SENIORS IN ISLAMIC FAMILY POLICY
MORAL AND LEGAL ASPECTS

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(Received 2 February 2023, revised 24 March 2023)

Abstract

Social changes, urbanization, as well as the creation of a new lifestyle and culture, began the family crisis. Until recently, this problem only concerned families with the roots of Latin tradition. Nevertheless, more and more often the loss of the authority of the elders affects the Muslim community living in Europe, but also in the affluent countries of the Persian Gulf. Despite the numerous dangers lurking over the unity of the Muslim family, Islam tirelessly surrounds the elderly. He is identified above all with the hierarchical structure of Muslim families and also with the patriarchy of the community. A multigenerational family is a model for the young generation, how to approach and treat other members of the community, especially seniors. The authority is not only enjoyed by the father, but also by the elder of the tribe or family. Islam often indicates a lack of respect for the elderly, sick and infirm, present in the Latin world, which has developed various methods, getting rid of people who require care. The teaching of Islam emphasizes that caring for elderly parents and other family members in the most difficult period of their lives is seen as an honour, a blessing and an opportunity to achieve spiritual development. Probably for this reason, in the Muslim world, 'homes of old age' or care for the elderly are rare. Islam emphasizes the cultural heritage and life experience that is passed on to young people by seniors.

Keywords: Islam, care, experience, knowledge, respect

1. Introduction

The complex religious, social and legal system of Islam was established on the Arabian Peninsula. The conditions of the geographical environment and the difficulties related to the dry and hot climate had a significant impact on people's behaviour. For example, it is necessary to point out the need for the entire community to cooperate in everyday activities: protecting the village from potential aggressors and caring for animals that are not only a source of food, but also to earn money. Tribal traditions were an additional element that determined mutual relations in the community. The Arab population was characterized by a patriarchal system, i.e. the domination of a man in the first place over the family and, depending on the position he occupied in a given territorial structure, also

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over the entire community [1]. Opposing the clan elders meant banishment and, consequently, death, because in the desert areas, without the support of others, a lonely man was not able to survive. Practices of mutual group life, in force in the times of Jahiliya [2], were also adopted by the new religion - Islam. Thus, the patterns regulating the life of the first Muslim community, founded in 622 [3], originally composed only of Arab people, were introduced as binding. In many parts of the world they are respected to this day, constituting an example of a family as well as a social community compatible with the principles of Islam.

The culture of ancestors became the foundation for shaping the life of families and clans, despite a significant change in religious values, and thus a departure from polytheistic beliefs, in favour of monotheism and faith in One God. However, the experiences of the elders were an unlimited source of knowledge and skills from which subsequent generations could draw. Islam emphasizes that just as youth is the future of the umma, old people are current wealth for Muslims. What is important in old age is that they put a lot of work into shaping and developing the community, but also their experience. The cultural capital of old age in Islam is also important in terms of family memory. A man, as the senior of the family, is obliged to honour the bonds of kinship towards his wife, children, grandchildren and other relatives. This command must be carried out in accordance with the provisions of the Qur'an: "Fear the God whom you ask one another and honour the bonds of kinship" (4,1) [4]. The Muslim family, especially seniors, care about the proper transfer of cultural heritage to the next generations. Thanks to the oldest generation, the continuity of tradition in society is maintained, and moreover, the young, following the example of the elders, learn moral values and worship God [5].

Islam recognizes and values the cultural capital of old age, because according to the tradition of Muhammad, old age and the limitations resulting from old age are values in themselves. The foundation of Muslim anthropology is the belief in the creation of man by God, which the Qur'an teaches about: "We made man from an extract of clay" (23,12) [4, p. 455]. Thus, it is the Creator who decides about the length of life of every person, because the will and plans of God are not known to people. However, the experience of old age comes from God, and therefore the elderly should be given due respect. Islam is a religion of justice and compassion with morality as one of its main characteristics. It obliges believers to act in accordance with human dignity, because everyone is a creature of God and has received an honourable place on Earth. Islam requires all seniors to show the dignity they deserve, regardless of the degree of kinship, so its age and gender, or even religion, are irrelevant. Muslim society must be able to show compassion for those in need and also be ready to provide support. This attitude is seen as paying due respect to God Himself and exercising His law. The principle of payment is of great importance in the treatment of the elderly. The teaching of Islam emphasizes that proper relations with seniors will bear fruit in the future, when a young person reaches an old age [6].

