

PAUSE FOR THOUGHT: REFLECTING ON MENOPAUSE AND THE WORKPLACE



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global



FOREWORD

There have been many studies in recent years focusing on menopause in the workplace - so why conduct another?

We wanted to create an asset that not only provides a snapshot of menopause and work in 2023, but combines commentary from a wide range of experts in the field, to provide insight and guidance on creating menopause-friendly work environments.

We also want to honour the menopause. Rather than it being seen as a negative health issue that needs to be mitigated, we believe that the process can be a special, unique experience - and that midlife women can provide huge benefits to organisations, and they should be actively recruited.

So read on for an observation and a celebration of the menopause and work!



INTRODUCTION

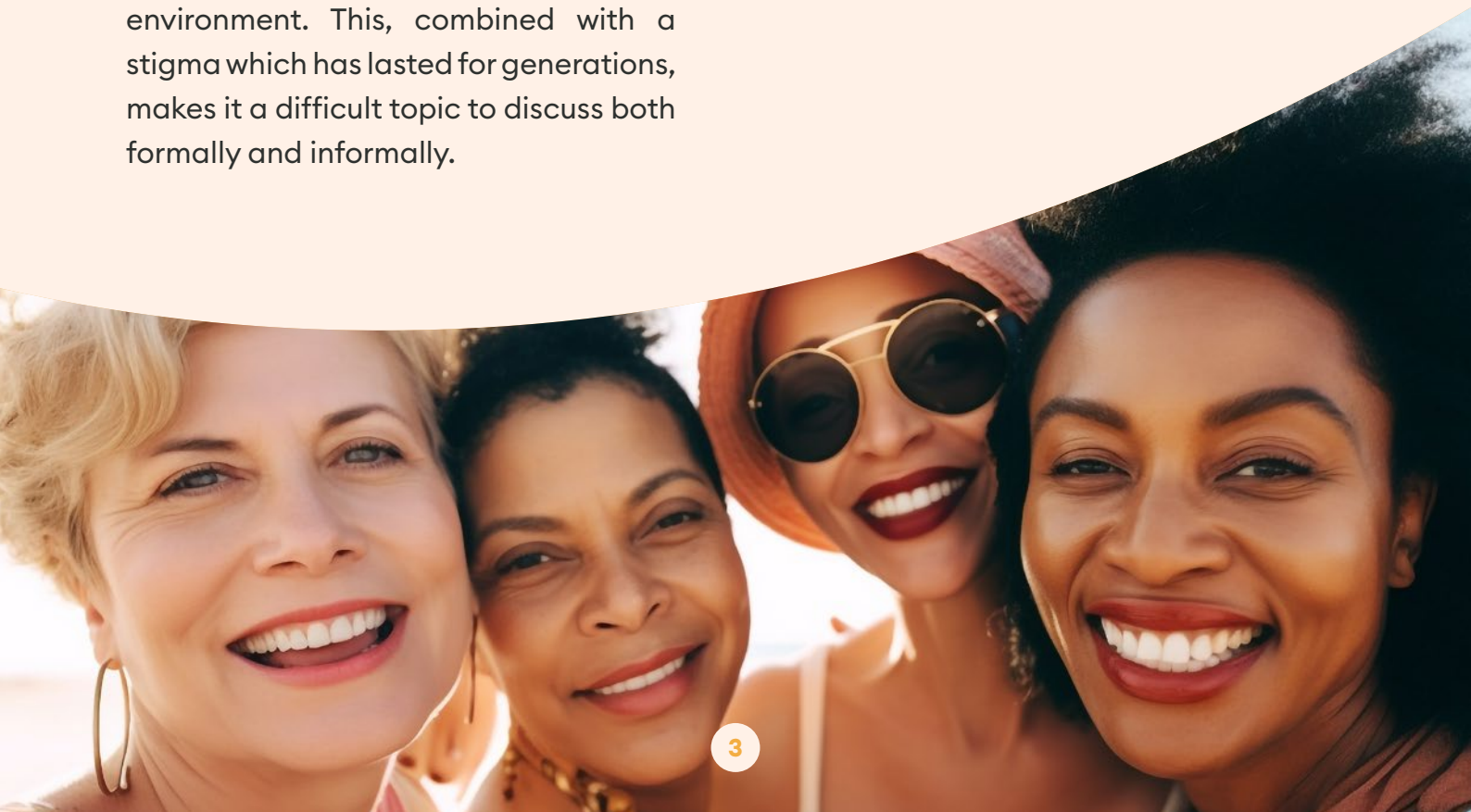
The Cambridge Dictionary definition of the menopause is very succinct: “the time in a woman’s life when she gradually stops having periods”. In fact, some might say this is an unfortunately scant description of a major life event that affects all women who reach later life.

