

**Menopause and Career Sustainability: The Role of Organisational Support in Shaping Career Progression of Midlife Women Professionals.**

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Abstract:

This report examines the often-ignored effect of Menopause on the career sustainability of women professionals. Menopause has been traditionally treated as a private and purely medical issue. But nowadays, it is being recognised as a workplace issue with significant implications for gender equity, leadership continuity and employee retention. Recent research suggests that symptoms such as fatigue, emotional strain, and reduced concentration can impact women's day-to-day work experiences, affecting their job satisfaction, career decisions, and performance. Lack of supportive organisational policies and practices, many women experience what has been termed a "Menopause penalty", resulting in higher absenteeism, reduced productivity and, in some cases, an early exit from the workforce. Hence, this report highlights an in-depth analysis of the role of organisational support affecting career outcomes. Based on current findings, the practical steps organisations can take to create more inclusive workplaces – the ones that not only address the challenges of menopause but also value and retain the skills, leadership potential and experience of women professionals.

**Keywords:** Menopause, Career Sustainability, Organisational Support Policy, Midlife Women, Work Life Balance, Leadership.

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Women professionals are a large part of the workforce globally, often in senior leadership and specialised positions. But many find themselves stuck in their careers as they undergo Menopause, occurs as part of the biological process where women stop having their menstrual period once for good due to hormonal changes caused by the decrease of estrogen and progesterone hormones; a stage that normally hits between the ages of 45 and 55 and is often the prime of one's career. Menopause is a universal fact, but it has begun to receive sustained research attention. The Menopause is more than just a collection of physiological symptoms; it is a complex life transition that affects organisational culture, workplace issues, and individual career paths. Without adequate support structures, these challenges may be exacerbated and could jeopardise women's professional self-efficacy, progression and continued participation in the workforce. This not only impacts individual career paths but also results in the loss of talent and expertise within organisations.

## 2. LITERATURE REVIEW

### 2.1 The Impact of Menopause on Career Sustainability and Progression

#### 2.1.a Symptom-Related Work Impairment

Studies have indicated that women's day-to-day work efficiency and performance can be significantly affected by Menopausal symptoms like pervasive fatigue, brain fog, hot flashes and sleep disturbances. Research into the ageing workforce has provided data that approximately 65% of respondents said these symptoms impacted their ability to work efficiently. Apart from the physical symptoms, Menopause how widely seen as a major workplace 'demand' capable of draining the individual as well as cognitive resources. This may also shape a woman's belief in her abilities at work and her overall confidence, as well as the quality of her output. Further data from quantitative research shows that there is a strong relationship between symptom intensity and decreased involvement in economic activity, including increased absence. This issue is especially prevalent in high-stress jobs like medicine, where Menopause related difficulties have led some women to work fewer hours or retire early. It is not just about individual careers but also represents a significant loss of valuable professional experience for the industry as a whole.

#### 2.1.b The "Menopause Penalty" and Leadership Barriers

The term "Menopause penalty" refers to a range of negative effects on career development that may arise during Menopausal transition, such as delays in promotion opportunities and, in some cases, early retirement from work. Importantly, these experiences are shaped not only Menopause itself but by the opinions held at the workplace and the gendered expectations associated with menopause. For women, there may exist a further "glass ceiling" related to Menopause based on certain stereotypes. As a result, lowered perceptions of competence and negative moods related to menopause can significantly impact evaluation and promotion processes, especially those associated with leadership roles.

As many as 35% of women surveyed have indicated that menopause had a negative impact on their career progress, indicating just how important menopause can be when considering one's career path. For others, having ongoing symptoms leads to decisions about career options that include passing up chances of promotions or moving away from challenging positions in an effort to take care of oneself better. This is compounded by the fact that few employers understand the situation or have organisational structures that allow for dealing with changing health issues.

## 3. ORGANISATIONAL SUPPORT MECHANISMS AND THEIR EFFICACY

**3.1 Formal Policies and Menopause Action Plans:** Workplace policies can be viewed as an important part of the basis for effective support during Menopause. Guidelines developed by The Menopause Society(2024) recommend that companies conduct systematic reviews of their current policies on leave arrangements, sick pay, and health insurance benefits to assess whether Menopause is considered and adequately supported in relation to relevant healthcare needs. Additionally, frameworks such as M-Power offer practical methods for creating menopause action plans based on research data.

In the public sector, policies such as those adopted by the Civil Service(2024) reflect an institutional approach that recognises the impact of Menopause and commits to making appropriate changes in the working environment. However, despite the increasing number of policy frameworks being developed, there remains a significant gap in empirical analysis of their effectiveness.

