

## Written evidence from Over the Bloody Moon [MEW0076]

Over The Bloody Moon is a menopause support provider, working with FTSE100 organisations, NHS Trusts and councils, as well as law practices, FMCG, healthcare, tech and media organisations. We run a thriving Instagram community, as well as two private Facebook groups – one dedicated to people transitioning through menopause in the workplace. We hear first-hand, people's experiences and challenges due to the lack of education, awareness and support at work.

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

The nature of discrimination is widespread amongst organisation, from NHS through to SME's due to a lack of education, awareness and training on how to identify or respond appropriately to menopause. We hear stories of discrimination every day.

One woman was told how she exuded stress and anxiety which didn't reflect well in her client-facing role. She was given this feedback without any solutions or offer of support. As she hadn't yet joined the dots between heightened stress and insomnia, she felt like she was a failure and no longer up to the job. She subsequently handed in her notice.

Another woman told us how she faced discrimination who was experiencing disrupted sleep due to night sweats, came into work exhausted. She was told by her line manager that she had lost her mojo and was no longer putting in the expected energy compared to other teammates. This was raised in her annual performance review. She subsequently handed in her notice.

Whilst running an Over The Bloody Moon Menopause Masterclass aimed at HR Directors, EDI and Women's Network leads, one HR Director told us when she floated the idea of having a menopause awareness session to the Board of a large media brand, she was told "Should we be having one for testosterone too!" Everyone in the Boardroom laughed.

We would say the nature and extent of discrimination against discrimination is widespread, and not exclusive to men or those not transitioning. There are situations where we have seen and heard senior women telling staff that menopause isn't that bad and to get on with it. If people transitioning through menopause cannot truly share how they are feeling, this causes stigma, biasing and discrimination. According to Vodafone / Opinionium research, last March, 33% hide their symptoms at work.

We often start our workshops asking people to come up with a word they associate with menopause. The most common amongst those transitioning or not transitioning through menopause is 'moody'. Then comes 'old'. With negative associations like that, there is a huge job to be done culturally and societally to show a more positive side to menopause.

How does this impact wider society?

Menopause is a massively overlooked EDI issue. Women support communities, so when they wilt, communities wilt. When they thrive, communities thrive. Women operate in an ecosystem. Those around them are impacted. Relationships can breakdown with the greatest level of divorces falling within menopausal ages. Families can breakdown. Suicides are at their highest during menopausal age.

What is the economic impact of menopause discrimination?

We were reviewing the other month, ONS Labour Force recent stats. Around 5.5m in the UK are aged 40-54 years. The age band where the majority but not all with transition through perimenopause, menopause and become post-menopausal. Just under 75% transition through menopause whilst working. Absenteeism, presenteeism, reduced productivity, and attrition are a few costs to organisations. Through training and support, discrimination can start to be dismantled.

Sadly, those finding it hard to manage menopause or with little support network are most at risk of leaving the workplace. It's estimated that around 15%-20% leave the workplace in perimenopause temporarily, triggered by a loss of confidence. That's a loss in talent, knowledge, experience and role models.

We all know that businesses thrive with an intergenerational, gender balanced team. Those in natural menopause are positive role models to younger generations and demonstrate gender parity is achievable in senior leadership. Specifically, people who identify as women, bring with them beneficial skills in a team environment such as mentoring, organisation skills and leadership in change management.

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

Conduct an anonymous employee survey to see how many people are affected, in what ways and ask them what they need, in terms of support.

Menopause is a health and wellbeing issue that needs to be addressed but it also transcends other aspects of the business – leadership and development, diversity and inclusion. Creating a cross discipline strategy that helps those transitioning through menopause is key.

Recognise too that everyone's experience is unique. A person induced into menopause due to hormone treatment for PMDD, or someone recovering from an oophorectomy, plunged into immediate menopause will differ from another who may be experiencing stress in early menopause or another experiencing hot flushes or incontinence in natural menopause.

Businesses need to understand there are many different shades of menopause and only by having conversations with their staff and treating each case individually, can they better support people's needs.

How can practices addressing workplace discrimination relating to menopause be implemented? For example, through guidance, advice, adjustments, or enforcement.

Menopause awareness workshops are key to building empathy and responding appropriately. We've run nearly a hundred workshops this year and 90%+ are attended by women. Men or those 'not there yet', don't think it's relevant for them, so most often the people that show up are those impacted by menopause. This segregates women and makes them feel invisible or not cared about in the workplace. Menopause awareness workshops should be mandatory and new employees should be made to watch the recordings.

