An in-depth qualitative interview study of Female Ambulance Staff Experiences of the Menopause Transition (CESSATION Phase 3)





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INTRODUCTION

Menopause transition is a key workplace issue. It will affect all women (including transgender) during their lives and many will experience in their later working life. The Ambulance Service constitutes an employment setting that, dependant on the roles of female staff, can impact on severity of symptoms and experiences of women going through the menopause. CESSATION explored female ambulance staff experiences and suggested ways to improve support offerings.

METHODOLOGY AND SAMPLE

Over 400 expressions of interest were received from CESSATION Phase 2 participants. Participants were emailed a Participant Information sheet and consent form and allowed one week to respond. During February-July 2022 twenty-one front line and office-based CESSATION participants across 13 UK ambulance services were purposively sampled to participate in a one-hour semi-structured online or telephone in-depth research interview. All phases of the menopause were represented: Perimenopause (n =9); Menopause (n =4); Post-menopause (n =3); Unsure (n = 5). Ages of participants ranged from 42-62 years. Eleven participants worked in Operational Service Delivery (Emergency), 6 in Service Support, 3 in Ambulance Operation Centre and 1 declined to specify. Interviews were transcribed verbatim and analysed using an inductive thematic approach.



RESULTS

Ten themes were identified: impact of work role, awareness and preparedness for menopause transition, personal impact of symptoms, desired support, appropriate sickness and menopause policy, managerial development, compassion and dignity, impact of working environment, impact on safety, lack of choice, Lack of understanding and support from colleagues and line managers were identified as key issues. This is included under the managerial development and compassion and dignity themes.

Impact of work role

"When I got a diagnosis, I was kind of like over the moon because I can put an end to what it is....All these **problems** under one umbrella"

Awareness & Preparedness

"I couldn't work with the symptoms I was experiencing because I was all over the place and had no control on what was going on"

> Personal Impact of Symptoms "It did disrupt daily life significantly"

Desired Support

"Those are the women that I go to for **suppor**t...they just kind of helped me come to terms with that new normal"

Appropriate Sickness & Menopuase Policy "I think the **policy** they've got, if you're office based, I'd say is fantastic"

Managerial Development

"Well, I suggest this isn't the job for you-go find another job"

Compassion & Dignity

"When I was having heavy vaginal bleeding, I was left by myself. I had a **manager** just chuck some wipes under the door at me"

Impact of Working Environment "It's debilitating and embarrassing"

Impact on Safety

"There were definitely shifts where I didn't feel **safe** because I was so tired and couldn't think clearly"

Lack of Choice

"I just plodded on, kept my mouth shut and just got on with it"

KEY FINDINGS

The varying range of symptoms and their severity had an impact on women's performance at work. The experience of working whilst going through the menopause could be challenging. Employers should adopt a menopause policy which includes training and awareness for all staff, suitable for front line as well as office-based staff. There is a need to create a culture where the menopause is no longer taboo, and women feel able to talk about their symptoms.

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