Research on seniors is carried out on many levels. They mainly concern the quality of life of seniors and health care for the elderly. Researchers pay less attention to the rank and importance of the elderly in shaping new generations of mankind. Older people have rich life and historical experience that especially young people should use. The aim of the article is to analyse old age in the Islamic tradition, the meaning of old age for human life, the presence of elders in the Muslim community, their experience and knowledge, and moral obligations imposed on the family. The life wisdom of seniors and their presence in the community is of great importance in shaping the right moral attitude of the young generation. It is also an excellent form of implementing moral principles in the community. Physical limitations of the elderly force the young generation to change their own behaviour, and often also change social policy, which can significantly improve the quality of life of seniors. Social policy towards seniors and theology and ethics resulting from religious principles are currently inextricably linked. Senior policy has already been the subject of scientific research in the past, mainly from the Christian perspective [7, 8]. The first element of the analysis is the definition of old age. It is sometimes justified in various ways, most often by the number of years lived, as well as the end of professional work, having grandchildren and frequent various diseases associated with old age. This article goes against the usual perception of older people. It shows seniors as extremely important people for building a responsible society. The basic research method used in the work was the source analysis method. In addition, conclusions from many years of research on a Muslim family, which were conducted using the participant observation method, were also used. The analysis of the presence of seniors in the Muslim community was conducted in a Christian environment. For this reason, naturally, observations and conclusions are interpreted in the context, customs and morality of Christianity.

Typically, these studies also concerned the support of the elderly and helping them in everyday functioning or improving the quality of life, also in terms of access to places of worship. However, social changes are present all over the world and do not exclude representatives of the Islamic world. The dynamics of social changes in the world concerns in a special way the family, its unity and integrity. Economic transformations, and especially intensive economic migration, make families vulnerable to disintegration. The consequence of modernity is the lack of appropriate dialogue in families [9] and this leads to a lack of respect towards seniors. Modern, intense life is marked by speed and usually the pursuit of ambitious goals. They are favoured by egoism and individualism, often dominated by the cult of youth, health, physical fitness and visual beauty.

The article refers to the changes in family ties that occur as a result of modernization. These transformations are now happening all over the world, in all cultures and religions. This study is closely related to the ideal of family life and the functions of individual members of the Muslim family contained in the Qur'an. This reference to the religious ideal is extremely important due to the

constant renewal of theological principles in the life of a believer. This study focused the researcher's attention on the general perception of seniors in Islamic family policy, from a moral and legal (qur'anic) perspective. Therefore, this study has inherent limitations. The paper deliberately did not discuss the general vision of the family in Islam: the functions of wife, mother, husband, father, children, the rules of marriage, including permitted polygyny, and the rules of divorce. The functioning of Muslim families living in diasporas of European countries, being the second or third generation of immigrants, was also not analysed. Each of these topics deserves a separate, detailed study.

Old age in Islam is not clearly defined. In the past, the contractual limit of maturity and responsibility was 40 years. Probably for this reason, it is assumed that Muhammad began his prophetic activity at the age of about 40. Currently, Muslim gerontology interprets the senior age differently. The most popular Middle Eastern honorary title assigned to the elderly is the sheikh. Sheikh in Arabic means an old man, a governor, a mature person, advanced in years, but constantly enjoying authority in the community. Currently, this title has several meanings. First of all, it characterizes a person who enjoys special respect, which is probably why this title belonged to the leaders of tribes or families. Muslim clergymen are also referred to as sheikhs. Historically, the sheikh was the highest religious dignity in a given country, and his competences included issuing fatwas and proposing candidates for the office of judge to the sultan [10].

It is assumed that the title of sheikh is available to men from the age of 50, and the characteristic feature is greying hair. Some researchers are of the opinion that only people up to 80 years old can be called this way. There are also opinions that old age begins at the age of sixty. However, the most optimistic theories do not point to statutory age, but emphasize physical abilities. According to these, a person is old only when he is unable to take care of himself. In addition, mental limitations are beginning to become noticeable. This definition does not apply to disabled or paralyzed people, because these limitations have a different aetiology [11].

