

## The Influence of Religion on Attitudes towards Death among Muslim Communities in Ghana

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### Abstract

**Aim:** The aim of this study was to analyze the influence of religion on attitudes towards death among Muslim communities in Ghana, with a focus on how religious beliefs and practices shape perspectives on end-of-life matters.

**Methods:** The study past literature and historical accounts to understand how Islamic beliefs about death have evolved over time within the Ghanaian context.

**Results:** The study revealed that Islamic religious beliefs and traditions play a significant role in shaping Muslim communities' attitudes towards death in Ghana. Core Islamic theological concepts related to the afterlife, fate, and the will of God influence perspectives on death as both inevitable and predestined. Islamic funeral and mourning rituals provide communal coping mechanisms for dealing with loss and reinforcing belief in the hereafter.

**Conclusion:** Religion has a profound influence on attitudes towards death among Muslim communities in Ghana. Islamic religious beliefs, rituals, and traditions provide a frame of meaning that shapes perspectives on death as inevitable yet purposeful, and provide coping mechanisms and sources of comfort for bereaved individuals and communities.

**Recommendation:** There should be more research into how Islamic religious beliefs and practices shape end of life experiences and provision of thanatology services in Ghana, with the aim of providing culturally appropriate and compassionate care for Muslim patients and communities. Overcoming misconceptions and promoting interfaith dialogue on matters related to death and dying could help improve end of life care and support for Ghanaians.

**Keywords:** *Religiosity, Islam, death attitudes, end of life, Muslims, Ghana, funerals, rituals, thanatology*

## INTRODUCTION

### Islamic Beliefs about Death and the Afterlife

The influence of religion on attitudes towards death is a crucial aspect to understand, particularly in Muslim communities in Ghana. Islamic beliefs about death and the afterlife play a significant role in shaping these attitudes and guiding the community's responses to the inevitability of death. According to the Quran, death is not an end but a transition from this life to the next (Quran 2:154). The Quran refers to death as 'tawaffa,' which means to take in sleep, thereby painting a picture of death as a peaceful transition rather than a violent end (Al-Qaradawy, 2022). This understanding of death as a peaceful transition influences the attitudes of Muslims in Ghana, leading to a less fear-based and more acceptance-based attitude towards death. The belief in the Day of Judgment is another central tenet of Islam that shapes attitudes towards death among Muslims in Ghana. Muslims believe that after death, all individuals will be resurrected for the Day of Judgment, where each will be held accountable for their actions in life (Quran 3:185). This belief instills a sense of accountability and moral responsibility in Muslims during their lifetime, which, in turn, influences their attitudes towards death. They see death not as an annihilation but as a door to ultimate justice and potential reward or punishment based on their earthly deeds (Ali & Ahmad, 2023). Furthermore, the Islamic faith espouses the belief in Barzakh, the period between death and the Day of Judgment. It is viewed as a different form of existence, separate from worldly life and the afterlife (Quran 23:100).

This belief significantly impacts the Muslim community in Ghana as they perceive death as a continuation of existence in another realm. Therefore, death is not seen as an interruption but as a passage into another phase of existence (Abdul-Rahman, 2023). The belief in heaven (Jannah) and hell (Jahannam) as the final destinations in the afterlife also informs the attitudes of Muslims in Ghana towards death. According to Islamic teachings, Jannah and Jahannam are the rewards and punishments for individuals' actions during their earthly lives (Quran 4:56). The vision of an eternal paradise serves as a form of consolation for the bereaved, and the fear of hell serves as a moral deterrent, both of which shape the community's attitudes towards death and their actions in life (Ibrahim & Mensah, 2023). In addition to these beliefs, the Islamic funeral rites and practices in Ghana also reflect the community's attitudes towards death. Death is treated with solemn respect, and the rites are performed immediately and involve community participation. Islamic funeral rites aim to prepare the deceased for their journey in the afterlife, reflecting the community's belief in life after death (Yusuf & Rahman, 2023). The Islamic beliefs about death and the afterlife significantly influence the attitudes of Muslim communities in Ghana towards death. The belief in death as a transition, accountability on the Day of Judgment, existence in Barzakh, and the final destinations in Jannah or Jahannam all contribute to a complex and nuanced perspective on death. This perspective manifests in the community's actions, practices, and rituals around death, demonstrating the profound influence of religious beliefs on attitudes towards this inevitable aspect of life.

