

The rating of sexual activity of women in perimenopausal period

(Ocena aktywności seksualnej kobiet w okresie okołomenopauzalnym)

M Sulima^{1,A,D}, M Bednarczyk^{2,D}, M Lewicka^{1,E}, I Brukwicka^{3,C}, B Stawarz^{3,B}, Z Kopański^{4,5,E}

Abstract – Introduction. Sexual behaviour in women's perimenopausal period is very likely to change. Until the mid-twentieth century, menopause was associated with the stereotypical notion of the termination of needs and interests of sexuality in this period of life. Contemporarily, women who undergo the period of perimenopause treat sexual life as an important aspect of social functioning.

Aim of the study. The aim of the study was to assess sexual activity in peri-menopausal women.

Materials and methods. The research was conducted using the method of diagnostic poll among a group of 150 perimenopausal women. The research tool was the authors' own, non-standardised questionnaire. The results were analysed statistically.

Conclusions. Women in perimenopause are sexually active. Age, place of residence, education and marital status determine sexual activity in perimenopausal women. However, the occurrence of physical and psychological symptoms of perimenopause and the decision whether or not to undergo replacement therapy does not affect the sexual activity of women during this period.

Key words - sex, sexual activity, perimenopausal period.

Streszczenie – Wstęp. Zachowania seksualne kobiet w okresie okołomenopauzalnym ulegają znacznym modyfikacjom. Jeszcze do połowy XX wieku menopauza wiązała się ze stereotypowym pojęciem wygasania potrzeb i zainteresowania seksualnością w tym okresie życia. Współczesne kobiety, które przechodzą okres okołomenopauzalny traktują życie seksualne jako ważny aspekt funkcjonowania społecznego.

Cel pracy. Celem pracy była ocena aktywności seksualnej kobiet w okresie okołomenopauzalnym.

Materiał i metoda. Badania, metodą sondażu diagnostycznego, przeprowadzono w grupie 150 kobiet w okresie okołomenopauzalnym. Narzędzie stanowił samodzielnie opracowany, niestandardyzowany kwestionariusz ankiety. Uzyskane wyniki badań poddano analizie statystycznej.

Wnioski. Kobiety w okresie okołomenopauzalnym są aktywne seksualnie. Wiek, miejsce zamieszkania, wykształcenie i stan cywilny warunkują aktywnością seksualną kobiet w okresie okołomenopauzalnym. Natomiast występowanie fizycznych i psy-

chicznych objawów okresu okołomenopauzalnego oraz stosowanie, lub nie stosowanie terapii zastępczej nie mają wpływu na aktywność seksualną kobiet w tym okresie.

Słowa kluczowe - seks, aktywność seksualna, okres okołomenopauzalny.

Author Affiliations:

1. Department of Obstetrics, Gynaecology and Obstetrical-Gynaecological Nursing, Faculty of Health Sciences, Medical University of Lublin, Lublin, Poland
2. Obstetrics Student, Faculty of Health Sciences, Medical University of Lublin, Poland
3. The Bronisław Markiewicz State School of Higher Technical and Economical, Jarosław, Poland
4. Faculty of Health Sciences, Collegium Medicum, Jagiellonian University
5. Collegium Masoviense – College of Health Sciences, Żyrardów

Authors' contributions to the article:

- A. The idea and the planning of the study
- B. Gathering and listing data
- C. The data analysis and interpretation
- D. Writing the article
- E. Critical review of the article
- F. Final approval of the article

Correspondence to:

Magdalena Sulima MD, PhD Department of Obstetrics, Gynecology and Obstetrical - Gynecological Nursing, Faculty of Nursing and Health Sciences, Medical University, Chodźki 6 Str., PL-20-093 Lublin, Poland, e-mail: msulima13@wp.pl

Accepted for publication: October 11, 2016.

