

Women's Experiences in the Premenopausal Period

Devika R.¹, Priya V.K.², Shirley Prakash³, Gladys J.⁴

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Abstract

Background: The life stages of women are based on the reproductive cycle, which begins with the menstrual period and continues throughout the menstrual period. Natural amenorrhea is considered to have occurred when there is no menstrual period for 12 consecutive months, no other physical cause or disease is present, and no medical treatment is applied.

Method: This qualitative study was conducted using a content analysis method in Kakathop village, Thrissur. The data were collected using a Semi structured questionnaire to assess the socio-demographic data and Semi structured face to face in-depth interviews with 14 premenopausal women. The inclusion criteria were women who are in the age group of 40 to 50 years and willing to take part in the research. The exclusion criteria were the women having history of hysterectomy or oophorectomy, mental disorders and other diseases that can affect the menopausal symptoms and who have attained menopause. Purposive sampling technique was used and sampling continued until datasaturation.

Results: The findings revealed that the mean age of the participants was 47.5. The majority (57.1%) of the women had 2 children and duration of premenopausal changes were from 4-6 months. Six of them had completed secondary education and 8 were employed. 35.7% had monthly income of 15000-25000. The study revealed four themes and 18 sub themes such as physical changes (Hot flashes, Sweating, Physical pain, Tiredness, Sleep problems, Headache and giddiness), menstrual changes (Painful menstruation, Breast tenderness, Excessive amount and duration of bleeding and Irregular menstruation), psychological changes (anger, fear, irritated, frustration, frequent crying and anxiety) and sexual changes (vaginal dryness and reduced desire for sexual activities).

Keywords: Women, Experiences, Premenopausal changes.

BACKGROUND

Women's life stages are based on the reproductive cycle, beginning with menstruation and continuing through menopause. When menstruation begins during puberty, an egg is released from the ovary

during ovulation each month. It travels through the fallopian tubes where it can be fertilized by sperm. If fertilized, it implants in the uterine wall and begins pregnancy. Otherwise, the egg and lining are shed during pregnancy. This condition continues until perimenopause, when the body begins to transition into menopause. In other words, the ovaries stop

Author's Affiliation: ¹M.Sc. Nursing Student, ²Department of Mental Health Nursing, ³Principal, ⁴Vice Principal, Westfort College of Nursing, Thrissur 680581, India.

Corresponding Author: Devika R, M.Sc. Nursing Student, Westfort College of Nursing, Thrissur 680581, India.

E-mail: devikaramalingam10@gmail.com

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producing eggs for fertilization. The timing and duration of menstruation can vary throughout a woman's reproductive life, but most women worldwide enter menopause between the ages of 45 and 55.

The early menopause may be due to some chromosomal abnormalities, autoimmune diseases or other unknown causes. Although there are correlations between the age at menopause and specific genetic, physical and demographic factors, it is impossible to predict when a woman will go through menopause. However, every woman's situation is different. There is no test that can predict when it will start in life or how easily it will start. In addition to desperate periods, women may also experience other physical and emotional symptoms. Hot flushes, poor sleep and mood swings are common. Some women experience vaginal dryness, weight gain and thinning hair. Bone density will also begin to decrease. Women may experience stress, anxiety or depression.

Menopause symptoms may include anger and irritability, worry, forgetfulness, low self-esteem, selfdoubt, sadness, depression or melancholy and depression, often described as "brain fog" and/or loss of language. Many women who enter menopause or perimenopause experience sleep problems. Lack of sleep and fatigue can also cause symptoms such as irritability, difficulty concentrating, or anxiety.

To estimate the prevalence of natural menopause in India and its major states and secondly to investigate factors associated with natural menopause in India and selected states, a population-based study of natural menopause was conducted among women aged <50 years in India. Overall, menopause before the age of 40 years was reported in about 1.5% of women. In the national dataset, significant associations with age at natural menopause were found to be being married or widowed, poverty, Muslim religious affiliation, scheduled caste status, lack of education, living in rural areas, non-use of contraceptives, non-use of sterilization or abortion, low parity and living in the western region.

A cross-sectional study was conducted in 2020 using a door-to-door survey using a semi-structured questionnaire among 400 rural women in Kerala to determine the prevalence and factors associated with menopausal symptoms in rural Kerala. Of the surveyed women, 79.9% (318) had at least one of the 23 symptoms studied, the most common being

joint pain (35.8%) and fatigue (32.3%).

Life Span As they age, most women will experience pregnancy-related changes and spend a significant portion of their lives in pregnancy. The menopausal transition involves many physical, endocrine, and psychological changes that are influenced by race, ideology, and culture. Each woman's experience of changing bodies is unique. Although menopause can cause negative physical symptoms, there is evidence that women in Asian cultures report fewer menopausal symptoms. Women's experiences, thoughts, and reactions to pregnancy affect their daily lives and health and may vary across societies and traditions.

A systematic review of pregnancy and body image was conducted in London in 2023. Six studies examining menopause symptoms and body image found an association between frequency, intensity and number of symptoms and greater body image concerns. Menopause symptoms in general are also associated with a range of negative feelings about the body. The impact of signs and symptoms related to a pregnant woman's weight on quality of life, disability, healthcare utilization and costs. The average age of women included in the analysis was 49.8 years. The results showed that women with menopausal symptoms had lower health-related quality of life, functional disability and healthcare utilization than women without menopausal symptoms. Depression, anxiety and joint pain are symptoms commonly associated with poor health. Therefore, the researchers felt that this study was necessary to investigate the experiences of women before their bodies became weak.

