

## Sexual Identity Transformation After Hysterectomy: A Qur'anic Perspective

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**Abstract:** Hysterectomy is a surgical procedure that has a significant impact on a woman's sexual identity, not only physically, but also psychologically and spiritually. The loss of the uterus is often interpreted as a partial loss of female identity, which then triggers a crisis of self-image, feelings of loss, anxiety, and even deep depression. This study aims to explore the transformation of women's sexual identity post-hysterectomy through in-depth analysis based on scientific literature and from the perspective of Qur'anic teachings. Problem solving is done through qualitative methods based on the study of relevant and current literature. The results show that accepting bodily changes as part of fate and divine will is a key factor in the healing and recovery. Ongoing spiritual support and social support from the immediate environment significantly influenced women's identity and emotional balance recovery. Therefore, a holistic and integrative approach that includes medical, psychological, social, and spiritual dimensions is needed in post-hysterectomy assistance. This approach can help women rediscover the meaning of life and the integrity of their identity within the framework of Islamic values.

**Keywords:** Sexual Identity Transformation, Hysterectomy, Qur'anic Perspective

### Introduction

Hysterectomy, a surgical procedure to remove the uterus, is one of the most commonly performed surgeries on women worldwide, especially for medical conditions such as fibroids, endometriosis, or uterine cancer.<sup>1</sup> However, more than just a medical procedure, hysterectomy carries profound psychological and emotional consequences. The loss of the uterus is often interpreted as the loss of a part of a woman's identity that is closely linked to femininity, reproductive function, and motherhood.<sup>2</sup> Several studies have found that women who undergo a hysterectomy often face significant challenges in accepting their body changes, which can affect intimate relationships, self-esteem, and overall self-perception.<sup>3</sup>

Sexual identity is one of the most affected aspects of post-mastectomy. Loss of reproductive function and physical changes often lead to feelings of loss, anxiety, and depression.<sup>4</sup> Women may feel less sexually attractive or incomplete as a woman, which exacerbates their identity crisis.<sup>5</sup> In addition, other studies have shown that hysterectomy is also often followed by changes in sexual function, including decreased libido, pain during intercourse, and emotional disturbances that worsen interpersonal relationships.<sup>6</sup> Therefore, understanding hysterectomy as a critical moment in a woman's sexual identity is an essential step in providing appropriate and holistic support.

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<sup>1</sup> Zimmermann et al., "Quality of Life and Sexual Function in Patients Aged 35 Years or Younger Undergoing Hysterectomy for Benign Gynecologic Conditions: A Prospective Cohort Study."

<sup>2</sup> Nicolas, Proust, and Fabiszak, "Women and Their Uteruses: Symbolic Vessels for Prejudiced Expectations."

<sup>3</sup> Elmir et al., "Interviewing People about Potentially Sensitive Topics."

<sup>4</sup> Beyan et al., "Comparison of the Effects of Total Laparoscopic Hysterectomy and Total Abdominal Hysterectomy on Sexual Function and Quality of Life."

<sup>5</sup> Ussher, Chrisler, and Perz, *Routledge International Handbook of Women's Sexual and Reproductive Health*.

<sup>6</sup> Lonnée-Hoffmann and Pinas, "Effects of Hysterectomy on Sexual Function."

The impact of hysterectomy is felt both individually and in social relationships, especially relationships with partners. Studies show that women who undergo hysterectomy often face changes in their social relationships, particularly in intimate relationships.<sup>7</sup> Hysterectomy can have complex psychological and emotional effects, such as feelings of loss of attractiveness, anxiety about partner acceptance, and physical discomfort that affects intimacy.<sup>8</sup> Research from Zuitasari reveals that hysterectomy is often followed by changes in sexual function, including decreased libido, pain during intercourse, and feelings of inadequacy.<sup>9</sup> Therefore, understanding hysterectomy as a critical moment in a woman's sexual identity is an essential step in providing appropriate support.

