

**Exploring the Commonalities and Differences in Attitudes Towards Menopause Among
Women of Different Age Groups**

Victoria Hesker

Faculty of Behavioral, Management, and Social Sciences, University of Twente

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Supervisor: Selin Ayas

2nd Examiner: Anneke Sools

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Abstract

Menopause is a natural transition that signifies the end of a woman's fertility and menstrual cycles. It is characterized by hormonal fluctuations leading to various symptoms such as hot flashes, mood swings, and depression. Previous studies found that women's attitudes towards menopause can significantly influence the severity of experienced symptoms, with older women typically showing more positive attitudes than younger women. Therefore, this study aimed to qualitatively identify the menopausal attitudes of women and to quantitatively compare them between younger and older women. The data was collected through an online survey that included the Attitudes towards Menopause (ATM) scale and open-ended questions to capture women's views on menopause. A total of 60 women participated, with 30 participants from each age group. The thematic analysis of the open-ended responses resulted in four main themes, namely "General perceptions of menopause", "Physical and psychological effects of menopause", "Women's emotional response to menopause", and "Social challenges and representation in society". The participants noted a lack of research and societal interest in the topic, contributing to feelings of anxiety and isolation. Furthermore, older women tended to view menopause as a meaningful transition with opportunities for personal growth, whereas younger participants were more likely to distance themselves from the topic. An independent samples t-test was used to analyze code frequencies and the outcomes of the ATM scale. The results indicated that older women had more positive attitudes compared to the younger participants, which was linked to the outcomes of the thematic analysis. Future studies could benefit from longitudinal designs including both age and menopausal status to explore the development of menopausal attitudes over time. Moreover, intervention studies to educate society about menopause should address stigma and misconceptions to reduce feelings of distress and isolation among women.

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Exploring the Commonalities and Differences in Attitudes Towards Menopause Among Women of Different Age Groups

Menopause is a complex and inevitable phase in a woman's life that entails the experience of significant hormonal and biological changes. It includes the decline of reproductive hormones, and thus, marks the end of a woman's menstrual cycles and fertility (Bruce & Rymer, 2009; Ferris, 2023). Menopause can be divided into three distinct stages that collectively span seven years on average, typically starting around the age of 51 (Ferris, 2023). The initial stage, perimenopause, normally occurs after the age of 40 and marks the onset of hormonal fluctuations, causing menstrual cycles to become more irregular (Ferris, 2023). The following stage, menopause, is characterized by the absence of menstrual cycles for 12 months that cannot be attributed to other causes like medications or pregnancy (Ferris, 2023). It is diagnosed retrospectively after 12 months, officially marking the end of ovarian follicular activity and fertility (Talaulikar, 2022). During the following stage, referred to as postmenopause, hormonal fluctuations and symptoms continue to persist for several years (Ferris, 2023).

To get a shared understanding and to provide context to the varied experiences of women during this transition, it is important to look not only at the different stages of menopause but also at the physical and psychological changes associated with it. The most common physical symptoms of menopause include vasomotor symptoms such as hot flashes, which often disrupt women's sleep patterns if experienced during the night (Bruce & Rymer, 2009). Additional symptoms include vaginal dryness, headaches, joint pain, and fatigue (Bruce & Rymer, 2009). Due to low estrogen levels, menopause also carries an elevated risk of developing psychological symptoms, such as depression and anxiety (Talaulikar, 2022).

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Furthermore, declined cognitive functioning, described as forgetfulness and ‘brain fog’, is frequently reported during this transition (Maki & Jaff, 2022). Therefore, menopause is characterized by several physical and psychological changes that manifest differently among women.

While menopause is commonly viewed as a biological process, it is essential to consider the broader context as it also encompasses social and cultural dimensions. For instance, in some cultures, menopause is commonly perceived as a beautiful and meaningful transition, whereas in others it is considered a time during which women lose their youth and sexual vitality (Gupta, 2022). A study conducted with Chinese women found that the majority of them experienced verbal and in some cases even physical abuse by their families and husbands during menopause (Li et al., 2023). According to Li et al. (2023), this mistreatment was attributed to negative public perceptions, societal stigma, and misinformation surrounding menopause. This suggests that women’s experiences during menopause are not only influenced by hormonal changes but also by their socio-cultural environment.

Acknowledging the influence of culture and societal beliefs on menopausal experiences gives rise to a more holistic understanding of the complex and multifaceted nature of menopause and the way it impacts the lives of women. This understanding serves as a foundation for exploring women’s attitudes towards menopause as it provides insights into the socio-cultural context within which these attitudes are formed and expressed.

Women’s Attitudes Towards Menopause

Given the impact of societal stigma and cultural perspectives on women’s experiences during menopause, it is crucial to also explore women’s menopausal attitudes to understand how they are shaped and how they influence their experiences. For instance, multiple studies demonstrated that the menopausal attitudes of women can significantly influence the severity of experienced symptoms (Akkazu et al., 2009; Dashti et al., 2021; Erbil, 2018;). In the field

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of psychology, the term ‘attitude’ refers to a person’s beliefs, emotions, and behaviours toward particular people, things, or events (Cherry, 2023). Therefore, attitudes towards menopause can be defined as “an individual's opinion or general feelings about menopause” (Ayers et al., 2010).

