

## Qualitative Study On Experience Of Menopausal Symptoms Of Middle-Aged Women In North Karnataka

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### KEYWORDS

Menopause, Symptoms, Problems, Coping strategies

### ABSTRACT

The phenomenological study explores the lived experiences of menopausal women, focusing on those who attained menopause naturally and those who underwent hysterectomy. The study aimed to understand the physical, psychological, and social challenges faced by these women and their coping mechanisms. A total of 12 women aged 35-50 years, selected through purposive sampling, participated in in-depth interviews. Thematic analysis identified four major themes: menopausal experience, menopausal signs and symptoms, menopausal effects on daily life, and knowledge and coping methods. Findings revealed that natural menopause was associated with fewer health complications and better marital satisfaction compared to hysterectomy. Women who underwent hysterectomy reported more severe health issues, including physical discomfort, psychological distress, and sexual dissatisfaction. Symptoms such as hot flashes, joint pain, mood swings, memory lapses, urinary issues, and sexual dysfunction were common across both groups. However, women with hysterectomy experienced prolonged health complications and emotional distress. The study also highlighted the role of family, friends, and healthcare professionals in providing information and support. While some women relied on self-coping methods like dietary changes and medical treatments, there was a notable lack of accurate information about menopause and hysterectomy. Many women expressed concerns about the inadequate communication from healthcare providers regarding alternative treatments and the long-term consequences of hysterectomy.

### Introduction

Menopause is a significant biological transition in a woman's life, marked by the cessation of menstruation and associated with various physiological and psychological changes. While menopause is a universal experience, the perception, manifestation, and coping strategies vary widely across different socio-cultural contexts (Avis et al., 2021). In India, particularly in rural regions such as North Karnataka, the experience of menopause is influenced by factors such as traditional beliefs, healthcare accessibility, economic status, and familial support systems (Nusrat et al., 2022).

Middle-aged women in North Karnataka face a myriad of menopausal symptoms, including hot flashes, night sweats, sleep disturbances, mood swings, and joint pain (Bairy et al., 2009). These symptoms can significantly affect their quality of life, daily functioning, and social interactions. However, the perception and reporting of menopausal symptoms are often shaped by cultural narratives, which either normalize or stigmatize the experiences of aging women (Singh & Arora, 2020). In many cases, women may not seek medical attention due to limited awareness or prevailing social norms that discourage discussions on women's health concerns (Rai & Prasad, 2019).

Despite the growing global interest in menopause research, there remains a paucity of qualitative studies exploring the lived experiences of menopausal women in specific regional contexts, such as North Karnataka. Most existing studies focus on biomedical aspects, overlooking the socio-cultural dimensions that significantly influence women's experiences (Goyal & Saxena, 2018). Understanding these experiences from a qualitative perspective can offer deeper insights into the emotional, social, and psychological challenges faced by menopausal women, thereby informing culturally sensitive interventions and healthcare policies (Sharma & Mishra, 2021). Hence the study aims to explore the experiences of menopausal symptoms among middle-aged women in North Karnataka using a qualitative approach. By capturing personal narratives and lived experiences, the research seeks to understand the impact of menopause on their daily lives, coping strategies, and the role of social and healthcare support systems. The findings will contribute to a broader understanding of menopause in rural India and offer recommendations for improving the well-being of menopausal women in similar socio-cultural settings.

## Methodology

Phenomenological study attempts to set aside biases and preconceived assumptions about human experiences, feelings and responses to a particular situation. It allows the researcher to delve into the perceptions, perspectives, understandings and feelings of those people who have actually experienced or lived the phenomenon or situation of interest. Therefore, phenomenology can be defined as the direct investigation and description of phenomena as consciously experienced by people living those experiences (Samarasiri *et al.*, 2017). The flow of the qualitative study as follows,

- **Ethical consideration**
- **Data collection**
- **Analysis**
- **Results**

**Ethical consideration:** All participants were fully informed about the purpose of the study prior to conducting the study. Informed consent was taken from each and every participants and voluntary participation was encouraged. Anonymity and confidentiality were assured by securing the information the information only among researcher and labeled them with a specific code for collected data.

