


FEATURE

An inquiry into the concept of infancy care based on the perspective of Islam

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All schools of thought believe that infancy is crucial to the formation and development of the human character. Nevertheless, a search of literature revealed the lack of a clear definition of the concept of 'infancy care based on an Islamic perspective' in nursing texts. As the lack of a clear definition of a concept conveys the inapplicability of that concept to its relevant field and community, this study was conducted to explore and determine the characteristic features of the concept of infancy care based on the perspective of Islam. Walker and Avant's (Strategies for theory construction in nursing. Prentice Hall, Boston, 2011) literary concept synthesis as the manner of concept development approach was conducted. Islamic documents were surveyed without any time limitation. Findings involved the extraction of six main concepts, including God as the Merciful Nurturer, mother as the symbol of the Creativity and Divinity of God, infant as a person with dignity and potential for excellence, parents as the nurture way paver, basic principles of nurturing, and holistic lifelong health promotion. The theoretical definition of each concept was presented. From the perspective of Islam, infant care is the nurturing of a human who has been conceived with dignity, certain rights, identity, and the capacity for development and excellence.

KEYWORDS

care, childhood, concept development, concept synthesis, infancy, infant care, Islam

1 | INTRODUCTION

As the most sensitive period in life and a golden opportunity, infancy boasts special features that have encouraged policy-makers, experts, and the public to seek the best possible care for infants. This period forms the basis of all the years of life to come (Klebanov & Travis, 2014). The foundations for virtually every aspect of human development—physical, intellectual, and emotional—are laid in early childhood. What happens during these early years has a lifelong effect on many aspects of health and well-being (Marmot, 2010). Founding strong individual health in the early years of childhood is a prerequisite to individual well-being, as well as economic production, social development, and coordinated urban communities. In other words, the future is promising for those countries who wisely invest in the well-being of their youngest citizens (Tang, 2015). Healthy children are a good

indicator of a healthy society and its future (Franck & Salantera, 2013). Therefore, investing in efforts to promote health and prevent diseases in the early years of childhood can be of great help to reducing the burden of disease in a society (Mistry et al., 2012).

Research suggests that high-quality infant care is positively associated with cognitive and language development and proper growth and development (Albers, Riksen-Walraven, & de Weerth, 2010). Scientists believe that although nature is responsible for a major part of early human development, the direction and path of this development is highly dependent on the experiences and protection provided by the care-givers. In fact, the means and style of the process of development are determined by the care-givers of the child or those who are somehow responsible for his or her care and health (Kupfer & Pesaro, 2014). The knowledge about what is best for the development of infants and young children needs to find expression in a variety of ways (Shulman,

2016). One of these is to pay attention to religion and its views and instructions.

Because religious beliefs and the related cultural traditions are the center of satisfying the needs of the believers, it is therefore necessary that these beliefs be investigated by researchers and scholars (Andrews & Boyle, 2012). Western contemporary medicine has been increasingly recognizing the significance of the influence of religion, and the necessity of health specialists' awareness of their patients' religious beliefs (Rumun, 2014). Religion is not only 'researchable', but is also of essential interest to clinicians, doctors, patients, and health care professionals (Basu-Zharku, 2011).

A search of literature showed that the concept of 'infancy care based on an Islamic perspective' is not clearly discussed and defined in nursing texts. The lack of a clear definition about a concept indicates the inadequacy of that concept (Cutcliffe & McKenna, 2005) and shows that the concept cannot be applied to its relevant field and community (Morse, Hupcey, Penrod, & Mitcham, 2002). These circumstances necessitate the adoption of a strategy for the development of the concept (Morse, 1995). Concept development has evolved to take a central position in knowledge development in nursing and results in the phenomenon being more fully clarified and defined (Meleis, 2012).

