

Religion and Epidemics: An Islamic Perspective

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Abstract:

Infectious disease can take the shape of pandemic, epidemic and endemic. When any infectious disease present in any specific society, it is known as endemic. Epidemic is the rapid exceed of cases in the disease for a specific period of a time and influence large number of population, then what is normally expected. When large number of people over broad geographical region becomes vulnerable and influence by the disease as a result of the concurrent outbreak of the disease, can take the form of pandemic. The main aim of this paper is that to analyze the different religious perspective about pandemics and epidemics in term of their causes, preventive measures and cure. The study conducted through qualitative method and data has been collected from secondary sources i.e. books, journals, research papers, newspapers etc. Broadly speaking, Muslim, Christian and Jews considered pandemics and epidemics as a punishment of God, sent down on people due to their sin or evil. The follower of these religions also favors preventive measures, medication and care for the victim of epidemics.

Keywords: Pandemic, Religion, Challenges.

Introduction

Pandemics, Epidemic, and Endemic

Disease outbreaks can take pandemic, epidemic or endemic ratio depends on the intensity of the virus, herd immunity, its mode of transmission and incidence and prevalence of the disease and illness in the community. When a disease continually present in a society it is known as endemic. When a large number of population and broad geographical region becomes vulnerable to be influenced by the disease agents as a result of the concurrent outbreaks of the diseases, can take the form of pandemic (Halsey, 1986). When there is a tentative exceed of cases in the diseases prevalence in the population is known is epidemics. It is an increase outbreak of disease for a specific period of a time and influence large number of population and region, than what is normally expected.

The term “epidemic” is 2,500 years old, comes from Greek word “epidemosis” epi for (on) and demos for (people). The term epidemic has long history and undergoes through the different culture and centuries and has been used in the non-medical field by Xenophon, Plato, Sophocles and Homer. However, the Greek physician and philosopher Hippocrates was first time used the term epidemic in medical context in 430 BC. According to Hippocrates epidemic mean a combination of syndromes occurring at a particular region at a particular time e.g. winter coughs or summer diarrheas. In the middle ages the term epidemics used for viral disease known as plague. The germ theory of disease presented by Robert Koch and Louis Pasteur largely contributed to the evolution of the term epidemic. In the other stage in the evolution of this term gain progressive notion; that most epidemics diseases outbreak were due to the spread of viruses or clone. The term epidemic was also used for non-communicable diseases during the second half of the 20th century (Martin & Martin Granel 2006). That time it refers to the non-infectious diseases such as diabetes, obesity, dengue, cancer etc. Until the early of 20th century only infectious diseases considered epidemic; but due to new research and innovation in the medical field the researchers and scientist epidemic also used for non-infectious diseases. Primarily epidemic consider communicable and infectious diseases.

The tem “Pandemic” comes from tow Greek words Pan mean “all” and demos “the people”. Pandemic is commonly referred to the spread of epidemic contagious disease throughout the

region, continent or globe. When a broad geographical region or large population becomes at risk to the disease virus as result of the concurrent diseases outbreaks take the shape of pandemic (Chu, 2017).

Human being have been constantly disturbed by attacks of epidemics and pandemics, for ages scientist and researchers have been trying to identify and classify the symptoms, mortalities and morbidities out of particular disease to identify the cause, to control and prevent the epidemic outbreaks effectively. Epidemics altered the fate of human civilization and sometime wiped out small civilization. Major epidemic and pandemic diseases are; smallpox, plague, influenza, yellow fever, viral hemorrhagic fever, Marburg virus, Ebola virus, Crimean Congo hemorrhagic fever, cholera, Rift Valley fever, Shigellosis, typhoid fever, west Nile fever, Lassa fever, Zika virus, MERS-CoV, Meningitis, Influenza A, nodding syndrome, monkey- pox, nipah virus infection, HIV/AIDS and more recently COVID-19 (WHO 2019).

