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**FINANCIAL
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**WORKPLACE
MENOPAUSE
SURVEY**



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Financial Services Union Workplace Menopause Survey

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Foreword - Sharon McAuley,

President of the Financial Services Union.



Colleagues,

When I became President of our Union in 2018 one of my commitments to you was to raise and address workplace issues like domestic violence and menopause.

Issues that had been ignored by employers, but which effect a large section of workers.

For too long the menopause has been treated with little understanding by employers and has been seen as a private matter not to be discussed.

The comments in this booklet are a response from members of the FSU to a survey conducted of FSU members on the Menopause.

The comments detail the effects that the menopause has on women in the workplace and shows the lack of support and respect that women who are going through the menopause receive.

This must change.

Women who are experiencing the menopause need to know that there is someone they can go to and discuss any difficulties they are having.

This is a societal and workplace issue that needs to be addressed.

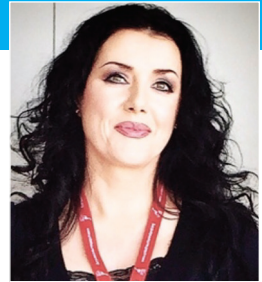
I am proud that the FSU are working to get a workplace menopause policy agreed with employers.

I hope this booklet acts as a wakeup call to employers and results in the positive response that is required,

Sharon McAuley
President
Financial Services Union

Executive Summary - Mandy La Combre

Senior Industrial Relations Officer.



Menopause is a natural stage of life for women which usually starts in the late forties or early fifties, but it can also happen earlier or later. Women often experience symptoms for on average 4 years but for many women symptoms can persist for much longer, even anything up to twelve years. Part of the process includes 'peri-menopause', this is when a woman's body is starting to change in the run up to menopause, usually in in the mid-forties but frequently earlier too. Symptoms of peri-menopause can commonly be as severe as symptoms of menopause. Surgical menopause can occur when women undergo certain surgeries, therefore triggering menopausal symptoms oftentimes at a much younger age. Menopause is a turning point in a woman's life, not a disease, but it can have a big impact on a woman's well-being. Menopause is not a one-size-fits-all, it affects each woman differently. Symptoms can vary from mild to severe. Managing the impact of menopausal symptoms at work is important. Some women reach natural menopause with little to no trouble. Others have a very difficult time coping mentally, and struggle with debilitating physical symptoms. And when menopause starts suddenly as a result of surgery, chemotherapy, or radiation, the adjustment can be tough. That is why it is an issue that needs careful handling from an employer. Workplace policies play an important role in guiding managers on how best to support employees. Having a workplace policy in place will also educate co-workers and break the stigma attached to perceptions of women experiencing menopause, helping to also counteract effects of sexism and ageism in the workplace.

To date employers have been slow to recognise that special consideration may be needed for women suffering through menopause in the workplace. Both workers and employers need to be informed and aware of how symptoms can affect the ability to carry out ones job, and how workplace environments can sometimes exasperate symptoms. Menopause has long been viewed as strictly a 'private and personal matter' shrouded in stigma, but with more women than ever in the workplace, and an increasingly aging workforce, employers have a responsibility to take into account the difficulties women may experience during menopause.

Decades of women feeling isolated and alone, suffering through symptoms in work with no support, has led to a lack of discussion around the issue and

leaving women without the confidence to disclose in the workplace when they may need some help.

Financial Services Union carried out the FSU Menopause Workplace Survey in July of this year because when the Union initiated research into how menopause affected the workplace, no menopause data specific to the workplace was available for the Republic of Ireland (ROI). Northern Ireland Congress of Trade Unions carried out a very successful survey in Northern Ireland (NI) in 2018, (which our own survey yielded very similar results to), but no similar data was obtainable for ROI.

If we want to develop and negotiate menopause workplace policies with employers to improve the working lives of our female members, it is important that we have the data to back up our claims.

The survey results were launched on World Menopause Day, October 18th 2021.

