

Theramex office opening and panel discussion

The Importance of Prioritising Women's Health in the Workplace



On Thursday 9th November we were delighted to celebrate the opening of our new office in St James' Park, London with friends of Theramex working in women's health.

To mark the occasion we had the pleasure of hearing from a panel of experts on 'The importance of prioritising women's health in the workplace'.

Our panel



Tina Backhouse
UK General Manager,
Theramex (Chair)



Janet Lindsay
Chief Executive,
Wellbeing of Women



Dr Nighat Arif
GP specialising in Women's
Health, Menopause and
Family Planning



Dr Aziza Sesay
NHS GP, GP educator,
Honorary Senior Clinical
lecturer, host, speaker and
health content creator

Our panel considered several challenges that women in the workplace face in relation to their health including taboos, workplace policies and senior leadership team support. Throughout the discussion, panellists also highlighted the additional challenges women from minority ethnic backgrounds or of a lower socio-economic status can face.

Before the panel discussion commenced, Rob Stewart (CEO, Theramex), outlined Theramex's commitment to reducing the gender health gap and empowering women to make informed decisions about their care. Theramex is a dedicated women's health company and we pride ourselves on championing women's health through each stage of life. It is not possible to make positive steps towards improving women's health issues alone, which is why we are grateful for our ongoing partnerships and collaboration with other organisations to achieve our shared goals, many of whom joined us for the evening.

Please see a more detailed summary of discussion below and get in touch if you have any questions.

Best wishes,

Anjuna Kalsi, Chief Human Resources Officer

Why is women's health in the workplace important?

- In the UK, women make up 47% of the workforce, which is a strong enough reason for why women's health matters in the workplace.
- There is also the financial impact of neglecting women's health conditions. A new report from Axa Health found that neglecting women's health in the workplace is costing the UK economy £20.2 billion a year.
- However, it is not just about the money lost through neglecting women's health. Women matter, and businesses are more likely to thrive when women are supported in the workplace and can assume key positions.
- Many people want to be able to support their female friends, family members and colleagues and it is important that the right tools are in place to enable this.
- Panellists and attendees reflected the need for all organisations who are working towards improving women's health to work together to solve some of these challenges.
- **When asked how we better support women in the NHS given they make up 80% of the workforce**, it was suggested that virtual engagement events for employees should be run so that women can join a large virtual discussion with a variety of experts.

Health challenges women in the workplace face

- There are several women's health conditions and life stages that can cause challenges for women in the workplace. These include, but are not limited to periods, menopause, fertility, pregnancy, endometriosis, uterine fibroids and osteoporosis.
- Women with conditions such as endometriosis can experience severe pain and may have to have repeated surgery given the lack of available treatment. It was reflected that many women with such conditions don't trust their employers to understand their pain. Some women have reported having their pain dismissed in the past and so there is greater need for women to be believed when stating how much pain they are in.
- In addition to the physical symptoms caused by some of these conditions, there is the additional mental stress that can be caused through having to miss work.
- Pregnancy is another aspect of women's health that can put pressure on women in the workplace. Men currently only receive two weeks statutory paternity leave which can mean more caring responsibilities fall on women from the early stages of their child's life.
- It was reflected that workplace policies and initiatives on women's health can vary depending on the size of the company. For example, small to medium sized companies may have less money to spend on resources to improve women's experience in the workplace in relation to their health.
- Panellists also outlined the importance of flexible working policies, such as hybrid working, to allow women more flexibility when balancing their health needs and work.

Equity in healthcare and ending taboos

- The provision of healthcare in the UK tends to be white centric, with menopause in particular viewed as a 'white middle-class privilege', meaning there is not always equity of care across ethnicities. In addition, poor socio-economic status can result in worse health outcomes.
- Many aspects of women's health remain a taboo in the workplace. Some people still feel uncomfortable discussing women's health issues with women reporting feeling the need to hide their period products and being more comfortable saying they have diarrhoea than menstrual health problems.
- In some cultures, women's health is still a taboo, demonstrated in that there is no word for vulva, menopause or vagina in Punjabi. There is also no word for menopause in British Sign Language.
- It is important that conversations around women's health are normalised so that women are confident to raise any concerns with their healthcare professional.
- The panellists reflected the need for better education on women's health, starting at school age for girls and boys. Social media has been a useful tool in helping end taboos and encouraging women to speak to their doctors about any concerns.
- In addition, the need for real life case studies to inform workplace policies was highlighted.
- **When asked what has helped accelerate conversations** around women's health, social media was cited as key because it has changed the narrative for healthcare professionals. However, some people do still see the menopause as a 'white-middle-class privilege' which isn't helped by the lack of representative content externally when exploring women's health.
- In some instances, cultural taboos can lead to online content being restricted or deemed unsuitable for consumption, which can limit the reach of educational content in certain religions and ethnic backgrounds.
- Panellists agreed that there needs to be a diverse and culturally-minded representation of content (e.g., on social media), which considers best methods of communication for women of all backgrounds. Doing this will allow women to have a sense of familiarity with content, and it reaches as many women as possible. This would ultimately lead to women understanding their health needs, getting checked and receiving the care they need.
- **When asked what the Women's Health Strategy for England offers**, there was a general consensus that its publication was a positive step of progress. However, there is a need to drive forward implementation of the strategy, to deliver change and realise the goals of the strategy.
- **When asked about thoughts around the ethical complexities of offering fertility benefits to employees** there was an agreement that it is complex and women and girls need to be able to make informed decisions based on real life-cases.

1. Global Data. Proportion of Female Labor Force in the United Kingdom (2010 - 2021, %). Available at: <https://www.globaldata.com/data-insights/macroeconomic/proportion-of-female-labor-force-in-the-united-kingdom-2125991/> [Accessed November 2023].

2. Axa Health (2023). The consequences of neglecting women's health in the workplace. Available at: <https://www.axahealth.co.uk/globalassets/menopause-support/corporate/axa-health-workplace-report.pdf> [Accessed December 2023]