Any line manager should be trained thoroughly (not just an hour's awareness workshop) but an in-depth, accredited online course where they learn at their own pace how to prepare for a meeting, assess and assist a colleague, demonstrate empathy and understanding, support and signpost and encourage positive action. Having a guidance document for all employees to tell them how to spot the signs, as well as how to support their employees is also important.

What are examples of best or most inclusive practices?

Channel 4's menopause policy is one of several that offer people a set number of days of paid leave.

Dark Horse's open policy is simply written and beautifully designed, so readers engage and understand it, rather than skip over a dull compliance document.

CDM London where we ran a workshop in March had virtually full attendance by employees and the men showed up. We had stimulating breakout discussions on how as an organisation, they could demonstrate empathy and support.

Experian and Mars run regular events that are aimed at all people in the business. Mars brought in a comedian to share her story and stimulate discussion.

We are running a global panelled event for Kantar Worldwide's monthly 'Disruption Talks' which includes andropause, as well as menopause. We will hear from clinicians, anthropologists, and neuroscientists about the impact of menopause and how this differs by culture, heritage, and other variances. We have also invited Kantar's employees to share their stories and within this, we will hear from a male partner about what their experience of menopause is like and how they've been impacted, as well as someone experiencing induced / early menopause to disrupt associations.

We also think there is huge power in ERG's – employment resource groups – as these cultivate an open, supportive culture. We love Pinsent Mason's Fan Clubs.

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

They should have the right for support, as women experiencing menopause is offered but a recognition that menopause experiences and changes will be different.

Over The Bloody Moon conducted research (in depth interviews last year) amongst the LGBTQi+, including the transgender community and discovered that the transmen we spoke to, did not like to be reminded of 'my dirty past'. Associations of femininity were suppressed and brought up trauma, so demand a different approach in terms of support. Transgender men that were off testosterone treatment were experiencing similar changes to women, such as hot flushes, headaches, tiredness, poor sleep. Transgender women to some degree experienced a short-lived menopause as they began their oestrogen treatment, but this soon settled down.

We are proud to have an inclusive and diverse community at Over The Bloody Moon with social media support and Masterclasses that are open to anyone transitioning through menopause. However, we found that transgender / non-binary people do not wish to participate in a community that is associated with women. There are some good support communities, such as [queermenopause.com](http://queermenopause.com) and [outandabout](http://outandabout) that should be included in policy / guidance / signposting materials to ensure people who do not identify as women have the same opportunity for support as those that identify as women do (albeit that this support may demand different solutions and interventions).

We find it is more inclusive when writing policy, guidance, delivering training or any other toolkit to use the term 'people transitioning through menopause' or 'menopausers' and unless we refer to research studies conducted by women, refrain from using gender as a means of defining those impacted by menopause.

We also ensure imagery is representative of all different people experiencing menopause.

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

This needs to be more overt. The Equality Act 2010 and Health & Safety Act 1974 don't go far enough, as they weren't designed with menopause in mind.

**Should current legislation be amended?**

Yes, menopause should be added as the tenth protected characteristic in Equality Act 2010.

**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?**

Policies tend to homogenise solutions but as we have stated previously, people's experience of menopause differs. Therefore, it is important to make reasonable adjustments on an individual basis, rather than a blanket approach. To this regard, it is perhaps better more beneficial to have a guidance, rather than a policy that allows for this flexibility that everyone must read and be trained in, so they can interpret appropriate support and response.

However, for companies with employees of over 150, we do believe that there should be a mandatory requirement to include menopause in a policy - either as an integration into existing policies, such as flexible working, or a stand-alone policy, if companies already have one for say menstruation.

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?

Until now there has been little to see in how the Government have addressed workplace discrimination but it's great that there are increasing debates, lobbying and enquiries, such as this which will hopefully bring about positive change.

With people working later into their careers and with greater representation of people transitioning through menopause in the labour force, it's important that the Government ensure legislation is reflective (although we also recognise that 1 in 100 people experience menopause before 40 years - NHS).

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

There was little promotion or awareness of this current enquiry. The Government Equalities Office should be getting out there, using social media and engaging more actively in menopause communities to learn and pick up valuable insights.

*September 2021*