

## Exploring the Impact of Physical Changes on Anxiety Levels in Premenopausal Women

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**ABSTRACT** This study aims to determine the level of anxiety of pre-menopausal women about the physical changes they experience. The research method uses quantitative with a descriptive approach. The research population was premenopausal women aged 40-50 years with a total sample of 30 people. Sampling technique used is purposive sampling. The results of the study found that most women experience anxiety about changing menstrual cycle conditions, weight gain, and vaginal dryness in the moderate level category (50%), but there are also premenopausal women whose anxiety level is in the severe category (26.7%) and mild category (23.3%). It is recommended that premenopausal women increase their understanding of menopause so as not to cause excessive anxiety.

### INTRODUCTION

Premenopause is a period before the cessation of menstruation, which generally occurs in women who are in the age range of 40 to 50 years. This period is very complex for women because it is closely related to their physical and psychological condition. In addition to experiencing physical stress, they can also experience psychological stress, which affects the emotional state in dealing with normal things as experienced by all women in general (Smart 2015).

It is estimated that around 25 million women worldwide experience menopause each year. The number of women aged 50 and over is expected to increase from 500 million today to more than 1 billion in 2030, while the number of premenopausal women is 342 million. Based on data from the World Health Organisation (WHO), in 2025 the number of older women is expected to increase from 107 million to 373 million (Forman et al. 2013). Around 70-80 percent of European women experience menopause, 60 percent in America, 57 percent in Malaysia, 18 percent in China and 10 percent in Japan and Indonesia (Nurchandra et al. 2019).

The results of research conducted by Dr. Frances A. Carter in Fitriani Edni Wari (2017) from the Faculty of Medicine, the University of New

Zealand in 2010 showed that as many as 63 percent of premenopausal women felt anxiety about the premenopausal period. Currently, Indonesia has 14 million menopausal women. Anxiety in facing the physical changes of menopause is caused because they experience physical changes such as the body becoming loose, the skin becoming wrinkled and the fear of not being attractive to partners anymore. This happens because the physical changes during menopause are poorly understood, so they have fear of changes that often occur (Mukarramah et al. 2022; Enterprise and Salim 2015; Vildiana 2013; Astuti 2021). The most frequently reported symptoms were 40 percent feeling hot flushes, 38 percent having difficulty sleeping, 37 percent feeling tired quickly at work, 35 percent often forgetting, 33 percent being irritable, 26 percent experiencing joint pain and excessive headaches for 21 percent of all premenopausal women (Lombogia 2014).

The occurrence of anxiety regarding physical changes in premenopausal women is often ignored by the individuals concerned because they consider this to be normal and is their problem. In addition, it is felt that it is still very sensitive and tends to seem taboo to talk about. The physical changes experienced by premenopausal women, which cause anxiety, especially in Indonesia, are a problem in themselves but do not appear on the surface to resemble the symptoms of an iceberg, even though they also affect the quality of life of

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women (Damayanti and Lestari 2021). Among previous studies, it has been found regarding the anxiety levels of pre-menopausal women due to the physical changes they experience, so this research raises this topic as gap research as well as a scientific process of discovering new ideas (novelty) regarding the phenomenon of anxiety among premenopausal women.

### Objectives

Based on the analysis of literature studies, the background shows a hypothetical pattern that menopausal women experience relatively high levels of anxiety. This study aims to analyze the anxiety level of premenopausal women regarding physical changes by proving the research hypothesis that premenopausal women tend to experience anxiety due to changes in the menstrual cycle, changes in body weight, and changes in vaginal dryness.

### MATERIAL AND METHODS

This research is a quantitative study with a descriptive design carried out in the working area of the Antara Health Center in April to June 2022. The research population consisted of premenopausal women (aged 40-50 years) who were in the working area of the Antara Health Center, Makassar City, totalling 30 people who visited during the research period. Thus, the research sampling technique was carried out purposively with a total sampling design, which means that the entire population was selected as the research sample, namely 30 people (Widarsa et al. 2022).

Data were analysed bivariate using a frequency distribution table presentation model. The use of a frequency distribution table was chosen because anxiety level data is included in the interval data category, it will be easier to understand and can provide a categorical picture of data that functions as information. Thus, the conclusion of research using frequency distribution analysis techniques is intended as solid basic information regarding the taxonomy of anxiety levels in premenopausal women. This basic information then becomes valuable input for further research aimed at testing the relationships between variables. The variables analysed in this study included menstrual cycle, body weight, and vaginal dryness univari-

ately. Meanwhile, variables such as age, education and employment are not the focus of analysis in this research because this information has already been disclosed in previous research.