### The Role of Religious Rituals in Coping with Death

Religious rituals and practices serve as powerful coping mechanisms in the face of death, especially in Muslim communities in Ghana. As proposed by Pargament (1997), religion provides a sense of meaning, control, comfort, intimacy, and life transformation which are often sought during times of crises such as the death of a loved one. Within the Islamic faith, certain rituals and

practices are undertaken when a person dies, including the washing and shrouding of the body, prayer, burial, and mourning. These rituals provide a structured pattern of behavior that can help bereaved individuals navigate through the disorienting experience of loss. The ritual of washing and shrouding the deceased, known as 'ghusl', serves as a cleansing and purification process. This ritual, as described by Ghazali (2005), not only prepares the body for the afterlife but also provides a therapeutic effect for those involved in the process. The act of physically caring for the body can serve as a tangible expression of love and respect and can help individuals come to terms with the reality of the death. Prayer, or 'salat', is another significant ritual in the Islamic context of death, which serves multiple purposes. It provides a communal space for expressing grief, allows individuals to seek divine comfort and support, and is believed to benefit the deceased in their afterlife (Smith, 2002).

It is common in Ghanaian Muslim communities to gather for prayer services in the immediate aftermath of a death and on specific anniversaries thereafter, providing ongoing opportunities for communal support and remembrance. The Islamic burial ritual, 'janaza', contributes to coping with death by reinforcing the belief in life after death, a central tenet of Islam. According to Sachedina (2009), the ritualistic return of the body to the earth serves as a symbolic reminder of the cyclical nature of life and death, and the continuation of the soul in the afterlife. For the bereaved, this can provide a sense of hope and comfort, mitigating the fear of death and the permanence of loss. Mourning in Islam, known as 'hidaad', provides structured periods for the expression of grief and remembrance. Agha (2005) noted that this period allows for the communal sharing of pain and emotional support, which can be crucial in the coping process. Moreover, the prescribed period of mourning also provides a timeframe for the bereaved to gradually adjust to the loss and reorient themselves to life without the deceased. Religious rituals within the Muslim community in Ghana play a significant role in coping with death. They provide a structured and communal approach to managing grief and loss, with the belief system providing a sense of meaning and comfort. These rituals not only serve as a reminder of the cyclical nature of life and the continuation of the soul in the afterlife but also provide a platform for the expression of grief and communal support, thus aiding the coping process.

### **The Influence of Islamic Teachings on Attitudes towards Euthanasia**

The influence of Islamic teachings on attitudes towards euthanasia is profound and underpins the overwhelming sentiment towards end-of-life decisions among Muslim communities in Ghana. According to Islamic belief, the sanctity of life is paramount and it is believed that all life is a divine gift from Allah. Consequently, euthanasia, or intentionally causing the death of a patient to alleviate suffering, directly contradicts this core principle (Ahmed & Al-Jahdali, 2021). This belief is firmly rooted in the Quranic verse, "Do not kill yourselves or one another. Indeed, Allah is to you ever Merciful" (Qur'an 4:29) and is upheld by a majority of Islamic scholars. The Islamic ethical framework, known as 'Shari'ah', provides a moral compass for Muslims in grappling with complex bioethical issues like euthanasia. Shari'ah interprets Allah's will and guides Muslims in all aspects of life, including matters of life and death (Brockopp, 2021). It categorically rejects euthanasia, considering it 'haram', or forbidden. This prohibition has significantly influenced the attitudes of Ghana's Muslim communities, making them predominantly anti-euthanasia despite the ongoing global debates on the subject. The concept of 'Qadr', or divine predestination, further influences Islamic attitudes towards euthanasia.

Muslims believe that life and death are under the divine control of Allah; hence, any human intervention in the process of death is viewed as an intrusion into the divine realm (Agyeman-Duah, 2023). This belief in predestination reinforces the idea that suffering is a part of the human experience and must be endured as a test from Allah. The acceptance of suffering as a part of life's journey creates a strong resistance to the idea of euthanasia among Muslims in Ghana. In addition to the religious and ethical considerations, Islamic teachings also emphasize the importance of caring for the sick and the elderly. The Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) is reported to have said, "No one of you is a believer until he desires for his brother that which he desires for himself" (Bukhari, 2023). This ethos of compassion and selflessness supports the provision of palliative care, rather than euthanasia, in the face of terminal illness or unbearable suffering. Despite the strong Islamic stance against euthanasia, there are nuanced discussions within the Muslim community about 'passive euthanasia', where treatment is withheld or withdrawn, allowing a natural death (Rahman, 2022). While still controversial and not universally accepted, some Islamic scholars argue that passive euthanasia may be permissible under certain conditions, such as when the continuation of treatment is futile or imposes an unbearable burden on the patient. The influence of Islamic teachings on the attitudes of Ghana's Muslim communities towards euthanasia is deeply embedded. The sanctity of life, the belief in divine predestination, the ethical framework of Shari'ah, and the emphasis on compassion and care for the sick all contribute to a predominantly anti-euthanasia stance. However, ongoing discussions around passive euthanasia reflect the complexities of reconciling religious beliefs with evolving bioethical challenges in the contemporary world.

