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### Peruvian Women, Hysterectomy, and Femininity: Evidence to Inform Culturally Competent Nursing Practice

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**Background:** In South America, hysterectomies in women of childbearing age are more common than North America. For example, an estimated 24% of Chilean and Peruvian women of childbearing age had a hysterectomy. At the local level in Peru, hysterectomies represent about 5% of all surgical procedures at a large regional hospital. Despite the frequency of the surgical procedure, the meaning of the womb removal for women following hysterectomy (WFH) is largely unknown. Yet, womb removal has been described as a serious event of losing womanhood for different populations of women. The meaning WFH give to this phenomenon can directly impact their lives following surgery. This study aimed to describe the lived experiences of young Peruvian WFH, including the impact of womb removal on their relationships.

**Methods:** A qualitative study using a case study design. The participants were purposeful selected; women 20 to 40 years of age following hysterectomy within the last 6-12 months. The sample size was determined by data saturation. Data was collected with in-depth interviews at participant homes. The study was approved by the ethics committee.

**Results:** Seven WFH were interviewed, saturation was reached at this point. The interviews required 45-90 minutes to complete. Each interview was transcribed, the data was analyzed individually and collectively, and the information was synthesized into themes by the research team. Through the data coding and thematic analysis, four themes emerged to explain the phenomena women described as their lives after hysterectomy. These categories included: 1) Acknowledging bereavement; 2) Accepting womanly limitations; 3) Living with myths and wrong beliefs; and 4) Giving meaning to hysterectomy. Each woman reported feeling profound loss as well as experiencing suffering after womb removal; resulting in a process comparable to bereavement. The process began with acute episodes of depression, progressed to frustration and anger, and ended in acceptance with a new reality for life. The process progressively worsened as the women believed their femininity was lost with their removal of their wombs. The women reported relationship problems specific to inaccurate perceptions of their partner about their sexual vitality and their ability to enjoy sexual relations. In addition, the women reported feeling insecure about their partners seeking sexual relations with other women. Over time,

these problems improved upon as the women realized they relied upon myths and wrong beliefs for knowledge; including their family would be destroyed and believing their husbands were unfaithful. After the depression, frustration, and anger, the WFH learned to cope without their womb as they accepted with the loss of their womb. New meaning was found in their lives as the surgery cured a disease but left intact their womanhood.

**Conclusion:** WFH acknowledged substantial loss with grief. The experience was not defined by surgery; instead, many myths, beliefs, and abusive behaviors left the women vulnerable. A medicalized process reduced the women with the womb removal. If nurses recognize the needs of WFH; they can tailor coping strategies to address the psycho-social priorities. They can guide the women through the bereavement process to regain wholeness as a woman without their womb. In the end, nurses can help the women understand their femininity is not defined by an organ.

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**Title:**

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**Keywords:**

Femininity, Hysterectomy and Latina Women

**References:**

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### **Abstract Summary:**

More than 20% of Chilean and Peruvian women of childbearing age have hysterectomies. The meaning for women following hysterectomy (WFH) is largely unknown. Yet, womb removal has

been described as a serious event of losing womanhood. The meaning WFH give to this phenomena can directly impact their lives following surgery.

### **Content Outline:**

#### **I. Introduction - Overview of the Topic**

- A. Describe the current situation for young women and hysterectomies in South America
- B. Discuss the concept of femininity and the womb in the context of Latinas
- C. Provide a brief overview of the qualitative study

#### **II. Body - Discuss the Emerging themes**

- A. Acknowledging bereavement
  - B. Accepting womanly limitations
  - C. Living with myths and wrong beliefs
  - D. Giving meaning to hysterectomy.
- #### **III. Conclusion - Key Findings and Recommendations**

- A. Discuss the findings in the context of Peruvian women, and Peruvians living in the North America.
- B. Provide recommendations for nursing education as a preventive measure prior to hysterectomy for Peruvian women.

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