

# Evaluation of mutual attraction and partnerships during menopause

(Ocena wzajemnego przyciągania i partnerstwa w okresie menopauzy)

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**Abstract** – Introduction. Menopause is a complex physiological process between reproductive period and old age (senium). The complexity of menopausal problems can lead to complications in marital relationships/partnerships and in the assessment of interpersonal attractiveness.

The aim of the study was to evaluate the mutual attraction and partnerships during menopause.

**Materials and methods.** The study was conducted in the Gynaecologic Clinic of the First Military Hospital and Policlinic in Lublin with the use of a diagnostic survey. The research tool included an independently developed questionnaire used to evaluate characteristics of the study group, Good Marriage Questionnaire (KDM-2), Menopause Rating Scale (Polish Version of the MRS-II) and SKAT mutual attractiveness scale. The results were subject to statistical analysis.

**Results.** Results show that women and men differ significantly in the assessment of the quality of relationships only in terms of the sense of disappointment. In the group of women, the sense of disappointment is higher than in men's, which means that more women suffer from the lack of pleasure from being with their partner. In addition, there are moderately strong, but statistically significant, negative correlations between mental, autonomic, urogenital symptoms and the rating of the partner's attractiveness, but only in case of women. Higher rating of menopause symptoms annoyance was associated with lower assessment of the partner's attractiveness and a weaker need to build a close relationship with them, a reduced level of perceiving one's own relationship as fulfilment of the self and own values, as well as a weaker conviction that the partners share similar views on the relationship.

**Conclusions.** The partner's attractiveness and the quality of the relationship is rated significantly higher by men than women. Higher ratings of symptom nuisance and annoyance during perimenopause are associated with lower assessment of the partner's attractiveness only in women. Higher quality assessment, therefore, is associated with higher assessment of the partner's attractiveness, both in case of women and men. The more satisfied partners are with their relationship, the more attracted to each other they are.

**Key words** - menopause, partnerships, quality of the relationship.

**Streszczenie** – Wstęp. Menopauza jest złożonym procesem fizjologicznym pomiędzy okresem rozrodczym i starością (senium). Złożoność problemów menopauzy może prowadzić do powikłań w relacji małżeńskich / partnerskich oraz w ocenie osobistej atrakcyjności.

Celem badania była ocena wzajemnego przyciągania i partnerstwa w okresie menopauzy.

**Materiał i metoda.** Badanie przeprowadzono w klinice ginekologicznej Szpitala Wojskowego z Polikliniką w Lublinie z wykorzystaniem badań diagnostycznych. Narzędziem badawczym był kwestionariusz stosowany do oceny charakterystyki badanej grupy, dobre małżeństwo Questionnaire (KDM-2), menopauza Rating Scale (polska wersja MRS-II) i SKAT skali wzajemna atrakcyjność. Wyniki poddano analizie statystycznej.

**Wyniki.** Wyniki pokazują, że kobiety i mężczyźni różnią się znacznie w ocenie jakości relacji tylko pod względem poczucia rozczarowania. W grupie kobiet, poczucie rozczarowania jest wyższe niż u mężczyzn, co oznacza, że coraz więcej kobiet cierpi z powodu braku przyjemności bycia ze swoim partnerem. Ponadto, istnieją umiarkowanie silne, ale statystycznie istotne, ujemne korelacje między stanem psychicznym, autonomicznym, objawami moczowo-płciowego a oceną atrakcyjności partnera, ale tylko w przypadku kobiet. Wyższa ocena objawów menopauzy była związana z niższą oceną atrakcyjności partnera i słabszą potrzebą budowania ścisłych relacji z nimi, zmniejszony poziom postrzegania własnej relacji jako spełnienia siebie i własnej wartości, a także słabszym przekonaniem, że partnerzy mają podobne poglądy na temat relacji.

**Wnioski.** Atrakcyjność partnera i jakość relacji jest oceniana znacznie wyższa przez mężczyzn niż kobiety. Wyższe wskaźniki objawów uciążliwości i irytacji podczas menopauzy wiążą się z niższą oceną atrakcyjności partnera tylko u kobiet. Wyższa ocena jakości, wiąże się z wyższą oceną atrakcyjności partnera, zarówno w przypadku kobiet jak i mężczyzn. Im bardziej zadowoleni są partnerzy z tych relacji, tym bardziej przyciągają się wzajemnie.

