

Written evidence from Name Withheld [MEW0060]

I left a senior role in 2021. I was one of 5 people made redundant at the same time, 4 were women, 3 of us were over 50. My employer employed approx. 70 staff from approx. 18 to 65. I don't know the age or gender split. But there was a pervading attitude that young people (under 25) are dynamic and "with it" whilst older women in particular were taken for granted. I directly challenged the male CEO once when he said we wanted "young dynamic people". We were loyal, extremely hardworking, and juggled caring responsibilities for children, parents and partners with demanding roles. But when it came to a restructure, we were in the firing line. We were disposable.

I wasn't made redundant because I was menopausal, but losing my job has significantly impacted on my financially. I was a sole earner. I have lost my employment rights, healthcare and pension at a critical point in life. I still have a significant mortgage and a young teenager who may go to university in a few years' time. I have skills and resources and have set up my own business but it is very tough starting out. I am worried about my financial future.

Realities of perimenopause/ menopause

Perimenopause and menopause are really tough on the body. I have haemorrhaged twice whilst travelling for work. I once had to wash my dress in the public toilet of a hotel and dry it under the hand dryer before a full day presentation. This was mortifying and distressing – yet I still had to perform at the top of my game. I've completely blanked in presentations – I had to jokingly ask the audience "what was I talking about"? Again, really embarrassing. I've fainted at work several times – we never got to the bottom of that. My hormones have been all over the place and so have my moods – I get very emotional which is embarrassing in a workplace. A man will never experience menopause this so cannot understand the effect these physical symptoms have on performance. Yet as women we feel we cannot let ourselves or the side down and have to constantly outperform men just to prove our worth.

Practical issues in an office

1. The office windows could not be opened. The younger staff frequently complained of the cold and wanted to put heaters on. I regularly suggested they wear more clothes because we couldn't all bear the heat. They were given heaters. Yet older women requesting fans were told to buy their own. I reminded my (male) director that a number of women on his team were either perimenopausal or menopausal. He didn't want to think about it. I was a senior manager, responsible for a key function, but my concerns were dismissed. Instead I was just seen as awkward and difficult. In hindsight, I have been going through perimenopause for a number of years – I just didn't recognise it. And yes, whilst I need to be aware of what's going on in my own body, HR should be very aware of this when they look at the demographics of their workforce.
2. There was no sick room, no private space you could go to when you just needed a break from the noise of the office.
3. They wanted to smarten up office wear. Rather than deal with the individuals concerned we were all mandated to wear jackets in office meetings. Again, meeting rooms were very hot with

poor ventilation. I explained to HR why I couldn't do this – the male HR director just didn't get it. The matter was never raised with me again.

Conclusion

Yes, menopause is a taboo in an office – despite being a senior member of staff, very good at my job I have challenged young male colleagues about comments and behaviour in the office – I actually heard them discussing how a colleague was probably having her period because we was quite grumpy. I could do this because I was a senior manager and felt I had a responsibility towards other women in the office who were younger and less confident but I shouldn't have to. Apart from me, I don't know if anyone else ever pulled them up.

I have no idea what government plans to assist older women in the workforce. Progress has been poor on so many fronts. I fear menopause is becoming a fashionable topic for employers to think about but given the lack of progress on pay, and other diversity matters, I expect little real support from employers or government. They will pay it lip service, have a policy, but no actual understanding of what it means. In practical terms we need spaces which are cool and quiet. We need to be appraised on results, not the hours of work.

I realise I offer little in terms of critique of legislation – in fact legislation is not the answer by itself. This is about a fundamental consideration of what women have to deal with in the workplace – menopause is just issue. I know I come across quite angry, because I am. There is little respect shown to older women in the workplace but we are a huge resource, have a lot to give and want to work.

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