The 21st century is a time when nurses and other health care professionals are eager to learn about different cultures of the world and to provide effective, safe, and culturally competent health care. Religious identification among people from different racial and ethnic groups is important because religion and culture are interwoven (Andrews & Boyle, 2012). Determining the characteristic features of the concept of infancy care based on an Islamic view provides a new perspective to the nurses responsible for taking care of Muslim patients and promotes the capacity of nursing for the provision of proper care in line with the cultural traditions of the society in question (Alimohammadi, Taleghani, Mohammadi, & Akbarian, 2014). The purpose of the present study, which is part of a more extensive PhD dissertation study, is to examine the concept of infant care from an Islamic perspective.

2 | METHOD

Three approaches are suggested for developing the concept by Walker and Avant (2011), including analysis, derivation, and synthesis. Given that the concept of infancy care based on an Islamic perspective has not been addressed in nursing texts, despite not being irrelevant to the field of nursing, and although it is not introduced into nursing from other fields, the present study chose the concept synthesis approach to develop the intended concept with the purpose of determining its characteristic features. To extract an Islamic perspective purely, Islamic sacred texts should be examined, so literary concept synthesis was utilized.

Concept synthesis is a method for generating new ideas that yields new viewpoints on the phenomenon in question and can thus be used in theory development. This method consists of four basic steps, including the classification of data into categories, category reduction

and labeling, review and evaluation of the new concepts, and the provision of theoretical definitions for each concept (Walker & Avant, 2011).

2.1 | Data sources

Islamic sacred texts including the Quran and Shiite Hadith books were extensively and precisely studied. The Quran contains the revelations of God, the Creator and Sustainer of the Universe, to mankind. It is the message from God to man and therefore of utmost importance to Muslims (Denffer, 2009). Hadith (Pl: Ahadith), as the second source of Islamic law after the Quran, is the narrations—the sayings, deeds, or agreements of the Holy Prophet Muhammad and his successors (Household of the Prophet or twelve infallible Imams) (peace be upon them) (Marzband, Hosseini, & Hamzehgardeshi, 2016).

2.2 | Data collection

In reviewing the Quran, verses literally or semantically related to the subject of the study were identified. This means that the verses comprised keywords such as infant, infancy, neonate, neonatal, pediatric, child, offspring, care, and caring, and the verses for which their meaning refers to these subjects were selected. Then, a Persian translation of all selected verses and interpretations of related verses to the subject of the study from the Quran interpretation books (such as Al-Mizan, Nemooneh, Majma' al-Bayan, Tasnim, Noor, etc) was surveyed carefully. During the process of studying Quran interpretation books, the paragraphs and phrases related to the subject of study were extracted and entered into a Word file. To investigate the Hadith books, Comprehensive Ahadith 3.5 software which gathered the full text of 431 Shiite authentic Hadith books in 1,115 volumes was used. The books were in Arabic or Arabic-Persian. All the Hadith books which were Arabic-Persian or had Persian translation were extensively examined with no time limitations. Using the search facility in the software and with the help of proper keywords, traditions (Ahadith) related to the study subject were determined and entered into a Word file. A total of 3,300 pages of Word file (A4, 0.5-inch margins, font: B Lotus, 14) was extracted from the study of the Quran and Hadith. These files were reviewed again and similar traditions or narratives that were weakly linked with the issue were eliminated. The process of review literature lasted 18 months (from August 2014 to January 2016).

2.3 | Data analysis and synthesis

The first and second steps of concept synthesis are categorizing the data and labeling the categories. For a more integrated and systematic classification and obtaining the main categories of information in this steps, the present study used the content analysis method proposed by Graneheim (Graneheim & Lundman, 2004). The excerpts of texts from studying Islamic texts, which made up the meaning units, were entered into MAXQDA-10 (verbi GmbH, Berlin) and were carefully reviewed to ultimately yield condensed meaning units. To classify the data, the condensed meaning units with common concepts formed a single code

and the codes with common concepts were classified into a single subcategory. The subcategories were reviewed once again in a back and forth process and similar subcategories were merged to eliminate the overlapping ones. The data were repeatedly and accurately reviewed throughout the research and during the category reduction stage. Six main categories or concepts were ultimately formed, which were labeled based on the common concept between their codes (Table 1).

