

Evidence Based Review on the Effect of Islamic Dietary Law Towards Human Development

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Abstract

Food is necessary for human's survival. Human beings become more health-conscious in consuming foods and drinks. This is to promote healthy lifestyle and prevent from illness caused by food consumption. Healthy lifestyle starts since the beginning of the time and dietary practices is connected with religious practices. Islam has acknowledges the importance of consuming food to nourish the body and mind. In this paper researcher will explain the connection of consuming food according to Islamic rules towards human development; intellect, akhlak, moral and psychology. Result from the analysis indicated that, consumption of food does surely affect human development on akhlaq, moral and psychology. If one choose an unhealthy lifestyle or consume haram food which Allah has prohibited, one may suffer health difficulties, resulting in stress and exhaustion physically and spiritually. Establishing Islam does not only means establishing mosques, Islamic centers and schools, but also establishing Muslims economically, politically as well as physically. When we put good things in our body, then only good things will come to our life. Allah's command to consume halal food is not merely related to Ibadah which entails the relationship between He and His creations, but also has wisdom behind it that is surely giving benefits to humankind. Halal food consumption can lead people to healthy lifestyle and give positive growth to human development.

Keywords: Food; Islam; Intellect; Moral; Psychology.

1. Introduction

In this postmodern era, human beings become more health-conscious in consuming foods and drinks. This is to promote healthy lifestyle and prevent from illness caused by food consumption. Healthy lifestyle starts since the beginning of the time and dietary practices is connected with religious practices. *Halal* food consumption is one of the principles set by Islam to determine the level of faith and it is also an act of worshipping Allah by doing what is obligated and preventing what is prohibited (Ghazali & Md. Sawari, 2014). Halal can be defined as permissible and lawful. Allah says about the consumption of *halal* and nutrients food in Surah Al-Baqarah, verse 168, "Ye people! Eat of what is on earth lawful and good" (Al-Baqarah: 168). In another verse, Al-Quran urges people to eat the best type of food "Eat of the good things with which We have provided you..." (Al- Araf: 160). Besides that, Allah says in Surah Al-Ma'idah,

They ask you what is lawful to them (as food). Say: Lawful unto you are (all) things good and pure: and what you have taught your trained hunting animals (to catch) in the manner directed to you by Allah: eat what they catch for you, but pronounce the name of Allah over it: and fear Allah; for Allah is swift in taking account. (Al-Ma'idah:4)

Therefore, based on what Allah says in these three beautiful verses, Allah provides His creations with *halal* and lawful things as there are benefits and pleasure to human's body and mind. Islam is a holistic system that impacts all areas of a person's life. Hence, the consumption of halal food does not only meet the demand of religion but it also leads to positive outcomes in *ibadah*, ethics and morality (*akhlaq*), human intellect, health as well as psychology (Md. Sawari, Mustapha, & Ghazali, 2014).

2. Effect Towards Akhlak and Moral

It is believed that a good Muslim will be devoted towards Islam, follows and practices the principles set by Islam in daily living, including consuming Halal food. Health is a blessing and responsibility from Allah Almighty and therefore, we should take care of it as it affects all areas of our lives. If we are healthy then we can think more clearly, we can have more energy, and we are even stronger physically and not to mention, psychologically. However, at the same time, people often neglect their health and fall victim to all kinds of things like fatigue, psychological and spiritual struggles, and even cloudy thought.

Akramulla Syed (2011) has defined *akhlaq* as the practice of virtue, morality and good manner. It is further defined as Islamic behavior, character, good conduct, nature, temper, ethics, morals or character of a person. This definition is supported by the saying of Saidina Ali (r.a) that "Good behavior lies in three traits: Avoiding unlawful things, acquiring the lawful ones, and being fair to one's family members" (Akramulla Syed, 2011). Donna Ricketts (n.d) has written on 'The Effects of Good Nutrition on Children's Behavior' through Healthy Eating Website about certain food that can trigger chemical and physiological changes within the brain that alter child's behavior, according to U.S. News and World Report Health. She has stated that children could experience mood swings which cause them to become cranky, tired and depressed, which can influence their behavior, if they do not get sufficient amount of carbohydrates, iron and omega-3 fatty acids, or consumes too much fat.