That the definition is so brief could be seen as a reflection of the fact that the social impact of menopause has for years been taboo or dismissed entirely in our society - especially in the world of work.

Yet the menopause is a complex event which can display many different facets depending on the individual and their environment. This, combined with a stigma which has lasted for generations, makes it a difficult topic to discuss both formally and informally.

In recent years there has been growing awareness of menopause. Increasingly women are being encouraged to open up about issues and discuss the changes and effects which happen to them.

Many businesses - with the help of expert consultants - are rolling out menopause policies, and working to create a culture that promotes openness when it comes to menopause.



A 2022 Government inquiry by the Women and Equalities Committee examined the extent of discrimination faced by menopausal people in the workplace, and investigated how Government policy and workplace practices can better support those experiencing menopause.

The result of this inquiry was a range of recommendations. These include appointing a Menopause Ambassador, and introducing menopause leave.

On 24 January 2023, MPs rejected the recommendation for menopause leave, and also dismissed a recommendation to include menopause as a protected characteristic under the Equality Act ¹.

Against this backdrop, we wanted to investigate the view of workers - both male and female - of the menopause at work - a phase of life which affects 51 percent of the population.

And with women over 50 representing the fastest growing segment of the workforce, it is crucial that businesses and organisations work to retain this talent.

Older women can be an untapped resource of knowledge and experience - in many cultures, menopausal women are seen as the wise people to turn to for guidance and support. We believe there is an opportunity here, for businesses to actively seek out women who are going through this life stage, in order to enrich their organisations.

Our report uses quantitative research of UK workers mixed with expert commentary to examine this issue, and suggest solutions, tactics and methods to help create menopause-friendly work cultures for everyone.

1. <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-politics-64381216>



METHODOLOGY

A combination of desk research and quantitative research was used to create this report.