1,335 respondents contributed to the survey. The breakdown by jurisdiction was: 71% ROI, 26% NI, and 2.9% Britain. Staggeringly 6,109 member comments were recorded, often with disturbing revelations. The results of our survey and the commentary included, will shape any discussions that take place with employers to outline the urgent need for workplace policies to be implemented

This document summarises not only the astounding results of our survey, but additionally includes a selection of comments from members that really describe just how depression, anxiety, sleep deprivation, cognitive impairment, not to mention debilitating physical symptoms can affect them in the workplace. And how the majority of women are too afraid to discuss their difficulties with anyone at work for fear of repercussion, blatant lack of interest or understanding from their employer, or worse; simply being treated as a joke. Sadly, there is an overwhelming thread throughout of how aging women are overlooked or seen as disposable or marginal in the workplace, so it is no surprise to learn that 97.5% of respondents don't have, and would welcome, a menopause workplace policy.

An issue that impacts older women in particular appears to be a non-concern to employers and something we must break through. Neglecting this issue is not an option, we know that suffering through the menopause with no support in the workplace has left many women opting to go on sick leave, or in some cases consider leaving work altogether.

Western culture has long been obsessed with youth. But today, women are making the most of -- and even celebrating -- their new phase of life. It can be a time to recommit to your health, celebrate your past, and envision your best future. FSU want to ensure our members who may suffer through menopause are supported on their journey, are protected in the workplace, and in doing so strive to remove the barriers that have existed around menopause for many years.

Mandy La Combre
Senior Industrial Relations Officer

HEADLINE SURVEY RESULTS

- 89.4% say menopause affects working life
- 97.5% don't have, and would welcome a workplace policy
- 74.9% say the gender of their manager influences how much they talk to their manager about menopause
- 96.1% would welcome management & union reps to be trained to support women experiencing menopause
- 38% say menopause has been treated as a joke in the workplace
- Only 17% say that menopause is 'not' treated negatively in the workplace
- Only 15% are comfortable talking about menopause in work
- 84% of respondents are currently experiencing or likely to experience menopause
- 95% of respondents are employees from banking

MEMBER COMMENTS

Total comments 6,109

Below are a selection of comments recorded from the survey.

Comments in relation to menopause affecting working life:

"Symptoms can affect day to day activities...we need more flexibility to step away when not able to work, and work at a better time for the individual".

"It can lead to increased anxiety and low confidence levels which can affect how you carry out your job".

"Memory, tiredness, brainfog can be an issue" "Temperature can make it harder to work".

"Lack of quality sleep has a huge influence on your ability to put in a quality day's work".

"You get stressed more easily".

"Tiredness, lack of confidence and sleep, the issue of being overwhelmed with such a drastic unexpected change to yourself is hard to deal with and impacts greatly on daily life including work".

"Going to the bathroom more, need quieter environment to be able to concentrate as much as before, hot flushes happening all the time is embarrassing".

Some days it can be difficult to concentrate...this can be especially difficult when managing a team and part of your role is to make decisions about a wide variety of things over the course of the day".

"Lack of control over office temperature".

"Everyone wants to bring the best of themselves to work - but if you have had severe broken sleep, high anxiety episode, or just an unexpected heavy period, these all contribute to a disruption to your day".

"Some people with menopause need time off, might need rest, may need to manage pain, but we are taught to be ashamed of what our bodies do monthly for a good portion of our lives".

"Often we are expected to endure our discomfort and god forbid anyone knows you have your period or worse menopause. The amount of misinformation about

this phase of a person's life is staggering. Any dissent you may express during this time will be chalked up to you're 'going through the change'...again, bad education and sexism".

"During peri-menopause I experienced times when it was very hard to concentrate, and it also affected my confidence levels".

"Feeling support from management would make things easier".

"Hot flushes make life uncomfortable and embarrassing if it happens in front of a customer. Concentration can be impaired and loss of confidence in myself can hinder my growth and progression in my role".

"Mood and drive can be affected, and this might appear as lazy and disinterested to the employer".

"It affects you both physically and mentally".

"Currently going through it...I feel like I have been dismissed as a vital staff member and I am not any use".

"Work environment is not suitable for when going through menopause, offices are warm and there's no flexibility".

"There is no way to accommodate working hours around this..."

"Sweating in the office, having to wear restrictive clothing, making an uncomfortable commute – working from home makes life a little easier".

"Symptoms like brainfog, tiredness, struggling to make decisions, stress with new things, hot flushes, all make the day hard, it's a lot easier working from home".

"With so many demands during the working day brainfog impacts. This leads to feeling stressed and anxious. Not the person I used to be".

"You don't feel comfortable to say you are not feeling the best on a day because you don't think it will be taken seriously".