Apart from that, modern scientists have done extensive research and have concluded that the roots of many diseases lie in excess food not being absorbed and remaining in the body. So, the best way is to avoid too much food. These modern studies are in line with what Allah has said in the Quran, "O Children of Adam! Wear your beautiful apparel at every time and place of prayer: eat and drink: but waste not by excess, for Allah loves not the wasters". (Al-A'raf :31)

Gluttony, according to Shaykh Muhammad Saalih al-Munajjid (2014) is one of the greatest sins that has given trouble to people as it can deteriorate one's health physically and spiritually. It can be classified as one's desire towards worldly matters and can negatively affect their *akhlaq* for instance showing off, envy, immodesty and arrogance. Desire, in most cases often leads to evil and immorality as stated by the old Arabic saying "The stomach is the home of disease and restraint is the basis of the remedy".

Furthermore, the Sunnah of Prophet also encourages moderation in eating, and strongly criticizes extravagance in every action. Narrated by al-Tirmidhi, Prophet Muhammad (s.a.w) said:

"The son of Adam does not fill any vessel worse than his stomach. It is sufficient for the son of Adam to eat a few mouthfuls, to keep him going. If he must do that (fill his stomach), then let him fill one third with food, one third with drink and one third with air".

Halal food consumption does not only entail on what we eat but also the etiquette on consuming the food. Moderation in eating is strongly encouraged in the Quran and Sunnah of the Prophet. Shaykh Muhammad Saalih al-Munajjid (2014) has further explained that one of the most dangerous things that may give trouble to the son of Adam to Hell is the desire of his belly, as the belly is the basis of all other desires and the core of all problems and diseases. Moreover, Allah shows His Mercy by guiding His slaves to consume foods and drinks which are enough to support their body, and advising them from being extravagant to preserve their health.

3. Effect Towards Human Intellect

Food is necessary for human's survival. Islam has acknowledges the importance of consuming food to nourish the body and mind. When the human body is healthy, it is indirectly will contribute towards healthy mind (Amatullah Abdullah, 2011). To understand more on the effect of halal food consumption towards human intellect, people need to first consider the reasons behind Allah's prohibition for taking *haram* food. Idris Tawfiq (2013) in his article 'Why Is Alcohol Forbidden?' has stated that human being without faith or not enough faith tend to dull their senses and cloud their judgement by consuming alcohol and drugs only to forget the harsh realities of life, their sorrows and allowing them to enjoy a brief

moment of happiness without realizing that they have taken something harmful into their body. All *haram* things are harmful. That is why Islam has a total prohibition on them. It shows that Allah cares for His creations by giving advices to avoid harm and to do good things that will benefit themselves. Allah never asks beyond one's limit. It can be proven when His injunction against alcohol was delivered in stages. At first, the Muslims were told in the Qur'an that there was some good to be found in alcohol, but that this was outweighed by the bad:

They ask you concerning alcohol and gambling. Say: 'In them is a great sin, and some benefits for men, but the sin is far greater than the benefits. (Al-Baqarah: 219)

After the revelation of this verse, people began to argue whether drinking alcohol was the best thing for them to do, even though it was not yet forbidden, and many stopped drinking from this time onward. They began to see drunkenness as something shameful and not befitting the high moral standards of which Muslims were called to be the best examples. In the next stage, another revelation was received which told them that they should not turn up drunk for the prayers in the mosque "O you who believe! Approach not prayers with a mind befogged, until you can understand all that you say"- (An-Nisa':43)

This Quranic verse shows that when people were clouded by strong drink, they cannot concentrate on praising Allah. Finally, a verse was revealed to the Muslims in Madinah which totally forbade alcohol:

"You who believe! Intoxicants and gambling, (dedication of) stones, and (divination by) arrows, are an abomination of Satan's handiwork. Eschew such abomination, that you may prosper. Satan's plan is (but) to excite enmity and hatred between you, with intoxicants and gambling, and hinder you from the remembrance of Allah, and from prayer; will you not then abstain?". (Al-Ma'idah 5:90-91)

These three stages show that Allah discourages and prohibits the Muslims away from what was harmful to them. At first, He said that intoxicants did have some good but was mostly bad. Then Allah hinted that it might not be good since it would affect their prayers. Finally, Allah declared it to be the work of Satan.

Likewise, recent medical and scientific studies have shown negative effect of alcohol. Consuming alcohol acts as a depressant to the nervous system and it can cause shrinking of the brain and lead to senility. Alcohol can also affect the digestive system, cause high blood pressure. Even if it is taken in small amounts, it can increase the risk of brain hemorrhage and strokes, or affect sleep patterns. Therefore, the answer to the prohibition is very clear that it gives harmful to human being. Consuming alcohol even in small amount often leads to drunkenness and a lowering of one's guard, which in turn leads to other bad behaviors. Alcohol has also torn apart families and broken many lives and careers (Idris Tawfiq, 2013).

