

## **Psychological experience of menopause: a qualitative analysis of cases with and without hormonal therapy support**

*D. Di Corrado, S. Di Nuovo<sup>1</sup>, G.M. Trovato, D. Catalano<sup>2</sup>, G. Sciacchitano, S. Rizzo<sup>3</sup>.*

The onset of menopause implies relevant psychophysiological changes in lifespan of women, often linked to disease, discomfort and reduced quality of life.

To better understand attitudes and perceptions of this event, biological and sociological interpretative models are not sufficient, because of the relevant individual differences pertaining both to physical changes and psychological experience regarding normality and pathology of climaterium.

Authors tried to integrate previous quantitative research with a qualitative approach aimed to study in depth the subjective conditions of women in menopause, and ascertain the possibility of really enhancing their quality of life in this critical phase, through a pharmacological and psychological therapy.

The psychological condition of women who accept the end of fertility as a natural phase of lifespan is very different from that of other women who consider the climaterium as an illness to be medically treated.

Thirty women in menopause (aged 45-62) participated in a qualitative interview about the use of drugs, attitude toward illness and therapies, perceived changes in personal and family life, particularly in the framework of sexuality.

Qualitative analysis results suggested that the impact of medical therapies (as the *Hormone Replacement Therapy*) on women who perceive menopause as a pathological change in lifespan is very peculiar: symptoms acceptance is indeed reduced, overall concern about health and illness is greater, and psychophysiological changes associated to climaterium (including changes in sexuality) are experienced as more negative.

Research data clearly showed that specific interventions both at medical and psychological level are needed to shift from perceiving the climaterium as an illness, or as an inevitable experience which negatively affects woman's lifespan, to positively considering this transitional phase as an opportunity for women to enhance self care and improve their lifestyle.

<sup>1</sup>*Cattedra di Psicologia – Facoltà di Scienze della Formazione Università di Catania*

E-mail: [s.dinuovo@mail.fmag.unict.it](mailto:s.dinuovo@mail.fmag.unict.it)

<sup>2</sup>*Istituto di Medicina Interna e Terapia Medica – Facoltà di Medicina e Chirurgia Università di Catania*

<sup>3</sup>*Servizio di menopausa, Clinica Ostetrica e Ginecologica Università di Catania e Azienda Ospedaliera V. Emanuele – Catania*