Previous studies have discussed the impact of hysterectomy on women's psychological and sexual aspects. For example, a survey by Elmir described the experiences of women who experienced a sense of loss, changes in body image, and disturbances in intimate relationships. Similarly, Zuitasari and Yiqun's study revealed changes in sexual function, such as decreased libido and pain during intercourse, as a common post-hysterectomy impact.<sup>10</sup> In addition, some studies, such as Bayda'a's, cover the social and psychological aspects of the experience of women who have lost their wombs, including feelings of not being whole as a woman and decreased self-esteem.

However, most of these studies have not deeply touched on the spiritual dimension, particularly regarding Islamic values. This study offers a novelty by integrating a Qur'anic-based spiritual approach to understand post-hysterectomy sexual identity transformation. By highlighting how Muslim women interpret such changes as part of God's destiny, this study aims to fill a gap in the literature and provide a perspective on identity restoration that is not only psychological or medical, but also spiritual.

From an Islamic perspective, women's sexual identity and roles are also regulated in the teachings of the Qur'an and hadith. The Qur'an provides guidance on the importance of patience and acceptance in facing life's trials, including in health conditions such as post-hysterectomy (QS. Al-Baqarah [2]: 286; and QS. Al-Inshirah [94]: 5-6).

*"Allah does not burden anyone except according to his ability. To him is the reward for what he has done, and to him is the punishment for what he has done. (They pray,) "Oh, our Lord, do not punish us if we forget or err. Oh, our Lord, do not burden us with a heavy burden as You burdened those before us. Oh, our Lord, do not impose what we cannot bear on us. Forgive us, pardon us, and have mercy on us. You are our protector. So, help us against the disbelievers." (QS. Al Baqarah verse 286)."*

*So, indeed, with difficulty there is ease. Indeed, with difficulty there is ease. QS. Al-Inshirah [94]: 5-6."*

These verses emphasize that Allah does not burden a person beyond his ability, which provides a foundation for women to understand physical trials as part of destiny that must be faced with patience and tawakkal. The concepts of patience and tawakkal (surrendering to Allah) can be the basis for women to accept their changing sexual identity and find new meaning after surgery.<sup>11</sup> In addition, Islam views the human body as a trust that must be safeguarded and respected, regardless of the

<sup>7</sup> Alshawish, Qadous, and Yamani, "Experience of Palestinian Women After Hysterectomy Using a Descriptive Phenomenological Study."

<sup>8</sup> Ismail, Noori, and Al-Ganmi, "Psychological and Sexual Problems among Women with Hysterectomy at Baghdad City."

<sup>9</sup> Zuitasari, Yusrizal, and Basir, "Influence Total Hysterectomy against Function Sexual Pengaruh Histerektomi Total Dengan Fungsi Seksual."

<sup>10</sup> Wang and Ying, "Sexual Function after Total Laparoscopic Hysterectomy or Transabdominal Hysterectomy for Benign Uterine Disorders: A Retrospective Cohort."

<sup>11</sup> Achour, Bensaid, and Nor, "An Islamic Perspective on Coping with Life Stressors."

physical circumstances at hand.<sup>12</sup> This shows that her biological or sexual functions do not solely determine a woman's value and self-worth.

Integrating a spiritual perspective in understanding hysterectomy can provide a deeper psychological and social healing dimension. Several studies have shown that spiritual support and religious understanding can help women deal with sexual identity crisis and reduce the negative psychological impact.<sup>13</sup> This study seeks to analyze the experiences of post-hysterectomy women in the context of sexual identity using the Qur'anic perspective as a foundation, which is expected to provide a more comprehensive understanding of this identity transformation process.

This study is critical because it provides a holistic view that not only considers medical and psychological aspects but also raises spiritual values that are relevant to Muslim women, such as how they interpret the loss of the uterus as a test or Allah's destiny that must be endured with patience and trust. While some studies have highlighted the psychological and sexual impact of post-hysterectomy, very few have gone into depth about spiritual support, especially in the context of Islamic values, as part of the recovery process. A Qur'anic perspective can be a significant source of strength in understanding and accepting the changes that occur, as well as assisting women in the process of reconstructing their sexual identity. This study is also expected to be a reference for health workers, counselors, and spiritual companions in providing support that aligns with the patient's religious values. Thus, this study fills an essential gap in the literature by offering a more comprehensive approach, integrating spiritual aspects that have received less attention in treating post-hysterectomy women.

