



Medieval Wisdom on Animal Ethics: Ibn Mazah's Hadith-based Ruling and Reasoning on Cat Sterilization

This study was motivated by the large population of feral cats that are not properly cared for, leading to cat overpopulation. The objectives of this study are to determine (1) the Islamic law regarding cat sterilization and (2) the health benefits of sterilization. This study employs a descriptive-analytical method and a qualitative approach, utilizing various relevant references as data sources. Data were collected using a literature review and subsequently analyzed using content analysis. The results of this study indicate that (1) Islam permits the sterilization of cats in accordance with the hadith evidence in the book by Ibn Mazah (d. 1219) titled *Al-Muḥiṭ al-Burhānī fī al-Fiqh al-Nu'mānī*, and (2) sterilization is strongly recommended by health experts. This study implies that cat owners who wish for their pets to be healthy and free from disease should have them sterilized. The sterilization procedure must also comply with Islamic principles, which require that the animal not be harmed by administering anesthesia prior to the procedure.

Keywords: Animal ethics; Hadith and law; Ibn Mazah; Medieval Islam

Penelitian ini dilatarbelakangi oleh banyaknya populasi kucing-kucing liar yang tidak terawat sehingga menyebabkan overpopulasi kucing. Tujuan penelitian ini adalah untuk mengetahui (1) hukum sterilisasi kucing dalam Islam dan (2) manfaat sterilisasi dalam bidang kesehatan. Penelitian ini menggunakan metode deskriptif analitis dan mengaplikasikan pendekatan kualitatif, serta menggunakan berbagai referensi yang relevan sebagai sumber data. Data dikumpulkan dengan menggunakan teknik studi literatur yang kemudian dianalisis dengan menggunakan teknik analisis isi. Hasil penelitian ini menunjukkan bahwa (1) Islam memperbolehkan melakukan tindakan sterilisasi pada kucing sesuai dengan dalil hadits dalam kitab Ibnu Mazah (w. 1219) berjudul *Al-Muḥiṭ al-Burhānī fī al-Fiqh al-Nu'mānī*, dan (2) sterilisasi amat dianjurkan oleh para ahli kesehatan. Penelitian ini mengimplikasikan bahwa bagi para pemilik kucing yang ingin hewan peliharaannya sehat dan terhindar dari penyakit untuk melakukan sterilisasi. Sterilisasi yang dilakukan pun harus sesuai dengan kaidah Islam dimana tidak menyakiti hewan tersebut dengan memberikan bius sebelum sterilisasi.

Kata Kunci: Etika hewan; Hadis dan hukum; Ibn Mazah; Islam Pertengahan

Author:

Putri Adisha¹

Tajul Arifin²

Affiliation:

¹ Universitas Islam Negeri
Sunan Gunung Djati,
Indonesia

² Universitas Islam Negeri
Sunan Gunung Djati,
Indonesia

Corresponding author:

putriadisha2@gmail.com

tajularifin64@uinsgd.ac.id

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Introduction

Cats, scientifically known as *Felis silvestris catus*, are carnivorous mammals classified under the class Mammalia, order Carnivora, family Felidae, and genus *Felis*.¹ Their docile, friendly, and adaptable nature is what makes these four-legged animals the most popular pets worldwide. There are various cat breeds, ranging from domestic or local cats commonly found. Then, there are short-legged cats or Munchkins, short-haired gray cats originating from Britain or British Shorthairs, and cats known as “hairless cats” a term for Sphynx cats.

A devout Muslim certainly knows that cats are among the many beloved animals of Allah SWT, the Prophet, and the angels. In fact, the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) kept this sacred animal and named it Muezza. The story of the Prophet and his cat became the talk of the town, making it one of the most popular stories about the Prophet. The story begins when the Prophet was about to perform prayer, but at that moment, a cat was sleeping on his cloak—namely, Muezza. Seeing this, the Prophet (peace be upon him) did not want to disturb its sleep, so he chose to cut off the part of his cloak that was not touching the sleeping cat. Therefore, many Muslims believe that keeping a cat for the sake of Allah guarantees a place in Paradise.²

Keeping cats is permitted in Islam.³ They should be kept and cared for as pets, and not worshipped as the people of ancient Egypt did. In those days, cats were considered sacred animals;⁴ the ancient Egyptians associated cats with the ancient Egyptian goddess Bastet, also known as the Cat Goddess. Goddess Bastet was depicted as half-human and half-cat and was believed to be the guardian of the home and fertility. Such practices are not recommended in Islam because they constitute shirk.