**Data Collection:** The 12 menopausal women were purposively selected for the study included three women who attended natural menopause and three women who underwent hysterectomy. On the whole six women from rural and 6 women from urban area were selected for the study. The in-depth interview was conducted using interview guide schedule However, the interview was open ended to record the lived experience of the phenomena of each sample. The schedule included must ask questions as follows,

- Describe your experiences of going through menopause?
- Do you have knowledge about menopause and the source of information?
- What is the effect of menopause on your daily life?
- Can you share about sexual experience after menopause?
- What is your husband's attitude about menopause? Do you feel?
- There is any change in your relationship with your spouse?

“How, what, where” added accordingly to encourage the women to explain their experiences in detail. The verbatim was recorded. Field notes were taken to record about the body language, non-verbal clues such as crying, sighing, smiling, pause etc used by the women to express their experiences during interview process. Every interview lasted around 30-45 minutes.

**Analysis:** Narrative analysis is a systematic method for processing qualitative data and provides new sight to cognitive processes, pitcher of reality, guide for action and interpretation of narrative information.

The interviews were recorded, all the recordings were listened again and again carefully in order to get a clear sense of participant's explanation and views. They were transcribed into text and analyzed. The data analysis was performed simultaneously with data collection. The meaningful units were extracted from the participants in the form of open codes. After that, the codes were reviewed for several times and those which had similarity were classified into themes and sub-themes. Peer debriefing and member checking were used as strategies of rigor in the study.

Finally four themes emerged from the data as follows,

Menopausal experience	Menopausal signs and symptoms	Menopausal effect on daily life	Knowledge and coping methods
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Normal experience</li> <li>• Negative experience</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Physical sign and symptoms</li> <li>• Psychological signs and symptoms</li> <li>• Urogenital signs and symptoms</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Self</li> <li>• Married life</li> <li>• Sexual life</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Family</li> <li>• Friends</li> <li>• Specialists</li> <li>• Need for accurate information</li> </ul>

## Results

The results of qualitative analysis are presented as follows

- Descriptive statistics
- Development of themes and sub-themes

**Table 1: Characteristics of the sample selected for qualitative study**

**N=12**

SI No	Characteristics	No
1	<b>Age (Years)</b>	
	35-40	3
	40-45	4
	45-50	5
2	<b>Age at menopause (Years)</b>	
	35-40	5
	40-45	4
	45-50	3
3	<b>Education</b>	
	Primary	6
	High school	3
	Graduate	3
4	<b>Working status</b>	
	Working	4
	Non-working	8
5	<b>Type of menopause</b>	
	Natural	6
	Surgical	6

### Descriptive statistics

Table 1 indicates that the sample size included 12 women aged between 35-50 years. Out of 12 women, five of them attained menopause in the age of 35-40 years, four women attained menopause between 40-45 years and three women attained menopause by the age of 45-50 years. Six women had primary school education while three of them had high School and graduation level of education. Eight women were non-working and four of them working. Six women were attained menopause naturally and six women underwent hysterectomy.

### Development of themes and sub-themes

Themes	Sub-themes
<b>Menopausal experience</b>	Normal experience
	Negative experience
<b>Menopausal signs and symptoms</b>	Physical sign and symptoms
	Psychological signs and symptoms
	Urogenital signs and symptoms
<b>Menopausal effect on daily life</b>	Self
	Married life
	Sexual life
<b>Knowledge and coping methods</b>	Family
	Friends
	Specialists
	Need for accurate information

