



UNPACKING THE MENOPAUSE MYSTERY

Dearbhalla Baviera and **Yvonne Inglis** reveal the findings from their research on how perimenopause and menopause are impacting the business and practice of coaching.

Recent research undertaken by the authors delves into the significant impact of menopause and perimenopause on coaches and supervisors. This research stems from both personal experiences and involvement in the Mental Health and Wellbeing Working Group within the Association for Coaching, where the need for greater understanding and data gathering on this topic became evident.

Our bodies arrive at this crossroads and choose which direction to take. We have no say in the matter. We go along for the ride. We have no choice on which fork in the road we go down. For some it may be empowerment and strength. For others, overwhelm and burnout result. But the more we learn to read the signs we see along the way, the more we can support ourselves and others.

Until you know, you don't know.

Menopause, defined as the permanent cessation of menstrual periods, is officially diagnosed after 12 consecutive months without a period, typically occurring around age 51. Perimenopause, often less understood, is a period of fluctuating hormones that often begins in the 40s, but can exceptionally begin as early as the late 20s or 30s and lasts between 4 to 8 years. Symptoms such as brain fog, mood swings, fatigue, weight gain, and joint pain can be debilitating and are often unrecognized.

The conversation around menopause is generally limited to symptoms like hot flushes, sleeplessness, and mood swings, neglecting the broader spectrum of impacts. However, research and advocates like Dr. Louise Newson in the UK and Dr. Lisa Mosconi in the US have been instrumental in driving a deeper understanding of menopause's broader effects, including how it rewires the brain.

And so, this survey. We are passionate about raising awareness. We believe it imperative that from at least the early 40s, women start

to be informed on the wide range of symptoms and how they may be impacted not just physiologically but from a mental health and wellbeing perspective. We heard from 50 coaches (62%) and coach-supervisors (36%), 78% from the UK and Ireland, 88% between the ages of 45 and 64 and almost all female.

RAISING AWARENESS AND INITIATING DIALOGUE

This research aims to raise awareness, start a dialogue, and identify support needs, especially for self-employed coaches, who make up a significant portion of the coaching industry. Menopause's impact on work performance is profound: a 2022 survey revealed that 1 in 10 women left their jobs due to severe peri/menopause symptoms, with 8 in 10 women reporting significant impacts on their work performance, confidence, and ability to work, often resulting in reduced working hours to cope.

1 in 10 women left their jobs due to severe peri/menopause symptoms

Despite these widespread impacts, many women, including those well-versed in leadership and coaching, find themselves unaware of the breadth of symptoms and their potential effects. We have heard more than once from female colleagues and friends: 'But how did I not know?' In one author's case, considering herself well-informed, working mostly with senior female clients, and well-read on women in leadership; but after about six months of irritability, mood swings, rage, and severe brain fog, she started on the journey of

understanding. She couldn't help but ask: 'How did I not know this was coming down the line?' And she knows that she is not alone.

This lack of awareness can lead to frustration and challenges in managing symptoms that profoundly affect mental health and wellbeing. The coaching industry, with its emphasis on support and personal development, is in a unique position to facilitate conversations around menopause, yet many perimenopausal and menopausal women remain uninformed about the wide range of symptoms.

The survey results indicated that 86% of women feel comfortable bringing up menopause in supervision sessions, yet there remains a significant gap in awareness, underscoring the need for coach supervisors and coaches to be better informed. This knowledge would allow them to spot tell-tale signs in clients and support those who may be struggling.

IMPACT ON MENTAL HEALTH

Perimenopause and menopause have a profound impact on mental health, often starting much earlier than many women expect.

The survey highlighted several key symptoms affecting coaches and supervisors: fatigue (71%), brain fog (56%), low motivation (56%), sleep difficulties (49%), memory problems (44%), decreased confidence (40%), and anxiety (40%). These symptoms are often interrelated, creating a cycle of challenges that can be difficult to break.

For self-employed coaches, these challenges are often compounded by the isolation of working independently. This isolation can exacerbate feelings of self-doubt and imposter syndrome, making it crucial for coaches to have support networks, including supervision, and a strong sense of community to share these experiences.

RUNNING A COACHING BUSINESS DURING MENOPAUSE

Understanding the impact of perimenopause and menopause on running a coaching business was a key focus of this research, particularly given the high number of female coaches aged 45-54 who are self-employed. The survey revealed that 50% of respondents reported that menopause has impacted their ability to run their coaching business, with symptoms like fatigue, low motivation, and brain fog having the most significant impact. These symptoms directly affect the ability to concentrate, focus, and maintain productivity, leading to feelings of overwhelm and decreased confidence.

50% of respondents reported that menopause has impacted their ability to run their coaching business

Interestingly, the impact of menopause on the ability to coach was reported to be lower, at 37%. This raises questions about whether clients are receiving the best from their coaches, who may be reserving their energy for coaching sessions, leaving little for business development, marketing, self-care, or other life factors.