Outcomes of a literature review measuring the menopausal symptoms of women in relation to their attitudes confirmed that the nature of women’s attitudes was related to the severity of experienced symptoms later on (Ayers et al., 2010). The outcomes of the same study suggest increased vaginal dryness, sleeplessness, and headaches among women with negative attitudes (Ayers et al., 2010). In addition, a study by Yanikkerem et al. (2012) discovered that women who agreed with statements like “Menopause leads to a loss of attractiveness of the woman” or “Menopause is not a natural event in a woman’s life” reported more intense physical symptoms, including joint and muscle pain.

Next to physical manifestations, women’s menopausal attitudes also influence the experience of psychological symptoms. A study by Erbil (2018) found that women with positive attitudes toward menopause reported fewer depressive symptoms and exhibited a more positive body image compared to those with negative perceptions. Another study yielded similar outcomes, indicating a bidirectional relationship between negative menopausal attitudes and more severe psychological manifestations, specifically depression (Ghazanfarpour et al., 2015). Considering the bidirectional relationship as proposed by Ghazanfarpour et al. (2015), it can be said that the way women think and feel about menopause is a crucial factor in altering their individual experience of diverse physical and psychological symptoms.

Overall, it becomes apparent that menopause is more than just a biological transition; It is a complex and multifaceted experience shaped by various factors like culture, society, and individual perspectives. These factors give rise to different meanings and interpretations

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of menopause that significantly impact women's physical and psychological experiences during this stage. By investigating women's attitudes in this study, factors that contribute to negative views and perceptions can be identified and addressed.

The Influence of Age on Menopausal Attitudes

Considering the influence of women's attitudes on their menopausal experience, it is important to dive deeper into factors that shape and influence the development of menopausal attitudes. In addition to factors like education, employment, and culture (Dashti et al., 2021; Erbil, 2018; George, 2002), the age and menopausal status of women have emerged as crucial factors influencing menopausal attitudes. According to a study by Akkazu et al. (2009), younger women generally display more negative beliefs about menopause than middle-aged and older women. Additionally, postmenopausal women exhibit more positive attitudes, suggesting that the experience of menopause itself leads to a more positive perception of it (Ayers et al., 2010). According to the study by Akkazu et al. (2009), the positive attitudes of postmenopausal women can also be attributed to improved health as menopausal symptoms decline over the years. Therefore, it is assumed that the changes in menopausal attitudes with progressing age are related to the menopausal status of women (Dashti et al., 2021). Given these outcomes, it can be said that age and menopausal status stand out as crucial factors influencing women's menopausal attitudes and experiences. Therefore, this study will distinguish between younger women (ages 18-35) and older women (ages 35-60) to investigate how menopausal attitudes differ between these age groups.

Aim of the Study

To summarize, menopause is a complex interplay of biological, psychological, and socio-cultural factors. Previous studies suggest that women's attitudes towards menopause play a crucial role in shaping their physical and psychological experiences, and that age can have a significant influence on their attitudes. Despite extensive research on menopausal

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attitudes, there remains a gap in the literature regarding the differences in these attitudes across age groups, particularly through the use of mixed methods approaches. Recent studies predominantly employed quantitative methodologies or literature reviews, which often lack the depth of understanding that qualitative approaches can provide (Akkazu et al., 2009; Ayers et al., 2010; Erbil, 2018; Yanikkerem et al., 2012). Furthermore, previous studies that investigated age as a factor influencing menopausal attitudes primarily identified whether age affects how positive or negative attitudes are, without exploring the specific attitudes or underlying causes. Thus, more extensive research is needed to fully understand the factors that shape menopausal attitudes in both younger and older women and to understand the influence that age has on the development of these attitudes.

Understanding women's attitudes towards menopause can help identify potential areas for intervention and support that can improve women's menopausal experience, potentially alleviating the severity of experienced symptoms. It can also be detected to what extent women's attitudes are influenced by misinformation and societal stigma to improve public education about this topic. Additionally, investigating age-related differences in menopausal attitudes could reveal how lived experiences shape women's perceptions at various life stages. Therefore, this study employs a mixed methods approach, combining a quantitative scale with open-ended questions, to make use of the advantages of both methodologies (Shorten & Smith, 2017). First, the menopausal attitudes of women will be qualitatively investigated, which leads to the first research question of the study:

“What common themes can be identified in the menopausal attitudes of women across age groups?”

Secondly, menopausal attitudes will be compared between younger women (ages 18-35) and older women (ages 35-65) using a quantitative approach. For the quantitative part of

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the study, it is expected that older women exhibit more positive attitudes towards menopause than younger women. Thus, the second research question guiding this study is:

“How do the menopausal attitudes of younger women (ages 18-35) differ from those of older women (ages 35-60)?”

By addressing these questions, the study aims to deepen the understanding of menopausal attitudes across different age groups, providing valuable insights and supporting the development of more effective interventions and support for women experiencing menopause.

Methods

Study Design

A mixed methods study was conducted, employing both qualitative and quantitative data collection through an online questionnaire. The background of this study, along with the conditions and risks for the participants was reviewed and approved by the Ethics Committee of the University of Twente from the Faculty of Behavioural, Management, and Social Sciences (BMS).

