

What makes a good workplace menopause programme?

Abstract

This report is essential. More research is needed to develop insight to implement info policy on how to support women at work who are going through menopause and how to improve the workplace to cover their needs. The purpose of this paper is to find which research has been done in the UK that is applicable to Birmingham compared to Sweden, about menopause in general, as per the title, and also to find which adjustments need to be made in the workplace. This project's primary aim is to inform what Birmingham can do in general to improve workplace health for women.



Introduction

Menopause affects women's daily life, whether it is at home or the workplace. Women experience different symptoms due to menopause and still need to manage to live and work during these circumstances since they for example could experience poor memory. This could become a challenge in the work context, which could cause embarrassment and potential stigma. What needs to be done to fulfil a women's needs and how can we create a workplace, where we can support women going through menopause?

Methodology

Political documents, articles, books, peer-reviewed articles, studies, and analysis were used in my report. To find these papers I used different kinds of search engines such as Google Scholar and OneSearch and the keywords that have been used are women, menopause, workplace, Birmingham/United Kingdom or Sweden. I did not find any papers about the success of different workplace interventions to support women experiencing menopause. Therefore, this paper about women's health is a step in the right direction to understand and apply knowledge to Birmingham's public health challenges and to develop experience across the Public Health skills and knowledge framework (PHSKF). This could also be a wake up call for Sweden to start taking action. The time range is between 2012-2022, however, as a consequence of lack of available papers, I had to extend the time range (Sweden) to 2008-2022. The papers are written in Swedish and English. Menopause normally occurs between ages 44-55, with an average of 51 years. Therefore, the studies focus on this age group

Results

Studies made in United Kingdom

The health company Bupa and the HR organization CIPD conducted a YouGov led survey in 2019 that 1400 women participated in, investigating their experience of menopause symptoms. The results showed that three out of five women in Britain are affected negatively by their menopausal symptoms. Statistics from CIPD show that 48% of women feel supported by their colleagues and only 32% by their managers when going through menopause (CIPD 2019). 65% of the women said they had a hard time concentrating. 58% of the women said they were more stressed during these periods. 52% of the women said they had a less even temperament with their colleagues/clients. 30% of the women took sick leave – ¼ told their managers the reason was menopause (CIPD 2019).

Studies made in Sweden

There was a study that was done in Sweden by Li, Borgfeldt, Samsioe, Lidfeldt & Nerbrand (2015, ss. 306-318) where it appeared that 50% of the women that they investigated reported that they got exhausted during some periods, 60% of them felt that they had depression and 40% experienced problems such as stress. Bauld & Brown (2008, ss. 160-165) conducted a quantitative study where they investigated the relationship between the psychological impact that menopause has, for example, depression and anxiety, with women who have emotional intelligence and negative attitude toward experiencing menopause. The results showed a relationship between these two factors. Therefore women experienced a higher measurement of discomfort when they are in menopause and the symptoms that come with it. The correlation also shows that a greater focus on correcting the negative attitude towards menopause, among the women who are dealing with their depression as well as anxiety, could help the women to get rid of their dilemmas.

Discussion United Kingdom

Researchers show that many women have taken long-term breaks from work to handle their symptoms, making the business less productive. To help overcome this issue, the workers must feel comfortable and get support from their manager to talk about menopause and get advice. It is an important subject, and it should not be taboo. Consideration of menopause should be included in the policy about flexible working and sickness. This could help the workers perform their best. A guide for the managers to access at work for female colleagues is recommended (CIPD 2021). There are recommendations on how managers can support colleagues experiencing menopause (CIPD 2021). Every conversation should be approached with empathy.

If someone tells about their menopause condition the information should be confidential.

Option to work from home if sleep has been disrupted (night sweats).

There could be easy adjustments, for example, using a fan in the office and easy access to drinking water

Discussion Sweden

Clas Lundstedt, the press officer at DO, has stated that could not be ruled out that a menopause case be investigated using arguments for discrimination based on gender. It would be more challenging to see a connection to disability, as this depends on how the basis of discrimination is defined in the law (Aquilonius 2021). The unit manager at the Swedish work environment Authority, Christina Jonsson, states that the employer should primarily handle menopausal complaints within a routine work environment (Aquilonius 2021). Annalena Eriksson, an author, and consultant argues that employers should have a policy for supporting women in menopause. She has developed a training program for the managers and human resources staff in order for them, to have more knowledge about menopause, what support they need and how it affects women. Eriksson claims that the course brings up, for example, how managers can implement a policy that create opportunities to work from home and more flexible work hours (Aquilonios 2021),

Recommendations

The Swedish government needs to follow in Birmingham's footsteps and do more research on menopause in general, despite that mainly creating a good workplace for women experiencing menopause and considering menopause as an actual disability. There were gaps found in the Swedish database and literature compared to Birmingham, which has come further in its development, and their research also shows that there are strategies and manuals that can be useful for managers and HR. Birmingham should start implementing more of their ideas into the policy leading and implement a menopause policy at more workplaces.

Conclusion

A similarity found in the results is that the United Kingdom and Sweden express that menopause will only become more costly because sick leave increases for women when they take long breaks and then return to work (CIPD 2021) (Rendik 2019). A difference I found is that the United Kingdom compared to Sweden, discussed options in the office that could be useful for women going through menopause, such as having a fan in the office and easy access to drinking water (CIPD 2021). Menopause is an issue affecting only women who suffer from several symptoms which affect their daily life, especially during work, since women's workability is worse than men's during the transition period in menopause. There has been lots of information about guidelines and what issues there are for women in the workplace, never less none about different successful workplace interventions to support women experiencing menopause. For this reason, it is important that more research needs to be done.

For further information about the references, see the report: 'What makes a good workplace menopause programme?'

Zozan Akyol
Public Health Intern
Euniwell Mayors
Placement 2022
Birmingham City Council

