

# MENOPAUSAL ANXIETY AND COPING STRATEGIES ADOPTED IN EARLY OLD AGE WOMEN IN NEPAL

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## ABSTRACT

This abstract explores the range of symptoms encountered by menopausal women, as well as their coping techniques for successfully navigating this transitional phase. Menopause signifies the end of a woman's reproductive years and is characterized by major hormonal variations, particularly in estrogen and progesterone levels, which cause a variety of physical, psychological, and emotional changes. Common symptoms include hot flashes, mood swings, vaginal dryness, altered sleep habits, and diminished libido, with severity and duration varied widely between individuals. Coping mechanisms play a crucial role in helping women navigate this transitional stage, with strategies ranging from lifestyle adjustments such as regular exercise, balanced nutrition, and stress management techniques to relaxation practices and mindfulness exercises. Moreover, the importance of social support networks, including open discussions with medical professionals, friends, or family members, is highlighted in fostering affirmation and certainty during this period of change. Ultimately, understanding and implementing effective coping mechanisms are essential for alleviating the severity of menopausal symptoms and promoting overall well-being. Healthcare practitioners and support providers play a pivotal role in empowering women through this transformative journey by being aware of and incorporating these coping strategies into treatment approaches. Finally, this study offers a thorough examination of the most common physical symptoms encountered during menopause, as well as the varied range of coping techniques used by women to lessen their impact. This study aims to improve our understanding of menopause by explaining the relationship between symptoms and coping methods, as well as to inform the creation of individualized therapies to help women navigate this transformational life stage.

**Keywords:** *Menopause<sup>1</sup>, Prevailing Symptoms<sup>2</sup>, Perception<sup>3</sup>, Coping<sup>4</sup>.*

## 1. BACKGROUND

Menopause, the cessation of menstruation and fertility, represents a significant milestone in a woman's life journey. Typically occurring between the ages of 45 and 55, with an average onset around 51 years, menopause marks the end of a woman's reproductive years and is characterized by hormonal changes that result in the cessation of menstrual cycles. While menopause is a natural and universal experience for women, its

manifestations vary widely among individuals. Some women transition through menopause smoothly, while others experience a myriad of symptoms that can impact their physical health, emotional well-being, and quality of life. Understanding the complexities of menopause and its implications for women's health requires a comprehensive examination of its physiological, psychological, and sociocultural dimensions. Hormonal fluctuations, particularly the decline in estrogen levels, are the primary drivers of menopause symptoms, which range from hot flashes and night sweats to mood swings and sleep disturbances. Additionally, women may experience changes in sexual function, cognitive function, and bone health during the menopause transition. The severity and duration of these symptoms can vary greatly among individuals, influenced by factors such as genetics, lifestyle, and overall health status.

As women navigate the challenges of menopause, they employ various coping strategies to manage their symptoms and maintain their well-being. From medical interventions like hormone therapy to lifestyle modifications such as diet and exercise, women adopt diverse approaches to mitigate the impact of menopause on their daily lives. However, access to appropriate healthcare services and support networks remains a critical factor in facilitating women's experiences during this life transition. By exploring women's perceptions and coping strategies related to menopause, this research aims to contribute to a deeper understanding of this natural phenomenon and inform the development of tailored interventions that promote women's health and empowerment across diverse cultural and societal contexts. Menopause, a natural biological transition in a woman's life, is marked by the cessation of menstruation and hormonal changes, particularly a decline in estrogen levels. This phase brings about a myriad of physical, psychological, and emotional symptoms, including hot flashes, mood swings, vaginal dryness, and changes in menstrual patterns. While some symptoms, such as weight gain, are commonly associated with menopause, research suggests that aging and lifestyle factors may play a more significant role in weight fluctuations during this period. Premature menopause, occurring before the age of 40, may result from various factors, including genetic predisposition and autoimmune diseases, and often requires hormone therapy to mitigate associated health risks.