**Słowa kluczowe** – menopauza, partnerstwo, jakość relacji.

## II. MATERIALS AND METHODS

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- A. The idea and the planning of the study
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## I. INTRODUCTION

Menopause is a complex physiological process between reproductive period and old age (senium). In women, symptoms collectively referred to as climacteric syndrome appear a few years before the last menstrual period and span usually over a few or several years to follow. Ovarian failure and related hormone deficiency are responsible for occurrence of clinical symptoms which can be divided into three groups: vasomotoric, somatic and psychological [1-3].

The complexity of menopause-related problems can lead to complications in marital relationships/partnerships and in the assessment of interpersonal attractiveness [4-8].

The aim of the study was to evaluate the mutual attraction and partnerships during menopause.

The study was conducted in the Gynaecologic Clinic of the First Military Hospital and Policlinic in Lublin. The study group consisted of 95 heterosexual couples, with 90.4% being married and 9.6% being in civil partnerships. The couples examined were married for 1 to 35 years ( $M = 24.58$ ;  $SD = 7.63$ ). The age of surveyed women ranged from 45 to 62 ( $M = 51.04$ ;  $SD = 4.27$ ). In contrast, the age of the surveyed men ranged from 47 to 68 ( $M = 53.31$ ;  $SD = 6.09$ ).

As a research method the study used a diagnostic survey. The research tools included an independently developed questionnaire to evaluate characteristics of the study group and Good Marriage Questionnaire (KDM-2), Menopause Rating Scale (Polish Version of the MRS-II), and the SKAT mutual attractiveness scale. The results were subject to statistical analysis. The interpretation of the study results was done in the presence of a psychologist. Statistical analysis was performed using SPSS IBM 21. The significance level assumed for the results was  $p < 0.05$ .

## III. RESULTS

Table 1 presents a comparison of the relationship quality assessment between men and women. The results show that women and men differ significantly in the assessment of the quality of their relationship only in terms of the sense of disappointment. In the group of women the sense of disappointment is higher than in men, which means that more women suffer from the lack of pleasure from being with a partner. There were no significant differences between sexes with regard to intimacy, self-fulfilment and similarities. Lack of any differences in other dimensions of the relationship quality indicates that both sexes feel the same need to build a close relationship with their partner, perceive their relationship in the same manner as a means of self-fulfilment, and realization of their needs and values, as well as share similar views on the execution of major life goals and those related to the development of their relationship.

Table 1. Comparison of the relationship quality rating between men and women, and a summary of statistical results of the Wilcoxon's signed-rank test

Relationship quality rating	Man		Woman		Wilcoxon test results	
	M	SD	M	SD	From	p
Sense of intimacy	31.55	3.40	30.79	5.20	-0.78	0.44
Sense of disappointment	20.65	5.29	22.37	7.42	-2.50	0.01 *
Sense of self-realization	27.71	2.54	26.89	4.15	-1.47	0.14
Sense of similarity	27.91	2.47	27.51	4.03	-0.78	0.43

\* Statistically significant difference at  $p < 0.05$

Table 2 shows Spearman's correlation coefficient between the assessment of menopausal symptoms and the partner's attractiveness as seen by men and women. The results show that there are moderately strong, but statistically significant, negative correlations between mental, vegetative, and urogenital symptoms and the assessment of the partner's attractiveness, but only in case of women. Higher menopausal symptoms annoyance was associated with the partner rated lower on attractiveness.

There was no statistically significant relationship between the symptoms of menopause and the assessment of partner's attractiveness in men. This suggests that in the examined group of men these variables were not linked with one another.

Table 2. Spearman's correlation coefficient between the assessment of menopausal symptoms and attractiveness in the view of men and women.