Participants

To collect an appropriate sample size, the participants were contacted via the social networks of the researchers and the supervisor, along with the SONA system of the University of Twente. Therefore, the participants were recruited using convenience and purposive sampling, ensuring that participants who met specific criteria were included while still reaching a representative number of participants. To take part in the study, the participants were required to be above the age of 18 and possess an adequate level of English, German, or Dutch reading and writing skills. Out of 247 participants who started the questionnaire, 23 participants (9.3%) were excluded due to not finishing the survey. To construct an appropriate sample for the thematic analysis, ‘male’ or ‘other’ participants were

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excluded to focus exclusively on female respondents. Furthermore, it was ensured that the remaining participants provided at least one response to both the statement question “Menopause is...” and the open-ended question “How do you view menopause?”. This step ensured that all included participants actively engaged with the investigated topic. In the following step, the participants were categorized as being either above or below the age of 35, before selecting a random sample of 30 participants from each age group. The age of 35 has been selected as a cut-off point to ensure that the older age group includes perimenopausal, menopausal, and postmenopausal women to avoid categorization based solely on the menopausal status of participants. Furthermore, the final sample was selected randomly as all irrelevant participants were already filtered out, such as those who did not respond to the open questions. As a result, the final sample consisted of 60 participants with the age of the participants ranging from 18 to 55 with a mean age of 34.5 (SD=12.32). In addition, 45% of the participants reported their nationality to be German (n=27), 33.3% reported to be Dutch (n=20), and 13.3% reported to be Turkish (n=8), while 8.3% (n=5) had other nationalities, including Ukrainian, French, Finnish, German-Canadian, and Dutch-Turkish.

Procedure

The survey was conducted online via the survey tool Qualtrics, and the entire questionnaire took approximately 30-45 minutes to complete. After agreeing to take part in the study, the participants received the consent form and a link to the online questionnaire in English, German, or Dutch, depending on their preferences. The consent form included detailed information about the aim and background of the study. Furthermore, it ensured that all personal data would be handled confidentially and anonymously. Before proceeding to the questionnaire, the participants were asked to give informed consent and disclose their age, gender, and physical health. After filling out the questions, the survey entailed contact

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information of the ethics committee and the supervisor while reminding the participants of their rights to withdraw their data from the study at any time.

Measures

Open Survey Questions

The online survey included two types of open questions that required participants to share their personal views on menopause. For the first question, the participants were asked to complete the statement “Menopause is ...” repeatedly with a maximum limit of 15 times. This approach enabled participants to share their individual perceptions and factual knowledge about menopause. Furthermore, it ensured that participants did not feel obligated to construct lengthy texts as the sentence structure was predetermined. The second open question “How do you view menopause?” required the participants to share their thoughts using an open text-entry field. Therefore, the question did not suggest specific formulations or limits regarding the length of the answer. It purposefully followed after the statement questions to give participants the freedom to add experiences and opinions that they had not shared already.

In the context of this study, the open-ended questions were applied to gain a more comprehensive understanding of participants’ perspectives, while simultaneously allowing for new themes to arise. By asking participants to use their words to describe a topic, they might mention opinions, hopes, or fears that have not been revealed in previous studies (Farrell, 2016). Therefore, the open questions not only offer individual freedom in generating responses but also allow for the emergence of new and unexpected insights.

Attitudes Towards Menopause

Next to the open questions, the Attitudes Towards Menopause scale (ATM) was implemented to assess the participants’ attitudes towards menopause. The ATM contains a total of 35 statements on menopause, including 16 positive and 9 negative items. The scale was developed by Neugarten et al. (1963) and it is still frequently used in recent studies. It

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requires respondents to indicate their level of agreement with statements like “Women often get self-centered at the menopause” or “Menopause is a disturbing thing which most women naturally dread”, assessing individual perceptions of social, physical, sexual, and psychological experiences of women during menopause (Ghazanfarpour, 2023). Considering the cultural and social aspects of menopause, it can be said that the ATM scale offers a comprehensive assessment of the various dimensions of the menopausal experience. The items on this scale are scored using a 4-point Likert scale (1=disagree strongly, 4=agree strongly) before summing the scores of all items. This results in a final score ranging from 35 to 140, with higher scores indicating more positive attitudes and a cut-off point set at 87.5 (Erbil & Gümüştay, 2018). The ATM scale remains a valuable tool for assessing attitudes towards menopause due to its applicability across diverse populations and various cultural contexts (Thapa & Yang, 2022). Despite its age, it has consistently demonstrated high internal consistency in previous studies, with a Cronbach’s alpha typically ranging from .80 to .90 (Ali et al., 2020; Thapa & Yang, 2022). The Cronbach’s alpha for the current sample was .708, indicating an acceptable internal consistency reliability.

