

Menarche and Menopause Among The Ao Naga Women of Nagaland, India

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INTRODUCTION

Menarche and menopause are two important events in women's life, and they are accompanied by many morphological and physiological changes in the body. The onset of menarche in girls signifies the attainment of sexual maturity. The period of menopause is also important, as it is marked by the arrest of ovulation and menstruation flow and indicates cessation of reproductive function. The age at menarche and menopause vary widely between and within populations and are influenced by multitude of factors, both genetic and environmental.

Although studies on menarche and menopause are not new and have attracted the interest of physical anthropologists of North East India since long, however, report from the population groups of Nagaland is scarce. Hence, the present note aims to examine the menarcheal and menopausal ages among the Ao Naga of Nagaland. An attempt has also been made to evaluate the level of difference in both the traits among different cognate Naga tribes of North East India.

The Ao are numerically a dominant Naga tribe of Nagaland. They came from the north, and settled to the north east of the Naga hills. They call themselves as Ni-someh and Sa-mai-na and are called Ao by their neighbouring Naga tribes. The Assamese plains people called them as Hatikuri or Hati-goria (Waddel, 1901). Linguistically the Ao belong to Tibeto-Burman group and on the basis of dialect, they are divided into two sections – Chung-ngi or Zung-gi and the Mong-sen, both of which are divided into several exogamous septs. In physical features they show affinity towards Mongoloid ethnic stock. At present they are mostly concentrated in Mokokchung district of Nagaland.

MATERIAL AND METHOD

Data from 150 and 48 women belonging to the Ao Naga tribe were collected for menarcheal and menopausal ages respectively from Chuchung

yimlang village, Mokokchung district, Nagaland. Data on menopausal age were collected from those women who had completed their reproductive life without adopting any birth control measure. Necessary information, regarding their date of birth, age at menarche, and age at menopause, were obtained from the subjects by retrospective method depending on recall. All individuals were healthy and unrelated.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Analysis of the data reveals that the maximum number of Ao Naga girls attained menarche at the age of 15 years (36.67%), the range of variation being 12 to 18 years, and the mean onset of menarche is reported to occur at 14.88 ± 0.11 years.

The mean menarcheal age of the present Ao Naga sample along with other published works on the Naga tribes of North East India are considered for present comparative study. The reviews on sexual maturation among the North East Indian populations (Sengupta, 1996) have shown that the females belonging to Mongoloid groups (mostly tribes) experience menarche at a relatively later age than the Indid (Caucasoids) populations and the women from the hills had much later mean age at menarche as compared to females of the plains (Sengupta, 1996). The present findings seem to confirm the above observation.

The mean age at menarche among the Tangkhul Naga (13.93 years; Chakravarti, 1986) and the Zemi Naga (14.13 years; Bhowmik et al., 1971) record markedly lower value, while the tribes like the Angami Naga (15.00 years; Suri, 1985) and the Kabui Naga (15.15 years; Chakravarti, 1986) are not much distinct from the present Ao Naga sample.

Studies on menopausal age of the women of North East India are rather scanty. In the present study, the maximum incidence of menopause among the Ao Naga women is found to occur at the age of 52 years (18.75%), the range of variation being 40 to 55 years with mean menopausal

Table 1: Age at menarche among the Ao Naga

Age (in years)	Number	%
12	6	4.00
13	22	14.67
14	22	14.67
15	55	36.67
16	37	24.67
17	3	2.00
18	5	3.33
	150	14.83±0.11

Table 2: Age at menopause among the Ao Naga

Age (in years)	Number	%
40	1	2.08
41	-	-
42	-	-
43	1	2.08
44	-	-
45	1	2.08
46	-	-
47	1	2.08
48	1	2.08
49	4	8.33
50	6	12.50
51	6	12.50
52	9	18.75
53	7	14.58
54	5	10.42
55	6	12.50
	48	51.33 ± 0.44

age being 51.33 ± 0.44 years. In this regard the Ao Naga women having relatively higher mean menopausal age markedly distinct from all the

Mongoloid populations of the region so far reported (Sengupta and Rajkhowa, 1996).

In the present study, it is obvious that there is a considerable variability in the age at menarche and menopause among the populations of Nagaland, thereby indicating the important role played by both genetic and environmental factors. Further in depth studies will throw much light in this respect.

KEY WORDS Sexual Maturation. Climacteric. Ao Naga Tribe. Population Variation.

ABSTRACT Investigation on the onset of menarche and menopause among the Ao Naga women is reported. Results are compared with those of the other Naga tribes of North East India.

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