International Women's Day 2025 – The Lifecycle of a Working Woman

International Women's Day falls on Saturday 8 March, and this year's theme is #AccelerateAction.

Despite being recognised for over a century, many women still encounter bias in the workplace. While many may perceive gender inequality as a relic of the past, our experiences as employment advisors to numerous women tell a different story.

To break the cycle of bias, whether it is conscious or unconscious, it is crucial to identify the stages in a woman's career where she may encounter challenges. In this mini-webinar series, BDBF Principal Knowledge Lawyer Amanda Steadman examines the professional lifecycle of women, the various obstacles they may face and the actions employers can take to foster an environment where women can thrive.

Menstrual health

Menstrual health is a critical aspect of women's overall wellbeing, yet it often remains an overlooked or stigmatised issue in the workplace. Every month, millions of working women experience menstruation, which can bring a range of symptoms from mild discomfort to severe pain and distress. This natural biological process can significantly impact productivity, concentration and attendance at work. Inadequate access to sanitary products, unsupportive workplace policies and cultural taboos surrounding menstruation can exacerbate these challenges, leading to missed opportunities and income loss.

Fertility issues and pregnancy loss

Fertility issues and pregnancy loss are profound challenges

that many working women face in their quest to start or expand their families. These distressing experiences often occur in the shadows of their professional lives, where they are expected to maintain productivity and composure. The emotional toll of such losses can significantly impact their mental and physical health, affecting their job performance and overall career trajectory. By fostering a supportive work environment, employers can help mitigate the stigma associated with fertility struggles and ensure that these employees feel valued and empowered to navigate the complexities of their personal and professional lives.

Pregnancy

Pregnant working women often face a unique set of challenges as they navigate the physical, emotional and professional changes that accompany their condition. These challenges can range from adjusting work routines to accommodate growing physical needs, managing the fatigue and discomfort associated with pregnancy, to balancing the anticipation and planning of parenthood with job responsibilities. Employers play a critical role in supporting expectant mothers by offering flexible work arrangements, such as modified work hours and ensuring a comfortable and safe work environment. Through open communication, understanding and the provision of appropriate resources, both employers and co-workers can help ensure a positive pregnancy experience for working females, leading to increased job satisfaction and productivity.

Maternity

Maternity is a transformative period in a woman’s life, significantly impacting her professional journey. Working women face a multitude of challenges when they decide to start a family. From navigating the complexities of maternity leave policies to balancing the demands of a career and new motherhood, these experiences can reshape their aspirations

and opportunities. Despite societal progress, the intersection of work and family remains fraught with issues like gender bias, workplace flexibility and the persistent wage gap. As women continue to break barriers and redefine work-life balance, the conversation around maternity in the workplace evolves, aiming to ensure equality and foster environments that empower them to thrive both personally and professionally.

Menopause

Menopause is a natural biological process that signals the end of a woman's reproductive years, and often brings about a multitude of physical and emotional changes that can impact her professional life. Working women may face a range of symptoms, including hot flashes, mood swings, sleep disturbances and decreased concentration, which can affect their job performance, productivity and overall workplace satisfaction. This transition can also coincide with career-defining moments, leading to a potential clash of personal and professional challenges. Employers who understand and support their menopausal employees by offering flexible work arrangements, education and open dialogue can create a more inclusive and supportive environment.

https://youtu.be/plHNRnziC38

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Conclusion

While the experiences of women may vary based on their chosen paths, it is a common reality that each woman is likely to face at least one of the situations discussed in our above mini-webinars throughout her career. As solicitors specialising in employment and discrimination, we recognise the significant effects that unjust and antiquated practices can have on a woman's professional journey. Although many

organisations are actively addressing these challenges, some continue to ignore them. A shift in perceptions is essential to create a more equitable environment.

On this International Women's Day, we honour those who have championed equality over the years and acknowledge the progress made in empowering and supporting women in the business sector. Nevertheless, there remains much work to be done. We aspire to raise awareness about the experiences of working women, encouraging employers to evaluate their practices and take meaningful strides to #AccelerateAction.

Further information about the movement and related events can be found on the IWD website.

This mini-webinar series was originally recorded on 26 February 2025 and reflects our understanding as of that date. Do get in contact with Amanda Steadman (AmandaSteadman@bdbf.co.uk) or your usual BDBF contact if you would like to discuss any of the issues raised.