Menopausal symptoms rating:		Partner attractiveness rating:
Perception of men	Mental symptoms	-0.101
	Vegetative symptoms	-0.022
	Urogenital symptoms	-0.131
Menopausal symptoms rating:		Partner attractiveness rating:
Perception of women	Mental symptoms	-0.454 **
	Vegetative symptoms	-0.377 **
	Urogenital symptoms	-0.352 **

\*\* Correlation significant at  $p < 0.001$

The correlation between the assessment of menopausal symptoms and relationship quality is shown in Table 3. The study results indicate that, both in men and women, statistically significant weak and moderately strong negative correlations were observed between the sense of intimacy, sense of fulfilment and similarities, and mental, autonomic, and urogenital symptoms. Higher menopausal symptoms annoyance rating among respondents of both sexes was associated with a weaker need to build a close relationship with the partner, the reduced level of perceiving their relationship as a way of self-fulfilment and one's own values, as well as with a weaker conviction that partners share similar views on the relationship.

Based on the analysis of own research, we can also state that in the group of men and women there were statistically significant moderately strong, strong, and very strong negative correlations between the sense of disappointment and mental, autonomic, and urogenital symptoms. The higher the study participants rated the annoyance of menopausal symptoms, the less desire they showed to be with the partner. To conclude, it should be noted that, both in women and men, higher rating of menopausal symptoms was conjoined with a lower sense of intimacy, self-fulfilment and similarities, as well as a higher sense of disappointment.

Table 3. The correlation coefficient between the assessment of the relationship quality and the intensity of menopausal symptoms in the view of men and women

Relationship quality rating		Mental symptoms	Vegetative symptoms	Urogenital symptoms
Perception of men	Sense of intimacy	-0.373 **	-0.321 **	-0.298 **
	Sense of disappointment	0.468 **	0.334 **	0.341 **
	Sense of self-fulfilment	-0.257 **	-0.324 **	-0.445 **
	Sense of similarity	-0.555 **	-0.443 **	-0.575 **
Relationship quality rating		Mental symptoms	Vegetative symptoms	Urogenital symptoms
Perception of women	Sense of intimacy	-0.578 **	-0.610 **	-0.592 **
	Sense of disappointment	0.711 **	0.649 **	0.614 **
	Sense of self-fulfilment	-0.505 **	-0.531 **	-0.546 **
	Sense of similarity	-0.479 **	-0.520 **	-0.466 **

\*\* Correlation significant at  $p < 0.001$

Table 4 shows the relation between the rating of attractiveness and relationship quality. Both in men and women, statistically significant weak, moderately strong, and strong positive correlations were observed between the sense of intimacy, sense of self-fulfilment, sense of similarity, and the assessment of the partner's attractiveness. The positive assessment of the attitude toward the partner was associated with a greater need to build a close relationship with them, an increased level of perceiving their relationship as a way of fulfilling the self and their values, and with a stronger conviction that partners share similar views on the relationship. Based on the results obtained, it was found that in the group of men and women, statistically significant, moderately strong, and strong negative correlations were observed between the sense of disappointment and the rating of the partner's attractiveness. The more negative the attitude towards the partner, the less pleasure participants took from being with the partner.

In conclusion, the high rating of the sense of intimacy, self-fulfilment, sense of having similarities, and low disappointment score were all conjoined with a high rating of the partner's attractiveness.

Table 4. Correlation coefficient between the assessment of attractiveness and relationship quality in the view of men and women

Relationship quality rating		Partner attractiveness rating:
Perception of men	Sense of intimacy	0.388 **
	Sense of disappointment	-0.472 **
	Sense of self-fulfilment	0.221 *
	Sense of similarity	0.253 *
Perception of women	Sense of intimacy	0.601 **
	Sense of disappointment	-0.634 **
	Sense of self-fulfilment	0.370 **
	Sense of similarity	0.632 **

\*\* Correlation significant at  $p < 0.001$

\* Correlation significant at  $p < 0.05$

#### IV. DISCUSSION

The perimenopausal period begins in the woman's middle age. At this stage, many changes take place in the woman's body, her image, self-perception and status in the family. In addition, the woman's feeling of self-attractiveness

also alters, which can lead to negative changes in partner relationships.