Epidemic is a sharp, sudden rise in the cases of infectious diseases, which influence a large number of populations relatively in a short period of time. Pandemics and epidemics can be:

- Airborne: spread through droplets and air, for example measles, flu, MERS, SARS;
- Body or blood fluids borne: spread by contact such as mother to child in utero, blood transfusion and sexual activity e.g. HIV, Ebola virus;
- Zoonotic: conveyed between people and animals through direct and indirect interaction, e.g. bacteria, viruses, fungi and parasites;
- Water-borne: spread through water, e.g. cholera;
- Foodborne: spread through preparing and eating food, e.g. hepatitis A, salmonella and listeria; and
- Vector-borne: spread through ticks, mosquitos, and fleas etc. e.g. plague, malaria and dengue.

Epidemic can be controlled through community and household measures such as access to safe food, proactive surveillance, vector control, good clinical practice, use of anti-viral medication, social distancing, hand washing, access to safe and clean water and good sanitation and hygiene (Ezeome & Simon 2010).

Islam and Pandemics

The word “Islam” is derived from Arabic word means “surrender” (that is, to the will of God), one who submit or surrender to the will of God is termed as a “Muslim”. The root Salam means “peace”. It is a religion for all human being. Islam is the first religion, which had a universal beginning. It is a complete code of life and organizes all aspect of human life on both single and national level. It organizes your relations with yourself, with God, with your family, with your blood relatives, with your guest, with your fellow citizen and with other colleagues. Islam clearly stated rights and duties in all those relationships. Islam also stated a clear system of civil rights, worship, code of behavior, what to drink, what to eat, what to wear, how to govern, the laws of peace and war, the laws of selling and buying. Islam is not limited to the mosque only, but it is a guide for daily life in all aspects: socio-economically and politically (Salleh, 2015).

Islamic rules are not just for spiritual development of its followers, but also deliver an instruction for their day-to-day routine. Alcohol is strictly prohibited in Islam because it creates sever health threats to its users i.e. cirrhosis of the liver, cancer, anemia and cardiovascular. Islam also prohibits its follower from eating fork, because it can introduce several bacteria and virus in the body and cause diarrhea, fever, dehydration and abdominal cramps. Islam stresses moderation, not too little and not too much in every field of life. “Eat and drink, but be not excessive. Indeed, He likes not those who commit excess” (surah Al-A’raf:31). It has been proved by the scientist that eating too little can cause in the body not receiving the nutrients which is essential for proper survival and development and eating too much can cause obesity and weight gain which creates sever health threats (Web desk 2015).

Endemics, pandemics and epidemics not only create severe threats to human life, but also extremely influenced the socio-economic life of all individuals. These infectious diseases wiped out some region and sometime change the fate of so many civilizations. There are different views about the causes of these infectious diseases. Therefor this study intended to identify, different religious perspective on pandemics and epidemics in term of causes, pre-cautionary measures and cures and Islamic perspective about pandemics and epidemics in term of causes, pre-cautionary measures and cure.

Research question:

- How different religions see endemics, pandemics and epidemics in term of their causes, pre-cautionary measures and cure?
- How Islam sees endemics, pandemics and epidemics in term of their causes, pre-cautionary measures and cure?

Research objectives:

- To analyze different religion perspective on endemics, pandemics and epidemics in term of their causes, pre-cautionary measures and cure.
- To find out Islamic perspective on endemics, pandemics and epidemics in term of their causes, pre-cautionary measures and cure.

Statement of the problem:

When diseases outbreaks it can take the shape of endemics, pandemics or epidemics, these types of infectious diseases are controlled and prevented by pre-cautionary measures such as quarantine, social distancing, isolation etc. The followers of different religions have several opinion and perception about the causes, pre-cautionary measures and cure of pandemics and epidemics. This study intended to analyze different religious perspective on pandemics and epidemics in term of causes, pre-cautionary measures and cure.

Significance of the study:

This study provides appropriate knowledge about epidemics and pandemics diseases, in term of their causes, pre-cautionary measures and cure. This study would be also contribute to the existing literature and also generate new area of investigation for new researcher who may want to know about this issue.

Literature review:

An infectious diseases breakout in a pre-historic village in China about 5000 years ago, it wiped out the entire region. The dead bodies of the people were stuffed that was latter burned down. Anthropological and archeological study shows that the disease happened so fast, therefore there was no chance of proper burials. In 430 BC, after a war between Sparta and Athens an epidemic

disease occurred known as Plague, it lasted for five years and wiped out the Athens. About 100,000 people were died due to this disease. It is a contagious bacterial disease with fever and delirium normally with the formation of buboes and sometime infection of the lungs.

