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# HEALTH RELATED QUALITY OF LIFE IN PERI-MENOPAUSAL AGE GROUP: AN OVERVIEW OF AYURVEDA

# DEEPTI SINGH\*

# Declaration

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# Abstract

Health related quality of life is a measure to know quality of life in the context of one's health and illness. It defines relationship of medical condition or its treatment with one's expected physical, emotional, and social wellbeing. In Ayurveda though this 'term' is not given as described in modern science yet the principle of HRQoL is given due importance. Regarding peri-menopausal age group exclusive literature is not available in Ayurveda texts but diffuse information give useful links. This paper attempts to join those diffused links to assess HRQoL in this age group as per Ayurveda.

Key words: Health related quality of life, Rajonivritti, Peri-menopuse, Ayurveda

# Introduction

Since its conception goal of Ayurveda has been quite explicit about quality of health in healthy individual and quality of management in diseased or in other medical conditions. Quality of health in healthy individual is established through proper practices of *ahar*, *vihaar* in accordance to *Prakriti*, *desh*, *kala*, *vaya*, *agni*. *Dincharya*, *rituchrya* and *rasayan* therapy for physical well-being, and *sadavritta* for psychological and social well-being has been promoted to attain 'Total Health'. When Ayurveda designs quality line of treatment, it advocates those methods of disease pacification which don't provoke other disorder or complications. Health related quality of life is a measure to know quality of life in the context of one's health and illness. It defines relationship of medical condition or its treatment with

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one's expected physical, emotional, and social wellbeing. In Ayurveda though this 'term' is not given as described in modern science yet the principle of HRQoL is given due importance.

# Material and method

The contents and references regarding *Rajonivritti*, were collected from *Brihattrayi*, *Laghuttrayi* and other ancient texts and collection of relevant matter of HRQoLdescribed in journals and websites was done. All collected matters were analyzed to find and assess principle of quality of life as per Ayurveda in women of peri-menopausal age.

# **Objectives**

Goal of Ayurveda regarding quality of health in healthy individual and quality of management in diseased or in other medical conditions has been lucid since its conception. Regarding peri-menopausal age group exclusive literature is not available in Ayurveda texts but diffused information give useful links. This paper attempts to join those diffused links to assess HRQoL in this age group as per Ayurveda.

# Health related Quality of Life

WHO defines Quality of Life as individual's perception of their position in the context of the culture and value systems in which they live and in relation to their goals, expectations, standards and, concern. While defining health, WHO gives stress over the fact that health, is not merely an absence of disease rather it is the state of complete physical, psychological and spiritual well-being. This aspect of defining health is inspired by the concept of 'Total Health' practiced and followed in Ayurveda. Charak has defined Ayurveda is the science or knowledge of four kinds of 'Ayu' (life) viz. 'hitaayu-ahitaayu', 'sukhayu-dukhayu' with description of its span along with wholesome and unwholesome elements for the same. The component 'sukhayu-dukhayu' relates with personal health and 'hitaayu-ahitaayu' is concerned with social health. When Ayurveda designs quality line of treatment, it advocates those methods of disease pacification which don't provoke other disorder and complications. Sharir, Indriya, SatvaandAtma are components of life and when Ayurveda analyze the quality of life it gives following proposals:

Quality of Physical body; Charak signifies that the person who has weight and height according to his/her age (samapramana) with proper amount and placement of mamsa and raktadhatu (sunivishtamamsa-shonit), have proper length and separation of bones in his/her body (samasuvibhaktasthi) and all the structural parts are arranged in a compact manner-is known as healthy. [4] Above characteristics don't include features of whole seven dhatu as a parameter of quality physical body. Here Charakemphasizes on the quality of those anatomical components which can be easily assessed trough five-fold examination method opted by an Ayurveda physician. Ancient scholars have criticized the obese and lean-thin body because both body type lack proper amount, placement and separation of above said dhatu. [5]

Quality of Physiological Body; It is known and measured through proper physiological interplay of dosha-dhatu-mala and regular working status of Agni. When digestive and metabolitory functions are coordinated and regulated in the body, then production of dosha at their respective site occur in qualitative and quantitative balance. <sup>[6]</sup> This homeostasis in dosha physiology brings harmony in the nourishment and functioning of body tissues along with absorption and utilization of beneficial elements and expulsion of wastes out of body. Status of Agni could be known through ones appetite and duration of digestion. <sup>[7]</sup> If a person, who has consumed food in the morning time, feels lightness in the body and can do his/her work without any tiredness after meal, urge food ingestion willingly at dinner time then his digestion is considered normal.