### **The Impact of Religion on the Grief Process in Muslim Communities**

The influence of religion on attitudes towards death is significant in Muslim communities in Ghana, and this impact is particularly evident in the grief process. According to Rahman (2020), religion provides a framework for understanding and processing death and grief, and this is particularly true in Islam, which has explicit teachings on death and the afterlife. For Muslims, the belief in an afterlife and the resurrection on the Day of Judgment can act as a source of comfort in times of grief, mitigating the impact of loss and providing hope for a reunion with the deceased. The Islamic faith also prescribes specific rituals and practices to be performed after death, which can offer a structured pathway through the grieving process (Hassan et al., 2019). These rituals, such as the washing and shrouding of the body, the funeral prayer (Salat al-Janazah), and the burial, involve the community and provide opportunities for collective mourning. By engaging in these practices, individuals are able to express their grief within a supportive community, thereby reducing feelings of isolation and loneliness often associated with bereavement. The communal involvement in grieving is a significant aspect of the Islamic approach to death. As pointed out by Agyekum (2006), in Ghanaian Muslim communities, death is seen as a communal event rather than a private affair. The community comes together to mourn, providing emotional and practical support to the bereaved family.

This collective response to death helps to foster a sense of unity and solidarity, which can be instrumental in facilitating the grief process. However, it is important to consider the potential challenges that religious beliefs and practices can also pose in the grief process. For example, some Muslims may experience guilt or spiritual distress if they perceive themselves as failing to meet the religious expectations related to grieving (Ahmed & Boisvert, 2020). Additionally, the emphasis on accepting death as God's will may discourage some individuals from expressing their

grief openly, potentially inhibiting the healing process. Furthermore, the impact of religion on the grief process may differ based on factors such as gender, age, and level of religiosity. For example, according to a study by Afolabi et al. (2019), older and more religious individuals in Muslim communities in Ghana may be more likely to find comfort in religious beliefs and practices during bereavement, compared to younger and less religious individuals. Therefore, it is essential to consider these individual differences when examining the role of religion in the grief process. While religion, specifically Islam, plays a significant role in shaping attitudes towards death and the grief process in Muslim communities in Ghana, it is a complex and multifaceted relationship. The comforting belief in an afterlife, structured mourning practices, and communal support can facilitate the grieving process. However, potential challenges such as feelings of guilt and spiritual distress, as well as individual differences, highlight the need for a nuanced understanding of this relationship.

### **The Role of Religious Leaders in Shaping Attitudes towards Death**

Religious leaders play an indispensable role in shaping attitudes towards death in Ghanaian Muslim communities. As spiritual guides, they are the primary source of religious knowledge and understanding for their followers, strongly influencing their beliefs and attitudes towards life and death (Agyekum, 2014). They interpret and teach the Quran, the holy book of Islam, which provides believers with guidelines on how to live, die, and what to expect in the afterlife. Their teachings, therefore, become instrumental in forming the community's perspective on death, often seen as a transition to a better life, rather than an end (Al-Hassan, 2007). Imams in particular, the leaders in mosques, play a significant role in shaping these perspectives. They deliver sermons (Khutbah) during the Friday congregational prayer (Jummah), which often touch on themes of mortality, afterlife, and the importance of righteous living. These sermons are influential in guiding the community's understanding of death and attitudes towards it (Rashid, 2019). Furthermore, during funerals, the Imam leads the Janazah (funeral prayer), reinforcing the belief in life after death and the importance of preparing for it. Scholars and Sufi leaders also contribute to shaping attitudes towards death in Ghanaian Muslim communities. They provide deeper interpretations of Islamic teachings, often emphasizing the transient nature of worldly life and the eternal nature of the life hereafter (Sulemana, 2020). Their teachings and writings are pivotal in reinforcing the idea of death as a transition to eternal life, leading many devout believers to view death with a sense of acceptance rather than fear.

The role of religious leaders extends beyond teaching and preaching. They provide pastoral care to the sick and dying, offering spiritual guidance and comfort. They help individuals and families cope with the fear and grief associated with death, often framing it as a part of Allah's divine plan (Baiden et al., 2016). This pastoral role significantly shapes the attitudes towards death, promoting acceptance and resilience in the face of mortality. Furthermore, religious leaders play a role in resolving conflicts and maintaining social order during bereavement events. They use their influence and understanding of Islamic teachings to guide mourning practices, ensuring they align with Islamic principles and promoting unity and harmony within the community (Agyekum, 2014). This leadership role further strengthens their impact on attitudes towards death, fostering a community-wide approach that supports acceptance and adherence to religious values. Religious leaders in Ghanaian Muslim communities play a multi-faceted role in shaping attitudes towards death. Through their teachings, pastoral care, and leadership, they instill an understanding of death from an Islamic perspective, promoting acceptance, preparing for the afterlife, and unity within



the community. Their influence is significant, shaping not only individual perspectives on death but also collective practices and rituals surrounding bereavement.

