

# EFFECT OF THE SCHOOLS' SOCIAL ENVIRONMENT IN MANAGING MENOPAUSE CRISES AMONG FEMALE TEACHERS

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**Abstract:** Menopause crisis is not regarded as a major issue in most organizations and therefore is not considered at workplace. Among female teachers, it may be worsened by an unfavourable social working environment but the significance of these factors is not yet known. This study investigated the influence of schools' social environment on menopause crisis for female teachers of public primary schools. The study utilized ex post facto research design because it was not possible or acceptable to influence the characteristics of respondents. The study was based on the Person-Environment-Occupation Theory of Occupational Performance. The researcher used stratified sampling, two stage clustered sampling, random sampling, and purposive sampling techniques. The sample of the study was 289 participants. The research instrument of the study was a structured questionnaire, Focus Group Discussion, and a key informant interview schedule. The results revealed that social environment has a statistically significant influence on menopause crisis with a Linear Regression analysis where ( $r^2=0.645$ ; p-value of 0.03). From the findings of the study, it can be concluded that, social environment influence menopause crisis. School administrators should provide working environments that are conducive to female teachers. Findings from the study provided insight that it is helpful to school managers to identify some of the social environment related gaps in their schools that need to be addressed in order to make their working environment more conducive to menopausal women. Policy makers will gain insight into initiatives that could ensure women teachers undergoing menopause are least affected socially.

**Keywords:** menopause, crisis, female teachers, coping, social environment.

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

According to Thorogood (2015), work environments have been shown to increase the effects of menopausal symptoms. Low self-concept while managing menopausal symptoms in the workplace has resulted to the increasing intent to quit and abandoned ambitions of promotional opportunities (Hamilton & Osman, 2022). This is supported by Sexton (2022) in the survey of 4000 women in United Kingdom where 59 % reported that menopause has impacted negatively on women careers while 49 % indicated that menopausal symptoms had forced them to take time off. In the same line of exploration Evandrou et al (2020) found out that 53.5% of employed women at age 50 indicated at least one serious symptom. In addition, menopausal symptoms can pose challenges to some middle-aged women in reference to staying in employment or maintaining their number of working hours. In the same view, Monteleone et al (2017) asserted that menopausal symptoms have a significantly huge effect on the quality of life of women and on performance at work place. This is contrary to Norton (2020) who indicated that most women experiencing menopause remained in employment. These views imply that if menopausal women were to remain in employment, their social working environment must be made conducive for them to cope with the menopause challenges and at the same time continue working.

## 2. RESEARCH DESIGN

The study utilized *ex post facto* correlational research design. *Ex- post facto* research can be viewed as experimental research in reverse. *Ex post facto* research is ideal for conducting social research when is not possible or acceptable to manipulate the characteristics of human participants. It is an alternative for true experimental research and can be used to test hypotheses about cause and effect or correlational relationships, where it is not practical or ethical to apply a true experimental or even a quasi-experimental design (Simon & Goes, 2013). The research design was appropriate for this study since the independent variables were not be manipulated to establish their effects on the dependent variables. The research design was adopted in order to determine the influence of the independent variables under study that include environment, personality related factors and psychological interventions on female teacher's menopause crises (the dependent variable).

This study used stratified sampling to obtain the sample. Stratified sampling is a probability sampling method that is implemented in sample surveys. The target population elements are divided into distinct groups or strata where within each stratum the components are similar to each other with respect to select characteristics of importance to the survey (Parsons, 2017). Under stratified sampling, each sub-population is sampled independently. The target population has three sub-populations; the female teachers (FT), the teacher counselors (TC) and Sub County Directors of Education (SDE). Each of the sub-population was stratified independently. Total of 600 female teachers between 44 and 55 years were sampled after obtaining their total number from Laikipia County TSC Office.

