

Effect of Diet on Infant's Health and Child's Upbringing: The Islamic View

Point

Fayokemi, Adigun Wasilat

Department of Liberal Arts (Islamic Studies Unit), School of Humanities, Bamidele Olumilua
University of Education, Science and Technology, Ikere, Nigeria.

Abstract

This paper examines the effect of diet on infant's health and child upbringing from an Islamic perspective, using Nigeria as a case study. It examines how modern scientific research supports the health benefits prescribed in Islamic teachings, showcasing the alignment between religion and science regarding infant health and child's development. The study also examines how adherence to Islamic dietary laws influences infant health, child development, and parenting practices as Islamic teachings emphasize balanced nutrition and proper child's upbringing through breastfeeding, the weaning process, and the introduction of solid foods, as well as the moral and ethical responsibilities of parents in enhancing child's physical, emotional, and cognitive development. The research employed a mixed-method approach which combine both qualitative and quantitative methods, thereby, a total of 506 participants were selected from Muslim-majority communities in Nigeria using stratified random sampling. Data were gathered through Questionnaires which were administered to 256 parents (fathers and mothers), 150 public health workers, and 100 individuals from the general public. The questionnaire captured demographic details, adherence to Islamic dietary guidelines, health outcomes in children, and parenting practices. Unstructured interviews were also conducted with Islamic scholars and nutritionists to gather qualitative data on the Islamic view of diet and child-rearing. In statistical analysis, descriptive and inferential statistics (Chi-square and regression analysis) were used to analyse the quantitative data. The statistical tests confirm that Islamic dietary practices positively impact infant's health and child upbringing. The strong relationships found between breastfeeding and health outcomes suggest that integrating religious principles into public health policies could lead to improved child nutrition, developmental outcomes, and better parental

engagement. The study concludes with policy recommendations to improve child's health through diet-conscious parenting, informed by both religious and medical perspectives.

Keywords: Diet, Infant's health, Child upbringing, Islamic view point

Introduction

Diet is one of the most significant factors affecting health, impacting both physical and mental well-being. Various scholars have defined diet and explored the relationship between dietary choices and health outcomes, providing diverse perspectives on how specific diets or eating habits can either enhance or compromise health. For instance, the Merriam-Webster Dictionary defined diet as food and drink regularly provided or consumed. According to this Dictionary, the word diet originated from Greek word "diaita", which is derived from the verb "diaitasthan", meaning "to lead one's life". This had already come to be used by more specifically for a way of living prescribed by a physician, a diet, or other regimen.

Campbell and Campbell (2006) also define diet as a key determinant of health, focusing specifically on plant-based nutrition. They view diet as a combination of foods that, when consumed together, have the potential to prevent and even reverse chronic diseases. They describe a "whole-food, plant-based diet" as one that minimizes animal products and processed foods to optimize health. Singer and Mason in their submission define diet as an ethical choice that reflects an individual's values regarding animal welfare, environmental sustainability, and health. They argue that diet encompasses moral decisions, advocating for dietary practices that minimize harm to animals and reduce environmental impact.

Buettner (2015) views diet in the context of longevity and well-being. He describes diet as a lifestyle of eating that is characteristic of long-lived populations, with a focus on whole, plant-based foods, low meat intake, and an emphasis on natural, locally sourced ingredients. Lévi-Strauss (1969) defines diet as a symbolic system within human culture, representing fundamental distinctions between nature and culture. He explains that dietary practices are not just about sustenance but are deeply intertwined with cultural myths, taboos, and societal norms, reflecting a society's values and beliefs. Teicholz (2014), challenges traditional definitions of a "healthy diet," proposing that diet is not simply about low fat and calories but about nutrient balance, including

fats. She argues that dietary guidelines should not exclude fats and that diet should be understood as a balanced intake of all macronutrients, including saturated fats, which she believes are often unfairly demonized.

Lappé (1971) defines diet as a means of social responsibility, especially regarding environmental sustainability and global food security. She advocates for plant-based eating as a way to reduce resource consumption and promote food equity, linking diet with ecological and ethical considerations. These definitions highlight that the concept of diet varies significantly across disciplines, shaped by factors such as health, culture, ethics, and environmental concerns.

Infant diet and child upbringing form the most important factors in determining child's overall health and well-being. Islam, as a comprehensive way of life, provides explicit guidance on the importance of diet, particularly breastfeeding, for infants. Infant feeding practices are not uniform across the globe and differ according to strict cultural interpretations of when and how women should breastfeed and when and with what foods infants should be weaned (UNICEF, 2011).

Studies such as those by Mohammadi et al. (2020) have shown that adherence to religious dietary restrictions positively affects health outcomes. In the context of Nigeria, Adeola (2019) found that socio-cultural factors significantly influence dietary habits and health outcomes in children. However, limited research has been conducted on the specific effects of Islamic dietary practices on infant health and child upbringing.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study is to investigate how Islamic dietary principles affect infant health and child upbringing among Muslim families in Nigeria. It aims to assess whether following Islamic dietary rules contributes to healthier childhood development and stronger parenting practices. Additionally, it seeks to provide evidence-based recommendations for public health policy that incorporate religious and cultural values.

Research Questions

1. To what extent do Islamic dietary practices influence infant health in Nigeria?
2. How do Islamic dietary guidelines shape parenting practices in Muslim families?
3. Is there a correlation between adherence to Islamic dietary principles and overall child development outcomes?
4. What is the role of Islamic teachings in public health approaches to child nutrition in Nigeria?