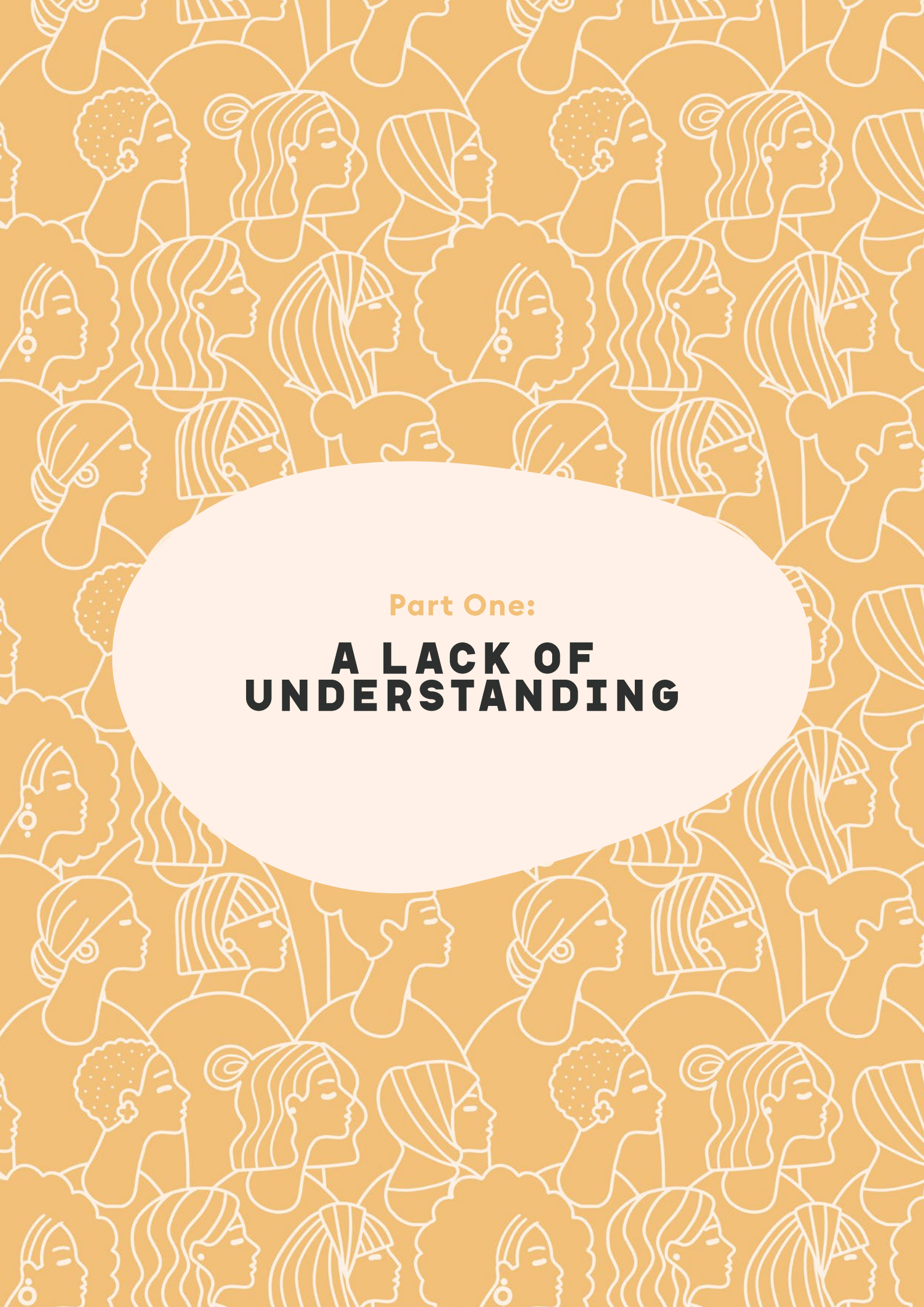
Overall, 2000 quantitative online surveys were undertaken, of which 304 were with working women aged over 45.

Experts in the field of the menopause were also interviewed and their comments were used to help shape the report's findings.



KEY THEMES

- There is confusion and a lack of understanding about what menopause means for women in the workplace
- Management and workplace policies are lagging behind and urgent action is needed
- Progress can be made quickly - there is approval from both sexes for more support for women going through the menopause
- Menopausal and postmenopausal women can benefit businesses because of their expertise, knowledge and wisdom, and companies should be actively recruiting this cohort



Part One:

**A LACK OF
UNDERSTANDING**



It's extremely timely that this research has been done. As positive as it is that menopause is getting coverage in the social environment, the conversation needs to move on from awareness into acceptance that this normal biological function is not managed, for many women, in a humane way.

The environment that a menopausal woman is in has a huge impact on the type of menopause she has, how able she is to voice her needs or indeed even feel able to discuss them. The older woman is still rendered invisible and unheard by the very nature of an environment that is toxic and hostile to the majority.

If we are serious about making a difference to those who are going through menopause, we have to accept that there is no one menopause. Each woman experiences her menopause with her own individual challenges. There may be socially acceptable symptoms, or unique symptoms, either way she should be supported so that she feels empowered and valued, able to use all the wisdom, experience and skills that she has accumulated throughout her life.