This research used a qualitative approach with a literature study method. Data were collected by searching relevant references, such as scientific articles and textbooks. Data analysis was conducted by reading critically, examining the content of these sources, summarizing, and presenting the findings according to the research focus.

## Discussion

### *Hysterectomy and Its Impact*

Hysterectomy is a surgical procedure that involves the removal of the uterus and can lead to profound impacts, both physical and psychological, on women. From a medical perspective, a hysterectomy is often performed to treat various medical conditions such as uterine myoma, uterine cancer, or endometriosis that cannot be treated in any other way. However, while it may provide long-term health benefits, the procedure can bring about significant changes in aspects of women's lives, especially their sexual and reproductive identities.

From a psychological standpoint, many women report significant changes in their self-perception and quality of life after undergoing a hysterectomy.<sup>14</sup> A study published by Niina showed that around 60% of women who underwent hysterectomy experienced an improved quality of life, particularly regarding reduced pelvic pain or heavy bleeding that previously interfered with daily activities. However, there are also significant adverse impacts, such as hormonal changes, impaired

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<sup>12</sup> Shomali, "Islamic Bioethics: A General Scheme."

<sup>13</sup> Ai et al., "Existential Relatedness in Light of Eudemonic Well-Being and Religious Coping among Middle-Aged and Older Cardiac Patients."

<sup>14</sup> Erdoğan et al., "Effect of Psychological Care given to the Women Who Underwent Hysterectomy before and after the Surgery on Depressive Symptoms, Anxiety and the Body Image Levels\*."

sexual function, and psychological distress that some women feel post-surgery.<sup>15</sup> Another study by Valentina revealed that 84% to 92% of women reported increased anxiety and depression after undergoing a hysterectomy, especially about the physical changes to the body and the reduced ability to have children.<sup>16</sup>

In terms of sexual impact, hysterectomy can have a significant effect on the sexual aspects of women, with experiences varying between individuals. Some women report improved sexual function after the procedure, particularly due to a reduction in physical symptoms resulting from certain medical conditions, such as chronic pelvic pain or heavy bleeding.<sup>17</sup> However, this experience is not universal. A study conducted by Kate R found that about 20-30% of women experience decreased libido, impaired sexual function, and changes in body perception after surgery.<sup>18</sup> This is especially true for women who feel they have lost part of their identity as a woman after uterine removal. Psychologically, the physical changes are often accompanied by symptoms of depression and anxiety that arise due to impaired self-perception after surgery.<sup>19</sup>

From an Islamic perspective, the human body is considered a trust from Allah, and any changes, including those that occur after a hysterectomy, are part of His will. Islamic teachings emphasize the importance of maintaining physical and mental health and accepting all life's trials with patience and confidence. QS. Al-Inshirah [94]: 5-6 states, "After hardship there is ease." This verse provides a spiritual framework within which women can cope with loss and body changes. This Islamic perspective teaches acceptance of physical changes. It gives women the spiritual strength to adjust to these changes, realizing that this condition is part of the God-ordained journey of life.

In the recovery process, Islam encourages women to rediscover the meaning of life through a spiritual approach, strengthening their relationship with God, and understanding that their bodies retain dignity and value despite the changes. Support from family and community, and diligence in worship play an essential role in strengthening self-identity and reducing the negative impact of post-hysterectomy changes. This holistic view not only aids the process of physical acceptance but also supports women's psychological and spiritual well-being, ultimately strengthening their resilience in the face of such changes.

