
PUBLIC HEALTH RESEARCH

Women in Menopause and The Workplace Experience: A Meta-Synthesis

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ABSTRACT

Introduction	Menopause is an inevitable phase in every woman's life, significantly impacting their physical, psychological, and social well-being, with wide-ranging effects on their quality of life, including their ability to work. This systematic review employed a meta-synthesis to explore the workplace experiences of menopausal women.
Methodology	This study employed meta-synthesis to integrate findings from several qualitative and mixed-methods studies. Using the Critical Appraisal Skills Programme checklist and structured according to the PRISMA 2020 flow diagram, the review synthesized data from 12 final articles.
Results	Four key themes emerged from the thematic analysis: Impact and Symptom Experience, Disclosure and Attitude, Coping Tactics and Self-Management, and Workplace Policies and Practices. A meta-theme, Menopause as a Diversity-Wellbeing Concern in the Workplace, highlighted the need to recognize menopause as a critical diversity issue affecting women across all stages of their careers, from entry-level roles to senior positions.
Conclusion	This review underscores the importance of tailored support and creating inclusive workplace environments that value and respect menopausal women, allowing them to thrive professionally while navigating this life stage.
Keywords	Menopause; Meta-Synthesis; Quality of Life; Systematic Review; Work Productivity

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INTRODUCTION

Menopause has long been seen as a taboo subject in many workplaces, but the taboo is finally being broken. A large increase in multidisciplinary research over the last decade, increased focus from governments and companies concerned about an aging workforce, and increased media and celebrity attention all highlight the issue's relevance and significance. Unfortunately, there has been inconsistent success in recognizing and addressing the needs of women experiencing menopausal symptoms at work.¹

According to the World Health Organization, menopause is a natural stage in a woman's life that affects a large percentage of working women.² We may address menopause-related difficulties and create a more inclusive and supportive work environment for women by embracing the concepts of Sustainable Development Goal 3 (SDG 3) - Good Health and Well-being. We can enable menopausal women to thrive in the workplace by increasing awareness, enacting inclusive policies, providing health support, and promoting education, thereby boosting their overall well-being and contributing to sustainable development following SDG 3.

Menopause is a natural occurrence for 50% of the population.³ The term menopause refers to the last menstrual period. However, it is also used to characterize the menopause transition, which begins with changes in the menstrual cycle and ends one year following the last menstrual period.⁴ The importance of menopause in the workplace is now one of national, international, and organizational interest.⁵⁻⁷ The increasing presence of employed women undergoing menopause has stimulated a growing corpus of research highlighting the complex relationship between menopause and work.⁸ Likewise, the problem of menopause and work is receiving more attention. An increasing number of employed women over 50.⁹ Women are living longer lives, working longer hours, and retiring later. Approximately 45% of the over-50-year-old workforce in nearly all forms of employment are women, all of whom will experience menopause and its symptoms, which may be mild to moderate in some women but severe and devastating in others.¹⁰

Women go through several physiological changes during menopause, which can result in a wide range of physical symptoms, as well as psychological and social issues. Every day, millions of women experience peri- and post-menopausal symptoms. Aside from the physical discomfort associated with the menopausal transition, women may feel a significant impact on their ability to handle a normal job load.¹¹ Whiteley et al¹² state that women experiencing menopausal symptoms, such as people suffering from depression, joint stiffness, anxiety, and memory loss, had much

higher absenteeism and overall job impairment than the rest. Menopausal women's job productivity index has been linked to a lack of awareness, poor knowledge, and negative opinions of menopause.¹³ Menopause is a normal physiological process defined by the permanent end of menstruation in women as a result of hormonal changes. Reduced ovarian hormone secretion is most common between the ages of 45 and 55. Women may encounter a variety of symptoms at this time, including hot flashes, night sweats, sleep and mood disturbances, decreased memory, difficulty in focusing, anxiousness, sadness, insomnia, bone and joint complaints, and muscle mass loss.¹⁴

Menopause issues have a substantial impact on women's ability to work and overall quality of life.^{15,16} The study found that women experiencing menopausal symptoms reported unfavorable effects on their physical, social, and sexual lives. This was highlighted in a study by Ama and Ngome,¹⁷ who discovered a link between severe menopausal symptoms and a drop in the standard of living. Regarding quality of life medical literature lacks a precise definition of quality of life, which is a wide, multidimensional notion. The World Health Organization defines the quality of life as an individual's perspective of their place in life in the context of the culture and value systems in which individuals live and about their goals, expectations, standards, and concerns.¹⁴

Understanding the experiences and problems women in menopause confront at work is critical for developing inclusive and supportive work cultures. While menopause is a natural stage in a woman's life, it can cause physical, psychological, and emotional changes that can have an impact on her career. However, thorough research is scarce to synthesize the available literature on this subject.