**3.2 Flexible and Hybrid Working Arrangements:** The adoption of flexible work policies is recognised as an important factor that helps in managing symptoms, but also provides women with stronger support for sustaining their careers. Specifically, hybrid work arrangements may enable individuals to have more control over their work environment and better manage changing symptoms, including fatigue, hot flashes, and decreased concentration. Nevertheless, flexibility has been shown to depend greatly on how it is implemented, and, when it is poorly managed or stigmatised, it may unintentionally reduce its own benefits.

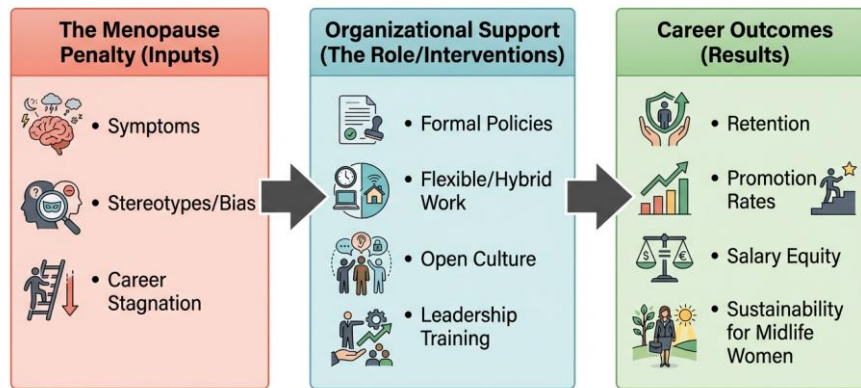
In addition to guidelines from The Menopause Society, the importance of flexible working and suitable workplace adjustments is highlighted as key to retaining women in the workforce and lowering the risk of early exit from the workforce. However, despite the presence of clear guidelines and strong employee demand, where approximately 65-68% require menopause-related policies and flexible working arrangements, actual implementation remains limited, with only around 2-6% of organisations having introduced such flexible working practices in the workplace.

**3.3 Leadership Training and Managerial Support:** However, the role of managers is significant in making sure that menopausal support at work succeeds in practice. Managerial participation plays an important role in encouraging women to talk about the issues related to menopause and making necessary changes. If managers know what needs to be done and how to handle the issue, they will be able to ensure that a psychological atmosphere has been created in which this subject can be discussed freely. For this reason, there is a growing tendency to implement manager training programs that make women aware of their rights.

This is the point at which the idea of "The Implementation Gap" gains significance. While managerial training has always been known to be a much-desired form of support, it continues to remain non-existent in most organisations. The gap between the two becomes one of the reasons for making the policy initiative less effective. For creating an atmosphere that suits middle-aged women, it is necessary to improve communication channels between managers and their employees, with HR services and employee assistance programs becoming critical components.

**3.4 Cultural Normalisation and Stigma Reduction:** An organisational culture that promotes open discussion of menopause is essential for encouraging acceptance and inclusivity in the workplace. Without such dialogue, many women may still feel uncomfortable sharing their symptoms as they worry that others may perceive it as less capable or less committed. Findings from recent research show that over 50% of respondents reported this concern to the extent to which stigma continues to influence the workplace. Hence, current studies indicate the necessity to revisit HRM policies by considering life stages associated with age and gender. Menopause should not be treated as a forbidden subject; instead, it must be acknowledged as an acceptable issue that demands professional and personal consideration.

## Menopause and Career Sustainability: The Role of Organizational Support



### 4. SECTOR-SPECIFIC INSIGHTS AND VULNERABLE POPULATIONS

The impact of menopause varies significantly across sectors and socio-economic groups.

**Healthcare and Professional Services:** Research on this topic is mainly focused on healthcare and professional services. Women experiencing menopause in these sectors often face significant disruptions in their working lives. However, with adequate support, women in these fields can be given greater flexibility, which helps them manage the challenges during this period effectively.

**Low-Paid and Manual Jobs:** Women employed in low-paid and manual occupations often face considerable challenges in managing their work responsibilities during menopause due to working conditions and physical demands. Limited control over work processes and restricted access to facilities such as restrooms further intensify these difficulties. At the same time, inadequate medical support, lack of guidance, limited flexibility, and low income levels also add to the complexity of this situation.