### **Influence of Islamic Beliefs on Funeral Practices in Ghana**

The Islamic faith has a strong influence on funeral practices among Muslim communities in Ghana. As a religion, Islam provides comprehensive guidelines on how to handle and respect the dead, and these guidelines are woven into the cultural fabric of the Muslim community in Ghana. A fundamental belief in Islam is the concept of life after death, which guides their approach to death and the rituals that follow (Rahman, 2021). The Islamic belief in life after death instills a sense of acceptance and calmness towards the eventuality of death. Muslims believe that life on earth is temporary and serves as a trial period for the eternal life that awaits in the hereafter. Consequently, when a member of the Muslim community in Ghana passes away, the event is met with a tempered grief, underscored by the belief that the deceased has transitioned to a better place (Abdul-Razak & Tahiru, 2022). This acceptance softens the blow of loss and provides a foundation for the funeral rites that follow. The funeral rites in the Islamic tradition are rooted in respect for the deceased and are considered a communal obligation. In Ghana, the process begins with Ghusl, the ritual washing of the body, which is performed by close family members of the same gender as the deceased. This is followed by the shrouding of the body in a simple white cloth, symbolizing equality in death (Al-Qaradawi, 2023).

The body is then prepared for the Janaza, the funeral prayer, which is led by an Imam and serves as a plea for mercy and forgiveness for the deceased. The burial follows the Janaza and is ideally performed on the same day as the death. The grave is dug with a niche on one side where the body, wrapped in its shroud, is laid on its right side facing the Kaaba in Mecca, Islam's holiest site. This practice is in line with the Islamic belief in the Day of Judgement, when all souls will be resurrected for final judgement (Sarpong, 2022). The simplicity of the burial process reinforces the Islamic view on the transience of worldly possessions and status. In the days following the burial, the Muslim community in Ghana comes together to support the bereaved family, providing emotional and material support. The mourning period lasts three days, during which time the family receives visitors who come to offer their condolences. This communal support provides a safety net for the grieving family and reaffirms the strength of the Muslim community in the face of loss (Mohammed, 2021). The Islamic beliefs about death and the hereafter deeply influence the attitudes towards death and the funeral practices among Muslim communities in Ghana. Through a series of rites that are rooted in respect for the deceased and communal support, these communities navigate the experience of death in a way that reflects their faith and reinforces their community bonds.

### **The Influence of Islamic Religion on Attitudes towards Organ Donation**

Religion plays a pivotal role in shaping attitudes towards organ donation among Muslim communities in Ghana. The Islamic faith, like many other religions, has specific teachings and interpretations that guide followers' decisions about organ donation. From a religious perspective, the issue of organ donation is complex and multifaceted, with various scholars and religious leaders offering differing views based on their interpretation of Islamic law, or Sharia (Rady, McGregor, & Verheijde, 2021). In Islam, the fundamental principle of the sanctity and dignity of the human body both in life and in death is central to discussions about organ donation. Some followers interpret these teachings to mean that the body should remain intact, precluding the

possibility of organ donation (Ismaeel, 2023). Others, however, view organ donation as a form of Sadaqah Jariyah, or ongoing charity, which allows a person to continue to accrue good deeds even after death. This perspective may encourage organ donation among some Muslims in Ghana (Al Khalaileh, Abualezz, Suleiman, & Froelicher, 2022). The Islamic concept of saving lives, known as Tahtheel Al-Nafs, is another aspect that influences attitudes towards organ donation among Muslims in Ghana. According to the Quran, "Whoever saves one life, it is as if he saved all of mankind" (Quran, 5:32). This belief may drive some Muslims to accept organ donation as a noble act that can save the lives of others (Raza, 2023).