### RESULTS

This study divided respondents into two age groups, namely 40-45 years and 46-50 years. The distribution of respondents by age group is presented in Table 1.

**Table 1: Distribution of respondents by age group, last education and type of work in the work area of the public health centre between Makassar city**

<i>Characteristics of respondents</i>	<i>Frequency (n)</i>	<i>Percentage (%)</i>
<i>Age Group</i>		
40-45	10	33.3
46-50	20	66.7
<i>Last Education</i>		
Junior high school/equivalent	6	20.0
Senior high school/equivalent	17	56.7
3-year diploma	3	10.0
Bachelor	4	13.3
<i>Type of Work</i>		
Civil servant	12	40.0
Private employees	6	20.0
Self-employed	3	10.0
Not working (housewife)	9	30.0
Total	30	100

*Source:* Primary data 2022

Table 1 shows that the majority of respondents in this study were premenopausal women aged between 46 and 50 years. The number of respondents in this age group was 20 people, which covered 66.7 percent of the total respondents. In contrast, the number of respondents aged between 40 and 45 years was smaller. There were only 10 respondents in this age group, which accounted for only 33.3 percent of the total respondents. This picture shows that the age distribution of respondents is uneven in this study. The majority of respondents were in the older age group, while the younger age group only made up a small portion of the total respondents.

The data presented in Table 1 also shows that the majority of respondents in this study had an education level equivalent to high school or equivalent. A total of 17 respondents, or 56.7 percent of the total respondents, fell into this category. In contrast, there were only 4 respondents or 13.3

percent of the total respondents who had a Bachelor's degree (S1) as their highest level of education. This description explains that the respondents' educational levels vary or come from different educational backgrounds.

The data shown in Table 1 also shows that the majority of respondents in this study work as Civil Servants, namely 12 respondents, or 40 percent of the total respondents. Other jobs include the private sector employee profession at 20 percent and the entrepreneurial profession at 10 percent. The distribution of respondents who do not work is quite large at 30 percent.

Meanwhile, an overview of the variables studied in this study, namely menstrual cycle irregularities, changes in body weight and vaginal dryness, can be seen in Table 2.

Irregular menstrual cycles in this study were menstrual cycle disorders experienced by premenopausal women, namely in the form of long menstrual cycles or short menstrual cycles until menstruation does not occur again, causing anxiety. The results of the study in Table 2 show that of the 7 respondents whose menstrual cycles were regular, there were 5 respondents (71.4%) who had moderate levels of anxiety and as many as 2 respondents (28.6%) had severe levels of anxiety. Meanwhile, of the 12 respondents who experienced menstrual cycle irregularities, 7 respondents (16.7%) were at a mild level of anxiety, 6 respondents (59.0%) were at a moderate level of anxiety and the remaining 4 respondents (33.3%) were at a moderate level of anxiety heavy.

The level of anxiety regarding changes in the menstrual cycle during menopause occurs in premenopausal women with both regular and irregular menstrual cycles. It is just that for women whose menstrual cycles are regular, the level of anxiety about changes in the menstrual cycle during menopause is quite severe. This is because the condition of their menstrual cycle has been classified as normal and menstrual cycle irregularities are considered a new experience of which they are completely unaware of the process and impact.

Meanwhile, the description of changes in body weight in this study is a change in this case the weight gain experienced by women during premenopause, which can make them less confident about their physical appearance. The results of the study in Table 2 show that of the 12 respondents who experienced changes in body weight, there were 2 respondents (16.7%) who were at a mild level of anxiety, 6 respondents (50.0%) were at a moderate level of anxiety and as many as 4 respondents (33.23%) experienced severe levels of anxiety. Of the 18 respondents who did not experience a weight change, as many as 5 respondents (27.8%) experienced a mild level of anxiety, 9 respondents (50.0%) experienced moderate levels of anxiety, and the remaining 4 respondents (22.2%) experienced severe levels of anxiety.

