

MARIE-Brazil (WP2a): A Mixed-Methods Study Exploring Menopause (Interim analysis)

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INTRODUCTION

Perimenopause, menopause, and postmenopause represent important stages in a woman’s life, marked by hormonal changes that can affect physical, emotional, and social wellbeing. In Brazil, increasing life expectancy means that women are spending a larger portion of their lives postmenopausal. Perimenopause, the transitional phase leading to menopause, typically begins between ages 40 and 50, with symptoms such as menstrual irregularities, hot flashes, mood changes, and sleep disturbances. Menopause is officially diagnosed after 12 consecutive months without a menstrual period, usually occurring around age 51 in Brazilian women. Postmenopause follows, often accompanied by a reduction in symptoms but increased risks for osteoporosis, cardiovascular disease, and metabolic disorders.

Research shows that Brazilian women experience a wide range of menopause symptoms, influenced by factors such as ethnicity, socio-economic status, education, and access to healthcare. In Brazil’s diverse population, Afro-Brazilian and Indigenous women may face additional barriers to diagnosis and treatment. Cultural perceptions of menopause vary widely across regions, from being seen as a natural phase of life to being associated with aging stigma. Despite growing awareness, gaps in access to evidence-based care persist, particularly in public health services. Addressing these challenges is essential to promoting healthier and more equitable experiences of menopause across Brazil.

OBJECTIVE

To report the population characteristics of a menopausal-Brazilian populous.

DESIGN

A mixed-methods study was designed and conducted in Brazil following IREB approval.

METHODS

- An interim analysis was conducted using the first 50 participants aged between 18-90 years of age residing in Brazil.
- All participants provided informed consent and were recruited through the clinics linked with Department of Obstetrics and Gynaecology of University of Campinas, UNICAMP. The Qualtrics XM platform was used to collect data.
- The interim analysis focused on outcomes derived from the Hospital Anxiety and Depression Scale (HADS).
- Descriptive statistics and mean (standard deviation-SD) were employed to analyse the categorical data.

RESULTS

The mean age of participants, the onset of menopausal symptoms, and menarche age were 62, 48, and 12 years, respectively. The sample included women who identified as White (58%), Japanese (4%), Mixed race (Pardo, 16%), Portuguese (8%), Indigenous (4%), and other ethnicities (8%). In terms of religious affiliation, participants reported being Christian (90%), having mixed religious views (6%), or non-religious (4%). Among the 50 participants, marital status distribution was as follows: married (66%), divorced (18%), widowed (12%), and in cohabiting relationships (4%). Geographically, participants were predominantly from São Paulo (68%), followed by Minas Gerais (26%), Espírito Santo (4%), and Rio de Janeiro (2%).

Regarding occupational status, 38% of participants were employed full-time, 10% part-time, 42% retired, 4% homemakers, 2% unemployed, and 2% carers. Participants were employed across various sectors, including healthcare (32%), education (14%), technology (4%), commerce (4%), finance (4%), law (2%), communication (2%), and administration (8%). The majority of participants were post-menopausal (78%), with smaller proportions identified as menopausal (18%) or perimenopausal (2%).

Notably, 12% of participants reported a surgical diagnosis of endometriosis, with 50% having utilised gonadotropin-releasing hormone (GnRH) analogues and 25% having undergone a hysterectomy.

Analysis of the Hospital Anxiety and Depression Scale (HADS) yielded significant findings regarding mental health outcomes within this menopausal population. The mean (SD) total HADS score was 12.41 (7.65), indicating a considerable prevalence of anxiety and depressive symptoms. Subscale analyses revealed mean scores of 6.88 (4.21) for anxiety and 5.53 (3.96) for depression. Using established HADS cut-off criteria, 36% of participants were classified as experiencing abnormal anxiety levels, while 28% exhibited abnormal depressive symptoms. Additionally, 20% demonstrated borderline anxiety, and 26% fell within the borderline category for depression. These findings underscore the spectrum of mental health challenges associated with menopause in this cohort.

CONCLUSIONS

The interim findings show a significant burden of mental health challenges, including anxiety and depression, among menopausal and post-menopausal women, with over one-third experiencing clinically abnormal symptoms. These results underscore the need for targeted interventions to address the psychological and physical health needs of this population, particularly those with a history of endometriosis or surgical treatments.

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