Women experience a range of psychological and physiological symptoms post-menopause, including anxiety, heart conditions, joint pain, and vaginal discomfort. Although menopause symptoms may lessen over time, some individuals continue to experience them for a decade or longer following the transition. Accurately diagnosing menopause involves monitoring menstrual cycles for 12 consecutive months of absence. Medical treatments for menopause symptoms include hormone replacement therapy, antidepressants, and anti-seizure drugs, although the suitability of these interventions varies depending on individual health considerations. Nontraditional approaches, such as acupuncture, meditation, and herbal remedies, are also employed by some women to alleviate menopause symptoms. Lifestyle modifications, including a balanced diet rich in fruits and vegetables, regular exercise, and stress management techniques, are advocated to support overall well-being during menopause. Moreover, cessation of smoking and moderation of alcohol consumption are recommended to mitigate the exacerbation of symptoms. Finally, dressing lightly, avoiding triggers like caffeine and spicy foods, and practicing relaxation techniques can help manage symptoms and promote a smoother transition through menopause. Overall, understanding the diverse array of symptoms and available treatment options is essential for healthcare professionals and women alike to navigate menopause effectively and maintain optimal health and well-being during this transformative phase of life.

### Psychological aspects

Issues with mental health, particularly mood swings, are common during menopause due to fluctuating estrogen levels. Low estrogen levels can lead to feelings of anxiety, hopelessness, and irritability, causing emotions to change rapidly and unexpectedly. Studies have shown that women are two to four times more likely to experience a major depressive episode during menopause than at other stages of life. Additionally, menopause can exacerbate mental health conditions such as schizophrenia and bipolar disorder, with symptoms worsened by factors like sleep disturbances, hot flashes, and night sweats. Social and cultural perspectives play a significant role in shaping women's experiences of menopause. In communities where older women are revered and valued for their wisdom, menopause symptoms are often perceived as less distressing. Conversely, in cultures where menopause is associated with old age and decline, symptoms may be more debilitating. Language differences, cultural expectations, and socioeconomic factors contribute to disparities in symptom reporting among nations, highlighting the need for culturally sensitive approaches to menopause care.

### Coping mechanisms

Coping strategies are essential for women navigating the challenges of menopause. Problem-oriented techniques such as social support and problem-solving have been found to be effective in improving sexual satisfaction and overall mental health. However, medicalization of menopause through excessive reliance on medication must be approached with caution, with a need for further research and exploration of holistic coping mechanisms. Lifestyle factors such as diet, exercise, and stress management also play a crucial role in promoting women's overall well-being during menopause, underscoring the importance of understanding and addressing the cultural context of menopause health.