Once the concept is named, the next step is to verify the new concept and modify it as necessary. To evaluate the new concepts developed, the researchers did not limit the inquiry to the review of the texts and the collected data, but also formed a panel of experts. The panel consisted of six faculty members, including three nursing PhDs who were familiar with research in Islamic studies, two pediatric nursing PhDs, and one PhD in Islamic philosophy who was familiar with religious and childcare texts. After making the necessary modifications recommended in this meeting, the concepts were emailed to three religious experts to receive their feedback and were ultimately viewed and approved by a religious scholar. Then, the theoretical definition for each concept was developed based on the shared characteristics within each category. Definitions are presented in Table 2.

3 | TRUSTWORTHINESS

In qualitative research, the concepts credibility, dependability, confirmability, and transferability are used to describe various aspects of

trustworthiness (Graneheim & Lundman, 2004). To enhance credibility, all Shiite texts related to the topic of the research were studied, and meaning units were selected in such a way that it was neither too broad nor too narrow. Decisions on codes and categories were based on agreements among all members of the research team (including a health specialist, a research methodology expert, and an Islamic issues expert). The researchers had been working with research data for more than a year, which is a mechanism for increasing credibility. To strengthen dependability in addition to several revisions conducted on the data, the coding process and the process of developing the main categories were continuously evaluated and controlled by the research team (Elo et al., 2014). To achieve confirmability, data reviews were conducted by three religious sciences experts and four nursing professionals outside the research team. The fact that the present study is solely based on Islamic texts, as well as detail about methods of data gathering, data analysis, and achieving the results, will enhance the transferability of the research (Graneheim & Lundman, 2004).

4 | FINDINGS

The process of developing the concept of Islamic perspective on infancy care was carried out through an inductive study of Islamic sacred texts using concept synthesis. A total of 875 data segments clustered into 21 subcategories and led to six main concepts. Concepts are described in the following:

TABLE 1 Categorizing scheme

Subcategories (n = 21)	Categories (n = 6)
God as the eternal carer	God as the Merciful Nurturer
God's love and special attention to infants	
Praying to God for having a healthy and competent child	
Mother; the basis for infant's body and soul formation	Mother as the symbol of the Creativity and Divinity of God
The impact of mother or wet nurse's breast milk in the structure of the body and soul	
Veneration of motherhood	
Motherly care of the other people's infant	Infant as a person with dignity and potential for excellence
Identity and rights from the moment of conception	
Dignity from the moment of conception	
Talent of development and excellence	Parents as the nurture way paver
Parents; founders of physical and mental health	
The impact of parent's actions on a child's health and competency	
Parents; representatives of God in the nurture of infant	Basic principles of nurturing
God's gift entrusted to the parents	
Maintaining the infant dignity	
Respect for the rights of infants	Holistic lifelong health promotion
Dealing with infant compassionately and kindly	
Importance of environment for nurturing the infant	
Preventive care in all aspects of health (body and soul)	
Health maintenance in all dimensions (body and soul)	
Health promotion in all dimensions (body and soul)	

TABLE 2 Definitions of new concepts

Concepts	Definitions
God as the Merciful Nurturer	Nurturing is to care for life that is growing, and to nurture things into perfection and making them flourish. God, the Cherisher, is the nurturer of all creatures and has absolute and inclusive mercy. The entire existence, including man, is created and nurtured by the mercy of God
Mother as the symbol of the Creativity and Divinity of God	Mother is the manifestation of the divine name of the Cherisher and is responsible for cherishing and nurturing the human kind. Mother is therefore the maker of humans and communities. God's creatorship is manifested in the mother and the infant's body and soul are made within the mother and then through her milk
Infant as a person with dignity and potential for excellence	The infant is a dignified human with a set of rights and a character. He possesses a divine spirit and recognizes his Creator from the beginning and has the potential for development and excellence
Parents as the nurture way paver	Although nurturing is performed by God, the parents are the agents of God on the earth for this nurturing and pave the way for the child's potentials to flourish
Basic principles of nurturing	Nurturing children is based on principles, such as how to treat the child, provide a nurturing environment for him and take appropriate care measures
Holistic lifelong health promotion	The outcome of facilitating the proper nurturance of the infants or caring for them is the flourishing of their potentials, which is the same as maintaining and promoting their physical, psychosocial and spiritual health