As an expert in human performance and indeed the human condition I think it is time we create a better understanding of the factors that can make a difference for all women, as all women will at some point experience their own menopause.

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DR RACHEL TAYLOR

I am a neuroscientist on a mission to create a better (and kinder) world, one brain at a time.

drracheltaylor.substack.com

The 2022 Government inquiry by the Women and Equalities Committee found that despite over half the population going through menopause, there was “a lack of awareness or understanding of menopause, even amongst women themselves”².

Our research findings mirrored this and revealed a lack of clarity about menopause spread over many levels.

On a fundamental level, 19 percent of people (a quarter of men and 12 percent of women) admit that they have no knowledge at all about menopause. 21 percent of men and one in 10 women even have no idea when women might start menopause.

One in five of all 18-to-24 year olds are unaware what the symptoms of menopause might be.

There is confusion over symptoms - and we believe this has led to millions of women experiencing issues which they are unaware could be linked to menopause.

One reason for this uncertainty could be the taboo nature of menopause - historically it has been swept under the carpet, not seen as a legitimate topic for conversation. For decades women have been expected to be stoical and accept symptoms as part of their lives.

While recent celebrity and political endeavours to raise awareness of menopause have been positive, the stigma remains. And shockingly 61 percent of women over 45 agree that “menopausal” is often used in an insulting or pejorative manner.

And a quarter of the same demographic agree with the statement: “I think that being called ‘menopausal’ can be an insult, as many use it as shorthand for a mad old lady”.

While there is some confusion about menopause in general, there is even less information on menopause and ethnicity. However, the limited research that has been undertaken implies that Black and South Asian women are likely to reach menopause earlier than white women, and symptoms may be different - something that every employer needs to be aware of.

2. <https://committees.parliament.uk/publications/23281/documents/169819/default/>



Race will play an integral part in people's menopause experiences, but there's a scarcity of robust research that attempts to extrapolate and explore the whys.

Although everyone's menopause is unique, the limited data has shown that Black and South Asian women can experience the menopause earlier than white women, have different symptoms and different experiences with health professionals - for example, Black women are less likely to be prescribed HRT.

When people talk about menopause and work, race is often not factored into the conversation. There may

be cultural expectations or stigmas surrounding discussions of menopause and women's health, which can make it more challenging for Black women to openly address their needs and seek time off or accommodations. There might be a fear of being perceived as weak or less committed to their work.

Race does need to be considered, to allow a culture that takes an individual approach to employees' needs and requirements. It's very important that organisations recognise and take into account the cultural backgrounds of their staff - especially when it comes to this issue. Recognising the intersectionality of menopause and race/ethnicity contributes to building an inclusive workplace. It shows a commitment to understanding and addressing the unique experiences and needs of people from diverse backgrounds, fostering a sense of belonging and equity. This can improve employee satisfaction, retention rates, and overall organisational culture.



NINA KUYPERS

Founder of Black Women in Menopause



Part Two:

**MANAGEMENT AND
TREATMENT OF
MENOPAUSE IN THE
WORKPLACE**

Menopause affects all women and yet as we have seen it is clear there is no single menopause - it is a unique experience for each person. This makes it complicated for workplaces to put in place a simple “best practice” policy which covers everyone.

In fact, only one in 10 working women aged 45 plus definitely know that their company has a menopause policy. 50 percent said there definitely wasn't a policy, and 40 percent have no clue either way.

Our research found that one in 20 women over the age of 45 have had symptoms which caused major difficulties at work. 10 percent have had symptoms which caused moderate difficulties and 27 percent had slight issues.

This variance also disguises the fact that women have been encouraged to play down symptoms - and “not make a fuss” for many years. On average, in

fact, women over 45 will only take a single day off a year due to menopausal symptoms.