People around the world, especially in the researcher's immediate surroundings, often love and keep cats. Whether it's because they're cute, as playmates, or simply following the trend. Unfortunately, however, cat owners do not fully understand or ensure the health of their pets. These cats are allowed to live freely outdoors. When these stray cats enter mating season, they will actively seek mates to satisfy their instincts. Consequently, the cat population will inevitably increase due to the mating season.⁵

Cats are highly fertile animals.⁶ This is evident in how easily they reproduce and produce offspring. In a single litter, a cat can give birth to one to six kittens. If the cat's owner is unwilling to care for them, these kittens will become neglected, and the neighborhood will become unsanitary due to the large number of neglected cats.

¹ Shannon Sotoudeh et al., “Cat, Dog, and Exotic Animal Allergy,” *The Journal of Allergy and Clinical Immunology: In Practice* 13, no. 11 (2025): 158.

² Muhammad Sarwar dan Aamir Shahzad, “Islamic History of Animal Welfare and Status of Cat in Islam,” *Al Khadim Research Journal of Islamic Culture and Civilization* 06, no. 01 (2025): 61-62.

³ Akbar, M.F., “Keutamaan Memelihara Kucing dalam Perspektif Islam: Studi Takhrij dan Syarah Hadits,” *Jurnal Riset Agama* 01, no. 02 (2021): 449-457.

⁴ Nabila Fitriani dan Anggita., “Historitas Agama Mesir Kuno dalam Perspektif Al-Qur'an,” *Jurnal Dirosah Islamiyah* 05, no. 03 (2023): 635.

⁵ Marcelo Teixeira Paiva dkk., “Enhancing access to neutering services for dogs and cats in a Brazilian city with a large animal population,” *Preventive Veterinary Medicine* 239 (2025): 106491.

⁶ Jully Handoko dan Habyb Palyoga, “Representnasi Opini Masyarakat Muslim Pemelihara Kucing Terhadap Tindakan Bedah Orchiectomy dan Ovariohysterectomy sebagai Upaya Kontrol Populasi Kucing,” *Prosiding Konferensi Integrasi Interkoneksi Islam dan Sains* 04 (2022): 145.





Neglected cats are susceptible to disease and can transmit it to humans. One disease in cats that can be transmitted to humans is toxoplasmosis.⁷ This disease is caused by *Toxoplasma gondii*, an intracellular parasite that commonly infects both humans and animals. Individuals with toxoplasmosis often do not exhibit clear clinical symptoms, so the diagnosis of toxoplasmosis is frequently overlooked in routine medical practice. If toxoplasmosis infects a woman in her third trimester of pregnancy, it can lead to hydrocephalus, chorioretinitis, deafness, or epilepsy.⁸ There is also another dangerous disease: rabies. Rabies in cats is often a primary concern for public health authorities, particularly in countries where the disease is common.⁹

With such a large cat population, competition for food is inevitable, which can compromise the animals' well-being.¹⁰ Although many communities care about the welfare of stray cats, there are still many people who view these animals with hostility. According to Abdurrahman Hanif et al. (2017), the explosion of the stray cat population can be prevented through euthanasia, sterilization, and contraception. Sterilization is the most effective solution for curbing the explosion of the feral cat population.

In practice, however, this does not go as smoothly as hoped. Some people view these measures as cruel. They argue that depriving cats of their right to reproduce and have offspring is wrong because it is seen as failing to preserve the cat population. Many laypeople argue that sterilization is a grave sin. Another barrier is the high cost of sterilization. This issue still raises many significant questions in the community. In fact, there are many health benefits, especially for the cats themselves, when they undergo sterilization.¹¹ For this reason, the researchers hope that this study can address all the public's concerns regarding sterilization.

Sterilization or Not? Examining Cat Sterilization Practices from Medical and Sharia Perspectives

Sterilization is the process of removing reproductive organs in both male and female animals. In males, the removal of the testicles is known as castration, while in females, the removal of the uterus and ovaries is known as ovariectomy.¹² Essentially, sterilization is the process of removing the reproductive organs, not all of the animal's genitalia. Therefore, after a successful sterilization procedure, a cat can still engage in reproductive behavior like any other cat, albeit with lower intensity and without the ability to produce offspring.¹³ The goal is to suppress reproduction without affecting other organs and systems.¹⁴ Sterilization in animals currently performed can be medically distinguished as surgical procedures involving the removal of reproductive organs in male animals (castration) or female animals (ovariectomy).

⁷ Serein Khalil Alkhatatbeh dkk., "The first seroprevalence and molecular detection of toxoplasmosis infecting cats in Jordan with associated risk factors," *Veterinary Parasitology: Regional Studies and Reports* 68 (2026): 101415.

