

**EXPLORING SEXUAL EXPERIENCES AMONG MENOPAUSAL
WOMEN IN SEMI-URBAN NORTHERN VIETNAM**

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ABSTRACT

In all countries, the menopausal period is a critical time of a woman's life cycle. The cultural meanings of menopause and old age strongly influence the sexuality of aged women, especially women in semi-urban areas where moral ideals are expressed in everyday bodily manner and attitude. Menopausal women are regarded as asexual by the society no matter whether they are sexually active or not. They are excluded from sexual and reproductive health programs. Therefore, related sexual health problems emerge. The objective of my study is to explore the sexual experiences of menopausal women and to understand how cultural meanings related to menopause and old age influence older women's sexuality. Feminist ethnographic methodology was employed in this study. Twenty-two informants were recruited. Life-history interviews, focus group discussions, in-depth interviews, informal interviews and participant observation were utilized as my research methods.

My research has found out that there are several cultural meanings related to menopause and old age, such as menopause being the state of cessation of bad blood release, being older is being asexual, etc. There are several meanings that menopausal women attached to their sexual behavior including sex for family's happiness, for health, and for fulfilling the wife's duty. The findings show that women who are economically independent bring positive meanings to menopause and old age, and those who have a sensitive sexual partner seem to be sexually active and have positive sexual life experiences. It is recommended that reproductive health programs should organize forums for the middle age group in which women can share their experiences, beliefs and practices about menopause in general and sexuality in particular in order to provide an optimistic view on sex in advanced age. Furthermore, interventions should not only focus on the female group. The educational activities should include men to sensitize them toward menopausal women's feelings.

KEY WORDS: CULTURE/ MENOPAUSE/ SEXUALITY/ VIETNAM.

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