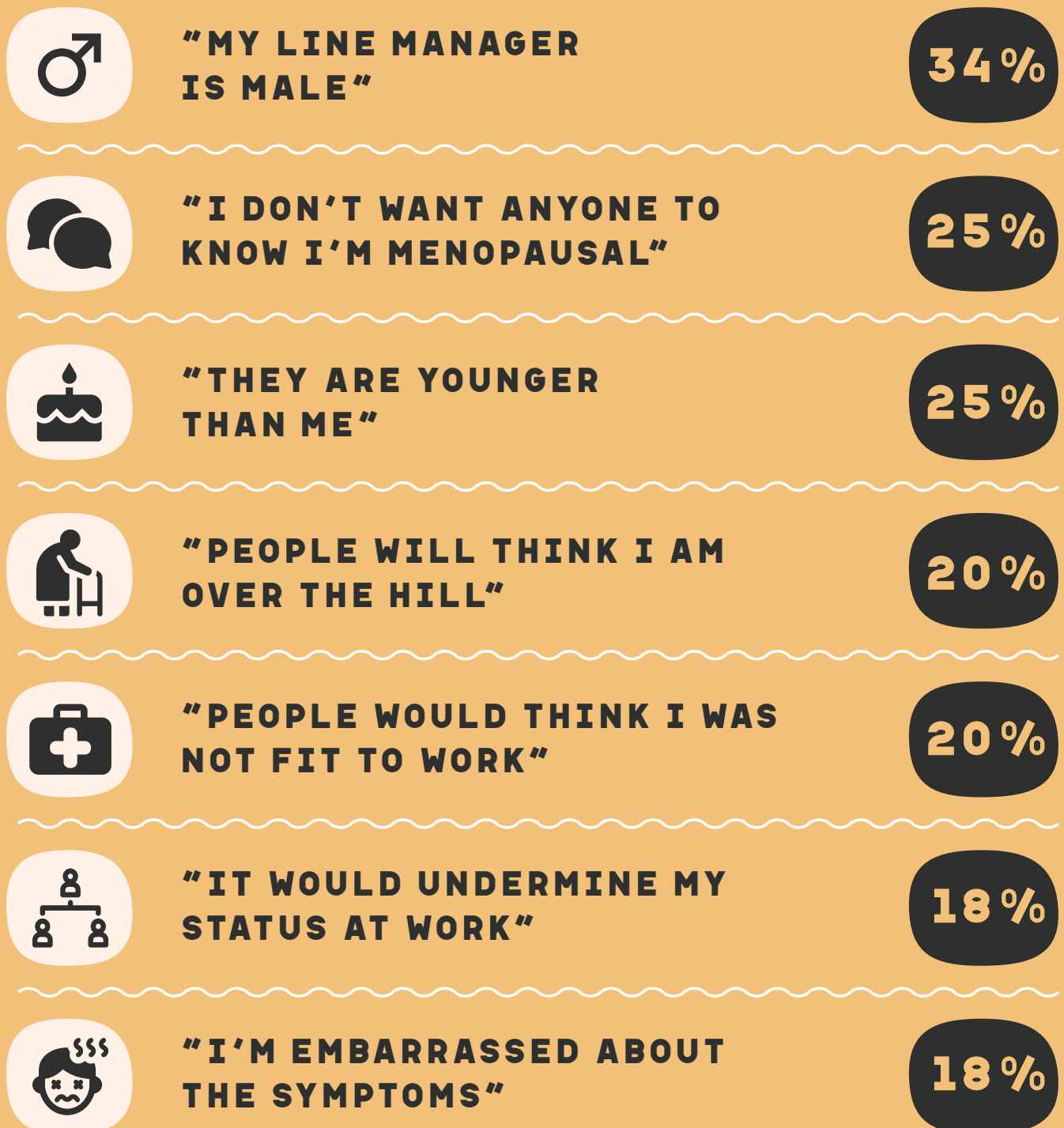
The British Menopause Society agrees that there is currently no “best practice” to help menopausal women at work³ because of the fact that every woman will experience it differently, so a “one-size-fits-all” approach is simply not feasible. But many women do not feel able to start talking about their experiences at work.