Furthermore, the principle of necessity, known as Daroorah in Islamic law, which allows for exceptions to prohibitions in life-threatening situations, can also be invoked to justify organ donation (Ali, 2021). However, attitudes towards organ donation in Muslim communities in Ghana may also be influenced by other factors, such as mistrust of the healthcare system, fears about the afterlife, and concerns about the process of organ retrieval and its possible impact on funeral rites (Abdallah, Badawi, & Elshazly, 2022). These fears and misconceptions can be addressed through education and consultation with religious leaders who can provide guidance based on Islamic teachings. Religious leaders play an essential role in shaping attitudes towards organ donation in Muslim communities in Ghana. They are often the primary source of religious knowledge and advice for their communities, and their interpretations of Islamic teachings can therefore significantly influence attitudes towards organ donation (Akgün, Bilgin, & Tokalak, 2021). Their support can encourage organ donation by affirming its compatibility with Islamic principles of charity and saving lives. The influence of religion on attitudes towards organ donation among Muslim communities in Ghana is complex and multifaceted, shaped by various interpretations of Islamic teachings, cultural beliefs, and the guidance of religious leaders. The ongoing dialogue and education about organ donation, informed by a deep understanding of Islamic teachings, can help to clarify misconceptions and promote acceptance of this life-saving practice in these communities.

### **The Role of the Quran in Shaping Views on Death and Dying**

The Quran is the fundamental source of Islamic teachings, delineating the code of conduct for Muslims, including their perspectives on mortality and the afterlife (Ali, 2020). The Quran's teachings on death are explicit and profound, emphasizing that every soul will taste death (Quran 3:185), thereby encouraging Muslims to live righteous lives in anticipation of the inevitable end. Consequently, death in the Ghanaian Muslim community is not seen as an end in itself but a transition to a different life. It prompts a sense of accountability in the lives of believers for their actions in the mortal world, shaping their attitudes toward life and death. The Quran's teachings regarding the afterlife play a significant role in shaping the perception of death among Ghanaian Muslims. According to the holy book, life is transitory, and the real, eternal life begins after death (Quran 29:64). This belief fosters an acceptance of death and dying, as they are viewed as gateways to the eternal life promised by Allah. This acceptance of mortality is often reflected in the calm and dignified way Ghanaian Muslims handle death and bereavement (Abdul-Korah, 2017). The belief in the afterlife also provides comfort and consolation for the bereaved, as they are reassured that their departed loved ones are in a better place if they lived righteously. In keeping with the Quran's teachings, the Ghanaian Muslim community follows specific rituals and ceremonies at the time of death.

These practices, such as the 'Janazah' (funeral prayer) and immediate burial, are designed to honor the deceased and seek mercy for their souls (Quran 9:113). These rituals play a crucial role in the community's attitudes towards death, as they provide a structured approach to death and dying, facilitating communal support and shared grieving (Idris, 2019). Importantly, the Quran also teaches the concept of 'Qadr' (predestination), which asserts that life and death happen according to God's will (Quran 9:51). This belief reinforces acceptance of death among Ghanaian Muslims, as it is seen as a divine decree that cannot be changed or avoided. This theological viewpoint contributes to the prevalent attitude of surrendering to God's will, even in the face of loss and bereavement (Nasir, 2022). Furthermore, the Quran's teachings on the Day of Judgment provide a moral framework that directly influences Ghanaian Muslims' attitudes towards death. The belief in a Day of Reckoning, where every individual will be held accountable for their earthly actions (Quran 99:7-8), encourages adherence to moral and ethical guidelines. This belief system promotes a life lived in righteousness and good deeds, as it is understood that these actions will determine their fate in the afterlife (Rahman, 2021). The Quran significantly shapes the attitudes of Ghanaian Muslims towards death and dying. Its teachings foster a unique understanding and acceptance of mortality, emphasizing life's transitory nature and the immortality of the soul in the afterlife. The resultant practices and beliefs, grounded in the Quranic teachings, contribute to a collective and dignified approach to death within the Ghanaian Muslim community (Alhassan, 2023).

### **The Impact of Religious Education on Attitudes towards Death**

The teachings and beliefs individuals acquire through religious education are often reflected in their perspectives on life and death (Abdul-Korah, 2018). In Islamic teachings, death is viewed not as an end but as a transition to another form of existence. This belief system helps to lessen the fear and anxiety associated with the idea of death. Muslims in Ghana, through religious education, are taught that life in the world is temporary and that the eternal life awaits every believer after death (Razak, 2021). Therefore, the influence of religious education on attitudes towards death is evident in the acceptance and calmness that many Muslims in Ghana display towards death. The concept of death in Islam is deeply embedded in the belief of accountability and judgement in the hereafter. According to Islamic teachings, every individual will be held accountable for their deeds in the world (Quran 2:281). This accountability has a significant impact on the attitudes towards death, as it encourages individuals to lead righteous lives in anticipation of the eventual judgement (Al-Hashimi, 2019). In this context, religious education acts as a moral compass guiding the behaviour and actions of Muslims in Ghana. It helps them understand the transient nature of worldly life and the significance of the everlasting life after death. Further, the rituals and practices surrounding death in the Islamic context provide a framework for grief and loss.

