

# Study finds positive change in menopausal experience

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(PhysOrg.com) -- White women are becoming more optimistic about menopause, with many seeing it as an opportunity to rethink their lives and redefine themselves, a new University of Texas at Austin national study shows.

This is just one of the positive changes in the way women across different [ethnic groups](#) are experiencing the change of life, the School of Nursing research found. The study also found women are getting support from their family and friends and some even mentioned relief and benefits when going through menopause.

Past studies have shown that [white women](#), in particular, were concerned about menopause as a "harbinger of physical aging taking them away from society's youthful ideal," said Dr. Eun-Ok Im, the La Quinta Motor Inns Inc. Centennial Professor in nursing. "Most of the white participants in our study say they try to be humorous and laugh — to boost their inner strength and motivate themselves to go through the hardships during the menopausal transition."

Im's four-year study, funded by a \$1.2 million National Institutes of Health grant, looked at ethnic differences in menopausal symptoms reported by Whites, Hispanics, African American and Asian women. The study was done via a Internet survey among 512 women and included equal numbers of mid-age (40 to 60 years old) participants from each ethnic group.

"A possible reason for the positive changes in the way white women look at menopause might be that the recent women's health movement has educated women to accept menopause as a normal developmental process, allowing them to refocus on themselves," said Im.

Results of her research were published recently in the *Western Journal of Nursing Research*.

African American, Hispanic and Asian women already reported being more optimistic and positive about their menopause and menopause symptoms than white women.

In Im's study, black participants cited they were raised to be strong and accepting of a natural aging process. They perceived that — compared to other difficulties in their lives — menopause was just another part of life to endure.

Getting support from family and friends during the menopausal transition is especially new to the literature on the menopausal symptom experience of Hispanic women, said Im.

"An interesting new finding, however, is that minority women prefer support from those who are of the same ethnicity," she said.

Minority participants also expressed their need for more information and educational programs, which Im sees as an additional encouraging sign. In the past, ethnic minority groups rarely talked about menopause with others and hardly ever said they wanted more information about the change of life, she said.

Im's study supported research that found significant ethnic differences in the total number and severity of menopausal symptoms.

Some of her findings on differences include:

- Black women had a slightly higher percentage of hot flashes at 67.8 percent with white women at 64.4 percent and Hispanic women at 52.5 percent. Only 26.1 percent of Asian Americans said they experienced hot flashes.
- More white women (60 percent) took some kind of treatments for menopause symptoms. These included antidepressants and alternative medicines like herbal remedies, chiropractic, meditation, acupuncture and dietary supplements.
- African American women — 54.6 percent — experienced weight gain compared to 33.3 percent for Asians, 45 percent for white and 50.8 percent for Hispanics.
- Whites reported higher percentages of racing heart, headache, fatigue, sleeping difficulty, breast pain, increased crying, depressed feelings, upset, grouchy feelings, difficulty in concentration, forgetfulness, breathing difficulty, ankle swelling, cold hand and feet, stomach pain, muscle and joint stiffness.
- Whites, Hispanics and African Americans reported about the same numbers of bloating while Asians only reported 23.4 percent.
- Whites, Hispanics and African Americans reported about the same percentage of mood swings — above 50 percent — while Asians reported only 32.4 percent mood swing symptoms.
- Asians reported muscle and joint stiffness and neck and skull aches as frequent symptoms of menopause. Findings strongly suggest there are sub-ethnic — Chinese, Korean, Indian Filipino — differences in the menopausal symptom experience of Asians, and more studies are needed

in this area.

The research also found few women (in all ethnic groups) reporting positive experiences with their physicians when they consulted them about [menopausal symptoms](#).

Im believes her findings will work to eliminate ethnic biases and inequity in menopausal symptom management and promote culturally competent care for menopausal women. Earlier research about [menopause](#) has mostly been with white women, she noted.

"The increasing ethnic diversity of our population requires health professionals to practice with greater cultural competence," Im said.

Provided by University of Texas at Austin

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