2. Analysis

2.1. Shura - the council of elders

An important function of elderly people with extensive life experience in the Muslim community is visible, for example, in the structures of both family and clan-tribal administration. In many Arab-Muslim countries, a type of local court is the shura, which is the assembly of tribal or administrative elders. During the session of shura, current problems of the community are discussed and important decisions are made. Shura also has the power to judge and impose penalties [12]. Her opinion leaves an imprint on the life not only of a given community, but also of specific people. The verdict of the elders is not open to discussion and is binding on everyone. Humility in accepting it is the most perfect show of respect for the experience and knowledge of elders. It is

assumed that the decisions of older people, especially with regard to difficult challenges, the adoption and implementation of which will affect a large part of the society, are balanced. Objectivity and getting rid of excessive passions, such as violence, anger, the desire for revenge, are attributed to mature age and grey hair. Therefore, in many places of the Muslim world, it is still the family or clan elders who make the most important decisions at the level of villages, oases, and often also obligations for the entire state [12].

2.2. Family identity

For Muslims, genealogy and family affiliation are very important. It comes from pre-Muslim times and emphasizes the identity of communities based on blood ties. It is true that with the advent of Islam, the fundamental function of blood ties, which testifies to human relationships, was abolished, because it was replaced by a common belief in one God. Nevertheless, the importance of genealogy has not been completely forgotten. Family heritage is cultivated especially in families and clans that are recognized in a given area. The followers of Islam are a patriarchal society where the eldest man exercises power over the family over society. An important element, therefore, is obedience and respect towards the doyen of the family. Its lack is tantamount to a lack of authority in the young generation for the values and customs of those generations. On the other hand, in social relations it is perceived as a dishonour with which the head of the family covers.

2.3. Multigenerational family

Islam is fond of poetry and often uses literary means of expression to describe ordinary as well as everyday situations. The family has been compared to a tree whose roots are parents, and whose branches are children and grandchildren, therefore the existence and development of the tree's crown is strictly dependent on the roots. Therefore, a Muslim family rests primarily on a foundation of continuity and security, which is guaranteed by blood ties and marriages. Blood ties oblige members of a given social group to obey the rights and obligations resulting from the dictates of religion. All these conditions influence family identity. Family life in Islam is held in high esteem and respect, Muhammad taught that one should care for the needs of one's relatives: ,,Allah says: Whoever cares for the family, I will also take care of it. Whoever wants a long life and prosperity - let him take care of the abundance of his relatives." [13] It is an example of coexistence in a community that guarantees correct relations in society later.

Due to the patriarchal structure of the Muslim community, the Islamic tradition still applies some, from the point of view of a modern European, outdated standards of conduct. The multigenerationality of the Muslim family is undoubtedly at the fore of the 'otherness' of the Muslim family, especially in the countries of the Middle East and the Muslim parts of Africa. Due to the

migration of people, it is also more and more often present in Europe. Everyday life of at least three generations under one roof is indeed in opposition to the model of a nuclear family promoted in the Western world, outside Islam [14], i.e. consisting only of partners and usually one child. Particular attention should be paid to the term 'partners', because in the Euro-American world the avoidance of the terms mother - father or wife - husband is being increasingly aggressively promoted, and in favour of the modern parent 1 - parent 2 terminology [15], informal relationships, without any legal regulations. Such action degrades the sense of responsibility for the other person. In terms of Islam, only the family community guarantees not strong relations between its members.

There are two types of bond in a Muslim family: marriage and parental bond. The transmission of life is one of the fundamental tasks of a woman and a man, who are also required to fulfil the educational function. Introducing the young generation to the norms and realities of collective life, teaches responsibility for other people and respect for the elderly. The family also cares for the attitude of its members, ensuring their emotional balance, as well as assistance in the event of illness or old age. The Muslim family model, in addition to cultivating religious and moral values, imposes on its members' rights and obligations towards each other, as well as responsibility for the younger and respect for the elders [16].

Islam distinguishes two types of family: a small family - consisting only of a married couple and children, and an extended family, which includes, in addition to a small family, other small families of relatives and seniors of the family who run one household together. Today, the large family model dominates, where strong psychological, social and economic ties are formed. It results from the teaching of religion, which requires maintaining contacts and mutual help for relatives and elders. The most common community is a three-generation family, consisting of grandparents, i.e. seniors of the family, parents and children living together. Living three generations together in one house, and in the case of nomadic communities in one tent, significantly emphasizes the interdependence of family members. In addition to living together, a strong bond between multigenerational families is evidenced by the habit of eating together. And although each age, i.e. children, parents and seniors, has different functions to fulfil, the home community is only then full, mutually enriching and supporting [17].