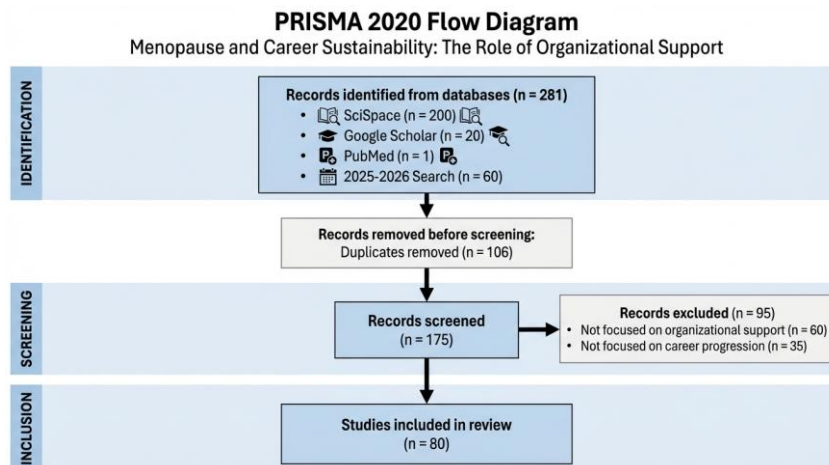
**Male-Dominated Industries:** Menopause intensifies gender-related barriers to advancement in male-dominated fields, such as hospitality management and STEM. The interaction between menopause and these factors makes career progression more challenging for women. To support equal growth opportunities, targeted interventions should be implemented.

### 5. OBJECTIVE

This research examines the role of menopause in the career progression of women and evaluates the effectiveness of organisational systems, such as policies, flexible working arrangements, and leadership training, in support of fair career progression.

### 6. METHODOLOGY

A systematic review of the literature available in Scopus databases from 2023 to 2026 was carried out. Relevant studies were also collected from multiple databases (SciSpace, Google Scholar, PubMed) focusing on themes such as workplace interventions, organisational culture, and career outcomes related to Menopause.



### 7. RESULTS AND FINDINGS

Results indicate a significant 'Menopause Penalty' reflected in higher rates of absenteeism, reduced productivity, and increased barriers in career progression within organisations. In addition, women face several issues during the menopausal period such as cognitive issues, such as "brain fog," hot flashes and persistent stigma at work. On the other hand, the research indicates that carefully constructed interventions, such as Menopause Action Plans, proper training for managers, and flexible working schemes, can positively impact worker retention and promote occupational self-efficacy. The need for these interventions is much greater (65-68%) than the actual provision (2-6%).

#### Future Directions and Recommendations

To ensure career sustainability for midlife women, organisations should:

**Implement Menopause Policies:** Set clear guidelines to ensure the provision of accommodation and flexibility at work.

**Provide Leadership Training:** Ensure that your leadership is trained to be able to recognise menopausal symptoms and handle them professionally and fairly.

**Improve Work Flexibility:** Ensure that flexible work becomes an everyday part of your work environment.

**Evaluate Physical Environments:** Regularly audit workplaces to ensure personal workplaces, accessible restrooms and a comfortable temperature are provided.

**Promote an Open Culture:** Promote an open environment that allows for conversations and awareness drives, helping in reducing stigma among people

### 8. SIGNIFICANT RESEARCH GAPS AND LIMITATIONS

Notwithstanding the increased number of studies, some significant gaps persist:

**Lack of Longitudinal Studies:** Most existing research relies on cross-sectional designs, limiting understanding of the long-term effects of menopause on career outcomes such as promotion pathways and pay progression over time.

**Objective Measures:** Despite this, however, there are still fewer studies that utilise organisational or administrative records in order to determine the level of the "menopause penalty." This implies that there is still a great deal of information that is based purely on personal opinion in relation to menopause.

**Efficacy of Workplace Interventions:** Although interventions aimed at promoting wellness and work capabilities have shown promise, still more research is needed to establish effective workplace strategies for addressing the adverse effects of menopause.

**Intersectionality:** The intersectional aspect of menopause and its implications for the career success of women from different communities have been explored in a few studies.

## 9. CONCLUSION

Menopause is an important issue that significantly impacts the career progression of women. Although menopause might bring temporary problems at work due to its symptoms, it seems like the main obstacle that women face when it comes to having sustainable careers includes a lack of support from organisations, as well as stereotypical attitudes towards this phenomenon and its consequences. In case these aspects are not considered, the “menopause penalty” is likely to develop, leading to lower retention and promotion rates of employees. Nevertheless, the implementation of a corporate policy on menopause and managers’ training in this aspect can help in minimising the negative effects mentioned above.

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