In fact, our research found that nearly half (49 percent) of women aged 45 and over would not feel comfortable talking to a line manager about menopausal symptoms.

3. <https://thebms.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2022/04/07-BMS-TfC-Menopause-and-the-workplace-03B.pdf>



WHY WOMEN DON'T FEEL COMFORTABLE TALKING TO THEIR MANAGER ABOUT MENOPAUSE:





In order to truly support staff during menopause, a menopausal policy is not enough. What's important is that an organisation fosters a culture and environment that helps support and nurture employees, and allows the topic of the menopause to be freely and openly discussed.

Menopause is not an illness, it's a natural phase of a woman's life. Research has shown that women who feel they can openly speak to their bosses about what they are going through are less likely to take sick leave, more likely to have better relationships with colleagues, and achieve higher morale overall.

In my experience - and it's also the recommendation of many bodies such as BOHRF (British Occupational Health Research Foundation) - menopause training for managers is vital, so that they are aware of how the symptoms can affect working women and what adjustments may be necessary to support them.

Women employees may also need menopause training so that they can take action to mitigate their symptoms and advocate for the help they need.

“

PAT DUCKWORTH

Founder of Smarter Menopause, Author
and a Women's Health Strategist

Our study found that only 37 percent of managers have been offered training around menopause - this results in some unacceptable responses from bosses.

When these managers were confronted with people who told them they were suffering menopause symptoms, 27 percent admitted they were shocked, a quarter didn't know what to do, 16 percent thought they were being lied to, 9 percent thought the complainant was making a fuss about nothing and 8 percent ignored them.

One interesting statistic taken from the research was that a much higher percentage of managers under the age of 35 have had training around menopause - 58 percent. This group are more likely to be approached by staff who are having symptoms - 70 percent have been contacted by employees, compared to just half of bosses and managers who are aged over 35.

This suggests that younger people are better trained - and that this training is much more likely to make them approachable and able to solve problems.

It is therefore essential that businesses invest in training for managers, as this survey clearly shows the benefits which would accrue immediately.

There's an active need for training to be rolled out, to avoid stigmatising women and to prevent a huge loss from the workforce - a 2019 study from BUPA and the Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development⁴ found that nearly a million women were leaving the workforce every year because they were not supported through menopause.

4. <https://www.cipd.co.uk/about/media/press/menopause-at-work>

REACTIONS OF MANAGERS TO EMPLOYEES WHO TALKED TO THEM ABOUT THEIR MENOPAUSE:





Women experiencing health conditions (including menopause) will often face significant pressure in managing the changes and symptoms that arise. To address this challenge, it is crucial to provide education and training - not only to women, but to the entire workforce. This approach fosters understanding, empathy, and dispels misconceptions surrounding menopause.

Organisations should raise awareness through workshops, internal campaigns, and online resources. It is essential to create safe spaces for open dialogue among women, while also ensuring the availability of trained individuals who can offer support and find solutions.

By normalising conversations about menopause, these discussions become essential and commonplace for all staff, irrespective of their health condition or situation.

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EMMA FREIVOGEL

Co-Founder and CEO of Radical Recruit



Part Three:
THE FUTURE



Women are different leaders to men, they're collaborative, inclusive, and they know the importance of fostering good team relationships. This is vital if you don't want a "traditional" hierarchical, top down management structure or style. I think that really fits into what modern corporations need in order to attract good staff.

Young people nowadays are coming into the workforce demanding purpose and jobs where they have freedom to make their own decisions. We have a group of midlife women who could run exactly the kind of workplace which would suit them - and instead, they're being sidelined once they get to this stage of life.

The positive thing is that though culture and representation at a high level have been stacked against women for years, there are easy ways to solve this issue. Harnessing the wisdom and experience of older women in the workplace can only add to the culture and will benefit everyone in the organisation.

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KATE BACON

Coach for marketing professionals

There are many signs that menopause is being taken more seriously.