4.1 | God as the Merciful Nurturer

The Holy Quran introduces God as the Merciful Cherisher of all creatures (Quran 1:1,2; 6:164; 21:112; 23:118). God is the owner and contriver of all and gradually perfects everything. As the Creator and the teacher of the Creation, God is responsible for improving human affairs (Tabatabaei, 1995). Caring is therefore an act of God. He introduces Himself as the Protector and Guardian of the Creation in the glorious Quran (Quran 4:1; 11:57; 12:64; 33:52). God takes care of the infant before and after the birth through His contrivance in the Creation and by assigning care-givers to them. He nurtures the tiny embryo in the mother's womb. For this purpose, He has structured the uterus and placenta such that they protect the fetus against any harm during the fetal period, feeds the fetus with the mother's blood and puts milk in the mother's breast after she gives birth to properly feed the weak child (Mofazzal-ibn-Amr, 2000).

God nurtures the infant with such kindness and mercy that His blessing to the infant causes the parents to take care of the infant and be affectionate toward him or her. It is God that inspires the mother with love for her child and enables her to take care of the child (Hoseini-Shahmoradi, 1984). The parents and care-givers of the infant enjoy the Divine Mercy of God as God's blessing to the infant and, if neglecting to do their job, they will be blamed and punished by God (Shaykh Al-Saduq, 1988). God's blessing to the infant is to such a degree that the infant's existence may prevent the exaction of Divine retribution on the creatures and His utmost wrath is revealed when the rights of a woman or child are violated (Koleiny, 1990). This Merciful Nurturer made the infants' mind weak and their cognition deficient (Quran 16:78) so that being born and taken care of after birth will not lead to a feeling of humiliation and their encounter with the new world will not cause bewilderment and thus their dignity is

preserved (Mofazzal-ibn-Amr, 2000). The view of God as the infant's nurturer causes the infant's care-giver to feel the need for God's assistance. It is thus that appealing to God for having a healthy and righteous child is a duty of parents from before the birth of their child (Shaykh Al-Saduq, 2001). The prevention and treatment of the infant's diseases is thus accomplished by making mediated or unmediated appeals to God. Presenting to physicians is thus also grounded in the belief that God is the main healer and a physician only the mediator of healing (Payandeh, 2003). To conclude, from an Islamic viewpoint, the infant enjoys the merciful nurturing of God before and after birth.

4.2 | Mother as the symbol of the Creativity and Divinity of God

Creatorship and lordship are dedicated attributes of God and He is the Creator and Cherishing Lord of all things (Quran 6:164; 40:62). On the basis of an Islamic perspective these two attributes of God manifest themselves in the mother, meaning that the mother is the root of the genesis and nurturing of the child (Javadi-Amoli, 2011). The child's body and soul are first created in the mother's womb and are then developed through her milk. The child is shaped in the mother's womb over 9 months. The mother's nutrition and even her thoughts, moral character and feelings during pregnancy and breastfeeding affect the child (Majlesi, 2000). As the parents have an undeniable effect on the physical, mental, emotional, social, and spiritual health of the child, men and women are advised to choose the proper spouse who is capable of becoming a suitable father or mother (Ibn-Shobe-Harrani, 2003). Inasmuch as the mother has the great impact on the infant's body and soul during pregnancy and infancy, from an Islamic viewpoint, the role of mother in child rearing and consequently creating

a competent generation is taken into account and having a worthy mother is considered as one of the children rights (Borujerdi, 1995).

