
Wales TUC

Menopause interim report

Why this work is needed

The Wales TUC has a positive relationship with workplace reps across Wales. Through consultations with these reps, holding Equality network meetings and engaging with the Wales TUC equality committee, we discovered that workplaces were not tackling certain issues in a way that helped workers. More worryingly, there were some issues that were ignored completely and this left workers being disciplined on competency grounds for an issue that required reasonable adjustments, or staff feeling unable to discuss equality issues in the workplace. One of those issues that was being ignored was that of the menopause.

Work began by engaging with reps and asking them if this was their experience, we found anecdotal evidence from workplaces and from the Women's forum that the menopause wasn't an issue that was being discussed in the workplace and although some found the process easy, other's found it to be a time where they experienced numerous symptoms that made working life more difficult. The menopause is often a taboo subject and this made this topic even more difficult to discuss and get help or have reasonable adjustments put in place.

Menopause is part of the natural ageing process for women, which refers to the point in time when menstruation has ceased for 12 consecutive months. This occurs naturally, usually between the ages of 45-55. In UK, the average age is 52. Symptoms associated with the menopause can include hot flushes, palpitations, night sweats, sleep disturbances, fatigue, poor concentration, irritability, mood disturbances, skin irritation and dryness. The period of hormonal change and associated symptoms (perimenopause) can last from four to eight years with women suffering varying degrees of symptoms during that time.

To look conservatively at some of the statistics of the people who may be affected. Women aged 16-64 comprise approximately half (48%) of the Welsh workforce (ONS Employment stats March 2016). When looking specifically at over 50s in the Welsh workforce, 44% are Women (ONS stats

March 2016). They represent over 213,000 workers (ONS Employment stats). This figure does not take into account those that are experiencing an early menopause or one brought about by medical treatment or surgery. It is also difficult to statistically gauge the number of people who experience the menopause from the non-binary, transgender or intersex communities and furthermore how different equality strands experience the menopause, or if differs because of your disability, age, race, religion, sexual orientation or marital/civil partnership status. Consequently, many women in today's Welsh workplaces are, or will be working through a little discussed stage of life, the menopause.

Why/how we did a survey

After hearing the experiences and feedback of workplace reps and union members. Wales TUC wanted to investigate further how Welsh employers are responding to this issue and what the experiences of women in the workplace are. We required a method which was capable of reaching large numbers of people and one which could be recorded easily.

We developed a short survey and distributed to our contacts and networks, assuring participants that their individual data will be confidential but broad trends would be gathered to allow Wales TUC to influence and create guidance for workplaces. The questions were designed to be direct and difficult to misinterpret. They were not designed to be leading. We wanted the clearest answers from this survey that was possible. This meant limiting the survey and not asking too many questions as we didn't want people to feel overwhelmed or bored by the survey and not complete it. We added a progress bar at the bottom of the survey to ensure that participants knew how many pages were left when they completed this. The survey was open to all regardless of gender or union membership status. We used Survey Monkey and this has worked well. However, despite the survey being a short survey, we encountered a technical error which affected a few hundred of the surveys, in which participants were led to a timed out page when they clicked to the last page of the survey. This has not affected the overall reliability of the survey or the results. The survey was available bilingually but there was a wider take up of the English language version.

Wales TUC motion to conference

To further develop this work and to gain the consent and action of the Trade Union movement in Wales, the Wales TUC Equality Committee proposed a motion to the biennial conference held in May 2016. The text was as follows;

Conference calls on the Wales TUC to lead the way in conjunction with WEN Wales and Older People's Commission to address the gaps in research that exist on the Menopause. Furthermore, to build upon survey work undertaken on Welsh Women about their experiences in the workplace in order to create healthy workplaces for women who are experiencing the menopause.

Conference instructs the General Council to establish a campaign to:

Highlight the role of Trade Unions in challenging attitudes to the menopause, ensuring that employers have procedures in place, and offering support to women who are experiencing problems.