This meta-synthesis study aims to fill this knowledge gap by reviewing and synthesizing prior research on women in menopause and the workplace. This meta-synthesis attempts to provide a thorough picture of the challenges and implications of menopause in the workplace by examining and combining information from different studies. The findings of this meta-synthesis can help employers, policymakers, and organizations design policies, programs, and initiatives to meet the special requirements of menopausal women. It is feasible to build inclusive workplaces that empower women in this transitional era of their lives and capitalize on their valuable contributions to the workforce by raising awareness and understanding.

Hence, this study aimed to explore and synthesize women's experiences in menopause and the workplace using a meta-synthesis method based on accessible literature from qualitative studies published in various publications.

METHODS

Research Design

This study employed meta-synthesis to integrate findings from several qualitative and mixed-methods studies. This meta-synthesis aims to provide a comprehensive understanding of the use of manipulatives in mathematics education by systematically reviewing previous studies and integrating qualitative research findings into their major themes.^{18,19}

Search Strategy

Using Publish or Perish software, Google Scholar, Semantic Scholar, Crossref, and some academic publications connected to the effects of menopause of women in the workplace were found in an electronic database for scholarly research. All research published from 2021 to 2023 that is pertinent to the effects of menopause on women in the workplace has been downloaded and examined. Further, the descriptors or keywords entered in the software were work experiences, qualitative, and menopausal symptoms. The keywords mentioned earlier were selected to draw out articles. A flow diagram using PRISMA 2020 was then utilized to sort out the screened data.

Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria

Inclusion and exclusion criteria provide a basis on which the reviewer draws valid and reliable conclusions (Meline, 2006).²⁰ Included studies were selected based on inclusion criteria protocol: (a) must include studies related to menopausal women at work; (b) must utilize qualitative design; (c) must be written in English; (d) must qualify using the Critical Appraisal Skills Programme (CASP). Selected papers were screened using the set inclusion criteria. The figure below shows the search strategy of the included studies.

Data Analysis

The emerging themes were determined using the thematic analysis procedure described by Clarke and Braun (2013).²¹ It is a qualitative data analysis technique that entails reviewing a data collection and looking for themes across the data. The six steps of thematic analysis are as follows: (1) familiarizing oneself with the data; (2) creation of initial codes; (3) topic search; (4) theme evaluation; (5) theme representation; and (6) result interpretation.

