245978 - The prohibition on masturbation is not from a medical point of view only

the question

I have an important question about masturbation. I have read the previous fatwa on it but am curious as to whether it may be changed due to new knowledge. One of the things I read about, why masturbation is haram is because of the ‘negative effects’ of it. However research done by professors has proven that all the old myths about it are false. Scientific research has actually proven the opposite that masturbation has many health benefits. I will name a few, it promotes the release of endorphins, the neurotransmitters associated with happy feelings that can improve the overall mood and fight off depression. It produces a chemical called oxytocin which works as a natural pain and improves pain resistance and tolerance. Masturbation also releases cortisol which improves the immune system. Masturbation has also been proven to help in the prevention of type-2 diabetes and prostate cancer by releasing cancer causing agents. Due to the fact that masturbation is not directly declared haram by Quran or hadith doesn’t the decision rest with whether it benefits of harms a person? With the present facts in mind it is obvious and scientifically proven that there are many effective health benefits of masturbation. And also the old myths and misconceptions about any harm it was thought to cause have been proven false. With the apparent facts wouldn’t the ruling on masturbation be changed as the benefit clearly outweighs any harm it was believed to have caused?

Detailed answer

Praise be to Allah.

If the shar‘i ruling was worked out on the basis of medical information only, and the medical findings changed, then in that case the shar‘i ruling would also change according to new medical findings. That is like the change in the ruling on smoking – over the years – for example. Because

medical knowledge when tobacco first appeared and was used for smoking did not indicate that there was any real physical harm from tobacco, the fatwas of many scholars at that time said that it was permissible to deal with tobacco, consume it and buy and sell it. But when medical science advanced and new medical research proved the grievous harm that smoking causes to the human body, the shar'i ruling changed and it was prohibited. The fatwas of most contemporary scholars state that it is prohibited, because the ruling on smoking is based on medical findings and the harms and benefits that tobacco may cause. It is not something based on specific religious texts.

The agreed-upon fiqhi principle states that the ruling is connected to the reason for it, and the ruling applies when the reason for it is present, and does not apply when the reason is absent. See Tahqeeq al-Burhaan fi Sha'n ad-Dukhaan by Mar'i al-Karami (d. 1033 AH), annotated by Mashhoor Hasan Salmaan.

This in fact is not a change to the shar'i ruling; rather it is a change in the view of the scholars that is based on the findings on smoking and the harm it causes.

As for masturbation, or the "secret habit", the reason for its prohibition as mentioned by the scholars is not physical harm only. Rather it is aimed at preventing physical desires from dominating a person's thinking, and not allowing any way of fulfilling those desires except through halaal marriage. We may note this idea in the verse in which Allah says (interpretation of the meaning):

"And those who guard their chastity (i.e. private parts, from illegal sexual acts).

Except from their wives or (slaves) that their right hands possess, - for then, they are free from blame;

But whoever seeks beyond that, then those are the transgressors" [al-Mu'minoon 23:5-7].

The shar'i reason for not allowing it is based on the apparent meaning of this verse, which the scholars may understand in various ways and reach a number of conclusions:

It is aimed at barring the means of fulfilling these overwhelming desires that may go beyond the

secret habit to looking for haram means such as watching movies, engaging in unlawful relationships and looking at images.

It is aimed at protecting man's power of reasoning and physical energy from being wasted in an inappropriate manner. Or it may be prohibited on the grounds that it is contrary to dignity, and so as to protect the individual from doing base and ignoble actions which serve no purpose, therefore it could be prohibited on moral grounds, as Imam Ahmad ibn Hazm said: We disapprove of it, because it is contrary to noble characteristics and virtuous deeds. End quote from al-Muhalla (12/407).

Medicine is also one of the reasons that could be understood from the verse. That is because doctors have affirmed the harm of this practice and its addictive nature that could lead to ruining one's health. So medicine is not the only reason for this shar'i ruling, such that it might be said that the ruling should change with changes in medical findings.

We searched the books of the fuqaha' and we did not find anyone who limited the reasons for the prohibition on masturbation to medical findings on its harm. Rather we found in the words of ash-Shawkaani that which indicates that medical knowledge is just one of the reasons for the prohibition; it is not the only reason. That is when he (may Allah have mercy on him) said: Among the reasons they cited is the fact that masturbation is harmful, as was mentioned by physicians. End quote from al-Fath ar-Rabbaani (7/3380).

We say all of this on the assumption that what is mentioned of health benefits of the secret habit is actually correct. But proving that requires proper scientific studies or the support of specialists whose views are based on definitive academic research, not just quoting some statements (of unknown people) from here and there, because such quotations do not constitute knowledge or a sound view.

We refer you to what has been written on some medical websites that are supervised by specialists, for you will find some beneficial information there, in sha Allah:

http://www.altibbi.com/definition/masturbation

For more information on the ruling on masturbation from our website, please see the following numbers: 329, 20161, 101539.

And Allah knows best.