Data Analysis

To explore the menopausal attitudes and perceptions of women across age groups, a thematic analysis was conducted. An inductive approach was used to discover topics and themes that might not have been explored in prior research. The text data of each participant was translated (if necessary) and saved as separate documents. Then, the numbered documents were uploaded in Atlas.ti to develop initial codebooks based on the responses to the open questions “Menopause is ...”, and “How do you view menopause?”. Since the responses to two different questions were analysed, multiple codes could be assigned to one participant. Next, the codes were categorized into overarching themes and organized in a Word document for a more structured overview. To ensure intersubjective reliability, the

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codebook was repeatedly exchanged with another researcher of the team to discuss the understanding and definition of the codes and themes and to navigate challenges together. For instance, short responses like “troublesome” or “disruptive” were discussed and interpreted together to ensure that codes and themes remained close to the data. After coding all documents, the codebooks were exchanged within the research team again to improve the validity of the codes. In case specific themes or codes were unclear or overlapping, they were adapted and reformulated to create mutually exclusive codes and themes. If multiple codes revolved around the same topic, they were combined into one overarching code or theme to create a clear and well-defined codebook. After coding 47 documents, no new codes or themes emerged.

Furthermore, a quantitative content analysis was conducted to investigate the differences in menopausal beliefs between younger and older women. Rstudio (version R-4.3.3) was used for the quantitative analyses, including the packages psych (v2.3.3, Revelle, 2023), tidyverse (v2.0.0, Wickham et al., 2019), dplyr (v1.1.1, Wickham et al., 2023), janitor (v2.2.0, Firke, 2023), broom (v1.0.4, Robinson et al., 2023), and modelr (v0.1.11, Wickham, 2023). By calculating descriptive statistics, the theme and code frequencies were assessed to evaluate how often specific codes and themes appeared for each of the two age groups. To determine whether there were significant differences in frequencies between younger and older women, an independent samples t-test was conducted.

Lastly, another independent samples t-test was conducted to compare the mean ATM scale scores between both age groups. First, descriptive statistics were calculated to gain an overall understanding of the distribution of the scores, including the mean, standard deviation, and range. Then, the t-test was employed to gather information on the significance of the observed differences as well as the effect sizes between the groups.

Results

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After gathering and analysing the data from 60 participants, the results of the study can be presented in three parts. The thematic analysis revealed key themes in women's perceptions and opinions of menopause, while the quantitative content analysis highlighted how these perceptions differed between age groups. Lastly, the statistical analysis of the ATM scale showed overall attitudes, distinguishing between positive and negative tendencies across age groups.

Women's Perceptions and Opinions Towards Menopause

The thematic analysis resulted in four main themes called 'general perceptions of menopause' (n=57), 'physical and psychological effects of menopause' (n=32), 'women's emotional response to Menopause' (n=36), and 'social challenges and representation in society' (n=15). The themes include 17 codes that give more detailed insights into the menopausal attitudes of women across age groups. Out of the 60 participants who answered the open questions, all participants (100%) could be assigned to at least one of the four themes. The final codebook including the frequencies and example statements from the questionnaire can be found in Table 1.

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Table 1*Overview of Codebook (371 Coded Fragments From 60 Participants)*

Theme	Code	Example	Code Frequency (n=371)	Participant Frequency (n=60)
General Perceptions of Menopause			207	57
	A Challenging Time for Women	“I think due to the hormonal changes and physical symptoms, it can be very hard for the women experiencing it.”	79	38
	Menopause as a Biological Transition	“Hormonal changes within the female body.”	63	36
	A Natural and Inevitable Part of a Woman’s Life	“I view menopause as a natural transition phase women go through.”	32	20
	Lack of Knowledge about the Topic	“I don’t know much about menopause.”	17	13

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Theme	Code	Example	Code Frequency (n=371)	Participant Frequency (n=60)
	Menopause as a Significant Event	“It is a crucial transition for women.”	12	10
	Menopause as an Individual Journey	“Something every woman experiences differently.”	4	4
Physical and Psychological Effects of Menopause			78	32
	Physical Symptoms	“Getting warm in the middle of the night.”	35	23
	Psychological Symptoms	“Associated with mood swings and psychological changes.”	27	17
	The Beginning of Being Old	“The beginning of being truly old.”	10	10
	Loss of Femininity	“The metamorphosis to being a man.”	7	5

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Theme	Code	Example	Code Frequency (n=371)	Participant Frequency (n=60)
Women's Emotional Response to Menopause			62	36
	Embracing and Accepting Menopause	"Once you get to the other side, you experience more peace and meaning in your life."	36	27
	Fear of Menopause	"I view it with fear!"	10	5
	Feeling Disconnected from Menopause	"Menopause is in the far future."	8	7
	Mixed Feelings about Menopause	"Pros and cons. It's nice to no longer have your period, but there are also disadvantages."	8	6
Social Challenges and Representation in Society			24	15

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Theme	Code	Example	Code Frequency (n=371)	Participant Frequency (n=60)
	Underrepresentation in Society	“Tragically under-researched.”	19	12
	Disrupting Social Environment	“Disturbing when you work.”	4	4
	Recent Increase of Representation	“It is embedded into women that their greatest life goal should be to conceive children. Thankfully that objective has changed.”	1	1

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General Perceptions of Menopause

The theme “General perceptions of menopause” addresses the participants’ overarching views and understandings of menopause. It delves into the multifaceted ways in which women conceptualize and interpret the menopausal experience, including emotional, biological, and social aspects. This theme emerged in the responses of nearly all participants (n=57), highlighting its significance among the women in this study.