Religious education in Muslim communities in Ghana outlines the procedures for mourning, burial, and remembrance (Abdul-Korah, 2018). These rituals provide a sense of structure and familiarity in the face of the unknown, which can help to reduce fear and anxiety associated with death. They offer a way to honor the deceased and to provide comfort for those left behind. Moreover, community support and collective practices in times of death as instructed by religious education reaffirm the communal bonds among Muslims in Ghana. The practice of congregational prayers, collective mourning, and community support during the time of bereavement are all teachings sourced from Islamic religious education (Razak, 2021). These practices foster a sense of unity and shared experience that can help to alleviate the pain and fear associated with death. Religious education also promotes the belief in predestination (Qadar) in Islam, which is the



concept that everything in life, including death, happens according to Allah's plan (Quran 9:51). This belief often instills a sense of acceptance and surrender towards death among Muslims in Ghana (Al-Hashimi, 2019). It encourages the understanding that death is an inevitable part of life and that it occurs at the predestined time set by Allah. This understanding can help to alleviate feelings of fear or uncertainty associated with death. Religious education has a profound impact on attitudes towards death among Muslim communities in Ghana. It provides a framework of understanding that encourages acceptance, reduces fear, and promotes ethical living. The teachings of Islam, as conveyed through religious education, foster a sense of peace and solace in the face of death, demonstrating the significant role that religion plays in shaping attitudes towards this inevitable aspect of life.

### **How Islamic Religion Affects Attitudes towards Suicide**

Religion significantly influences attitudes towards suicide among Muslim communities in Ghana, with most community members viewing the act as a severe violation of religious principles. The Islamic faith, like many other religions, places a high value on life and dictates that it should only be taken by God (Al-Qur'an, 4:29). This fundamental belief is a strong deterrent against suicide, which is seen as an act of self-destruction and a direct affront to the sanctity of life. This perspective is firmly embedded in the Ghanaian Muslim community, contributing to a negative attitude towards suicide (Gyekye, 1996). Additionally, the religious belief in an afterlife, particularly the concept of Heaven and Hell, plays a crucial role in shaping attitudes towards suicide. According to Islamic teachings, those who intentionally take their own lives will face eternal punishment in the afterlife, creating a strong deterrent against suicide (Al-Qur'an, 4:30). This belief reinforces the idea that life is a test from God, and enduring hardships without resorting to self-harm is a sign of faith and patience. This perspective is widely held in Ghanaian Muslim communities, further strengthening the negative attitudes toward suicide (Rathod & Kingdon, 2009). Muslim clerics, as religious leaders, also play an influential role in shaping community attitudes towards suicide. Their teachings and sermons, drawn from Islamic scriptures, often emphasize the sanctity of life and the religious impermissibility of suicide. They play a crucial role in the socialization process, disseminating these beliefs and values to their followers, thereby reinforcing the negative attitudes towards suicide (Abdallah, 2011). Moreover, the communal nature of the Ghanaian Muslim society also contributes to these attitudes.

The strong social bonds and mutual support systems prevalent in these communities promote a sense of interdependence and shared responsibility. This effectively discourages isolation and despair, conditions often associated with suicide. The communal nature of the society also fosters a sense of shared grief and collective trauma when a suicide occurs, further reinforcing the societal taboo against it (Oppong, 2013). Religion in Ghanaian Muslim communities also provides a coping mechanism during times of crisis or hardship, which can indirectly influence attitudes towards suicide. The practice of religion often encourages faith, patience, and reliance on God during adversities, which can serve as a protective factor against suicidal ideation. This is supported by studies showing a correlation between religious practice and lower suicide rates (Koenig, 2012). Religion significantly shapes the attitudes towards suicide among Muslim communities in Ghana. Through its teachings about the sanctity of life and the afterlife, its communal nature, and the coping mechanisms it provides during adversities, Islam plays a pivotal role in shaping societal attitudes towards this issue. However, more research is needed to fully understand the complexities

of this relationship and the variations in attitudes within different sects and demographic groups within the Muslim community in Ghana (Abdallah, 2011).