Campaign on a wider occupational health and safety awareness campaign to raise issues such as the menopause so all staff know that their employer has a positive attitude, and that it's not something women should feel embarrassed about.

Work in partnership with WEN Wales, the Older Peoples Commission to develop a joint resource for workers, reps and employers.

Campaign for better healthcare information for women experiencing the menopause

Provide guidance on how to deal with the menopause and make it freely available

Raise meetings with employers to ensure that the workplace meets the needs of menopausal women.

To ensure that existing TUC leaflets are recreated bilingually so to make them appropriate for a Welsh audience

Wales TUC Equalities Committee

This motion was unanimously passed and it became a conference resolution which the Wales TUC office has been instructed to work on.

Union organising issue

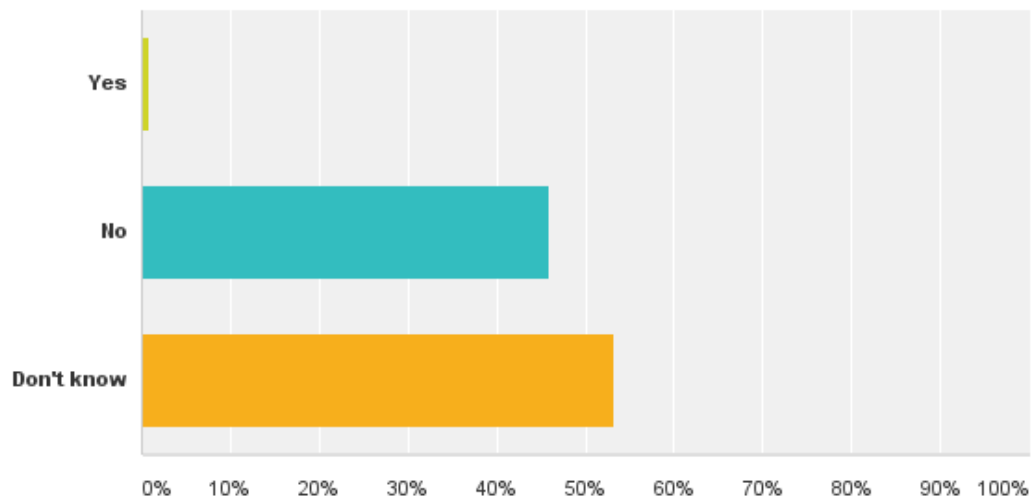
As the graphs below will show, nearly a quarter of the participants of the Wales TUC menopause and the workplace survey were not union members. However, when asked if they would welcome a model policy from the Wales TUC relating to the menopause and if they would welcome training for union reps in order to support women at work, the numbers of people replying 'yes' reached nearly 90%. Clearly there is a much larger number of people who would look to the Wales TUC for guidance on this, than who are union members. When activity takes place in the workplace, this may show non-union members further examples of the kind of practical, on the

ground work that unions do and may encourage them to join. Furthermore, there is an additional benefit to this work, because if it is seen to make a difference, the Trade Unions involvement and relationship with members will be recognised and further strengthened. After talks with a number of workplaces, employees have been keen to work with their Trade Unions in a collective way to achieve change in this way. The embarrassment factor and difficulty of achieving change on this subject matter may have stopped some from raising this an issue, but together and working as a union team, this issue may be resolved.

What the survey findings are

Q1 Does your workplace have a policy on the menopause?