After birth, the main issue becomes the child's breastfeeding. Not only does Islamic tradition place a great emphasis on breastfeeding, it also states special practices and conditions for a properly thorough breastfeeding (Shaykh Al-Saduq, 1988). Islam also identifies breast milk as a determining factor in the formation and development of the infant's body and soul. Breast milk affects not only the infant's nature and essence; it also affects his or her character and temperament (Borujerdi, 1995). Infants should not be deprived of the benefits of human milk even if their mothers are unable to breastfeed them for any reason, in which case a good wet-nurse with a healthy body and soul should be chosen for breastfeeding the child (Shaykh Al-Saduq, 1988). The mother's creatorship and nourishing for the child thus apply not only by way of pregnancy and infant care, but also by way of breastfeeding and breast milk. The maternal role thus takes an elevated position in Islamic thought, and pregnancy and infant care and enduring the hardships of these stages count as great virtues to God (Tabarsi, 1986). Another important point is that the children of others are the same as the children of one's own in the Islamic viewpoint, and when anyone except the infant's mother assumes the responsibility of providing care to him or her, the care provided should be motherly and conducted as if the child is one's own, so that the infant's nurturing is not disrupted (Majlesi, 1999; Tabarsi, 2000).

4.3 | Infant as a person with dignity and potential for excellence

In contrast to the different views that challenge the humanity or personhood of the fetus or neonate (Baker, 2005; Giubilini & Minerva, 2012; Sweis, 2014), from an Islamic viewpoint, humans are valued and dignified from the time they are merely a fluid drop (*nutfa*) and possess rights and a dignity from the beginning. If one causes an unexplained abortion of this fluid drop even in early gestation, he is responsible for paying a sum as damages (blood money) (Borujerdi, 1995). And a fetus that is aborted with all his organs developed should be washed ceremonially, shrouded and buried like an adult (Koleiny, 1990). From an Islamic perspective, allowing the fetus an identity and dignity is not only necessary but also is their right, which is proven by the duty of parents to give a name to the fetus (Majlesi, 2000). The infant born is therefore regarded not only as a human, but as a person with dignity and a set of rights. It is precisely for this reason that from an Islamic viewpoint the value of a newborn is more than anything that exists in the universe (Borujerdi, 1995; Shaykh Al-Saduq, 1988). In this view, the infants are humans with demands and preferences and their preferences and sense of independence should be respected in the process of taking care of them (Majlesi, 2000).

God gifts human with an inherent talent for achieving perfection from the beginning of birth. Although adventitious cognitions associated with the self, others and the environment are not fully developed in the infant (Mofazzal-ibn-Amr, 2000), the means of this recognition are instilled in him or her (Quran 16:78). In addition, infants are in possession of a God-given nature (i.e. *Fitrat*) or innate disposition

(Berenjkar, 2000) and therefore recognize their Creator from birth. As a result, the Islamic viewpoint holds that the spiritual dimension of the infant's existence should be taken care of along with his or her other dimensions from birth. In fact, this tiny creature has the potential and capacity for development and excellence in all human dimensions and it is upon the parents and care-givers to provide him or her with the necessary and sufficient care for accomplishing this end (Ibn-fahd al-hilli, 2002).

4.4 | Parents as the nurture way paver

As stated, God is the main Care-giver and Nurturer of infants. But as the child is God's gift entrusted to the parents (Koleiny, 1990), it is incumbent upon the parents to take care of this entrusted gift as ordered by the Merciful God, his Owner, through religion. God has instilled in the parents a love for the infant and has made them compassionate and careful toward him or her (Hoseini-Shahmoradi, 1984). The parents are indeed the agents of God for taking care of infants and paving the way for proper nurturance. According to Islam, the child is the parents' own body and soul (Majlesi, 2000), and that is why the parents get sad with the child's sadness and gets happy with his or her happiness (Shaykh Al-Saduq, 1988). It is once again for the same reason that the actions of the parents not only protect or damage the child (Majlesi, 1985), but also affect his or her character and destiny (Shaykh Al-Saduq, 1988). By maintaining their own physical and spiritual health—that is, their actions, behaviors, and moral character—the parents are able to provide a good foundation for the development or persistence of their child's physical and spiritual health.