Anxiety about weight changes during menopause is experienced by all premenopausal women to varying degrees. Severe anxiety is most often experienced by women whose weight increases during premenopause. Generally, they think that

**Table 2: Distribution of respondents based on irregular menstrual cycles, weight changes and vaginal dryness with anxiety levels in premenopausal women in the work area of the Antara Public Health Centre in Makassar city**

Research variable	Anxiety level						Total	
	Light		Currently		Heavy		n	%
	n	%	n	%	n	%		
<i>Menstrual Cycle</i>								
Regular	0	0	5	71.4	2	28.6	7	100
Irregular	7	16.7	6	59.0	4	33.3	23	100
<i>Weight</i>								
Changed	2	16.7	6	50.0	4	33.3	12	100
Do not change	5	27.8	9	50.0	4	22.2	18	100
<i>Vaginal Dryness</i>								
Yes	2	15.4	7	53.8	4	30.8	13	100
No	5	29.4	8	47.1	4	23.5	17	100
Total	7	23.3	15	50.0	8	26.7	30	100

Source: Primary data 2022

premenopause alone causes a situation of weight gain, especially when they enter menopause. The possibility of weight gain is much greater.

Meanwhile, the description of the vaginal dryness variable in this study is that respondents felt reduced vaginal elasticity, and reduced lubrication (less wetness) during intercourse so they felt pain, loss of clitoral sensation and disturbed sensation of touch during premenopause, which can cause anxiety in premenopausal women. The results of the study in Table 2 show that of the 13 respondents who experienced vaginal dryness, there were 2 respondents (15.4%) who were at a mild level of anxiety, 7 respondents (53.8%) at a moderate level of anxiety, and as many as 4 respondents (23.5%) are in the level of severe anxiety. Of the 17 respondents who did not experience vaginal dryness, 5 respondents (29.4%) were in a mild anxiety level, 8 respondents (47.1%) were in a moderate anxiety level, and the remaining 4 respondents (23.5%) were in a severe anxiety level.

The level of anxiety regarding changes in vaginal dryness during menopause is generally greater in moderate levels of anxiety, both premenopausal women who currently experience vaginal dryness (53.8%) and those who do not experience vaginal dryness (47.1%). The average level of anxiety in the moderate category arises due to the general knowledge that they understand vaginal dryness as a natural symptom on the one hand, and on the other hand they get basic information from social media regarding vaginal care technology.

## DISCUSSION

Premenopause is a physiological condition in women who have entered a period of ageing which is characterised by decreased levels of the ovarian hormone oestrogen, which plays a very important role in the reproduction of sexuality (Feniza 2017). The premenopausal period is generally felt in women who are over 40 years old. These hormonal changes are often followed by various physical changes, this is what can cause anxiety in women. Premenopausal anxiety is a feeling of anxiety and worries from physical, psychological, social, and sexual changes (Suprapti 2021).

According to Manuaba in Meta Fintari (2016), women who are undergoing the premenopausal phase will experience chaos in menstrual patterns, psychological changes, physical changes, and

around 40-80 percent of all climacteric women have both physical and psychological complaints. The premenopausal phase is the beginning of the climacteric transition, which begins 4-5 years before menopause. Climacteric complaints have started to appear and the hormone oestrogen is still being formed by the body. If oestrogen levels fall, irregular bleeding will occur (Triastin 2018).

The results of the study on 30 premenopausal women in the working area of the Antara Health Centre showed that the majority of women or as many as 23 people experienced menstrual cycle irregularities, ranging from menstruation that was not on time, menstruation came late to excessive bleeding than usual. The average respondent experienced this during the first 1 to 2 years.

Changes or irregularities in the menstrual cycle are one of the common symptoms experienced by women who are entering the premenopausal period before their menstrual cycle stops when they enter the menopause phase (Suryoprajogo 2019). Various menstrual cycle disorders such as polymenorrhea, oligomenorrhea, amenorrhea and menorrhagia occur because oestrogen levels in their bodies begin to decrease during premenopause (Thaief 2022).

The observation results showed that as many as 15 premenopausal women (50%) who were interviewed had a moderate level of anxiety. This is because in general they already know that at menopause their menstrual cycle will eventually stop completely so they are more prepared psychologically when their menstrual cycle is disrupted when they enter the premenopausal phase. This result is supported by the background of their average education level, which is high school/equivalent, so they have sufficient knowledge, including in terms of premenopause. The anxiety they experience is because they feel a change in their skin, where they feel their skin is getting drier, which makes them feel less confident about their appearance.