In systematic random sampling, the researcher first randomly picked the first item or subject from the population. Then, the researcher selected each  $n^{\text{th}}$  subject from the list. The procedure involved in systematic random sampling is very easy and can be done manually. The results are representative of the population unless certain characteristics of the population are repeated for every  $n^{\text{th}}$  individual, which is highly unlikely. The 'n' was arrived at by dividing the number of samples under each sub-county with the population of primary schools. The list provided by the Ministry of Education was used as the sampling frame for public primary schools in the sub-counties.

Purposive sampling was also used to select five Sub County Directors of Education and fifty teacher counselors. Ten teacher counselors from each of the five Sub Counties were included in the Focus Group Discussions (FGD). Nyumba et al (2018) intimates that FGD method is used to obtain statistics from a purposely selected group of individuals rather than from a statistically representative sample of a wider population. Purposive sampling is a non-probability sampling technique in which decisions concerning the respondents is taken by the researcher based upon various criteria such as specialist knowledge of the research issue, capacity and willingness to participate in the research as well as participants' likelihood to contribute appropriate data both in terms of relevance and depth. Ames, Glenton and Lewin (2019) posits that purposive sampling of primary studies in the synthesis is one way of accomplish a manageable amount of data. On the other hand, Guarte and Barrios (2006) opines that purposive sampling is expressed as a random selection of sampling units within the portion of the population with the most information on the characteristics of intense.

## 3. RESULTS

### Descriptive Data Analysis on Influence of Social Environment on Menopause Crises

The respondents were guided by a Linkert scale in which 1 represented Strongly Disagree (SD), 2 was for Disagree (D), 3 was for Neutral (N), 4 was Agree (A) and 5 was for Strongly Agree (SA). The study obtained data that was analysed and presented in Table 1.

**Table 1: Influence of Social Environment on Menopause Crises**

Statements		SD	D	N	A	SA
Male teachers relate well with older women in the work place	%	4.8	13.4	8.6	44.5	28.7
	f	10	28	18	93	60
Female teachers at menopause are open to their female colleagues	%	7.7	27.8	21.1	31.1	12.4
	f	16	58	44	65	26
There is a smooth relationship between older female and young male teachers	%	6.7	23.9	7.7	39.7	22.0
	f	14	50	16	83	46
Staff believe that menopause is a non-issue	%	13.9	17.7	16.7	27.8	23.9
	f	29	37	35	58	50

TSC officials are aware of menopausal condition of affected female teachers	%	42.6	22.0	16.7	8.1	10.5
	f	89	46	35	17	22
Females teachers at menopause are accorded consideration attention such as sick leaves when need be	%	50.2	23.0	8.6	14.4	3.8
	f	105	48	18	30	8
Working schedule is considerate of female teachers who are at menopause	%	61.7	23.4	6.2	4.8	3.8
	f	129	49	13	10	8
Women at menopause are allowed to move to a different location if their health condition makes it necessary	%	33.5	38.8	14.8	8.1	4.8
	f	70	81	31	17	10
The school has informal support (that is support beyond official support, e.g. being given water) networks to help female teachers who are at menopause	%	50.2	26.8	16.3	2.9	3.8
	f	105	56	34	6	8
The school has occupational health guidelines in support of female teachers at menopause when they experience a problem during work	%	51.7	27.3	12.4	3.8	4.8
	f	108	57	26	8	10
Female teachers at menopause feel embarrassed discussing their issues with male colleagues	%	15.3	14.8	22.0	27.8	20.1
	f	32	31	46	58	42
Female teachers at menopause discuss their needs with their bosses and co-workers.	%	56.0	23.0	12.4	5.7	2.9
	f	117	48	26	12	6

The results as shown in Table 1 showed that 73.2% of the respondents agreed that male teachers relate well with older women in the workplace while 8.6% were not sure. This implies that in most of the situations, female teachers do not encounter problems when relating with male teachers. According to Wales Trades Union Congress (2017), it is difficult for male counterparts and especially line managers to empathize or sympathize with menopausal workers. Often, they might be too embarrassed or reluctant to discuss the issue or, conversely might tend to belittle the experience and the related symptoms.

