

INVESTIGATING POST-MENOPAUSAL CHARACTERISTICS AND PERCEPTIONS OF THE MENOPAUSAL TRANSITION

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ABSTRACT

OBJECTIVES

This study aimed to investigate the knowledge and perceptions of menopause among post-menopausal women.

METHODOLOGY

A descriptive cross-sectional study was conducted at Hayatabad Medical Complex, Medical, and Teaching Institute Peshawar from March 2022 to March 2023. Participants meeting the inclusion criteria were assessed using a semi-structured proforma covering demographic variables, knowledge, and attitudes toward menopause. Delving into knowledge and perceptions of menopause, the questionnaire probed participants about their awareness of menopause upon cessation of menstrual periods, knowledge of the age of menopause, understanding of menopausal symptoms, whether they perceived menopause as a disease, medical condition, or a natural process, and their opinions on the treatment of menopausal symptoms.

RESULTS

In a survey assessing menopausal characteristics and perceptions, 81% of women experienced natural menopause and 19% underwent surgical menopause. 85% had prior knowledge of menopause, but only 45% knew its typical onset age. 56% held a positive perception of menopause. Hot flashes and mood swings were reported by 55% of women, while 48% experienced insomnia.

CONCLUSION

Many post-menopausal women are not aware of menopausal symptoms. Tailored health education and comprehensive support are necessary to address knowledge disparities and provide holistic care for women in this transition.

KEYWORDS: Menopause, Knowledge, Post-Menopause, Perception, Aging

INTRODUCTION

Menopause, a critical transition in a woman's reproductive life, signifies the cessation of menstruation and fertility. Understanding the knowledge and perceptions of post-menopausal women regarding this natural physiological process is pivotal for comprehensive healthcare strategies. Over the past decade, research has increasingly focused on elucidating the factors influencing women's awareness and attitudes during this life stage. Numerous studies have investigated the socio-demographic variables shaping menopausal experiences.^{1,2,3} Furthermore, insights into educational backgrounds and their impact on menopausal knowledge have been explored.^{4,5} The prevalence of surgical menopause and its implications for women's health have also garnered attention in recent literature.^{6,7} Studies suggest that cultural contexts play a significant role in shaping women's perceptions of menopause, emphasizing the need for a holistic approach to healthcare that considers diverse cultural

perspectives.^{8,9} Additionally, the role of social support, particularly from family, elders, and friends, in disseminating information about menopause has been underscored.^{10,11} Despite these advancements, there remains a critical gap in understanding how women perceive menopause, especially considering its association with Aging. Recent research has explored the psychological aspects of menopause, shedding light on women's attitudes and emotions during this phase.^{12,13} However, there is a need for a more comprehensive investigation into the interplay of cultural, educational, and psychological factors shaping women's understanding and acceptance of menopause. In light of the evolving landscape of menopausal research, this study aims to contribute valuable insights by examining the knowledge and perceptions of post-menopausal women. By delving into socio-demographic factors, educational backgrounds, and cultural influences, our research seeks to provide a nuanced understanding of how women navigate the complex terrain of menopause.

METHODOLOGY

The study adopted a descriptive cross-sectional design. All eligible outpatient post-menopausal women attending the department over one year were included, following specified criteria. The inclusion criteria comprised obtaining consent from patients 40 years or older. Those with significant cognitive impairment and individuals diagnosed with psychotic disorders were excluded. A meticulously designed semi-structured proforma was employed to capture comprehensive data, facilitating the collection of demographic information such as age, marital status, education, parity, and residence. Delving into knowledge and perceptions of menopause, the questionnaire probed participants about their awareness of menopause upon cessation of menstrual periods, knowledge of the age of menopause, understanding of menopausal symptoms, whether they perceived menopause as a disease, medical condition, or a natural process, and their opinions on the treatment of menopausal symptoms. Participants' perceptions were assessed by prompting them to characterize this life event as positive, negative, or neutral. Subsequently, the collected data were meticulously entered into an Excel sheet and systematically tabulated. The analytical process was conducted using SPSS version 26. The Ethical approval was taken from Hayatabad Medical Complex. Approval No. 1663, Dated: 14-11-2023

RESULTS

The study population exhibited a mean age of 55.6±8.8 years, with the majority falling within the 51-60 age group (58%), followed by 41-50 years (30%). Marital status reflected that 78% of participants were married, with 53% having 1-3 children, 3% being nulliparous, and 10% having more than five children. In terms of education, 67% had no formal education, and 80% came from a rural background.

Table 1: Menopausal Characteristics and Perceptions

Characteristic	%age
Natural Menopause	81
Surgical Menopause	19
Heard About Menopause	85
Knowledge of Menopause Age	45
Awareness of Menopausal Symptoms	20
Positive Perception of Menopause	56
Negative Perception of Menopause	30
Considered Menopause Natural	81
Happy with Cessation of Menstruation	62
Worried about Cessation	20
Worried about Loss of Fertility	11

Table 2: Reported Menopausal Symptoms

Menopausal Symptom	%age
Body Aches	51
Mood Swings	55
Depression	50
Irritability	50
Insomnia	48
Night Sweats	50
Hot Flushes	55

These tables offer a well-structured and lucid depiction of the study's demographic attributes, menopausal characteristics, perceptions, and the reported symptoms associated with menopause.

DISCUSSION

In comparison to women in Western countries, who generally exhibit a more comprehensive understanding of menopause and its symptoms.¹⁴ Our study illuminates a knowledge gap among women in our cohort. While a survey in Mexico City reported that 83.8% of women were informed about climacteric symptoms, our findings indicate that 85% of women in our study had heard about menopause when their periods stopped.¹⁵ However, only 45% were aware of the age of menopause, and a mere 20% recognized menopausal symptoms. Notably, a significant proportion of these women were uneducated (67%) and hail from rural backgrounds (80%), aligning with prior studies indicating that women in developing countries, like our study, may lag in health literacy concerning menopause.^{15,16,17} Studies in Taiwan and South India reported that most women view menopause as a natural phenomenon and even find it convenient.¹⁸ Our study aligns with these findings, as 56.6% of participants held a positive perception of menopause, 81% considered it a natural process, and 62% expressed contentment due to the cessation of menstruation. The frequency of menopausal symptoms in our study ranged from 19% to 55%, with the most common symptoms being hot flushes (55%), mood swings (55%), body aches (51%), irritability (55%), and depression (55%). Interestingly, there are notable differences in symptom presentation across various societies, reflecting dietary habits and lifestyle variations. For instance, Japanese women commonly reported fatigue (2%), shoulder stiffness (50%), headache (30%), and hot flashes (28%). While mid-aged Thai women experienced tiredness, headaches, dizziness, backaches, and joint aches and pains.¹⁹ These distinctions underscore the influence of cultural and lifestyle factors on the manifestation of menopausal symptoms.

LIMITATIONS

This survey has some limitations because of limited resources like time and money. Due to time constraints, a sample of only 100 respondents was selected.

CONCLUSIONS

Post-menopausal women have knowledge gaps about menopause, its age, and its symptoms. Tailored health education is crucial, particularly for those with limited formal education in rural areas. Comprehensive healthcare support is needed due to the prevalence of symptoms. Culturally sensitive approaches are also essential. Our findings advocate for targeted interventions addressing knowledge disparities and holistic support for women in this life transition.

CONFLICT OF INTEREST: None

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CONTRIBUTORS

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- Shakeela Wahab** - Data Acquisition
- Syeda Sitwat Fatima** – Supervision; Final Approval



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