### ***A Holistic Approach to Recovery***

In the face of post-hysterectomy sexual identity transformation, a holistic approach is necessary to ensure optimal recovery. Recovery involves not only physical aspects, but should also include psychological, social, and spiritual dimensions that are intertwined to form a woman's total well-being. The post-hysterectomy recovery process often includes significant bodily changes that affect a woman's sexual identity and function. Therefore, it is essential to view recovery as a complex and multidimensional process, which requires support that is not only medical but also emotional, social, and spiritual. QS states that the Qur'an encourages people to maintain balanced body, mind, and spirit health. Al-Baqarah [2]: 195: "*And spend (your wealth) in the way of Allah, and do not throw yourselves into destruction, and do good; surely Allah loves those who do good.*"

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<sup>15</sup> Humalajärvi et al., "Quality of Life and Pelvic Floor Dysfunction Symptoms after Hysterectomy with or without Pelvic Organ Prolapse."

<sup>16</sup> U et al., "0717-7526-Rchog-84-03-0245."

<sup>17</sup> Tyagi et al., "Prospective Observational Study of the Impact of Vaginal Surgery (Pelvic Organ Prolapse with or without Urinary Incontinence) on Female Sexual Function."

<sup>18</sup> Muller et al., "Female Gender and Surgery Impair Relationships, Body Image, and Sexuality in Inflammatory Bowel Disease: Patient Perceptions."

<sup>19</sup> Rahima, "Gambaran Tingkat Kecemasan Pasien Pre-Operasi Katarak Di Rumah Sakit Di Kota Bandung."

**Physical Aspects.** Physical recovery post-hysterectomy involves a process of healing the body that requires intensive and targeted medical attention. The Qur'an teaches the importance of taking care of the body as a form of trust from Allah, which includes caring for health and accepting the body's condition with patience. In this context, women can understand their physical changes as part of the journey of life that needs to be lived with patience and tawakkal, as mentioned in QS. Al-Baqarah [2]: 286: "Allah does not place a person except according to his ability."

In addition to the medical aspects, changes in sexual and reproductive functions often have an impact on a woman's sexual identity. Therefore, physical recovery must occur with medical and psychological support to manage these changes positively. This support can help women restore confidence and understand that their bodies still have the same value and power despite the changes. With a holistic approach that includes medical, psychological, and spiritual aspects, women can thoroughly recover and rebuild their self-identity.

**Psychological Aspects.** Psychologically, women may experience anxiety, depression, or decreased self-image due to changes in their bodies. Providing adequate emotional and psychological support through professional counseling and spiritual approaches is essential. Here, the concepts of tawakkal (surrender to Allah) and patience taught in the Qur'an can be a significant source of strength. For example, QS. AlBaqarah [2]: 286 states that "Allah does not burden anyone except according to his ability," which provides a spiritual foundation for women to believe they can face this trial.

In addition, it is essential to involve support from the immediate environment in the psychological recovery process of post-hysterectomy women. Support from partners, family, and friends can help ease the emotional burden. When women feel heard and understood, they are better able to manage feelings of anxiety or depression that may arise. On the other hand, doing religious activities such as praying, reading the Qur'an, or praying can also calm the heart and help restore psychological balance. QS. Ar-Ra'd [13]: 28 emphasizes, "*Remember, only with the remembrance of Allah will the heart be at peace.*"

**Social Aspects.** Social support from spouse, family, and community plays a vital role in the recovery process of post-hysterectomy women. In Islam, family and community are invaluable sources of social support, as emphasized in the teaching to help one another in goodness and piety (QS. Al-Ma'idah: 2). Women who feel emotionally and morally supported by their partners and communities may find it easier to cope with feelings of loss or changes in their sexual identity. Affectionate and understanding spousal support is key in helping women restore their self-image and strengthen their confidence post-surgery. As mentioned in QS, marriage in Islam is seen as a relationship based on mawaddah (compassion) and rahmah (love). Ar-Rum [30]: 21: "*And among the signs of His greatness is that He created for you mates of your kind, that you may tend to them and feel secure in them.*" This teaching underlines that support in marriage is not only an obligation, but also a form of deep affection, which can provide peace for couples in every phase of life, including when facing trials such as post-hysterectomy recovery.

