

Age at Menopause Among The Lobanas of North West India

Sarabjit Mastana

*Human Genetics Laboratory, Department of Human Sciences, Loughborough University of Technology,
Loughborough, LE11 3TU UK*

KEY WORDS Menopause, Lobanas, North West India.

ABSTRACT The age of onset of menopause is most significant physiological event in the life of a woman, when a woman ceases to menstruate. Mean age at menopause of 47.68 years among the Lobanas is observed in this study. Late onset of menopause in present sample, compared to other populations of North West India, may be due to socio-economic, parity and other biological factors.

INTRODUCTION

The menopause is a critical biological phase in women's life, during which ovulation and menstruation are arrested and consequently the reproductive function ceases. It is a very complex process of changes that occur in the biological structure of women, accompanied by a variety of psychological events, sometimes resulting in extremely unpleasant symptoms, which includes hot flushes, headaches, insomnia, and itching. The age of menopause is reported to vary among different populations (Agarwala, 1977; Trelor, 1974), but for demographic analysis, the mean age is often taken to be in India is 44 years and in developed European countries 49-50 years. Variety of factors like race, heredity, socio-economic level, parity, nutrition and obesity, are known to effect the age at menopause. There are not many studies on Indian populations for age of menopause, as compared to work on menarcheal age. The present communication reports the age at menopause among the Lobanas of North West India.

POPULATION AND METHODOLOGY

The Lobanas are an endogamous Sikh agricultural caste group now settled in the

states of Punjab and Harayana. The name 'Lobana' have been derived from two Sanskrit words 'Loon' meaning salt and 'Bana' meaning trade; reflecting their traditions as a salt carrying and trading community (Rose, 1919). Prior to the 18th and 19th centuries their main occupation was interstate trading in consumer goods transported largely being by means of bullocks and the people lived an itinerant, pastoral, seminomadic mode of life. However, changes in various socio-economic and cultural factors forced them to become settled cultivators. Many different theories have been put forward as to their origins. They are also known by variety of other names such as the Lambadi, Lamani, Labhana, Banjara, and Sugali, in different states of India, and are supposed to have constituted the bulk of those Indian migrants to European lands who later came to be known as the Romany gypsies (Singh, 1983, Mastana and Papiha, 1992). Linguistic, social and cultural similarities support this contention (Mastana et al., 1991).

180 Lobana Sikh females aged 40-55 years of 2 Lobana villages (Ajrawar in Patiala district, Punjab and Genespur in Ambala district, Harayana) were interviewed in 1985-86, individually for estimation of age at menopause by status quo method. The menopause was accepted as an established fact only when menstruation had ceased for at least one full year. A record of age, subcaste, age at marriage, number of conceptions, and number of children was made for each individual. In some cases the dates of birth and/or menopause were ascertained through association with important historical and social events. Dietary, socio-cultural and economic patterns were similar for all the subjects. The sample was homogeneous in all respects.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The menopause is a striking event in the life of a women, that it tends to overshadow all other aspects of life associated with reproductive decline, because it marks the termination of a women's reproductive cycle. The mean age at menopause in the Lobanas is 47.68 (± 3.38) years. Comparison with other North West Indian populations (Table 1) shows that the Lobanas have a late occurrence of menopause with respect to Harijans, Gujars, Sansis, Sikligars, Punjabis, Baniyas, Khatri, Sindhis, Choudhury and Aroras, but early occurrence when compared to Jat Sikhs and Brahmins. The differences between the Lobanas and Aroras, Sansis, Jat Sikhs, Brahmins, Sikligars are statistically significant.

The differences in age at menopause in different populations or in different subgroups of the same population may be influenced by

genetical and environmental factors. Since the Lobanas, like most Indian populations, are strictly endogamous group, the contribution of genetical factors for any difference in menopausal age cannot be ruled out. Also Labanas and other communities (like Jat Sikhs, Harijans, Gujars, Sikligars, and Sansis) share similar ecological habitat, food practices, and belong to similar or slightly different socio-economic strata, the differences between Lobanas and these communities are probably due to their diverse ethnic origins (Mastana, 1987). On average Lobana women have a greater number of children than urban Baniyas, Aroras, Punjabis, Khatri, and Sindhis and occurrence of the late menopause among the Lobanas could be partly attributed to parity factor- as the larger the number of pregnancies, the later the onset of menopause (Wood, 1971). The findings of the present study also support Wood's results.

Table 1 : Incidence of age at menopause among some North-Western Indian populations

Population	Place	No.	Mean Age	SD	Source
Jat Sikh	Punjab	317	48.62	2.38	Singal & Sidhu, 1985
Bania	Punjab	357	47.33	2.74	Singal & Sidhu, 1985
Sikh Harijan	Punjab	-	46.01	-	Sidhu, 1982
Hindu Harijan	Punjab	-	54.64	-	Sidhu, 1982
Gujars	Punjab	150	46.20	-	Sidhu, 1986
Sikligars	Punjab	90	43.71	3.52	Balgir, 1985
Arora	Punjab	325	43.96	-	Singh & Ahuja, 1980
Punjabi	Punjab	325	44.68	-	Singh & Ahuja, 1980
Sansi	Punjab	160	45.28	3.10	Sidhu & Sidhu, 1987
Lobana	Punjab, Harayana	180	47.68	3.38	Present Study
Brahmin	Himachal Pradesh	173	48.84	0.05	Sharma & Singh, 1980
Chodhury	Himachal Pradesh	205	46.98	0.40	Sharma & Singh, 1980
Punjabi Khatri	Delhi	-	46.33	-	Ghosh & Kumari, 1973
Sindhi	Delhi	-	44.60	-	Ghosh & Kumari, 1973

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