

PRO-AGE CULTURE IN PAKISTAN

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This article explores Pakistan's pro-aging culture, where aging is associated with wisdom and respect. It analyzes how elements such as family values and religion create an environment for the psychosocial well-being of older adults and emphasizes the importance of incorporating these elements into medical practice for aging with dignity.

Keywords: pro-age culture, healthy aging, psychosocial well-being, geriatrics, respect for elders, family values, cultural context of aging.

КУЛЬТУРА ПОДДЕРЖКИ СТАРЕНИЯ В ПАКИСТАНЕ

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В статье исследуется пакистанская проэйдж-культура, где старение ассоциируется с мудростью и уважением. Анализируется, как такие элементы, как семейные ценности и религия, создают среду для психосоциального благополучия пожилых людей, и подчёркивается важность их учёта в медицинской практике для достойного старения.

Ключевые слова: проэйдж-культура, здоровое старение, психосоциальное благополучие, гериатрия, уважение к старшим, семейные ценности, культурный контекст старения.

Introduction

In many contemporary societies, aging is predominantly perceived through a lens of decline, dependence, and loss of social utility, which can precipitate isolation and psychological distress [1].

Rooted in collectivist familial structures, Islamic teachings, and deep-seated traditions, Pakistani society traditionally embodies a "pro-age" culture. Here, the aging process is culturally coded as a transition towards greater wisdom, moral authority, and social prestige [2]. Older individuals are not seen as passive recipients of care but as active, revered pillars of the family and community. This cultural framework inherently provides psychosocial resources that are essential for mental and emotional health in late adulthood [3].

This paper aims to elucidate the structure of this pro-age culture in Pakistan and argue for its significance as an essential component of holistic elder care, providing actionable insights for medical practice.

The concept of pro-age culture

A pro-age culture transcends specific rituals or customs; it represents a foundational societal mindset that reframes the ontology of aging itself [2]. It is a worldview that interprets the accumulation of years not as a linear depletion of capacity but as a parallel accumulation of experience, judgment, and social capital. In this paradigm, the value of an individual is not diminished by chronological age but is often enhanced by it.

Within Pakistani society, this concept is deeply ingrained. The transition into old age is informally marked by a shift in social role---from one primarily focused on labor and provision to one centered on guidance, arbitration, and spiritual mentorship. The term "Buzurg" (elder), used with reverence, encapsulates this status. This cultural narrative directly counters the "burden" stereotype, instead positioning the elder as a repository of communal history, ethical knowledge, and practical wisdom [3]. This proactive valuation is crucial for maintaining self-esteem and a coherent identity in later life, serving as a primary defense against the psychological risks associated with aging in more ageist contexts.

Aging: de-pathologizing the life course

Modern medicine, with its disease-centered model, often inadvertently medicalizes normal aging. While combating specific age-related pathologies is essential, conflating the aging process itself with a state of illness is a categorical error with detrimental psychosocial consequences [4]. Aging is a universal, natural biological progression, not a syndrome.

The pro-age culture performs a vital corrective function here. It insists on a holistic definition of "healthy aging" that moves beyond the mere absence of disease or the extension of lifespan (longevity) [1]. It introduces qualitative metrics: the presence of dignity, the feeling of emotional security, and the continuation of a purposeful existence. In Pakistan, the expectation of respect and continued social participation ensures that these qualitative needs are recognized and validated by the community. Thus, the culture provides a complementary framework to healthcare, addressing the dimensions of well-being that fall outside the strict purview of clinical medicine but are fundamental to overall health [5].

Respect as a structural pillar and social safety net

In Pakistan, respect for elders ("Tauzeeh" or "Ehram") is not merely a polite convention; it operates as an informal yet robust system of social protection. This respect is institutionalized within the family hierarchy [2]. Elders typically hold significant advisory and decision-making power in matters ranging from marital alliances and financial investments to conflict resolution and healthcare choices for the wider family.

This sustained authority and inclusion have profound implications. First, they provide a powerful antidote to loneliness---a key determinant of poor health outcomes in the elderly [4]. Second, they preserve a sense of agency and identity, countering the helplessness that can accompany retirement or physical frailty in other settings. The cultural notion that old age represents a "promotion" in social and moral standing, rather than a diminution, creates a positive feedback loop: respectful treatment fosters psychological well-being, which in turn reinforces the elder's capacity to contribute, thereby justifying continued respect [3]. This system constitutes a preemptive, community-based intervention for mental health.

