

Perception of Women Towards Physiological Problems Faced at Menopause

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ABSTRACT Menopause is one of the most significant events in a woman's life and brings in a number of physiological changes that affect day-to-day adjustments. Keeping in mind the importance of menopause during middle age, the present study was aimed at finding out the perception of middle-aged women regarding physiological problems faced during this period. A sample of 30 married women in the age range of 39 to 52 years were selected through snowball technique from middle socio-economic group of people in Baroda city. The tools for data collection included a checklist and an interview guide. Results indicated that the mean age at menopause was 44.59 years. It was found that women reported problems like backache, uneasiness, fatigue, increased headache, hot flushes and sleep disturbances during the menopausal period.

INTRODUCTION

Middle age is one of the turning points in one's life as it brings along many changes. It roughly starts in the early 40s, when for most of the people, it is the "best" period in their life when their achievement is at the highest point. As stated by Mitchell (1971), midway between the challenges of adulthood and despair of old age, comes the change – menopause in women and during which lives take a compulsory change of direction.

For women, middle age includes the gradual winding down of the reproductive system and the ending of the childbearing years. Menopause is derived from the Latin words *meno* (month) and *pausia* (halt), and essentially marks the end of a woman's period of natural fertility. Bavadam (1999) stated that it is not merely the end of menstruation but also is an inevitable part of aging. The exact age at menopause varies from population to population but generally the spread is from late 30s to 50s. Studies done in various regions of India by Indira (1979) and Kaw et al. (1994) report the age at menopause ranging from 40 to 50 years.

As a woman approaches menopause, the number of ovarian follicles declines producing less estrogen causing irregular menstrual periods and a host of other physical discomforts. The problems related to menopause and those that occur in the post-menopausal period have received a little attention. Although studies have focused on the issues of elderly women but few

have dealt with the menopausal health of women. Therefore with the objective of looking into the physiological health problems as perceived by women during menopause, this study attempts to look into the menopausal health of middle-aged women.

MATERIAL AND METHODS

A sample of 30 married women between the age of 39 to 52 years belonging to middle socio-economic class were selected from Baroda city of Gujarat, India. These women were either undergoing menopause or had attained menopause in the last five years. The sample was selected through snowball technique in which first contacts were made with two to three women of the above mentioned age group and then they were asked to identify other women of the same age group. A checklist was used to know the frequency and intensity of various physiological problems as perceived by the women during menopause. An interview guide was also used to elicit information about their background information, age at menopause and other related information. Data was analysed by calculating frequencies and percentages.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Middle age is a period of change and development and for women this includes the

gradual winding down of the reproductive system and ending of childbearing years. Menopause is an important reproductive milestone in a woman's life and it brings a woman acutely face to face with the reality of aging.

As per the menopausal status of the women, there were basically two groups of sample in the present study. One group (n=14; 46.7%) had attained menopause and their menstrual periods were stopped for at least two years and the other group (n=16; 53.33%) experienced irregular menstrual periods and were undergoing menopausal changes. About 46.67 % of the sample had attained menopause and the rest were undergoing it. Taking the last menstrual period as criterion, the age at menopause ranged from 38 years to 49 years with a median of 44.59 years. The exact age at which menopause occurs varies from population to population. It is generally stated that the average age at menopause falls between 40 to 50 years. In the present study the mean age at menopause was 44.59 years and this figure is almost similar to the study done by Debnath et al (1994) who studied gynecological problems in postmenopausal women and found the age to be 44.85 years.

Menstrual history is one of the important dimensions in depicting the menstrual state at the time of menopause. The first and the easiest indication of beginning of menopause is the

Table 1: Aspects of menstrual history

Aspects	Women who have attained menopause (n = 14)	Women undergoing menopause (n = 16)
1) Amount of Menstrual Flow		
Light	21.42 %	18.75 %
Normal / Medium	-	18.72 %
Heavy	78.57 %	62.5 %
2) Duration of Menstrual Flow		
0 to 2 days	35.71 %	31.25 %
3 to 5 days	57.14 %	56.25 %
6 to 8 days	7.14 %	12.5 %
3) Time Interval		
After 1 month	28.57 %	31.25 %
After 2 to 3 months	42.86 %	43.75 %
After 4 to 5 months	21.42 %	25 %
After 5 months and above	7.14 %	
4) Problems Faced During Menstruation		
Pain in lower abdomen	30.1 %	27 %
Backache	14.28 %	18.7 %
Bodyache	21.42 %	18.7 %
Mood swings	21.42 %	18.7 %
Irritation	7.14 %	6.25 %
Fatigue	-	6.25 %