Quoted by Idris Tawfiq (2013) from the same article, he stated that Brother Mohsen Haredy, a previous member of Ask about Islam Editorial Staff said that Islam prohibited alcohol and drugs, whether they are taken in much or little amounts. If a person is allowed to take the little, the much will be taken later. This prohibition is based on the Shari'ah objective of maintaining and keeping safe one's mind. `Abdullah ibn `Umar reported that:

"I heard `Umar (ibn Al-Khattab) while he was on the pulpit of the Prophet saying, "Now then O people! The revelation about the prohibition of alcoholic drinks was revealed, and alcoholic drinks are extracted from five things: grapes, dates, honey, wheat, and barley. And the alcoholic drink is that which confuses and stupefies the mind." (Al-Bukhari).

Suzana Nabil Saad (2014) in her writing 'Understanding Islam: Pursuit of Happiness, Stay Away from Vice & Believe in Islam' stated that heavy drinking can also lead to subtle but potentially devastating, deficits in the ability to plan, make judgments, solve problems, and perform other higher-order abilities. Therefore, whatever Allah has prohibited us from doing it is only for our own benefit.

According to Akramulla Syed (2011), it would be impossible for a man to distinguish between good and evil, right and wrong, true and false if the man did not have the power of reason. Therefore, the power of reason can only be achieved if one is able to differentiate between what is benefit and what is harm.

Donna Ricketts (n.d) from Healthy Eating Website has stated the report from The Prevention Institute which testified that good nutrition does not only contributes to young children's physical development, but also affects their cognitive development as well. Apart from that, children who consume unhealthy foods can have trouble concentrating, become easily fatigued, irritable and are likely to face difficulties in learning, which can lead to behavioral and social problems. Therefore, American Psychological Association has established that healthy eating lifestyles in early age can lead to good behavior as people move into adulthood.

Shaykh Muhammad Saalih al-Munajjid (2014) added in his writing 'Ahaadeeth of the Prophet (s.a.w) which criticize extravagance with regard to food' that scholars have agreed that the benefits of moderation in consuming food includes the purification of heart, mental alertness and deep insight. Satiety or the state of being full always causes futility and blinded the heart. There is a proverb which says "The one whose stomach is hungry will become able to think deeply and his intelligence will improve".

4. Effect Towards Towards Psychology

Our health is a blessing and responsibility from Allah Almighty and the level at which we take care of it affects all areas of our lives. If we are healthy then we think more clearly, we have more energy, and we are even stronger psychologically (Md. Sawari, Mustapha, & Ghazali, 2014).

Recently, more and more studies are pointing at the importance of proper nutrients consumption for psychological behavior, be it mental, social or cognitive behaviors. Amira Ayad (2014) through her article 'Diet & Human Behavior: Is our Food to Blame?' has mentioned about previous studies conducted on young adult prisoners. The result of the study shows that multivitamins, minerals and essential fatty acids lead to reduction in their anti-social behavior, violence and aggression. Besides that, significant improvement among school children who receives essential fatty acids daily for six months have also been reported. The progresses are reported in terms of their restlessness, aggressiveness, completing work, and academic performance. Another research report shows significant improvement after eight weeks in British middle managers' activity, mood, cognitive and behavioral strain, and stress management when they were given dietary supplements to compensate for missing nutrients in their diet.

There are lot of studies which prove a significant correlation between the type of food we choose to eat and our mental health. Typical modern-day diet, according to Amira Ayad (2014) from the same article, is very poor in nutritional value yet very high in calories. Studies show that this type of diet is not only directly related to cardiovascular problems, inflammatory and chronic diseases, but it is also directly related to stress, mood disturbance, irritability, lack of motivation, inappropriate social behaviors, low cognitive performance and poor memory. Increase consumption of processed and refined foods lead to anxiety. Low intake of fruits, vegetable, dairy and good quality meat is related to increased stress levels. Daily consumption of sweets and candy at the age of ten may lead to increase violence behavior in adulthood. Eating junk food at the young age of 4 is associated with hyperactivity and behavior problems in childhood as well as later in life. Omega-3 fatty acids deficiency is linked to depression and dementia, and omega-3 supplements prevent aggression and hostility, control anger and improve social behavior.