### Conceptual Framework

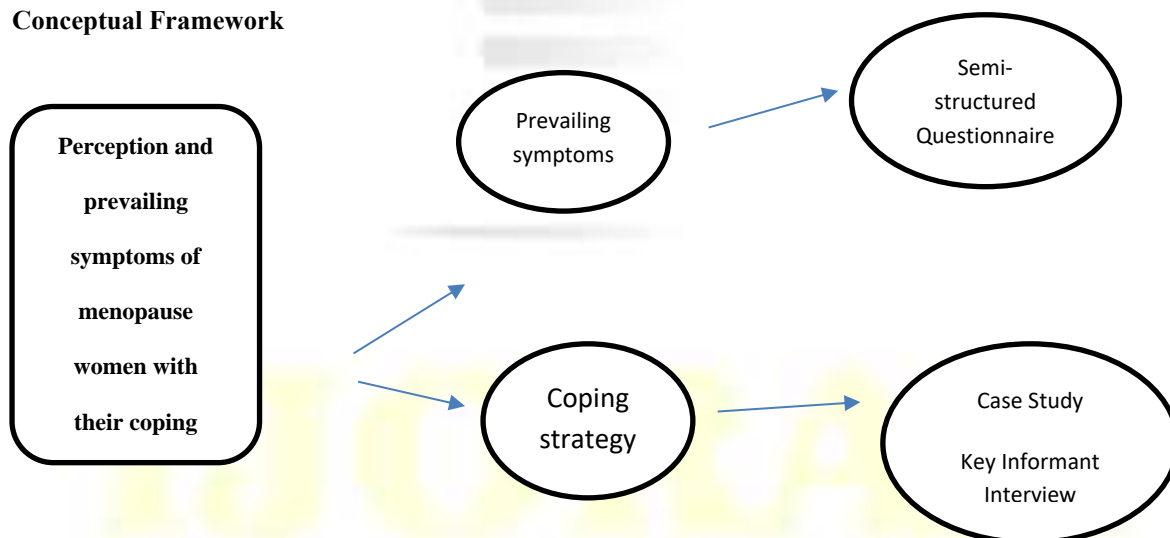


Fig 1: Conceptual Framework of the study

## 2. RESEARCH GAP

The research gap identified in this context revolves around several key areas. Firstly, while numerous studies have explored the basic symptoms of menopause, there is a lack of research specifically examining the unique set of predominant symptoms experienced by Nepalese women during this transition. This gap highlights the need for

culturally sensitive investigations that consider the biological, psychological, and social dimensions of menopause within specific cultural contexts. Secondly, existing research on the relationship between menopause and psychiatric symptoms has yielded inconclusive results, pointing to a gap in understanding the interplay between menopause and mental health. Moreover, there is a significant knowledge gap between women's understanding of menopause and the scientific knowledge available, emphasizing the need for educational interventions to bridge this divide. Furthermore, while many studies focus on the symptoms of menopause, there is limited research exploring effective coping strategies for women during this stage of life. This gap underscores the importance of investigating women's coping mechanisms throughout the menopause stage, particularly within diverse cultural frameworks.

### 3. METHODOLOGY

This study employed a mixed methods research design, combining both quantitative and qualitative methods. Mixed methods research allows for a comprehensive understanding of research problems by leveraging the strengths of both quantitative and qualitative approaches. Given the sociological nature of this study, utilizing mixed methods was deemed appropriate to capture both statistical data and in-depth experiences of participants.

#### Population and Sampling Procedure

The study aimed to gather data from women aged 45-55 in Suryabinayak Municipality, Ward No. 4, Bhaktapur. The total population of women aged above 45 in the municipality was approximately 2,300. From this population, a sample size of 70 participants was initially targeted, but due to age restrictions, 45 participants were selected for the study. Additionally, two key informant interviews and four case studies were conducted to enrich the data. Both primary and secondary data were utilized in this study. Primary data was collected through structured questionnaires, in-depth interviews, and case studies. Questionnaires were self-administered, and in-depth interviews were conducted using semi-structured questions. Secondary data was sourced from various literature including books, journal articles, and documentaries. Quantitative data from the questionnaires were analyzed using IBM Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) 25. Thematic analysis was employed to analyze qualitative data from in-depth interviews and case studies, allowing for a comprehensive understanding of menopause experiences and coping strategies. To measure coping methods, a menopause toolkit<sup>1</sup> developed from a journal article published by the University of Florida titled "Women in Perimenopause and Menopause: Stress, Coping, and Quality of Life" (Greanblum, 2010) was used. The toolkit, which was translated into Nepali for the study's women to understand, was designed to assess coping techniques.

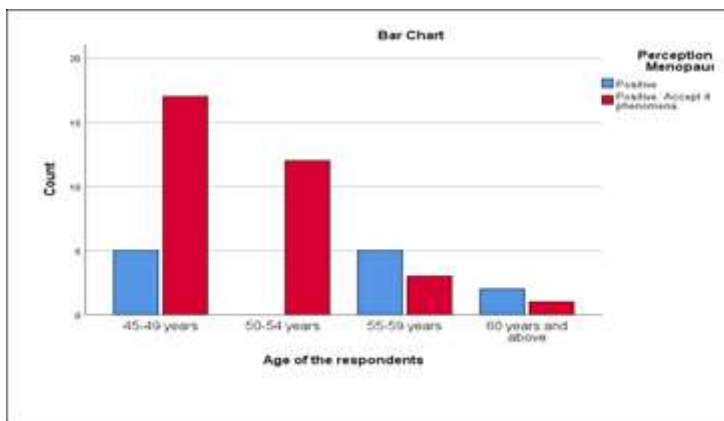
### 4. RESULTS

This section presents the prevailing symptoms of menopause women and their coping strategies aligned with the conceptual framework presented above.

