

Exploring the Barriers Regarding Safe Discussions about Menopausal Symptom Management, as Perceived or Experienced by Pre-menopausal and Menopausal Women.

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Abstract : Background: Open discussions surrounding menopause are often associated with stigma, with many women feeling uncomfortable to engage in them with friends, colleagues, and healthcare professionals. Though the barriers regarding safe discussions of symptom management experienced by menopausal women are well documented, existing research offers little insight into whether these were shared by pre-menopausal women. This study aimed to explore the barriers regarding safe discussions about menopausal symptom management as perceived or experienced by pre-menopausal and menopausal women. Methods: This qualitative study was conducted over a 2-month period (March 2022 - April 2022) under the auspices of Imperial College Business School, London, UK. Snowball sampling was used to recruit both menopausal (age 45-70) and pre-menopausal participants (age <45), and sampling continued until data saturation was achieved. 16 semi-structured online interviews were conducted, and transcripts were thematically analyzed following Braun and Clarke's six-step methodology. Results: A total of 7 higher themes regarding safe discussion of menopausal symptom management were identified by both pre-menopausal and menopausal women, including: "ineffective coping mechanisms", "perceived onus to self-endure", "lack of workplace support", "poor knowledge of management approaches", "poor healthcare infrastructure", "poor support from friends and family", "lack of knowledge and interest from a young age". Conclusion: Identifying the barriers regarding safe discussion helped to highlight which areas require most significant intervention. Alongside tackling the barriers, menopausal women face, ultimately, there is a pertinent need to and address the lack of insight into menopause from a younger age and to encourage earlier discussions so as to not propagate the cycle of stigma.

Keywords : menopause, stigma, safe discussions, symptom management

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