As we've seen, younger, better trained managers are more approachable, and this should help matters.

But further progress is needed and there is support for this - 53 percent of people agree with the statement: "I think that the menopause affects every woman differently and there shouldn't be a one-size-fits-all approach at work" and this is from all respondents - 61 percent of women and 44 percent of men.

50 percent agree: "I think companies need to have a menopause policy in place to support women who need it" once again - the gender gap was not significant - 48 percent of men agreed and 54 percent of women.

And 47 percent (44 percent of men and 51 percent of women) agree: "I think women going through the menopause should be given time off at work when needed".

This shows that even people who won't go through the menopause recognise there is a natural need for more support.

But for all these improvements and attitude changes, one telling, simple statistic stands out from the survey - nearly half of women (47 percent) did not feel supported during their menopause.

While women have some protection for their menopause from the Equalities Act 2010, which means that discrimination on grounds of sex, disability or age is illegal, making menopause a protected characteristic, alongside others such as pregnancy, would be a big step forward.



63 percent of people now believe that menopause should now be a protected characteristic of the Equality Act. We encourage everyone who agrees to sign the following petition: <https://petition.parliament.uk/petitions/634230>

Employers should make sure they have steps, procedures and support in place to help staff affected by menopause.

This would mean less people leaving the labour market - and also improve lives and outcomes for the entire country.

While our study has shown that many employees are not getting the support they need, increasingly organisations are getting it right, using empathy and lateral thinking to foster menopause-friendly work cultures.

On the next few pages you'll see comment from leaders in the field of menopause and work.





When my menopause-related insomnia was at its worst, I didn't feel in control of anything. The best thing I did was to go to the GP and talk to Foot Anstey about how I was feeling. When I was signed off work, I appreciated the contact from the HR team so much as I felt like I was failing and didn't feel able to carry out my role with confidence. Foot Anstey recognised how I was feeling and constantly reassured me. I quickly realised that the firm was taking menopause symptoms seriously.

On my return, which was phased and in line with the firm's agile working policy, I was asked if I would like to become a Menopause Champion and help the firm promote menopause awareness to all teams. I jumped at the chance as it felt good to help others going through what I had gone through. We didn't want people to stay silent about this and it felt good to be part of a driving force that was encouraging people to come forward with confidence and share their stories.

I worked with multiple members of the firm to organise a menopausal awareness session. This was attended by one of our employment lawyers who delivered a thorough presentation of menopause in the workplace which was extremely interesting. Alongside our employment lawyer the attendees heard from a nutritionist, a member of our HR team and myself who all spoke about our experiences.

Since the session the firm has created the Menopause Connections Group. I am part of this group, and we have regular meetings where we share stories and support each other. It has been extremely successful and the group continues to expand. I felt fully supported by Foot Anstey and the firm has made the effort to make sure we can talk about menopause and its impact openly.



NICKY BURGESS

Menopause Ambassador
at Foot Anstey



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Organisations should raise awareness about menopause through workshops, internal campaigns, and online resources. It is essential to create safe spaces for open dialogues among women and ensure the availability of trained individuals who can offer support and find solutions.

EMMA FREIVOGEL

Co-Founder and CEO
of Radical Recruit

My driving imperative is to challenge the negative ageing agenda for women and as a woman and a brand consultant, I see we have a crucial imperative to 'rebrand' age for women. Our society sexualises women when they are still girls and discards them at their most powerful.

With an ageing population, poor female representation at board level, and a gaping hole in the workforce, this is as financially ludicrous as it is sexist and ageist.

There will soon be more retired people in the UK than schoolchildren. Whilst women of 50 and over are the fastest growing UK workforce cohort, it is also where organisations have most attrition. These are women with decades ahead of them – whose contribution we need.

Navigating menopause well is a step to power and longevity, aspirational and essential to retaining female experience and expertise in the workplace. Women can't afford to lose it all post 45. And organisations can't afford to lose women. This level of knowledge and experience walking out the door is a costly loss – not what any Finance Director wants on their watch.