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<sup>1</sup> Questionnaire used from menopause toolkit published by University of Florida titled "Women in Perimenopause and Menopause: Stress, Coping, and Quality of Life"

### Perception of Menopause among woman

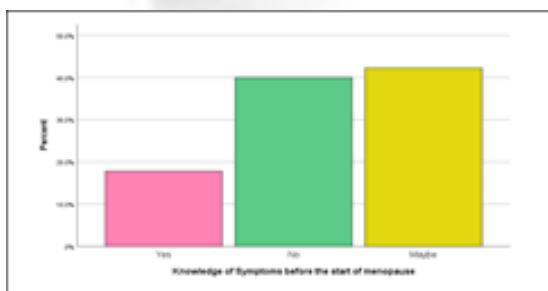


Source: Field Work, 2023

**Fig. 2** Perception of menopause in your opinion and the age wise perception of the menopause.

There were three options in analyzing the perception of menopause of the respondents. Three values were divided as Positive, Negative, and positive- accept it as natural phenomena. Majority of the respondent answered as “Positive. Accept it as natural phenomena”. No one perceived or thought menopause as a negative process. It was seen that all the age group had a positive attitude and perception about the menopause. But the group of the woman who also accepted the phase as a natural phenomenon were high in the age group 45-49 years and 50-54 years woman.

### Knowledge of Symptoms before the start of menopause



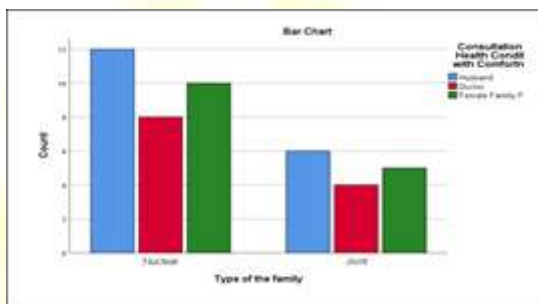
Source: Field Work, 2023

**Fig. 3** Understanding of symptoms before start of menopause

The participants were asked whether they had any knowledge about symptoms of menopause before they reached the menopause phase. A majority of the participants i.e. 42.2 % answered “Maybe” because they were unsure about if they knew about menopause or not, while only 17.8 % of the participants answered “Yes”. The respondents who had answered “No” were 40% of the population. This shows that woman who were from 45 age group also did not have any knowledge about the changes/symptoms they were facing/ about to face.

### Consultation on health condition with comfort

The above bar graph represents the trusted person with whom respondent felt comfort to share about their health condition. 40% of the respondent preferred to consult with their husband about their health condition. 33.7% of respondent felt comfortable to share with their female family members. Only 12 of the respondents representing 26.7% consulted comfortably with doctors. The second diagram shows the family type and the comfort woman had for consultation on health condition. Both the nuclear and joint family had more comfort to share with their husband. After husband, they preferred to share with female family members and less with the doctors.



Source: Field Work, 2023

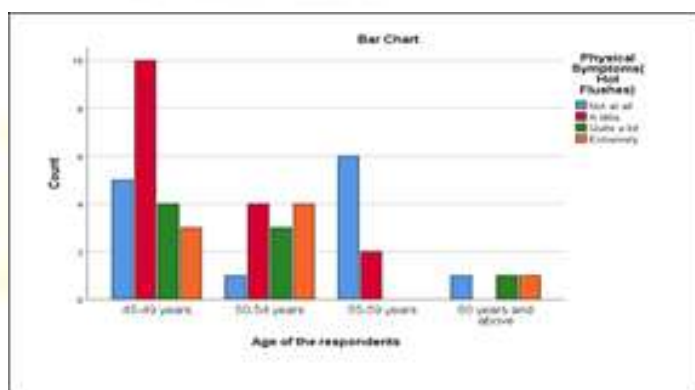
**Fig. 4** Understanding of symptoms before start of menopause

### Analysis of Prevailing Symptoms

The second research question “What are the prevailing menopausal symptoms (physical, social and psychological) among the woman in their adulthood?” had the following findings. The tools that were used here are the home visits done to fill a questionnaire formed. The symptoms were divided in three aspects. Among the Physical Symptoms, Hot Flushes and Muscles Pain was very highly seen among menopause woman. The severity of symptoms was measured as the analyzing must be done in a perfect way. The 4-point Likert Scale was used to measure all the symptoms.

