

Equality Act Review Campaign Policy Briefings

To inform Government and Parliamentary Debate

Why Endometriosis needs further specified protection under the Equality Act 2010

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Background

Endometriosis is a long-term condition in which uterine lining tissue grows outside of the uterus (NHS, 2019). Symptoms of endometriosis can include pelvic pain both during and post menstrual cycle, lower back pain, heavy periods, trouble getting pregnant, and pain with urination or bowel movements (NHS, 2019). This can lead to experiences of depression associated with the impact of endometriosis on an individual's life (NHS, 2019). Endometriosis can affect women of any age and is incurable (NHS, 2019).

The existing prevalence of a diagnosis of endometriosis occurs in 1 in 10 women, with a possible 8-year timeline before proper diagnosis is obtained (Endometriosis UK). Additionally, 40% of women will need 10 or more GP appointments before being referred to a specialist (Department of Health and Social Care, 2021a).

Current Protection

For more than 1.5 million women currently working in the UK, endometriosis is a daily struggle that follows them from home into their professional environments (Irvine et al., 2022). Specifically, with 77% of the NHS workforce and 82% of the social healthcare field identifying as women, the need for endometriosis support would have a direct effect on the healthcare system of the UK in terms of quality of care being delivered

(Department of Health and Social Care, 2021b).

Currently, **endometriosis is not recognised as a long-term disability under the Equality Act 2010 and is not classified for statutory sick pay (SSP) in the UK as SSP is only available for three years** (Simoens et al., 2012). With endometriosis being composed of sporadic, unplanned flare-ups, women in the workplace need protection through policy to support their needs. While working from home has been found effective in reducing the impact of endometriosis symptoms on women working, this can be a difficult privilege to access within the workplace in the UK (Endometriosis UK). Employees typically can only apply for flexible employment after the 26-week mark, leaving newer employees unprotected both financially and, in their ability to manage their symptoms, while balancing work requirements.

Recommendations

We recommend that **endometriosis be recognized as a protected characteristic under the Equality Act 2010**, along with being **recognized as an ongoing and qualifying condition under the definition of disability within the Equality Act 2010**. Additionally, it is imperative for **workplace endometriosis policy** to be implemented, with emphasis on options of flexible working, sickness absence, and support networks to better support women (Endometriosis UK).

These interventions would assist in addressing the ongoing challenges women face within employment because of experiences of endometriosis, while

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THE EQUALITY
ACT REVIEW

ensuring appropriate protection and support throughout their career. This would make for a more inclusive workplace and empower women to continue their careers, despite the presence of an endometriosis diagnosis.

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