C-Suites need to strategise retention of older women fast, and offer dialogue, education and innovation. A big factor is flexibility – women post 50 rate work/life balance as 16 times more important than status. Menopause sits alongside managing children and elderly parents - the load on women is huge.

Innovation such as cross-generational job sharing can offer two-way up-skilling, meet the changing needs of GenX, not dissimilar to older women's, and strengthen the employer brand at multiple points. And attraction is as important as attrition - the pandemic pushed experienced workers out who we need to attract back in.

This life-stage is a gate-way to power and life-long better health. We have to support senior women navigating this and learn from them to shape future organisational change – they can tell us how to drive retention up and bring back leavers. Organisations can either listen and learn or continue to have talent slip through their fingers.



CLAIRE LOWSON

Founder of Supermenopause



This study's findings remind us how important it is to understand people's current attitudes, if you're to have a hope in hell of solving a societal problem.

Here at WMN, we believe the taboos and lack of basic knowledge around menopause are a direct result of two related factors intersecting: a 'male as default' approach to pretty much everything and the gendered ageism that characterises modern society.

As women age, they feel increasingly invisible. Is it any surprise, when our own research has shown that six out of 10 of those aged 55 and over believe there is a distinct lack of representation of older women in advertising. (When it comes to menopause specifically, recent research by Kantar found that 76% of women experiencing menopause or perimenopause don't see themselves in ads at all).

The bottom line is that midlife and older women have at best been misrepresented and at worst have been rendered invisible by cultural norms that the marketing industry has unthinkingly adopted.

As an industry increasingly aware of its potential role as a 'force for good', there can be no doubt we have to do better. There are positive early signs: many of us are now looking at the age make-up of our teams with fresh eyes, in the knowledge that lived experience matters when you're crafting communications for brands (and that currently only 5 percent of those in 'adland' are over 50).

Roll on a whole lot more taboo-busting research, rallying and radical change. We're here for it.

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TRUDI HARRIS DUBON
Director of Purpose + Impact
at Creative Agency WMN



Appendix:
ABOUT OUR EXPERTS



[Dr Rachel Taylor](#) is a neuropsychologist, podcast host and founder of [UNBroken](#).



[Nina Kuypers](#) is founder of Black Women in Menopause, set up to raise awareness and address the discourse of menopause. BWiM also provides free sessions delivered by specialist and expert practitioners for Caribbean and African people in the UK and beyond enabling them to access information in a culturally appropriate way.

Twitter: [@blkmenopause](#)

Instagram: [@blackwomeninmenopause](#)



[Kate Bacon](#) is a coach working to empower midlife women in marketing to get the most out of their lives, in all arenas.



Nicky Burgess is Menopause Ambassador at one of the UK's fastest growing law firms, [Foot Anstey](#). It is a significant national player working with leading brands and individuals predominantly across six key sectors: Developer, Energy & Infrastructure, Islamic Finance, Private Equity, Private Wealth, Retail & Consumer. Foot Anstey cares about contributing to the communities and Foot Anstey Foundation provides grants to local grassroots organisations.



Pat Duckworth is founder of Smarter Menopause, author and women's health strategist.



Emma Freivogel is co-founder and CEO of Radical Recruit, a firm which works exclusively with disadvantaged candidates from marginalised communities.



Claire Lawson is the founder of Supermenopause, a consultancy that works across all sectors, offering menopause as a lever to educate women within a background of health and longevity.



Trudi Harris Dubon is Director of Purpose + Impact at creative agency WMN, a female forward studio for future facing brands, and a division of CPB London.

FURTHER RESOURCES AND INFORMATION:

<https://www.wellbeingofwomen.org.uk/menopause-workplace-pledge/>

<https://petition.parliament.uk/petitions/634230>

<https://www.nhsemployers.org/articles/menopause-and-workplace>

<https://www.womens-health-concern.org/help-and-advice/menopause-in-the-workplace/>



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