According to Szpak et al. [9], in spite of a high understanding of the perimenopause-related problems, a partner relationship-related issue during menopause still remains a taboo. The authors are of the opinion that men perceive their partners as attractive women, sympathize with and understand them, but do not help them to deal with troublesome symptoms of menopause.

The analysis of the study results on the relationship quality and satisfaction with the relationship between partners showed similarities with other available publications [7,8]. According to own research, men assessed the quality of the relationship significantly higher than women, whereas the latter were more disappointed with their relationships with partners and the quality of the relationship. In their own study carried out on a group of 40 couples living in Upper Silesia, Szpak et al. [9] showed that 58.62% of men reported that they understand the problems of partners during the perimenopausal period. As many as 62.07% of the men declared that they support their partner during this period. Over 75% of the men perceive their partner as attractive, but 27.59% of the respondents do not accept these changes, and 20.69% said that they are "repelled" at the thought of the contact with their partner.

Our study showed that higher nuisance and annoyance ratings of perimenopausal symptoms were associated with the partner's attractiveness rated lower by women. Those experiencing more intense menopausal symptoms had a more negative attitude towards their partners and rated their attractiveness significantly lower. The research conducted by Markwitz-Grzyb [10] on the group of 286 women in perimenopause from Greater Poland shows that 71.5% could freely talk to their partner about menopause-related issues. On the other hand, 77% reported that they could count on their husband or partner in this period. Only 9.9% of respondents indicated that their relationship with the husband/partner changed, especially in the sphere of sexual life. The surveyed women also stated that they argued more often with the partner and that they ceased to understand each other. The findings obtained by the authors can stem from the fact that women may not be perceived as attractive to their husbands or partners, yet this was not the subject of the research under analysis.

The analysis of the own research data revealed that more than 81% of the surveyed women felt jittery, irritated and sometimes aggressive. More than 64% suffered from bad mood, mood swings and sadness. The results obtained from research by Bielawska-Batorowicz [11], carried out on the group of 183 women aged 45-50 demonstrated that bad mood was associated with intense perimenopausal symp-

toms and a high level of stress experienced in this period. The research by Janicka [12] shows that the lack of acceptance as a woman appeared in both perimenopausal women treated with hormone therapy, as well as in women not treated with hormone replacement therapy. This difference was not statistically significant ( $p > 0.05$ ). The lack of self-acceptance by the surveyed women resulted from perceived changes in the body image, but also could result from disturbances in the relationship between the partners and the quality of the marriage/partnership. The authors' own research shows that, both in women and men, occurrence of stronger menopausal symptoms concurred with a lower sense of intimacy, self-fulfilment and fewer similarities, as well as a higher sense of disappointment.

Our study also shows that a higher rating of the partner's attractiveness was significantly associated with a higher assessment of the relationship quality, both in case of men and women. The more partners were satisfied with their relationship, the more attractive they seemed to each other and satisfied with their relationships. These results are consistent with studies conducted by Chmielewska [13]. The author conducted a survey among 36 couples aged 38-80 with a mean age of  $M = 49.1$ . The analysis of the results shows that women are more satisfied with their relationship ( $M = 0.79$ ) than men ( $M = 0.75$ ). However, these differences were not statistically significant, although a statistically significant correlation was proved between the length of the relationship and willingness to take responsibility for the feelings and actions of the spouse. Such an attitude may have a positive impact on the quality of the relationship and marital relationships/partnerships during perimenopause.

The research carried out by Markwitz-Grzyb [10] showed that the subject of menopause in women does not attract interest of the public opinion. More than 52.3% of the respondents feel that it is rarely discussed, and 32.9% said that it is rarely tackled. Therefore, there is a need for further reflection on not only the symptoms occurring in perimenopause, but also issues related to the attractiveness of partners and the quality of their relationship, as well as the relationship between spouses/partners.

## V. CONCLUSIONS

- Partner's attractiveness and relationship quality are assessed significantly higher by men than women.
- Higher ratings of perimenopausal symptoms nuisance and annoyance are associated with the partner's attractiveness rated lower only in women.
- Higher assessment of the relationship quality is associated with higher rating of the partner's attractiveness,

both in the view of women as well as men. The more satisfied are partners with their relationship, the more attractive they seem to each other.

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