

STATUS OF WOMEN IN MILITARY MEDICINE AT THE EARLY ISLAMIC ERA-A HISTORICAL REVIEW**Seyyed Alireza Golshani¹, Fatemeh Seddigh² and Zehra Zaidi^{3*}**¹PhD Islamic History of Iran, Ferdowsi University of Mashhad, Mashhad, Iran.²English Department, Faculty of Paramedical Sciences, Shiraz University of Medical Sciences, Shiraz, Iran.³B.U.M.S., M.D., Assistant Professor, Department of Ain, Uzun, Anaf, Halaq wa Asnan, Jamia Hamdard, New Delhi, India.Article Received on
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New Delhi, India.**ABSTRACT**

With the advent of Islam women gained the equal social status as men and played the same role in all aspects of life such as social, political, and even military aspects. The presence of women in the battle fields was mainly for providing logistic support and medical activities. In this article the role of women in medical realm is described by revisiting and exploring the narrations and the early Islamic texts. The results indicate that one of the duties of women who were engaged in the battle fields was contribution in medical activities in order to cure the sick and the wounded. Therefore, these women can be regarded as the pioneers of the military women in the medical realm.

KEYWORDS: Military Medicine, Nursing, Women, Early Islam,

War.

INTRODUCTION

Islam attaches great importance to education and knowledge as a tool to solve all the problems of humanity which is evident from the Holy Quran and many traditions of Prophet (SWA). Islam has given equal right to women to seek medical education and to practice medicine as it has given to its male counterpart. We can see the examples of equal participation of Muslim medical women in the Islamic society and military activities in early Islamic era by visiting historical literature. Unfortunately, researchers have not paid enough

attention to women's role in medical services and so far there are few independent articles regarding services of female physicians in the Islamic civilization.

AIMS AND OBJECTS

Study of historical literature to establish the status of Muslim women in Military Medicine at the early Islamic era.

Literature Review: To study about the history of medical science especially about a particular disease during a particular era of a specific geographical boundary would not be complete without considering the socio-cultural and ethical values along with spiritual and scientific beliefs of that era. Treatment of the ailing originates from the socio-cultural values. Medicine is the combination of theoretical and practical activities used to provide and promote the health of a society.

Historical evidence reveals that men and women were actively involved in the medical field from the very ancient time. In this context, Will Durant states "women were the first to perform medical activities in primitive societies. It seems that women's interest in medicine was not solely due to their taking care of men and doing midwifery; rather it was a result of their familiarity with medical herbs. "...because their closer connection *with the soil gave them a better knowledge of plants, and enabled them to develop the art of medicine as distinct from the magic-mongering, it was the woman who healed. Only when the woman failed did the primitive sick resort to the medicine-man and shaman*"^[1]

To investigate the role and contribution of Muslim women in medical field in early Islamic era, we studied the life of prophet Mohammad, peace be upon him (PBUH) through Islamic and historical literature of that time. At that time some women participated in the Jihad by providing logistics support. In this way women were involved in medical activities during the prophet Mohammad (PBUH)'s life, which can be regarded as military medicine or the practice of health care for military services.^[2]

Military medicine is composed of two words: medicine and military, and means medicine in the service of military personnel. Actually, military medicine considers humanitarian goals in the military context. From scientific point of view, there is no difference between medicine and military medicine regarding their methods and manner.^[3]

Therefore, the women who were active in medical services at the early Islamic era can be regarded as the pioneers of female physicians in the Islamic civilization.

Women with Military Medicine in the prophet Muhammad (PBUH) Era

The study and analysis of the scientific, political, and economic status of women plays a key role in recognizing the historical identity of the women in Islamic culture and civilization. With the spread of Islam, the social position of women was recognized and they took part in all aspects of life such as political, social, and military activities alongside men. The presence of women in the battle fields in that historical era were necessity of that time, as after the battle of the Trench and the elimination of the Jews, when the prophet (PBUH) settled in Medina. Women played the most important roles in all social arenas including medical services in the big city of Medina.

