

MINUTES
Mental Health and Wellbeing

Women and Work APPG Meeting, Monday 20 January 2020
3-4pm, Wilson Room, Portcullis House

Chair: Gillian Keegan MP, Co-Chair of the Women and Work APPG

Parliamentarians in attendance:

- Gillian Keegan MP
- Kirsten Oswald MP
- Liz Saville Roberts MP
- Alex Davies-Jones MP
- Wendy Chamberlain MP
- Rachel Maskell MP
- Kirsten Oswald MP (elected as Vice-Chair)
- Baroness Prosser
- Baroness Garden
- Baroness Howe
- Baroness Burt

Co-Chair of the Women and Work APPG, Gillian Keegan MP convened the meeting as Chair, welcoming attendees and panellists.

Minutes

The first speaker, **Andrea Barrett, Director of Corporate Responsibility at Centrica**, said she would focus on how Centrica supports carers in the workplace. She stated that 65 million people in the UK are unpaid carers, and one in seven people are juggling work and care. She added that three quarters of unpaid carers suffer mental ill health, 61% suffer physical ill health, and there is a significant financial impact too, as 1.2 million unpaid carers are classified as in poverty. Andrea stated that this is a growing issue, as 600 people each day give up work due to care responsibilities. She added that 58% of carers are women, so this is a gendered issue. Those who do stay in work often experience absenteeism and presenteeism if they aren't supported by their employer.

Andrea went on to explain how Centrica supports employees who are carers. They offer a Care Leave policy of up to six weeks per year, of which the first two weeks are completely discretionary. After that, carers are entitled to a further two weeks of discretionary leave, which is matched with annual leave. Centrica also have a carers network of more than 1000 colleagues, which provides peer support, counselling and signposting to those who need it. Centrica also have 300 mental health first aiders at their sites to support their employees, even those who work remotely. As a HR initiative, Centrica provide a Carers' Passport, where people with caring responsibilities can input the work policies they require. This information then follows them around the business without them having to repeat it to new teams and managers.

Andrea stated that understanding is one of the most important factors in providing a positive work environment for carers, so Centrica seek to offer an inclusive culture and supportive line manager. The average carer only takes 3.4 days off work each year, so Andrea added that Centrica's Care Leave policy covers most needs. She stated that the financial benefits of this policy are high. They save £1.8 million in avoiding absenteeism and presenteeism, and £1.3 million more in retention. She stated that extrapolating these figures suggests that these policies could save the wider economy of £8.2 billion if all businesses adopted them. Andrea concluded by stating that there is expected to be a 40% rise in the number of carers by 2037. Businesses can't afford to ignore this if they want to prevent a mass exodus of carers from the workforce. This is especially important as carers are typically in the prime of their career and some of the most valuable employees to a company.

Sophie Walker, Chief Executive of the Young Women's Trust was the next speaker. She discussed the impact of sexism on mental health. Sophie stated that there needs to be a change in how young women's mental health is spoken about at work, to that employers can understand how to be more supportive. She criticised that women are told to improve their confidence or ask for a pay rise, stating that this confuses the fact that the crisis of confidence in young women is the result of an "*epidemic of sexism.*" She explained that young women who experience sexism are five times more likely to suffer from clinical depression and are more likely to have poor mental health four years later. She said that young women are most affected, as they experience sexism in many different spaces and at consistently higher rates than older women. Many feel that this is because they are perceived as an easier target. Young women also have a greater awareness of the sexism they experience and more are identifying as feminists.

Sophie explained that one in five young women said that their mental health had affected their ability to stay in work. She said that this is especially bad for those on low pay, and affects their ability to maintain their friendships and relationships. She added that suicide among young women and girls has risen by 83% in six years. Most mental health problems are established before the age of 24 and young women who face intersecting forms of discrimination are the most adversely affected by mental ill health. This is particularly the case for young disabled women and young women of colour.

Sophie recommended that the response to mental ill health for young women and girls should be more tailored and needs to recognise the role of sexism. There needs to be provision for women-only spaces where young women and girls can talk about the issues they face. Employers also need robust practices and must be able to recognise warning signs of issues like economic abuse, which may prevent someone from coming into work. She finished by stating that employers must offer paid leave to young women who experience domestic abuse or are at risk of homelessness in particular.

Georgia Webb, Member of the Young Women's Trust Advisory Panel gave the next speech. She explained her own experiences of mental ill health in the workplace. Georgia had felt that only a few jobs were available to her as a young woman; in the social care, retail, and hair and beauty industries. She was in college and working part-time in retail when she experienced the loss of a parent, which meant she had to take on the running of her

household, and created significant mental health difficulties for her. Georgia sought to prioritise her education, given the constraints on her time, which meant she struggled at work. Coupled with the mental health challenges she was experiencing, Georgia was left feeling unsupported.

