



EXPERT: Cassie Everett

WHAT PRICE ARE WOMEN PAYING FOR THEIR POSITION IN THE WORKPLACE?

There have been several articles in the news recently about women being paid less than men in the workplace. A new report from the World Economic Forum estimates that it will take up to 170 years for the world's women to earn wages that are equitable to men's.

Here in the UK, according to the office of national statistics, women represent just under half (46% in 2014) of the total labour force in the UK. Yet pay still suggests a bias in favour of men. In 2015 the gender pay gap for full and part time workers in the UK was 19.2%, meaning that women currently make approximately 80% of men's median hourly wages.

What other biases exist and what other prices women are paying or pay as a hidden cost?

In an article in the Financial times recently a woman was asked her opinion on gender bias in the work places and she said, "I was surprised by how male-dominated the workplace is, designed by men, for men, with a male culture and set of values."

If you ask women, many will say that their voice is not heard, they are interrupted or ignored in meetings; that much work takes place on the golf course, at football matches and other male-dominated events; that progress is not based

on merit and women have to do better than men to succeed, and that questions are raised in selection processes about whether a woman 'is tough enough'. Is the fact that the work place is set up for men, causing more stress for women in the workplace and what are the knock on effects of this on women's health? I am finding in my practice that a high level of stress is the number one block to couples conceiving naturally.

So how are women and men different in the work place and why is this important?

If more organisations were understanding and valuing men and women equally, not only would their profits be bigger, their workforce feel happier and more productive but potentially the pressure on women would go down, reducing their stress levels and the negative impact on their bodies.

Women are natural multi taskers and as such will often be holding down a very demanding job, whilst also trying to maintain a social life, supporting the extended family, looking after children, maintaining the house etc. I often hear my female clients talk about feeling a lot of guilt about trying to 'do' it all and yet they wonder why they are struggling to conceive. Is there a

hidden cost to their health? When women are saying yes to all these things (as stated above) what are they also saying no to as a result?

In the current work place, both men and women are expected to work longer hours and generally have a lot more pressure on them. This is bad for both sexes, causing a massive increase in societal mental health issues due to high stress levels. For women especially, I can see that this is also having a negative impact on their hormones. This is because the body prioritises things very differently on a physical level.

The bodies number one priority is to deal with stress, and the bodies least priority is reproductive health. This means that when women are stuck in a constant low level of stress, the result will be their body not prioritising fertility, and this is the unrecognised issue facing women in the workplace today.

Progesterone the 'pregnancy' hormone is a luxury hormone in the body. That means that it can be easily converted into other hormones in the body when needed. When the body has run out of its supply of stress hormones i.e.: because its stuck in a loop of feeling a low level of stress on a daily basis, it will then convert luxury hormones like progesterone into cortisol (the main stress hormone) to top levels up. This is because stress is always its number one priority. This is bad news for women,





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not only does progesterone naturally decline as women age but it is also needed to help balance Oestrogen levels and maintain pregnancies as well as many other essential bodily functions.

So many women think once I'm on maternity leave - I'll have a rest. I've also heard many of my female clients say to me that they have to stay in their very stressful job so that when they get pregnant they'll qualify for maternity cover. This is however counterproductive if the stress of their job is actually preventing them from falling pregnant in the first place. Generations ago women would not have been exposed to anywhere near the same levels of stress that women are today and so they need to consider more how they balance that out.

One of my clients came to see me wanting help with staying pregnant following 4 miscarriages. Both her and her husband came to the conclusion that stress was a potential factor in why they were unable to hold a pregnancy and so they decided to do something very different with their lives. They took a one year sabbatical from their work and went travelling/working abroad. Towards the end of that year they fell pregnant, they agreed to not tell anyone and to not return to the UK straight away. They returned for their 12 week scan but still didn't tell anyone until

the 20 week scan had happened and was all ok. After returning to the UK Louise left her very stressful TV job and got a part time job in a local shop. 6 months later her beautiful baby boy was born. To read the story in full go to my blog fertilityrejuvenation.com/blog

Women need to know that while they can do any job as well as a man and should be paid accordingly, if they want to conceive, their work might need to take a back seat or work/life balance must be found.

Potentially a work place that is gender equal would address the differences about women's unique needs around these crucial fertility years. In a recent guardian article, a Bristol based company is planning to create an official 'period policy' designed to allow women to take time off without being stigmatised in the hope it will make its workplace more efficient and creative.

Bex Baxter, the director of Coexist, said:

“I have managed many female members of staff over the years and I have seen women at work who are bent over double because of the pain caused by their periods. Despite this, they feel they cannot go home because they do not class themselves as unwell. And this is unfair. At Coexist we are very understanding. If someone

is in pain - no matter what kind - they are encouraged to go home. But, for us, we wanted a policy in place that recognises and allows women to take time for their body's natural cycle without putting this under the label of illness.”

If more companies started creating policies like this for women, then women would be more likely to have a better work/life balance. In turn, this would reduce their stress levels and keep their reproductive health as a priority in their body.

When I work with couples who are wanting help with falling pregnant I will discuss with them at length all their work and life commitments and we then brain storm ideas of how they can claim back time for themselves, for rest and relaxation. This might be simple strategies like regular Epsom salt baths with some essential oils and their favourite book or that yoga class that they keep meaning to go to but never have time for.

As I mentioned earlier on, reproduction is not a priority for the body at all. This means that if the body is busy doing something else it is not putting energy into helping you conceive. So when I work with people I give them homeopathic medicine that helps restore their health to its former glory allowing for that all important balance to be regained, almost like giving your body a full MOT, leaving it in tip top health again.

If you recognise that stress maybe an issue for you that is potentially standing in your way of motherhood then I recommend you start making time for gentle exercise like yoga and Pilates. Get a cleaner if you don't already have one, start shopping on the internet so you have more 'you' time. Think about starting a creative hobby like sewing or photography, start doing meditation in the mornings, make time to spend time with friends and if you can reduce your working hours so you make space in your life for that baby to fit in, then all the better!

As our ability to naturally procreate declines with age and as more women are having careers later on in life, the impact of stress in the work place is a debate that needs to be considered more and more if women want to also have a family. For more information on my work and how I can help you, visit my website: fertilityrejuvenation.com

Cassie has practised Homeopathy for the last 11 years, first in London and now in Bristol. She also lectures, provides practical courses and supervises students. She specialises in natural hormonal health and the treatment of infertility and more information can be found on her website: fertilityrejuvenation.com

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