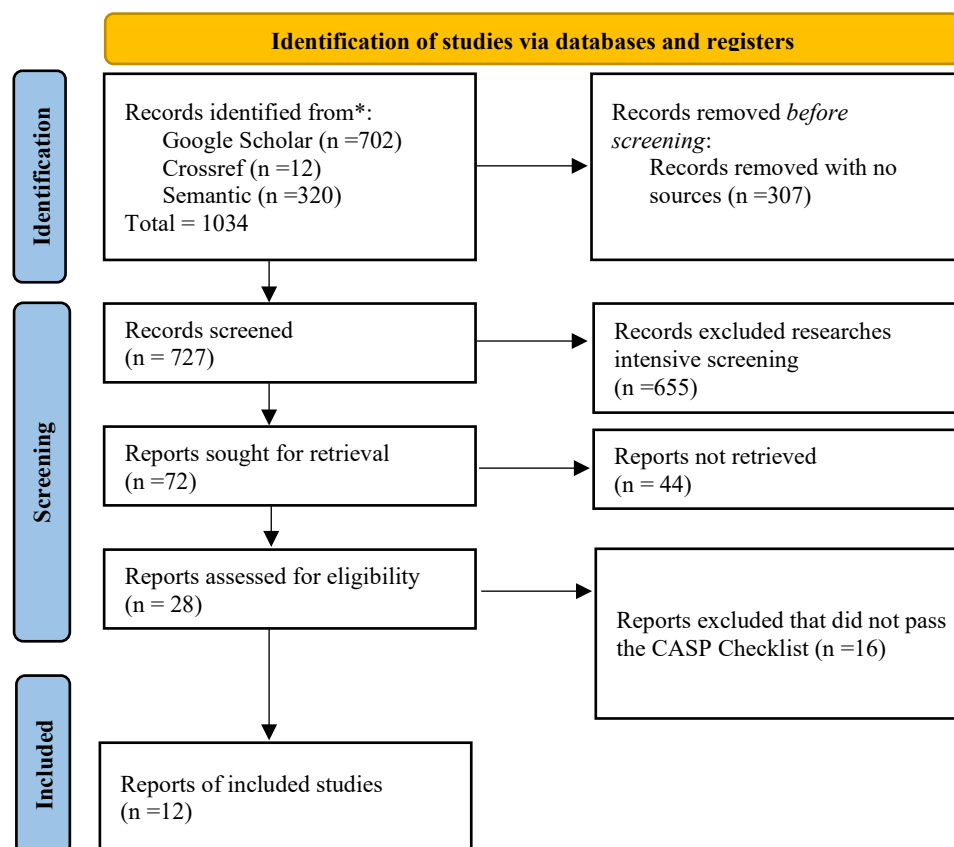


Figure 1 Search strategy utilizing PRISMA

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The effects of menopause on women at work were used to generate initial codes highlighting the 12

studies considered in the meta-synthesis. As shown in table 1, the initial codes on the experiences of women in menopause and the workplace were generated to search for themes.

Table 1 Studies highlighting the effects of menopause of women at the workplace

Article	Author/s & Year Published	Generated Initial Codes on the Effects of Menopause on Women at Work
1	Rees M et al. (2021) ⁷	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Zero-tolerance policy to bullying harassment of women with menopause symptoms • Open, inclusive, and supportive culture/environment • Allow disclosure of menopausal symptoms but with utmost respect
2	Steffan B. (2021) ¹⁹	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lack of confidence • Fear of perceived reduced value at work • Coping through silence • Neoliberal identity of menopause endurance
3	Hardy C, Hunter MS & Griffiths A (2017) ²²	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Importance of awareness and acceptance • Emphatic to the situation • Appropriate talking and communication
4	Sang K, Remnant J, Calvard T & Myhill K. (2021) ²³	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Manages to work despite the pain • Get more tired quickly from teaching • Access to appropriate facilities so no need to go out or go home • Fear of the stigma of menstruation
5	Viotti S, Guidetti G, Sottimano I, Travierso L, Martini M & Converso D. (2021) ⁸	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Develop a prevention strategy at both organizational and public-institutional levels • Health promotion programs
6	Verdonk P, Bendien E & Appelman Y (2022) ²⁴	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lack of knowledge or information about menopause • Absenteeism and productivity loss • Menopausal remains a taboo • Menopause in relation to work requires serious consideration
7	Brown N, Williams R, Bruinvels G, Piasecki J & Forrest LJ (2022) ²⁵	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The need for greater menstrual health education • Support is required for teachers to increase confidence and knowledge • Training should be provided
8	D'Angelo S, Bevilacqua G, Hammond J, Zaballa E, Dennison EM & Walker-Bone K (2022) ²	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Difficulties coping up with work • Importance to employers of being aware of, and applying policy measures to, menopause among their workforce.
9	Guidetti G, Viotti S, Sottimano I & Converso D (2021) ²⁶	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Direct attention to the needs of menopausal women • Raise health concerns
10	Gamal El-Said G, Abdelhaseeb M, Abdel-Salam Ramadan S & Abdel-Haliem Said S (2021) ²⁷	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Educational programs intended for women
11	Whiley LA, Wright A, Stutterheim SE & Grandy G (2022) ²⁸	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Physically, emotionally, morally, and emotionally dirty • Menopause at work is problematized
12	Dunn S (2022) ⁵	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reluctant to disclose of experiencing menopausal period • Workplace coaching

The general codes were analyzed using the thematic analysis approach, which emerged with five (5) themes and one (1) meta-theme. The themes generated are the following:

Theme 1: Impact and Symptom Experience

This theme may investigate the many physical, psychological, and emotional symptoms that women experience throughout menopause, as well as how they affect their professional lives. It includes hot flashes, sleep difficulties, mood changes, cognitive consequences, and how these symptoms impair productivity, focus, and overall well-being at work. Menopause symptoms, including anxiety, irritability, hot flashes, and poor concentration, can be perceived as problematic, embarrassing, and shameful in the workplace.^{9, 29, 30} Indeed, hot flushes and nocturnal sweats alone are related to lower work engagement and a higher propensity to quit³¹ and decreased work productivity for many women.^{12, 19}

Women go through several physiological changes during menopause, which can result in a wide range of physical symptoms, as well as psychological and social issues. Every day, millions of women experience peri- and post-menopausal symptoms. Aside from the physical discomfort associated with the menopausal transition, women may feel a significant impact on their ability to handle a normal job load.¹¹ Likewise, the study also revealed that over three-quarters of symptomatic menopausal women report substantial difficulties dealing with the physical and mental demands of their jobs (reported as low workability); thus, these women may be at risk of missing work for an extended period.

