No Desk, No Rest - an exploration of inclusive menopause support for deskless workers

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1. Introduction, research question, aim, and objectives

Menopause, a natural biological transition, remains underrepresented in workplace policy and research, particularly for deskless workers who comprise approximately 80% of the global workforce (Iden, 2021). Concentrated in sectors such as healthcare, retail, and transport (CIPD, 2023), deskless roles often entail physical demands, irregular schedules, and limited autonomy conditions that can exacerbate menopausal symptoms and restrict access to organisational support (Beck & Brewis, 2024). Despite growing recognition of menopause as a workplace issue, organisational engagement remains inconsistent: only 53% of UK employers have implemented specific measures (CIPD, 2023), often leaving women to manage symptoms amid a historical backdrop of stigma and age-based discrimination (Brewis et al., 2017; Fawcett Society, 2023). Research indicates that one in six women has considered leaving work due to insufficient support, with 6% have resigned (Tomlinson, 2024). This forms part of a broader pattern of prolonged unemployment among workers aged fifty and over (DWP, 2024), challenging the view that work is a fundamental right and a social good (Taylor et al., 2017). Recognising women's health as integral to the recruitment and retention of older workers, the Employment Rights Act 2025 supports menopause in legislation, mandating employer menopause action planning from 2027 (Department for Business & Trade, 2025). This research examines how workplace culture, governance, and design can be adapted to provide inclusive support, developing a framework that informs future organisational practices.

1.1 Research question

How do deskless workers experience menopause in the workplace, and in what ways can inclusive workplace design and practices support their inclusion and well-being?

1.2 Aims and objectives

The research aims to deepen the understanding of menopause in deskless work environments and to generate evidence-informed strategies for inclusive support. Objectives include: i) understanding women's experiences of menopause; ii) exploring HRM practices that address women's hormonal health; iii) identifying barriers to incorporating inclusive menopause support, reviewing existing workplace frameworks, and developing recommendations that consider the realities of deskless workers.

2. Justification

As retirement ages increase and more women participate in the workforce, menopause becomes crucial for workforce sustainability and gender equity. In the UK, 4.5 million working women aged 50 to 64 face disproportionate economic inactivity due to health-related factors (DWP, 2024). Deskless workers are particularly vulnerable to issues such as poor communication (SHRM, 2024), inadequate facilities, particularly access to toilets and running water (BSI, 2023; Tomlinson, 2024) and feelings of disconnect and a lack of belonging (Root, 2023).

3. Literature review

Menopause is a biopsychosocial phenomenon marked by hormonal changes that can last over a decade, often longer (Beck & Brewis, 2024). Symptoms such as hot flushes and cognitive changes can impair work performance and confidence, further compounded by performance-driven cultures and inflexible schedules (Rees et al., 2021). The absence of support correlates with increased absenteeism, presenteeism, and reduced productivity, imposing significant personal and organisational costs (DWP, 2024). Deskless workers frequently lack access to vital facilities, which can worsen their symptoms (Tomlinson, 2024) and are often overlooked in organisational planning, as Human Resources (HR) professionals may not sufficiently adapt policies to fit mobile and shift-based positions (SHRM, 2024). Workplace culture significantly affects menopause experiences: stigma, organisational silence, and a lack of compassionate leadership heighten feelings of invisibility while supportive relationships encourage disclosure and necessary adjustments (Eccles et al., 2025). This research builds on emerging frameworks, such as BS 30416, which outlines standards for menopause in the workplace and advocates a cohesive approach that integrates policy, culture, and environmental factors (BSI, 2023).

4. Theoretical basis

Grounded in Person–Environment Fit (PE Fit) theory, this research explores how compatibility between individuals and their work environments influences job satisfaction, performance, and well-being (Kristof-Brown et al., 2002; Van Vianen, 2018). A misfit between needs and supplies, or between demands and abilities, can lead to stress, burnout, and withdrawal (Kandler et al., 2024). For menopausal workers, misfit is heightened by inadequate uniforms, rigid rotas, and unsupportive cultures, especially in male-dominated and safety-critical environments. Psychological Capital (PsyCap) comprises hope, efficacy, resilience, and optimism (Luthans et al., 2007) and helps mitigate challenges but cannot replace structural support. High-quality leader–member exchange (LMX), characterised by trust, justice and open communication, encourages workplace adjustments (Hoyt & Goethals, 2009), while breaches of the psychological contract, such as feeling unsupported, may prompt women to reduce hours or leave (Kristof-Brown & Guay, 2011; Rousseau, 1995). The researcher's contribution to the study is the *Menopause AlignMent Framework*, an evidence-informed model synthesising PE Fit, PsyCap, LMX, and psychological contract theory. The framework provides a structured approach for organisations to assess alignment between deskless employee needs during menopause and workplace conditions, guiding inclusive redesign.

5. Research design

A qualitative, interpretivist approach was employed, using purposive sampling to recruit deskless workers, menopause and workplace design specialists, HR leaders, and line managers. Ethical approval was sought from the LJMU ethics committee, and all participants provided informed consent (Liamputtong & Rice, 2020). In-depth, semi-structured online interviews guided by Appreciative Inquiry principles (Cooperrider & Srivastva, 1987) were conducted with workplace menopause and design experts to explore current practice and opportunities for redesign. Interviews with female deskless workers focused on lived experience, work context, and perceptions of inclusion, visibility, and fit. To reduce power imbalances during the research process, participants were given the opportunity to review transcripts (McIntosh & Wright, 2019). A reflexive thematic analysis was undertaken to identify key themes and opportunities for strengthening menopause support in workplace practice (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

6. Implications for practice

Findings highlight that deskless workers require context-sensitive, inclusive strategies to remain productive during menopause (CIPD, 2023). *The Menopause AlignMent Framework,*

developed from this research, offers a practical, participatory tool for organisations to redesign work and support deskless employees. By centring lived experience and participatory design, the framework positions menopause inclusion as a collective responsibility and provides a basis for evaluating and improving workplace fit. When used with the Kirkpatrick model, it offers a structured framework for assessing training outcomes (Kirkpatrick & Kirkpatrick, 2006).

7. References

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