⁸ Eden Woldegerima dkk., "Seropositivity of toxoplasmosis in pregnant women living with HIV/AIDS worldwide: A systematic review and meta-analysis," *Parasitology International* 102 (2024): 102922.

⁹ Tan, J.S. (1997) *Human zoonotic infections transmitted by dogs and cats. Archives of Internal Medicine* 157 (1997): 1933-1943.

¹⁰ Dewi Utari Rahmiati dkk., "Kontrol Populasi Dengan Kegiatan Sterilisasi Kucing Liar di Lingkungan Unpad," *Jurnal Aplikasi Ipteks untuk Masyarakat* 09, no. 02 (2020): 115.

¹¹ Caitlin Crawford dkk., "A Purr-Suasive Case for Sterilization: How Sterilizing Working Cats Supports Dairy Farmers' Wellbeing, Improves Animal Welfare, and Benefits the Environment," *Animals* 15, no. 6 (2025): 766.

¹² Herbert B Peterson., "Sterilization," *Obstetrics & Gynecology* 111, no. 1 (2008): 192.

¹³ Anita Firdaus dan Meirina Lani Anggapuspa., "Perancangan Iklan Layanan Masyarakat tentang Pentingnya Sterilisasi pada Kucing," *BARIK* 01, no. 01 (2020): 20–21.

¹⁴ Linda Rhodes., "New approaches to non-surgical sterilization for dogs and cats: Opportunities and challenges," *Reproduction in Domestic Animal* 52, no. S2 (2016). 327-331.





The sterilization procedure for female cats involves the removal of the ovaries. Surgery on female cats tends to be more difficult. Therefore, the removal of the ovaries must be performed by a veterinarian or other qualified professional, and requires your cat to undergo surgery. This procedure will prevent the female cat—also known as a queen—from producing eggs that can be fertilized by a male cat, as well as stop her body from releasing sex hormones that attract male cats.¹⁵



Figure 1. The Cat Sterilization Process

So how does this differ from the sterilization process for male cats? For male cats, the testicles are removed through a minor surgical procedure so that they no longer produce sperm capable of fertilizing a female cat's eggs, and thus can no longer reproduce. Male vasectomy has been proposed as a method for controlling the feral cat population because most male cats are not satisfied with just one female. Before undergoing the procedure, the cat will be fasted for approximately 4 hours to minimize the effects of anesthesia and to empty the stomach. Water is still provided to prevent the cat from becoming dehydrated. In other situations, if the cat to be spayed is a female who has given birth, one must wait until the weaning period is over or the kittens are 3 months old. It must also be ensured that the cats to be spayed are in good health, have received all necessary vaccinations, and are not pregnant.¹⁶

Typically, after a cat undergoes surgery at a veterinary clinic, the veterinarian or animal health center will transfer the cat to an inpatient ward. The cat will regain consciousness from the anesthesia within the next two to three hours but will still be in a weakened state. Therefore, post-surgery care must be particularly attentive. The cat should be separated from other cats and temporarily kept away from the litter box and food bowl. These measures are intended to reduce the risk of exposure to dust or dirt that could trigger an infection at the surgical site.

The hospital stay lasts three days for male cats and five days for female cats. Afterward, the cat will be released to its owner to be taken home or for outpatient care. A week later, the cat must return for a follow-up visit and have the stitches removed. Cats often feel both itchy and ticklish when their sutures are removed. It is not uncommon for surgical incisions to reopen and bleed. To prevent this, cat owners must diligently clean the wound and apply antiseptic ointment to the incision, or follow the veterinarian's specific instructions. To further prevent licking or biting of the post-surgery wound, owners should fit the cat with a fabric or plastic e-collar to keep the cat from licking or biting the incision.¹⁷

¹⁵ Ahmet Gozer., "Short-Term Effects of Ovariohysterectomy on Some Antioxidant Parameters in Cats," *Journal of Applied Biological Sciences* 17, no. 3 (2023): 433.

¹⁶ Lisa M Howe., "Surgical methods of contraception and sterilization," *Theriogenology* 66, no. 3 (2006): 503.

¹⁷ Çağatay Esin., "Effect of post-operative clothing, bandage, and collar application on stress after ovariohysterectomy in cats," *Thai J Vet Med* 55, no. 11 (2025): 4-5.