The blood sugar level is another element that affects one's mood swings, anxiety and irritability. Hypoglycemia (low BSL) drains one's energy and depresses his/her mood and vitality, while hyperglycemia (high BSL) influences people to obesity, diabetes and uncomfortable mood swings. That is why when blood sugar is low, people are more fidgety, anxious, and stress and therefore, crave sweets and stimulants. Instant sweets are not good for health because it can start a vicious cycle of swinging blood levels of insulin and sugar which further disturbs mood, increases stress, and predisposes to diabetes. Also raising our adrenaline through caffeine or nicotine intensifies stress and anxiety, and, on the long run, affects blood pressure, heart, and immunity. For an ideal performance and optimum state of mind, we need first and foremost to balance our blood sugar level (Amira Ayad, 2014).

Amino acid on the other hand, helps in synthesizing the level serotonin, the mood boosting neurotransmitter. A constant supply of amino acid is very important as low serotonin levels are linked to suicidal tendency, depression, violence and aggressive behaviors. Apart from that, vitamins are important for metabolism and nervous system health. For example, vitamin B6 is known to reduce risk and treat premenstrual depression. Vitamin C, E and A are essential for nerve cell health and vitamin K plays its role in nervous tissue biochemistry. Lack of vitamins creates problems to health. For instance, vitamin B12 deficiency is linked to dementia while vitamin D deficiency is linked to depression and neurodegenerative diseases. In addition, iron deficiency is linked to depression and depleted energy (Amira Ayad, 2014).

Research performed in British and US prisons has shown positive results on prisoners' aggressive and anti-social behaviors through dietary intervention. This positive affect can be achieved by consuming whole natural food in a balanced diet rather than nutrients in capsules and pills. Natural foods are whole grains, fruits and vegetables, nuts, seeds, legumes and etc. processed food with added preservatives, colours or flavors, energy drinks and caffeine should be avoided.

Felicity Lawrence (2006) has written about a study conducted in a high-security prison for young offenders in the UK. The study has shown that violent behaviour may be attributing to nutritional deficiencies. It has been proven when the number of violent offences that young men from Aylesbury jail committed in the prison fell by 37% when young men were fed multivitamins, minerals and essential fatty acids. Apart from that, new claim were made by the Dutch

government that fish oil has improved behaviour and reduced aggression among children with some of the most severe behavioral difficulties in the UK. Joseph Hibbeln, a clinician in charge of the US study believes that deficiency in the essential fats the brain needs and the nutrients needed to process those fats is causing of a host of mental problems from depression to aggression. Therefore, the studies show that junk food may not only be making us sick, but mad and bad too.

The timing is also important in a balanced diet. One needs to eat fish at least once or twice a week to supply the need for omega-3 fatty acids. Eating balanced healthy three meals a day with two snacks in between supply people with the needed energy and nutrients to sustain their health and adjust their mood. Skip meals especially breakfast should be avoided.

Modern studies are in line with Islamic teaching on the consumption of *halal* food. Traditional Books of Prophetic medicine has talked about one of the best mood soothing foods which is '*Talbinah*', a thin barley soup made with barley flour and adjusted to a milky consistency. It can be sweetened with honey or served as savory soup with added spices. Regarding this kind of food, Aishah narrated,

If any of the Messenger's family became ill, the Messenger (s.a.w) would recommend *Talbinah* to be prepared. He says: "It soothes the grief and cleanses the ailing heart just as one of you cleans dirt off her face with water" (Ibn Maajah).

Recent studies have proven the effect of *Talbinah* which show its significant effect in boosting mental health, relieving depression and anxiety and balancing the mood (Amira Ayad, 2014).

5. Conclusion

In conclusion, everything that Allah has made to us halal is very beneficial for our life (Ghazali & Md. Sawari, 2014). So do the haram things. Allah prohibits in order protecting us from any harm and impurity. A Muslim is not required to know exactly why or how something is unclean or harmful in what Allah has prohibited (). There might be obvious reasons and there might be obscure reasons. Thus, the only thing that we can do is to follow the guidelines according to Islamic teaching such as eating halal food to give us the strength to carry out acts of worship and obedience. The body mankind has been blessed with is an Amanah (trust) from Allah. It is an obligation to take care of it and fuel it with that which is good.

The consumption of food does surely affect human development on akhlaq, moral and psychology. If one choose an unhealthy lifestyle or consume haram food which Allah has prohibited, one may suffer health difficulties, resulting in stress and exhaustion physically and spiritually. As a consequence, one will fail to obey Him in performing basic religious duties. Establishing Islam does not only means establishing mosques, Islamic centers and schools, but also establishing Muslims economically, politically as well as physically. When we put good things in our body, then only good things will come to our life.

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