- Women—diseases

A brake in career

Endometriosis has a negative impact on women at the workplace.

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ENDOMETRIOSIS is a chronic, inflammatory, hormone-dependent gynaecological disease that affects around 10% of women of childbearing age.

It has a major impact on the daily lives of those affected, particularly in the workplace.

According to British research, women suffering from endometriosis experience a decline in income over the years.

Britain's Office for National Statistics has analysed the impact of endometriosis on British women's working lives, using anonymised data from over 55,000 women in England.

The study reveals that between one and five years after diagnosis, the average salary of women with endometriosis decreases, with an estimated average drop of £56 (around RM311) per month four to five years after the disease is diagnosed.

In addition, the probability of holding a job decreases significantly after an endometriosis diagnosis. In the four to five years following diagnosis, the employment rate of women with endometriosis drops by 2.7 percentage points.

Between April 2016 and December 2022, this trend was confirmed among women aged 25 to 54 diagnosed in a public hospital.

And that's when a diagnosis is actually made. Endometriosis remains a largely underdiagnosed condition, and the journey to putting a name to its symptoms is often long and chaotic. In England, as in many other countries, it takes an average of eight to 10 years to get a diagnosis, as activist Jen Moore points out in the columns of People Management.

Often taboo

Nevertheless, once diagnosed, some women are forced to reduce their working hours or accept lower-paid jobs due to the disabling effects of this disease. Endometriosis is characterised by heavy periods, pelvic pain, backache, chronic fatigue and, in some cases, fertility issues.

Its symptoms vary considerably from person to person, influenced by genetic, immune and environmental factors, including exposure to endocrine disruptors.

To date, there is no definitive cure, and it can even recur after surgery.

The main objective is therefore to relieve the pain and discomfort, notably through continuous hormonal treatment (such as the pill), which blocks menstruation and slows the progression of the disease.

In the workplace, many women choose to remain silent about their situation.

For them, evoking a gynaecological illness means exposing a part of their intimate life to colleagues and superiors, at the risk of facing a lack of knowledge on the subject, or even misunderstanding.

But this discretion can also be explained by the fear of repercussions on their careers: 7% of the women concerned feel they have suffered discrimination in the workplace because of their menstrual symptoms, according to the report "Menstruation and support at work" by the Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development.

Even more alarmingly, 3% claim to have left their jobs due to a lack of support from their employer. It's vital that companies make efforts to better understand endometriosis and deconstruct the preconceptions and stigma surrounding menstrual health disorders. They can also put in place suitable arrangements for the women affected, such as the provision of specific equipment (ergonomic chairs), flexible working hours or easier access to remote working.

Appropriate support could help improve both the wellbeing and productivity of employees with endometriosis.