Smallpox is an epidemic disease with pustules usually leaving permanent scars and fever. It was one of the most lethal, dreaded and common of all viral diseases. This disease was first occurred in Japan in 735 BCE. This disease outbreak in Europe in 16th century and influenced all classes similarly, about 15% people were died. It got the shape of endemic disease in many cities and epidemic in villages in towns. About 25% - 40% of its victims were died in which 80 percent were under ten year of age (Dobson, 2007).

During the 20th century, 300 to 500 million people were killed by smallpox, which is more than the people died in “epidemics and all wars” of the period. It influenced human population for many centuries because there was no curative measures and vaccine for smallpox. Edward Jenner, an English scientist and physician for the first time introduced its vaccine in 1776. Vaccination for smallpox was started in 1800 throughout the world. It was abolished by several European and American countries. South America abolished this disease in 1972. In 1975 last case occurred in Asia (Bangladesh), and in 1977 the last case was detected in Africa (Somalia). However, it presents in the world in endemic form, smallpox epidemic had been removed in 1980 (O’ Toole, 1999).

The plague epidemics pick up the world in seven consecutive phases. The first phase has been recoded from 540 to 8th century. This disease started in Asia and then spread to the Middle East, Mediterranean and North Africa. In 541, during this phase, the plague brushed a broad geographical region, from Egypt to European countries and also led to the collapse of Roman Empire. The second phase of plague epidemic started in 1330s which is known as “Black Death”, it spread quickly throughout the Europe. This epidemic disease killed 70,000 to 100,000 million people (Dobson, 2007).

The plague disease is still present in Russia, Africa, Asia and South America, in endemic form. Approximately 2000 cases and 180 deaths are recoded per-year, in which 98.6% of cases and deaths are counted in Africa. Peru, Congo and Madagascar are the most endemic countries. The plague epidemic outbreak most recently in Asia (India) in 1994 and Africa (Madagascar) in 2014 (WHO, 2014).

Influenza epidemic is also an infectious disease attacking human population so many times. The word influenza comes from Latin word *influentia* means that which can influence. Flu or Grip was its commonly known name, first used by Hippocrates in 412 BC, but nickname “influenza” was given to this disease in 1357. The virus behind this disease was identified in 1933. It is spread by airborne droplets out of sneezing and coughing and basically attacks the respiratory tract (nose, throat and lungs). It is characterized by cough, high fever, sore throat, headache and malaise (WHO, 2005).

Influenza epidemic was first occurred in Europe in 1137 and by 1510 spread throughout the Europe and gradually invaded other territories. The Russian flu (1889-90), killed one million people. There had been three main influenza epidemics occurred in the 20th century. Spanish influenza (1918) killed approximately 20-100 million people throughout the world. 02-7.4 million people have died due to fast communication and globalization. Asian influenza (1957) was another major world epidemic disease. Hong Kong influenza (1968) is another global epidemic. A H5N1 of 2005 and A H1N1 of 2009 epidemics occurred in twenty first century but they are not destructive as earlier (Potter, 2001).

The pandemic and epidemic diseases are not only creating serious threats to the world population, but also to its economy. The infectious diseases create economic instability in various countries through direct and indirect cost and long term burden. The allocation of fund for dealing with epidemic and pandemic diseases can be very high. For example, the Ebola virus has extremely damaged the economy of West Africa. Sierra Leone cost \$06 billion on hospitals, staff and medication during Ebola outbreak in 2015 (Gostin & Friedman, 2015). The Global Health Risk Framework (GHRF) estimated about \$60 billion directly cost on infectious diseases per-year (Murice, 2016).

The long-term load is also very heavy. One of the major loads is from the loss of incomes of those who have expired. Prager indicated, that financial losses from influenza pandemics in the United States would be \$ 90-220 billion, out of that 80% would originate from the upcoming life earning of those who would expired (Prager et al, 2016). Indirect cost is also very severe. They consist of the whole things that contribute to decay in GDP. For example, due to SARS the GDP of China (2003) declined by 01% and the GDP of Southeast Asia decreased by 0.5 percent. In 2003 SARS outbreaks, southeast and East Asia lost \$ 12.3-28.4 billion (Chung, 2015).