irregularity in the menstrual cycle. For some women menstruation stops abruptly, for others it may be irregular cycles. Researches done by Choi (2001) and Tribune News Service (2002) indicates that women having heavy menstrual flow and increased irregularity of menstrual cycle at the time of menopause suffer more from different physical problems such as headaches, mood changes, vasomotor symptoms as perspiration, etc. Aspects of menstrual history like amount of flow, duration, and problems faced during menstruation were also taken into consideration (Table 1). The menstrual history of women revealed that most of them experienced heavy menstrual flow with a normal duration of three to five days and usually had their periods after two to three months. More percentage of women faced problems like pain in the lower abdomen, body-aches, mood swings, etc. during menstruation. It was revealed from the present study that women who were undergoing menopause were suffering from more difficulties at the time of menopause. This in turn can affect the mental health of women and thus may increase psychosocial problems in their life as stated by Jamuna (1987).

A wide range of problems, both physical and psychological, have been attributed to menopause. According to WHO (1996), the most important among these are headaches, insomnia and backache. Referring to the various problems faced during menopause, all the women in the sample reported some or the other physiological difficulties. The women in both the group reported different problems like backache (100%), headache (92%), uneasiness (89%), profuse perspiration (84%), pain in joints (83%), etc

Table 2: Physiological problems faced by women due to menopause

Problems faced by women	Women who have attained menopause (n = 14)	Women undergoing menopause (n = 16)
Backache	100 %	100 %
Headache	92 %	93 %
Uneasiness	78 %	100 %
Fatigue	86 %	93 %
Short waves of hot sensations	92 %	87 %
Decrease in vision	100 %	76 %
Profuse perspiration	86 %	82 %
Decreased sleep	92 %	88 %
Abdominal pain	78 %	82 %
Pain in joints	96 %	70 %

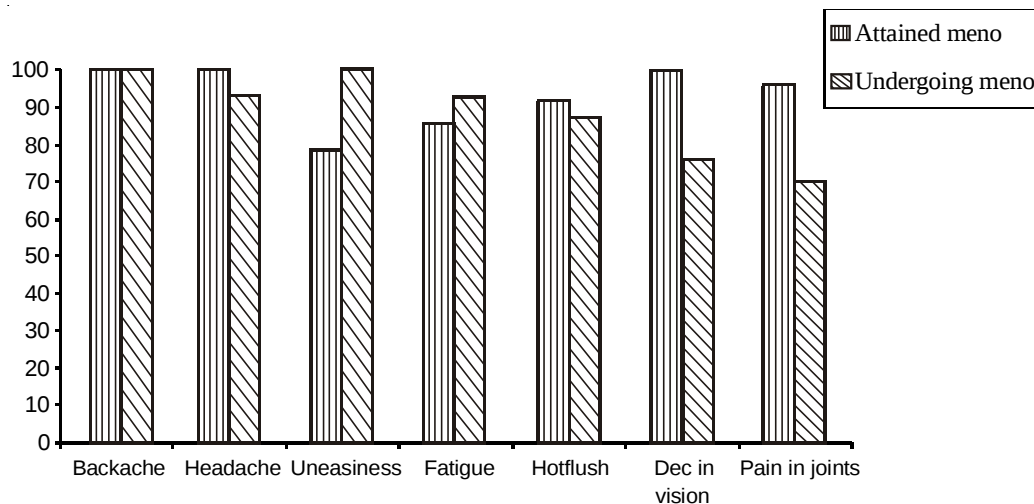


Fig. 1. Perceived problems during menopause by women (in percent)

(Table 2). While hot flushes which is considered to be the common symptom of menopause as reported in the studies by Bhargava and Pant (1982) and Mukherjee et al (1996), in the present study 89 percent of women complained of hot flushes as short waves of hot sensations sweeping all over the body. It also came through that women complained more of backache, loss of sight, pain in joints and fatigue during this phase. As mentioned earlier that menstrual history may affect the occurrence of the above problems, it becomes clear from the data that women having irregular periods with heavy menstrual flow perceived more physiological difficulties during menopause. It was also seen that women who were undergoing the changes of menopause seemed to be affected more by the extent of problems faced at menopause.

CONCLUSION

The menopause signals the end of a woman's ability to reproduce. Therefore an understanding of menopause and how it causes changes in the women's body is not only relevant to the women but also to the providers of health services. Menopausal health has been one of the neglected areas in our country and needs timely vital attention. The need of the hour is to conduct awareness campaigns to inform general public,

health workers, etc. about menopause and associated health issues through various forms of mass media.

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