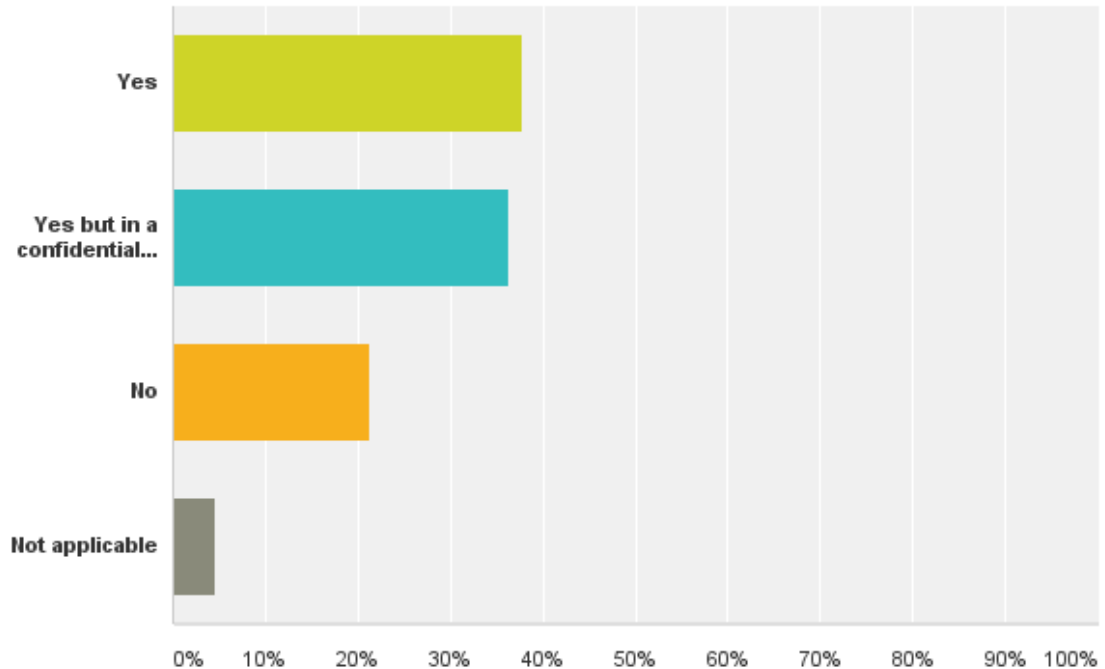
Answered: 3,695 Skipped: 0



As this graph shows, only a small number of workplace had an identifiable policy in place. For the majority of survey participants, they were unaware if their workplace had a policy or not. Clearly in those cases, if a policy does exist it's not working well enough.

Q2 Would you feel comfortable talking about your menopause status at work?

Answered: 3,695 Skipped: 0

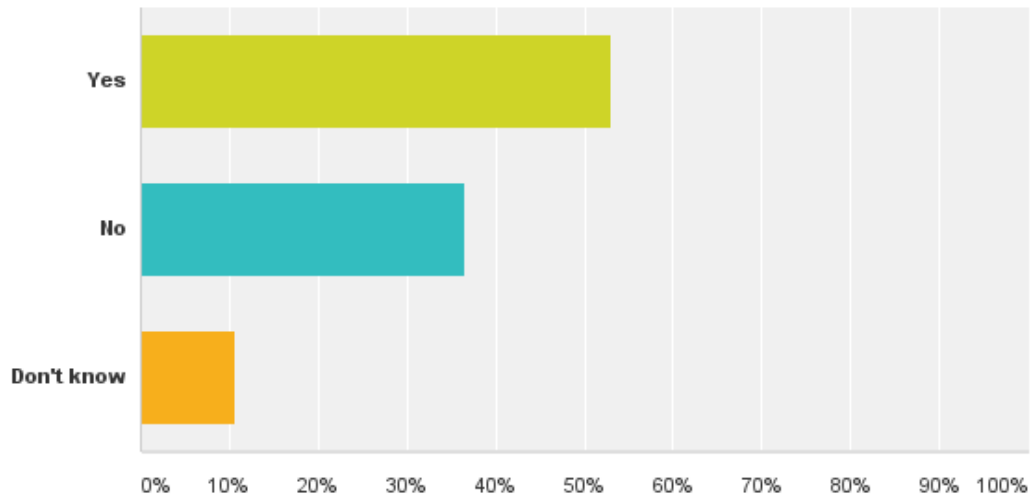


The majority of participants did feel comfortable in talking about the menopause. Some declared that to do so, it would have to be in a confidential situation with a line manager or a trade union rep. However, as the previous question has highlighted, this is not translating into practical help through reasonable adjustments or workplace policies. Some participants would feel uncomfortable talking about this issue at all, but may feel more inclined to do so if the workplace culture was different.