According to Islam, facilitating the nurturance of the infant is not only concerned with the parents' care for their own body and soul, but also with their actions upon marriage, at the moment of conception and during pregnancy. From this viewpoint, not only the physical, but also the mental, emotional, social and spiritual health of the child at the present moment and in the future is taken into account prior to the parents' marriage. One of the reasons for promoting legitimate marriage is to prevent the damage exerted on the child's body and moral character by illegitimate birth (Ibn-Shobe-Harrani, 2003). The parents' nutrition after marriage and before conception is also crucial for achieving the goal of having a healthy and righteous child. The parents' type of nutrition affect the child's appearance and gender and its lawfulness or unlawfulness has an influence on the formation of his spirit and soul (Borujerdi, 1995). During pregnancy, it is the mother's nutrition that contributes significantly to the child's body and soul, so that consuming special foods, mainly plants and fruits, leads to a beautiful appearance and admirable moral traits in the child (Ibn-Shobe-Harrani, 2003). Another issue that makes Islam regard the parents as the founders of the child's physical and spiritual health is the importance given to the moment of conception in this religion. Islam emphasizes the time, place, rituals and even the thoughts of the parents at the moment of conception. It has stipulated special instructions for parents that observation of them may help prevent many disorders and promote the physical and spiritual health of the child (Borujerdi, 1995).

Infants' need for being with their mothers is as fundamental as their need for food (Kippely, 2005). From the viewpoint of Islam, the mother is the main and unmediated care-giver in the infancy period and, not only is she the prioritized care-giver of the infant who fosters him or her (Shaykh Al-Saduq, 1988), but also she reserves herself and her infant this right even if she is divorced. Separating the child from his or her mother during infancy is not permitted even by the father (Tabatabaei, 1995) and he who separates the infant from the mother is punished by God (Payandeh, 2003). The father also plays a key role in supporting the mother and providing for her and for the child. In taking care of the infant, it is the parents' duty to also provide care and support to each other, to not disturb each other and to co-operate and consult with one another (Tabatabaei, 1995).

4.5 | Basic principles of nurturing

The infant is like a seed that will grow and flourish when properly nurtured; but without observing the principles of proper nurturance, any effort will be futile. Adhering to these principles is the duty of whoever is responsible for taking care of the infant, whether the parents or any other person. Respecting the infant's dignity is one of these principles. Dignity is the basis of Islamic ethics and cultivation of dignity is mainly achieved by venerating the human during the childhood. One of the most important points in honoring the infants' personhood is to take their feelings seriously in the early years of life.

The early years of life constitute a period of lordship and dominion during which the infant is like a ruler and king (Tabarsi, 1986). Infants have their own demands and preferences, and the care-giver should take note of these demands and direct the care. Accordingly, paying attention to what pleases the child and giving him or her risk-free freedom help maintain this dominion (Majlesi, 2000). Observing ethical principles in dealing with the infant is another measure taken to respect the dignity. Honoring and respecting the infant (Tabarsi, 1986), behaving unconditionally good toward the infant, even when he keeps crying (Borujerdi, 1995) and dealing with children in justice and fairness should not be compromised and neglected under the pretext of their young age. Respecting and observing infant rights is another point to bear in mind, for example, allowing the infant the chance to be born legitimately (Qazaee, 1982), be loved and cherished by the parents, and be given a good and worthy name (Ibn-Shobe-Harrani, 2003). Another important point is to attend to the infant's needs, which should always be fully met by the care-giver in a timely manner, to the extent that even worship and work should not prevent the timely meeting of the infant's needs (Ibn-fahd al-hilli, 2002).

A care based on mercy and compassion is another fundamental principle of nurturing the infant. Despite the strict prohibition on separating the infant from the mother, he or she should be taken away from the mother and handed over to a kind and compassionate care-giver in the case of his or her own mother being unkind and incompetent (Hoseini-Shahmoradi, 1984). Parents and child care-givers should be good and kind to the infants and nurture them on a basis of tolerance, mercy and compassion (Ibn-Shobe-Harrani, 2003). In Islam, being good and kind to the infant is as important as being good and kind to the parents, and