"Mood can be low, very tired, so productivity is reduced".

"I have seen many colleagues suffer from its effects. Before I was educated on the subject, I thought it was just something you woke up with one day and that was it. I was not aware that it could affect all aspects of life including physical and mental health. I believe it is a topic that is swept away as just 'she is going through the change of life'...and I feel there is a shame around discussion and recognising

it as a genuine condition. More should be done to support other workers going through this”.

“Symptoms of menopause can be extremely debilitating on a day-to-day basis, affecting both physical and cognitive ability. Without support for some women, it means they will have to give up work”.

“I was one of the confident influencers within my team but as the menopause took over it was as if my whole reasoning was affected as things I would normally do as habit I started to overthink and question myself”.

“It really is a taboo topic in the workplace”.

“Anything that affects your health and wellness affects your working life”.

“Terrible stressful, experiencing anxiety daily, hormones up and down. Day to day life very uncomfortable. I am past menopause now, but I will never forget the whole experience. Working daily in an office with no support was a nightmare. No support from the company as it was deemed to be a personal issue”.

“If you’re not feeling well, it’s hard to perform well”. “You don’t just go through the menopause at home”.

“Some days are really difficult, and you do not want to seem so old”. Days are difficult when symptoms are hard to control”.

“It is a natural part of human life...and should be accommodated / appreciated as such in the workplace”.

“I hide symptoms to pretend all is good”.

“Brainfog, tiredness – there’s a lack of understanding from the organisation, a fear of speaking out about it. There is definitely ageism in the bank for females”.

“Physical symptoms can sometimes be overwhelming and exhausting”.

“The physical symptoms are not conducive to working in high stress environments”.

“Tiredness – by the end of the day I’m done. I have worked hard during the day, but my energy levels drop come late afternoon. Also, more anxious about things. In the past I would take new challenges in my stride. Now I absolutely dread them. I feel that those younger than me think I am being awkward and difficult but that is not the case. Also, I feel that I am undervalued due to my age. Experience counts for nothing – no respect. I feel that once you are over 50 you are seen as being done. I was at a meeting once where someone (male), actually said this. I feel the younger ones see me as a nuisance and it is time for me to move on. This is so hurtful as I have worked hard for the bank, and given a lot, but once you get to a certain age all your past achievements are forgotten. I may not want to be developed anymore but I still want to be respected”.

“Uniforms are not best suited to hot flushes”.

“I am currently going through the menopause, and it is greatly affecting my working life, but I don’t feel I can speak about it to my manager about it. It is horrible and awkward”.

“I have to go on anti-depressants to cope with the anxiety attached to the symptoms but have worked throughout with no sick leave as I don’t feel it would be an acceptable reason for my employer for me to take time out, as all women my age working in the bank go through this”.

“I have gone through the menopause with no support at work...I really felt alone at one of the most difficult times of my life”.

“It’s yet another inconvenient, milestone in a woman’s life (after periods, pregnancy, having small kids), that affects how she is perceived in work by others”.

“I had to take sick leave for 4 months as I couldn’t cope in work”.

“It can seriously affect women’s physical and mental health at a time when they are at the peak of their careers or ready to progress their careers after maybe working part-time due to childcare arrangements”.

“There have been days when I have been so low and emotional with no understanding from any manager”.

“I have witnessed in the last 15 years working in an environment with a staff that was 90% women, the effect it can have on your life, it is massive. Also, how it is not spoken about in work and there is no support available, women are just expected to get on with it when realistically it is life altering”.

“You feel like you are struggling, and it is not taken seriously”.

“It is not something that has been widely discussed until now – so its never taken into account when determining workloads”.

“A platform to talk about it and perhaps options for working from home would help...I feel a woman would feel a lot more at ease at home on bad days.”

“It is a health issue, so of course it impacts working life”.

“Severe palpitations which sometimes felt like a heart attack. I would have to sit in the bathroom until it subsided. This on top of flushed face and sweat marks made me very self-conscious and embarrassed. The constant sleepless nights invariably affect your productivity. The brain fog is frustrating and feels

like dementia. The menopause completely affects your confidence which also has a knock-on effect on how you perform at work”.

“It is important to have access to resources regarding symptoms and supports”.

“Women have enough pressure aside from trying to hide one”.