2.4. Respect for the elderly

Muslim communities in the Middle East, brought up in the patriarchal tradition, with respect for the elders of the family and tribe, show due respect to elders and people of a certain social position. In direct phrases, titles related to state or honor are used: *sajjid* - mister, *sajjida* - lady (married woman), *anisa* - miss, *ustaz* - professor, master, teacher, *ustaza* - professor, mistress. These phrases are used not only by unrelated people, but often also by children or

grandchildren who show respect for the elderly in the family in this way. The way of everyday life of the inhabitants of the Middle East, as well as extensive, large and multi-generational families, resulted in the development of specific polite phrases towards the elders, which are some kind of nicknames that often replace real names. Mr. Mahmud, who is Rashid's father, the son's friends will call or refer to him as Abu Rashid, which means Rashid's father. Similarly, Mrs. Fatima, who is Amira's mother, will be referred to as Umm Amira, and thus Amira's mother [18]. That is why it is often difficult for representatives of the Muslim community to understand the excessive familiarity of young people with older people of high social status, characteristic of European Latin culture. Shortening the distance in interpersonal relationships and switching to informal 'you' is virtually unacceptable in traditional Muslim communities.

Respect for elders is influenced by the hierarchical structure of Muslim families. The extended family is a model for children in how to relate and treat other members of the community. Authority is enjoyed not only by the father or senior of the family, but also by the older siblings, caring for younger children. Tradition says: "An older brother has the same rights over a younger brother as a father has over a son" [18]. Due to his position in Muslim culture, a man primarily acts as a family protector, in line with the command of Muhammad, who said: "A man is the guardian of his family and he is responsible for it" [19], while accepting I assume the obligations of being: grandfather, husband, father, son, brother. The rights and duties of men in the Muslim community follow from the teaching of the Qur'an: "Men stand over women because they give away from their property ..." (4,24) [4, p. 110].

The social hierarchy in force in the Muslim tradition is not limited only to the principles related to patriarchalism. An important part of the social structure are elderly people who have reached a good age and with it gained life experience. Such persons are respected not only because of their life expectancy, but also because, according to the tradition of Islam, they enjoy a special status with Allah himself. For this reason, the community makes every effort to ensure that their opinions are respected and various postulates are taken into account. The principles of showing respect towards seniors are found in the Qur'an itself and in the Tradition of Muhammad. The Prophet said, "He who cannot respect the elders is not one of us" (Hadith 1919) [20], meaning that such a person is not worthy of being called a Muslim. It is unacceptable to mistreat the elderly, as well as use physical violence against them. In addition, the Qur'an repeatedly emphasizes the need to respect the elderly because such action is seen as serving God Himself.

The importance of seniors for the community is emphasized in the principles of savoir vivre. During speeches and speeches, the oldest person takes the floor first, regardless of their position in the community. In intergenerational discussions, significant differences of opinion on specific topics appear particularly often. Even then, the young debater is obliged to speak in a moderate tone. In the Muslim tradition, raising a voice to an older person is seen as a lack of upbringing and no respect for seniors. The authority of the head of

the family also manifests itself in the behaviour of adult sons who do not light a cigarette in the presence of the doyen.

3. Women - seniors of families

The home in the Islamic tradition is not only a safe place of refuge, it is also a community that maintains its bonds. The modern concept of a Muslim house was created on the harem social foundations, in which the ruler's mother was the main governing person. Despite the patriarchal structure of Middle Eastern societies, and the other parts of the Muslim world, and the dependence of women on men, the houses of the followers of Islam are governed by their own laws. To this day, the head of the household is a woman - an elderly woman, mother of adults, often married sons, responsible for running the house and cultivating family traditions. Muslim women, especially the elderly, who are elderly families, are the main housekeepers, and the queens of houses today [21]. It is true that the man is responsible for supporting the family, but the house is managed by the woman. And the older she is, the greater her influence on family policy becomes. The senior woman of the family, with grandchildren, has a significant opinion in the upbringing of the young generation. Usually, conflicts that arise between women living together in the same house, which are the result of a generation gap, concern a disagreement with their mother-in-law or grandmother. It is up to the eldest woman in the family to choose the right candidate for a wife for a son, and often also for a grandson and a husband for a daughter or granddaughter [22].