### **The Influence of Islamic Religion on Attitudes towards Life Extension Technologies**

The Islamic faith is deeply woven into the socio-cultural fabric of these communities, influencing their perspectives on life, death, and the afterlife (Hassan, 2021). The Quran, the holy book of Islam, teaches that life and death are in the hands of Allah, the Supreme Being. This divine determinism is a fundamental tenet of Islamic belief, and it shapes the views of Muslims on life extension technologies. Many Muslims in Ghana, therefore, view life extension technologies, such as gene therapy and anti-aging medicine, with skepticism, seeing them as attempts to interfere with the divine order (Hassan, 2021). Moreover, the Islamic concept of 'Barzakh' - the period between death and the Day of Judgment - is another factor that influences attitudes towards life extension technologies. According to Islamic teachings, death is not the end but a transition from this world to another plane of existence (Akhtar, 2022). The thought of indefinitely postponing this transition through life extension technologies is seen by some Muslims as a defiance of Allah's will. Therefore, the religious belief in the life hereafter (Akhirah) and the acceptance of death as a natural and predestined process makes many Muslims in Ghana resistant to the idea of extending life artificially (Akhtar, 2022). It is also important to note that the interpretation of Islamic teachings varies among different scholars and communities. Some Muslim scholars and followers in Ghana argue that Islam encourages the pursuit of knowledge and innovation for the betterment of human life. They suggest that if these technologies are used ethically and with the intention to alleviate suffering, they could be seen as compatible with Islamic teachings (Majid, 2023).

This perspective highlights the diversity of views within the Muslim community in Ghana, suggesting that attitudes towards life extension technologies are not monolithic but are subject to interpretation and debate. The influence of religious authority in the Muslim communities in Ghana cannot be overlooked. Imams and religious scholars have a significant influence on the attitudes and behaviors of their followers. Their interpretation of the Quran and Hadith (sayings and actions of Prophet Muhammad) often guide the community's stance on complex issues. If religious leaders view life extension technologies as contrary to the teachings of Islam, their followers are likely to adopt the same stance (Mahmood, 2023). Therefore, the position of religious authorities is crucial in shaping attitudes towards life extension technologies among Muslim communities in Ghana. However, it is also crucial to appreciate the dynamic nature of religious beliefs and attitudes. As more information becomes available, and as people engage in discourse and reflection, perspectives can evolve. In the context of Ghana, where education levels are increasing and access to information is improving, there is potential for changing attitudes towards life extension technologies among Muslims (Boateng, 2023). Therefore, future research needs to track these changes to provide a more nuanced and updated understanding of the impact of religion on these attitudes. The belief in divine determinism, the concept of life after death, the interpretation of religious teachings, and the influence of religious authorities all play a crucial role in shaping these attitudes. However, these attitudes are not static and may evolve with changing socio-cultural contexts and increasing access to information. Understanding these religious influences is vital for policymakers, healthcare providers, and researchers, as it could help in designing culturally sensitive health interventions and promoting informed discussions about life extension technologies in these communities.

### **The role of Islamic Religious Beliefs on End-Of-Life Decision Making**

Religious beliefs play a significant role in end-of-life decision making among Muslim communities in Ghana, shaping attitudes and behaviors towards death and dying. As observed by Abubakar (2021), Islam emphasizes the continuity of life after death, which plays a crucial role in how Muslims approach end-of-life decisions. The faith encourages acceptance of one's impending demise and discourages extraordinary measures to prolong life if it leads to unnecessary suffering. This belief system can influence decisions about palliative care, use of life-sustaining technologies, and other medical interventions. In accordance with Islamic teachings, the preservation of life is paramount, but not at the expense of prolonged suffering or the violation of human dignity (Al-Bar & Chamsi-Pasha, 2015). This belief often shapes the medical choices made by family members and caregivers of terminally ill patients in Ghana's Muslim communities. For instance, the use of life-support machines could be considered inadmissible if it only prolongs the dying process without providing a significant chance for recovery. This perspective is rooted in the Islamic principle of avoiding harm, known as "darar," which is often invoked in end-of-life decision-making. Another significant influence in these decisions is the Islamic concept of "tawakkul" or reliance on God. This principle dictates that while individuals should seek treatment for illnesses, they must also accept that life and death are ultimately in God's hands (Rassool, 2000). This belief can lead to a greater acceptance of death and less aggressive pursuit of curative treatments towards the end of life, especially when the prognosis is poor.

The role of religious leaders or 'imams' in end-of-life decision making in Ghana's Muslim communities is also vital. As spiritual guides, they often provide counsel to families dealing with end-of-life issues, helping them navigate the complex intersection of medical possibilities, ethical dilemmas, and religious obligations (Ali & Ayuba, 2017). Their interpretations and teachings of the Quran and Hadith, especially those relating to illness, death, and the afterlife, can significantly shape the decisions made. Religion also influences the rituals and practices surrounding death in Ghana's Muslim communities. Islamic customs require that the body be treated with utmost respect, swiftly and carefully prepared for burial following death. The dying person is encouraged to recite the 'Shahada' or declaration of faith, and family members often gather to pray and seek forgiveness for the deceased (Gyasi, Poku, & Boateng, 2018). These practices provide a sense of closure and continuity, reinforcing the belief in life after death and influencing attitudes towards the end of life. The influence of religious beliefs on end-of-life decision making in Muslim communities in Ghana is profound and multifaceted. It guides medical decisions, shapes acceptance of death, provides a moral and ethical framework for dealing with end-of-life issues, and informs the customs and rituals surrounding death. As such, it is crucial for healthcare professionals working with these communities to understand these beliefs and their implications, ensuring culturally sensitive and appropriate end-of-life care.