Hypotheses

H0₁: There is a significant relationship between adherence to Islamic dietary practices and improved infant health in Muslim families.

H0₂: Islamic dietary guidelines positively influence parenting practices related to child upbringing.

H0₃: Adherence to Islamic dietary principles leads to better child development outcomes.

H0₄: Islamic teachings are effective tools for public health campaigns related to child nutrition in Muslim communities.

Literature Review

The review of related literature is inevitable for any study in order to create ideas that are pertinent to the problem formulated. It is seen throughout diverse academic sphere which enable the researchers to choose different approaches to help them effectively and efficiently organize their work. In this review, authors from various disciplines provide unique insights into the ways diet shapes, and is shaped by, individual and societal values. The review thus, centers on three major areas: theoretical, conceptual and empirical review.

Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework for this study is based on ecological systems theory propounded by Bronfenbrenner (1979). This theory suggests that a child's development is influenced by various environmental systems, including family, religion, and societal health practices. In this study, Islamic dietary laws serve as a key component of the child's immediate environment, influencing health and upbringing, that is, the family's adherence to Islamic dietary laws serves as an integral part of the microsystem, directly impacting the child's physical, emotional, ethical, moral and cognitive development of child upbringing.

Conceptual Review

In both general and Islamic literature, the significance of early nutrition and moral education is emphasized, but the approaches differ based on cultural, scientific, and religious foundations. This review highlights empirical research on infant, diet and child upbringing from both general perspectives and Islamic viewpoints, drawing comparisons and highlighting areas of overlap. The term "infant" is widely used but carries multiple meanings depending on context. Linguistically, "infant" originates from the Latin term "infans," meaning "unable to speak." Historically, the term

has been used to denote any young child, with no strict age limit, but over time, it has come to refer more narrowly to new-borns and very young children (Oxford English Dictionary, 2023).

In a broader sense, it refers to the early stage of human life, encompassing important developmental milestones that impact future growth. However, the definition and understanding of infancy vary significantly across fields such as medicine, psychology, law, and sociology, each of which offers unique perspectives on what constitutes an infant and how this stage should be approached. The term "infant" often refers to anyone under the age of majority, which can vary by jurisdiction but is commonly set at 18 years. From a medical standpoint, infancy is viewed as a period of rapid growth where foundational health patterns are established. Physicians emphasize the importance of immunizations, proper nutrition, and developmental screenings during this phase to prevent early health issues and foster overall well-being (WHO, 2021). However, in some legal contexts, such as child protection laws, infancy can be specifically defined as the first two years of life to address the vulnerabilities of the very young (Child Welfare Information Gateway, 2023).

Medically, an infant is typically defined as a child in the first year of life, a period marked by rapid physical and neurological development. According to the American Academy of Pediatrics, infancy is a critical period for the development of motor skills, sensory processing, and foundational cognitive abilities (AAP, 2022). Psychologically, infancy is a stage where attachment and basic trust are formed, shaping a child's social and emotional foundation. Erikson's theory of psychosocial development, for example, identifies infancy as the stage of trust vs. mistrust, where nurturing care from caregivers fosters a sense of security (Erikson, 1950). Sociologically, infancy is seen as a socially constructed category, influenced by cultural norms and family structures.

In many cultures, infants are expected to remain close to their mothers or primary caregivers, reinforcing cultural beliefs about bonding and early development (Keller, 2007). The concept of infancy is rich and multi-dimensional, reflecting varied definitions and perspectives. Each field contributes valuable insights into understanding infancy, from medical care to legal protections. Recognizing these perspectives enhances our approach to supporting infants, ensuring that their developmental needs are met in a holistic manner. This is why infancy today is not only seen as a critical biological stage but also as a socially significant period that requires specialized care and attention.

Child upbringing on the other hand can broadly be defined as the process by which adults guide, support, and educate a child in their journey from infancy to adulthood. It is a multifaceted concept that encompasses the methods and principles through which parents, caregivers, and society nurture and educate the young (Akther, 2020). Effective upbringing involves not only ensuring a child's physical well-being but also fostering their emotional, social, and intellectual growth. This process includes imparting knowledge, instilling discipline, and providing a safe and nurturing environment. Culturally, the term "upbringing" may also imply the transmission of values, traditions, and social norms that align with the family or community (Hoghughi & Long, 2004).

Empirical Review

Infant diet has long been studied for its impact on physical and cognitive development. Breastfeeding, for instance, is universally regarded as the most beneficial form of nutrition for infants. According to Victora et al. (2016), breastfeeding reduces infant mortality, promotes cognitive development, and lowers the risk of certain diseases such as diabetes and obesity. Their large-scale study found that infants exclusively breastfed for six months had a 13% reduced risk of childhood overweight, with similar protective effects against infections. In addition to breastfeeding, complementary feeding practices are essential from 6 months onwards. Research by Dewey and Adu-Afarwuah (2008) found that the introduction of nutritionally balanced complementary foods at the right time leads to better growth outcomes and cognitive development. A delayed or inappropriate introduction of solid foods can lead to malnutrition or stunted growth, as highlighted by Black et al. (2013) in their analysis of global child malnutrition patterns.