The quote from the women who had natural and underwent surgery

### I-Theme: Menopausal experience

#### a. Normal experience

#### A natural menopausal women expressed

*Hmm...I underwent menopause at the age of 43 years, during normal menstruation.. I used to get irritated and was restricted to some works. It made me to feel weak but after cessation of menstruation ( beaming face).... no regular cycles, feeling good, healthy and... more ever I feel like a man(smiles!!)*

**A quote from women works in agricultural fields**

*Before menopause and during menstruation.... I felt discomfort while doing work in field...always conscious about stain in clothes and turning back to look at (frowns)....I always used to ask my friends or colleagues about my clothes getting stained.. During menstrual days I had too much of joint pain and irritation.... it always did not allow me to work effectively.... but now there is no such tension and irritation and I can do work on all 30 days of month.*

**A quote from hysterectomy women**

*You know....before one year I underwent surgery means my uterus was removed... because I suffered from heavy bleeding. After the surgery I am very happy(laughs) today as my health has improved.....earlier due to heavy bleeding I had become very weak and family members were also very upset that time. Now my family(smilingly says..) and myself are leading happy life .*

**The women who had natural menopause before 2 years expressed,**

*“Feeling very happy.... Permanent stopping of monthly menses, menopausal problems and health issues. I consulted the specialist but no medication helped coping and suffered a lot with peri menopausal problems.*

**Negative experience****Another women who underwent hysterectomy before 8 years says,**

*Before eight years I underwent hysterectomy due to blockage of urinary tract ..... After surgery almost one year I was healthy not having a single health issue..... but after that my health started getting upset severely..... so sometimes I feel I was better earlier..... I think this is because of cessation menstruation and now some of my friends and even the doctors are also telling it may due to surgery. So I feel very bad for myself.....*

**The woman who underwent hysterectomy reported**

*Hmm...I am facing lot of health issues after surgery..... I feel I am a burden to my family because my daughter and son are not married as they give their 100% attention on my health..... they are thinking like if my daughter gets married, will have to go in-laws home and my son thinks like if he marries, he will not be capable to give complete attention and his future wife should understand the situation...(sighs..)..... so all are awaiting for good days.*

**II-Theme: Menopausal signs and symptoms****a. Physical sign and symptoms****A quote by natural menopausal women**

*“It feels like I am sitting in hot room or on a hot pan.....feels my body is completely burning and I am for sure it is not fever.....as it is only for few minutes and then I become relaxed. All of these symptoms I experience suddenly at my feet, back and neck and also suffering from too much of joint pain and even I am not able to do heavy work like before.....*

**Another woman who underwent hysterectomy expressed**

*Menopausal period is very problematic.....specially for my health..... means too much of abdominal pain, most nights I feel very hot... sometimes I have experienced like having bath at night .Mmm...(sighs)..... then I cannot get sleep. I remember one day I felt like whole room was spinning around me..... after that I suddenly woke up and felt like it was a last moment of my life.*

**Another woman reported**

*“Yes (with emphasis)..... after menopause I have joint problems, BP and diabetes and sometimes have feeling of heartburning sensation. Other than this..... I not able to sleep I wake-up in between sleep and again going back to sleep is very difficult to me”.*

**b. Psychological signs and symptoms****A quote by women who had natural menopause before 6 years reported**

*You know now a days.... I get angry very easily..... for example if my husband and children ask one more time to explain any work or my opinion... I suddenly get hyper and start scolding them like anything..... because of it I become unhappy later and get irritated about myself.*

### **Hysterectomy women expressed**

*Sometimes I go to market to purchase things..... before going I list in my mind.... but when I reach the market... I simply cannot recall why I came here .....I start getting confused . You know sometimes in home also..... simply I go to kitchen and start thinking what I have to do ....you know I go blank.....*

### **A quote from women who had natural menopause before 9 years**

*I experienced mood swings. You know... my nature basically is to be clam and quite. Now, I am very sensitive. I don't have control on my emotions. Suddenly I started getting irritated and loose my temper. I used to shout on my family members. They felt.... I tortured them. Sometimes I didn't feel like talking to anyone.*