### **The Role of Islamic Faith in Coping with Terminal Illness**

According to Yendork and Kpobi (2020), faith in divine intervention is a common coping mechanism among terminally ill Muslim patients. Despite the grim prognosis often associated with terminal illnesses, many of these patients cling to the hope that a miraculous recovery is possible through divine intervention. This faith in a higher power provides comfort and solace, giving them the strength to endure the physical and emotional pain associated with their condition. The belief in life after death and the concept of 'Jannah' (paradise) in Islam also significantly influences how

terminally ill patients perceive their situation. As Qureshi et al. (2021) note, the belief in an eternal life of bliss for those who have lived righteously provides a sense of purpose and meaning, reducing the fear associated with death. The acceptance of death as a transition to a better existence can make the process of dying less distressing for the terminally ill and their families. Another crucial aspect of faith is the belief in predestination ('Qadr'), which is central to Islamic theology. According to Agyekum (2019), this belief helps many Muslims in Ghana accept their terminal illnesses as part of Allah's divine plan. The notion that everything, including illness and death, happens according to Allah's will, can offer a sense of peace and acceptance, reducing the psychological distress associated with terminal illnesses.

Prayer and religious rituals also play a significant role in coping with terminal illnesses. As observed by Abdul-Rahman and Al-Attabi (2022), Islamic practices such as daily prayers, recitation of the Qur'an, and making 'Du'a' (supplication) provide a sense of routine and normalcy, which can be immensely comforting for patients in the face of the unpredictability of their illness. These religious practices also provide a means of expressing emotions, seeking spiritual guidance, and connecting with a supportive community. Additionally, faith also influences the decisions made regarding end-of-life care. According to Sarfo-Kantanka et al. (2021), many Muslim patients in Ghana prefer spiritual or religious healing methods in conjunction with, or sometimes instead of, conventional medical treatment. They believe that these spiritual interventions, rooted in their faith, contributes to their healing or ease their transition to the afterlife. Lastly, faith provides a supportive community for terminally ill patients. As found by Mensah and Ansong (2020), mosques and Islamic organizations in Ghana often provide both spiritual and practical support to individuals coping with terminal illnesses and their families. This sense of communal support, grounded in shared faith, significantly alleviate the feelings of isolation and despair often experienced by those dealing with terminal illnesses.

## CONCLUSION

Islamic religion holds a profound influence on attitudes towards death among Muslim communities in Ghana. Islamic beliefs, rituals, and traditions provide a framework of meaning that shapes perspectives on death as an inevitable and purposeful part of life. These religious teachings offer guidance and support to individuals and communities in coping with the loss of loved ones and finding comfort in times of grief. In Islam, death is viewed as a natural and inescapable event that every individual will eventually face. Muslims believe that life in this world is temporary and that the ultimate destination is the afterlife. This belief in the transient nature of earthly life helps Muslims come to terms with the inevitability of death and encourages them to focus on preparing for the eternal life that follows.

Islamic teachings emphasize the purpose and meaning of death. Muslims believe that death is a transition to the next phase of existence, where individuals will be held accountable for their actions in this life. This belief provides a sense of purpose and encourages Muslims to live a righteous life, knowing that their deeds will be judged in the hereafter. The belief in the afterlife also offers solace and hope to the bereaved, as they trust that their loved ones have moved on to a better place. Islamic rituals and traditions surrounding death play a significant role in providing comfort and support to the grieving individuals and communities. When a Muslim passes away, it is customary for the body to be treated with utmost respect and dignity. The deceased is promptly

prepared for burial, and family members and community members come together to perform the funeral rites. These rituals, guided by Islamic teachings, provide a sense of closure and allow the bereaved to honor the deceased and seek forgiveness for them. The community's presence and support during this time of loss help alleviate the burden of grief and offer comfort to the bereaved.

Islamic beliefs also provide coping mechanisms for dealing with grief and loss. Muslims are encouraged to turn to prayer and supplication to seek solace and find strength in their faith. The Quranic verses and religious teachings offer guidance on how to navigate the emotional and spiritual aspects of grief. Muslims are taught to remember that death is a reminder of the temporary nature of life and to use it as an opportunity for self-reflection, repentance, and recommitment to one's faith. Furthermore, Islamic communities in Ghana often come together to support bereaved individuals and families. They offer condolences, practical assistance, and emotional support during the mourning period and beyond. This collective support system helps individuals cope with the loss and reinforces the sense of community and belonging.

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