Question 3 looked at how the gender of the line manager influenced the conversation about the menopause and clearly this influenced many people in how they talked about this issue. The survey also gathered qualitative evidence in which women declared that they would feel uncomfortable talking to a male line manager, and this increased if that male manager was young. For some, they feel that a younger female line manager who has not yet experienced the menopause would be similarly unsympathetic. In the meantime, women were losing out because of their perceptions of how their managers might deal with this topic. It should no longer be the case that help is only offered to you if your line manager is able to empathise. This is a valid and recognised stage of life which many people go through each year.

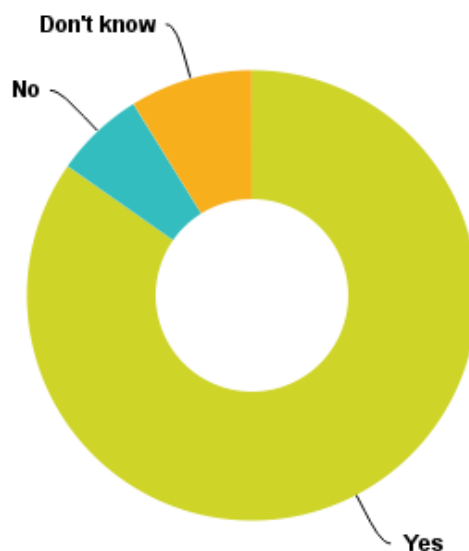
Q3 Does the gender of your line manager influence how much you talk to them about the menopause?

Answered: 3,695 Skipped: 0



Q4 Do you think that the menopause affects working life?

Answered: 3,424 Skipped: 271

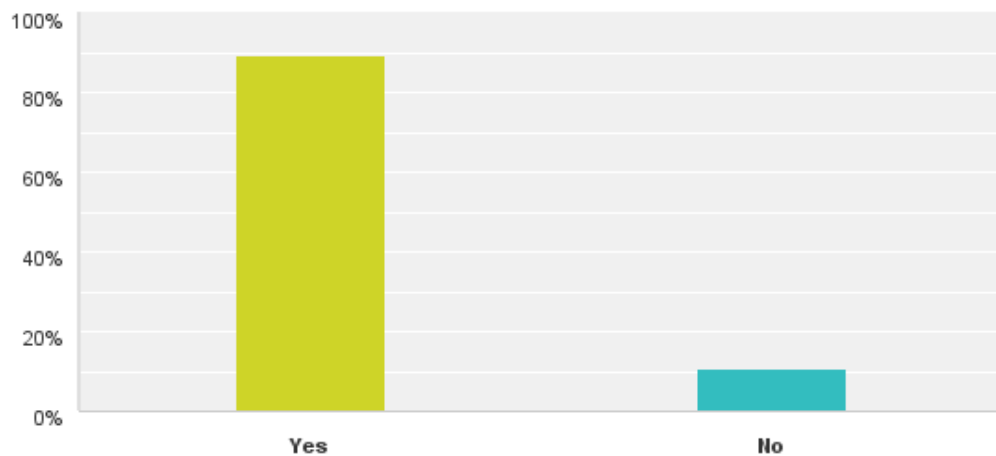


Evidently, the majority of participants felt that the menopause affected working life and this has huge implications for the workplace. Some participants of this survey seemed unsympathetic to those that may have a

difficult time during the peri-menopause. However, it is clear that there are many people out there that do recognise that this stage in a person's life often comes with multiple symptoms and can affect significantly your day to day life.

