

Awareness of Menopausal Symptoms among Young Pakistani Women of Different Educational Backgrounds

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ABSTRACT

Menopause has significant effects on a woman's quality of life. It is important that women realise these changes and are better equipped to look after their needs in this age group, to be able to postpone or prevent those risks. Educating them regarding these symptoms would definitely equip them better to avoid and reduce many adverse emotional and psychological symptoms of menopause.

Keywords: Menopause, Pakistan, Symptoms, Education.

How to cite this article: Mujahid S, Siddiqui AA, Hussain R. Awareness of Menopausal Symptoms among Young Pakistani Women of Different Educational Backgrounds. *J South Asian Feder Menopause Soc* 2013;1(1):18-20.

Source of support: Nil

Conflict of interest: None declared

INTRODUCTION

Pakistan is the sixth most populous country of the world with the population growth rate of 2.2%. It is home to around 185 million people. Menopause is a significant public issue in Pakistan, as by 2020, population will reach 226 million and 7.1% (16 million) will be aged more than 60 years.¹

Menopause, as part of the cycle of reproductive aging, is universal but how women experience menopause differs by ethnicity, culture and socioeconomic status.² Menopause is an event that tends to be highly variable in timing and pattern. It occurs relatively early in women from developing countries and later in developed countries.³

According to one international health report, menopause seems to be associated with fewer and less severe symptoms in Asia than the West.³ Numerous factors including menopausal status, social background education and physical and emotional health may influence women's knowledge and beliefs about menopause.⁴

According to a recent local study, the average age at menopause in Pakistan is estimated to be 49.3 years,⁵ while female life expectancy is 67 years.¹ Life expectancy is increasing while age of menopause remains relatively unchanged, so Pakistani women now live one-third of their lives after menopause experiencing menopausal symptoms and associated adverse health and psychological effects. The literacy rate of females in Pakistan is only 28%.⁶

Menopause can have a significant effect on women's quality of life. Their health needs change significantly and

it is important that women become aware of the new health risks that they face and that there are options for preventing those risks. Studies have revealed that women avoid and reduce many adverse emotional and psychological symptoms of menopause by educating themselves about menopause, to better equip them when approaching this stage of life cycle.⁷

Several local studies regarding menopause have emphasized on prevalence, physiology, menopausal symptoms, but little work has been done on the awareness of menopause among the young Pakistani women. Therefore, in this study we evaluate the awareness of menopause in women between the ages of 30 and 40 years.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

A descriptive cross-sectional survey was conducted based on sample of convenience at the outpatient department of Dr Ziauddin Hospital, Karachi, Pakistan. Duration of the survey was from 6th August 2009 to 6th February 2010.

A total of 205 women of ages 30 to 40 years attending the outpatient department were interviewed. Informed consent was taken and interviews were carried out by a resident of the gynecology department. A questionnaire was used to collect the information regarding sociodemographic data, awareness about menopause and other related health problems.

Data analysis was done by computer software statistical program for social sciences (SPSS), Version 11.0.

RESULTS

Results were analyzed and it was found that the mean age of respondents was 34.34 ± 3.8 years with a range of 30 to 40 years. The sociodemographic characteristics of the study population are shown in Table 1. Majority of respondents had completed their intermediate and higher education 135 (65.9%) (Fig. 1). Regarding their source of awareness about menopause, only 57.6% had tried to seek information about menopause, with doctor being the source of information in 63 (53.4%) (Table 2).

About 89 (43.4%) knew what is menopause, while 119 (58%) were aware of the average age of menopause in Pakistan. Although majority of women thought that tiredness was the most common immediate consequence of

Table 1: Sociodemographic characteristics of the respondents (N = 205)

Variables	Mean ± SD	
Age	34.34 ± 3.8	
Parity of women	Number	%
0	41	20
1-2	63	30.7
> 2	101	49.3
Employment		
Employed	78	38.0
Housewife	127	62.0
Social status		
< ₹ 10,000	37	18
₹ 10,001 - 20,000	69	33.7
₹ 20,001 - 50,000	53	25.9
> ₹ 50,000	46	22.4

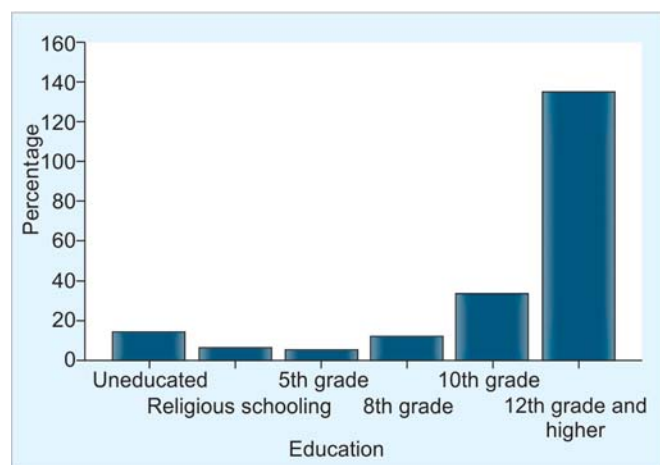


Fig. 1: Educational status of respondents (N = 205)