A mother for Muslims is the greatest sanctity and only in this one case does she destroy the patriarchal tradition of society. Due to her motherhood and the hardships associated with it, especially physical, the mother is surrounded by all the privileges that no man will experience. It is emphasized by the following hadith: "Her husband has the greatest power over a woman, his mother has the greatest power over a man" [18]. Therefore, every Muslim, regardless of gender, should give special respect to his mother. This is, of course, the child's duty to the parent, but it also becomes a great merit for God. The poet wrote: "Remember your sinless childhood when you huddled in the arms of your mother helpless, tiny and weak. Look, today she is helpless, alone and sick. Do not hurt her, open the heart of a mighty husband - a poor old woman." [23] These words indicate the important role played by the doyen of the family in society. They also emphasize the grandmother's ethos in the proper development of all family members and the functioning of the family.

4. Care for seniors

The Qur'an teaches respect for parents. It should be clearly emphasized that it is to be shown by children not only in the childhood and adolescence period, but for the rest of their parents' lives. Islam compares this duty to the respect shown to Allah Himself: "And we commanded a man as to his parents,

the mother bore him amidst many hardships (...). Be grateful to me (Allah) and your parents" (31,14) [4, p. 552]. Showing gratitude to parents is expressed in many ways: most often by expressing verbal thanks for the upbringing effort, as well as through deeds and proper behaviour, especially during the parents' old age or illness [24].

The responsibility of caring for elderly parents rests with the children and is the best form of gratitude for their upbringing: "And if one or both of them has reached old age with you, do not tell them 'away' and push them, but speak to them with respectful words! Lean the wing of meekness towards them, through mercy and say: "My Lord, be merciful to them, as they were, bringing me up when I was little" (17,24) [4, p. 371]. Respect and gratitude expressed in patience and gentleness are due to both parents, regardless of their religion. Children are responsible for their parents and are obliged to provide them with personal care. This responsibility does not allow the parents to be sent to a retirement home. There is a punishment for wrongdoing against the parents in the next life: "He will not recognize Paradise by breaking family ties" [23]. The responsibility of children to their parents increases with the age of both parties. The older the parents get, the more they need to be cared for. The law requires that the mother and father be provided with food, as well as a roof over their heads, when they are unable to provide for it themselves. The religious duty of the offspring is to do everything so that the parents' lives are as little burdensome as possible: "And part of thanksgiving for goodness is gratitude to parents and to all those who do good to you, because whoever does not thank people does not thank Allah" [20]. The teaching of Islam emphasizes that caring for elderly parents and other family members in the most difficult period of their lives is perceived as an honour, a blessing and an opportunity to achieve spiritual development. Perhaps for this reason, 'retirement homes' or care for the elderly are rare in the Muslim world. Islam even imposes on its faithful the obligation to live together with seniors, who should be part of the family for the rest of their lives. Man, especially the old, often sick and infirm, needs not only to provide basic life functions, such as food, clothes and a place to sleep. The emotional aspect is also important, i.e. love, care, tenderness and family companionship [25].

5. Euthanasia

The classical teaching of Islam emphasizes the value and respect shown for human life, regardless of origin, age or race. Often, Muslim communities show the lack of respect for the elderly, sick and infirm, present in the Latin world, which has developed various methods of getting eliminate of people in need of care from the environment. Islam is unequivocally opposed to any form of shortening human life. Euthanasia is also assessed negatively, which Muslim thinkers perceive as an invention of Western societies to eliminate the sick and the elderly from society [26]. The Qur'an teaches, "Don't kill yourselves! Surely Allah is Merciful to you!" (4,29) [4, p. 111] Therefore, euthanasia and suicide

were unequivocally condemned at the First International Conference on Muslim Medicine in Kuwait in 1981. The Muslim Code of Medical Ethics was then adopted, based on the guidelines contained in the Qur'an and the Tradition of Muhammad. In addition, it was emphasized that science and modern technologies should be used for the benefit of mankind, and not be a tool to destroy it [25].