For example, 38 participants shared a range of negative terms they associated with menopause, describing it as a period that is “stressful”, “exhausting”, “draining”, or “unpleasant”. These descriptions were often related to the physical and emotional changes women experience during menopause. While some simply addressed the hormonal changes and physical challenges, others expressed frustration about the fact that women are the only gender to experience this transition. One participant shared this frustration by stating: “It’s a personal challenge. As if women don’t have enough problems yet: periods, bearing children, breastfeeding, and then the change with the new bodily adjustments and challenges that come with menopause.”

Furthermore, a code that occurred for 36 participants was the biological transition of menopause. Thus, most women expressed a neutral perception of menopause, describing it as “hormonal changes”, “long-lasting”, and “the phase when the woman’s menstruation stops”. A fact that many participants considered important was the loss of fertility, for instance: “What I know is that menopause is the part of a woman’s life where she can’t get pregnant anymore. She is not fertile anymore; her period stops and therefore there will be some hormonal changes.”. Along with this view of menopause, many participants acknowledged it as an essential and unavoidable aspect of the female experience. To describe this view, the participants used terms like “human”, “normal”, or “unavoidable”. For instance, one participant explained her view: “I think it is a normal phase in a woman’s life.”.

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Another code that frequently occurred and stood out within this theme was a neutral stance of women towards menopause due to a lack of knowledge or personal experience. 13 participants admitted to possessing insufficient experience and knowledge about the topic. While some participants specifically referred to a lack of education: “I would say that I do not have a very strong or specific opinion about it as I am very uneducated on the matter”, others argued with a lack of personal experiences: “I have not really given it a thought because I do not have personal experience with people around me having it (...)”. Moreover, some participants claimed to view menopause as a significant life event, describing it as “a big change” or “a crucial transition for women”, while others described it as “the end of an era” or “like a second puberty”. Considering the biological and hormonal changes, menopause was also compared to women’s menstruation, emphasizing its individuality among women: “I think it looks different for every woman, just like one’s period does.”.

Physical and Psychological Effects of Menopause

The following theme refers to the physical and psychological effects participants associated with menopause. It was identified among 32 participants and it captures the various impacts of menopause on women’s bodies, minds, and self-perceptions.

For instance, 23 women acknowledged various physical symptoms of menopause, including hot flashes, night sweats, headaches, hair loss, weight gain, fatigue, and general changes in the body. In addition to physical symptoms, psychological complaints were frequently highlighted (n=17), including mood swings, irritability, depression, and insomnia, with some even mentioning shame and helplessness. One participant expressed annoyance about one symptom she experiences herself: “I especially find my mood swings annoying”.

Beyond the symptoms, this theme also includes the significant impact of menopause on women’s self-perceptions and sense of femininity. By some participants (n=10) it was seen as a symbolic milestone of aging and the loss of women’s youth, evoking mixed feelings of

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awareness and acceptance regarding the aging process: “a period where you become aware of your age”, or “accepting that you’re getting older”. Another notable association emerged between menopause and the loss of femininity. Some described it as the “end of being a woman” or “the metamorphosis to being a man”, while others expressed concerns about social stigma and the loss of their menstruation: “I suddenly don’t get my period anymore after 35 years of having it. I am suddenly confronted with the societal stigma around it and I ask myself if I lost something essential to my womanhood.”. Therefore, this theme addresses the diverse effects of menopause on physical health, psychological well-being, and personal identity, which further highlights the complexity of the menopausal experience.

Women’s Emotional Response to Menopause

The theme “women’s emotional responses to menopause” addresses the range of emotions experienced by women resulting from their individual perceptions of menopause (n=36). Compared to the physical and psychological effects of menopause, this theme captures positive, negative, and mixed emotions women feel when they think about menopause, and thus, their underlying associations with it.

27 participants shared a positive emotional response to menopause, including hope and appreciation. They perceived menopause as a liberating and transformative phase, embracing the cessation of menstruation. For instance, one participant expressed her view of menopause as an opportunity for personal growth and self-reflection: “I believe it can also be used to connect deeper with yourself and reflect on your feelings and life. Maybe some women feel the urge to change something in menopause and can see parts of themselves they were not able to tap into before.”. Thus, for nearly half of the participants, menopause could be viewed with inspiration and acceptance.

However, others experienced distress and anxiety, particularly concerning physical changes such as weight gain: “Honestly, as someone with eating disorders and body

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dysmorphia, I would say it scares me because I am scared to become fat or to feel like it (...). Five participants shared this emotional response, using words like “scary”, “terrifying”, or “threatening” to describe their feelings. Others recalled negative emotions resulting from the inability to become pregnant: “The transition is also a confrontation with the fact that the possibility of becoming a mother is really behind you.” This highlights the fears that some women associate with the physical and psychological changes of menopause, which were captured in the previous theme.