“Women can have very difficult days and in the current working environment you need to be on your best day every day...”.

“Employer expectation and employee output is constantly rising. No consideration is given to older people in general. Expected to stand all day in your 50’s and 60’s”.

“Peri-menopause should also be given consideration, these are taboo subjects., we are in the 21st century”.

“Most feel they have to hide symptoms from colleagues, especially male colleagues”.

“I have considered giving up work when I go through a bad patch but know I would regret it as I couldn’t afford to do so. I feel inadequate when symptoms are hard”.

“Total lack of understanding from management”.

Comments in relation to menopause being treated negatively in the workplace:

“It is never discussed, no awareness, most managers are male and don’t care”.

“Organisation is so performance driven that any sign of struggle will be held against you”.

“It’s just not talked about”.

“Some disguise how they are feeling as they think it will affect their status at work”.

“Instead of being respected for my years of service I feel it would be held against me”

“There is no policy, so symptoms have to be raised on a 1-2-1 basis and solutions are totally dependent on the manager”.

“Menopause is treated as a joke at work in relation to women having hot flushes and not getting something right – being told by colleagues male and female they have ‘brainfog’ and lack of concentration due to menopause. We are expected to take whatever is said. No support given”.

“There is certainly a perception that older staff are past it and I feel that adding menopause into the mix would add to that perception”.

“Any mention of menopause in my work environment was always a joke... it must be the change”.

“The sexism of the workplace itself and the younger demographic also plays into the ageist stereotypes about menopause”.

“The culture is to NEVER talk about it”.

“No tolerance”.

“They just don’t want to know...”

“It is not recognised as a serious condition that has real side effects...more of a joke condition that you can make fun of”.

“I have heard negative comments about older ladies in the past – and some colleagues saying they would be better off retiring. One lady had to place a fan on her desk and received awful ridicule”.

“Middle aged women are written off by management”.

“It’s not spoken about, not understood and is just seen as a negative condition”.

“I don’t think it’s taken into account when piling on the workload”.

“I feel it’s brushed over as a minor ‘women’s problem’ and we should just get on with it...”

“Male colleagues often make disrespectful comments about women of a certain age and the fact that they are probably ‘going through the change’”.

“It’s really important that line managers (male or female) understand the impact menopause can have on a woman’s working life – they should know how to support their staff through this time”.

“It’s largely a taboo subject and the majority of the management population aren’t impacted by it”.

"They don't understand".

"It's something women just seem to have to 'suck up' at work".

"Women who suffer symptoms are more-or-less told to be quiet and keep it to themselves. They feel embarrassed to talk openly about it".

"It's a male dominated environment. One manager asks staff straight out if they are going through it".

"I don't believe there is enough education or support on this which is alarming as it will effect 50% of the population. Menopausal women are the fastest growing workplace demographic – fact! We need to bring this hidden subject out into the open, so women feel comfortable to talk about their symptoms. Equally, line managers / employees should follow clear and coherent guidelines, employers could introduce an array of solutions".

"I have experienced team members go through this with no support from their peers or managers due to lack of understanding on how it effects women".

"It's seen as a woman's problem...'hormonal women'. Particularly in a male dominated environment".

"Older staff in general are looked upon differently".

"When I was going through menopause my manager didn't understand, I was asking for help, and he couldn't support me. His answer was to put me on a PIP (Performance Improvement Plan), which undermined my confidence further adding to my stress".

"Age & gender discrimination still exists".

"There is no policy, how can it effect anything?".

"It's something that's never dealt with except for the bad atmosphere and snide comments made".

"I feel it is treated as a made-up issue".

"Any female over 50 hits a wall. They don't want older employees".

"Don't care attitude. Just get on with it".

"There's a complete ignorance of menopause and managers are afraid to address it".

"Men in banking are still chauvinists".

"You're treated as a waste of space".

"Male hierarchy in the bank means women's issues are not taken seriously".

"I explained that I needed to go to the toilet more often and was told I could, but my name was in 'red' in the daily report".

"If you open up and chat about it you just get laughed at".

"I was told to go home and put your brain in and take your HRT".

"You are deemed over the hill if you dare mention it is happening".

"I am made fun of if I am showing to have a hot flush, or any symptoms associated with menopause...even the word was shouted at me one day and was told that the men have to 'pause' to wait for me to catch up when we're like this. I'll never forget that day".