### **c. Urogenital signs and symptoms**

#### **Another respondent said**

*There is a feeling of itching in urinary part, it is so awkward..... but sometimes I can tolerate it and control the temptation to scratch ... but it is difficult. I consulted doctor he prescribed an ointment and I am using it regularly now.*

### **A quote from woman who underwent hysterectomy**

*"After surgery .....even now after 8 years... I have uncomfortable feeling due to itching and swelling.....you know....I feel numb in these areas..... means feeling like as if a doctor has give anesthetic injection....that means like unsensetional..... so I am continuously on medication .....means I am taking tablets regularly".*

### **Another hysterectomy woman expressed**

*"Yes(remembers)..... before I reached menopause..... nearly for 6 months to1 year I feeling burning sensation while urinating and even I had no control over urination..... so I started avoiding to go outside from home.....to market places, functions and relatives home".*

### **A quote from women who had natural menopause before 11 years**

*"I am not having control on my bladder....I need to empty my bladder urgently...It never happened before ...I think my vagina has become dry, sometime there is a feeling of itching also".*

## **III-Theme: Menopausal effect on daily life**

### **a. Self**

#### **The respondent who had natural menopause before 2 years said**

*"You know before menopause..... I was very active and always did too many works at a time..... but after menopause I am unable to do work on time at home and field, because I faced many health problems..... Joint pain, back pain and sometimes felt pain in chest .....So I took leave to go home and take rest.... but could not slept also".*

### **Another woman who underwent hysterectomy expressed as**

*"Now after hysterectomy I am feeling like losing concentration and even losing confidence in doing work.....you know, before that I was doing maximum field work and all my friends scolded me for doing extra work for a day earning .....but now I not able to work because of lack of confidence and energy to work.*

### **A quote from natural menopausal women**

*"Menopause affected my routine life. I am not able to perform my daily activities or even household work activity as compared to previously..... I am not able to cope up with my menopause as it is associated with many health issues..... Many times, I went to the hospital... I am fed up with hospital investigation, various procedures... and medication.*

### **The other respondent who had natural menopause before 2 years expressed**

*I didn't have trouble as much as my older sister suffered....Menopause didn't affect on my routine life... When I got irregular menstruation with heavy bleeding I was scared about my menses..... but within 11/2 year my menses stopped....some health problems occurred .....but didn't required any treatment .....was able to cope with menopausal problems.*



**b. Married life****A quote from natural menopausal women**

*Hmm (smiled)... menopause has not affected our marital life because we both accepted it as natural and thought that we should think of our children's life and put extra efforts for son's education and daughter's marriage*

**Hysterectomy women expressed**

*Badly.... Means lot of adjustment problems .....you know, before 8 years I underwent surgery.... Before surgery and also after surgery I have experienced lot of health problems for that I not able to household work and satisfy my husband. My husband expected me like earlier..... most of the times he is not understanding ....When I express health issues he always comments like "you are telling lie and you are trying to escape from work just like that*

**Other respondent who underwent hysterectomy said**

*I have lost my connection with my husband; I am irritated all the time.... My irritability has affected my relation with my children. I'd suddenly get angry and shout at them. Then I used to ask to myself .....why do I behave so*

**c. Sexual life****A quote from hysterectomy women**

*"Sexual (Laughed)... when I have irregular periods once he forced me but I refused because of fear of pain and I can't even imagine consumating. After that he didn't force me and he saw how much I suffered due to bleeding. Once I told him like I not having interest regarding this..... so don't expect it from me like that. I wanted to discuss about this issue in front of doctor and elders in home because of hesitation.... I closed my mouth forcefully. I know my husband is dissatisfied... but he is trying to understand and adjust with me".*

**Another woman with natural menopause expressed**

*"I think we have satisfaction (Smiled).... I think no sexual problems because I don't know others but my husband adjusting with me after menopause he didn't demand or forced me more over he sleeps outside the room with grandchildren..... so no misunderstanding between us".*

