

Attitudes toward menopause among middle-aged women: A community survey in an island of Taiwan

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Abstract

Objectives: The purpose of this report is to explore the attitudes toward menopause of middle-aged women in Taiwan as well as to examine related factors.

Methods: A large community-based sample of Taiwanese women aged 40–54 years who are living on the islet of Kinmen were recruited for this study. Attitudes toward menopause were collected with a self-administered questionnaire.

Results: Of a targeted population of 1429 individuals, 1113 (78%) participated in the study. The mean age was 48.5 ± 4.0 years (range, 43–57 years) and 434 women (39%) were premenopausal. The rate of current hormone use was 13.5%. Compared to premenopausal women, fewer postmenopausal women agreed that menopause depressed them, and that interests distracted their attention from menopause ($p < 0.01$, Mann–Whitney test). Postmenopausal women did not believe that menopause would change their lives, and not having periods made women feel regretful. Compared with the illiterate women, higher educated women were more regretful about menopause ($p < 0.05$, Mann–Whitney test). Women who experienced vasomotor symptoms within 2 weeks of the study expressed a more negative attitude regarding menopause.

Conclusions: Women in Taiwan held a more positive attitude toward menopause as compared to prior studies in other countries. They had a more positive attitude when they actually faced menopause. Education and vasomotor symptoms had a significantly negative impact on menopausal perceptions. This report provides more insight on the perception of menopause in Taiwanese women that will guide future public health initiatives.

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1. Introduction

Modern medicine has significantly prolonged human life. Menopause is the depletion of ovarian function followed by the cessation of menstruation. For middle-aged women, this loss is a critical issue

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that represents the end of fertility and the onset of the aging process. Owing to a lack of estrogen, women during menopause may experience compromised physical well-being [1] and climacteric symptoms, such as mucosal dryness, hot flashes, sweats, and emotional fluctuation. Attributing menopause to ‘deficiency disease’, hormone replacement therapy (HRT) has become mainstream during the previous three decades. However, the role of hormone therapy (HT) has become debatable since the results of Heart and Estrogen/progestin Replacement Study [2] and the Women’s health initiative (WHI) in 2002 [3].

Numerous factors determined a woman’s perceptions and beliefs about menopause. Menopausal status, social background, education, occupation, physical or emotional health, and general symptoms may influence the view of menopause [4,5]. Cultural influences are thought to affect the menopausal transition experience but little cross-cultural data exists. While menopause has been extensively investigated elsewhere, menopause studies are very limited in Taiwan. Most of these studies are clinical, and they focus on menopausal symptoms [6–9]. In our previous survey, we found the prevalence of vasomotor symptoms among the community women in Taiwan was low compared with that of western studies [10]. The impact of vasomotor symptoms among Taiwan society is also unclear.

The purpose of this study is to examine the attitude about menopause in a group of middle-aged women in a Taiwan rural community. We investigate the relationship between their attitude and menopausal status, educational level, and the appearance of vasomotor symptoms.

2. Material and methods

2.1. Study population

Kinmen is a 176 km² island that is 154 miles (248 km) west of Taiwan and 25 miles (41 km) east of Mainland China. From the fourth century until the Japanese occupation in 1937, this island has been in close contact with China. Starting again in 1945, the government of the Republic of China ruled over the island but, unfortunately, the area became the focal point of confrontations between Mainland China and

Taiwan, and has been under military control since the government of the Republic of China moved to Taiwan in 1949. Military and artillery attacks from Mainland China have occurred for some years. Martial law was lifted in July 1993, and Kinmen was then selectively opened to the public. Kinmen consists of four townships with a population totaling 53,832 in 2000. The people on Kinmen are Han Chinese, and most of them are involved in farming activities. Almost all people on Kinmen can speak both Fukien and Mandarin, except for some elderly residents. The living standard and lifestyle are equivalent to an average rural community in Taiwan. Based on the population stability, geographical region, and local community-support network, Kinmen was selected as a site to conduct a series of surveys for chronic-related diseases, neurological diseases, and women’s health.

2.2. Target population

The Kinmen women-health investigation (KIWI) cohort established in 1998 consisted of 1429 middle-aged women [10]. The cohort aimed to study the natural history of menopausal transition, and they were assessed annually. We invited all the women in the cohort to participate in this study. The study protocol was approved by the institutional review board of Taipei Veterans General Hospital. The details of the KIWI have been described elsewhere [10].

2.3. Definition of menopausal status

The categories of menopausal status are defined as follows. The premenopausal period is defined as regular menstruation. A woman is considered perimenopausal if her menstrual cycles have been irregular or her last menstrual bleeding occurred >3 and <12 months prior to the study. Women who have not menstruated within the previous 12 months are categorized as postmenopausal.

2.4. Assessments

The subjects were given the following self-administered questionnaires in the presence of trained interviewers: personal information, medical history, reproductive history, family history, personal habits, menopause-related attitudes, and vasomotor symp-

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