Historical reports indicate that women in early Islamic era participated in battlefield by providing logistic support like water, food delivery and medical activities in order to cure the sick and the wounded.^[2]

Women took part in the battles only if Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) approved to do so. There were cases that the prophet did not give permission to women to participate in the wars. Some historical reports explicitly express why prophet Muhammad (PBUH) did not permit the participation of some women in the battle fields.^[2] It is reported that when Umm Keshah of Quda'a tribe asked the prophet to permit her to join the army for the treatment of the wounded, her request was rejected. It has been mentioned that prophet Muhammad (PBUH) wanted to avoid the cynical views of his opponents.^[4] However, lack of women's participation in the battles did not mean that they were totally prohibited from fighting. Perhaps it can be said that the spirit of women are not compatible with fighting and bloodshed. According to some authors the prophet did not want that the women's presence in wars and bloodshed become a norm.^[5,6] However many women were given permission by the prophet Muhammad (PBUH) to accompany him and the soldiers.

In addition to the women who attended the battle fields for the treatment of the wounded, there were also women who treated the sick based on their experience and/or comparative curative approaches in social life. Some historians reported Shifa the daughter of Harith and some say the daughter of Abdullah ibn Abdulshams in Jahiliyyah (the ignorance of divine guidance) treated Numlh which is a kind of skin disease with Amulet.^[4,7] Up to some extent

this kind of treatment of *Jahilliyyan* (Ignorance) era was unscientific and experimental. As this treatment was practiced by the priestess of the Chaldean and from them passed over to Muslim women. Therefore, these female priests can be considered as medical and midwifery teachers of Arabs women.^[8] During this period there was no formal medical education in Arabia and they practiced traditional Herbal medicine. This indicates that women at the early Islamic era were not only familiar with the beneficial properties of herbs and herbal remedies, but also knew how to practice primary medical care.

To prove the status of women in medical field in early Islamic era we find out some women from the historical literature who were the pioneers of medicine at that time. The names of women physicians, healers, nurses or health care providers are Hazrat Fatima Zahra (PBUH), Hammanah bint Jahsh ibn Riyab Asadi, Rofeideh Islimiye, Kaebah Bent Sa'd Ibn Uqba Aslami, Umm Ziyad Ashjaeyh, Umm Attieh Ansari, Umm Salim Gromeisa (Sahleh), Nasibeh Bent Kaab Mazeneyh, Barakah Bent Tha'alaba bin Amr, Umm Sanan Aslami, Umayya Bent Qais Ibn Abi-Salt Ghaffari, Ash-Shifaa binte Abdullah al-Quraishiyah al-Aladviyah, Samira Bent Qais, Lili Ghaffareyh^[9], Rabi Bent Mauz Safra Ansari, Umm Keshsheh Quda'a^[10], Umm Salmeh^[11], Mauz Ghaffareyh^[12] and Umm Abeh^[10], who took part in many of the prophet's battles. Perhaps these women can be considered as the pioneers of military physicians in the early Islamic era.^[6]

To elaborate the medical activities of female physicians of early Islamic era we are providing the brief introduction of some female physicians from the above names with small descriptions of their medical contributions.

Hazrat Fatima Zahra (PBUH)

Fatimah bint Muhammad (born c. 605 or 615-died 633) was the youngest daughter of the prophet Muhammad and Khadijah. She took part in the battle of Uhud and delivered water and food to the soldiers and treated the wounded including her father.^[13] As reported by the Muslim historians, she attended the battle of Uhud and treated the wounds of her father many times. When prophet Muhammad (PBUH) was wounded, she burnt a piece of mat and covered his wounds with its ashes to stop bleeding.^[4] She was indeed familiar with all aspects of medical treatment.