Purpose

The purpose of the study is to explore the women's experiences in the premenopausal period

METHODS

This study adopted a qualitative research phenomenological design. The inclusion criteria were women aged 40-50 years who were willing to participate in the study. The exclusion criteria were women with a history of hysterectomy or ovariectomy, mental illness, and other illnesses affecting menopausal symptoms, and those who had attained menopause. Purposive sampling techniques and continuous sampling until data saturation was reached.

Tools used in the study includes:

Tool 1: Semi structured questionnaire to assess the socio-demographic data.

Tool 2: Semi structured face to face in-depth interviews using open-ended questions to explore the women's experiences in the premenopausal period.

The Formal permission for data collection was obtained from concerned authorities and the informed consent from participants were obtained. The investigator conducted the face to face in depth interview with the participants. By using an electronic device the data were recorded and then transcribed. After each interview, the content were typed in Microsoft word and was considered as a unit of analysis which was analysed using thematic analysis.

RESULTS

The mean age of the participants was 47.5.

Table 1: Frequency and percentage distribution of socio-demographic variables

Demographic Variables	Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)
Age		
40-45	7	50
46-50	7	50

Demographic Variables	Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)
Number of children		
0	1	7.1
1	2	14.3
2	8	57.1
3	3	21.4
Duration of premenopausal changes		
0	0	0
1-3 months	8	57.1
4-6 months	4	28.6
7-9 months	2	14.3
10-12 months	2	14.3
Education		
Primary	5	35.7
Secondary	6	42.9
Higher secondary	1	7.1
Undergraduate	2	14.3
Postgraduate	0	0
Employment		
Employed	8	57.1
Unemployed	6	42.9
Monthly income		
<5000	0	0
5000-15000	2	14.3
15001-25000	5	35.7
>25000	1	7.1

Table 2: Women's experiences in premenopausal period

Theme	Sub Themes	Quotations
Physical changes	Hot flashes	Sample 1: I have body pain, backpain and not able to do all household works.
	Sweating	Sample 2: I feel like very hot and sweating, giddiness at times and leg pain.
	Physical pain	Sample 4: I feel like tired not able to do my routine works. I have back pain and knee pain.
	Tiredness	Sample 6: I feel increased body heat and sweating, not able to sleep during night
	Sleep problems	Sample 7: I get severe headache most of the days and sometimes feel giddiness
Menstrual changes	Headache and giddiness	Sample 10: I have body pain, backpain and not able to do all household works.
	Painful menstruation	Sample 13: I have disturbed sleeping pattern and increased sweating.
	Breast tenderness	Sample 1: I had irregular periods with excessive bleeding.
	Excessive amount and duration of bleeding	Sample 3: I have severe pain and breast tenderness during menstruation which was not present in the past
	Irregular menstruation.	Sample 5: I have irregular menstruation and excessive bleeding at times. Sample 7: I have irregular menstruation with pain Sample 8: I felt like excessive duration of bleeding when compared to the past.

Psychological changes	Anger	Sample 1: I get angry at times and feel to be alone.
	Fear	Sample 3: I got very angry with family members. I used to cry and be alone.
	Irritated	Sample 5: I have fear and anxiety regarding these changes.
	Frustration	Sample 6: I feel anxious and frustrated at some times.
	Frequent crying	Sample 9: I have fear regarding any underlying disease of reproductive system.
	Anxiety	Sample 14: I feel like irritated while talking to others and wants to be alone.
Sexual changes	Vaginal dryness	Sample 4: I have reduced interest in sexual activities.
	Reduced desire in sexual activities.	Sample 12: I feel vaginal dryness and reduced desire for sexual intercourse.
		Sample 14: I feel lack of interest in sexual activity.

DISCUSSION

According to the analysis results, the average age of the participants was 47.5 years. Most of the women (57.1%) had 2 children and the premenopausal transition period was 4-6 months. Six of them had completed secondary education and eight were employed. 35.7% of people had a monthly income between 15,000 and 25,000. These results are consistent with the quality of education provided in Iran in 2020 using the content analysis method. The average age of the participants was 47 ± 2.98 years. Data analysis revealed five categories: menopause and aging, life transitions, fear of hopelessness, life transitions, and the need for support during the transition. In addition to finding answers to questions from friends, family, and doctors, studies show that women with erectile dysfunction are characterized by a fear of the future and its consequences, as well as a need for approval⁷. Current study results have Four themes and 18 subthemes such as physical changes (hot flashes, sweating, body aches, fatigue, sleep problems, headaches, and dizziness), behavioral attire (cold, milk, heavy, and prolonged bleeding), menstrual irregularity), emotional changes (anger, fear, irritability, depression, crying, and anxiety), and sexual changes (dry vagina and lack of desire to have sex).

A community based crosssectional study was conducted among 106 postmenopausal women living more than 6 months in Anjarakandy, Kannur, Kerala in 2013 to understand the prevalence of pregnancy symptoms and responses. The mean age at menopause is 48.26 years. The majority of women's symptoms are 90.7% emotional problems (crying, depression, irritability), 72.9% headache, 65.4% fatigue, 58.9% difficulty urinating, 57% forgetfulness, 53.3% musculoskeletal problems (joint pain, muscle pain) and sexual problems (loss of libido, dyspareunia) 31.8%, genital problems

(itching, soft dryness) 9.3%, voice change 8.4%. Only 22.4% of women know the real cause of impotence. Studies have shown that all women will experience one or more menopause symptoms.

Limitations

As such the investigator did not face any difficulties and limitations in conducting the study.

Conflict of Interest

The author has no conflict of interest.

CONCLUSION

The results of this study shed light on the experiences of menopausal women. Providing education and awareness will promote understanding of the changes that occur before and after menopause and the resources available. Health care providers should provide tailored care that addresses individual concerns and health needs and emphasizes physical activity, mental well-being, and stress management for menopausal women.

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