The study sought to find out whether menopausal female teachers are open to their other female colleagues. Data revealed that 43.5%, (91) of the respondents agreed that female teachers who are at menopause are open to their other female colleagues, compared to 35.5% (74) of those that had a different opinion. A study by Gavin (2014) showed that older women depict a high level of enthusiasm in their jobs and even seek and utilize any opportunities that may prop up all through their operation in an attempt to build up their career path and success. A study by Wales Trades Union Congress (2017) showed that though in the wider cycles menopause is not necessarily regarded as a gender issue; younger females may be very dismissive of issues that do not affect them. This means that despite there being a good relationship between young female teachers and menopausal female teachers, the possibility of disjointed approach between the young female teachers and those undergoing menopause is there.

The study further sought to know whether there is a smooth relationship between menopausal female teachers and young male teachers. The results indicated that 61.7% of the respondents agreed while 7.7% of the female teachers were not sure. Duffy et al (2011) suggested that improved support networks would diminish some of the confusion about symptoms experienced by menopausal women. Miller (2019) concurs with this suggestion and asserts that within the workplace, depression is linked to poor social relationships with colleagues and decreased work satisfaction.

The study further sought to determine whether female teachers undergoing menopause would consider menopause as a non-issue. The results showed that cumulatively 51.7% agreed that it is a non-issue, while 16.7 were not sure. According to Davies (2017), menopause is culturally perceived as a private matter or 'a women's issue'. Subsequently it is seldom discussed as an open topic. It is rarely considered in the design of workplaces and working practices.

The study further sought to determine whether TSC officials are aware of menopausal conditions of affected female teachers. Cumulatively, 64.6% of the respondents were of the opinion that TSC officials were not aware while 16.7% were not sure. This implies that to the employer, menopause is not given a strong consideration and most often it is just assumed. This agrees with views by Newson (2017) that often symptoms of the menopause are under recognized, undervalued and taken for granted. These psychological symptoms associated with menopause such as loss of self-confidence, low self-esteem, anxiety and depressive symptoms are the ones that often affect women the most. This collaborates with Prothero et al (2021) who found that majority of menopausal women do not feel appreciated.

The study sought data on whether female teachers at menopause are accorded consideration such as sick leaves when need be. The study findings revealed that 83.2% of the respondents cumulatively disagreed that they were accorded consideration such as sick leaves when need be while 8.6% were not sure. This implies that in most cases, the administration will not grant an unwell female teacher leave to go and attend clinic for ailments or discomfort related to menopause. Menopause has adverse influence on a woman's work ability but varies across individuals. Menopause is associated with higher work absenteeism and productivity impairment due to the invaluable experience and skills of menopausal women. Absenteeism and work productivity impairment adversely affect work performance and organizational productivity. Menopause impairs work ability, performance and quality of related work outcome. Evidently, menopause presents a critical aspect of workplace issues which need management assistance (Mwangi, et al 2019).

Menopause impairs work productivity and increases work absenteeism. There is need for work places to adopt measures for supporting menopausal women to improve work productivity and to mitigate its adverse effects particularly recognizing menopause as a work place issue. This requires organizations to develop and institutionalize appropriate policies and staff support programs to support women during menopause transition and improve their work productivity.

A study carried out by Webster (2016) revealed that menopausal symptoms are negatively related with work ability and may increase the risk of sick offs absence. Many career women go through the menopause while working full time or part time. Menopausal symptoms such as hot flushes, irregular periods, mood swings and poor memory are often at odds with the self-confident professional image which women want to convey while working. This means that it might be prudent to consider granting menopausal female teachers leave of absence when they need it in view of enabling them work with confidence after the treatment.

As per the findings, 85.1% disagreed with the statement that the working schedule is considerate of female teachers who are at menopause. The findings implied that work schedule not favour female teachers undergoing menopause in Laikipia county. These findings are consistent with Webster (2016) who asserts that the sensitization of employers has to be raised to explore a wide range of accommodations that are flexible to working arrangements and working environments. This is because menopausal symptoms can be exacerbated by work and working conditions (Norton & Tremayne, 2020). In the same line of exploration Viotti et al (2021) indicated that women with high menopausal symptoms are exposed to the negative effects of job demands and work-ability compared to women with low menopausal symptoms.

