

News Release

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Quarter of Kiwi women say menopause symptoms halve work efficiency

New research from Global Women and ANZ Bank New Zealand reveals three quarters of Kiwi women experiencing menopause symptoms felt the symptoms negatively impacted their work but only 11 percent had talked to their manager about it.

The research, conducted by the New Zealand Institute for Economic Research, found most women felt they were working at 20 to 30 percent below their best because of the symptoms. One in four women felt their ability to work was halved. Concentration loss and brain fog were the most reported symptoms.

“Menopause occurs at a critical time in a woman’s career when many are experiencing career successes or achieving leadership roles,” said Theresa Gattung, Global Woman Chair.

“While international evidence suggests that the impact of menopause on women’s work can be significant, we wanted to apply a local lens on this issue by surveying New Zealand women and employers.”

“This is the first-ever in depth look at how menopause can affect Kiwi women’s economic engagement, allowing us to identify how employers can better support their wellbeing and productivity through the menopause transition.”

More than half the women surveyed had never discussed menopause, perimenopause, or their experiences at work; and only 11 percent said they had talked about it with their manager.

“This research highlights the impact menopause can have on women’s physical and emotional wellbeing and the implications on their ability to engage and participate in the workforce,” said ANZ’s General Manager, Talent & Culture Michelle Russell.

“ANZ is one of New Zealand’s largest employers with over 8000 staff; 56 percent of our workforce are female, and 40 percent of our female workforce are over the age of 45.

“We are very aware of the importance of improving workplace support, awareness, and understanding to ensure that women can effectively manage their symptoms and continue to excel in their careers.”

The research also reveals a disconnect between women’s concerns and employer perceptions.

94 percent of employers said they had no concerns about women's performance during menopause suggesting the impact on performance might be more of a perceived issue than an actual one. Improved communication and understanding between employees and employers are crucial to bridge this gap.

Employers appear open to this; 90 percent of employers said they were comfortable discussing menopause-related issues with their employees. However, nearly 40 percent of employers admitted to needing more information on the topic.

To address these challenges, the research highlighted key adjustments that women sought to manage their menopause symptoms effectively. Three-quarters of women experiencing

symptoms at work aimed to make adjustments, including working from home (22 percent), flexible start and finish times (20 percent), and reduced work hours (14 percent).

However, the industry in which women worked significantly impacted their ability to implement these adjustments. Women in predominantly female-dominated sectors, such as health and social care, education, retail, and hospitality, were less likely to work from home or have flexible schedules.

While only one in four managers believed that a specific menopause policy would benefit their organisation, many employers were already offering the most requested adjustments.

“Women make up a large percentage of our workforce and everyone has a shared responsibility for understanding the impacts of menopause in the workplace. Increased understanding is essential for creating an inclusive environment that supports gender equality.” Ms Russell said.

“This research shows us the diverse nature of work in New Zealand presents some challenges, but I encourage all employers to look at ways to normalise menopause, identify ways to support their female employees, and provide guidance for managers so they can support their staff.”

Key findings from the research:

Three quarters of Kiwi women who experienced menopause symptoms report that their symptoms negatively affected their work, with concentration loss and brain fog being the most reported:

- Most women felt that their symptoms caused them to work at a level that was 20 to 30 percent below their best.
- One in four women (24 percent) felt that their ability to work was reduced by at least half.
- Other common symptoms reported were feeling a loss of interest or motivation, feeling less patient with others, feeling more stressed and feeling less confident in their abilities.
 - Loss of interest/motivation 38%
 - Feeling less patient 38%
 - Feeling more stressed 37%
 - Feeling less confident in their abilities 35%
- Although women have concerns about performance, 94% of employers have no concerns about women’s performance through menopause, suggesting that impaired performance may be more perceived than real.

Flexible hours and remote working are key adjustments women seek to manage symptoms of menopause:

- Three quarters of women experiencing symptoms at work will seek to make adjustments to manage their symptoms.
- Key adjustments include working from home some or all the time (22 per cent), flexible start and finish times (20 per cent) and reduced work hours (14 per cent)

However, industry is a major determinant of women’s ability to make the adjustments they seek:

- Women working in predominantly female dominated industries particularly health and social care, education, retail, and hospitality reported being significantly less likely to work from home and to take advantage of flexible start and finish times.
- 42% of women in female dominated industries who didn’t ask for adjustments said it was because they knew the adjustments, they needed would not be possible (compared with only 20% in other industries).
- Nearly 1 in 3 employers say it is not possible to offer popular adjustments in their workplace due to the nature of the work.

While women are unlikely to discuss menopause in the workplace, most employers are comfortable having these discussions with their employees:

- More than half of the women surveyed have never discussed menopause, perimenopause, or their experiences of these with anyone at work.
- Only 11 percent of women responded that they had at some point had this discussion with their manager.
- Conversely, 90 per cent of employers are comfortable having these discussions about menopause.

Employers are open to discussions about menopause, however nearly 40 per cent of employers still felt they need to know more about it:

- Half of managers are “very comfortable” having discussions about menopause symptoms and possible workplace adjustments.
- But only one in three managers feels “very knowledgeable” about menopause (dropping to only 1 in 5 male managers).
- More than half of managers felt their workplaces would benefit from:
 - Increasing awareness and understanding of menopause among employees
 - Being able to identify the support and adjustments that are available to support a person experiencing menopause.
 - Promoting an environment where employees can openly and comfortably engage in discussions about menopause and its impact on work.

While only 1 in 4 managers thought a specific menopause policy would benefit their organization, many employers already offer the most requested adjustments:

- 3 in 4 managers are already accommodating or doing their best to accommodate any adjustments needed by women dealing with menopause when they are aware of the problem.
- Many employers already offer to all employees the two most requested adjustments by women: flexible start and finish times (nearly 70%) and remote working at least some days (nearly 50%).

For media queries contact: Briar McCormack 021 2801173

Our insights on women’s experiences of menopause and employers’ attitudes about menopause are derived from two surveys we designed which Kantar ran in May-June 2023: A survey of over 1,000 New Zealand women designed to understand the challenges posed by menopause from women’s perspectives. And a survey of 500 New Zealand employers, designed to understand the experiences, attitudes, and concerns that may shape what actions are needed and what actions are feasible in the New Zealand context.