Quality of Psychological Body; Harmony of psychological body i.e. Mana, Indriya and Atmais known through prasannta (feeling of happiness/satisfaction, proper perception of sensations respective to all sense organs) and dridhta (specificity

of sense organs to perceive their own sensations) of foresaid entities. [4,8]In fact Ayurveda scholars have given emphasis over *prsannaindriya* as a prime characteristic of health and say that all other characteristics viz. *Dosha-Dhatu-Mala-Agni Samata* meant to give pleasure to spiritual elements viz. *Mana*, *Indriya* and *Atma*. [4]Even in current medical practices physician rely more on sign and symptoms of patient than their laboratory findings. So the quality of psychological body relies on the mechanism operating between *Mana*, *Indriya*, *Indriyaarth* accurate knowledge passed to *Atma*.

Self-Assessment Method for Health Related Quality of Life; The term 'Swastha' composed of two words viz. 'Swa' and 'Stha' which means being in one's own natural state. Above characteristics to assess quality of life, is the subject matter of a physician mainly. Ayurveda also states the method of self-assessment for common people in a precise and concise manner which can be listed in following points by AcharyaKashyap-(1)Desire for food intake, (2) proper digestion of ingested food, (3) proper evacuation of feces, urine and flatus, (4) lightness in the body, (5) proper functioning of sense organs, (6) timely sleep and awakening with pleasant feeling, (7) strengthening of body and pleasant mind. [9]

# Peri-menopause and Physiology of Rajonivrtti

It is the known as transit period before and after menopause and specified by endocrine and metabolic changes, reduced reproductive abilityand increased risk for physical (hot flush, heart discomfort, sleep discomfort, joint and muscle discomfort, vaginal dryness, sexual problem, bladder problems) and psychological (anxiety, irritability, depression etc.) changes. [10] Worldwide data for the age at which menopause occur is 45-55 years. [11] The Stages of Reproductive Aging Workshop (STRAW) in July 2001 established a nomenclature and guidelines for reproductive ageing system. The basis of the staging system is the (FMP) final menstrual period. Five stages precede the FMP and two follow it, for a total of seven stages which are as follows: [12]

- Reproductive interval: Stages -5 to -3,
- *Menopausal transition* Stages -2 to -1,
- *Postmenopause*: Stages +1 and +2.

Ayurveda defines monthly cycle as- *Rajah*(menstrual blood), a substance, which is uniquely formed in female from *Rasa dhatu* and comes out through the female genital tract every month, the duration of which varies from three daysto seven days. [13] *Bhavaprakash* coinedthe term '*Stridharma*' which indicate starting of reproductive life of a woman with regular monthly cycle [14] age of which range from 11 to 16 years. Modern literature depicts age of the menarche between 11-15 years with a mean of 13 years. '*Rajonivritti*' means absolute cessation of monthly cycle for a period of one year and it denotes end of the reproductive life of female. All ancient scholars considered 50 years as age of menopause i.e. '*Rajonivritti*'. [15] Mean ageof menopause in Indian women population is 46.2 years which is much less in comparison to western population. [16]

According to Ayurveda menopause is appraised as normal physiological process occurring in *Vata* dominated phase of life i.e. *vriddhavastha* (old age). [17] *Vriddhavastha* is the last part of the lifespan and is mainly characterized by degenerative changes like decay in the *Dhatu* (various anatomical tissues), perception power of the *Indriya* (sensory and motor organs), potency, strength, speech, and various mental and cognitive functions (e.g., memory, intellect, reception, retention, and analytic ability). [18] Physical and psychological changes occurring in peri-menopausal women is not only due to estrogen deprivation but also involves consequences of ageing. [19]

Though menopause is part of normal physiology but since past, life expectancy of women has been increased, social attitude towards this phase has been changed<sup>[20]</sup> and worldwide studies on perimenopausal age group and its relation to risk of cardiovascular disease, endocrine and metabolic changes and altered autonomic responses, have created concern in medical science.<sup>[21,22]</sup>

Health Related QoL in Peri-menopause: Contemporary View; From fetal life onwardshuman ovary undergoes continuous and progressive decline in the number of follicles, number of which being several millions from birth to less than thousand at menopause. [10] A multi-centric study of human ovaries showed that the rate of follicular disappearance increases by the age of 37.5 years or once the follicular stock reaches a critical number of 25,000 follicles. [23] The theory that menopause is triggered primarily by ovarian aging is supported by the coincident occurrence of follicular depletion, elevated gonadotropin levels, and subsequent menstrual irregularity with ultimate cessation of bleeding. [10] Women in menopausal age have been reported to show some characteristic changes viz. greater sympathetic and less parasympathetic activity than premenopausal womenwhich may account for their increased risk of coronary artery disease. [24,25] So above progressive transit of peri-menopausal age bring several endocrine, metabolic and autonomic changes which burden post reproductive life of women ranging from common physiological problems to severe degree of discomfort.