Euthanasia in Arabic is *maut rahim* and means 'death out of pity', it can also be referred to as *katl rahim*, which means 'mercy killing' and is an act or omission to hasten the end of life in order to stop the pain and suffering accompanying incurable disease [27]. The forum of Muslim doctors during many medical conferences has repeatedly emphasized that no doctor can take part in interrupting a patient's life, even if the motive for his actions was compassion for the sufferer. Furthermore, Muslim doctors believe that taking a life in an illness cannot be called pity. In Muslim countries, making euthanasia or assisting in suicide is punishable, although it says less importance than murder and manslaughter [26, 28].

All hardships and sufferings with which a person is burdened during earthly life are a test of faith in God. For this reason, religion requires the believer to be optimistic in life and not to run away from or submit to problems when faced with difficulties. Human life in Islam is sacred and is owned not by man, but by God. Therefore, man cannot dispose of it, and thus cannot demand its shortening, nor help in ending another life. Modern medicine recommends alleviating the sufferings associated with age and old age [29]. Islam does not oblige its believers to accept suffering because of the mere experience of hardships and inconveniences associated with it, although scholars see suffering as an opportunity for spiritual development. As in the Christian tradition, in Islam the model of patience in accepting suffering is Job, known in the Muslim tradition under the name of Ayub, about whom the Qur'an teaches: "And Job ... when he called his Lord: Here I am afflicted, and You are the Most Merciful of the Merciful!" (21,83) [4, p. 437] There are also theories among modern Muslim scholars that a terminally ill person gains a chance to redeem his sins by accepting suffering. Interestingly, the mere reception of suffering by a sick person exerts a moral influence on the environment, especially those caring for the suffering [25].

6. Physical limitations of seniors

Old age also brings with it limitations, especially in the physical dimension. And although religious duties do not change with the age of the believer, the religious community makes every effort to facilitate the practice of worship by seniors. An elderly person may use a chair while praying, and at the same time is relieved of the practice of bowing, also known as crawling. People who are chronically ill and lying in bed can also pray in a horizontal position. It is also recommended that the imam, who presides over the prayer in which the elderly participate, select short fragments of the Qur'an so as not to prolong the

communal prayer [17]. Another simplification of the implementation of religious duties for seniors is the freedom in the practices related to ritual fasting during the month of Ramadan. Islam imposes on the faithful the need to refrain from eating, drinking and sexual activities from sunrise to sunset. However, such a restrictive obligation may be difficult for old people to fulfil. Therefore, religious law gives the senior the freedom to choose how he or she wishes to fulfil this religious ritual. A popular form of replacing fasting with works of mercy is to provide food for the poor. A ritual pilgrimage to Mecca, which should be made at least once in a lifetime by every believer, also requires good physical condition and a stable state of health. If, for various reasons, a man is unable to do so, he is not punished for failure to do so. However, it is possible to ask another person to undertake this task on behalf of an elderly, sick or infirm person [6].

7. Conclusions

According to Islam, old age is closely connected with the belief that everything was created by God, and at the same time it belongs to his plan. According to the principles of religion, God's will should be accepted and carried out. Also, any limitations related to the aging process, a decline in physical form, a slow loss of the ability to learn and remember quickly, as well as changes in the body of an elderly person should be treated with dignity. At the same time, Islam strongly emphasizes the importance of seniors for the entire community. It emphasizes their experience and life wisdom, at the same time pointing to the elderly as an invaluable source of knowledge from which one should be greedily drawn. Express thanks for this wisdom is the commitment of the younger generation to the respect shown to their elders. Elderly people take their rightful place in the community, because as years ago they took care of their children, in their old age they should repay their parents and grandparents the same. It should be noted that Islam indicates the authority of the elderly, regardless of their religion.

Ethical obligations towards the elderly should be an example to be followed by the younger generations, regardless of their religion. There is currently a worrying trend in Europe whereby seniors are placed in nursing homes. A common argument that justifies this behaviour of young people is that they have to work a lot and cannot look after their elderly parents. The view that condemns euthanasia is also relevant, as it can be considered a kind of murder committed in the name of the law, as well as a kind of cowardice and an escape from problems that need to be solved. The obligations of the young generation towards seniors should be marked by care for their well-being. Then, seniors will stay healthy and fit for many years and will be able to share their life wisdom.

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