

Abstract

The study of “Hysterectomy : Medical Power towards Woman’s Body” aims to sociologically analyze the hysterectomy (the surgical removal of the uterus), which tends to be increasingly performed. The 2 purposes of this study are 1) to examine the exercise of discursive practices of modern medicine on women’s bodies 2) to study women’s resistance to medical power : explore women’s knowledge of their own bodies, the source and the reference of their knowledge; study their ways of resistance, including their decision-making towards hysterectomy performed by physicians.

The study works on concept of “Power/Knowledge”, coined by French Philosopher, Michel Foucault. Using the qualitative research approach, I conduct in-depth interviews with 8 women who have undergone the hysterectomy due to non-cancer conditions, such as the benign conditions, unbearable pain and bleeding.

The study found that the medical discourse and practices operate through scientific knowledge which is rooted by patriarchy. The reasons which the physicians recommend to women for having the hysterectomy are based on the techniques and strategies of medical knowledge and power. That is, medical discourse views women’s body on the notion of “body as machine” and often defines the inferiority of woman’s body. Moreover, medical knowledge provides the power to the professionals in medical science, especially, the physicians who are supposed to be the arbiters on the healthiness and illness of individuals.

Due to women’s knowledge and resistance, the study found that women’s knowledge are generated via feminine experience, including the domestic responsibilities, their illness experience, and life-events. However, the women’s knowledge are subjugated by medical discursive practices to be irrational and unreliable knowledge.

According to the women's resistance to medical power, the study found that the forms of resistance are women's attempts to build up their knowledge by seeking information from relatives and colleagues. Other forms of resistance are to consult the second-opinion, to choose the method of surgery, and to refuse the removal of ovary together with their hysterectomy. Nevertheless, woman's reasons to making decisions towards hysterectomy are partly based on physician's suggestions. It shows that medical discourse has influenced the women's ways of thinking and actions to their own bodies. The study found that there are 2 discourses : discourse on "menopause" and discourse on "cancer of the uterus", encouraging the existence of medical power to perform the hysterectomy.