The survey also revealed that coaches generally have good levels of self-awareness, with many respondents actively implementing measures to manage the impact of menopause. Strategies such as adjusting work schedules and workloads, being mindful of the volume and type of work taken on, and reducing working hours were common. In fact, 30% of respondents have reduced their working hours, and another 20% have considered doing so but have not yet taken the step.

30% of respondents have reduced their working hours

Medical treatment and lifestyle adjustments, including diet, exercise, sleep hygiene, and stress management techniques, were cited as important elements in managing symptoms. Coach supervision was also identified as a valuable resource for resourcing themselves. Some respondents mentioned that even completing the survey increased their awareness of the impact of menopause on their coaching practice.

POSITIVE IMPACTS ON COACHING RELATIONSHIPS

Despite the many challenges, menopause can also bring about positive changes, such as heightened creativity, greater self-awareness, and wisdom. Many respondents reported that their experience of menopause has had a positive impact on their coaching relationships, particularly with female clients experiencing similar challenges. Increased empathy, understanding, and self-compassion were noted as key benefits that have enhanced the coaching experience.

This shared experience fosters a deeper connection between coaches and clients, allowing for more effective support and guidance. The experience of menopause can also lead to better boundary management and a more profound sense of self, which can positively influence coaching practices.

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THE ROLE OF COACH SUPERVISORS AND COACHING BODIES

Coach supervisors play a critical role in supporting coaches through the challenges of menopause, particularly in helping them manage capacity and address any doubts about their competence during this phase. However, the survey revealed that only 1 in 5 respondents felt their supervisors were well-informed about menopause, with almost half reporting that their supervisors were only somewhat informed. This gap in knowledge highlights the need for supervisors to be better educated about the symptoms and

impacts of menopause so that they can provide appropriate support and guidance.

It is crucial for supervisors to be able to recognize symptoms and know where to refer their supervisees for further support. Supervisors who have experienced menopause themselves are more likely to spot symptoms in others and offer empathy and understanding. However, even those who have not experienced menopause need to be well-informed to effectively support their supervisees.

Coaching bodies also have a significant role in raising awareness and generating dialogue around menopause. The survey indicated that 20% of respondents did not see any role for coaching bodies, while others emphasized the importance of awareness-raising, information provision, and community-building. Large organizations that are mature in their diversity practices are already stepping in to support their employees through menopause, recognizing the importance of retaining female talent. The coaching industry must follow suit, ensuring that talented coaches are not lost due to a lack of awareness and support.

MOVING FORWARD

Menopause is a journey that all women share, with no end destination but we each tread our own path. Some will find it rocky. Some will find it completely smooth and others will come across the odd bump in the road.

By being informed and building support networks, coaches can better navigate this phase, both for themselves and their clients. The research highlights the need for continued awareness, dialogue, and support within the coaching industry to ensure that coaches can continue to thrive during this stage of life.

This initial research focuses on the direct impact of perimenopause on coaches, extending beyond physiological symptoms to understand the potential effects on mental health and wellbeing. Future discussions, webinars, and resources will explore how coaches and supervisors can support clients through menopause without needing to be experts, focusing on the benefits of holding space, increasing empathy, and being informed about symptoms.

No matter the age or gender, it is important for all coaches and supervisors to be curious, and knowledgeable about where to signpost for further information. This awareness will not only benefit their coaching practices but will also contribute to the broader understanding and support of menopause within the industry.

1 Menopause and the Workplace. (2022). The Fawcett Society. <https://www.fawcettsociety.org.uk/menopauseandtheworkplace>

SUGGESTED FURTHER READING

- Newson Health Menopause and Wellbeing Centre. <https://www.newsonhealth.co.uk/>
- McCall, D. (2022). Menopausal: the Positive Roadmap to Your Second Spring. HQ.
- NHS. (2022, May 17). Menopause. NHS. <https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/menopause/>

ABOUT THE AUTHORS



Dearbhalla Baviera is a Master Executive Coach, Accredited Coach Supervisor, Speaker and Facilitator, with a depth of experience in and passion for working with Women in Leadership, and Emerging Female Leaders. Supporting clients in managing transitions is often at the core of her work including returning to work after Maternity Leave. More recently Dearbhalla focuses on developing and supporting leaders to show up in this complex world.

Dearbhalla is a member of the Association for Coaching and is actively involved in the Mental Health and Wellbeing Working Group.



With a background of 30 years in the financial services industry, Yvonne is an Executive Coach, (ILM7) Accredited Psychotherapist, Supervisor, Trainer and Facilitator. Yvonne is also a trained Menopause Coach.

Yvonne works with individuals and organisations supporting individuals by building strong, sustainable, and transparent relationships with her clients. Having navigated through personal and professional challenges, Yvonne is deeply passionate about empowering personal growth. She understands first hand the difficulties in identifying and implementing changes necessary to achieve full potential.

Yvonne is a former member of the BACP Coaching Executive and current member of the AC Mental Health and Wellbeing Group.

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