

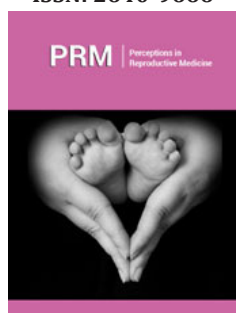
The Challenge of Womanhood...

Marina Matos de Moura Faíco^{1,2*}

¹Department of Obstetrics, Paulista School of Medicine, São Paulo Federal University (EPM UNIFESP), Brazil

²Department of Gynaecology and Obstetrics, Caratinga University Center -UNEC, Brazil

ISSN: 2640-9666



***Corresponding author:** Marina Matos de Moura Faíco, Department of Obstetrics, Paulista School of Medicine, São Paulo Federal University (EPM UNIFESP), Brazil and Department of Gynaecology and Obstetrics, Caratinga University Centre-UNEC Brazil, Rua João Pinheiro, 244 – Centro – Caratinga/MG, Brazil

Submission:  August 06, 2026

Published:  August 28, 2026

Volume 6 - Issue 4

How to cite this article: Marina Matos de Moura Faíco*. The Challenge of Womanhood.... Perceptions Reprod Med. 6(4). PRM. 000641. 2026.
DOI: [10.31031/PRM.2026.06.000641](https://doi.org/10.31031/PRM.2026.06.000641)

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Opinion

Balancing multiple roles at once while coping with the physiological changes inherent to the female body is far from easy; additionally, as mothers, wives, professionals and household managers, women today occupy a distinct place in society. Amid so many responsibilities, hormonal changes and the desire for motherhood can make a woman's life even more complex. The social image of women as mothers and wives remains deeply ingrained, even as women now take on so many different roles. Their growing presence in the workforce has not changed this view; beyond this, it has simply added the role of worker and professional to the many responsibilities they already carry. Within this shift in roles, women have gained greater control over their sexuality. Modern contraceptive technologies have helped free them from male control over reproduction, making the decision to become pregnant or have children almost entirely their own. A woman's reproductive function begins with her first menstrual period during puberty, a key milestone in her development and transition into adulthood. From that moment, she becomes biologically capable of reproduction. This usually occurs between the ages of 12 and 15 and continues until the end of her reproductive years, marked by menopause, which occurs at around age 50 on average. Ovarian function has a limited duration, determined genetically for each woman and there is no exact formula for predicting when female reproductive capacity will decline. In general, this decline is gradual and becomes more significant between the ages of 30 and 40.

The reality is that the most productive stage of a woman's life often overlaps with her strongest reproductive years. Becoming a mother has become both a privilege and a personal choice. Perhaps the greatest dilemma for women in the 21st century is deciding when the right time is to fulfil that dream. Professional demands often conflict with this desire and place considerable pressure on women. How can a woman balance caring for a child with maintaining her career? Motherhood transforms a woman. Being a mother is experiencing womanhood in its fullest form and to complete the cycle of life. But what about the limits of reproductive capacity? This is another challenge women face in the 21st century. With so many responsibilities today, women often experience conflicts that bring joy, frustration, disappointment and many concerns, in addition to the wide range of symptoms that may result from hormonal changes. Being a woman is singular in a deep way. Beyond basic biology, a woman's physical reality and lived experiences differ fundamentally from those of men-so much so that shared species status often feels like where the similarities end.

Women may experience so many symptoms at different stages of life that it becomes difficult to define what is "normal." I avoid using that word because, today, it seems too limited to describe what it means to be a woman. From this perspective, "Normal" suggests a rule or standard-but where does that fit in a woman's life? What is normal during menopause? What about during menstruation, adolescence, the premenstrual period, pregnancy, or the

postpartum phase? Does “normal” even exist? Hot flashes, night sweats, insomnia, mood changes, depression, anxiety, brain fog, short-term memory issues, reduced concentration, vaginal dryness, low libido, urinary incontinence, weight gain, hair loss, dry skin, joint and muscle pain, fatigue, palpitations, migraines, dizziness, tingling, digestive problems and other symptoms may all be associated with one stage of a woman’s life: the climacteric, when the often-misunderstood menopause occurs. Reading such a long list of possible symptoms can be tiring. Now imagine experiencing them—and realizing that they may represent only the tip of the iceberg. How can a woman move through this turbulent stage of life with greater ease? The answer is simple and complex at the same time: by understanding the process and clearing the fog that can settle over her mind and life. The more I search for answers, which are deeply individual, the more convinced I become that women spend much of their lives trying to understand who they are. Balancing the responsibilities assigned to women throughout their lives is difficult, but the phase where a woman bears the weight of aging makes everything even more complicated. Aging and gaining

experience through each stage of life is a gift. I believe it is essential to support, inform and guide women as they move through the specific challenges of the phase they are living. Each moment is part of a larger journey, one shaped by everything that has passed and everything still to come.

So, what does a woman need at each stage of life?

She needs to be seen, valued and, above all, able to understand herself. Women often reach this stage feeling overwhelmed and exhausted, clinging to menopausal symptoms to explain their vulnerabilities. Yet what appears to be a symptom often serves to conceal deeper wounds and pain, whether physical or emotional.

For this reason, we must remember that what is visible does not always reveal what is truly happening. Often, it is only the “tip of the iceberg.” In conclusion, the fog surrounding a woman’s internal development along with her lack of self-knowledge creates a profound challenge both for her understanding and for others to truly comprehend her.