In addition, community support in the form of moral and spiritual support is also critical. Social solidarity is one of the main pillars of individual well-being in Islam. A caring community, whether through emotional support or prayer, can provide comfort and motivation for women undergoing the recovery process after hysterectomy. Being together in a community has the potential to ease the emotional burden while giving new hope for recovery. This is in line with Islamic values that encourage people to always support each other, especially for those who are experiencing difficulties, as mentioned in the Quran. At-Taubah [9]: 71: "And those who believe, men and women, some of them are helpers for others." I am running a few minutes late; my previous meeting is over.

***Spiritual Aspects.*** From a spiritual perspective, post-hysterectomy recovery is not only centered on the physical and psychological aspects, but also includes a deep effort to accept the changes within the framework of the Divine will. In Islamic teachings, patience and tawakkal (surrender) are necessary to face life's trials. This is in line with QS. Al-Inshirah [94]: 5-6, which states, "For surely after hardship there is ease." This verse serves as a spiritual reminder that every life challenge, including hysterectomy, is part of God's plan with greater meaning and purpose. This belief can help women interpret the changes that occur as part of the journey of life that God has arranged.

Religious practices such as prayer, reading the Qur'an, and prayer act as spiritual coping mechanisms that help women gain inner peace and accept their sexual identity transformation more gracefully. Research shows that spirituality can be an essential psychological resource in dealing with significant changes to the body and self-identity, and contributes to reduced stress levels and an increased sense of peace. This holistic approach that includes medical, psychological, social, and spiritual dimensions allows Muslim women to see post-hysterectomy recovery not only as a physical process but as a spiritual journey that strengthens their resilience in the face of change. Support from family, community, as well as a closer relationship with Allah, play a significant role in helping women undergo this transformation of sexual identity. With this approach, they can find strength in the Qur'anic teachings of resilience, patience, and piety, making recovery an opportunity to affirm their closeness to God and strengthen their spiritual and sexual identities simultaneously.

***Cultural and Social Influences.*** Perceptions of women's sexual and reproductive identity are often strongly influenced by cultural and social factors. In many societies, the uterus is seen as the ultimate symbol of femininity and reproductive ability, so losing it can trigger an identity crisis for some women.<sup>20</sup> Research shows that women from different cultural backgrounds respond to hysterectomy in varied ways. In some cultures, hysterectomy is seen as the end of the reproductive period and the beginning of a change in roles within the family and society. This sometimes leads to women feeling a loss of status or self-worth as they are no longer able to play a reproductive or family-forming role.<sup>21</sup> This concept shows how much social and cultural pressure there is on women in terms of their reproductive ability and their identity.

However, in the Islamic context, women's identity and dignity are not solely determined by their reproductive abilities. QS. Al-Hujurat [49]: 13 emphasizes that the value of a human being in the sight of Allah is more dependent on piety, with His words: "Indeed, the noblest among you in the sight of Allah is the most pious." This verse provides a spiritual foundation for women to understand that their glory and value in the eyes of Allah are not only based on their biological role as mothers, but also on their faith and piety.

Islamic teachings support the view that women's value transcends biological and physical boundaries and is not limited to social roles. This understanding can help post-hysterectomy women cope with social and cultural pressures related to sexual and reproductive identity. The support provided through this spiritual perspective enables women to reinvent themselves more fully, with a focus on religious values that view piety as a measure of nobility. In the context of post-hysterectomy recovery, this perspective can be a source of strength, reduce social pressure, and support women to continue to fulfill other productive roles in the family and society without feeling a loss of self-worth.

***Spiritual Support and Coping Mechanisms.*** Spiritual and social support play an essential role in helping women manage the identity transformation that often accompanies hysterectomy. Studies show that women who receive pre-operative psychological support and counseling, as well as

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<sup>20</sup> dzebu and arts, "the perceptions of women with fibroids from diverse cultures."

<sup>21</sup> Elson, "Hormonal Hierarchy: Hysterectomy and Stratified Stigma."

spiritual support, tend to experience a more positive adjustment post-hysterectomy.<sup>22</sup> In Muslim women, religious practices such as prayer, reciting the Qur'an, and praying proved to be effective coping mechanisms to help them deal with the physical and emotional changes brought about by the procedure. This study highlights that religious rituals can provide calmness as well as emotional stability, especially when women face changes that affect their sexual identity.