Furthermore, seven participants claimed to feel disconnected and detached from the topic, perceiving it as something that did not directly affect them. When being asked to complete the sentence “Menopause is ...”, they explained it in terms like “far away”, “not a current worry”, or “not an issue for me yet.”. Other participants (n=6) expressed mixed feelings towards menopause, acknowledging both the advantages and disadvantages, such as: “I find it exciting. I am quite emotional and melancholic. Then a phase of youth is over, and I am ‘old’. I do not want that. At the same time, I see older friends who seem to be in the prime of their lives, with children out and about and doing lots of fun things, while I still have relatively young children and have to take care of a lot.”. Overall, this theme illustrates the complex and sometimes conflicting emotions that menopause causes among women, reflecting on the loss of fertility and the potential for new opportunities and development.

Social Challenges and Representation in Society

The last theme discusses the social and societal challenges associated with menopause, as described by participants. It reflects on the societal and social challenges regarding menopause and the impacts of societal attitudes on women’s menopausal experiences.

For instance, 19 participants expressed frustration over the underrepresentation of menopause in society, criticizing a lack of research and general disinterest in the topic among men and broader society. One woman expressed the need for more research and information

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on menopause as a solution: “There should be more attention for women in menopause. Such as information and short screening. So that women listen to their bodies and are less strict on themselves. By raising awareness in society, women could receive more support and understanding from those around them.”. A less frequently mentioned but significant code was the impact of menopause on daily life at home and in the workplace. Four women described menopause as disturbing as it affects their ability to fulfil responsibilities. For instance, the participants considered menopause to be “disturbing when you work”, or “annoying for the woman’s surroundings”. Despite these challenges, one participant noted positive shifts in societal perceptions of menopause, expressing gratitude for evolving societal attitudes: “Thanks to society, it is embedded in women that their greatest life goal should be to conceive children and raise them. Thankfully, that objective has changed.”. Therefore, this theme does not only highlight the current challenges of menopause within society but also positive changes in the societal perceptions of menopause.

Comparison of Attitudes Between Age Groups

After exploring the qualitative themes that emerged from the participants’ perceptions of menopause, the following sections present the outcomes of the quantitative content analysis and the ATM scale to evaluate how menopausal attitudes differ between the age groups. An independent samples t-test was conducted to assess the distribution of themes and codes extracted from the thematic analysis between younger and older participants. The frequency distribution of the themes and codes, as well as the results from the t-test, are displayed in Table 2.

Five significant results emerged from the analysis. First, viewing menopause as a biological transition by acknowledging hormonal shifts and the cessation of menstrual cycles occurred significantly more among the younger participants, $t(57) = -2.43, p = .018$. Additionally, ‘menopause as a significant event’ emerged as significantly more prevalent

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among women above 35 ($M = 0.27$, $SD = 0.58$) compared to those below 35 ($M = 0.13$, $SD = 0.35$), $t(40) = 1.53$, $p = .019$. Participants above 35 also tended to accept and embrace menopause by viewing it as an opportunity for personal growth and development, which was less common among the younger participants ($t(58) = 2.13$, $p = .038$). Moreover, younger women reported significantly higher levels of feeling disconnected from menopause ($M = 0.23$, $SD = 0.50$) compared to older women ($M = 0.03$, $SD = 0.18$), $t(40) = -2.05$, $p = .047$. Lastly, the older participants also claimed to experience disruptions in their social environment due to menopause ($M = 0.13$, $SD = 0.35$), which did not occur at all among younger participants, $t(29) = 2.11$, $p = .043$.

Relation with Attitudes Towards Menopause

As shown in Table 2, the analysis of the Attitudes Towards Menopause (ATM) scale revealed a mean menopausal attitude score of 83.57 ($SD=8.99$) for all participants. Older women showed a higher mean attitude score of 86.30 ($SD=6.42$) compared to younger women, whose mean attitude score was 80.83 ($SD=10.38$). Furthermore, the outcomes of the independent t-test revealed a significant difference in menopausal attitudes between younger and older women ($t(48) = 2.45$, $p = .018$). Therefore, the women above 35 generally displayed more positive attitudes than those below 35. Notably, the cut-off point of the ATM scale is set at 87.5 (Erbil & Gümüşay, 2018), suggesting that the participants' menopausal attitudes were rather negative, regardless of age group.

In line with the expectation that older women display more positive attitudes than younger women, the results indicate that participants above the age of 35 exhibited more positive attitudes towards menopause compared to those below 35. This finding was supported both by the quantitative analysis of attitudes using the ATM scale, where older women scored significantly higher than younger women, and the quantitative content

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analysis, which revealed greater levels of appreciation and acceptance of menopause among the older participants.