### Physical Symptoms

#### a. Hot Flushes

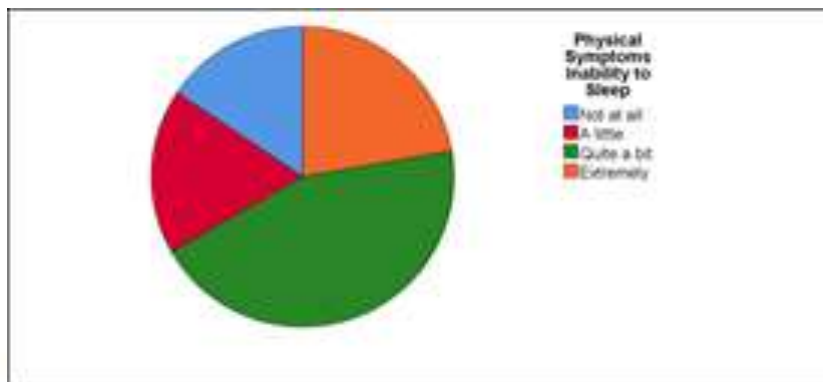


Source: Field Work, 2023

**Fig. 5** Physical Symptoms, Hot Flushes and Hot flushes as per the age group

The above bar graph demonstrates the frequency and severity of hot flushes as physical symptoms. Extreme severity of hot flushes was seen among 8 respondents, which covered 17.8% of the total population. No symptoms of a hot flush were seen among the 13 respondents.

**b. Inability to sleep**

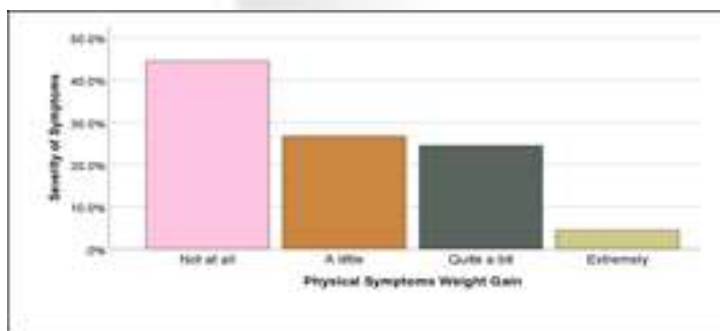


Source: Field Work, 2023

**Fig. 6** Physical Symptoms, Inability to Sleep

This table details the frequency and percentage of individuals who report various degrees of difficulty falling asleep as a physical symptom. 20 participants, or 44.4% of the total, reported facing quite a bit of the symptom of difficulty falling asleep.

**c. Weight Gain**

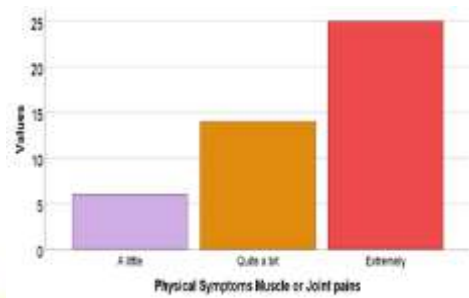


Source: Field Work, 2023

**Fig. 7** Physical Symptoms, Weight Gain

The above bar graph demonstrates the frequency and severity of weight gain as physical symptoms. 44.4% of all participants, reported experiencing no weight gain at this level. The answer of “Not at all” when asked if they had weight gain were 20 respondents.

**d. Muscle or Joint pains**

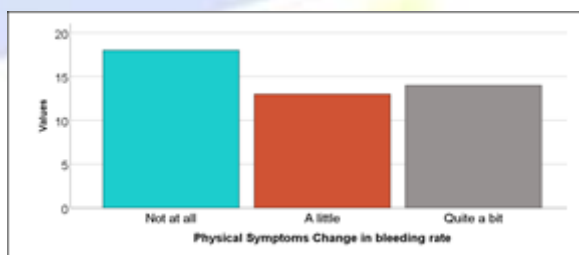


Source: Field Work, 2023

**Fig. 8** Physical Symptoms, Weight Gain

The above bar graph represents the symptoms seen in woman during menopause phase. This symptom includes muscle or joint pain. Extreme severity of muscle pain was seen among 55.6% of the respondent. Quite a bit symptom was seen among 14 respondents.