"I've been told to keep it to myself".

"Been told if you're not able for the heat you know you are ready to retire"

"Been told you're too old to work here".

"A male manager turned up the rads in the branch to laugh at 3 of us who found the place too warm to work in".

"If it wasn't treated so negatively staff wouldn't have to hide what was going on".

"There is no lead out of top management on this topic, staff won't speak up as they won't understand or care about the issue".

"I think non-disclosure from the person with menopause and mood swings can be misinterpreted as being happy in their job, which can also have a negative effect".

"I believe it is often made a joke of as we still have a lot of male line managers, probably their lack of understanding too".

"Managers should be trained on this"

"Lack of sympathy & understanding".

"I think there is a stigma about it – and the lack of knowledge around this whole area of menopause is a contributory factor".

"I am crying completing this survey. This is the first time that the issue is being addressed or taken seriously. I have experienced symptoms for the past 12 years and received no understanding or support in all those years. I have felt embarrassed and even thought about leaving my job. I was unaware that a lot of what I was experiencing was normal for anyone suffering through menopause".

"There is indifference to menopause. It isn't even mentioned. No provision made for women experiencing difficulties. It is not even a taboo subject – it simply does not exist in the working environment".

"I don't think menopause is considered by the majority of men in the organisation".

"The word menopause is only used when joking".

"If men experienced menopause it would be treated differently".

"Gender equality is not happening quick enough."

"It has always been a taboo subject".

"I think any woman over a certain age is deemed deadwood".

"Symptoms are generally laughed at".

"I think it is something that male staff find amusing".

"Males don't understand it and joke about it".

Comments in relation to menopause being treated as a joke in the workplace:

"The only time menopause is mentioned is when people laugh at it".

"Often joked about".

"I have heard the branch male CSM pass comments to at least two colleagues joking when he saw them red in the face re: menopause, and also, if they couldn't remember things in relation to a memo they had 'brainfog' because of the menopause – all said quietly to individuals but then loud laughter from him. Appalling behaviour, but no point in raising the issue higher because there is no staff support available".

“Crude drawings of older women’s bodies circulated where the women’s ageing bodies were the joke”.

“Males joke around the subject a lot”.

“Women going through menopause are seen as less important”.

“If someone mentions they are going through it, it is not addressed”.

“Young people don’t understand and make jokes about it”.

“It’s always joked about”.

“Male staff asking, ‘are you going through the menopause?’ if you are in a bad mood”.

“I have heard a younger staff member saying there are too many ‘old people’ in our area, but this related to men and women...I was offended by the remark as he was only in his 20’s”.

“Women going through menopause are seen as less important”.

Comments in relation to gender of line manager & how it influences speaking about menopause:

“Would feel more comfortable talking with a female colleague”.

“Male managers need to be educated about the symptoms of menopause and how it impacts on a woman in work. Currently with no policy in place it is never discussed”.

“Menopause is not spoken about out loud and is viewed as a disadvantage – ‘a woman is not up to the job if she has issues going on’, so I wouldn’t raise it”.

“Mentioning it would impact on progression.”

“Work aren’t interested in these types of discussion”

“This topic has never been discussed in all of my 25 years plus years here”.

“I would worry that ‘brainfog’ would be seen as a negative and impact on my performance review – and would ultimately affect my pay”.

"I am starting menopause and don't feel any support".

"I have seen how ladies who were menopausal have been made fun of, so I wouldn't bring it up".

Further comments about experiencing menopause in the workplace:

"Men joke about women being contrary or difficult when they are simply being assertive and say they are 'going through the change'...internalised misogyny can lead younger women to also join in on the jokes".

"Ageism for our gender is systemically an issue. Leaving young men working with us unchecked when it comes to menopause /old lady jokes always happens".

"Menopause is laughed at".

"Menopause is often the punchline to a joke".

"I feel vulnerable describing symptoms such as memory loss and difficult to concentrate as I could see how this could potentially be used against me at a later stage – e.g., negative performance rating".

"I work in a male dominated area and the men sneer at women of my age".

"It's just not taken seriously".

"I saw staff and management making comments about a girls face and neck in the office".

"I lost hair, hot flushes, and developed low self-esteem – found the branch was not interested in helping me cope by making even little changes".

"Management, including women management, told us we were too old to be working if we think we are in the 'minnie' pause. Their words".