Table 2

Frequency Distribution and Independent Sample T-Test Results for Each Age Group Including the Attitudes Towards Menopause Scale

Themes and Codes	Age 18-35 (n=30)	Age 35-65 (n=30)	Total (n=60)	t- value	p- value
Attitudes Towards Menopause Scale	80.8	86.3	83.6	2.45	.018*
General Perceptions of Menopause	30	27	57	-0.77	.447
A Challenging Time for Women	18	20	38	1.25	.216
Menopause as a Biological Transition	22	14	36	-2.43	.018*
A Natural and Inevitable Part of a Woman's Life	7	13	20	1.65	.103
Lack of Knowledge about the Topic	9	4	13	-1.57	.122
Menopause as a Significant Event	4	6	10	1.53	.019*
Menopause as an Individual Journey	3	1	4	-1.03	.310
Physical and Psychological Effects of Menopause	16	16	32	0.48	.628
Physical Symptoms	11	12	23	0.26	.795
Psychological Symptoms	10	7	17	-0.85	.399
The Beginning of Being Old	2	8	10	1.83	.074
Loss of Femininity	2	3	5	0.46	.647
Women's Emotional Response to Menopause	15	21	36	0.91	.364
Embracing and Accepting Menopause	9	18	27	2.13	.038*
Fear of Menopause	3	2	5	-0.46	.647
Feeling Disconnected from Menopause	6	1	7	-2.05	.047*

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Themes and Codes	Age 18-35 (n=30)	Age 35-65 (n=30)	Total (n=60)	t- value	p- value
Mixed Feelings about Menopause	2	4	6	1.21	.235
Social Challenges and Representation in Society	5	10	15	1.47	.146
Underrepresentation in Society	5	7	12	0.93	.356
Disrupting Social Environment	0	4	4	2.11	.043*
Recent Increase of Representation	1	0	1	-1.00	.326

*p<.05

Discussion

The purpose of this study was to qualitatively identify the menopausal attitudes of women and to quantitatively compare them between younger and older women. By implementing a mixed methods approach, this research aimed to offer more detailed insights into women's perceptions and experiences regarding menopause. It was expected that the attitudes between younger and older women differ and that older women display more positive attitudes than younger women.

Key Findings

The thematic analysis resulted in four main themes, including "general perceptions of menopause", "physical and psychological effects of menopause", "women's emotional response to menopause", and "social challenges and representation in society". The participants revealed a diversity of perspectives, including negative, positive, and neutral associations with menopause. The majority focused on hormonal changes of menopause and viewed it as a challenging and uncomfortable time for women. Others perceived it as a significant and meaningful transition, acknowledging it as a normal and inevitable part of life. Related to the hormonal shifts, many participants shared their knowledge of common physical

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and psychological symptoms, such as hot flashes, mood swings, and headaches. Based on their perceptions, the women expressed a wide range of emotions concerning menopause, including feelings of hope and inspiration. Some women explained that menopause can be viewed as a new chapter in life leading to self-growth and more freedom. While these participants focused on the advantages of menopause, others described feelings of distress, anxiety, and fear due to hormonal fluctuations and physical changes. They described feelings of shame as they associated the transition with the loss of youth and femininity, which was often influenced by the societal belief that women's femininity was closely linked to their age and fertility.

Related to their emotions, the participants stated that the underrepresentation of menopause in society was a significant issue, including both a lack of research and men's general disinterest in the topic. Some participants claimed to feel hesitant to openly talk about menopause, suggesting that it would be disturbing at home or in the workplace. This finding relates to a study by Currie & Moger (2019) that found that women tend to feel isolated as the societal stigma surrounding menopause does not allow them to communicate their experiences, especially around their partners. Additional research suggests that especially in the workplace, menopause is often seen as an unspeakable subject, causing women to feel ashamed of their experiences (Whiley et al., 2022). This perspective is, according to Whiley et al. (2022), influenced by the societal belief that the loss of fertility signifies a woman's loss of something fundamental to her womanhood. Furthermore, a study by Dashti et al. (2021) found that especially in cultures that view childbearing as the primary purpose of women, menopause is considered a significant loss of femininity. Thus, women's feelings of fear and negative associations with menopause likely stem from the influence of cultural stigma and misinformation about menopause on their self-perceptions and self-identity.

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Based on the themes derived from the thematic analysis, the quantitative analysis revealed five main differences between the age groups. First, in contrast to older women, younger women primarily understood menopause in biological and physiological terms by referring to hormonal changes and the cessation of menstruation. This finding can be supported by the findings of another study by Patel et al. (2023), which suggests that the most common knowledge about menopause in society revolves around the physiology and the symptoms associated with it. Within this study, they found that the most common symptoms mentioned by young participants included hot flashes and mood swings, which is similar to the outcomes of this study. Shahzad et al. (2021) explained that especially younger women, but also middle-aged women, are often not fully educated on the more complex symptoms and experiences of menopause, which emphasizes a lack of education about menopause in society.

Secondly, younger women were more likely to distance themselves from the topic of menopause. This tendency was shown in their lower engagement with the open questions, where they often claimed to see menopause in the far future. The same tendency was also found in a study by Tariq et al. (2023). Their survey revealed that the majority of women do not possess knowledge of menopause before the age of 40 and that they begin to educate themselves once they enter the early stages of menopause. Conversely, the older women in this study generally spoke more extensively about menopause, viewing it as a significant and meaningful event that significantly impacted their lives rather than just a variety of symptoms. The findings also showed that older women were more likely to perceive menopause as an opportunity for growth and self-development, in contrast to the negative associations expressed by younger women. This finding is consistent with previous research indicating that older women may have a more optimistic outlook on menopause due to their lived experiences and obtained knowledge (Ayers et al., 2010). Moreover, their perception of

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menopause as a significant and meaningful life event emphasizes their recognition of its importance and necessity in their lives. These outcomes can be explained by the Construal Level Theory as proposed by Trope & Liberman (2010). This theory suggests that individuals' way of perceiving and processing events is influenced by their psychological distance towards them. According to this theory, events such as menopause are perceived as more emotionally impactful if they are currently occurring or in the near future, whereas events that are in the far future are perceived as less emotionally engaging and significant (Trope & Liberman, 2010). Therefore, older women, who are closer to menopause or are currently experiencing it, feel more emotional engagement, and thus, attribute greater significance to this transition compared to younger women.