In the findings conducted by Faubion et al,³² they identified a major negative impact of menopause symptoms on work outcomes and the need to improve medical treatment for these women and make the workplace environment more supportive. Women going through peri- or post-menopause suffer a variety of symptoms that might be 'bothersome' depending on the individual. Menopause symptoms include sleep difficulties, exhaustion, hot flashes, night sweats, anxiety, lack of confidence, irritability, mood swings, and difficulty concentrating and/or making decisions.³³⁻³⁵

Women say that exhaustion and issues with memory and attention can harm their professional lives during the menopausal transition. Furthermore, hot flushes can be embarrassing and distressing. Some believe these symptoms will affect their performance.³⁶ Additionally, as cited by Brewis et al³³ (in the findings of Grandey et al,³⁷ in the workplace, menopause may be regarded as "the symbolic end of a woman's productive life" as well as its reproductive counterpart.

In contrast, the findings in the study by Hickey et al³⁴ showed that women assessed their

work performance as excellent and did not believe that menopausal symptoms hampered their capacity to work. Most women would like more organizational assistance, notably temperature control, flexible work hours, and menopausal information for employees and managers. This is also evident in one of the findings as cited by Brewis et al³³ that many women's menopausal experiences are good, referring to "a transition period" between one's childbearing years and the extended period of life that follows when one no longer has children, there is no need to be concerned about monthly menstrual bleeding or the potential responsibilities of pregnancy.

Further, menopausal symptoms have a limited reported impact on some women's employment,³⁴ and menopause can be related to good outcomes such as increased vitality, enhanced self-belief, and greater perceived autonomy.³⁷ Others, though, see things very differently. Hot flushes, for example, can have a detrimental impact on job performance and cause feelings of shame or humiliation,³⁰ but sleep disruption or weariness caused by night sweats or the unpredictability of menstrual flow might make work more difficult.³¹

Theme 2: Disclosure and Attitude

Menopausal women frequently adopt coping methods and self-care routines to deal with the physical, psychological, and emotional challenges of menopause. Exploring this issue can show how these methods affect women's quality of life and productivity at work. Reasons for non-disclosure are complex but have been reported to include menopause being a private issue not to be talked about at work, disclosure resulting in negative perceptions by colleagues, and an individual's work abilities being questioned.³⁹

According to one of the findings conducted by Dunn,⁵ menopause prompted women in menopause to question their own professional identity and the unfavorable image in the workplace produced a reluctance to disclose to anybody in the workplace. Likewise, Atkinson et al⁴⁰ stated that menopause symptoms were a marker of older female bodies, and negative attitudes about older women's capability and contribution abounded and created a reluctance to disclose.

The presence of bodies in the workplace resulted in secrecy and concealment of their (female) functions and needs, and the majority of women (61%) had not mentioned their menopausal symptoms to their line manager. Concerns about being perceived as less capable, line manager gender and age, that disclosure would be embarrassing, and that it was a private/personal matter were all reasons for nondisclosure.^{37, 40}

Atkinson et al⁴⁰ also added that women who had worse experiences of symptoms or were unprepared for menopause were more likely to

disclose, presumably related to their symptoms being more problematic at work. Conversely, those who could manage symptoms without disclosure chose to do so, perhaps also linked to lower disclosure by those with positive attitudes towards menopause in managing work and life. Grandey et al³⁷ suggest that disclosure reduces stigma but resistance to its discussion and concerns about the personal/professional.

Theme 3: Coping Tactics and Self-Management

This theme could look at women's tactics and self-management approaches to navigate menopause while continuing to work. It may involve discussing lifestyle changes and alternative therapies, obtaining medical help, and leveraging workplace resources to manage menopausal symptoms effectively.

Griffiths et al³⁶ indicated that women value information on menopause and ways of dealing with symptoms at work. This can come from both formal (given by employers and occupational health authorities) and informal networks of menopausal working women. Marlatt et al⁴¹ concluded in their study that women report an interest in a structured lifestyle program that includes weight loss and weight-maintenance techniques to address menopause symptoms.

While Butler's⁴³ study focused on the body and physical menopause symptoms, she discovered that the same-gender peer-group support of real women who were not ashamed of their menopausal bodies but used their bodily distinction as a psychological coping mechanism was one of their key sources of support that helped them cope.