"Seen as a bit of a joke, dismissed as a moaning woman".

"You are just made to feel old".

"I have heard comments passed about women in their 50's, but I don't believe the same would be said about men in their 50's".

"Any time it's discussed in work it's for a joke".

"If an older lady became a bit annoyed over something we would be told 'not to mind her' as she is hormonal".

"I've been referred to as a hormonal woman several times".

"It's just laughed about...and also when leadership doesn't have any empathy or even an understanding, it can leave you feeling isolated".

"When someone has 'sweats' etc...it is joked about, and some men would say 'she's going through the change".

"Many people make disparaging remarks".

"There are comments on older women in the workplace being awkward to deal with, symptoms are ignored, and no accommodation made for someone suffering symptoms. Older women are dismissed for tasks or projects".

"A manager made disparaging remarks about how their mother acted during the menopause thereby making it more difficult to discuss my personal journey".

"It can be used as a reason to 'laugh' at someone having a bad day".

"Anytime she made a mistake or had a problem, staff would say 'leave her alone, she's going through the change' and then laugh at her".

"It's amazing how many times someone would say 'I feel like a 50-year-old woman' if they were sick or hungover".

"It's clear that this makes men particularly uncomfortable and rather than trying to understand it they joke about it".

"People are guarded in their speech about race or sexual orientation but feel free to mock older females".

"People think menopausal women are crazy".

"I heard someone joking that someone hadn't done their work well and that they must be going through the menopause. Then laughing".

"If a woman of a certain age comments on the temperature, then the guys laugh and say it must be the change".

“There are jokes about periods and ‘baby brain’ after pregnancy too, and you’re expected to laugh along”.

“Women face huge challenges and changes in their bodies throughout their lives a lot of which is dealt with by ‘humour’ in the workplace”.

*“A male manager said - wow, it’s fierce cold in here and the sun is not out. Ha ha, swear it was ‘cause ya had hot flushes, but sure ya would be fierce hormonal then. S**t. We men better watch out. No need for the aircon is there?”.*

“Women having hot flushes are always made fun of”.

“Ireland in general has always had a stigma and joking mindset attached to women’s issues. This is also reflected in the workplace. Again, men need to be educated about women’s issues and what they go through in the menopause but also menstrual cycles”.

“I have had a male manager remark and laugh at me personally when I was having a hot flush. This was in front of about six people at a meeting and was not funny or acceptable”.

“I overheard a male colleague commenting to another male colleague about a female colleague, who just happened to be fairly questioning something he said. ‘She must be menopausal’ he said”.

Further General Comments:

“I would never discuss it at work. Never ever”.

“It is hard to admit that menopause is impacting the way you work, go from overachieving to be graded under achieving when you are trying your best”.

“I do think it’s an area that needs to be highlighted and having discussions must take place – everyone needs to be educated, it is more than hot flushes”.

“I am hoping to see this issue being brought to the fore given the number of women currently in the workplace”.

“I definitely could not imagine speaking to a manager about menopause”.

“I would like to be able to say I am not well today and willing to work, ‘but please don’t punish me with protocol or threats of breach of protocol for this reason”.

"This is a welcome topic of conversation for me at least I can talk about it without judgement. I don't even know how to bring this up with my partner never mind my manager".

"Women making jokes about it too doesn't help".

"Information is key...should be more awareness and as part of well being it should be included".

"With no policy it's never spoken about".

"I feel it should have the same treatment and emphasis as mental health support and awareness. We have regular learning modules to complete on supporting staff with mental health but nothing on menopause which can impact on mental health".

"I was horrified when my female manager wrote in my PR that I need to be more succinct when communicating and get to the point more quickly. It was at a time when I was really struggling with 'brainfog'. I didn't challenge the comment as she was leaving and anyway, I felt embarrassed"

"I was suffering from anxiety due to menopause, no understating in work... just felt like a silly woman and got home in such a state I cut my hair off".

"It has had a very detrimental effect on me, there is no forum to discuss or any support - no option for the off or reduced hours which would be helpful".

“Delighted to see the questionnaire from the Union. Hope it leads to a better understanding..”

“I think it is great that the Union are looking at this... it has been a taboo subject for too long.”

“I think this is a brilliant initiative and very welcome. It will be worthwhile addressing this and benefit everyone into the future.”

NOTES

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