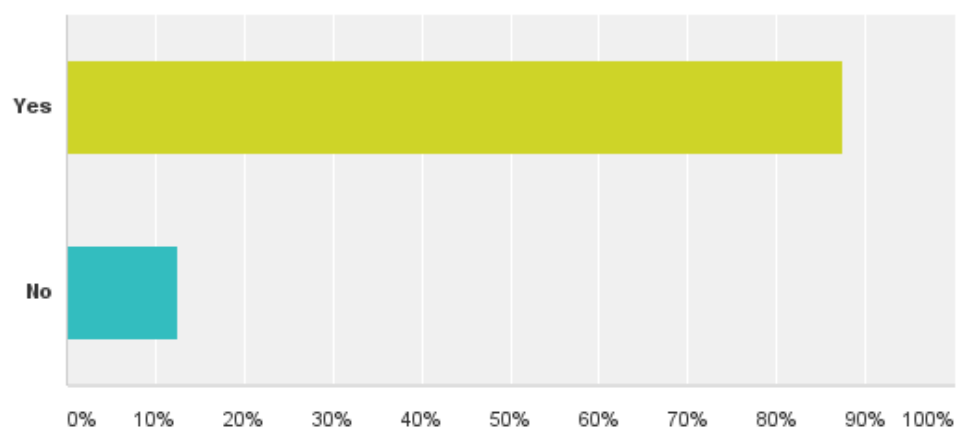
Q5 Would you welcome a model workplace policy from the Wales TUC on the menopause?

Answered: 3,424 Skipped: 271



Q6 Would you welcome training for union reps so that they could support women experiencing the menopause at work?

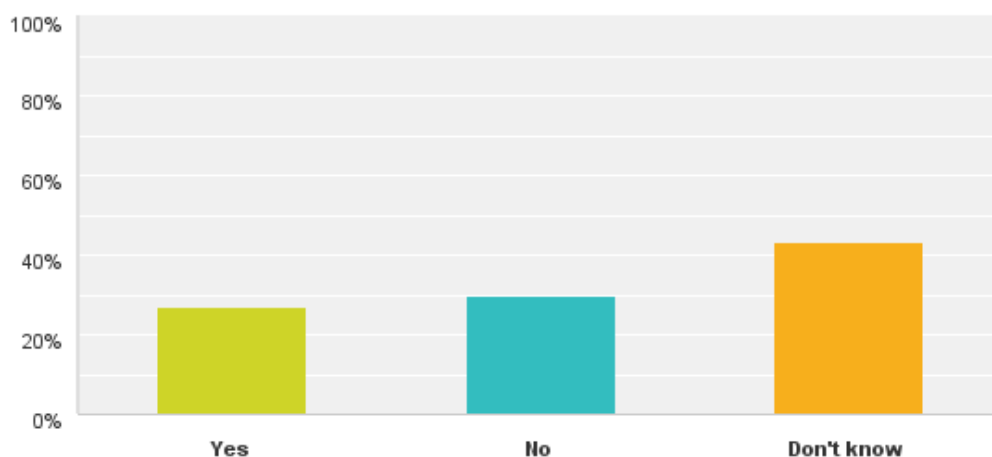
Answered: 3,424 Skipped: 271



One of the surprising results of this survey was the different responses to questions 9 and 10. One might have expected a strong correlation given the similarity of the questions asked. However it seems that when asked if the menopause was treated negatively within the workplace, survey participants answered relatively equally between yes and no and slightly more didn't know. In question 10, it seems that the majority of participants could recognise that the menopause had been treated as a joke. Qualitative survey responses highlighted that there were many people who go through the menopause and who discuss this issue in the workplace by introducing it as a joke, or by making light of it. This is perfectly acceptable, however, there was also evidence that suggested that some women felt they became the butt of a joke. Interestingly, many of those did not answer 'yes' to the menopause being treated negatively within the workplace. There is clearly a problem if the latter situation is prevalent and those going through the menopause felt that jokes were being made at their expense, without their involvement, humour or consent. The use of humour may help lighten the situation and make employees feel more at ease, but those jokes should never be allowed to make another person feel uncomfortable.