Table 2: Source of awareness about menopause

Awareness	Number	%
Women tried to seek information regarding menstrual issues	118	57.6
Source of awareness	Number	%
Doctor	63	53.4
Relatives	18	15.3
Educational sessions	12	10.2
Friends	4	3.4
Television/magazine/radio	7	5.9
Educational session/television/magazine/radio	3	2.5
Doctor/relatives	1	0.8
Relatives/friends	3	2.5
Doctor/television/magazine/radio	2	1.7
Doctor/educational session	2	1.7
Doctor/friends/television/magazine/radio	3	2.5

menopause, 85 (41.5%) were of the opinion that it was hot flushes. Most of the women 157 (76.6%) expressed the view that osteoporosis was the most common long-term consequence of menopause. The main sources of information about menopause in descending order in our study were doctor 63 (53.4%), relatives 18 (15.3%), educational sessions 12 (10.2%), friends 4 (3.4%) and media

Table 3: Comparison of education with knowledge about menopause

Educational status	Knowledgeable n (%)	Unknowledgeable n (%)	Total n
Uneducated	4 (3.3)	10 (12.2)	14
Religious school	3 (2.4)	3 (3.7)	6
5th grade	3 (2.4)	2 (2.4)	5
8th grade	4 (3.3)	8 (8.9)	12
10th grade	20 (16.3)	13 (15.9)	33
12th grade and higher	89 (72.4)	46 (56.1)	135

7 (5.9%). Majority (95.6%) felt a need for awareness program on menopause.

A comparison of education with knowledge about menopause revealed that the predominant knowledgeable respondents 89 (72.4%) completed their 12th grade and higher education. This was followed by 10th grade 20 (16.3%), 8th grade and uneducated 4 (3.3%), while religious schooling and 5th grade were 3 (2.4%) each (Table 3).

DISCUSSION

In a similar international survey of knowledge about menopause in young women, where majority of the respondents had 10th grade education 195 (49.4%), none of the respondents were illiterate, 128 (32.4%) were university graduates, the results did not indicate that tertiary educated respondents were more knowledgeable than secondary school educated women.⁷

Two local studies conducted on women older than 40 years of age showed that majority of illiterate women also knew about menopause. The study conducted at Isra University, Sindh Pakistan, shows that 78.79% women were aware about menopause, among them 73.52% were illiterate and 26.47% were educated.⁴ Another 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.⁴ A cross-sectional descriptive study conducted at MCH center, PIMS, Islamabad, Pakistan, reported similar results that 74.3% respondents had heard and knew about menopause.⁸

A total of 119 (58%) women were aware of the average age of menopause in Pakistan in the present study. In an international study, 26.1% young women accurately determined the onset of menopause,⁷ while in an Egyptian study 41% of women knew the average age of menopause.⁹

In our study, almost half 108 (52.7%) of the young women had reasonably good knowledge on signs and symptoms attributed to menopause and said that tiredness was the most common immediate consequence of menopause, 85 (41.5%) were of the opinion that it was hot flushes. In a similar survey conducted on young women in

Kuala Lumpur, majority had good knowledge of menopausal signs and symptoms, (86.5%) identified depression as the commonest sign and symptom of menopause, whereas 85.6% thought it was irritability.⁷

Symptoms reported by older women from different regions of Pakistan were different. Two surveys of Hyderabad showed backache (75.66%)³ and body ache (81.7%)¹⁰ as the predominant symptoms. Hot flushes was the most common symptom in studies conducted in Karachi (82%)¹¹ and Abbottabad 50%.¹²

Majority 157 (76.6%) of the young women in our study were aware of complications like osteoporosis which is similar to a Malaysian survey⁷ conducted in young women, 76.2% describing osteoporosis as most common long-term consequence of menopause.

The main source of awareness about menopause in our study is through the doctor (53.4%), on the contrary in a Malaysian survey⁷, the main source of information about menopause in young women were families 76.7%. In the Egyptian respondents, information was obtained mainly from mass media (42.5%).⁹

On further questioning types of additional information needed about menopause, the respondents expressed overwhelming positive response. Majority (95.6%) felt a need for awareness program on menopause whereas in another local study on older women, 78.6% respondents expressed the desire to learn more about menopause and 74.3% felt a need of starting health education on menopause in educational institutions.¹³

CONCLUSION

The young women were more aware of the common signs and long-term health implications of menopause. According to the results, the most common source of information about menopause in our study was from medical source and majority felt a need for awareness program on menopause. Education above grade 12 had the highest level of knowledge.

This survey reflects that the respondents varied widely in their ideas about menopause and the average age of menopause in Pakistan. Young women in this country should be educated to remove stigmas about menopause from the school level. For the older group, it is important to emphasize on educating them about health risk, and adopting healthy lifestyle behavior now can influence their risk for developing diseases associated to menopause in the near future. More randomized controlled studies are needed in the Asia Pacific region.

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