Hammanah bint Jahsh ibn Riyab Asadi

She was the aunt of the prophet (PBUH). While taking part in the battle of Uhud she not only delivered water to the soldiers, but also treated and cured the wounded.^[4,14,15]

Rufaidah Al-aslamiya

She belonged to Ansars, the supporters of prophet Muhammad (PBUH). Rufaidah was the most famous physician and professional nurse of her time. She obtained clinical experience from her father and provided nursing training to other Muslim women. In the battle of Trench, she put up a tent in Al-Masjid an-Nabawi and used it as her clinic. All the wounded were taken to that tent to be treated by her. Supervision and nursing of the Muslim wounded soldiers was carried out by Rufaidah herself. Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) used to meet and greet her from time to time.^[9,16,17]

Kaebah Bent Sa'd Ibn Uqba Aslamiya

She took part in the battle with Banu Qurayza and cured the sick and wounded in a tent which was set up in Al-Masjid an-Nabawi. Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) encouraged her by giving her the same share of the spoils as a soldier. Kaebah treated Sa'd ibn Mu'adh who was injured in the battle of Trench and extracted the arrow from his body successfully.¹¹ She was Rufaidah's sister and possibly used the same tent as her clinic.^[4]

Umm Ziyad Ashjaeyh

She was one of the women who left Medina with the permission of the prophet (PBUH) to deliver drugs and treat the wounded in the battle of khaybar.^[10]

Umm Attieh Ansari

Umm Attieh was another dedicated Physician and nurse who accompanied prophet Muhammad (PBUH) in most of his battles.^[10] Ibn Sa'd quoted from her that she accompanied the prophet (PBUH) in seven battles and was responsible not only for cooking and looking after the goods, but also for nursing and treatment of the wounded.^[4]

Umm Sulaym Gromeisa (Sahleh)

She was Milhan Ansari's daughter from the tribe of Banu Najjar. She took part in the battle of Uhud and delivered water and took care of the wounded. Although she was pregnant, she provided health care in the battle of Hunayn.^[4]

Nasibeh Bent Kaab Mazeneyh

She was the daughter of Kaab Mazeneyh and known as Umm Amarah. Nasibeh was from Medina and belonged to the tribe of Banu Najjar. She took part in two pledges: pledge of Aqaba^[1] and pledge of the Tree.^[2] In addition to delivering water and treating the wounded, she also fought like a lion in the battle using a sword or an axe as a perfect warrior. She received twelve wounds in the battle of Uhud and lost one of her hands in the battle of Yamama and Ridda wars with Musaylimh Liar.^[4,19]

Barakah Bent Tha'alaba bin Amr

She was the daughter of Tha'alaba bin Amr and was known as Umme Aymen. Barakah was liberated bond woman and nurse of Prophet Mohammad (PBUH). She was part of the battle of Uhud and was responsible to provide water, bandaging the wounded soldiers and care of the sick.^[4]

Umm Sanan Aslami

She accompanied Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) in the battle of Khaybar and treated the wounded.^[4,10,11]

Umayya Bent Qais Ibn Abi-Salt Ghaffari

She belonged to the tribe of Ghaffari. Along with some women of the tribe of Ghaffar, she treated the soldiers who were wounded and moved the martyrs to Medina.^[5]

Ash-Shifa binte Abdullah al-Quraishiyah al-Aladviyah

Her real name was Layla, Ash-Shifa is a title derived from her profession as a medicine woman, it meant, healing. She was literate in an illiterate age and was expert in medicine and involved in public administration also.



Figure 1: Arab warrior woman (Figure extracted from History of Islamic Civilization by Jurji Zaydan, page: 771).

DISCUSSION

The period of Prophet of Islam at Medina w.e.f.622 to 632 AD, where he fought many battles is very small. In this short period of settled life of about ten years he set many examples for participation of women as physician, nurse and health care providers in battlefields and social life also. Women were discouraged to participate in battle as warrior except in extreme necessity but their participation as health care providers was permissible by Prophet (SAW). Jurji Zaydan has published the photograph of women warrior in his book.

CONCLUSION

The history of medicine has witnessed many surprising events and one of them is the participation of women in the military medicine at the early Islamic era. This reveals the Islamic broad mindedness that permitted women to take part in important social activities shaping their lives and destinies. Women in early Islamic era got recognition as physicians, surgeons, nurses and medical health care provider centuries ago ahead of women in Europe and other parts of world where they got this recognition in 19th century.

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