The study further sought to determine whether female teachers at menopause are allowed to move to a different a location if their health condition makes it necessary. The study revealed that a cumulative (72.3 %) disagreed with this opinion while 14.8% were not sure. This implies that in most of the cases geographical job transfers on matters of conditions tangential to menopause among female teachers in the primary schools in Laikipia County are not allowed. It is not therefore possible for any teacher to be granted a transfer from one school to another within the county or to another on the basis of menopause-related health issues.

The study further sought to determine whether the school has informal support (that is social support that is beyond official support,) networks to help female teachers who are at menopause. The study showed that cumulatively, (87 %) of the respondents disagreed with the view that their school offered them informal support to help them based on the fact that they were at menopause while 16.3% were not sure. This implies that in most primary schools in Laikipia County there are no informal support mechanisms for female teachers undergoing menopause. Verdonk, Bendien and Appelman (2022) gave the view that due to taboo, menopause remains unrecognized and unaddressed within an institutions context. Polat et al (2021) agrees with these findings and found a positive and statistical correlations between menopausal symptoms and social support and that menopausal symptoms decreased as social support increased. This is inconsistent with Arnot (2021) who gave the view that there was no strong evidence that emotional support led to lower vasomotor symptoms.

The study further sought data on whether the school has occupational health guidelines in support of female teachers at menopause when they experience a problem during work. The obtained data revealed that cumulatively (79 %) of the respondents disagreed with the statement while 12.4% were not sure. This implies that in most primary schools within Laikipia County, there are no occupational health guidelines that would support female teachers when they reach menopause. This is a policy issue that would call upon education managers and stakeholders to take a better and keener interest on issues of health and female teachers undergoing menopause. This agrees with Gumusay & Erbil, (2018) in their study of correlation between perceived social assistance and opinions towards menopause among women and affecting factors. They pointed out that majority of women had a negative attitude towards menopause and perceived social support

during menopause was at low levels. Information programs need to be focused on developing positive attitudes in both men and women in order to strengthen women's social support and preparation during menopause.

The study further sought data on whether female teachers at menopause feel embarrassed discussing their issues with male colleagues. Cumulatively, (30.1%) agreed with the statement while 22% were not sure. This implies that in most of the cases, matters to do with menopause are not discussed between female teachers undergoing menopause and their male counterparts. This implies that the expression of female teachers to male teachers on menopause is limited and which could mean that male teachers' awareness on menopause matters affecting female teachers is limited. Clarabut (2021) agrees with these findings and gave the view that many menopausal women are unwilling to disclose menopausal related health problems to their colleagues due to negativity and stigma around menopause. This is because they can feel embarrassed believing that it can undermine their professional image.

The study sought data on whether female teachers at menopause are accorded consideration such as sick leaves when need be. As per the findings, (85.1%) disagreed with the statement that the working schedule is considerate of female teachers who are at menopause. The findings implied that work schedule does not favour female teachers undergoing menopause in Laikipia County. The study further sought to determine whether female teachers at menopause are allowed to move to a different a location if their health condition makes it necessary. The study revealed that 72.3%, disagreed with this opinion while 14.8% were not sure. This implies that in most of the cases geographical job transfers on matters of conditions tangential to menopause among female teachers in the primary schools in Laikipia County are not allowed. It is not therefore possible for any teacher to be granted a transfer from one school to another within the county or to another on the basis of menopause-related health issues.