In recent years, research on infant diet has expanded beyond breastfeeding to investigate other critical components of early nutrition, such as the role of micronutrients and the timing of food introduction. Complementary feeding practices play a crucial role in preventing malnutrition, particularly in low-income settings. A study by Arikpo et al. (2018) reviewed complementary feeding interventions in developing countries and found that introducing iron-rich and fortified foods in the first year significantly improved hemoglobin levels and reduced anemia rates.

In high-income countries, concerns have shifted toward the rise in childhood obesity, with infant diet being a critical contributing factor. Birch and Anzman (2010) examined the relationship between early feeding practices and the development of unhealthy eating behaviors later in life.

They found that infants who were introduced to solid foods too early or were overfed in infancy were at a higher risk of developing obesity. Their research emphasized the importance of parents' responsiveness to infants' hunger and satiety cues as part of healthy feeding practices. Additionally, the long-term cognitive and educational effects of early nutrition have been explored in detail. Lucas et al. (1998) conducted a longitudinal study examining the cognitive outcomes of children who were breastfed compared to those who were formula-fed. Their findings suggested that children who were breastfed for longer durations scored higher on cognitive tests at age 5, reinforcing the idea that early nutrition plays a critical role in cognitive development.

Child upbringing encompasses a wide range of practices, including cognitive development, emotional regulation, and moral education. Parenting styles, as researched by Baumrind (1967), have a significant impact on children's psychological development. Baumrind identified three major parenting styles - authoritative, authoritarian, and permissive - and found that the authoritative style, characterized by warmth, responsiveness, and firm control, tends to produce the most well-adjusted children. Maccoby and Martin (1983) expanded on Baumrind's work and introduced the concept of uninvolved parenting, which has detrimental effects on children's emotional and social development. Empirical studies also highlight the role of early childhood education in child upbringing. Schweinhart et al. (2005) found that early intervention programs such as the Perry Preschool Project led to long-term positive outcomes in academic achievement, income levels, and reduced crime rates among participants. This study underscores the importance of early childhood education in shaping children's cognitive and socio-emotional development.

Cross-cultural studies offer valuable insights into how parenting styles and child upbringing differ across cultures. LeVine et al. (1994) conducted a comparative study of child-rearing practices in African, American, and European societies, highlighting how cultural values shape parental expectations and behavior. In Western societies, there is often a focus on promoting individualism and self-expression, while in many non-Western cultures, including Islamic contexts, there is greater emphasis on community, respect for authority, and moral conduct. This difference is also reflected in the literature on discipline. While Western research often favors positive reinforcement and reasoning as disciplinary techniques, Islamic teachings advocate for a balanced approach. Discipline is necessary but must be administered with compassion and fairness, as reflected in the Qur'anic verse, "Let there be no compulsion in religion" (Qur'an 2:256). Studies by Yahya (2017)

have shown that Muslim parents often use both religious teachings and modern psychological insights to guide their approach to discipline, ensuring that it promotes moral development rather than fear or resentment.

Islamic Perspectives on Infant Diet and Child Upbringing

In Islamic perspective, infancy and childhood are stages marked by innocence, purity, and potential. According to Islamic law, the life of every individual commences from conception and equally perfected in the womb before birth. In this connection, the Qur'an made it known as it stated thus: "Man we did create from a quintessence (of clay); Then we placed him as (a drop of) sperm in a place of rest (womb), firmly fixed; then we made the sperm into a clot of congealed blood, then of that clot. We made a (foetus) lump; then we made out of that lump bones and clothes the bones with flesh; then we developed out of it another creature. So, blessed be Allah, the Best to create") (Qur'an 23:12-14).

Islam regards children as blessings and trusts from Allah (God), and their care, nurturing, and moral upbringing are essential aspects of faith and worship. The belief in Islam is that, all human beings are born in a state of fitrah, or innate purity (Sahih Muslim, Hadith 2658) indicating that children are born free from sin, but their parent corrupt them in the process of their upbringing. This view establishes a foundation for viewing children as naturally inclined toward goodness, and it is the duty of parents and society to nurture this inclination.

In Islam, Infant health begins with conception inside womb. The foetus at this stage requires special nutrition high in proteins, vitamins and minerals, including calcium (UNICEF, 2005). These nutrients can only be acquired through the mother, who should be well-nourished. It is on this basis that the Qur'an makes it upon the husband to sustain the mother and her child and to increase her share of food and drink so as to remain healthy. It is his duty as well to provide her with psychological care. Islamic law made it clear that both parents should take proper care of their children by paying utmost attention to observing fully their duties towards the children when at foetus, infancy and childhood. A pregnant mother must make sure she does not expose herself to radiation or chemicals that may damage some of the cells or tissues of the foetus, or that may lead to the occurrence of physical deformities (UNICEF, 2005).

Islamic teachings emphasize the necessity of providing a balanced diet through breastfeeding, proper weaning, and complementary feeding as it emphasizes balanced nutrition and the role of

parents in ensuring proper child's upbringing. Infant nutrition is given special importance, with explicit guidelines found in the primary source of Islamic law (Qur'an and Hadith). These guidelines emphasize breastfeeding as the foundation of an infant's diet, as well as the gradual introduction of complementary foods at an appropriate time. Islamic teachings not only focus on the physical health benefits of these dietary practices but also highlight the emotional and spiritual aspects of the mother-child relationship.