**A quote from hysterectomy women**

*Hmm....No matter of satisfaction or dissatisfaction but definitely my husband have dissatisfaction because during intercourse I am experiencing pain..... so I avoid sleeping with him and sometimes I try to adjust because of the fear that my husband may search for alternatives to satisfy his needs.... He still sometimes tells "you are not like earlier".*

**Other hysterectomy woman felt**

*"No.... means not much because we both are at the fag end of life..... even I am not interested in sexual life and my spouse also not expressed anything..... but after surgery I think once I convinced that my health got upset, since then....from 2-3 years he didn't force me and now it's not possible for me to think also".*

**IV-Theme: Knowledge and coping methods****a. Family****A quote from natural menopausal women said**

*Not much....I got some information from my mother.... she told after 40-45 years the menstruation is going to stop..... so before menopause this much only I knew and she didn't tell about the problems and how to manage, but she told it is natural process so I also did not follow any coping method*

**Other women expressed**

*I got information from my mother and my relative living beside my home.... before menopause sometimes I experienced irregular periods so I asked them whether it's normal and is it natural. I was told that in middle adulthood the menstruation is going to stop. They advised me to keep body cool and not get tensed as a coping measure.... and that's it.*

**Participant who had natural menopause expressed**

*When I came to know about my friend, who was diagnosed for breast cancer that time I worried about menopause....I immediately had a talk with my husband...He told, don't be scared...Every thing will be OK.... we will consult doctor, take early discussion, he told that, he will be there for me..... That time I felt better, suddenly my tension reduced by the feeling that somebody is there to take care of me*

**b. Friends****A quote from natural menopausal women**

*When I started irregular menstruation.... I was scared... No one was there to shared this problem....first I told my problems to a friend. She advised me for consultation... We both consulted the gynecologist at right time...I am vary thankful for her....she always is there to help me any time.*

**Hysterectomy women reported**

*Before menopause when I came to know that my friend attained menopause.... that time I feared about myself in the situation and I started discussing about the cessation of menopause with her... She always helped me whenever I needed help.*

**c. Specialists****Other natural menopausal women expressed**

*When I experienced heavy bleeding I consulted doctor... She spoke very nicely, took care and gave information regarding changes that occurs during menopause, it treatment and management.... She explained in simple language so that I could understand and today with treatment my health issues are reduced.*

**d. Need for accurate information****A quote from hysterectomy**

*I was not informed and even my family members did not got exact information by doctors about what happens exactly, why my ovaries were removed..... now I came to know there is treatment..... but there was no one who discussed with me.. what's best to me. When my condition was critical..... the doctor only told like.... if the uterus is not removed immediately we not give any guarantee for her health.....and nothing else. This sacredly my family members, kept quit and accepted the doctor's suggestion. Everyone in this situation will do this only na?*

**Another hysterectomy woman expressed**

*"The doctors also not informing about the other treatments they simply suggested surgery I think there is other treatments, I felt no one was taking me seriously"*

**The working hysterectomy women said**

*"Ya now a days so many treatments are there like HRT and even for prolapsing uterus also other treatments available..... but in hospitals none of the doctors explain the alternatives.....simply the suggest to undergo hysterectomy".*

**Conclusion**

The qualitative analysis of the present study reveals that women experience both positive and negative aspects of menopause. However, those who underwent hysterectomy reported more health issues later in life. Regardless of how menopause was attained—naturally or through hysterectomy—women faced physical, psychological, and reproductive challenges. Women who experienced natural menopause reported fewer problems and higher marital satisfaction compared to those who had hysterectomies. Many women managed menopausal symptoms through self-coping strategies, medical treatment, and dietary adjustments. Additionally, family members and friends played a significant role as sources of information, yet there remained a strong need for accurate knowledge about the causes and consequences of hysterectomy.

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