

A Blether on...

MENOPAUSE



October 2022

Menopause Awareness Day

The 18th of October 2022 was International Menopause Awareness Day, and as such we elected to host an informal discussion with women about their experiences of the menopause. Women were given the opportunity to engage in an open discussion about issues that surround menopause, including medical treatment and social attitudes. They explained to us that they felt continuously let down by public services and policy, and therefore made multiple suggestions how women's lives could be improved.

Recommendations:

- Readjust social attitudes to menopause, to reduce stigma and shame associated.
- Employers provide improved support for women experiencing menopause through training for management, as well as a 'Menopause Champion' to advocate for menopausal women.
- Consider 'reasonable adjustments' that could be made to workplaces: such as menopause friendly uniforms and shower facilities.
- All medical professionals receive comprehensive training on menopause treatment.
- Incorporate menopause within sex education for girls and boys.



The Scottish Women's Convention (SWC)

The SWC is funded to engage with women across Scotland to ensure that their views are represented in policy and decision-making processes. The SWC uses the views of women to respond to a variety of parliamentary, governmental, and organisational consultation papers at Scottish, UK, and international levels.

The SWC gathers information using different methods, including roadshows, thematic conferences, surveys, and both in-person and online roundtable events. This submission presents the views of a range of women, reflecting their opinions, ideas and lived experience. Working together with many other equalities organisations and community groups, we use our broad network to ensure that women from a range of backgrounds are heard and acknowledged. We are continually reviewing innovative ways of engaging with women and developing our trauma-informed and culturally sensitive practice to support vital contributions from as many women as possible.

Stigma

Throughout conversations with women, it became clear that many had experienced direct stigma and discrimination while going through menopause. They spoke of humiliation at work and general misunderstandings around symptoms. Attendees explained that men would freely make jokes and comments, while also belittling the health condition as a 'woman's problem'. This had pushed some women out of paid employment, knocking their confidence and many felt that they had been improperly supported throughout their experience.

- "People think it's funny and that's a big issue... you know they think it's hilarious when you're late for a meeting... it's just awful and humiliating, and men in particular tend to make jokes about it and that can be really uncomfortable."
- "My issue is that they say it's a woman's issue and so they'll lock it away because no-one wants to talk about it."
- "I've known a lot of women who have resigned because it has got too difficult for them to do their job."

Workplaces

Women also explained that alongside stigma within the workplace, employers did not have sufficient menopause friendly policy in place. They stated that they regularly felt pressure to leave their work, and that employers were not sympathetic to their physiological and psychological conditions. Women told us that they have had to resort to setting up their own support networks within workplaces, due to a lack of assistance through official channels.

- "When I did speak out about it at work, it was amazing just how many of my colleagues approached me and said that they felt the same way, and that they didn't have anyone to talk to... and so we have been able to create our own, organic support group."

To help reduce the impact menopause has upon their working lives, some women suggested implementing 'Menopause Champions', who could advocate on behalf of those experiencing menopause. They also believed that it was imperative that employees and managers received menopause training, which could reduce stigma and create a healthier work environment for menopausal women. Another possible solution was to treat menopause similarly to disability, with employers making 'reasonable adjustments' to enable the work of menopausal women: suggestions included showering facilities, menopause friendly uniforms and increased comfort breaks.

- "We need to have menopause champions in workplaces... we have first aiders, we have mental health support, but we don't have menopause support."
- "Without training, particularly of managers, we will continue to face the problems we do at work... they're very happy to dust off disciplinaries and appraisals when they want, but they're not really trained to understand the conversation you need to have with them about what's happening to you."
- "...it should just be an open conversation where your manager says, 'here's the shower room, you don't need to justify anything'. We need to stop saying that it's about money, naw, it's about keeping women happy and supported in their working environment."

Health Care

Alongside issues within work, women regularly faced difficulties with healthcare professionals. We were told stories of misdiagnoses and a lack of empathy from medical staff, with women struggling to get the help they required. This had forced some attendees to turn to private medical services, rather than the NHS, as they were either refused treatment or put on incredibly long waiting lists. Women attributed this to poor gynaecological care across Scotland, particularly in rural areas, and a lack of education about women's health problems. Women suggested that mandatory training for all medical staff was essential in creating a more menopause friendly healthcare environment.

- “I have been unable to get the medical support I need. So much so, that I've had to do something that goes against my values, I've had to pay privately to get treatment. On visiting the NHS, I was given a bunch of holistic leaflets: go do yoga, go for a walk, take some time out, when I actually needed medicine.”
- “...for me it started with really horrific headaches, I thought I was dying... my GP told me it was migraines”
- “We need to make it compulsory for the medical profession to be trained in menopause.”

Education

Attendees also explained that their experience of menopause was worsened due to a lack of personal knowledge on the subject. They felt that the Scottish education system had not adequately prepared them for this period of their life, with focus being on pregnancy and puberty. Women stated that they had also noticed a pattern of ignorance within men, with most not fully understanding the health condition. Therefore, they highly recommended incorporating menopause into sex education for girls and boys, so that both could be properly informed and prepared for this natural process. They also wished for more emphasis to be placed upon menopause for those studying medicine at university, which would align with the mandatory training for healthcare staff discussed above.

- “Something I've heard is that they don't want to scare young women, so they don't tell them the horrific stories about the menopause – but they have to be aware that there are a range of symptoms...it's something they're going to experience, whether that's medically or naturally.”
- “We need to start with awareness training, and that's through education... because I mean, how do you talk about something that you don't even know?”
- “I think we need to have more conversations, open conversations, get men involved because they have a great part to play in it.”



Thank You!

Thank you to the women who spoke to us about their experiences of menopause and how society can change to better the lives of menopausal women. We will strive to advocate for women across Scotland, to include their views in policy making processes.

SWC CONTACT DETAILS

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