

KNOWLEDGE, ATTITUDE AND EXPERIENCE OF MENOPAUSE

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Objective: To determine the knowledge and attitude of women towards menopause and to investigate the symptoms experienced by postmenopausal women. **Design:** It was a cross sectional survey based on sample of convenience. **Place and Duration of study:** Study was conducted at out patient department of Isra university hospital from 1st January 2005 to 31st December 2006. **Methods:** Total 863 women of age 42 to 80 years were interviewed in office of out patient department. A semi structured questionnaire was used to collect data. Data analysis done by computer software statistical program for social sciences (SPSS) version 11.0. **Results:** Mean age of respondents was 55.05, Menopause was natural in 727 (84.24%) women and 136 (15.75%) had surgical menopause. 680 (78.79%) women had little knowledge about menopause, while 137 (15.8%) women knew about effects and symptom of menopause. 680 (78.79%) women considered menopause as a natural process, while 183 (21.2 %) perceived it as a disease, 720 (83.42%) women were happy about cessation of menses and they did not want to have menses again, while 143 (16.57%) women wanted to have menses again. These women were of age 45 to 58 years and 85 (59.4%) were uneducated. Frequently reported symptoms were Backache in 653 (75.66%), body aches, 576 (66.74%) and Insomnia in 544 (63.44%) women. Vasomotor symptoms (Hot Flushes and Night Sweats) were reported by 513 (59.4%) and 390 (45.19%) respectively. Short loss of memory was reported by 536 (62.10%) women. 318 (36.84%) women were bothered by menopausal symptoms but only 275 (31.86%) has consulted doctor. 649 (75.20%) women were not taking any medicine for symptoms, 08 (0.926%) were taking Herbs, 10 (1.15%) were on HRT and 196 (22.71%) women were taking analgesics and Ca supplements off and on. Hypertension and Diabetes Mellitus was present in 180 (20.85%), 215 (24.9%) women respectively. **Conclusion:** Majority of our women were unaware of menopausal symptoms and its health effects. Most of them considered it as a natural process of aging, though bothered by symptoms but did not go for consultation due to lack of awareness and poverty.

Key words: Menopause Awareness. Attitude .Menopausal Symptoms

INTRODUCTION:

Modern medicine has significantly prolonged human life.¹ All women who live long enough will make transition to menopause.² Menopause is the depletion of ovarian function followed by cessation of menstruation and is usually diagnosed when a woman who do not have menstrual period for 12 consecutive months without any other biological or physiological cause.³

For middle age women this loss is critical issue as it that represents the end of fertility and onset of aging process. Owing to lack of oestrogen women during menopause may experience compromised physical wellbeing and climacteric symptoms such as mucosal dryness, hot flushes, night sweats and emotional fluctuations.⁴

Numerous factors including menopausal status, social background, and education, physical and emotional health may influence women's knowledge and beliefs about menopause.^{5,6}

As it is well known today that socio cultural factors can alter women's attitude and experience of menopausal symptoms. These symptoms are found to be less common in societies where menopause is viewed as positive rather than negative event. This cultural aspect of menopausal symptoms have been described in number of studies among Asian women, including Japanese and Chinese women.^{7,8}

In this article we evaluated woman's knowledge and attitude towards menopause and women's experience of climacteric symptoms in our area.

SUBJECTS AND METHODS

Over a period of 24 months from January 2005 to December 2006 a descriptive study cross sectional survey based on sample of convenience was at outpatient department of Isra university hospital Hyderabad, Pakistan.

A total of 863 women of age 42 to 80 years attending Obstetrics and Gynaecology out patient department were interviewed .Informed consent was taken Interviews were carried out by third year resident in the office of out patient department .

The predesigned questionnaire was used to collect the information regarding sociodemographic data, knowledge and attitude of women towards menopause and about health problem related to menopause and women's experience of menopausal symptoms.

All the data was analyzed utilizing Statistical Program for Social Sciences (SPSS) version 11.0

RESULTS

Results were analyzed and it was found that the age of women ranged from 42 to 80years and mean age was 55.05±6.12.

