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Menopause Toolkit

FOR WORKPLACE



Foreword

This toolkit is the outcome of two years of discussions and activism on menopause and the workplace in Nepal. Its development involved two key processes: the Menopause Storytelling Workshop (September 2023), where 12 peri/menopausal women shared their experiences, and the Stakeholder Engagement Workshop (October 2024), which gathered professionals from various sectors to provide feedback. The toolkit was reviewed by leading Obstetrician-Gynecologists Dr. Swaraj Rajbhandari and Dr. Shreyashi Aryal, President and General Secretary of the Menopausal Society of Nepal respectively.

This initiative was supported by the Australia Awards Women in Leadership Network Regional Grant (2023), awarded to Dr. Neeti Aryal Khanal and Dr. Buna Bhandari (Tribhuvan University, Nepal) and Nurjan Khavdsyelyem (National University of Mongolia). The team, with Grant Manager Jyotika Rimal, received additional

support from GIZ Nepal for stakeholder engagement and printing. We also acknowledge our partners, Menstrual Health and Hygiene Management Partners' Alliance (MHM PA) Nepal, Institute for Integrated Development Studies (IIDS), and Department of Gender Studies, Tribhuvan University. Special thanks to Ms. Madhurima Bhadra for co-facilitating the storytelling workshop and Sona Sitikhu for designing the toolkit.

We hope this toolkit helps create more inclusive and supportive workplaces for women in Nepal experiencing peri/menopause.

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Why the Toolkit?

People hesitate to discuss menopause which is everyone's issue. The more we can understand menopause, the more we can support it. It is an issue of fundamental human rights.

When women enter a higher-level leadership position, it is adjacent to the time when they are going through menopause. Most women go through menopause silently. More and more women are joining the workforce - both in formal and informal sectors. There will come a time when the women will go through menopause. Organizations need to be ready and equipped with resources to help women have a smooth transition toward menopause so that they are able to continue their professional journey and are able to reach leadership positions.

Women during peri/menopause experience affect

both their physical and mental health. Thus, it is important that peri/menopause supportive culture needs to be developed in organizational settings. We also need to start working on policy, attitude, and behavior and reform our workplace culture



Key Facts About Menopause:

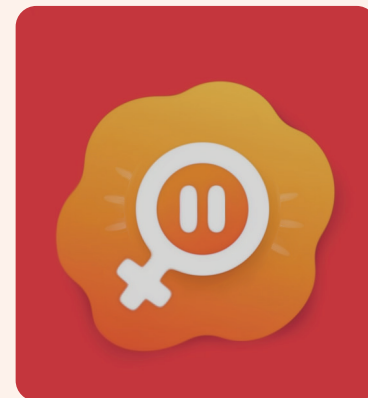
- ✓ Every woman's symptoms are different depending upon her family background, work, ethnic group, & many external factors
- ✓ Most women get treated for the symptoms of menopause rather than treating menopause
- ✓ Lack of awareness at home/workplace is the biggest reason women don't share about menopause
- ✓ There are limited exploratory studies conducted on Menopause related issues in Nepal and Mongolia to our knowledge.
- ✓ Menopause impacts overall wellbeing and an individual's professional journey
- ✓ It is essential to look at menopause through the lens of contextual setting to address the issue holistically.



Use of the Toolkit

The Menopause Toolkit is developed for individuals and organizations to help them learn about women going through the menopausal transition. It consists of techniques and methods to help/support women. In addition, there is also one section for caregivers to navigate their caregiving journey during menopause.

We have designed this toolkit as we realized that there is a need to help organizations understand menopause to help women stay in the workforce. The toolkit can be used by following organizations and caregivers.



