

Attitudes of Bahraini women towards the menopause: Implications for health care policy

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Abstract

Objectives: To assess the attitudes of Bahraini women aged 30–64 years towards the menopause and to examine the relationship between attitudes of Bahraini women towards menopause and their sociodemographic data and reproductive characteristics.

Materials and methods: A cross-sectional study of 260 Bahraini women attending primary health care centers was conducted. A multistage stratified and clustered random sampling technique was used. The women were interviewed using a questionnaire composed of Attitude Towards Menopause scale and sociodemographics.

Results: The mean \pm S.D. of women's age and age at menopause were 45.04 ± 9.43 and 48.67 ± 2.92 years, respectively. Respondents' median age and median age at menopause were 45.5 and 48.0 years, respectively. Almost half of the women (48.5%) had completed high school or diploma, and 41.5% were currently employed outside home. Over half of the women (53.5%) were premenopausal, 19.6% perimenopausal and 26.9% were postmenopausal. The Mean Average Attitude Score (MAAS) \pm S.D. was 2.4 ± 0.26 where the minimum score is 1 indicating very negative attitudes and the maximum is 4 indicating very positive attitudes. Statistically significant differences in means were noted among categories of educational level, menopausal status, and marital status. Moreover, MAAS was positively correlated with age of respondents. Premenopausal women had more negative attitudes towards menopause than peri- or postmenopausal women.

Conclusions: Bahraini women display a considerable range of attitudes towards the menopause, with their general attitudes ranging from neutral to positive. Postmenopausal women had more positive attitudes towards menopause than premenopausal women. Implications for health care policy were explored in this study.

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1. Introduction

Menopause is a natural biological event experienced universally by all women. According to the World Health Organization (WHO) meeting in Geneva in 1996, the scientific group defined natural menopause

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as no menses for 12 consecutive months with no obvious intervening cause, such as pregnancy, lactation, exogenous hormone use, dietary deficiencies, or surgical removal of the uterus or ovaries. Menopause usually occurs between 45 and 54 years with an average onset of 51 years [1].

Worldwide, there are over 470 million women aged >50 years [2]. But it is estimated that in the year 2030, 1.2 billion will be peri- or postmenopausal, and that this total will increase by 4.7 million a year. It is also estimated that in developed countries, women now aged 50 can be expected to live for a further 30 years [3]. In USA it has been projected that there will be almost 60 million women aged 45 and older by 2010 and that number will increase to 70 million women by 2020 [4].

In 1990, 40% of postmenopausal women lived in the world's industrialized regions while 60% lived in developing countries. By 2030, although overall numbers will have increased, the proportion of postmenopausal women living in the industrialized regions will have declined to 24%, and 76% will be living in developing countries [1].

In Bahrain and according to 2005 health statistics, the number of women aged 40 and above was 48,574 (21.85% of all females). With a current life expectancy for women of nearly 77 years, women can now expect to live one-third of their lives beyond menopause and this will have a tremendous impact on health care delivery in the future [5].

Because of these predicted changes in population structure, physicians are beginning to see the menopause not as a negligible natural phenomenon but as a major public health problem [3].

In the Arab world, the term menopause is referred to as "Desperate age" which further increases the burden on women going through this change of life [6].

The comparability of studies on menopausal attitudes is limited by a lack of a consistent definition of menopause and the inclusion or exclusion of women with a hysterectomy [7]. Moreover, much of the data on attitudes towards menopause come from investigators using different design methodologies, thereby hampering cross-study comparisons. Studies differ in terms of tools used to assess attitudes, study population, study design, and representativeness (i.e., some used convenience samples others are population based) [8].

The most popular questionnaires used in assessing women attitudes towards the menopause were the 35-item Attitude Towards Menopause scale (ATM) checklist developed by Neugarten et al. [9] and the 20-adjective menopause attitude scale (MAS) developed by Bowles [10] either in their full or short form or a combination of both.

A study by Yahya and Rehan involving a systematic random sample of 130 women, investigated the perceptions of Pakistani women regarding menopause [11]. The majority of those women considered menopause as a positive change of life. According to 71% of women, their relationship with the family had either improved or there was no change. In Tahrán, 250 women (50–60) years old referred to health care centers for nontherapeutic reasons were selected randomly and the results of the study revealed that only 11% had a positive attitude towards menopause [12]. However, the study had some methodological problems and did not specify which instruments were used to assess the women's attitudes.

Several studies showed that postmenopausal women expressed a more positive attitude towards menopause than perimenopausal women or women who had surgical menopause [13,14].

There is a wealth of information available regarding menopausal women in the western society but Arab menopausal women have been generally neglected in menopausal research. Moreover, studies regarding attitudes towards the menopause are scarce or non-existing in the Arab and Gulf countries generally and in the Kingdom of Bahrain specifically. To our knowledge, no studies have been found in the Kingdom of Bahrain that investigated Bahraini women's attitudes towards menopause. In view of the fact that menopause is universal but the attitudes towards it vary across cultures, and considering the shortage of related information in Bahrain, there is a significant need to compile data on the attitudes of Bahraini women towards menopause.

This study is aimed to contribute to an understanding of the current attitudes of women during this important change of life which will help health care providers to work effectively with menopausal women by a better understanding of women's beliefs and needs before, during and after menopause and will lay a basis for developing a policy for this group of women.

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