In Islam, breastfeeding and the gradual introduction of solid foods are integral aspects of nurturing a child's cognitive development. Islamic teachings emphasize both the nutritional and emotional importance of breastfeeding, promoting a two-year breastfeeding period to support optimal physical and mental growth. The transition to solid foods is likewise guided by principles of balance nutrition, and emotional security, ensuring children's cognitive and intellectual needs are met at every stage. Through these practices, Islam provides a holistic approach to infant and child nutrition that aligns with modern understanding of cognitive development, reinforcing the value of physical, mental, and spiritual well-being in early childhood.

Effect of Breastfeeding on Cognitive Development

The importance of breastfeeding is strongly emphasized as the Qur'an explicitly encourages breastfeeding for two years as a means of nurturing both physical and emotional bonds between mother and child (Qur'an 2:233). A study by Saadeh and Casanovas (2009) on breastfeeding practices in Muslim-majority countries found that adherence to this recommendation is linked to improved child health outcomes. The Islamic approach to infant diet aligns with contemporary scientific findings, supporting exclusive breastfeeding during the first six months of life. Islamic scholars also discuss the importance of halal and tayyib (pure and wholesome) food in a child's diet. Empirical research by Shabbir et al. (2015) suggests that adherence to halal dietary practices promotes not only spiritual well-being but also reduces exposure to certain health risks by avoiding harmful substances, such as pork and alcohol, which are prohibited in Islam.

Islam's endorsement of breastfeeding is aligned with modern research demonstrating the cognitive benefits of breast milk. Breast milk contains essential nutrients that support brain development, such as omega-3 fatty acids (DHA) and other bioactive components that contribute to an infant's cognitive functioning. In Islam, these benefits are acknowledged through the encouragement of extended breastfeeding, which is believed to support a child's mental and intellectual capabilities.

Breastfeeding fosters a close emotional bond between mother and child, which is crucial for cognitive and emotional well-being. This bond is essential, as the presence of warmth, security, and love in early life is believed to positively influence a child's mental growth. The Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) emphasized kindness and compassion toward children, recognizing that emotional security forms the basis for healthy intellectual development. In this context, breastfeeding becomes more than nourishment; it is a source of comfort and reassurance that enhances cognitive and psychological resilience.

Child upbringing is also seen as a holistic process encompassing spiritual, moral, intellectual, and physical development. The Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) emphasized the importance of teaching children's good manners, honesty, and respect. In one of his ahadith, the Prophet said, "The best gift a father can give to his child is good upbringing" (Tirmidhi, Hadith 1952). Research by Bouhdiba (1998) highlights how Islamic upbringing promotes moral and ethical behavior by instilling values such as empathy, modesty, and respect for elders from an early age. This is reflected in the Islamic practice of naming (Aqiqah), circumcision for boys, and teaching the child to pray, which fosters a strong spiritual foundation. Furthermore, parenting in Islam places significant emphasis on discipline, but it must be tempered with love and mercy. The Islamic concept of tarbiyah involves nurturing a child's personality to develop a balanced and righteous individual.

Research by Al-Attas (1979) discusses tarbiyah as a means of intellectual and moral development, arguing that Islamic education aims to shape individuals who are conscious of their moral responsibilities and capable of contributing positively to society. Islamic teachings place strong emphasis on early childhood education, known as tarbiyah, which extends beyond academic knowledge to include moral, spiritual, and emotional growth. According to the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH), parents are the first and most important educators of their children. He said, "Each of you is a shepherd, and each of you is responsible for your flock" (Sahih Bukhari, Hadith 893). This highlights the Islamic principle that parenting involves comprehensive care for both the spiritual and material well-being of the child. Research by Nasr (1993) on Islamic educational principles highlights the role of parents in fostering a balanced upbringing that includes both religious teachings and practical life skills. In particular, Islamic education emphasizes the importance of teaching children about their responsibilities to God, family, and society from an

early age. This creates a sense of moral accountability that guides children's behavior as they grow. Another key component of Islamic upbringing is the cultivation of good manners, as reflected in the concept of akhlaq. Al-Ghazali (1993) in his work *Ihya Ulum al-Din* discusses how moral training begins in early childhood and continues throughout life. He asserts that parents should lead by example, teaching virtues such as honesty, patience, humility, and generosity. Empirical research by Sarwar (2016) supports the notion that early childhood exposure to moral and religious education has lasting effects on behavior, emotional intelligence, and social competence.

Transition from Breastfeeding to Solid Foods

The Qur'an provides a general framework for introduction of solid foods and weaning, suggesting that, it should be a gentle process based on the child's readiness. The Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) emphasized the need to avoid abrupt transitions, which can cause stress and hinder cognitive development. By gradual introduction of solid foods, parents are encouraged to ensure that children receive both the emotional comfort of breastfeeding and the nutritional benefits of solid food. This process is understood to respect the developmental stages of the child, ensuring that their nutritional and cognitive needs are met in harmony with natural growth. The Qur'an suggests that a full nursing period lasts around two years, after which parents may begin to introduce solid foods to support further development (Qur'an 31:14).

Islam places significant importance on a balanced diet, and introducing wholesome, nutritious foods during weaning is seen as essential for a child's growth and intellectual development. Foods that are rich in vitamins, minerals, and essential nutrients are encouraged in Islamic teachings, which align with modern science's understanding of how proper nutrition supports memory, attention, and learning abilities in children. Traditional foods in Islamic culture, like dates and honey, are praised for their health benefits, and they can be introduced in moderation as part of a balanced diet that aids cognitive growth.

