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Age of Natural Menopause Linked With Intergenerational Violence Exposures

New study demonstrates that a woman's own abuse, as well as witnessing the abuse of others, affects reproductive aging

CLEVELAND, Ohio (Feb 16, 2022)—Research on women's violence exposure is timely as the COVID pandemic has elevated rates of intimate partner violence and child abuse. A new study shows that a woman's collective violence exposure—consisting of her own abuse and that of her child—speeds up reproductive aging to result in an earlier age of menopause. Study results are published online today in *Menopause*, the journal of The North American Menopause Society (NAMS).

Violence exposure has previously been shown to be associated with an array of mental and physical health problems. Newer research is additionally revealing its connection with the pace of reproductive aging. Early menopause, particularly before age 45, is associated with increased risks of heart disease, osteoporosis, and premature death.

In addition, studies have shown that childhood sexual and physical abuse are associated with earlier menarche. Associations between violence and accelerated reproductive aging in the early and later life course of women are believed to work through the disruption of the hypothalamic-pituitary-adrenal axis and the body's response to stress. Previous studies, however, have been limited to focusing on the effect of a woman's own abuse.

This new study is one of the first to look at what is known as *intergenerational violence exposure* and its effect on the age of menopause. It was designed to evaluate how both maternal and child violence exposures will independently accelerate maternal menopause timing. It concluded that a mother's own childhood physical abuse and her child's sexual abuse were both associated with an earlier age of menopause. Specifically, mothers who were physically abused in childhood and have a child who experienced regular sexual abuse reached menopause 8.78 years earlier than mothers without a history of personal abuse or abuse of their child.

Study results are published in the article "Association between intergenerational violence exposure and maternal age of menopause."

"This study underscores the devastating effect of exposure to violence that is known to affect subsequent generations. The health-related burden of intergenerational violence is substantial and includes the possibility of early onset menopause and the associated potential long-term adverse health outcomes. Addressing this issue will require involvement of multiple sectors and necessitate social change, as well as updated policies and education," says Dr. Stephanie Faubion, NAMS medical director.

For more information about menopause and healthy aging, visit www.menopause.org.

Founded in 1989, The North American Menopause Society (NAMS) is North America's leading nonprofit organization dedicated to promoting the health and quality of life of all women during midlife and beyond through an understanding of menopause and healthy aging. Its multidisciplinary membership of 2,000 leaders in the field—including clinical and basic science experts from medicine, nursing, sociology, psychology, nutrition, anthropology, epidemiology, pharmacy, and education—makes NAMS uniquely qualified to serve as the definitive resource for health professionals and the public for accurate, unbiased information about menopause and healthy aging. To learn more about NAMS, visit www.menopause.org.