Pandemics and epidemics are largely effected the social life of individual as well. Because travel was severely restricted, schools, sporting and markets were closed. Movement become problematic and the travel including carrying goods to the markets, visiting families and relatives were limited by executive. The cancellation of flights and closing of airports influenced many individuals travel, family life and livelihood. With fast, efficient and modern air travel, SARS which occurred in southern China was quickly spread more than 30 states (Wong & Leung, 2007). Closing schools give rise to the social and ethical issues (Cauchemez et al, 2009). Markets closure caused shortage of food supply. People can't find living things and necessary food due to which change came into being in people's diet (Zhang & Liu, 2016). Sports activities and public games also cancelled during pandemics and epidemics diseases. Sometime fear produced in mind of people which may leave psychological effects on individuals, which effects their life (Prieto & Das, 2016).

Research gap:

There are so many research projects, articles and research papers on endemics, pandemics and epidemics diseases; to find out the causes, effects and cure of different diseases. But there is no publish knowledge on religious perspective about epidemics/pandemics in term of their causes, pre-cautionary measures and cure. Therefore, the researcher intended to conduct study on this area.

Different Religious Response to epidemics/pandemics

The responses of main religious values and religiously famous people to infectious diseases have been a significant feature of pandemics and epidemics. Many spiritual groups have interpreted epidemics and pandemics within the limit of their teachings and beliefs. These explanations have frequently led to communal proclamation on epidemics causes, pre-cautionary measures, education and care. This section is about reactions to the pandemics/ epidemics by religious traditions and personalities.

Judaism and Christianity hold their traditional views about pandemic and epidemics diseases. These views have become influential image in the spiritual imagination and have effected theological explanation of the way God deal with human being. Christian and Jews believed that infectious diseases or epidemics are God wrath and punishment. They also believed that God closely involved in the lives of human being and conveys both deliverance and disease as sign of

love and wrath. The belief that epidemics comes by divinely order was given a scientific confirmation through medical explanation. Greek medicine stated that infectious diseases came from combination of astral, metrological and terrestrial influences that under certain conditions created a climate for disease. This concept existed until the 19th century in different form. After that's philosophical and theological views also held that epidemics diseases caused by God, because that physical forces under the guidance of God providence (Jonsen & Stryker, 1993).

Ambrose Pare (16th century surgeon), described the plague as, “the upcoming of the anger of God, sudden, furious, monstrous, swift, dreadful,” and he write down one chapter of his book with many biblical quotation to support this view. In the Christian middle ages, the maximum shared explanation proclaimed that plague epidemic was the punishment of God for the sin of human being. The religious experts recommended penance and prayers and also insisted that precautionary measures be taken to stop and prevent the infectious disease and that the effected be cared for. Some observer noted that epidemics are the result of deterioration of social life and morals, that the bad were blowout while good were hiding. Epidemics and pandemics frequently bring to mind this decent response of condemnation of evil and the call for regret. The bubonic plague (1665), that devastated London was considered as a “punishment of God” and anger against sin. The physician and religious authorities warned the public that plague was a wrath of God against wrongdoing as arrogance, desire, prophaneness and immorality and advised them to avoid such worldliness as pleasure, feasts, profit, usury, blasphemy, censure and hypocrisy (Shrewsbury, 1970).

Judaism and Christianity, have deep and long backgrounds that interpret epidemics and pandemics within the range of God providence. They also hold influential requirements to care for the sick. The Jewish laws gave consent to the doctor to heal; in addition, this is a religious edict and it is counted in the type of saving life, the most stringent of spiritual responsibilities. The primary Christian literature is also filled with the warnings to care for the sick. Clergy recommended precautionary measures such as penitential processions and quarantine as well as medical care. Disappearance of the sick by ecclesiastical leaders and physician was branded as disgraceful. Historically, Judaism and Christianity intensely insisted their believers to care for the victim of pandemics and epidemics (Jonsen & Stryker, 1993).

Islamic Perspective about Epidemics/Pandemics:

According to Islamic point of view the epidemics and pandemics has been decreed by Allah (Stearns, 2009). Gulen cited “whatever affliction befall you it is due to, what your hand have made” (Ash-Shura 42:30). The calamities which fall on people are punishment of Allah for wrongdoing, which they have done. Though, if the people were penalized for every sin in this sphere, they would not ever free from calamities. But Allah who kindness suppress His anger, forgive people many times in a day (Gulen, 2013).