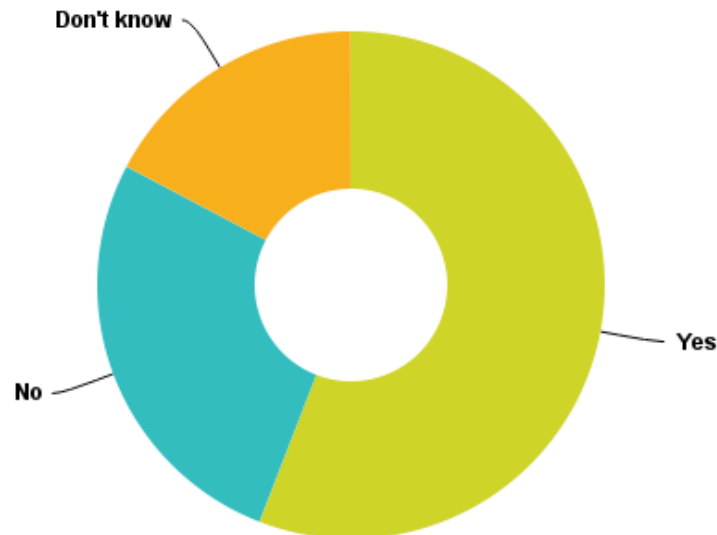
Q9 Do you think the menopause is treated negatively within your workplace?

Answered: 3,424 Skipped: 271



Q10 Has the menopause even been treated as a joke topic within your workplace?

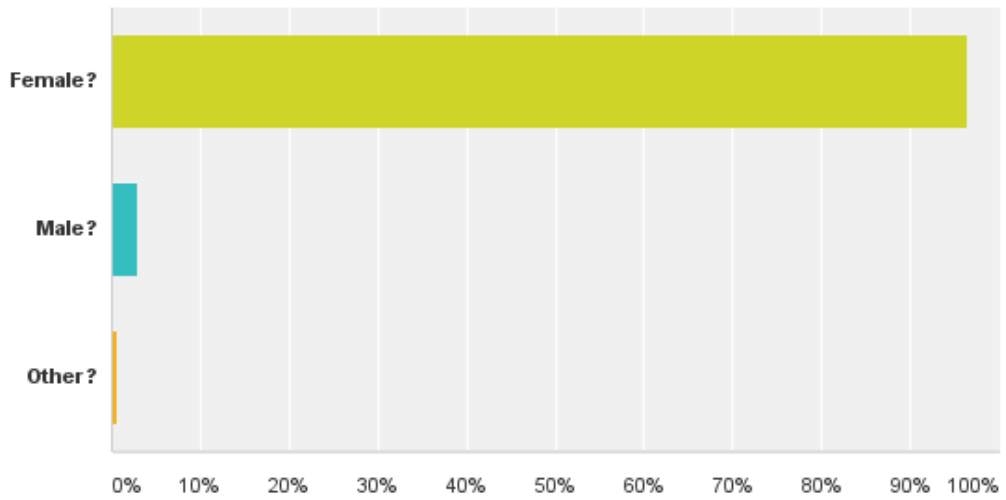
Answered: 3,424 Skipped: 271



As one might expect, the largest number of participants to this survey were female. However, there was a representative and proportionate (to the general population) number of people who defined under the category 'other'. This may include transgender, non-binary, intersex amongst others. This has been the most representative survey that the Wales TUC has produced in reaching this group of people and it raised questions about how specifically transgender men and women experience the menopause. It has been decided that a great deal more engagement work has been necessary and that there is a need to look at how those with protected characteristics may experience the menopause in a different way. This engagement work has begun and the final report will highlight some of this work. However, due to there being little information out there about the menopause and transgender, young women, religion, race, FGM, disability or sexual orientation we expect this to be an area in which further engagement is required, or one which develops as the final report becomes more widely available. This is certainly an area in which the Wales TUC and WEN Wales see potential for further engagement and research.