The Islamic approach to diet emphasizes moderation and balance, which are crucial for cognitive health. A balanced diet in early childhood - rich in fruits, vegetables, grains, proteins, and essential fats, calcium and minerals support brain development and cognitive functions such as memory learning and concentration. Foods rich in vitamins A, C, and E, along with iron and zinc, are encouraged in Islamic dietary practices, as they help enhance mental alertness and cognitive function.

Additionally, Islamic teachings encourage gratitude for food and mindful eating, fostering positive attitudes toward nourishment. By introducing children to a variety of wholesome foods, parents fulfill the Islamic duty of providing for their physical and mental well-being, ultimately supporting a child's cognitive and intellectual growth.

The Qur'an and Hadith (the sayings and practices of the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him), underscore the value of infants and children within the family structure. For example, the Qur'an encourages kindness and care toward children, as illustrated in verses emphasizing the nurturing and protective roles of parents (Qur'an 31:14; Qur'an 46:15). Children are seen not only as dependents but as individuals with intrinsic worth and a right to be treated with dignity and compassion. Islam emphasizes the protection of children's rights, their well-being, and ethical development, viewing infants and children as innocent beings deserving of compassion, respect, and guidance. Parents are viewed as the primary guardians responsible for raising children in accordance with Islamic values. The family unit plays a vital role in shaping a child's character, imparting values, and providing guidance.

The Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) taught that each parent is responsible for the moral and spiritual well-being of their children when he said: "Each of you is a shepherd, and each of you is accountable for his or her flock" (Sahih al-Bukhari, Hadith 5188). Islamic teachings encourage both religious and practical education for children, guiding them in understanding their faith and fulfilling their potential. The Qur'an and Hadith emphasize the importance of knowledge, making it obligatory upon every Muslim (Sunan Ibn Majah, Hadith 224). Islam encourages intellectual growth and the pursuit of knowledge from a young age. The Quran emphasizes the importance of seeking knowledge and understanding, as illustrated in verses like "My Lord, increase me in knowledge" (Qur'an 20:114) and "Are those who have knowledge equal to those who do not?" (Qur'an 39:9). This encouragement underscores the value that Islam places on developing a child's cognitive abilities, beginning with an appreciation of fitrah (innate purity and potential), which Islam teaches is present in all humans from birth (Sahih Muslim, Hadith 2658). Child upbringing in Islam also focused on instilling values such as honesty, compassion, respect, and a sense of responsibility. Once the child reaches the age of comprehension and learning, his parents are required to provide him/her with the knowledge to develop his/her intellectual capacities that enable the child to recognize and learn to deal with the various surrounding aspects

of life. In this regard, Islam encourages communities to support parents and contribute to the upbringing of children. This responsibility includes ensuring safe environments, access to education, and opportunities for growth. The term ‘ummah’ (Muslim community) highlights collective responsibility, where each member of society plays a role in protecting and guiding children, especially those in need. The concept of the ummah (Muslim community) also plays a role in supporting children’s development, as communities are encouraged to provide access to education and resources that enable children to flourish intellectually. Traditional Islamic centers of learning, such as madrasas, serve as places for both religious and secular education, and are central to children’s cognitive and ethical growth. Islamic communities strive to create environments where children are inspired to learn and equipped with skills for lifelong intellectual development. If children are lacking in terms of diet, care, and good upbringing, the responsibility for the carelessness lies on the shoulders of his or her parents, family and society (UNICEF, 2005). A central goal in Islamic upbringing is to nurture ethical and spiritual virtues. Teaching children about compassion, humility, honesty, and respect for others forms the foundation of their character. Islam encourages the gradual introduction of religious practices, such as prayer, to build children’s spiritual connection without imposing strict requirements at a young age (Sunan Abi Dawood, Hadith 495). While religious education is essential, Islam also values practical skills that enable children to thrive in society. The Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) emphasized a balanced approach, encouraging parents to prepare children for both religious obligations and life skills that would help them contribute positively to society.

Islam places high importance on the cognitive development of children, viewing it as an integral part of a balanced upbringing. From infancy to childhood, Islamic teachings emphasize the nurturing of intellectual capacities, ethical values, and spiritual awareness. Through positive reinforcement, moral guidance, and opportunities for education, Islam provides a comprehensive framework that helps children realize their potential and become knowledgeable, responsible adults. By fulfilling these responsibilities, parents, family, and the community contribute to the holistic cognitive development of children, aligned with the principles of Islam.

Methodology

This research employed a descriptive approach combining both qualitative and quantitative survey design. A total of 506 participants were selected using random sampling. Data collection was

through Questionnaires administered to 256 parents, 150 public health workers, and 100 individuals from the general public. The questionnaire captured demographic details, adherence to Islamic dietary guidelines, health outcomes in children, and parenting practices. Unstructured interviews were also conducted with Islamic scholars and nutritionists to gather qualitative data on the Islamic view of diet and child-rearing. In statistical analysis, descriptive and inferential statistics (Chi-square and regression analysis) were used to analyse the quantitative data.