**e. Change in bleeding rate**

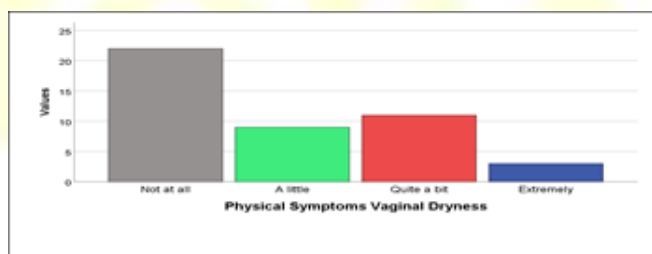


Source: Field Work, 2023

**Fig. 9** Physical Symptoms, Change in bleeding rate

The above bar graph represents changes in bleeding rate as a physical symptom. No extreme changes in bleeding rate were seen in any woman. Rather, 40% woman did not have this symptom at all. 28.9% had little changes in bleeding rate.

**f. Vaginal Dryness**



Source: Field Work, 2023

**Fig. 10** Physical Symptoms, Vaginal Dryness

The above bar graph represents the physical symptoms. Vaginal Dryness severity in extreme level is seen among 6.7% of the population. 48.9% of the population do not have this symptom at all.

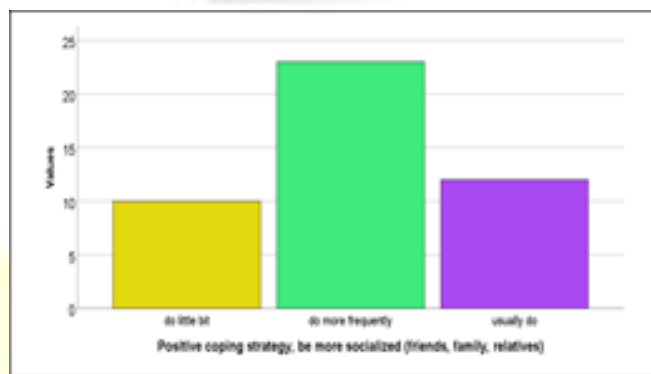
### Findings of the perception and prevailing symptoms

The outcomes of this study provide insight on the complex interplay of social, psychological, and physiological elements that influence women's experiences throughout the menopause transition in Nepal. Menopause clearly presents considerable obstacles in women's social lives, especially in terms of family interactions and marital dynamics. Sexual incompatibility among couples throughout menopause emphasizes the importance of improved understanding and support in personal relationships during this stage of life.

Furthermore, the study emphasizes the relevance of reciprocal pleasure in family relationships as a potential treatment for menopause symptoms. The study highlights wide range of physical, psychological, and social obstacles that women confront throughout the menopause transition by conducting a thorough review of predominant symptoms. Despite efforts to manage with these symptoms, women reported poor mood and behavioral behaviors, underscoring the importance of targeted support treatments to address their emotional well-being during menopause. However, it is reassuring to see that many participants stated a determination to overcome these problems, implying that Nepalese women are resilient and have adaptive coping strategies. As a result, focused educational activities, public health campaigns, and enhanced access to resources for menopause women are critical to closing the gap. Finally, this study emphasizes the importance of holistic assistance programs for women facing the complex issues of menopause in Nepal. We can improve women's experiences during this important stage of life and promote general well-being in our communities by raising awareness, encouraging understanding, and providing specialized support.