I. INTRODUCTION

Sex life is an integral part of health. According to the World Health Organization, sexual health is a state of physical, emotional, mental and social well-being in relation to sexuality. It is not only the absence of disease, dysfunction, or infirmity. Sexual health requires a positive and respectful approach to sexuality and sexual relationships, as well as the possibility of enjoyment and safe sexual experiences, free of coercion, discrimination, or violence [1,2].

Perimenopausal period is the time covering several years before the onset of menopause when clinical, endocrine, and biological features of the upcoming termination of menstruation appear. It is called pre-menopause. Also, menopause is followed by post-menopause [3,4].

Hormonal changes during perimenopause lead to a decline in fertility, but this does not mean that a woman does not experience sexual needs. The literature observes that women in this period often feel the desire to increase the number of sexual contacts and to diversify their sex lives. However, the sexual activity of women is dependent on their individual biological, psychological, and social circumstances [5,6,7,8].

Sexual behaviour in women's perimenopausal period undergoes significant changes. Until the mid-twentieth century, menopause was associated with the stereotypical notion of the termination of needs and interests of sexuality in this period of life. Contemporarily, women who undergo the period of perimenopause treat sexual life as an important aspect of social functioning [9,10].

The aim of the study was to assess sexual activity in women's perimenopausal period.

II. MATERIALS AND METHODS

The research, based on the diagnostic poll method, was carried out in the OVEA Gynaecology and Obstetrics Centre in Lublin and the Centre for Health in Niedrzewica Duża. The authors' own questionnaire was used in the study. The study group consisted of 150 women aged 40 to 55 years. The highest percentage of women 38.7% (n=58) was between the ages of 46 to 50, while 34.0% (n=51) of the women were aged 51 to 55. Women aged 40 to 45 amounted to 27.3% (n=41). Among the respondents, 42.0% (n = 63) lived in rural areas, while 58.0% (n=87) lived in urban areas. In the study group, most of the women had second-

ary education (n=66, 44.0%). 63.3% (n=104) were married, while 36.7% were not married.

The results were statistically analysed. The answers to specific questions in the survey are presented in the form of distributions of numerical values and percentage. For comparisons between groups, the Pearson's chi-squared test and the Fisher's exact test. The statistical significance level of $p \leq 0.05$ was assumed. Database and statistical tests were performed using the software STATISTICA 10 (StatSoft, USA).

III. RESULTS

Table 1 shows the correlation between the sexual activity of the women and demographic variables. The presented studies show that the largest percentage of women who were sexually active were those aged 40-45 (n=40; 97.6%), while the largest proportion of women who were not sexually active were aged 51 -55 (n=19; 37.3%). In addition, the authors' research shows that 66.7% (n=42) residents of rural areas and 83.9% (n=73) residents urban areas were sexually active. In turn, the largest percentage of women who indicated that they were not sexually active were the residents of rural areas (n=21; 33.3%). Women with higher education (n=38; 90.5%) were more sexually active compared to those with secondary education (n=20; 30.3%). Married women (n=91; 87.5%) were significantly more likely to be sexually active than those who were not married (n=22; 47.8%). A statistically significant relationship was found between age, place of residence, education, and marital status and sexual activity in women's perimenopausal period ($p < 0.05$).

Table 2 shows the correlation between the sexual activity of women and the prevalence of physical and psychological symptoms of perimenopause period. The study shows that the highest percentage of women who have experienced physical symptoms of perimenopausal period (n=100; 74.6%), and most women who do not have physical signs of menopause (n=15; 93.8%) were active sexually. On the other hand, 75.4% (n=101) of women who have psychological symptoms of menopause and 87.5% (n=14) patients not experiencing psychological symptoms of perimenopausal period were sexually active. There was no significant statistical relationship between the occurrence of physical and psychological symptoms of perimenopause and sexual activity of the women ($p > 0.05$).

