sure that insha Allah (by the grace of Allah) we can keep the spread of this disease under control in Pakistan.
Chapter 10: Questions & Answers about HIV/AIDS

1. What is HIV?
HIV (Human Immune Deficiency Virus) is a virus which attacks the cells of the defence system in the human body and slowly renders them useless. As a result, human body is unable to fight against diseases and opportunistic infections. This virus remains in different fluids of the body and the same virus becomes the root cause of the disease known as AIDS.

What is AIDS?
We cannot declare an HIV Positive person as AIDS patient, unless he suffers from infections and cancers developing as a result of a weak immune system. In the presence of HIV, the body’s defensive system does not function laying the body open to different infections and cancers that attack the body. These various diseases & their symptoms are known collectively as AIDS (Acquired Immune-Deficiency Syndrome).

2. When did HIV/AIDS start?
It is said that the first AIDS patient was an African, Gates Dogas, from Kinshasa who died in 1959 after transferring the virus to 50 people with three years. To investigate, scientists collected more than 1200 blood samples from Africa during 1959-86 to trace the root cause. In America, the first case of AIDS was detected/ diagnosed in June 1981 by scientists when five homosexuals were found infected from the virus.

3. Why does it spread so rapidly and how does it get into the bloodstream?
The virus can enter the blood in the following ways:

1. Sexual intercourse with an HIV infected person (vaginal, oral or anal sex)
2. Transfusion of virus-infected blood or plasma, use of infected and non-sterilized surgical instruments or syringes.
3. From infected mother to the child.
4. From used surgical instruments infected with HIV.

4. Has a treatment been found?
A treatment has still not been found but there are some anti-retroviral medicines which can delay the development of AIDS in the HIV Positive person and reduce the possibilities of its transfer from mother to child.

5. Why is AIDS threatening?
The spread of the disease cannot be stopped by medicine or injections. Only a change in human attitudes and behaviour will work. If infected people do not take care and adopt safe behaviours, it can affect the family and society. Often, even the infected person is unaware of having the disease and can spread unknowingly to others.
6 How to know whether a person is HIV/AIDS Positive?
The status of an HIV Positive person can only be diagnosed through a blood test.

7. What are the remedial measures?
(i) HIV/AIDS is mostly transferred through unsafe sexual relationships with an infected person. The safest method of prevention is not to have any kind of sexual relationship outside marriage. It is important not to indulge in relations before or outside marriage as it is not always possible to know the background/ssexual history/HIV status of a partner. It is useful that before marriage the couple should have an HIV/AIDS test.

(ii) If a spouse is HIV/AIDS, infected condoms should be used consistently and correctly for sexual intercourse. Used properly condoms can be 99 percent safe and can also stop the spread of sexually transmitted diseases.

(iii) Used needles and injections should not be reused. A new disposable syringe should always be used for injections. People should abstain from all kind of drug abuse and injecting drug users should not share syringes.

(iv) Pregnant mothers should have an HIV/AIDS test, so that if they are HIV/AIDS Positive, medical treatment can be given to protect the child from the virus in the womb or during delivery.

8. In the case of HIV/AIDS what is the lifespan?
Once a person is HIV Positive, it takes about 5-10 years to develop the symptoms of AIDS. But with good nutrition and regular use of certain medicines lifespan may be extended. There are cases of HIV Positive people enjoying good health twenty years after being diagnosed.

9. Why are collective efforts vital to prevent AIDS?
HIV/AIDS is not an individual issue, but a problem of the entire community. Once it spreads in a society, communities are confronted with many problems in which care for the sick, orphans, widows and their human rights are at the top of the list. If this disease can ruin an entire society, then it is our duty to tackle the issue. Only combined efforts can prevent this disease.

10. What can you do?
Get proper information; educate your family and community. Positive moral attitudes should be encouraged and you can assist the government’s efforts to spread awareness.

11. As it is more of a foreign disease, why do we have to worry about it in Pakistan?
HIV/AIDS spreads irrespective of colour, caste, race or religion. Positive cases in Pakistan are also on the rise. By denying the reality we will be giving false assurance to ourselves. Pakistan and its people are also threatened by this disease and dissemination of information and creating awareness amongst the masses is important.
The Role of Religious Leaders in the Prevention of HIV/AIDS

PRECAUTION IS THE ONLY PREVENTION FROM HIV/AIDS

For more information and assistance – contact

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