Lastly, the women above 35 mentioned a negative impact of menopause on their social environment, such as changes in personal relationships, which were not shared by younger women. The nuanced considerations of the older participants might reflect their firsthand experiences with the topic, offering broader perspectives and enabling them to consider more aspects of the topic that younger women are not necessarily aware of.

The results of the ATM scale showed that all participants shared a generally negative outlook toward menopause, with older women exhibiting more positive attitudes than younger women. This outcome aligns with the acceptance and appreciation of menopause in the older participants revealed in the thematic analysis (see Table 2). The difference observed in menopausal attitudes between the two age groups highlights the influence of age on the menopausal perceptions of women. These findings collectively suggest that older women's broader perspectives on menopause allow them to see beyond its challenges and view it as a meaningful transition with opportunities for personal growth. Furthermore, due to their psychological proximity to the topic, they tend to perceive menopause in a more balanced and multifaceted way by recognizing its advantages, which is in line with the Construal Level

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Theory (Trope & Liberman, 2010). However, due to a lack of experience and education, younger women might be more likely to base their perspectives on societal stigma or misinformation, resulting in feelings of fear or a tendency to distance themselves from menopause. This finding is consistent with prior research in this field. For instance, a study by Thapa & Yang (2022) revealed that younger women experienced higher levels of distress and anxiety when thinking of menopause, associating this transition with a loss of femininity due to a lack of information.

Despite the differences observed between younger and older participants, there was a common understanding among all participants that menopause is a challenging and uncomfortable period. Across both age groups, the women expressed feelings of distress or fear about what menopause would bring, especially regarding the physical and psychological effects. A significant concern was the underrepresentation of menopause in society, leading to misconceptions and a lack of knowledge, which is in line with other research in this field (Patel et al., 2023; Tariq et al., 2023). These findings highlight the need for greater societal awareness and research to improve women's knowledge and overall menopausal experience.

Strengths and Limitations of the Study

One strength of the study is the implementation of a mixed methods approach, combining the thematic analysis with a quantitative content analysis and statistical tests for the Attitudes Towards Menopause (ATM) scale. This methodological approach allowed a more comprehensive investigation of women's attitudes towards menopause by exploring different aspects of their perspectives, as well as the frequency distribution of themes. Furthermore, a key strength of this study is the inclusion of a broad age range, including women aged 18 to 60. The age range of this study allows for the emergence of wide perspectives and experiences across different menopausal stages, which offers potential insights into how menopausal attitudes might evolve over time.

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However, some limitations should be considered when interpreting the findings of the study. One limitation of this research was that the participants were only categorized by age, without considering whether the women were perimenopausal, menopausal, or postmenopausal. As a result, the findings were only significant in relation to age, without allowing insights into their menopausal status as a significant underlying factor. Therefore, no suggestions can be made about the extent to which the differences can be attributed to women's menopausal status. Another limitation of the study was the reliance on short responses to the open-ended questions, which sometimes included single-word responses. Consequently, the analysis of the collected data was quite challenging, considering the limited room for interpretation of the results. Overall, while this study provides valuable and reliable outcomes, the limitations highlight the need for additional future research to further investigate menopause more in-depth.

Directions for Future Research

Future research in the field of menopause could benefit from two primary directions. First, longitudinal studies that include both the age and menopausal status of women would offer valuable insights into the complexity of menopausal experiences and attitudes. Tracking women over time would offer a broader understanding of the development of menopausal attitudes, distinguishing between participants before, during, and after menopause.

Furthermore, as a second option, intervention studies focusing on education about menopause could play a crucial role in addressing societal stigma and misconceptions surrounding menopause. Educational programs targeting the general public, and men in particular, could promote more accurate information and foster supportive attitudes toward menopause. By raising awareness and understanding of menopause, these interventions have the potential to reduce stigma and distressing feelings for women experiencing this transition.

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Furthermore, healthcare professionals could better address the individual needs of women across different age groups by tailoring support and resources.

Conclusion

All in all, this study contributes to a deeper understanding of women's individual perceptions and experiences of menopause, as well as the influence of age on the development of menopausal attitudes. The results suggest a link between societal stigma and misinformation about menopause and women's feelings of fear, distress, and isolation. The underrepresentation of menopause in society leaves the majority of women feeling unprepared and uneducated, contributing to the perception of menopause as a shameful and lonely experience. Moreover, it was found that older women generally display more positive views by drawing on their firsthand experiences and psychological proximity to the topic. The findings highlight the importance of addressing societal misconceptions by providing accurate information and education to the broad population. This direction of research would allow women to embrace menopause as a natural and meaningful transition rather than as a loss of youth and femininity.

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