Table 3 shows the correlation between the sexual activity of the women and the use of hormone replacement therapy. The study shows that a higher percentage of women using

plant products as a replacement therapy (n=43; 79.6%) were sexually active, compared with women who did not use replacement therapy (n=61; 74.4%) and studied, who used hormone therapy (n=11; 78.6%). There were no significant statistical relationship between the application of replacement therapy to be tested and female sexual activity tested ($p > 0.05$).

IV. DISCUSSION

The beginning of XXI century brought a breakthrough in terms of knowledge about sexual health of women and their sexuality. Several studies indicate that a satisfactory sexual life of women prolongs the length of their life, reduces the risk of cancer, cardiovascular disease, migraine, depression, pain syndromes, and also improves the quality of life. Sexual health is promoted through active sex life, the positive relationships, proper diet, elimination of myths and stereotypes as well as the ability to live here and now [11].

Women in the perimenopausal period experience physical, psychological, and social changes. This period is also associated with changes in female sexuality [12,13,14]. Sexual activity plays an important role in human life – it makes an important element of quality of life, a source of pleasure, procreation and the basis of parenthood [16].

Gardziejewska et al. [17] showed that for 60.0% of women in perimenopausal period, sexual contacts were important or very important. The rest of the women surveyed said that sex was irrelevant to their lives. A survey conducted by Szpak et al. [18] showed that for 48.0% of studied women, sex had medium importance in their lives, while only 12.0% of women surveyed admitted that the role of the sexual contact was totally irrelevant.

Research carried out by Blumel et al. [19] showed that 80.0% of women in perimenopausal age were sexually active. However, from the studies presented by Posturzyńska et al. [20] showed that more than 50.0% of women over 50 were sexually active. On the other hand, Skrzypulec et al. [21] in their study reported that among women in perimenopausal age who are regularly menstruating, 91.6% are sexually active, and among women who menstruate irregularly, 70.9% are sexually active. The women who did not menstruate were sexually active in 59.9% of the cases. Barnas et al. [22] in their study showed that women's mental state, professional status, and age had the effect on the sexual activity. Similar results were obtained in the authors' own study, where a significant influence on the sexual activity of women was age ($p < 0.001$), place of residence ($p = 0.019$), education level ($p = 0.040$) and marital status ($p < 0.001$).

Sexual activity in perimenopausal women depends on many factors. An important role is also played by sex hormones. Low levels of oestrogen and testosterone can lead to disturbances in the functioning sex life, which is why some women require the use of replacement therapy [23]. Based on the analysis of the obtained results, there was no significant own statistical relationship between the application of the tested replacement therapy women and their sexual activity ($p > 0.05$).

V. CONCLUSIONS

- Women in perimenopause are sexually active.
- Age, place of residence, education and marital status determine sexual activity of perimenopausal women. However, the occurrence of physical and psychological symptoms of perimenopause and the decision whether or not to apply hormone replacement therapy does not affect the sexual activity of women during this period.