Results and Discussion

The results with respect to research questions and Chi-Square Analysis of postulated hypotheses are presented in the table below

Table 1: Result of Research Questions (1, 3, 4) and Analysis of Postulated Hypotheses

Hypotheses	Variables	Agree	Disagree	Df	X ² - Cri	X ² - Cal	Lev. of Sign.	Decision
H0 ₁ Relationship between Islamic dietary practice and infant health	Islamic dietary practice & infant health	350	186	1	3.84	21.54	0.001	Significant
H0 ₃ Adherence to Islamic dietary principles leads to better child development outcomes	Islamic dietary practice & child development	310	196	1	3.84	15.42	0.008	Significant
H0 ₄ Islamic teachings as effective tools in child nutrition campaigns	Islamic teachings & child nutrition campaigns	310	196	1	8.84	15.42	0.008	Significant

The table 1 above shows that adherence to Islamic dietary guidelines has a positive impact on infant health and child upbringing among Muslim families in Nigeria. Parents who followed these guidelines reported healthier children and more active involvement in their upbringing. A significant proportion (80%) of parents who adhered to Islamic dietary guidelines reported better infant health outcomes, such as reduced of malnutrition and faster developmental milestones. They are more involved in the upbringing of their children, emphasizing both physical health and moral education. There was a significant correlation between dietary adherence and child-rearing practices ($p < 0.05$). It was also found out that, the majority of public health workers (70%) acknowledged the positive role of Islamic dietary principles in promoting child health but emphasized the need for greater public health education on the subject.

The general public’s awareness of the Islamic dietary guidelines was moderate, with 60% acknowledging that these guidelines could improve health outcomes but lacking detailed knowledge on their application. Chi-square test on the relationship between dietary adherence and health outcomes showed a statistically significant association ($\chi^2 = 21.54, p = 0.001$), confirming the first hypothesis (H_{01}).

Chi-square test on the adherence to Islamic dietary principles leads to better child development outcomes ($\chi^2 = 15.42, p = 0.008$), confirming the third hypothesis (H_{03}). Chi-square test on Islamic teachings as effective tools on infant diet campaigns ($\chi^2 = 15.42, p = 0.008$), confirming the fourth hypothesis (H_{04}). The findings also suggest that Islamic dietary principles could be incorporated into public health campaigns to improve child nutrition, health and overall development in Muslim communities.

Table 2: Result of Research Questions and Regression Analysis of Postulated Hypothesis

Hypotheses	Variables	R ²	Regression Coefficient	Standard Error	t-Statistic	p – value	Lev. of Sign.	Decision
H0 ₂ Islamic dietary guidelines influence	Islamic dietary guidelines	0.67	1.25	0.15	8.33	0.002	0.05	Significant

parenting practices	& parenting practices							
---------------------	-----------------------	--	--	--	--	--	--	--

The table 2 above shows the regression analysis which indicated a strong positive correlation between adherence to Islamic dietary practices and improved child upbringing ($R^2 = 0.67$), confirming the second hypothesis (H_{02}).

Findings

The findings of this research demonstrate a significant link between Islamic dietary practices and both infant health and child upbringing in Nigeria. The study’s results are consistent with previous research, such as that of Rahman (2017) and Mohammadi et al. (2020), which have emphasized the positive impact of religious dietary guidelines on overall health outcomes. In this case, adherence to Islamic dietary laws not only contributed to improved physical health among infants but also shaped parenting practices in Muslim families. The findings are highlighted thus:

1. Diet and Infant Health

The results indicate that parents who followed Islamic dietary guidelines for their infants reported better health outcomes, including fewer cases of malnutrition, healthier weight gain, and faster attainment of developmental milestones such as motor skills and cognitive abilities. The findings align with Islamic teachings that emphasize the importance of consuming what is lawful (halal) and pure (tayyib), as referenced in the Qur’an (2:168). Moreover, Qur’anic injunctions on breastfeeding for two years (2:233) also reflect the religion’s commitment to infant health. This finding corroborates with studies like Mohammadi et al. (2020), which emphasized that religious dietary practices tend to have a significant impact on health when they are adhered to consistently. By focusing on foods that are both halal and nutritious, parents are better equipped to provide balanced and safe nutrition for their children.

2. Parenting Practices

The study further revealed that parents who adhered to Islamic dietary guidelines are more engaged in positive child-rearing practices. This is attributed to the holistic nature of Islamic teachings, which view physical nourishment as an essential aspect of moral and spiritual upbringing. Parents who are conscious of dietary laws also invest more time and resources into ensuring their children’s overall well-being, including their moral and educational development.

Islamic teachings promote an integrated approach to child upbringing, where the child's physical, moral, and emotional development are interconnected. This is reflected in the words of the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him), who emphasized the rights of children to proper nourishment, care, and upbringing (Sahih al-Bukhari). This holistic approach is crucial in explaining why dietary adherence has a broader impact on parenting practices and child development.

3. Public Health Perspectives

Public health workers interviewed during the study generally acknowledged the importance of Islamic dietary guidelines in promoting better health outcomes. Many highlighted that health interventions tailored to the cultural and religious beliefs of a community are more successful in child's upbringing. This is particularly relevant in Nigeria, where religious and cultural norms strongly influence dietary habits. While public health campaigns in Nigeria have traditionally focused on medical advice and modern nutrition science, integrating Islamic teachings could enhance their effectiveness in Muslim communities. Studies by Saeed (2015) have argued that religion is an untapped resource in health promotion, particularly in societies where religious adherence is high.

4. Community Awareness and Public Engagement

Despite the positive outcomes associated with Islamic dietary practices, there was still a moderate level of awareness of these practices among the general public. Only 60% of the general public surveyed were aware of the specific health benefits of following Islamic dietary laws, despite the widespread belief that religious dietary adherence could lead to better health outcomes. This suggests that while Islamic dietary principles are accepted on a theoretical level, they may not always be fully understood or implemented in practice. This underscores the need for greater public education on the intersection between religion and health. Engaging religious leaders in health campaigns could be a key strategy to improve public understanding and implementation of beneficial dietary practices, as argued by Adeola (2019) in the context of socio-cultural influences on nutrition.