Georgia explained how her story is typical of how young women from low-income backgrounds get stuck in low-income jobs, have to focus on paying household bills, are offered little room for progress and self-development, and become detached from their long-term goals.

Georgia went on to become an apprentice engineer. She still suffered from mental health problems when working for this company but received much more support. She was offered time off when she needed it and access to occupational therapists. There was a more open attitude to mental health, and she was encouraged to talk about this with her colleagues. Georgia said that in this job she felt supported as a person first and an employee second. She was allowed to develop personally and professionally at work and, in working with the Young Women's Trust too, she became a "*confident and competent young woman.*" Georgia concluded by saying that her story shows how much employers have to gain by nurturing and supporting their staff.

Sarah Tite, Director of Fundraising and Communications for the Mental Health Foundation (MHF) was the final speaker. She stated that prevention is the core principal of the charity and outlined the internal policies they have to prevent mental health problems for their employees. MHF have an email-free policy between 7pm and 7am. They offer their staff three paid, non-consecutive wellbeing days, which don't have to be agreed with or explained to management. Sarah stated that MHF recommend all public sector workers are given a minimum of two wellbeing days. She added that employers need to remember that everyone has mental health, just like they have physical health. Mental health is not confined to diagnosed issues and must not be seen as a problem – it should be recognised as a workplace asset.

Sarah stated that five million workers in the UK have mental health problems, and one in six people experience a mental health problem every single week. 50% of diagnosed mental health problems are established by age fourteen. Given how common these issues are, Sarah argued that mental health programmes should be "*business as usual.*" She explained that mental health first aiders are key and underlined how important it is that everyone feels safe, especially those facing mental health risks. She finished by pointing out that mental and physical health are not dissimilar, and there are similar principles involved in looking after both.

Gillian Keegan MP thanked the panellists for their comments. She agreed that there is more awareness of the importance of looking after mental health, but the support systems in place are insufficient. She said that recognition that anybody can have mental health problems is key, as are practical solutions. She then opened the floor to questions from the rest of the room.

Q&A

Baroness Burt of Solihull asked how the panellists' knowledge could be made into digestible recommendations for employers.

Sophie Walker pointed out how widespread gendered issues that impact women's mental health are. She referred to how in some cases employers break the law, but argued that policies such as austerity, zero-hours contracts, and insufficient investment in childcare, which are perfectly legal, disproportionately impact women. These factors, along with the fact that women are more likely to be paid below minimum wage, make it harder for them to balance work with caring responsibilities and cause huge mental strain. Many women are left with a choice between working, paying for childcare, and feeding their families. She stated that non-investment in women has a far-reaching impact and argued that investment in childcare yields higher returns than investment in infrastructure.

Gillian Keegan MP added to Sophie's argument by pointing out that caring responsibilities often limit women to working 20 or fewer hours each week, which means they can be limited to areas with less growth potential.

Rachel Miner, AMAR Foundation asked about the language of the discussion. She asked why panellists were encouraging policies that "*respond*" to issues rather than "*empower*" women who face them. She also asked how employers could address issues that might arise before hiring women who may face them, so that they don't have to tackle them themselves.

Andrea Barrett said that Centrica try to look holistically; from attraction, through recruitment and into development, to root out sexist practices. They ensure their job descriptions aren't biased, offer flexible working or the right to discuss it for every position, and give all line managers unconscious bias training. Centrica seek to ensure that their approach isn't reactive and that there are checks and balances along the way.

Sophie Walker argued that women don't need to be empowered, they have inherent power, but structures prevent this from being realised.

Andrea Barrett added that it is important to have an employee-centred approach, not just a women-centred one. Creating more equal working live for men too – for example through better paternity leave practices – is key to delivering change for women.

Gillian Keegan MP said that if more male CEOs took full paternity leave, this would be a positive signpost for their employees.

Sophie Walker agreed and said that senior men being more involved in childcare, for example by leaving early to pick up their children, sets a positive precedent for all employees.

Yogi Ragam, Young Women's Trust said that her work pays a low wage, often involves night shifts, and is a zero-hours contract job. She said that jobs like hers have an integral element of mental strain because of low pay and lack of security. She asked if there were ideas for how to offer more mental health support to people in positions like hers.

Andrea Barrett said that Yogi made a key point; workers in the gig economy are prevented from accessing support.

Sarah Tite said she wanted to see employers in the night time economy begin addressing mental health more effectively.

Keith Jones, Institute of Civil Engineers asked what more needed to be done to promote apprenticeships, as Georgia's experience had been so positive.

