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Older women's experiences of menopause:
A feminist descriptive study of older women's knowledge
and attitudes toward menopause

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Abstract

As a result of improved health breakthroughs, most women can expect to live into their ninth decade. Consequently they will experience several stages of growth and development through which most women from previous centuries never had the opportunity to pass. Maturation changes often bring satisfaction, but the physical and social changes that accompany ageing may encourage some women to seek support and information from nurses. Although women today have more awareness of menopause and access to information and resource than women 30 years ago, it remains difficult for women to understand menopause in a non-contaminated manner.

This study brings together the two divergent perspectives on menopause: feminist and biomedical discourses. Feminist discourses most commonly regard menopause as a normal life transition whilst, biomedical models construct menopause as an illness requiring medical treatment. This qualitative descriptive study underpinned by feminist epistemology explores older women's experiences of menopause before menopause came to be perceived to be a problem requiring medical treatment. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with ten women, aged 70 years and over. Qualitative content analysis in this study resulted in two categories and eight themes of older women's experiences of menopause.

The findings in this study indicate that older women perceived menopause to be a 'natural' and 'normal' life developmental stage. Although the women viewed menopause to be a 'normal' passage in life and something that did not require much attention or medical intervention, the majority of women were quick to recommend that today's woman should seek help from menopausal symptoms from medical practitioners. This surprising variation of menopause being accepted as an illness for today's woman but not an illness 30 years ago suggests that the women's thinking has evolved in keeping with the social context they now occupy.

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