The study further sought to determine whether female teachers undergoing menopause are able to discuss their needs with their bosses and co-workers. The responses showed that 79% disagreed while 12.4% were not sure. This means that cumulatively the number of respondents that could not agree with the statement which suggests that matters of menopause at primary schools in Laikipia County are by and large maintained as personal and private. This agrees with Davies, (2017) whose views shows that menopause is culturally perceived as a private matter or 'a women's issue. Most often colleagues and bosses do not take such as matters that would affect them. Sexton (2022) concurs with this assertion and posits that menopause is one of the greatest workplace issues that many have never heard of and some are unwilling to disclose about. This implies that menopause experience makes women to suffer in silence rather than disclose what they are going through. The findings concur with Clarabut (2021) suggestion that many menopausal women are unable to complain to their employers fearing they will be seen as old, incapable or lazy. They don't want to be singled out as having women issues. This implies that menopausal women do not share the challenges they experience with their employers. This line of exploration is consistent with Parsa, Tabesh and Karami (2015) who suggested that supportive consulting can be suitable for improving women's health, reducing problems and enhancing well-being during the menopause period. This implies that women in menopause transition need to discuss their needs with their bosses and co workers

Further analysis was done to determine whether the female teachers' menopause crisis was influenced by social environment. The means of responses to items were computed and then transformed into influence of social environment on menopause crisis as presented in Table 25.

**Table 2: Female Teachers' Means on Influence of Social Environment on Menopause Crisis**

Statements	Mean	SD
Male teachers relate well with older women in the work place	2.11	.760
Female teachers at menopause are open to their female colleagues	2.60	1.09
There is a smooth relationship between older female and young male teachers	1.49	1.06
Staff believe that menopause is a non-issue	1.07	1.00
TSC officials are aware of menopausal condition of affected female teachers	2.00	.800
Females teachers at menopause are accorded consideration attention such as sick leaves when need be	1.80	1.05
Working schedule is considerate of female teachers who are at menopause	1.90	.092
Women at menopause are allowed to move to a different location if their health condition makes it necessary	1.67	.820

The school has informal support (that is support beyond official support, e.g. being given water) networks to help female teachers who are at menopause	2.84	1.02
The school has occupational health guidelines in support of female teachers at menopause when they experience a problem during work	1.91	0.930
Female teachers at menopause feel embarrassed discussing their issues with male colleagues	2.02	0.910
Female teachers at menopause discuss their needs with their bosses and co-workers.	2.92	0.870

The means of the items in table 25 ranged from 1.07 (SD=1.07) to 2.92 (SD=1.00). Most of the means were below 2.5 meaning that majority of the female teachers disagreed with the statements. An examination of the SD reveal that they were high ranging from 0.76 to 1.09. This is an indication that there was variation in the respondent's responses to the items. This means that the respondents were of the view that social working environment influence menopause crisis. According to Collier (2022), providing information about menopause will contribute to a work environment where women feel that their needs are addressed. Similarly, Van der Heijden (2021) asserts that sustainability of women's careers in the second half of life is of increasing significance given the increasing equal representation of men and women in working organizations and the impact of the changing nature of work in the 21<sup>st</sup> century on older workers.

#### 4. CONCLUSION

The study concludes that menopause is not given a strong consideration by the employer and most often it is just assumed. Administration rarely grants an unwell female teacher leave to go and attend clinic for ailments or discomfort related to menopause while work schedules are not favourable to menopausal primary schools' female teachers. In most cases geographical job transfers on matters of conditions tangential to menopause among female teachers are not allowed

#### 5. RECOMMENDATIONS

The study recommends that employers should consider menopause as an issue that affects their job. In addition, they should help menopausal female teachers cope better with all colleagues especially those younger in age and male and help them cope better in their job-relations as a way of promoting job performance. The school administrators should encourage open communication as a way of boosting menopausal women to be more open and to share their experiences. School administrators should be ready to grant formal support to female teachers undergoing menopause such as leave of absence to unwell female teachers who need to attend clinic for ailments or discomforts related to menopause and support work schedules that are favourable to menopausal primary school female teachers. They should grant geographical job transfers on matters or conditions tangential to menopause among female teachers and provide occupational health guidelines that would support these teachers when they reach menopause.

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