Georgia Webb said that the human understanding present in the organisation she worked for was key to the way it supported its employees' mental health. She said that the first step to a more inclusive workplace is creating a safe and open space.

A member of the audience asked where schools come into the conversation on mental health, given the importance age has had in the discussion.

Sophie Walker said that there is no one answer. The Young Women's Trust looks at how to deal with sexism across a range of ages and measures, from toys to playground attitudes, and is considering campaigning to have gender equality put on the curriculum.

Andrea Barrett said that Centrica seek to build their employee's soft skills around communication and offer a scheme where they can get a Gold Duke of Edinburgh award. She said that schools should try to promote these areas too.

Sophie Walker pointed out that calling these "soft skills" may be part of the problem. Young Women's Trust are looking at how they can demonstrate how vital the skills related to caring are for the business world.

Sarah Tite said that the Mental Health Foundation encourage peer support in schools. They have programmes where sixth form students teach mental health lessons to year sevens. This is important as many believe that young people listen to their peers more than anyone else. The programme improves the communication skills of the sixth form students and gives the year sevens the tools they may need to cope with mental health difficulties. Sarah argued that these translate into positive workplace skills, such as support and advocacy.

Gillian Keegan MP said that leadership skills like teamwork are vital for the workplace. Good leadership is supporting everyone in your organisation.

A member of the audience raised the issue of low pay. They stated that this impedes social mobility and is especially an issue for apprentices.

Sophie Walker said that apprenticeships in the sectors that women are funnelled into tend to be lower paid in comparison to the sectors that men are funnelled into. She added that it's important to invest in salaries people can actually live on.

Gillian Keegan MP agreed that there is significant variation in the quality and standard of apprenticeships.

Georgia Webb agreed that some employers use apprenticeships as a way to take on cheap labour. Good quality apprenticeships with good wages, like the one she did, allow people to develop their skills.

Iman Achara, British Black Anti-Poverty Network said that coverage of Meghan, Duchess of Sussex in the media has been discriminatory. Many companies promote an anti-bullying

agenda but few condemn this prominent case of a young woman, who is simply trying to protect her own wellbeing, being portrayed so negatively. Iman pointed out that as the Duchess has recently had a baby, her mental health may be more at risk. She emphasised the importance of unity and the need to condemn the actions of the media.

Sophie Walker said that the fervour around Harry, Duke of Sussex and Meghan, Duchess of Sussex's decision demonstrates how uncomfortable society is with discussing racism and colonial attitudes. She argued that society doesn't like it when a woman answers back and likes it even less when a woman of colour answers back. She said the idea that being woke is something to be mocked is worrying, especially as 50% of young women say they're worried about the future, which increases to 60% of young women of colour.

Lennie Roles, University of Sussex said that employment arrangements being flexible by default is an important thing and that he was pleased to see the Government had picked up on this. He said that it is particularly important for young women.

Jane van Zyl, Working Families said she was excited about flexible by default policies but that these need to be tied to work that pays sufficiently and ways to prevent people having to frequently work overtime. She stated that it's important to advocate human-sized jobs that don't require overtime as a baseline.

Gillian Keegan MP pointed out that costs are so high that wage rises don't always make things much easier. It's important to look at living standards and costs, particularly for housing and renting.

Jane van Zyl added that working hours beyond what an employee is paid for has a huge impact on their mental health.

Karen Clements, Cushman and Wakefield said she started her career in the 1980s when overt sexism in the workplace was dreadful. Women have worked hard to address this but it hasn't been resolved. Karen asked why the panellists thought this was the case.

Sophie Walker said that progress isn't linear and there is no country in the world with true gender equality. She referred to a report recently published by Oxfam, which shows that the 22 richest men in the world have more money than all the women in Africa, while women and girls carry out 12.5 billion hours of unpaid care work each day, which contributes at least \$10.8 trillion to the global economy each year. She said that it is vital to continue research and seek to recognise all forms of work, including unpaid labour. The expectation that women will do work for free gives men more economic freedom, which then creates an unhealthy professional work environment for women to inhabit.

Gillian Keegan MP said it's important to acknowledge where there has been improvement.

Georgia Webb added that there has been significant progress but – particularly in male-dominated industries – there is still sexism, discrimination and stereotyping. She said it's important to remove gendered labels of certain industries and encourage women into more traditionally male-dominated fields.

Another member of the Young Women's Trust advisory panel pointed out that access to mental health services is an issue. The length of waiting lists and the fact that sessions

are typically offered during working hours both make it difficult to balance working full time with accessing the care young women need for their mental health.

Gillian Keegan MP agreed that there isn't anything close to the required support systems in place for mental health.