Organizations

- Government
- Non-Government
- INGOs
- UN Agencies
- Private Sector
- Education Sector
- Associations
-



Caregivers

- Immediate Family
- Friends & Acquaintances
- Work Colleagues/Immediate Supervisors
- Line Managers



Individual Women

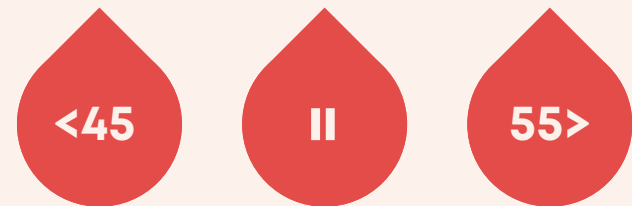
The toolkit can also be used by individual women to understand and manage their experience of peri/menopause.



Understanding Perimenopause and Menopause

The transition to menopause is characterized by a gradual change from perimenopause to menopause, marking one of the most critical stages in a woman's life in middle age. Transition to menopause starts with menstrual irregularities and ends with the last menstruation. There are various factors that affect the age of onset of menopause. Some factors include number of pregnancies, irregular menstrual cycle, age at last pregnancy, etc. The phase of perimenopause may extend over multiple years and has the potential to impact physical, emotional, mental, and social aspects of well-being. Rather¹ than a singular event, menopausal symptoms typically span several years, making it best described as a transitional phase.

Perimenopause is the phase leading to menopause with shifts in hormones. The majority of women undergo menopause, a natural aspect of the biological aging process, between the ages of **45 and 55** years old. On the other hand, perimenopause can extend over many years. However, for some women, perimenopause may start very early, in early thirties while others may experience later, in their late forties.



Perimenopause



Every woman (including transgender and non-binary individuals) who experiences menstruation will also experience menopause at one point in their life. It is also important to reflect that every individual's menopausal journey is different and every individual might have a different set of symptoms. Therefore, instead of analyzing it, it is important to create an environment where individuals feel safe and secure to share their symptoms with their immediate workforce.

Natural menopause occurs when a woman has experienced 12 consecutive months without menstruation, without any evident physiological or pathological cause, and without clinical intervention.

¹ The World Health Organisation. Menopause. Key Fact Sheets. 17 October 2022.

URL <https://www.who.int/news-room/fact-sheets/detail/menopause#>

Symptoms and Effects of Peri/Menopause



**Hot flushes and
excess sweating,
night sweats**



**Mood swings,
depression and
anxiety**



**Vaginal
dryness**



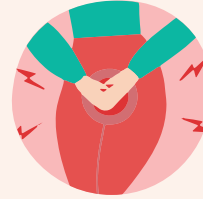
**Loss of memory
and brain fog**



**Muscle and
joint aches**



**Difficulty
sleeping/insomnia**



**pain during
sexual intercourse
and Incontinence**




Socio-Cultural Barriers to help seeking during menopause

Menopause comes as a shock to many women, often creating havoc in their way of living. Due to a lack of proper knowledge and guidance, many of them might also not realize that the symptoms that they are facing might actually be because of menopause. Symptoms like sudden hot flashes & inconsistent mood swings often make women question themselves about their bodies and have

no clear answers.

The symptoms of menopause are directly linked to an individual's cultural setting. When women are ashamed to talk about a natural biological process, it often creates a burden on their mental health and also often creates difficulties in talking about the physical symptoms.





In some parts of Nepal, although the conversation on menstruation has shifted from stigma and taboo to menstrual health and hygiene, there still is a need to initiate a conversation on menopause. Those going through menopause, mainly in urban areas, feel shy and a pinch of shame to share their physical and mental changes because of menopause.

In Mongolia, women are not well-informed about

what it means to age well, and what constitutes healthy and quality living as menopause still is not a mainstream issue to talk about. Thus, many women, in particular those in professional settings endure their suffering in silence. Therefore, it is crucial to engage in conversation and dialogue to tackle the complex correlation between menopause and workplace stress.

Effects of Cultural/Social Barriers

- Social stigma often results in loss of confidence, especially during social gatherings
- Women are hesitant to go to doctors, mainly gynecologists.
- There are very few trained healthcare professionals to have good understanding of menopause
- Women do not talk about menopause symptoms effects with each other often resulting in isolation and awkwardness
- Menopause often being treated as a “women’s issue” and not given enough importance
- Difficulties in navigating professional and personal lives.



