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**Feeling like a ‘perimenopausal stress ball’: menopause and midlife stress in people with autism**

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*Objectives:* The menopausal transition is often difficult for women, marked by emotional, social and cognitive changes associated with physical and mental health adjustments. We examined the menopausal experience of women with autism, who have pre-existing difficulties in these areas, in order to highlight stressful experiences relating to midlife.

*Design:* In-depth individual interviews using interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA) to examine the menopausal journey of individuals with autism.

*Methods:* Seventeen biologically female autistic people were interviewed in their preferred format via Skype, telephone, on-line survey or instant messenger. Participants were aged 41-66 years, and all self-reported as currently going through menopause or being post-menopausal. The semi-structured interview schedule covered questions relating to peri-menopausal through to post-menopausal experiences, feelings and emotions surrounding menopause, and the impact of these experiences on their lives.

*Results:* Four themes emerged: 1) journey to self-awareness (growing up with autism and effect of menopause on social and emotional identification); 2) menopausal attitudes and understanding (lack of menopausal knowledge, stereotyping and positive aspects of menopause); 3) signs, symptoms and multiple impacts of menopause (including physiological, cognition, emotions and stress reactivity, communication and social relationships, sensory sensitivity); and 4) navigating a neurodiverse menopause (additional challenges during menopause in autism, support and unmet needs).

*Conclusions:* Many participants were unprepared for the severity of menopausal symptoms, which frequently exacerbated daily difficulties and compromised pre-existing coping skills. This study focuses the need for increased attention to stress experienced in midlife, particularly in those with pre-existing conditions for whom underlying hormonal changes exacerbate symptoms.