cruelty to children is strictly prohibited. This view urges not only love and compassion and mercy for the child, but also urges the expression of this affection and mercy in practice and behavior. Kissing the child was therefore a highly rewarded act by God (Borujerdi, 1995), an act that can be done even during worship. Bringing joy and happiness to the babies is also highly recommended and being kind to them, even if only by caressing their head and embracing them, is highly emphasized (Ibn-fahd al-hilli, 2002). Other principles of proper infant nurturance include paying attention to the conditions of the time and taking expedient measures. Paying attention to the environment and the area in which the child grows up is also very important. The parents are responsible for providing the infant with an environment that is conducive to growth and development and that guarantees his or her physical and spiritual health. The child should therefore be raised in a healthy climate and nurturing environment (Tabari, 1997). The parents' interaction with one another should be so that the child can grow up in an environment filled with peacefulness, safety and love (Tabatabaei, 1995).

4.6 | Holistic lifelong health promotion

Holistic health promotion, defined as nurturing a healthy and righteous human, is the main goal of infant care. Despite the instructions provided by Islam on how to have a beautiful child (Ibn-Shobe-Harrani, 2003) or a child with certain gender (Tabarsi, 1986), the holistic health of the infant is much more important than his or her gender or beauty (Borujerdi, 1995). According to Islam, childhood begins before birth (Musavi-Bojnurdi, 2004) and having a physically and spiritually healthy child therefore necessitates preventive care, health maintenance and health promotion measures to be taken before marriage, at the moment of conception, during pregnancy, in the early days of life and afterward. In the Islamic culture there is a set of rituals to be performed upon birth and on the seventh day that facilitate the physical and spiritual health of the infant including observing the infant's hygiene and attending to his or her neat and clean-cut appearance upon birth, uttering the name of God in the child's ear (*Azan*) as the first sound he or she hears, touching the infant's palate with a pure and holy substance before breastfeeding, almsgiving and feeding the poor to guarantee the child's health, circumcision and shaving the infant's head to prevent future diseases (Borujerdi, 1995). From an Islamic point of view, ensuring health during infancy is not the only thing that matters; rather, fetal and infant cares ensure not only infant health, but also facilitate a holistic health in adulthood (Majlesi, 1985). It is worth noting that the instruction recommended for promoting the child's holistic health deals not only with physical and spiritual health in this world, but also with having a good afterlife; it is inferred that having a peaceful afterlife requires measures that should begin before birth and during infancy (Shaykh Al-Saduq, 1988).

5 | CONCLUSION

According to Islam, infant care is to nurture a person who has dignity, certain rights and a personhood from the time of conception, and who

has potential and capacity for development and excellence. Although these tiny creatures do not have enough cognition of their surroundings, themselves and others, they identify their Creator. In this view, God is the kind, dignified and eternal Nurturer of the infant. Not only He has contrived for the infant's health and righteousness upon his or her creation, but He has also chosen care-givers for nurturing this valuable creature, the most important of whom are the parents. The mother, who is the manifestation of the Creatorship and Cherishing Lordship of God on earth, plays the main role in infant care, while the father paves the way for the proper nurturing of the infant by providing for the mother and the infant. In other words, parents are responsible for the job of nurturing the infant, and as such, they are the agents of God and should base their nurturing in wisdom, nobility and compassion and thus facilitate proper nurturing. The outcome of this nurturing is the flourishing of the infant's potentials and his or her development and excellence and the creation of a healthy and righteous person.

The results obtained in the present study help open a new chapter in infant care. The first point to bear in mind is that infant care is to nurture the infants such that both their body and soul are considered. The infant is not a creature capable of becoming a human; he or she already is a human with dignity and potential for development and excellence that falls under God's special Grace. Infants have rights and identity and their care should be rooted in dignity and compassion. The infants have demands and preferences, and when caring for them, any routine tasks that fail to take account of the care recipient's demands should be avoided. The second point to bear in mind is that God is the Nurturer and Care-giver of the infant and has given the nurse the capacity to assume responsibility for the act of God. Proper infant care also paves the way for a holistic health throughout adulthood and even in the afterlife. The nurse should therefore provide a care that is conducive to the proper nurturance of the infant. Infant care is therefore a highly valued task and a basis for future public health. To achieve this end and provide nurturing care, the nurse should provide motherly care with compassion and with respect for the infant's dignity.

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