Effect of Peri/Menopause on Work-Life Balance

1

Direct link between
menopausal symptom
and employment status

2

Job performance
(negatively) affected
by menopause

3

Loss of credibility felt
by women going through
menopause and
perimenopause

4

Difficulty in managing
menopausal symptoms and
work together, sometimes
resulting in women leaving
the workforce

5

General symptoms
affecting the work of
women

Role of Employers to Support Menopause

Employers play an important role in supporting employees going through menopause. The following are some of the recommendations for employers.

1. Raising Awareness on Menopause

Employers need to realize the importance of menopause in a workplace setting and should try to raise awareness regarding the topic by initiating information sessions by bringing in experts and providing in-depth knowledge about the issue.

2. Creating an environment where women going through peri/menopause can share their experience to their colleagues/superiors

The work environment should be supportive to speak up about women's problems without being judgemental. Employers often play a role in enabling a positive environment for employees and helping them ease any difficulty. Therefore, it is important that a positive and healthy environment is built for employees to help them share their personal difficulties.



3. Recognition of Menopause in HR Policy of the Organization

Just like maternal leave and sick leave, if HR policies in an organization acknowledge menopause & incorporate leave in the organization, many women will be positively impacted by this. The leave should specifically designed for menopausal women when they feel severely impacted by symptoms of menopause.



4. Additional HR Policy for Menopausal Leave (whenever it is required by women)

Just like maternal leave and sick leave, if HR policies in an organization acknowledge menopause and incorporate leave in the organization, many women will be positively impacted by this. The leave should specifically designed for menopausal women when they feel severely impacted by symptoms of menopause.

5. Priority to Employee Empathetic Care for those going through peri/menopause

Infrastructure that is friendly to menopausal women. Items that are needed during the menopause transition. Having a yoga/meditation room and creating support groups within an organization.

6. Flexible working hours and locations

(hybrid/remote) when needed

Provide women with space and the option to either work from home or from the office when they are going through the menopause transition, also provide them with flexible working hours, in case they are having difficulties in working at certain hours. Maybe have reduced working hours. It is also important to create an enabling work environment for women going through menopause by providing air conditioner/fans (whichever is possible).



7. Engagement of men in Peri/Mmenopause conversation

In order to bring menopause to the limelight and to make sure that everyone in an organization understands about menopause, it is important to have male engagement when talking about menopause. This not only helps in normalizing menopause in the workplace but will also raise awareness and empathy towards women going through menopause.

8. Availability of psycho-social counselor (need-based)

Since menopause is a topic that is not discussed much in both personal and professional settings, it is important for women to have a safe space where they are able to share their symptoms & difficulties. Employers should try to create a safe space for women by bringing in psycho-social counselors whenever they are in need.

Suggestions for Direct Line Managers and HR Professionals

- Help staff understand the services that are available to them during menopause
- Have 1 to 1 conversation with individuals who might go to menopause in the coming few years
- Develop a plan for Infrastructure assessment - ventilation, condition of toilet, work environment, etc. to help employees feel at ease during menopause
- Promote open dialogue on menopause rather than making it an individual affair
- Annual health checkup -make it mandatory

Suggestions for Co-workers

- Be prepared to listen and not give opinion
- Encourage menopausal women to speak with their managers about the problems that they are facing
- Ask your colleague how you can support them. Let them answer about their needs
- Avoid making assumptions and generalizations. Every menopause journey is different
- Not every woman will go through this



Suggestions to Caregivers on How to Help Peri/Menopausal Women

- Communication is Key
- Empathy is Important
- Validation towards feelings of depression and anxiety
- Support in visit to gynecologist/psychologist
- Availability of nutritious and healthy food available at home and at the workplace
- Encourage on locally grown and available food, does not need to be fancy and imported

When to Visit a Health Care Provider?