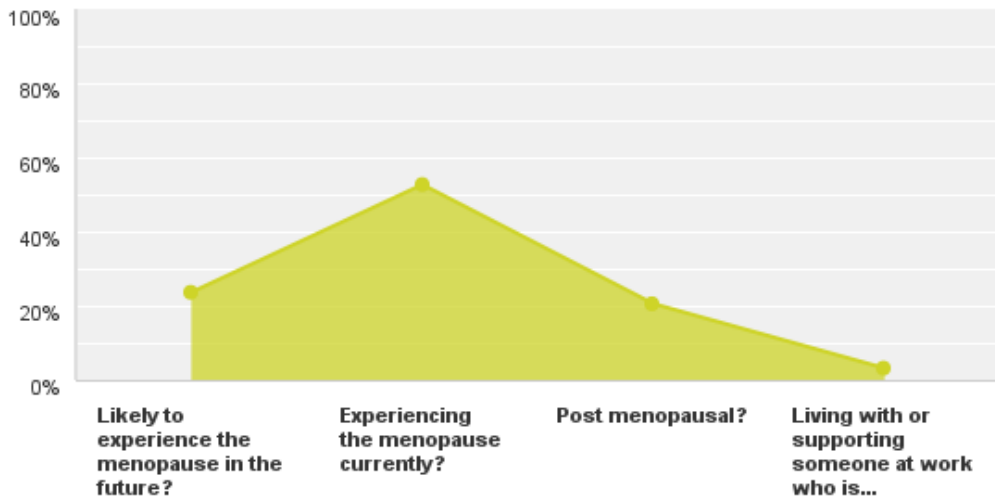
Q12 Are you

Answered: 3,373 Skipped: 322



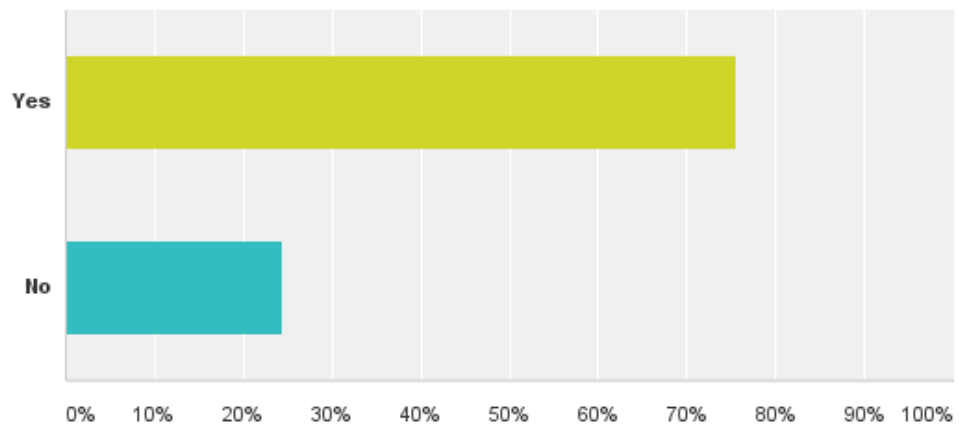
Q13 Are you

Answered: 3,332 Skipped: 363



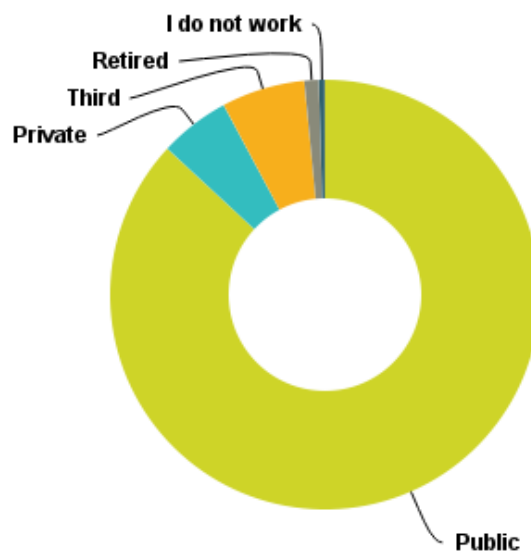
Q14 Are you a member of a Trade Union?