Figure 2. Fitting a Collar on a Cat

The cost of cat sterilization varies. For example, in the Tasikmalaya area, the subsidized price for neutering a male cat is Rp150,000–Rp250,000 per cat, while the subsidized price for spaying a female cat ranges from Rp200,000 to Rp300,000 per cat. For standard rates (non-subsidized or non-mass sterilization), the cost is approximately Rp500,000–Rp750,000 per cat. Of course, these costs cover only the surgery itself, not post-sterilization hospitalization. Hospitalization costs vary, ranging from Rp30,000 to Rp50,000 per day. However, hospitalization is only an option. If the cat owner is already familiar with the cat's post-sterilization condition, the cat can be taken home immediately or cared for at home.

Changes after sterilization do not occur immediately; it takes time to notice the differences. A common side effect of sterilization is that the cat becomes more docile and affectionate. The most frequently observed side effect is that the cat becomes healthier and gains weight (not overweight or obese).¹⁸ Sterilization has no effect on the cat's physical development, including height, urinary tract size, or genitalia. Often, these benefits seem unimportant to owners who want their pets to behave in a certain way, intend to use them for breeding or showing, or do not want to pay the cost of sterilization.

Spaying is also an effective preventive measure against certain diseases in cats, particularly those related to the reproductive and digestive systems, such as urinary tract disorders. Other common conditions affecting female cats include mammary gland tumors or cancer, as well as malignant tumors in the ovaries and uterus. Performing this surgery on female cats can significantly reduce the risk of pyometra. Pyometra is a serious infection that develops in a female cat's uterus. The infection manifests as a significant accumulation of pus within the uterus. If left untreated, pyometra can be fatal. Just like female cats, male cats can also develop serious diseases such as testicular cancer. The likelihood of a cat developing testicular cancer is significantly reduced if it has been spayed or neutered.¹⁹

The ideal age for spaying or neutering a cat is when the cat reaches six months old. Alternatively, when the cat is fully grown and showing signs of being in heat. For example, when a male cat is in heat, he will spray or mark the areas he encounters with his urine. This behavior naturally causes disgust and a foul odor for the people caring for him. Moreover, the smell of cat urine is very strong, making it difficult to remove and considered unclean. Naturally, an owner wouldn't want to perform religious rituals in a space that isn't free from such impurities. Another common behavior during mating season is the cat frequently running away for days or searching for a mate. Cat owners often worry when their cat enters this phase, as it's not uncommon for them to get lost and end up missing.

¹⁸ Darcee A Guttilla dan Paul Stapp., "Effects of sterilization on movements of feral cats at a wildland-urban interface," *Journal of Mammalogy* 91, no. 2 (2010): 485.

¹⁹ Dedek Azura., "Analisis Dampak Perilaku Sterilisasi Terhadap Kesehatan Kucing Betina dan Jantan," *JPB: Jurnal Pendidikan Biologi* 1, no. 1 (2023): 8.





The reproductive organs regulate the hormones progesterone and estrogen, which influence a cat's emotional state. Fluctuations in reproductive hormone levels can affect a cat's estrus cycle. If these reproductive hormones are absent, the cat will lose its sexual desire. It will no longer be attracted to the opposite sex, even if a member of the opposite sex is in heat; the cat will simply remain indifferent.

Despite the many benefits of sterilization mentioned above,²⁰ the public—especially Muslims—still question whether it is a sin to prevent a cat from having offspring. People believe that sterilization deprives animals of their right to reproduce. So, what is Islam's stance on sterilizing or castrating animals, particularly cats? In principle, performing sterilization surgery on cats is prohibited. This is because such surgery constitutes *ikhshā'* or castration, which renders the animal infertile (unable to reproduce).

Many scholars disagree on this issue. Hanafi scholars argue that there is nothing wrong with castrating animals, as it benefits both animals and humans. Meanwhile, Maliki scholars state that animals that are neutral and whose meat is permissible to eat may be castrated, as this makes the meat more flavorful. Shafi'i scholars distinguish between animals whose meat is permissible to eat and those whose meat is not. They state that animals castrated while still young are permissible if they are of a species whose meat is permissible to eat. However, if the animal is of a species whose meat is not permissible to eat, then it is not permissible. They also stipulate that this castration must not result in the animal's death.

ان النبي صلى الله عليه وسلم نهى صبر الروح وعن اخصاء الهياثم نهى شديدا

"The Prophet (peace be upon him) strictly forbade confining or restraining living creatures (and killing them with arrows or the like) and forbade castrating animals with a strict prohibition" (Narrated by al-Bazzar from Ibn Abbas)²¹

However, the principles of Islamic jurisprudence state

إذا تعارض ضرران دفع أخفهما

"If two evils are in conflict, one must determine which is the greater evil and choose the lesser of the two."²²

A similar explanation is found in the fatwa of the Permanent Committee for Islamic Research and Issuing Fatwas, number 3458. The Permanent Committee for Islamic Research and Issuing Fatwas is one of the leading scholarly committees of our time, comprising a select group of senior scholars in Saudi Arabia, and enjoys high credibility in both scholarly and Islamic matters. This committee strives to the best of its ability to explain the laws of Sharia to all segments of society and to issue fatwas related to all aspects of life.

