

Written evidence submitted by Mrs Sue Johnson [MEW0012]

Call for evidence equality and women's committee: menopause

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

This is an extremely difficult question to answer as much of the discrimination is insidious and not overt. From personal experience, since the age of 50 I have had people asking me when I plan to retire. This is not a question I hear made to my male colleagues and appears more closely related to age and gender than menopause specifically. This impacts on the psychological impact of menopause especially around self-image and self-worth, changing body image, anxiety and depression.

Many of my colleagues experiencing menopause along with my own experience is that sharing information around menopause and its work impact is difficult. Lack of concentration and poor memory impacts on the abilities to meet targets or produce required work. This can be difficult to raise as individuals that want to highlight their shortcomings (which may not have been noticed) this will make themselves the focus of attention or scrutiny after raising concerns .

Accessing appropriate services such as toilet facilities with private washing facilities both in the workplace and when out and about can have an impact where flooding, and unexpected period or just general sweatiness make washing essential.

Women can suffer from a lack of confidence as they reach this point of life impacting on their willingness to apply for senior positions or confidence in achieving them.

Jokes about the menopause are not infrequent and although self deprecation may be a way of coping comments are not always helpful or supportive.

- How does this impact wider society?

Menopausal women do not have a high-profile in any fora and men are still much more likely to be in senior positions in later life.

- What is the economic impact of menopause discrimination?

Society is missing out on the skills and knowledge of women contributing to the economy. Menopausal women may well retire early to look after grandchildren or other parents as they are still seen as the caregiver.

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

An open and supportive culture across the whole adult life pathway would be the best way to manage menopause rather than suddenly expecting people to discuss personal matters later in life. Many younger women suffer from gender -related issues such as infertility, endometriosis, early menopause and fibroid related ill health. While pregnancy -related issues are well covered policies, many women will still not talk about fertility challenges or miscarriage fearing they will be disadvantaged if it is known they are going to need time to manage to related issues. We are a long way off enabling women talk about menopause in a supportive manner.

Workplace policies are the ideal place to start however greater publicity in general is needed for those policies to be adopted and adapted appropriately. Support needs to be given to both unionised and non-unionised workplaces as well as considering the needs of self-employed women who may feel they have no alternative but to end their business when menopause hits.

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- How can practices addressing workplace discrimination relating to menopause be implemented? For example, through guidance, advice, adjustments, or enforcement.
 - What are examples of best or most inclusive practices?

National guidance on good work force policies will be welcomed.

NHS advice with access to good quality menopause support is essential. Many GPs still do not follow NICE guidance with several colleagues managing menopause reporting back that male GPs in particular are completely unsupportive and frequently refer women to mental health services rather than consider more holistic support for their change in hormonal status.

- How should people who experience the menopause but do not identify as women be supported in relation to menopause and the workplace?

Gender neutral facilities would be the least discriminatory way to support people who do not identify as women menopause.

The best way to identify support is to ask those people who do not identify as women what they would find useful or would have found useful if they have already passed through the menopause.

Guidance documents advice and support for people who do not identify as women should be clearly signposted to both the people and their employers.

- How well does current legislation protect women from discrimination in the workplace associated with the menopause?

There have been recent cases at employment tribunal's where women were shown to have been unfairly treated during menopause. This suggests legislation is not currently robust enough or awareness is low. Further work may be needed to identify which is the case.

- Should current legislation be amended?

Guidance around gender and age discrimination may need to be expanded rather than legislation changed

- What further legislation is required to enable employers to put in place a workplace menopause policy to protect people going through the menopause whilst at work?

Legislation around facilities would be helpful

- How effective has Government action been at addressing workplace discrimination related to the menopause, and what more can the Government do to address this issue?

Government action is low-profile. A quick Internet search brings up charitable organisations and trade union bodies as the primary promoters of decreasing workplace discrimination related to the menopause. The government should give more consideration to promoting good practice and embedding legislation into policies. They could lead by example by developing good policies for public sector organisations and promoting their use.

- How effectively is the Government Equalities Office working across Government to embed a strategic approach to addressing the impact of menopause in the workplace?

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I found this consultation from a workplace awareness session on the menopause. It had not come to my attention in any other way. I consider myself to be reasonably aware of women's issues and public policy however despite maybe having seen this review was taking place I haven't known that I could contribute as an individual.

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