This is naturally felt during the premenopausal period due to a decrease in the production of the hormone oestrogen, which also functions to maintain elasticity in the skin (Siregar and Yusuf 2022). Premenopausal conditions reduce the production of the hormones oestrogen and progesterone, which directly affect the physical condition of the body and reproductive organs, as well as psychological due to changes in the hormone oestrogen (Widari 2022).

Perimenopause occurs physiologically due to loss or reduced sensitivity of the ovaries to gonadotropin stimulation, which is directly related to follicular decline and dysfunction. This is what can cause the menstrual cycle to become irregular. In addition, menstrual irregularities also occur due to the shortening of the follicular phase in the menstrual cycle phase (Syahriani and Damayanty 2020).

As you get older, in this case before perimenopause, the body will usually get fat easily, and generally will have difficulty losing weight if you experience anxiety about menopause (Wahyu 2018). The feeling of fatigue that is generally experienced in perimenopausal women makes them lazy to do physical activity, coupled with excessive food consumption behaviour, which makes it easy to gain weight. This is what often causes anxiety because they do not feel confident about their physical appearance.

Of the 30 perimenopausal women who were interviewed, 18 people (60%) stated that they had experienced weight changes. This is what makes them feel uncomfortable with their physical appearance, causing anxiety. They said they had tried to reduce their food portions but still could not lose the weight they wanted. When advised to do light exercise regularly in the morning, some stated that they did not have time because they were busy at work and most of them were civil servants who had work routines from morning to evening. Some state that they are too lazy to exercise because they feel tired easily. The fatigue they experience also makes them often feel hungry. The feeling of fatigue they experience also makes them often feel hungry and as a result their weight increases. This is in line with research conducted by Meta Fintari (2016), which states that many women gain weight during menopause, this is due to dietary factors and lack of exercise. Women are creatures who pay a lot of attention to their physical appearance. Changes in physical appearance in women can cause reduced self-confidence and cause anxiety.

Another physical change that causes anxiety is vaginal dryness. The results showed that out of 30 perimenopausal women interviewed in the working area of the Antara Public Health Centre in Makassar city, 13 stated that they experienced vaginal dryness. The women said that this became even more pronounced when they had sex with their partners, which made them feel uncomfortable and less excited.

Vaginal dryness is a condition in which a person feels reduced vaginal elasticity, reduced mucus (lubrication)/less wetting during intercourse so that they feel pain, loss of clitoral sensation and disturbed touch sensation felt during perimenopause (Ester 2013).

Vaginal dryness occurs because the cervix secretes very little mucus. The cause is a lack of oestrogen, which causes the vaginal canal to become thinner, drier, and less elastic, and the genitals begin to contract. Dry intercourse holes cause pain during intercourse, vaginal discharge, and pain when urinating. This situation makes sexual intercourse painful and uncomfortable (Indrias et al. 2015). Women who are in perimenopause often feel psychological anxiety. This causes a decrease in their sexual function because of feelings of discomfort and lack of confidence when having sexual intercourse with their partners. These feelings can hurt the quality of life as a married couple. The fear of not being able to meet their husband's sexual needs is one of the triggers for anxiety to arise in them (Veronika and Afdal 2021).

Perimenopausal women stated that they did not experience vaginal dryness but still felt anxiety because they were worried about reduced sexual desire as they got older. They become more sensitive and worry that their husbands will leave them because they are no longer young (Alazizah and Susilawati 2017).

## CONCLUSION

Pre-menopausal women experience varying levels of anxiety about physical changes, as they enter menopause. In general, perimenopausal women experience a high level of anxiety regarding changes in the menstrual cycle and changes in body weight, while moderate levels of anxiety are experienced regarding changes in vaginal dryness. The implication of this research is the emergence of new thinking for changing counselling services for perimenopausal women which places greater emphasis on a good understanding of changes in the menstrual cycle and changes in body weight to reduce anxiety for perimenopausal women.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

It is recommended to reformulate counselling material for perimenopausal women in health ser-

vices with a new emphasis on aspects of physical changes during premenopause, especially changes in the menstrual cycle and changes in body weight.

### LIMITATIONS

The sample size for this study is quite limited with only 30 samples, which still requires testing a larger sample to get more meaningful results. In addition, the test method which only uses descriptive cross-tabulation analysis requires a significance test in understanding the significant relationship between variables.

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### CONFLICTS OF INTEREST

The authors have no conflict of interests to declare.

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