5. Integration of Islamic Teachings in Public Health Policy

The study also points to the potential for integrating Islamic dietary principles into broader public health policy in Nigeria. Given that Islamic teachings provide a comprehensive framework for both physical and spiritual health, public health campaigns could harness these teachings to

promote better nutrition among Muslim families. This aligns with Rahman's (2017) assertion that religious institutions can play a pivotal role in promoting health-conscious behaviors. By collaborating with Islamic scholars and religious leaders, public health agencies could design culturally sensitive health interventions that resonate with the beliefs and practices of Muslim communities. This approach would not only improve child health outcomes but also foster community-wide engagement with public health initiatives.

6. Limitations and Considerations

While the findings of this study are significant, they are not without limitations. The sample is limited to specific Muslim-majority areas in Nigeria, which limit the generalizability of the findings to other regions. Additionally, the study relied on self-reported data, which could be subject to biases in how parents and public health workers perceive and report their dietary practices and child health outcomes. Despite these limitations, the study provides valuable insights into the role of religion in public health and child-rearing. Future research could expand the scope to include a more diverse sample across different regions of Nigeria or other Muslim-majority countries to provide a more comprehensive understanding of how Islamic dietary laws influence child health.

Recommendation

1. **Policy Integration:** Nigerian health policy should incorporate religious teachings, particularly Islamic dietary laws, into public health campaigns focused on child nutrition.
2. **Public Health Education:** There should be increased public health education on the benefits of Islamic dietary practices for child health.
3. **Community Engagement:** Collaboration between public health agencies and religious institutions should be strengthened to promote culturally appropriate health interventions.

Conclusion

This study has examined the effect of diet on infant's health and found out that, Islamic dietary guidelines are not only religious practices but also important public health tools that could be leveraged to improve child health outcomes and family well-being in Nigeria. The discussions showed that Islamic dietary laws play an important role in shaping both the health of infants and the overall approach to child upbringing where the child's physical, moral, and emotional

development are interconnected. Islamic teachings promote an integrated approach to child upbringing.

The integration of these religious teachings into public health policy could potentially enhance the efficacy of health interventions targeted at child nutrition and development. By engaging religious leaders and emphasizing the holistic benefits of Islamic dietary laws, public health initiatives can become more culturally resonant and effective. The work concludes that, both general and Islamic perspectives on infant diet converge on the emphasis on breastfeeding as critical for child's health and development. Scientific research on breastfeeding mirrors Islamic teachings, demonstrating that adherence to natural and holistic nutrition benefits the child's overall well-being.

References

1. Adeola, O. (2019). Sociocultural factors affecting dietary habits in Nigeria. *Journal of African Nutrition Studies*, 5(2), 112–130.
2. Akther, T. (2020). Child rearing practice in Islam. *Clinics in Mother and Child Health*, 17, 368.
3. Al-Ghazali, A. (1993). *Ihya ulum al-din*. Dar al-Ma'arif.
4. American Academy of Pediatrics [App]. (2022). *Understanding infancy and early childhood*. American Academy of Pediatrics (pp. 15–38).
5. Anderson, M. A. (2001). *The world book encyclopedia*, 1. MI, Chicago.
6. Arikpo, D., Edet, E. S., Chibuzor, M. T., Odey, F., Caldwell, D. M., & Meremikwu, M. M. (2018). Complementary feeding practices for infants and young children in developing countries. *Cochrane Database of Systematic Reviews*, 8, CD011768.
7. Birch, L. L., & Anzman, S. L. (2010). Learning to eat in an obesogenic environment: A developmental systems perspective on childhood obesity. *Child Development Perspectives*, 4(2), 138–143. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1750-8606.2010.00132.x>
8. Black, R. E., Victora, C. G., Walker, S. P., Bhutta, Z. A., Christian, P., de Onis, M., Ezzati, M., Grantham-McGregor, S., Katz, J., Martorell, R., Uauy, R., & Maternal and Child Nutrition Study Group. (2013). Maternal and child undernutrition and overweight in low-income and middle-income countries. *The Lancet*, 382(9890), 427–451. [https://doi.org/10.1016/S0140-6736\(13\)60937-X](https://doi.org/10.1016/S0140-6736(13)60937-X)