### Common Coping Strategies adopted by the respondents

#### a. Positive coping strategy, be more socialized (friends, family, relatives)

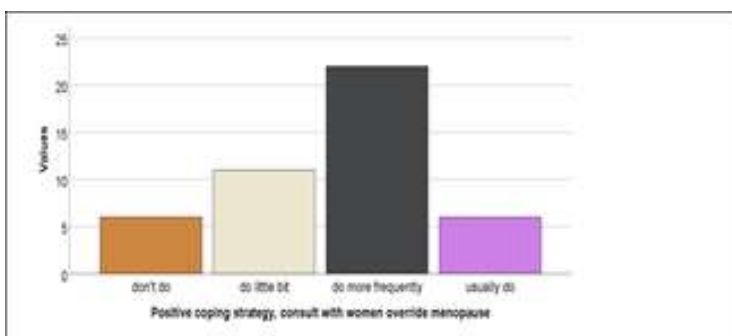


Source: Field Work, 2023

**Fig. 11** Positive Coping Strategy, be more socialized (family, friends, relatives)

The above bar graph represents the woman coping with the symptoms of menopause by socializing with the friends, family and relatives. 51.1% of the woman adopt this coping more frequently. No one disagreed on adopting this coping strategy.

**b. Positive coping strategy, consult with women override menopause**

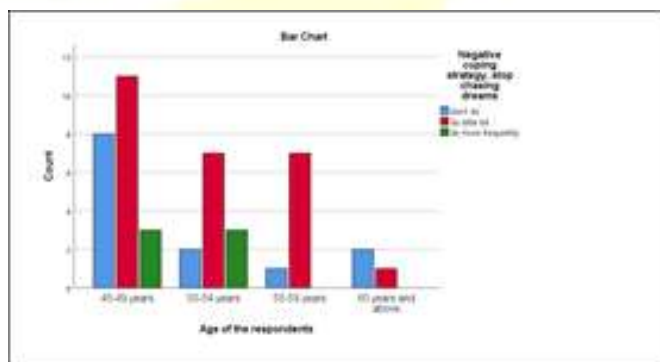


Source: Field Work, 2023

**Fig. 12** Positive coping strategy, consult with women override menopause

The above bar graph represents the positive coping strategy, where woman prefer to consult with woman who have already passed through menopause phase. 48.9% which is 22 respondents discuss about their health condition and symptoms frequently with the woman who have passed through menopause. Whereas, 6 respondents do not consult with the other woman.

**c. Negative coping strategy, sleep long time**



Source: Field Work, 2023

**Fig. 13** Negative Coping Strategy, Sleep long time as per the age.

The pie chart shown above explains that 35.6% of the woman usually sleep long time to cope with the prevailing symptoms. Only 4% of the women do not apply sleeping as a coping strategy. It is shown by the two variables data that the age between 45-49 years old have adopted this strategy more than other groups. And age group above 60 years old, adopted this coping less.

**Social Work Intervention and Recommendation**

The discoveries of this study highlight the urgent need for focused social work interventions and advocacy initiatives to address the issues that menopause women experience in Nepal. For starters, community organizing initiatives can play an important role in creating open discourse and raising knowledge of menopause and related

issues. Working jointly with community members, researchers can help uncover shared concerns and establish collective action plans, such as organizing meetings or campaigns to raise awareness and advocate for change. This grassroots method empowers menopause women to express their needs and concerns while also building community solidarity and support. Furthermore, it is critical to fight for the inclusion of menopause health as a distinct subject on the Ministry of Health and Population's agenda. By emphasizing menopause women's unique health requirements, legislators may guarantee that resources and support services are allocated correctly. This advocacy initiative aims to increase recognition and understanding of menopause within the larger healthcare system, thereby enhancing menopause women's access to quality care and support throughout Nepal. Through these collaborative initiatives, social workers and legislators can improve the well-being and quality of life of menopause women, providing they have the support and resources they need to negotiate this significant life change with dignity and resilience.

## 5. CONCLUSION

In summary, developing appropriate coping mechanisms during menopause is essential to feeling better and maintaining one's health. Women employ a variety of strategies to control their symptoms, including regular exercise, a healthy diet, stress management, and the application of mindfulness and relaxation practices. Having great support throughout this time from friends, family, and healthcare providers is also crucial for feeling supported. This study demonstrates how crucial it is for medical professionals to comprehend these coping mechanisms and include them into patient care regimens. Understanding the relationship between coping strategies and symptoms can help us develop more effective, individualized therapies to support women as they transition through menopause more easily.

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