As shown in Table-1, 665 (77.8%) women were illiterate and they were unable to read or write. Ninety four (10.8%) had primary education, while 39 (4.5%) attended higher school and 65 (7.5%) did graduation. Five hundred and seventy-five (66.62%) women belong to poor socioeconomic group, 209 (24.21%) were from lower middle class and 79 (9.15%) women belongs to upper middle class. Seven hundred and twenty-seven (84.24%) had natural menopause while 136 (15.75%) had surgical menopause. The reason for surgery was dysfunctional uterine bleeding in 84 (61.76 %), fibroid uterus in 41 (30.1%) endometriosis in 9 (6.6%) and Carcinoma of cervix in 2 (1.47%) women.

One hundred and eighty-three women had no knowledge about menopause and its effects. Six hundred and eighty (78.79%) women were aware about menopause, among them 500 (73.52%) were illiterate and 180 (26.47%) were educated. 137 (15.8%) women had knowledge about the effects and symptom of menopause and all of them were educated. Six hundred and eighty (78.79%) women consider menopause as a natural process, 183 (21.2 %) perceived it as a disease. Out of 183 women who perceived it as a disease 150 (81.9%) were illiterate and 30 (16.39%) had surgical menopause. Table-2.

Table-1: Sociodemographic characteristics (n=863)

Age of women (in years)	Number	%
42 – 50	220	25.49
51 – 60	480	55.61
61 – 70	155	17.96
71 – 80	08	0.92
Parity of Women		
Nulliparous	13	1.50
1 – 4	390	45.19
5 – 8	283	32.79
9 – 11	177	20.50
Marital Status		
Married	680	78.79
Widow	170	19.69
Divorced	013	1.50
Education		
Nil	665	77.8
Primary	94	10.8
High school	39	4.5
College	65	7.5
Social Status		
Poor	575	66.62
Low Middle Class	209	24.21
Upper Middle Class	79	9.15

Table-2. Knowledge & attitude towards menopause

Knowledge about	Number	%
Menopause	680	78.79
Symptoms & effects	137	15.87
Consider Menopause as:		
Natural Process	680	78.79
Disease	183	21.2
Happy about menstrual cessation	720	83.42
Worried about menstrual cessation	143	16.57

Seven hundred and twenty (83.42%) women were happy about cessation of menses and they did not want to have menses again, while 143 (16.57%) women wanted to have menses again. Those women who wanted to have menses again were of age 45 to 58 years and 85 (59.4%) were uneducated. The frequency and percentage of symptoms experienced by women is listed in Table-3. Three hundred and twenty (83.42%) women were bothered by menopausal symptoms but only 275 (31.86%) had consulted doctor. 649 (75.20%) women were not taking any medicine for symptoms, 8 (0.926%) were taking Herbs 10 (1.15%) were on HRT and 196 (22.71%) women were taking analgesics and Calcium supplements on and off. Hypertension and Diabetes Mellitus was present in 215 (24.9%) and 180 (20.85%) women respectively.

Table-3: Symptoms experienced by women

Symptoms	Number	%
Backache	653	75.66
Body ache	576	66.74
Insomnia	544	63.44
Loss of memory	536	62.10
Hot flushes	513	59.4
Mood changes	492	57.01
Night sweats	390	45.19
Loss of libido	362	41.94
Depression	310	35.92
Frequent urination	303	35.11
Dyspareunia	182	21.08
Weight gain	216	25
Associated Problem		
HTN	215	24.91
Diabetes Mellitus	180	20.85

DISCUSSION

With increase in life expectancy through out the world most of the women will live through menopause. Therefore, they should have knowledge about the health effects of menopause and its prevention.

Women in Western countries tend to be better informed about implication of menopause.⁹ one survey conducted at Mexico City by Velasco-Murrillo *et al*¹⁰ reported that 83.8% of women have knowledge about climacteric symptoms and 90% knew about osteoporosis, 37% had some knowledge about cardiovascular risk after menopause.

