

Onset Age of Menopause Among Women in Kangra District of Himachal Pradesh

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ABSTRACT The present study was conducted in Bhawarna and Panchrukhi blocks of Kangra district of Himachal Pradesh. 120 respondents (females) were randomly selected from these blocks. Door to door, survey was conducted to get desired information from the respondents. The data were collected through self-designed interview schedule and then analyzed in terms of mean and percentages. The findings indicate that the mean age at menopause is 44.6 years with majority of women having menopause between the ages of 41 to 45 years.

INTRODUCTION

The outstanding age-related event in middle adulthood is menopause. Midway between the challenges of adulthood and despair of old age, comes the change of menopause in women during which their lives take a compulsory change of direction. The word menopause comes from the Greek words “menos” and “pause”. It refers to that time in a woman’s life when there is a pause in the menses, a cessation of monthly reproductive function.

During a woman’s reproductive years, the follicles of the ovaries, under the stimulation of hormones released by the pituitary gland, periodically rupture and discharge their ova (eggs). As menopause approaches, some follicles fail to rupture, and their ova are not discharged; later all the follicles fail to rupture. The cycle of menstruation is disturbed by this failure to ovulate. The continuing decline in ovarian activity may result in missed periods, longer intervals between periods, irregular bleeding, varying lengths of periods, or a decrease or increase in menstrual flow.

The event significantly termed, menopause signals a cessation of the women’s capacity to bear children. Women after menopause, however, also get prone to several medical complications. The average age for the onset of menopause may begin as early as 40 or be delayed to the late 50s. Genes may play a role in determining at what age a woman goes through menopause. A woman with a family history of early menopause is herself likely to have an early menopause and consequently early reproductive failure (Bruin, 1999).

Menopause can be divided into three phases:

Pre-menopause: it takes place spontaneously before the age of 40 and occurs in about 8 percent of women. There is a little disruption of the ovarian function and the menstrual cycle remains regular. Some symptoms may begin to occur in this phase. Peri-menopause: This phase represents declining ovarian function with menstrual irregularities and symptoms commonly start or become troublesome during this time. Post-menopause: Once there have been no menses for 12 months the post-menopause phase is entered. An artificial menopause may be induced by removing the ovaries by surgery or by destroying them with X-rays.

The sex organs continue their activity from about 10-13 years of age to somewhere between 45-50 years of age. The natural life of the ovaries is about 35 years. The menopause is brought on by a progressive decline in ovarian function. This decline is a normal result of ageing and is accelerated as the menopause approaches. This event marks the culmination of several years of pre-menopausal changes during which hormones secreted by ovaries gradually decline. Menopausal women are also referred to as ‘mature women.’ A total of 130 million Indian women are expected to live beyond the menopause into old age by 2015 (Sengupta, 2003).

The main objective of the present investigation was to assess the onset age at menopause in women.

METHODOLOGY

Panchrukhi and Bhawarna blocks of Kangra district were purposively selected. A list of

villages was obtained from Bhawarna and Panchrukhi block development office. Ten villages were selected from two blocks (five from Bhawarna and five from panchrukhi block). Finally a sample of 120 respondents were selected randomly. Sixty females each from Bhawarna and Panchrukhi blocks were selected

The primary data for the present study were collected through survey method on well-designed and pre-tested schedule.

RESULTS

Data collected were tabulated and the results were interpreted by working out the averages and percentages. Table 1 reveals that 67.5 percent respondents were in the age group of 46-55 years followed by 22.5 percent in the age group of 56-65; only one female respondent was below the age of 35 years and about 41.66 percent of the respondents were graduate followed by 28.34 percent who were middle. It was observed that 12.50 percent were educated up to primary level whereas 10 percent were educated up to higher

secondary level. Only 7.5 percent of female respondents were illiterate. It was observed that majority of respondents 79.16 percent were non working and 20.84 percent of the respondents were working. It can be seen from the table 1 that majority of the respondents (75.83 %) belonged to nuclear families and 24.17 percent to joint type of families.

About 31.67 percent of respondents were Brahmins followed by 17.5 percent each for Kshatriyas and Vaishyas. About 15 percent of respondents were scheduled tribes whereas 10.83 percent were scheduled caste. Lowest percentages (7.5%) were of Kayasthas.