Answered: 3,373 Skipped: 322



Q16 What sector do you work in?

Answered: 3,373 Skipped: 322

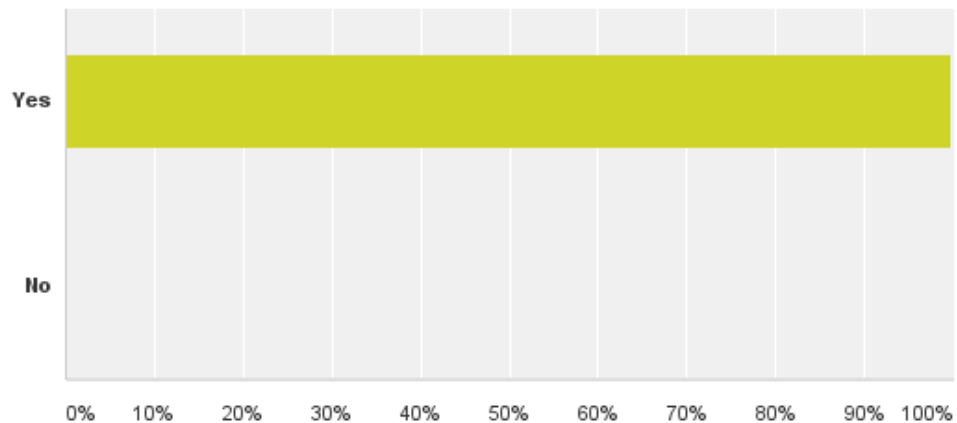


This survey correlated well with other reports that show that in Wales, Women occupy a larger proportion of the public sector. This again highlights how vulnerable women are to public sector job cuts or changes to terms and conditions. On a positive note, if negotiation in the public sector could take place in which menopause policies and action plans were adopted. This could positively impact on a larger number of people. All participants came from Wales and so this report is authentically Welsh. However, it has raised a number of issues which will be relatable to women

outside of Wales, and so the Wales TUC is happy to share findings in order to achieve a positive difference to workplaces outside of Wales.

Q17 Do you live or work in Wales

Answered: 3,373 Skipped: 322



Summary and next actions

Wales TUC has launched a joint campaign with the Women's Equality Network Wales (WEN Wales). This campaign will firstly look at developing a report which can highlight the issues and outline how to tackle this issue in the workplace. Wales TUC and WEN Wales are working to co-author a report aimed at highlighting this issue and raising awareness, whilst also setting out workplace policies, reasonable adjustments, guides to help deal with the menopause and information about the menopause and protected characteristics. The current outline for the report headings are as follows;

Main headings and timeline for menopause document

The menopause, a workplace issue

- What is the menopause?
 - Natural, peri, medical, surgical
- Timeline, Diagnosis of menopause. NICE Guidelines
- Legal cover
- Symptoms
 - Physical, psychological, sexual, impact of HRT
- Coping strategies
 - Being informed, empowering
- Disclosure
 - Talking to a manager or union rep in the workplace
- Wales TUC survey research

- How many women took part
 - Results and findings
 - What this tells us
-
- The effect of the menopause
 - Women's experiences at work
 - What we expect of the workplace
 - Protection, public sector equality duty, discrimination
 - The menopause health and safety/disability. Health and wellbeing during the menopause
 - The menopause and protected characteristics, BME women, young women, disabled women, lesbian women, religious women.
 - Is there a male menopause
 - Ideal workplace policies
 - Reasonable adjustments
 - Health and Wellbeing during the menopause
-
- Women's experience at work, case studies/experiences
 - What can you expect from your workplace?
 - Workplace policies and reasonable adjustments, easy wins/What can workplace union reps do?
 - What can employers do?
 - What can unions do?
 - What a model workplace policy might look like
 - Who to signpost to
 - How to join a union
 - Worksmart website
 - Further information and signposting