Berlin Centre for Epidemiology and Health Research developed a tool for assessment of health related quality of life in peri-menopausal women. [26] The instrument consists of 11 items with 5 point rating scale (0-no symptoms to 4-very severe) in accordance of severity of complaint perceived. The composite score is the sum of the dimension score which is obtained by adding the scores of the items of the respective dimensions. The total score of the MRS ranges between 0 (asymptomatic) and 44 (highest degree of complaints). The minimal/maximal scores vary between the three dimensions depending on the number of complaints allocated to the respective dimension of symptoms:

- Psychological symptoms: 0 to 16 scoring points (4 symptoms: depressive moods, irritability, anxious, physical and mental exhaustion)
- Somatic symptoms: 0 to 16 points (4 symptoms: Hot flushes, heart discomfort, sleeping problems, joint & muscular discomfort)
- Urogenital symptoms: 0 to 12 points (3 symptoms: sexual problems, bladder problems, and vaginal dryness).

Health Related QoL in Peri-menopause: View of Ayurveda; 'Raja'is by product of Rasadhatu according to Ayurveda Physiology. [15] When Rasa Dhatu is acted upon by Rasagni, Prasad and Kittabhaga are generated and Raja or Artava get produced and nourished by Prasad bhagaof Rasa Dhatu. Tridosha(Vata, Pitta, Kapha) perform their homeostatic mechanism in all parts of life but each stage of life is dominated by each of Tridoshaaffecting that part of life in accordance with their guna and karma. For example in last phase of life (vriddhavastha) vata is dominated, the reason being progressive dhatu-kshaya in the phase of ageing.

The detailed description of cause, pathophysiology and symptoms of 'Rajonivrtti' are not found as a whole, however, the causes responsible for manifestation of Rajah - [kala (time), svabhava (naturally occurring), vayu (dominant or increased level of vata- disturbing act of menstruation and other irregularities in body and mind physiology viz. dryness, pain, irritability etc.), karma (practice of unwholesome diet, regimen and habits)] along with Dhatu-kshaya (deterioration of body tissues due to aging process) and Abhighata (direct and indirect trauma to ArtavahaSrotas-the uterus and uterine arteries), may be considered as causal factors for Rajonivritti (menopause) and gives links to pathophysiology, symptoms and signs associated with this phase of women's life. [27,28]

Change in Physical body during Peri-menopause: Due to progressive Dhatu-kshayametabolism of mamsa and raktadhatu is compromised leading dyslipidemic changes in the body. The joint spaces are also reduced because of deprived shleshkakaphaand total body contour is over or under-changed because of deranged dhatuupachayakram. Females are prone tovaginal dryness, loss of skin tone, excess cholesterol and mucus, edema in joints. [27,28]

Change in Physiological body during Peri-menopause: Dominant vataalong with decreased level of KaphaDoshaduring this phase brings though physiological but deranged homeostasis of Dosha-

*Dhatu-Mala-Agni*coordination and functions, leading to symptoms like weight gain for no reason, mild or variable hot flashes, palpitations, backache, fluid retention, slow digestion, feeling of mental and physical heaviness, sluggishness, lethargy, lazy etc. [27,28]

*Change in Psychological body during Peri-menopause:* The mechanism of knowledge perception through the processing of *Mana, Indriya, Indriyaarth* and *Atma* is also get influenced leading to anger, irritabilitylack of concentration, restlessness, fear, depression, confusion, nervousness, anxiety, mood swings, and memory loss, sleepiness, depressed, lacking motivation. [27,28]

The occurrence of above symptoms/complaint varies according to one's own psychosomatic constitution along with various geographical areas, their socio-cultural attitudes towards menopause. In the senile stage of life there is gradual decrement of different physio-anatomical aspects described in *Madhyavastha* i.e. *Bala-Virya- Paurush- Parakrama*etc. *SharangdharSamhita* quotes loss of *Medha*(retention power) in fourth decade and *Buddhi* (intellect power) in ninth decade of life. [29]

# Conclusion

We can conclude that though there is less availability of extensive descriptions of *Rajonivritti* in *Brihattrayi*yet we have important links in *Laghuttrayi* and other ancient texts to find status of health related quality of life in peri-menopausal age. The health related QoL during this phase can be known and assessed through-1) the comparison between physiological traits of reproductive life and post reproductive life of women, 2) through the gradual decrement of different physioanatomical aspects viz. *Bala-Virya- Paurush- Parakrama*etc.during transit of *Madhyavastha*to *vriddhavastha*, 3) characteristic changes occurring during *vata* dominated phase of *vriddhavastha*.

# Limitations and Future Research

In Ayurveda the matter related to QoL is found exclusively in ancient literature but in scattered manner and lack validity and consistency. Though WHO has developed tool to assess QoL in different cultural groups yet an instrument can be developed in ancient system of medicine, to assess the health related QoL in peri-menopausal women group which may be most suited to Indian population and method of diagnosis and management for the same as per Ayurveda.

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