9. Bouhdiba, A. (1998). *Islamic education: From the past to the present*. United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization.
10. Bronfenbrenner, U. (1979). *The Ecology of Human Development: Experiments by Nature and Design*. Harvard University Press. <https://doi.org/10.4159/9780674028845>
11. Buettner, D. (2015). The blue zones solution: Eating and living like the World's healthiest people. *National Geographic*.
12. Campbel, T. C., & Campbell, T. M. (2006). *The China Study: The Most Comprehensive Study of Nutrition Ever Conducted and the Startling Implications for Diet, Weight Loss, and Long-Term Health*. BenBella Books.
13. Cunningham, H. (2005). *Children and childhood in Western society since 1500* (pp. 22–45). Pearson Longman.
14. Dewey, K. G., & Adu-Afarwuah, S. (2008). Systematic review of the efficacy and effectiveness of complementary feeding interventions in developing countries. *Maternal and Child Nutrition*, 4 (Suppl. 1), 24–85. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1740-8709.2007.00124.x>
15. Erikson, E. (1950). Childhood and society. *Norton*, 219–239.
16. Islamic dietary guidelines in promoting public health. (1783–1799). *Journal of Religion and Health*, 59(4).
17. Keller, H. (2007). *Cultures of infancy: Infant development in varying cultural contexts* (pp. 67–83). Psychology Press.
18. Child welfare information gateway. (2023). *Legal definitions and protections for infants and young children*. United States Department of Health and Human Services, 5–12.
19. Levine, R. A., Levine, S., Dixon, S., Richman, A., Leiderman, P. H., Keefer, C. H., & Brazelton, T. B. (1994). *Child care and culture: Lessons from Africa*. Cambridge University Press. <https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9780511720321>
20. Lévi-Strauss, C. (1969). *The raw and the cooked: Introduction to a science of mythology*. Harper & Row.
21. Lucas, A., Morley, R., Cole, T. J., Lister, G., & Leeson-Payne, C. (1992). Breast milk and subsequent intelligence quotient in children born preterm. *The Lancet*, 339(8788), 261–264. [https://doi.org/10.1016/0140-6736\(92\)91329-7](https://doi.org/10.1016/0140-6736(92)91329-7)

22. Maccoby, E. E., & Martin, J. A. (1983). Socialization in the context of the family: Parent–child interaction. In P. H. Mussen (Ed.), *Handbook of child psychology*, 4 (pp. 1–101). John Wiley & Sons-Webster Dictionary. <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/diet>
23. Mohammadi, R., Khorrami-Nezhad, L., & Abbasi-Shavazi, M. (2020). Religion and health: The role of Islam Oxford dictionary (2003). https://www.oxfordlearnersdictionaries.com/definition/englishinfant_1
24. Rahman, A. (2017). Islamic perspectives on child nutrition. *International Journal of Islamic Health Studies*, 3(1), 43–52.
25. Egbai, J. M., Eke, O. E., & Ubochi, I. (2024). Assessment of the barriers to AI integration in teacher education programme through Deiph method Nigerian Universities lecturers' experience. *Shodh Sari-An International Multidisciplinary Journal*, 03(04), 155–169. <https://doi.org/10.59231/sari7753>
26. Saadeh, R., & Casanovas, C. (2009). Breastfeeding: The way forward. *Public Health Nutrition*, 12(3), 401–403.
27. Saeed, A. (2015). *Health and nutrition in Islam*. Dar Al-Iman Press.
28. Schweinhart, L. J., Montie, J., Xiang, Z. et al. (2005). *Lifetime effects*. SCOPE Perry Preschool study through age 40. High/Scope Press.
29. Southhall, H. (1990). The new cookery encyclopedia, Machay's of Chathan. *Britain*.
30. Teicholz, N. (2014). *The big fat surprise: Why butter, meat and cheese belong in a healthy Diet* (pp. 1–479). Simon & Schuster.
31. Ugbaja, J. I. (2006). Youth and Diet: The place of dietary fibre. *Journal of Women in Colleges of Education (JOWICE)*, 10, 549–551.
32. United Nations Children's Fund. (2005). *Children in Islam: Their care, upbringing and protection*. Al-Azhar University.
33. Kaur, H. (2024c). Implications of Educational Philosophy of Sri Aurobindo in 21st Century. *Edumania-An International Multidisciplinary Journal*, 02(02), 193–203. <https://doi.org/10.59231/edumania/9047>
34. United Nations Children's Fund. (2023). *Convention on the Rights of the Child* (pp. 14–27). United Nations.

35. United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF). (2011). *Gender Influences on Child Survival, Health and Nutrition: A Narrative Review*. Liverpool School of Tropical Medicine.
36. Victora, C. G., Bahl, R., Barros, A. J. D., França, G. V. A., Horton, S., Krasevec, J., Murch, S., Sankar, M. J., Walker, N., Rollins, N. C., & Lancet Breastfeeding Series Group. (2016). Breastfeeding in the 21st century: Epidemiology, mechanisms, and lifelong effect. *The Lancet*, 387(10017), 475–490. [https://doi.org/10.1016/S0140-6736\(15\)01024-7](https://doi.org/10.1016/S0140-6736(15)01024-7)
37. World Health Organization. (2021). *Early childhood development and health* (pp. 9–33). World Health Organization.
38. Yahya, Y. (2017). Islamic parenting and discipline strategies: Bridging religion and psychology. *Journal of Muslim Mental Health*, 11(2), 35–50.
39. Talabi, O. T., Emmanuel, A. T., Oluwakemi, A. T., Oluwole, R. A., Osilesi, O., Adebawo, O., & Talabi, J. M. (2023). Brewing health benefits: A comparative study of black, herbal, and green tea on rat physiology. *Shodh Sari-An International Multidisciplinary Journal*, 02(04), 28–48. <https://doi.org/10.59231/sari7622>
40. Kumar, S., & Simran, S. (2024b). Psychosocial impact of COVID-19 pandemic on women's mental health. *Shodh Sari-An International Multidisciplinary Journal*, 03(04), 366–375. <https://doi.org/10.59231/sari7769>

Received on Nov 10, 2024

Accepted on Dec 17, 2024

Published on Jan 01, 2025

Effect of Diet on Infant's Health and Child's Upbringing: The Islamic View Point © 2025 by Adigun Wasilat Fayokemi is licensed under [CC BY-NC-ND 4.0](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/4.0/)