In present study we have found that 78.79% women were aware about menopause but only 15.87% had knowledge about symptoms and health implication of menopause. Most of these women were uneducated and belonged to low socioeconomic group. While a study of 100 women conducted at JPMC Karachi Pakistan shows that 93% among 79 uneducated and 57% among 21 educated women were aware of menopause and its implications.¹¹ Another cross sectional descriptive study of 70 women conducted at MCH centre PIMS Islamabad Pakistan, reported

similar results that 74.3% respondents had heard and knew about menopause, 55.7% were aware of symptomatology while only 10% knew about sequel of menopause.¹²

Women in eastern societies view menopause as a natural process and hold a positive attitude^{8, 13-15} Chen *et al*¹⁶ reported that 91.7% midlife Chinese women in Taiwan perceive menopause a natural phenomena and most of these women could deal with menopause in a positive way. Another population based cross sectional study from south India showed similar results that 57% of women perceive menopause as convenient.¹⁷

Results of our study can be compared with other Asian studies, 78.79% of our study women perceive menopause as a natural process and 83.42% were happy due to cessation of menses and these women did not want to have menses again.

Among Western studies one study of 53 Canadian Italian women aged 45 to 75 year show similar results that most of women perceive menopause positively and most of them consider it as a natural process of aging.¹⁸

Symptoms experienced during menopause are influenced by social and cultural beliefs and this result in altered perception of symptoms in different population. Eighty percent of Western women suffer from physical and Psychological symptom at menopause.¹⁹ whereas studies reported from Asian region shows different results. Flint²⁰ found that Rajput women in India had very few problems during menopause.

Symptoms reported from different regions of Pakistan were also different. In our study frequency of menopausal symptoms varied from 21.08% to 75.66% commonest symptom reported were Backache, Body ache and Insomnia 653 (75.66%), 576 (66.74%) and 544 (63.4%) respectively. Similar symptoms were reported in another study from Hyderabad Sindh²¹. Whereas commonest symptom reported from Punjab were lethargy 65.4%, urinary symptom 56.2% and agitation 50.8%.²² Commonest symptom reported in a study from Karachi Sindh were Body ache 86%, Hot flushes 86% and irritability 65%.¹¹

In Japanese population commonest symptoms were shoulder stiffness 50%, fatigue 2% headache 30% and Hot flushes 28%,²³ while symptoms experienced by mid-aged Thai women were dizziness, tiredness, headache, joint aches/pain & backache.²⁴ Middle aged women in Taiwan reported troubled sleep, backache & joint pain.²

In our study troubled sleep & Short loss of memory was reported by 66.7% & 62.10% respectively. This frequency is higher than other Asian studies. This could be due to change in life style and other routine activities after menopause. Vasomotor

symptoms hot flushes and night sweats were reported by 59.4% and 45.19% of study subjects. This is higher than that reported by Japanese population,²⁵ this marked difference indicates the difference in the dietary habits and life style.

The corresponding figures for lethargy, forgetfulness, irritability, depression, insomnia and hot flushes show comparatively high rates among the Caucasian population.²⁶ Decreased libido was reported by 20% in Caucasian population,²⁶ in our study subjects decreased libido was reported by 41%, dyspareunia by 21.08%.

Yahya & Rehan²² in their study from Pakistan reported different results in their study subjects, increased libido was in 70.5% while decreased in 5.7% and no change in 23.8%. Dyspareunia was reported by 16.9% subjects.

About 25% women were Hypertensive and 20.85% were Diabetic. Roshan Ara in her study of urban women of Hyderabad reported 31.5% HTN & 51% diabetic women.²¹

Thirty-six percent of our study subjects were bothered by menopausal symptom, 31.86% consulted doctor, and 75.20% women were not taking any medicine for symptoms. This is similar to traditional response by most of Asian women to menopause, as most of them consider menopause as a natural process of aging and they have belief that such problems are an expected part of life.²⁴

CONCLUSIONS

Knowledge, attitude and menopausal symptoms in studied population were not very different from other studies reported within the country and abroad.

This hospital based survey reflects that most of our study subjects were unaware of menopausal symptoms and its health implications. Most of them consider menopause as a natural process and part of aging, though most of them were bothered by menopausal symptoms, but due to lack of awareness of long term consequence of menopause and poverty very few women sought for treatment.

It is important to encourage schools and other educational institutions, medical care providers and the health department to cooperate in educating women about menopause, its symptoms, long term consequences and treatment options. This combined effort by educational programs and health care providers will help in increasing public awareness. This may result in significant improvement in both life expectancy and quality of life of women in future.

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