

Written evidence from Hilary Carse [MEW0027]

I qualified as a pharmacist in 1982 and worked within the profession until being forced to leave in 2014 aged 54. The age of my working demise says it all in my view.

In 2010, at the age of 50, I felt as if I was approaching the peak of my career. Like many women of my generation from a working class background, I had fought to be allowed to be educated, to get a university place, to get into a profession, to navigate a career path, to have maternity rights and crucially a right to return to that career pathway.

Perhaps naively I felt I'd navigated the anticipated gender pitfalls.

My children were becoming independent and now was the moment for me to savour the culmination of my professional knowledge and experience.

And then the menopause hit me like a tsunami.

Trying to take a responsible professional attitude to this, I approached my GP, my employers and also my professional body with a view to getting help with debilitating symptoms and/or workplace conditions and expectations. At every turn I encountered sexism, gaslighting and eventually a sustained disruption by my employer of my workplace setting and hours-supposedly to deal with their unforeseen needs. For months I tried to cope but menopausal symptoms kept flooring me and I had to take the odd day off to stabilise myself. After 30 plus years as a proud professional, I was faced with the humiliation of disciplinary interviews because of these absences. Coupled with the unsupportive working conditions this was the final straw for me.

I could perhaps have fought my employers for what felt like unfairness, but quite frankly I felt so unwell with menopausal symptoms I just wanted to walk away. The sustained negative pressure brought to bear on me by my employers I feel was in essence constructive dismissal. The whole experience has left me feeling defeated and with a sense of shame at not fighting more for my right to remain in professional employment. Now I find myself noticing such an absence of women of my age in the workplace and I wonder if their journey experiences have been similar to mine.

What a waste of skills!

I felt personally unable to fight back at the time but I'm hoping by contributing to this call for evidence that I can perhaps help move the dial to better employment rights for women.

Good luck and thankyou.

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