In the study of Steffan and Potočnik,²⁹ their participants were having difficulty coping with menopause symptoms at work, and very few sought help from outside sources. Furthermore, women in this study acknowledged a negative impact on work performance due to a variety of physical and psychological menopause symptoms.

In Australia, Jack et al¹ interviewed women working in three universities and found that some respondents saw menopause as "an opportunity to articulate the potential advantages of identifying as a professional older woman," such as a reassessment of the role of work with self and happiness, confronting sexism and ageism, and feeling liberated.

Another manifestation of coping tactic and self-management is evident in one of the findings of Edwards et al,⁴³ which revealed that women recognized the significance of beginning to exercise and the benefits of low-intensity activities such as walking, yoga, and swimming. This included altering the sort of exercise that individuals did, such as introducing strength training into workout programs.

Theme 4: Workplace Policies and Practices

This theme may cover existing workplace policies, practices, and organizational support for menopause. It could look into the availability and sufficiency of workplace policies, flexibility arrangements, accommodations, and training programs aimed at supporting women during menopause and promoting a friendly work environment.

Improving employer knowledge that menopause might cause difficulties for certain women at work is a crucial first step. Managers should know that women may alter their usual working habits to help themselves. Women said it is important for their managers to be understanding. Managers may require training, online information, or a menopause booklet indicating the type of support women find useful.³⁶ As affirmed in the study of Jafari et al,⁴⁴ every head or manager must conduct a risk assessment to identify potential health and safety issues. They must act on it to reduce hazards to their employees at work and consider risk assessment and other relevant problems when assessing and regulating risks to menopausal women.

Likewise, Hardy et al²² found out that women desired employers and managers to have more understanding and awareness about menopause in order to effectively communicate with women about it and agree on relevant modifications, provide staff training, and implement supportive policies.

Having a menopause policy or policies accommodating women going through menopause is something else to consider. This includes offering regulations that allow for work modifications such as flexible working and sick leave. Procedures for granting women time off for medical visits or additional breaks to assist them during this transitional period of menopause.⁴⁵

As evident in the study of Beck et al,⁴⁶ the menopause transition experience is not standard; each woman has a unique set of symptoms, including none. As a result, a one-size-fits-all strategy for menopause transition in the workplace is ineffective. Instead, they advocate for a cafeteria approach in which women can select from a menu of solutions to help with their unique symptoms based on intensity, frequency, and length, an opt-in approach. Viotti et al⁴⁷ also added that it might be necessary to adopt organizational policies, training, and activities expressly targeted to supporting menopausal women's well-being in order to promote women's job sustainability across their whole work-life duration.

Greater employer understanding, combined with compassionate and flexible management, can be beneficial to women at this time. Fostering a culture in which employees feel comfortable admitting health problems, permitting

flexible working, eliminating causes of work-related stress, giving quick access to cold drinking water and bathrooms, and assessing workplace temperature and ventilation are some specific tactics.³⁸ Improving employer knowledge that menopause might cause difficulties for certain women at work is a crucial first step.

Meta-Theme: Menopause as a Diversity-Wellbeing Concern in the Workplace

This meta-theme underlines the importance of menopause as a part of workplace diversity and its impact on the well-being and experiences of female employees. It emphasizes the importance of addressing the specific issues faced by menopausal women in order to establish inclusive and supportive work environments. Menopause is a natural and typical life change that can substantially impact women's health, productivity, and career trajectories, according to the meta-theme.

Menopause is becoming more widely acknowledged as a serious professional concern. Menopausal symptoms have been shown to harm female health and well-being, as well as work attendance and performance.³⁹

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

This study highlights women's experiences in the workplace during menopause, focusing on the four key themes that emerged. First, impact and symptom experience explores women's physical, psychological, and emotional challenges, such as hot flashes, mood changes, and sleep disturbances, which can significantly affect their professional lives, productivity, and overall well-being. Second, disclosure and attitude address the reluctance many women feel in discussing their menopausal symptoms at work due to stigma, privacy concerns, and fear of being perceived as less capable. Third, coping tactics and self-management reveal the various strategies women adopt to manage their symptoms, such as lifestyle changes, peer support, and seeking medical help, all influencing their ability to maintain their work performance. Finally, workplace policies and practices highlight the need for organizational support through flexible working arrangements, education on menopause for managers, and accommodating policies that create a more inclusive and supportive work environment. These findings emphasize the critical importance of recognizing menopause as a diversity and well-being issue that impacts women at all career stages, underscoring the need for specialized support to foster an environment where women can thrive professionally despite the challenges of menopause.

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