



The University of  
**Nottingham**

# **Workplace Health**

## **Older Women, Work & Health**

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### **National Employment & Health Innovations Network**

*Albert Hall, Nottingham, 13<sup>th</sup> Oct 2009*

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# Institute of Work, Health & Organisations

promoting:

## 'Healthy People, Healthy Work & Healthy Organisations'

- Research & consultancy - occupational, health, clinical & forensic psychologists
- Education – MSc, PhD
- WHO Collaborating Centre

### Government Quality Audits:

- Research Assessment Exercise: 95% output 'international' (2008)  
70% 'world-leading or excellent' research power – 6<sup>th</sup> (90 units)
- Teaching Quality Assessment: 24/24



# Older Women Workers

- Women – nearly 1/2 UK's workforce  
*Help the Aged/TAEN 2006*
- More women than men in part-time, low-skilled, low-paid jobs with lack of autonomy
- Middle years – key to preventing ill-health & disadvantage in later working years
- Mid-life women (45-54) – report more work-related stress, anxiety & depression *HSE*
- Working life critical to quality of life in retirement  
*Finland*

# Report Conclusions

- Little known about quality of working lives of older women -
  - 1½ million women workers aged 45-64
  - 113,000 aged 65+
- Older women's occupational health– neglected
- Older women more likely to occupy multiple roles
  - greater share of domestic responsibilities
  - More likely to be carers
- Major health problems – stress & MSDs
- Workplace policies and practice need to recognise age & gender – diversity
- Research gaps – eg. menopause

# Research Aims

- Most workplace health issues are not medical/clinical but organisational & psychosocial
- What problems does the menopause present for working women?
  - well-being, job satisfaction, performance
- How do they cope with it?
- What can employers do to help?
- Advice for women, employers & healthcare practitioners
- Funders – BAWP, BOHRF

# Menopause - Definition

- Menopause - average age 51 (45-55)
- Period of hormonal change lasts about 6 years - *peri-menopause, menopausal transition, climacteric, change*
- Symptoms attributed by women to the menopause – hot flushes, night sweats, sleep disturbances, fatigue, poor concentration & memory, weight gain, irritability, anxiety, depression, etc.

# Scientific Review of the Literature – Search Terms

Menopause	Menopausal Transition	Climacteric	Peri-menopause	Midlife
Working Women	Employment	Working	Job Performance	Work Performance
Workplace	Work	Job	Self-Esteem	Body Image
Body Esteem	Hot Flashes	Social Support	Support	HRT
Decision	Information Seeking	Knowledge	Coping	Physical Activity
Exercise	Attitudes			

# Scientific Review of the Literature - Results

- Search engine: Web of Knowledge
- Complex and sensitive issue to research
- Few papers about work (8)
- Most about menopause in general
  - symptoms, hot flushes, self-esteem, attitudes, HRT
- Normal physiological changes
- Medical issues & treatment
- Social (organisational) context

# Interviews

- 65 semi-structured, confidential interviews
- Age 45-55 (average 51)
- 84% British
- Interview schedule refined over time
- Questions – nature of job, changes, feelings, effect of symptoms on work, effect of work on symptoms, hot flushes, coping strategies, absence, disclosure to managers & colleagues, adjustments, support, info about menopause, suggestions for improvements, HRT usage

# (1) Women's Responses

- Knowledge, awareness & attitudes to the menopause
- Quote: "I often think 'Am I good enough' you know. 'Am I doing the job as well as I should be' because I keep forgetting bits, tiny little bits, details..."  
(age 47, Admin)

## (2) Others' Responses

- Colleagues' & managers' knowledge, awareness & attitudes to the menopause

*"I do think sometimes menopause is seen as an excuse... Because it's just menopause ... I think anyone who hasn't gone through it ... I think they see it as, you know, ok you get hot, ok you might get a bit irritable but they don't understand the extremity of it ..."*

(age 52, Education)

## (3) Coping Strategies

- Individual's response to the menopause – general and work specific

*"In general terms, I try to eat properly and get as much sleep as I can and get some exercise and look after myself..."*

(age 53, Education)

## (4) Support

- *"His (line manager) wife is the same age as me. So she is going through a similar thing. So he is very understanding about it."*  
(age 48, Admin)

# Questionnaire - Design

- Information from scientific literature
- Information from interviews
- Consultation with expert groups
- Internal design team
- Pilots
- Amendments & distribution

# Questionnaire

- Menopausal status algorithm (questions)
- Menopausal symptoms (general, work)
- Work characteristics (line manager, work environment)
- Coping & support (general, work-specific)
- What would make things better at work
- General well-being (GHQ)
- Demographics

# Example Page

BOHRF Questionnaire Version 10 - Windows Internet Explorer

http://www.nottingham.ac.uk/~kszyyww/bohrf\_version10/bohrf\_version10.htm

File Edit View Favorites Tools Help

how to create screen dump Search Web

Google

BOHRF Questionnaire Version 10

[text only](#)