Sarah Tite stated that the NHS will never be able to support everyone who experiences mental health difficulties, so prevention is key. She said it's important to try and build self-resilience and not assume what other people need.

Gillian Keegan MP acknowledged that waiting lists are huge and flexibility is an issue.

Andrea Barrett said that removing the stigma around mental health is key. She pointed out that it is not difficult to miss work for a GP appointment so it shouldn't be the case for a mental health appointment.

Gillian Keegan MP said that services do not currently match ambition to tackle mental health. She stated that we need a greater range of more accessible options.

Rachel Starkings, University of Sussex stated that carers give up a lot of their employment opportunities. Many are in a sandwich of caring for children then caring for their parents, and often find that they want to go back to a job that isn't there any more.

Ayesha Ghafoor, Barclays asked how the panellists thought the challenge of mental health problems experienced by entrepreneurs should be addressed.

Alison Fendley, Forensic Archive asked what progress the civil service had made in taking on recommendations about employment practices inclusive of mental health difficulties. She pointed out that the Government should seek to be a role model in employment practice.

Andrea Barrett responded to the question on returning to work. She said there is an issue of returning to a role that isn't manageable or where previous colleagues have left. Centrica set up a returners support group, which meets to share issues and produce toolkits. They are considering starting a programme to encourage people to return to work.

Sarah Tite responded to Ayesha Ghafoor's question. She said that it's important for people to identify the best way for looking after their own mental health. Once someone has established this, it's easier for them to support others in this way.

Sophie Walker said that its important to acknowledge the practical barriers preventing mental health improvement, like access to support infrastructure.

Gillian Keegan MP said she doesn't have knowledge on the civil service but many companies, including Parliament, often fail to practice what they preach, but it's important to be patient as things work eventually.

Non-parliamentarian attendees

Name	Organisation
Sophie Stratton	Conservative Women's Organisation
Camilla Cross	Harrods



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Jane van Zyl	Working Families
Rebecca Macdonald	Southbank Centre
Danica Burn	Association of British Insurers
Emma Elson	Association of British Insurers
Prina Shah	Cushman & Wakefield
Karen Clements	Cushman & Wakefield
Charlotte Hoyland	University of Manchester
Tom Butt-Evans	Atlas Partners
Laura Forster	Road Haulage Association
Ruby Peacock	Carers UK
Lola Kveton	Recruitment & Employment Confederation
Nadia Finer	Shy and Mighty
Uracha Chatrakul	Birkbeck, University of London
Nicky Payne	Middlesex University
Keith Jones	Institution of Civil Engineers
Iman Achara	Black British Anti-Poverty Network
Sandrine Rivoal Pluviaux	City of London Corporation
Jane Moffett	Kangaroo Coaching
Mark Gale	Young Women's Trust
Dierdre Costigan	UNISON
Phosile Mashinkila	Young Women's Trust
Monica Stancu	Royal Academy of Engineering
Katie Draper	Queen Elizabeth Prize for Engineering Foundation
Felicity Spencer	Institute of Fundraising
Rachael Anderson	How Do You Do It
Mandalee Trivedi	Enterprise Rent-A-Car
Samantha Meredith	Enterprise Rent-A-Car
Ayesha Ghafoor	Barclays
Rachel Starkings	University of Sussex
Laura Mimoun	Kaleido Rolls
Janet Shelley	Building Engineering Services Association
Sue Hyde	Skanska
Alison Fendley	Forensic Archive Ltd
Xenia Koumi	City of London Corporation
Julia Green	Ambition
Nicky Acuna Ocana	Ambition
Lourdes Keever	Hornsey and Wood Green Constituency Labour Party
Verity Roach	Juno
Chris Seaton	Road Haulage Association
Balvinder Ahluwalia	Gard (UK)Ltd
Mandy Garner	Working Mums
Ryan Barnett	Association of Independent Professionals and the Self-Employed
Ben Williams	Centrica
Lenny Rolles	University of Sussex
Adam Nice	Mental Health Foundation



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Claire Baithun	Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development
Mark Hoda	Shaw Trust
Anand Yagnik	Maximus UK
Yogi Ragam	Young Women's Trust
Kamala Mackinnon	Vodafone
Fiona Alfred	Women in Property
Teresa Peacock	Spinnaker
Amy Wright	Fidelio
Mattea Sykes	Young Women's Trust
Jenny Carter	Young Women's Trust
Zoe Pike	Young Women's Trust
Hilary Compton	V Formation Ltd
Sara Naffine	Lodders Solicitors
Lizzy Dobres	Care Quality Commission
Jenny Ross	Care Quality Commission
Rachel Miner	Bellwether International