



The University of  
**Nottingham**

## Institute of Work, Health & Organisations

### Women Police Officers: Ageing, Work & Health

A research report on the experience of ageing at work, with particular reference to the menopause, and its impact on the well-being of women police officers aged 40+.

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## **TERMS OF REFERENCE**

The authors of this report were commissioned by the British Association for Women in Policing (BAWP) to explore women police officers' experience of working through the menopause. In particular, the research aims were to:

- Review the scientific literature on work, health and ageing, with specific reference to the menopause
- Explore the experience of ageing at work for women police officers aged 40 +
- Focus specifically on health-related and workplace performance issues associated with the menopause in women police officers
- Provide recommendations for future practice

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Julie Spence, President of BAWP, Chief Constable, Cambridgeshire Constabulary.

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Sue Lampard, Superintendent, Surrey Police.

The views expressed here are the authors' and do not necessarily reflect those of any other person or organisation.

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This study represents the results of a survey of 941 women police officers aged 40+. They ranged in rank from Police Constable to members of ACPO, with an average length of service of 21 years. The majority of results presented in this report refer to those 249 women who were going through the menopausal transition (as defined by their self-report of menopausal symptoms) at the time of completing the survey. The postmenopausal group also provided useful, albeit retrospective, information on their experiences of ageing, health and the menopause. The questions in the survey were designed after preliminary interviews with 24 women police officers of menopausal age, and by reference to the published literature on the menopause.

Officers were asked their views on which aspects of the menopause most affected their capacity to function normally at work. The main factors (as agreed by over half those who were in the early and late stages of menopausal transition, or who had gone through the menopause) were tiredness and insomnia. Factors reported by just under half the sample included perceived lower levels of physical fitness, loss of concentration and forgetfulness. Those characteristics of work and the working environment which were thought to affect menopausal symptoms adversely were temperature of the working environment, inadequate ventilation and workload. When asked how they coped at work when their menopausal symptoms were particularly challenging, most women said they tried to ignore it, used humour to cope, or distracted themselves with other activities.

Two thirds of women would not (or did not) disclose their menopausal status to their line managers. Half would not (or did not) disclose to their colleagues. The main reasons women gave for *not* disclosing to their manager were having a male manager, embarrassment, and having a younger manager. The main reasons women gave *for* disclosure were where symptoms became very obvious, when they felt their performance was affected, or when they were not coping with symptoms well. Some women reported that they would disclose as a means of justifying a change in their behaviour. The reasons given for disclosure/non disclosure to colleagues were the same, except that women also said that they would/did disclose to colleagues as a means of sharing experiences with other women who were going through, or who had gone through the menopause.

When asked what changes at work would be most helpful to them while going through the menopause, the most popular suggestions chosen (from a list compiled from the results of the interviews) were a comfortable rest room, better ventilation and the provision of fans. Women were also offered the opportunity to make additional suggestions as to what might ease their menopausal transition. Their suggestions included more flexibility in terms of working hours and roles, improved support and information from formal sources (eg. Occupational Health) and informal sources (eg. women's network groups and/or women's support contact number), and raising awareness and understanding among colleagues and managers.

Officers were also asked about their views, particularly as women, of getting older in the Police Service. The clear majority of women (87%) felt that the Police Service had the same expectations of the physical capabilities of younger and older officers. Less than half the sample (41%) agreed that the Police Service valued the contribution of older officers. When asked what changes at work would be most helpful to them as they got older, the most popular suggestions concerned (i) increased flexibility of working hours and roles (eg. flexitime, compressed hours, no night shifts after a certain age, work patterns, choice in move to office-based work or continuation of front-line/PSU role), (ii) workplace health promotion (eg. regular health checks, fitness programmes, greater knowledge by managers of health-related changes that affect older workers, easier access to Occupational Health), and (iii) changes to the physical work environment (eg. better women-only facilities including toilets, showers and restrooms, the provision of sanitary bins, more comfortable and suitable uniforms, reductions in the weight of equipment carried while on foot, and better quality of general facilities including chairs, desks, computer screens, access to cold drinking water, and more supportive car seats).

In summary therefore, recommendations concern (i) raising awareness of ageing and health issues in general, and the menopause in particular, among managers and colleagues, (ii) increasing access to informal and formal sources of support, (iii) improving aspects of the physical working environment and (iv) allowing more flexibility in job roles and working arrangements.

## AUTHORS

The Institute of Work, Health & Organisations is an international postgraduate research school at the University of Nottingham. It is a centre of excellence in research in applied psychology and a major provider of quality postgraduate education. Occupational psychology, health psychology, occupational health psychology and clinical psychology are among its defining competencies, and over 120 MSc level students graduate in these subjects each year. The Institute is a designated Collaborating Centre for Occupational Health of the World Health Organization, and a member of the Topic Centre on good practice in health and safety management established by the European Agency for Safety and Health at Work. The Institute hosts the *European Academy of Occupational Health Psychology* and its journal *Work & Stress* - one of the top international journals in applied psychology.

Further information about the Institute can be found at: [www.nottingham.ac.uk/iwho](http://www.nottingham.ac.uk/iwho)

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