

# Depressive symptoms' pattern in postmenopausal women

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## Summary

The study was conducted to elucidate the problem of depressive symptoms' pattern in climacteric women. The study included 128 postmenopausal women aged 47-65 years admitted to the Department of Gynecological Endocrinology, Poznan University of Medical Sciences, because of climacteric symptoms. The authors assessed the intensity of climacteric symptoms with the Kupperman index and the severity of depressive symptoms with the Hamilton depression scale. They measured BMI of all studied women. The average score of the Hamilton scale in the studied group was 11 points ( $SD \pm 7$  points). No depressive symptoms were found in 40 (31.2%) of the study participants. A slight increase in the severity of the depression symptoms was found in 64 (50%) and 23 (29.9%) displayed depressive symptoms at a moderate severity, while one (1.3%) study participant was diagnosed with very severe depressive symptoms. Depressive symptoms observed most often were: somatic symptoms of anxiety and fear experienced in 90 (70.2%), light and interrupted sleep reported in 88 (68.6%), and general symptoms in 88 (68.6%) of the study participants.

**Key words:** Depression; Menopause; Climacterium.

## Introduction

Climacteric women often give depressive symptoms as a reason for seeing a doctor [1]. Their occurrence pose a diagnostic problem for a gynaecologist, especially given that they sometimes resemble symptoms of other somatic dysfunctions. The etiology of the depressive symptoms during menopause is not clear and it is believed that the underlying cause, just as in the case of neurovegetative symptoms of the climacteric syndrome, are hormonal changes. This study was conducted to elucidate the pattern of depressive symptoms in postmenopausal women.

## Materials and Methods

The study included 128 postmenopausal women aged 47-65 years admitted to the Department of Gynecological Endocrinology, Poznan University of Medical Sciences, because of climacteric symptoms. The mean age of the studied women was  $54.6 \pm 3.8$  years. The mean time since last menstrual period was  $5.9 \pm 4.6$  years. The mean BMI value in the study group was  $26.4 \pm 5.7$  kg/m<sup>2</sup>.

The intensity of climacteric and depressive symptoms was evaluated with the Kupperman index [2] and the Hamilton depression scale [3], respectively, in all study participants.

The study was approved by the Ethics Committee, Poznan University of Medical Sciences, and financed by the State Committee for Scientific Research (project no: 50305-01109136-12261-08039).

## Results

The mean score of the Kupperman index in the studied group was 25 points ( $SD \pm 13$  points); 29 women (22.6%) were diagnosed with a mild climacteric syndrome, 36 (28.1%) with a moderate severity climacteric syndrome, and 34 (26.5%) with a climacteric syndrome of high severity. The occurrence rate of individual symptoms of the climacteric syndrome is presented in Table 1. No statistical correlation was found between the degree of severity of the climacteric syndrome and the age of the studied women or in the time since the last menstrual period. A positive correlation was found between the time since the last period and the degree of severity of arthralgia ( $p < 0.01$ ).

An average score according to the Hamilton scale in the studied group was 11 points ( $SD \pm 7$  points); in 64 (50%) of the patients there was a slight increase in the severity of the depressive symptoms, 23 (29.9%) were diagnosed with depressive symptoms of moderate severity, and one (1.3%) with depressive symptoms of high severity. The occurrence rate of individual depression symptoms is presented in Table 2. No statistical correlation was found between the age and time since the last period, with the degree of the severity of the depression symptoms.

## Discussion

In the studied group of postmenopausal women, on the basis to the Hamilton scale, 87 patients (79.9% of the

Table 1. — *Climacteric symptoms' frequency in the studied group.*

| Symptom of the climacteric syndrome | Number of studied women (%) |
|-------------------------------------|-----------------------------|
| 1. Hot flashes                      | 102 (79.7%)                 |
| 2. Sweating                         | 105 (81.9%)                 |
| 3. Sleep disorders                  | 86 (67.1%)                  |
| 4. Anxiety                          | 100 (78%)                   |
| 5. Depressed mood                   | 79 (61.6%)                  |
| 6. Dizziness                        | 63 (49.1%)                  |
| 7. General weakness                 | 74 (57.7%)                  |
| 8. Arthralgia                       | 91 (71%)                    |
| 9. Headaches                        | 69 (53.8%)                  |
| 10. Palpitations                    | 85 (66.3%)                  |
| 11. Paresthesia                     | 78 (60.8%)                  |

study participants) were diagnosed with depressive symptoms, where in 64 (50%) the degree of the symptoms severity was typical of a mild depression, in 23 (29.9%) typical of a moderate depression, and in one (1.3%) typical of a serious depression. The high rate of depressive symptoms found in the study confirms the findings of other authors [4, 5]. Ballinger [6] reports that about 50% of women seeing a doctor due to symptoms of the climacteric period can be diagnosed with depression.

In the studied group, the most frequently diagnosed depressive symptoms were: somatic symptoms of anxiety and fear (70.2% of the study participants), a light, interrupted sleep (68.6% of the study participants), and general ailments (68.6% of the study participants). Typical depressive symptoms such as a depressed mood, sense of guilt, as well as suicidal thoughts and tendencies occurred less often, which proves that the depressive symptoms during postmenopause have a different clinical picture than depressive the symptoms during other life periods.

No correlation was found between the age or the time since the last period, and the degree of severity of the depressive symptoms, which rules out aging processes being the main factor in the etiology of the discussed symptoms and supports the role of the factors important in the etiology of the symptoms of the climacteric syndrome.

## Conclusion

The occurrence rate of depressive symptoms in postmenopausal women is high. Among the most frequent de-

Table 2. — *Depressive symptoms' frequency in the studied group.*

| Depressive symptom                              | Number of studied women (%) |
|---|-----------------------------|
| 1. Depressive mood                              | 53 (41.3%)                  |
| 2. Sense of guilt                               | 53 (41.3%)                  |
| 3. Suicidal thoughts and tendencies             | 33 (25.7%)                  |
| 4. Difficulty falling asleep                    | 71 (55.4%)                  |
| 5. Light, interrupted sleep                     | 88 (68.6%)                  |
| 6. Waking up early                              | 78 (60.8%)                  |
| 7. Less engaged and having difficulties at work | 75 (58.5%)                  |
| 8. Inhibition                                   | 30 (23.4%)                  |
| 9. Motor excitability                           | 22 (17.2%)                  |
| 10. Psychological symptoms of anxiety and fear  | 84 (65.5%)                  |
| 11. Somatic symptoms of anxiety and fear        | 90 (70.2%)                  |
| 12. Gastrointestinal disorders                  | 22 (17.2%)                  |
| 13. General symptoms                            | 88 (68.6%)                  |
| 14. Reproductive system disorders               | 77 (60.1%)                  |
| 15. Hypochondria                                | 16 (12.5%)                  |
| 16. Loss of body weight                         | 6 (4.7%)                    |
| 17. Critical approach                           | 8 (6.2%)                    |

pressive symptoms in postmenopausal women are: somatic symptoms of anxiety and fear, light and interrupted sleep, and general symptoms.

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