Some rudimentary measures are essential when trying to stop or prevent the spreads of any infectious disease. These measures include hand washing hands, accurate throwing away of tissues, cover the mouth when coughing or sneezing, staying at home, quarantine etc. Islam is a complete way of life and it takes into account the spiritual, emotional, mental and physical welfare of people and societies. Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) was teaches to his followers hygiene practices that are still valid in twenty-first century.

We find the evidence, from the Hadiths of Prophet Muhammad that obviously shows Islam’s standpoint on sneezing and coughing. Prophet Muhammad was taught to the followers to cover their mouth when sneezing (cited in Gusau, 2020). The clear effects of coughing and sneezing without covering the face can cause the spread of droplets, viruses and bacteria; which may influence other people. The epidemic and pandemic diseases such as SARS plague and coronavirus are spread through respiratory droplet or when a person touch an item polluted with infectious droplet and then touches his nose, mouth or eye. Cleanliness is one of the main pre-cautionary measures of pandemics/epidemics. Islam emphasize on cleanliness, Allah says: “Truthfully, Allah loves those who turn unto Him in penitence and love those who clean themselves.” (Quran, 2:222). Prophet Muhammad, hygiene is declared as half of faith. The last messenger of Allah insisted that the followers wash their hands before and after eating and before praying (cited in Gusau, 2020).

Islamic rules also recommended quarantine and isolation which is one of the most important measures for prevention and controlling of epidemics and pandemics. Prophet Muhammad established policies that are today employed by public health consultants. He ordered his believers not to travel to area identified to be plagued with sickness and people not to leave and transmit the illness further (Gusau, 2020). Prophet Muhammad said: “If you listen that there is a plague in a

place, don't go into it, and if it visits a place but you are within, don't travel out of it." [Shih Bukharin, 5728]. Prophet Muhammad (Peace be upon him) also advised sick individuals not to visit healthy persons (cited in Gusau, 2020). The principles and teaching of Islam are planned to advantage all human being.

The religion of Islam provides rules relating to the diseases, use of drugs, health and death. Treating diseases is a significant subject in Islamic rules relating to health care. It is perceived as mistaken for a sick Muslim not to pursue cure for an illness or not to use medicines. Because when the last messenger of Allah was questioned whether an ill Muslim should pursue cure or not, He responded; "Yes, pursue cure because Allah didn't create a disease nonetheless has created a cure for it-except old age" (cited in Amusa, 2010). The concept of cure and medication for a disease in Islam is also supported from these tow excerpts from hadith: Every ailment has a medicine if the medicine for a specific ailment is found the ailment will be cured with Allah consent (cited in Amusa, 2010). Medicine is part of God ordainment; it may help with Allah's approval (cited in Al Jibaly, 2003). From the above, it is obvious that the religion of Islam is not contrasting to pursuing cure and using medicine but the point is that these medicine and cures are only helpful and effective if Allah permits or will.

Conclusion:

The epidemic and pandemic diseases create a serious threat to the life of world population and also influence the socio-economic condition of the people. These diseases create economic instability in various countries through direct and indirect cost and long term burden. The followers of several religions have different opinion and perception about the causes, pre-cautionary measures and cure of epidemics and pandemics. Many spiritual leaders and experts have interpreted epidemics and pandemics with in the limit of their own teachings and beliefs. Judaism and Christianity having similar views about epidemics and pandemics in term of their causes, prevention and cure, they believed that epidemics is God wrath and punishment. According to Christian and Jews, epidemics are the result of deterioration of social life and morals when bad overcome good. Christian believed that epidemic is a wrath of God against wrongdoing such as arrogance, desire, immorality, usury, censure and hierocracy. Historically, both Christian and Judaism intensely insisted their believer to follow preventive measures and care for the victim of pandemic and epidemic.

According to Islamic perspective pandemics and epidemics were decreed by Allah, as a punishment or wrath due to their sin or evil. The religion of Islam is not against of adopting preventive measures and cure. The Islamic rules recommended preventive measures i.e. cleanliness, isolation and quarantine to control and prevent the spread of pandemics and epidemics diseases. Islam also gave permeation of medication and care for the victim of pandemic and epidemic.

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