

What is the nature and the extent of discrimination faced by women experiencing the menopause?

I believe that the discrimination in the MOD isn't particularly direct, it is indirect and reflected.

Firstly, MOD has the right equality policies in place, but it doesn't have a menopause policy or a strategy for dealing with it. This means that the only formal route for women having issues is by claiming it to be a disability, and requiring reasonable adjustments. Who wants to do that with something so personal unless they absolutely have to? Why would we ever consider ourselves disabled just for going through an unavoidable life stage?

Secondly, there is the embarrassment and stigma factor. This isn't to be under-estimated. We try and soldier on and when we can't cope with the workload through the lack of sleep, brain fog and mental health challenges, we have no choice but to speak directly to our (mostly male) managers about the problems we're having to arrange informal or formal adjustments. This is probably why a lot of women leave their workplace - it's the lesser of two evils.

Finally, there is pressure on us in light of the above to go down the HRT route as the only way of keeping our performance up - and so keeping our jobs and careers (especially given the requirement to keep on working until we are at least 67).

How does this impact wider society?

The country loses women's skills, experience and economic activity; women themselves feel like they're 'past it' and can lose their drive and confidence.

How can businesses factor in the needs of employees going through the menopause?

It's still a taboo. Women themselves are acutely embarrassed about the whole thing. So, businesses have to make a decision about whether to actively support their women or to let them disappear if they can't cope with the workload. If it's the former, support really needs to be spear-headed through a senior female in the organisation. Just the thought of a man talking about it brings me out in a cold sweat. The other key point is that it needs to stay confidential if the woman wants it to.

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