The active social role

A critical feature of the Pakistani pro-age model is the expectation of continued active participation. Elders are integral to the socialization of the young, serving as primary narrators of family lineage, cultural traditions, and religious values [2]. They act as moral guides and ethical arbiters, their counsel sought in times of personal or familial crisis.

This assigned role of "custodian of culture" is not symbolic; it involves daily, meaningful engagement. Whether it is overseeing grandchildren's upbringing, advising on business matters, or leading family prayers, their involvement is tangible. This functional utility is psychologically vital. The feeling of being needed and useful derived from genuine responsibility is a cornerstone of life satisfaction and a buffer against depression in late adulthood [5]. It transforms the elder from a passive object of care into an active subject contributing to the family's future, thus maintaining intergenerational solidarity and a sense of existential purpose.

Urbanization and the evolution of pro-age dynamics

The traditional model, deeply tied to multigenerational joint families living in close proximity, faces significant challenges from rapid urbanization, migration for work, and the rise of nuclear family units [3]. Geographic dispersion and the fast-paced nature of modern urban life can physically limit daily interaction and the traditional modes of care and respect.

However, to interpret these changes as the erosion of pro-age values would be an oversimplification. Instead, the culture demonstrates notable resilience and adaptability. The core value of respect often persists, manifesting in new forms [6]. Technology becomes a crucial bridge, with regular video calls, digital money transfers for support, and online consultations replacing daily physical presence. The expression of care and deference adapts to constraints of time and distance. The challenge for contemporary Pakistani society lies not in abandoning its pro-age ethos but in creatively reinventing its practices to remain relevant within

new structural realities, ensuring the psychological benefits of inclusion are not lost due to physical separation [7].

Religion as the bedrock of meaning and duty

The pro-age culture in Pakistan is powerfully reinforced and sanctified by Islam, the faith of the majority. Islamic teachings explicitly and repeatedly enjoin respect, kindness, and care for parents and the elderly [2]. Verses in the Quran and sayings of the Prophet Muhammad (Hadith) elevate such care to an act of worship and a key to paradise, while disobedience or neglect is among the gravest sins.

This religious framework provides a transcendent rationale for pro-age behavior, moving it from social custom to spiritual imperative. For the aging individual, faith offers a comprehensive system of meaning. Aging, with its attendant challenges of loss, illness, and dependency, is framed within a spiritual journey. Religious practices---daily prayers, Quranic recitation, participation in community worship---provide structure, solace, and a sustained sense of belonging to a community that transcends age [3]. This spiritual anchorage is a profound resource for psychological stability, helping individuals contextualize suffering and maintain hope and dignity through the final stages of life.

Implications for Healthcare Practitioners

For medical professionals, especially in geriatrics and palliative care, the pro-age paradigm offers a crucial lesson: treatment transcends pharmacology and procedures [4]. The acts of listening, showing respect, honoring dignity, and spending time are themselves therapeutic. Adopting a person-centered approach that views the older adult as a valued individual with a lifetime of experience, rather than merely a patient with a disease, leads to more effective and humane care outcomes [5, 8].

Conclusion

The phenomenon of global aging demands models that look beyond the limitations of a purely biomedical and often deficit-oriented framework. Pakistan's pro-age culture offers a vital alternative paradigm [1, 2]. It demonstrates how deeply held cultural values---of respect, purposeful familial integration, and spiritual meaning---can be systematically harnessed to create an environment where older adults are not just living longer, but are afforded the opportunity to age with dignity, continued purpose, and profound social connectedness.

This cultural system acts as a pervasive, preventive psychosocial intervention, mitigating key risk factors for poor mental health in late life. While undergoing transformation due to modernization, its core ethos shows resilience [3, 6]. The ultimate challenge and

opportunity for global health practice lie in synthesizing the strengths of advanced medical science with the wisdom of such cultural models. By consciously integrating pro-age principles into clinical training and healthcare design, we can move closer to a holistic vision of healthy aging---one that ensures added years are not merely endured, but are valued, respected, and meaningfully lived [8].

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