

Menarche and Menopause among the Iruliga Tribal Women

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KEYWORDS Environment. Biological Changes. Tribe. Variation.

ABSTRACT In the present study an attempt has been made to study the age at menarche and menopause among the Iruliga women of Mysore district, Karnataka state. The mean menarcheal and menopausal age of Iruliga women was found to be 13.93 ± 1.6 years and 46.63 ± 0.53 years respectively.

INTRODUCTION

Menarche is the primary indicator of onset of sexual maturation in a female, which affects her reproductive life. Age at menarche is varied as it being physiological phenomenon is affected by interaction between different factors such as genetic, nutrition and socio-economic status (Eveleth and Tanner, 1976). 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 menarcheal and menopausal age vary widely within and between populations because of multitude of factors like heredity, nutrition, food habits, environment, climate, altitude, socio-economic status, physical activity and occupation etc. In the present study an attempt has been made to study the age at menarche and menopause among the Iruliga women of Mysore district, Karnataka state.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

The present study was conducted on Iruliga women, a tribal population of Mysore district, Karnataka state. The Iruligas are a jungle tribe; they speak a dialect of their own among themselves, which is very close to Tamil and Kannada. They are found in the districts of Mysore and Bangalore as also on the slopes of the Mysore side of the Nilgiris. The term Iruliga might have been derived from Irul (night), perhaps from their dark colour. They are black or brownish black in complexion, thick lips and curly hair. The primary occupations are hunting, collection of honey, cultivation, basket making and agricultural labourers. They have their tribal organization, and their headman is Gouda. The descent of the family

is patriarchal, patrilineal, and patrilocal type. Widow Remarriage is practiced. The dead are buried and sometimes cremated. (Iyer, 1998).

Data from 100 and 30 women belonging to the Iruliga tribe were collected for menarcheal and menopausal ages respectively from Hunsur taluk, Mysore district, Karnataka. Data on menopausal age were collected from those women who had completed their reproductive life. Regarding their date of birth, age at menarche and age at menopause, were obtained from the subjects by retrospective method depending on recall.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Table 1, shows the distribution of age at menarche and menopause among the Iruliga females. Analysis of the data reveals that, the mean age at menarche of Iruliga women varies from 11 to 18 years. The maximum Percentage of Iruliga women menstruate at the age of 12 (38.0%) and 13 (32.0%) years. The mean age at menarche has been found to be 13.93 ± 1.6 years.

The mean menarcheal age in Indian women varies from 11.88 years among scheduled caste girls of Punjab (Sidhu, 2002) to 15.28 years among the Kshatriyas of Andhra Pradesh, (Padmavathi et al., 1984). And in tribal women it is 12.08 years in Gonds of Madhya Pradesh (Sharma, 1995) to 15.00 years among the Abujhmara of Madhya Pradesh (Pandey et al., 1999). The onset of puberty starts earlier in caste population compared to tribal population. It may be attributed to their better economic conditions of life. A good diet during childhood and the premenarcheal period causes early menarche. So higher the socio-economic status, the lower the age at menarche. There is a significant relationship between the age at menarche and socio-economic status.

Table 1: Distribution of menarcheal and menopausal age among the Iruliga females

Age at Menarche	No.	Percentage	Mean $\pm$ S.E.	Age at menopause	No	Percentage	Mean $\pm$ S.E.
11	01	1.0	13.93 $\pm$ 1.6	42	01	03.33	46.63 $\pm$ 0.53
12	38	38.0		43	01	03.33	
13	32	32.0		44	03	10.00	
14	09	9.0		45	10	33.33	
15	02	2.0		46	06	20.00	
16	04	4.0		47	03	10.00	
17	01	1.0		48	02	6.67	
18	11	11.0		50	01	03.33	
Total	100	100.0			30	99.99	

The age of menopause among the Iruliga females ranges from 41 to 50 years, the mean age at menopause is (46.63 $\pm$ 0.53 years). The maximum women come to menopause at the age of 45 years (33.34%).

The mean menopausal age of the present Iruliga sample is compared with other population of India. The mean menopausal age varies from 43.70 years among the Ahom of Assam (Sengupta and Mina Rajkhowa, 1996) to 54.64 years among the Hindu Harijans of Punjab (Sidhu, 1982). And in the tribal population it varies from 43 years among Kamars (Biswas et al., 2001) to 51.33 years among Ao Nagas of Nagaland (Purnungala et al., 2002).

The differences in age at menopause in different population may be influenced by genetical and environmental factors. Malnutrition low socio-economic factors, rural-urban residence, family size etc. may be attributed to the possible reasons for determining the menopausal age of women (Frisch, 1974; Bongaarts, 1980; Beall, 1983; Sengupta and Rajkhowa, 1996; Kalita and Sengupta, 1997; Majumdar, 2001; Biswas and Kapoor, 2003).

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