Fatwa No. 3458 addresses the neutering or spaying of cats, but this must be based on clear reasons or legitimate interests, not on baseless claims.²³ Such reasons include the cat's health, preventing the cat from contracting various diseases, an overpopulation issue leading to many cats dying due to lack of care, or a veterinarian's recommendation to prevent the cat from urinating indiscriminately. However, the method chosen must be the least painful sterilization method for the cat, must not endanger the cat, and must not cause the cat's death.

²⁰ Peterson, "Sterilization."

²¹ Imam Syaokani, *Nailul Auṭar*, (Beirut: Dar Ibn Hazm, 2000): 1661, hadits no. 3581.

²² Imam Suyuṭī, *Al-Asybah wa an-Naẓā'ir fi al-Furū'*, (Beirut: Darul Kutub al-Ilmiyah, 1998), hlm. 62.

²³ Ahmad Djalaluddin, "Hukum mensterilisasi hewan peliharaan," *Research Repository* (2019): 3.





To support this statement, the scholars have provided explanations, such as that of Imam Al-Allamah Burhanuddin Abi Al-Ma'ali Mahmud bin Ahmad bin Abdul Aziz, may Allah have mercy on him:

قد صح عن عمر رضي هلا عنه: أنه نهى عن إخصاء الفرس، وأما غيره من البهائم
فال بأس به إذا كان فيه منفعة، وإذا لم يكن فيه منفعة فهو حرام، وفي أضحية وفي
النوازل «في إخصاء السنور إنه ال بأس به إذا كان فيه منفعة أو دفع ضرره
«الواقعات»: ال بأس بإخصاء البهائم إن كان يراد به إصالح البهائم، فأما كي البهائم
فقد كرهه بعض المشايخ، وبعضهم جوزوه؛ ألن فيه منفعة ظاهرة فإنها عاملة

“It has been authentically reported from ‘Umar ibn al-Khattab: ‘Umar prohibited the castration of horses. As for animals other than horses—that is, other types of livestock—it is permitted if it is beneficial. If castrating these animals does not yield any benefit, then it is prohibited. In the chapter on sacrificial animals from the book “An Nawazil,” it is mentioned regarding the castration of cats: Indeed, castrating a cat is permitted if it brings a benefit or prevents something harmful.²⁴ In the book “Al Waqi’aat,” it is also mentioned that castrating an animal is permitted for the animal’s own good. However, if castration causes pain to the animal, some scholars deem it disliked (makruh), while others still permit it. (Those who permit it argue that) “because there are benefits that will become apparent through castration.” (Al-Muhith Al-Burhaniy:5/376)

The book *Al-Muḥiṭ al-Burhānī* was authored by Sheikh Mahmud ibn Mazah al-Bukhari (551–616 AH). Originally, this book was written by an Imam of the Hanafi school. However, he included both unrecognized and recognized Hanafi fiqh opinions. This book, *al-Waqi’āt*, contains a collection of the ijtiḥad of the later Hanafi scholars, such as the companions of Muhammad, Abu Yusuf, Zufar, al-Hasan ibn Ziyad, and so on.

Conclusion

Based on the discussion in the previous section, this paper concludes that (1) sterilization in Islam is permitted in accordance with the hadith in the book Al-Muhith Al-Burhaniy, number 376, and (2) it is beneficial for the cat’s health. The author advises cat owners not to worry if they choose to have their cats sterilized. It is important to maintain the health and cleanliness of the cat’s surroundings after sterilization to prevent it from becoming a breeding ground for disease.

From the various hadiths and explanations above—whether those expressing opposition to sterilization or those permitting it in Islam—it can be concluded that: First, sterilization is the process of removing the reproductive organs, not the removal of all vital parts (ovaries and/or testicles). Second, based on the fatwa in the book Al-Muhith Al-Burhaniy, number 376, the sterilization of cats is permitted if it brings benefits or prevents something harmful. Third, from a medical perspective, sterilizing cats has positive effects, such as preventing pyometra, urinary tract disorders, and cancer.

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²⁴ Mahmud ibn Ahmad al-Bukhari, *Al-Muḥiṭ al-Burhānī fī al-Fiqh al-Nu‘mānī*, Jilid V (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-‘Ilmiyyah, 2004): 376.





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