1

**Any abnormal Discharge
from Vagina**
(smelly or pus like)

2

**Bleeding
after Menopause,**
(should take it as Ominous sign)

3

**Urinary
incontinence**

Exercises to help Menopausal Women



1. Yoga and Meditation



2. Walking and running



3. Strength Training Exercises



4. Muscles Stretching

Resources for Peri/Menopausal Women

Gynecologists who have specialized in Peri/Menopause

- 1) Dr. Shreyashi Aryal, Kathmandu Medical College
- 2) Dr. Swaraj Rajbhandari, Helios Hospital
- 3) Dr. Smrity Maskey, KIST Medical College
- 4) Dr. Achala Vaidya, Norvic Hospital
- 5) Dr. Sapana Vaidya, Paropakar Maternity Hospital
- 6) Dr. Snighda Rai, Paropakar Maternity Hospital
- 7) Dr. Neeva Ojha, TUTH
- 8) Dr. Keshang Dikki Bista, TUTH

List of Counselors/Psychiatrists for Mental Health Support

- 1) Dr. Rachana Sharma Basnet, Kathmandu Medical College
- 2) Dr. Sagun Ballav Pant, IOM, TUTH
- 3) Happy Minds, Pulchowk

Participants of Menopause Storytelling Workshop

Moderator: Ms. Madhurima Bhadra

S.N.	Name	Organization
01	Anjana Rajbhandari	Tribhuvan University
02	Dr. Laxmi Tamang	Beyond Beijing Committee Nepal (BBC Nepal)
03	Dr. Lina Gurung	Kathmandu University
04	Dev Kumari Parajuli	Nepal Disabled Women's Association (NDWA)
05	Durga Karki	--
06	Gita Adhikari	Freelance Consultant
07	Sarita Shrestha	Asmita Women's Publishing House, Media & Resources Organization (ASMITA)
08	Savanta Thapa	WE - Women from Indigenous Nationalities (WE-WIN)
09	Seema Rai	Grand Academy
10	Shanta Bhandari	Asmita Women's Publishing House, Media & Resources Organization (ASMITA)
11	Sita Rana	--
12	Sucheta Pyakurel	Tribhuvan University

Participants of Stakeholder Engagement workshop

S.N.	Name	Organization
01.	Anjuli Shrestha	Nabil Bank Ltd.
02.	Anuta Shrestha	LOOM Nepal
03.	Bhawana Shakya	Marie Stopes International Nepal
04.	Divya Shakya	PSR HUB
05.	Dr. Bindu Pokharel	Tribhuvan University
06.	Dr. Jagjit Kour	Beyond Beijing Committee Nepal
07.	Dr. Shreyashi Aryal	Kathmandu Medical College
08.	Dr. Swaraj Rajbhandari	Helios Hospital
09.	Kabita Nepali	LOOM Nepal
10.	Kalpna Bhandari	GIZ S2GESI
11.	Krishna Kumari Waiba	Beyond Beijing Committee Nepal
12.	Milu Shree Maskey	GIZ Nepal
13.	Mokshada Sharma	IOM Nepal
14.	Nirajan Khadka	Plan International Nepal
15.	Niva Shrestha	ANAA

Participants of Stakeholder Engagement workshop

S.N.	Name	Organization
16.	Paulina Campos	GIZ Nepal
17.	Poonam Pokharel	Days for Girls Nepal
18.	Priti Sharma	VSO Nepal
19.	Sajana Shrestha	FNCCI
20.	Sambriddhi Bhattarai	Nabil Bank Ltd.
21.	Sambriddhi Malla	PSR HUB
22.	Sami Pande	GIZ S2HSS
23.	Samjhana Sharma	Nepal Human Rights Commission
24.	Sangeeta Thapa	GIZ S2HSS
25.	Simol Khadka	Possible Health
26.	Smriti Gurung	UNFPA
27.	Sunita Sharma	Ministry of Social Development
28.	Srijana Gurung	Plan International Nepal
29.	Stefannie Lotter	SOAS London
30.	Sudiksha Lohani	IOM Nepal

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