Table 2 revealed that majority of respondents (65.83 %) said that there was irregularity of timing with skipped periods before menopause. About 48.33 percent of women had abrupt cessation of menstruation. Heavy periods were common among 45.83 percent of the respondents and only 20.00 percent said that there were slowing down of flow of blood before final cessation of menstruation.

Majority of the respondents i.e. 93.34 percent had natural type of menopause while rest 6.66 had surgical menopause. Table 2 shows that 36.67 percent of the respondents had menopause at the age of 41 to 45 years followed by 32.5 percent at 46 to 50 years. 20.83 percent had menopause below the age of 40 years (one respondent had menopause at the age of 25 years) only 10.0 percent of respondents reported the age above 56 years. Similarly, in the study done by

Table 1: Background profile of the respondents

<i>Variables</i>	<i>No. of Respondents</i>	<i>%</i>
A. Age		
Below 35 years	1	0.83
36-45	11	9.17
46-55	81	67.50
56-65	27	22.50
Total	120	100.00
B. Education		
Graduation	50	41.66
Higher Secondary	12	10.00
Middle School	34	28.34
Primary Education	15	12.50
Illiterate	9	7.50
Total	120	100.00
C. Class		
Working	25	20.84
Non working	95	79.16
Total	120	100.00
D. Family type		
Nuclear	91	75.83
Joint	29	24.17
Total	120	100.00
E. Caste		
Brahmin	38	31.67
Kshatriya	21	17.50
Vaishya	21	17.50
Kayastha	9	7.50
Scheduled caste	13	10.83
Scheduled tribe	18	15.00
Total	120	100

Table 2: Onset of menopause

<i>Variables</i>	<i>No. of respondents</i>	<i>%</i>
A. Menstrual Changes Before Cessation		
Slowing down of flow of blood	24	20.00
Heavy periods	55	45.83
Irregularity of timing	79	65.83
Abrupt cessation	58	48.33
B. Type of Menopause		
Natural	112	93.34
Surgical	8	6.66
Total	120	100.00
C. Age at menopause		
Below 40 years	25	20.83
41-45 years	44	36.67
46-50 years	39	32.50
51-55 years	12	10.00
Above 56 years	-	-
Total	120	100

Table 3: Age at menopause according to class and family type of the respondents

Variables	Age at Menopause (years)				Total
	Below 40	41-45	46-50	51-55	
<i>Respondents Class</i>					
Working	8.00 (2)	32.00 (8)	56.00 (14)	4.00 (1)	25
Non working	24.21 (23)	37.89 (36)	26.31 (25)	11.57 (11)	95
Total	25	44	39	12	120
<i>Respondents Family Type</i>					
Joint	17.24 (5)	37.93 (11)	37.93 (11)	6.89 (2)	29
Nuclear	21.97 (20)	36.26 (33)	30.76 (28)	10.98 (10)	91
Total	25	44	39	12	120
<i>Figures in parentheses indicate actual number of respondents</i>					
Variables	χ^2	d.f.	P		
Class	9.18	3	0.05*		
Family type	0.96	3	0.05		

* Highly significant

Randhawa et al. (1982) on Himachali women, the mean age at menopause was found to be 43.55 years with the peak incidence at 44 years. Results have been reported by Debnath (1991) who found the mean age at menopause 44.8 years and Praveen (2004) found the mean age of menopause to be 43.4±3.9 years.

Table 3 depicts effect of socio economic factors on age at menopause. Class of the respondent had a significant effect on the age at menopause while family type of the respondent had no relation with respondent's age at menopause. Silva and Beral (1994) revealed that women of higher socio-economic status and with more education had lower fertility and later age at first birth, but a greater prevalence of childlessness and later age at menopause.

CONCLUSION

In India, menopause is, looked upon as a time of greater freedom - a liberation from the restrictions of youth. The essential difference appears to be in the way these cultures perceive menopause. While in west, women stress over menopause because of complex social and psychological factors. The thing to remember, regardless of culture, is that menopause is a unique experience for every woman. It is a pivotal event of women's life, and it can be very smooth

if women step forward with grace and embrace it! (Lonsdorf, 1999).

The present study reveals that most of the respondents had menopause between the ages of 41 to 50 years and the mean age at the onset of menopause is found to be 44.5 years.

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