

MENOPAUSE: HOW IMPORTANT IT IS TO KNOW BEFORE IT HAPPENS?



Salma Hassan

MSc, RN, RM

Introduction

Hot flushes, mood swings, fatigue and other symptoms bring physical and psychological stresses to a woman. Menopause is an important milestone in a woman's life marking the end of her reproductive period. Just like puberty it is an important occurrence in a woman's body thus introducing various physiological and psychological changes in her body. According to Merriam-Webster dictionary menopause means natural cessation of menstruation, which usually occurs at the age of 45 to 50 years.

The transition period usually consists of three parts, perimenopause, menopause and postmenopause. The changes usually begin with perimenopause, it begins several years before the last menstrual period. The transition period of end of reproductive life can bring changes to a woman's life physically and psychologically. Various physiological and psychological changes have been attributed in this regard due to hormonal changes in the body (Poomalar & Arounassalame, 2013). These bodily changes can be daunting if women are not aware of them. However, the symptoms and the experiences are different for

each woman. Some women may have trouble with sleeping while others may enjoy a more energetic life.

This paper will present the survey findings of my research based on the topic menopause its significance and also the issues surrounding will be highlighted.

Justification and background

This topic has caught my interest for various reasons. Firstly, at present in the Maldives there is no published research done on this area. Secondly being a woman I would like to know more about the physiological and psychological changes that take place during different phases of menopause. In order to help other women going through the changes, to create awareness among women approaching menopause is critical. As a health care provider I came across many women

of menopausal age who expressed fear and anxiety about physiological changes and the signs and symptoms of menopause.

My main aim and objective is to find out how much the women in Maldives are ready for menopausal changes, how they get help, treatment and support during distress.

Methodology

A structured questionnaire was developed using Google forms and its link was sent to academic and non -academic colleagues via email to a total of 44 participants. Mailed surveys are advantageous as it is unobtrusive and inexpensive to administer. In addition, another advantage of surveys are that they are carried out in natural settings, and random probability sampling is often easier to conduct than experimental studies (Bowling, 2000). The survey participants were all females' ages ranging from 35 to 55 years. Data was obtained via email and all filled forms were received automatically to the researcher's email.

Furthermore, the questionnaire was circulated to academic and non-academic colleagues, a random sample was chosen. Although ethics approval was not required, all colleagues were informed about the details of the survey carried out and they took part in the survey.

Results and discussion

According to the findings 75% of the respondents strongly agree on the importance and the need on creating awareness among menopausal aged women. Planning educational programs, creating awareness and giving health education can improve the quality of women's lives (Abedzadeh-Kalahroudi, Taebi, Sadat, Saberi, & Karimian, 2012). Since majority of the participants agree on such programs it is believed to be implemented successfully. It will therefore improve the attitudes of women towards menopause and improve their behavior on physical activities, diet behavior thus leading to improving their quality of life (Abedzadeh-Kalahroudi et al., 2012). Additionally the survey has also shown menopause as an important area of concern for creating awareness as many women are not aware of the occurrence of the signs and symptoms during menopause. It has also shown that women need to be educated on this area in order to be keep women ready and prepared for the changes. 68.2% of the respondents expressed that women are unaware of the signs and symptoms. Therefore 89.9% respondents feel that the following topics should be included in the awareness session. Signs and symptoms, treatment, self-help and how to cope with it. Furthermore, 64.9% of respondents said they do not have prior knowledge on menopause whereas 52.8% of respondents said they get information from their friends about menopause.

Moreover menopause and its symptoms are considered to be largely dependent on traditional beliefs. Similarly women's perception of menopause also depends on their sociocultural,

economical and life style factors(Abedzadeh-Kalahroudi et al., 2012).

Most people perceive that it is the end of women's productivity in life as well as sexual relationship therefore it is very important to create awareness among women to address misconceptions about menopause, 88.6% respondents agree that the awareness program should be targeted to women less than 50 years of age in order for them to be educated before menopause occurs. According to the survey findings, the three main sources of receiving information about menopause are family, friends and health facilities.

Women need to be informed and educated on the medical risks involved during pre and post-menopausal changes. Some of the risks are postmenopausal breast cancer, osteoporosis and weight gain, which can also lead to increased risk of other medical conditions and problems. In addition, early natural menopause has increased risks of cardiovascular disease (Atsma, Bartelink, Grobbee, & van der Schouw, 2006). The results also show that women lack knowledge about the other symptoms of menopause like libido changes and dryness in the vagina, only 8.3% had knowledge about the sexual changes during menopause other than stopping of periods. On the contrary women in western countries tend to be better informed about implications of menopause. According to (Nusrat, Nishat, Gulfareen, Aftab, & Asia, 2008) a survey conducted in Mexico City reported that 83.8% had knowledge about climacteric symptoms and 90% knew about osteoporosis and 37% of women had some knowledge about cardio vascular diseases after menopause.

Conclusion

Menopause is an important part of women's lives where they need to be educated and informed about the physiological and psychological changes in order to improve their quality of life.

References

- Abedzadeh-Kalahroudi, M., Taebi, M., Sadat, Z., Saberi, F., & Karimian, Z. (2012). Prevalence and Severity of Menopausal Symptoms and Related Factors Among Women 40-60 Years in Kashan, Iran. *Nursing and Midwifery Studies*, 1(2), 88–93. <http://doi.org/10.5812/nms.8358>
- Atsma, F., Bartelink, M.-L. E. L., Grobbee, D. E., & van der Schouw, Y. T. (2006). Postmenopausal status and early menopause as independent risk factors for cardiovascular disease: a meta-analysis. *Menopause (New York, N.Y.)*, 13(2), 265–79. <http://doi.org/10.1097/01.gme.0000218683.97338.ea>
- Bowling, A (2000). *Research Methods in Health: investigating health and health services*. open University Press, 22 Ballmoor, Buckingham
- Nusrat, N., Nishat, Z., Gulfareen, H., Aftab, M., & Asia, N. (2008). Knowledge, attitude and experience of menopause. *Journal of Ayub Medical College, Abbottabad: JAMC*, 20(1), 56–59.