VI. REFERENCES

- [1] Woźniak P, Ziółkowski P, Stetkiewicz T, i wsp. Zastosowanie akupunktury w leczeniu obniżonego libido u kobiet w okresie menopauzy. *Prz Menopauz* 2011; 2: 128-131.
- [2] Bień A, Stadnicka G, Iwanowicz-Palus G. Sexual behaviour of youth and sources of knowledge about such behaviour. *JPHNMR* 2015;4: 31-37.
- [3] Barnaś E, Krupińska A, Kraśnianin E. i wsp. Funkcjonowanie psychospołeczne i zawodowe kobiet w okresie okołomenopauzalnym. *Prz Menopauz* 2012; 4: 296-304.
- [4] Skrzypulec V, Nowosielski K. Cykl reakcji seksualnej u kobiety. *Ginekol Pol* 2009; 80: 440-444.
- [5] Dennerstein L, Lehert P, Burger H. The relative effects of hormones and relationship factors on sexual function of women through the natural menopausal transition. *Fertil Steril* 2005; 84: 174-180
- [6] Dębski E, Paszkowski T, Pawelczyk L, i wsp. Terapia hormonalna okresu menopauzalnego - stan wiedzy w 2010 r.: Stanowisko Zespołu Ekspertów Polskiego Towarzystwa Menopauzy i Andropauzy. *Prz Menopauz* 2010; 3: 121-127.
- [7] Skrzypulec V. Seksualność kobiet w okresie klimakterium. W: Lew-Starowicz Z, Skrzypulec V (red.). *Podstawy seksuologii*. Warszawa; Wydawnictwo Lekarskie PZWL, 2010: 26-48.
- [8] Słopeń R, Warenik- Szymankiewicz A. Przekwitanie. W: Bręborowicz G H (red.). *Położnictwo i ginekologia*. T.2. Warszawa; Wydawnictwo Lekarskie PZWL, 2010: 65-87.
- [9] Lew-Starowicz Z, Szymańska M. Zaburzenia seksualne i problemy osobiste kobiet powyżej 45. roku życia. *Prz Menopauz* 2010; 6: 381-384.
- [10] Lew-Starowicz Z. Seksualność w okresie menopauzy. *Przew Lek Ginekol* 2000; 4 (4): 2-8.

- [11] Lew-Starowicz Z. Zdrowie seksualne kobiet. W: Lew-Starowicz Z, Skrzypulec V (red.). Podstawy seksuologii. Warszawa; Wydawnictwo Lekarskie PZWL, 2010: 52-75.
- [12] Avis N. C, Stellato R, Crawford S. i wsp. Is there an association between menopause status and sexual functioning? *Menopause* 2000; 7: 297-309.
- [13] Lew- Starowicz Z. Seksualność wieku menopauzalnego. W: Pertyński T (red.). Diagnostyka i terapia wieku menopauzalnego. Wrocław; Wydawnictwo Medyczne Urban & Partner, 2004.
- [14] Lewicka M, Sulima M, Grabowiec J, Stawarz B, Makara-Studzińska M. Mood disorders of women during perimenopause. *JPHNMR* 2013, 1: 9-15.
- [15] Skrzypulec-Plinta V, Chelmicki A, Gojdz K. Czy spadek libido po menopauzie ma podłoże hormonalne?. *Prz Menopauz* 2011; 4: 334-337.
- [16] Lew- Starowicz M, Lew- Starowicz Z. Seksualność Polek. Raport Seksualność Polaków 2002. *Prz Menopauz* 2002; 4: 64-73.
- [17] Gardziejewska A, Różańska- Kohsek A, Zalewski M, i wsp.: Seksualność kobiet w okresie klimakterium. *MONZ* 2014, 20, 4: 400-404.
- [18] Szpak R, Folwarczny W, Drozdol A., i wsp. Relacje partnerskie w okresie klimakterium. *Ginekol Pol* 2010; 81: 115-119.
- [19] Blümel J. E, Araya H, Riquelme R, i wsp. Prevalence of sexual dysfunction in climacteric women. Influence of menopause and hormone replace therapy. *Rev Med Chil* 2002; 130: 1131-1138.
- [20] Posturzyńska M, Rechbereger T, Postawski K. Objawy uroginekologiczne i ich wpływ na jakość życia kobiet w okresie przekwitania. *Prz Menopauz* 2006; 6: 388-392.
- [21] Skrzypulec V, Drozdol A, Ferensowicz J, i wsp. Ocena wybranych aspektów życia psychicznego i seksualnego kobiet w okresie okołomenopauzalnym. *Ginekol Prakt* 2003; 11: 26-34.
- [22] Barnaś E, Krupińska A, Kraśnianin E. i wsp. Funkcjonowanie psychospołeczne i zawodowe kobiet w okresie okołomenopauzalnym. *Prz Menopauz* 2012; 4: 296-304.
- [23] Avis N. E, Green R. The Perimenopause and Sexual Functioning. *Obstet Gynecol Clin N Am* 2011; 38: 587-594.