In addition to spiritual support, support from partners and family also plays a vital role in the recovery process. A study conducted by Mi Hae Sung revealed that emotional support from a partner plays a crucial role in improving self-image and increasing sexual satisfaction of women after undergoing a hysterectomy.<sup>23</sup> Among women who receive support from their spouses, body image and acceptance of physical changes significantly improve their self-confidence. In Islam, the concept of marriage is regarded as a bond built upon *mawaddah* (affection) and *rahmah* (compassion), as explained in Surah Ar-Rum [30]: 21: 'And among His signs is that He created for you from yourselves mates that you may find tranquility in them; and He placed between you affection (*mawaddah*) and mercy (*rahmah*).'

This teaching indicates that the marital bond in Islam goes beyond the physical aspect, encompassing deep emotional support throughout all phases of life, including when facing medical challenges such as a hysterectomy. By strengthening spiritual connection with Allah and receiving support from family and spouses, women can more easily navigate identity changes caused by hysterectomy, find peace during recovery, and maintain their quality of life and self-confidence.

The coping theory by Lazarus and Folkman, known as the *Transactional Model of Stress and Coping*, describes coping as a dynamic process involving an individual's efforts to manage internal and external demands perceived as stressful or exceeding their available resources. This theory views dealing as a result of interaction between the individual and their environment in response to stress. According to Lazarus and Folkman, there are two main stages in coping with stress.<sup>24</sup>

1. Primary Appraisal: Individuals first assess whether an event or situation is perceived as relevant and can potentially affect well-being. The individual will perceive the situation as stressful if it is perceived as threatening, challenging, or detrimental.
2. Secondary Appraisal: Individuals assess their ability to deal with the stressor at this stage. They evaluate their resources (physical, psychological, and social) and the strategies they can use to cope with the situation.

After these two stages of assessment, individuals will choose a coping strategy that is considered the most effective in coping with stress. Lazarus and Folkman classify coping into two main types:

1. Problem-Focused Coping: This strategy focuses on trying to change or overcome the source of stress. Individuals use this approach when they feel the situation can be controlled or altered. Examples include seeking information, making an action plan, or taking direct steps to reduce or eliminate the stressor.
2. Emotion-Focused Coping: This strategy regulates emotional responses to stress. It is usually used when individuals feel they cannot change or control the situation. These strategies include accepting the situation, seeking emotional support, distraction, or finding a positive meaning.

In the context of post-hysterectomy research, this theory is relevant as women face stressors related to changes in sexual, physical, and emotional identity. They use problem-focused coping by

<sup>22</sup> Erdoğan et al., "Effect of Psychological Care given to the Women Who Underwent Hysterectomy before and after the Surgery on Depressive Symptoms, Anxiety and the Body Image Levels\*."

<sup>23</sup> Sung and Lim, "Factors Affecting Sexual Satisfaction in Korean Women Who Have Undergone a Hysterectomy."

<sup>24</sup> Ali et al., "Of Kidney Diseases and Transplantation Brief Communication Effectiveness of Interventions Based on Lazarus and Folkman Transactional Model on Improving Stress Appraisal for Hemodialysis Patients in Tehran."

seeking medical information or social support to cope with these changes. At the same time, emotion-focused coping is applied by seeking spiritual support or engaging in worship practices to help them accept the irreversible physical changes. This theory provides a framework for understanding how individuals use different coping strategies, according to their resources and context, in the face of significant change or loss

## Conclusion

This study shows that hysterectomy not only affects the physical aspects of women but also brings significant changes in their sexual and emotional identities. Spiritual support, primarily through the teachings of the Qur'an, as well as social support from partners, family, and community, play an essential role in the post-hysterectomy recovery process. After this procedure, women steeped in the values of patience and acceptance of Allah's destiny can find new strength and meaning in their life journey. It is therefore essential to develop a holistic recovery program that considers the medical, psychological, and spiritual dimensions to support women in embracing these changes more positively. Integrating spiritual values can enrich recovery, help women find inner peace, and strengthen their resilience in facing life's challenges.

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