**Did you go on HRT to help you cope with work?**

Yes  Yes, but it was not the only reason  No

**Since being on HRT, have you found coping with work easier?**

Yes  
 Yes, but side effects can be a problem  
 No difference  
 No

**What's your attitude towards HRT?**

positive  neutral  negative

**Have you tried alternative treatments? (e.g. herbal supplements)**

Yes  No  Don't need treatment at present

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start

EN 13:14

# Questionnaire – Pilot & Review

- 10 menopausal women
- Experts & organisational stakeholders:
  - occupational medicine, OH nursing
  - gynaecology
  - health promotion, mental health policy
  - occupational health psychology
  - organisational psychology
  - epidemiology, statistics
  - human resources, trade union
  - equal opportunities & diversity
  - corporate planning & development

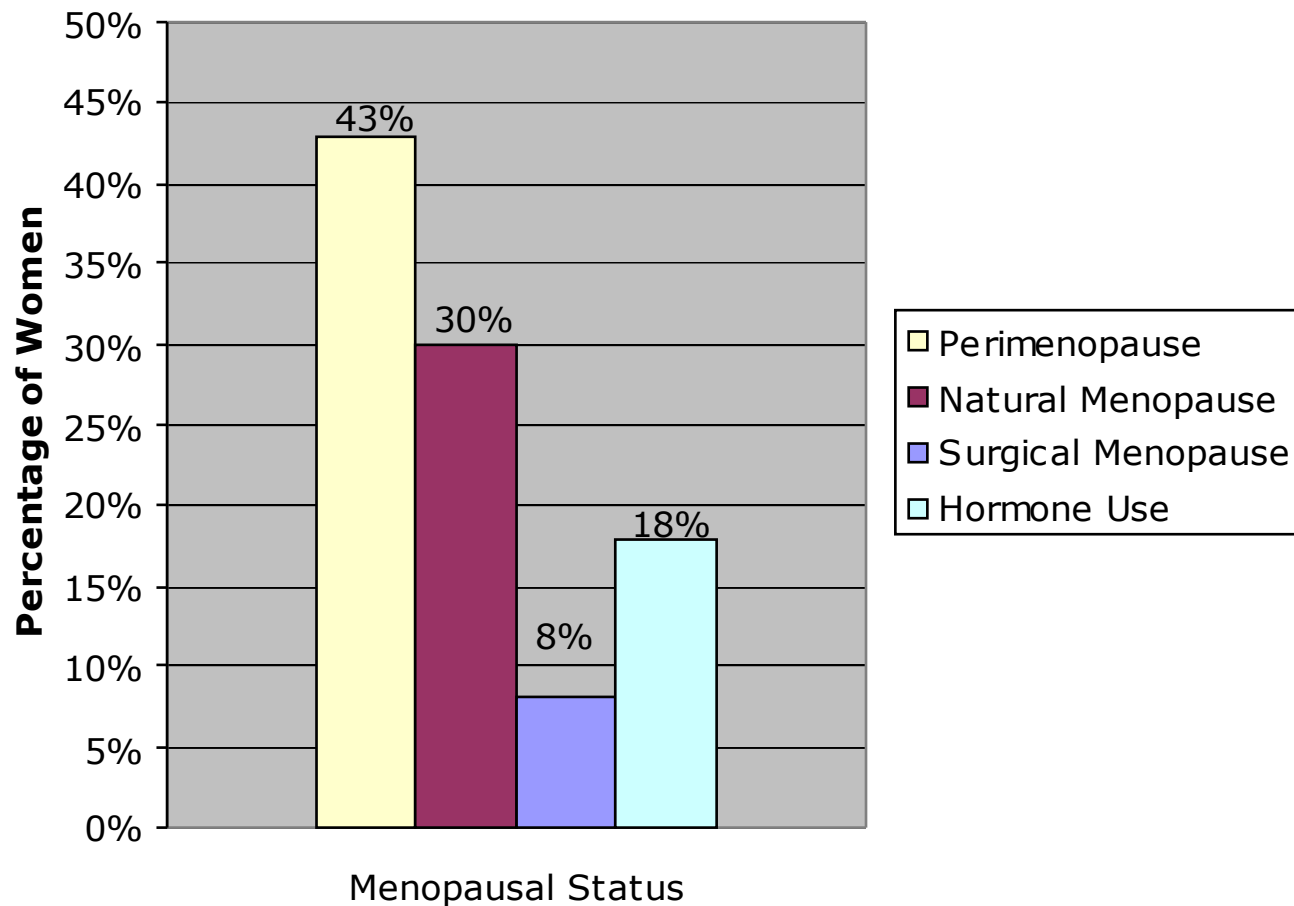
# Participating Organisations

Sectors Represented	No. of Org
Professional, scientific & technical activities	1
Information & communication	1
Wholesale & retail trade	1
Education	2
Transportation & storage	2
Public administration & defence; compulsory social security	3

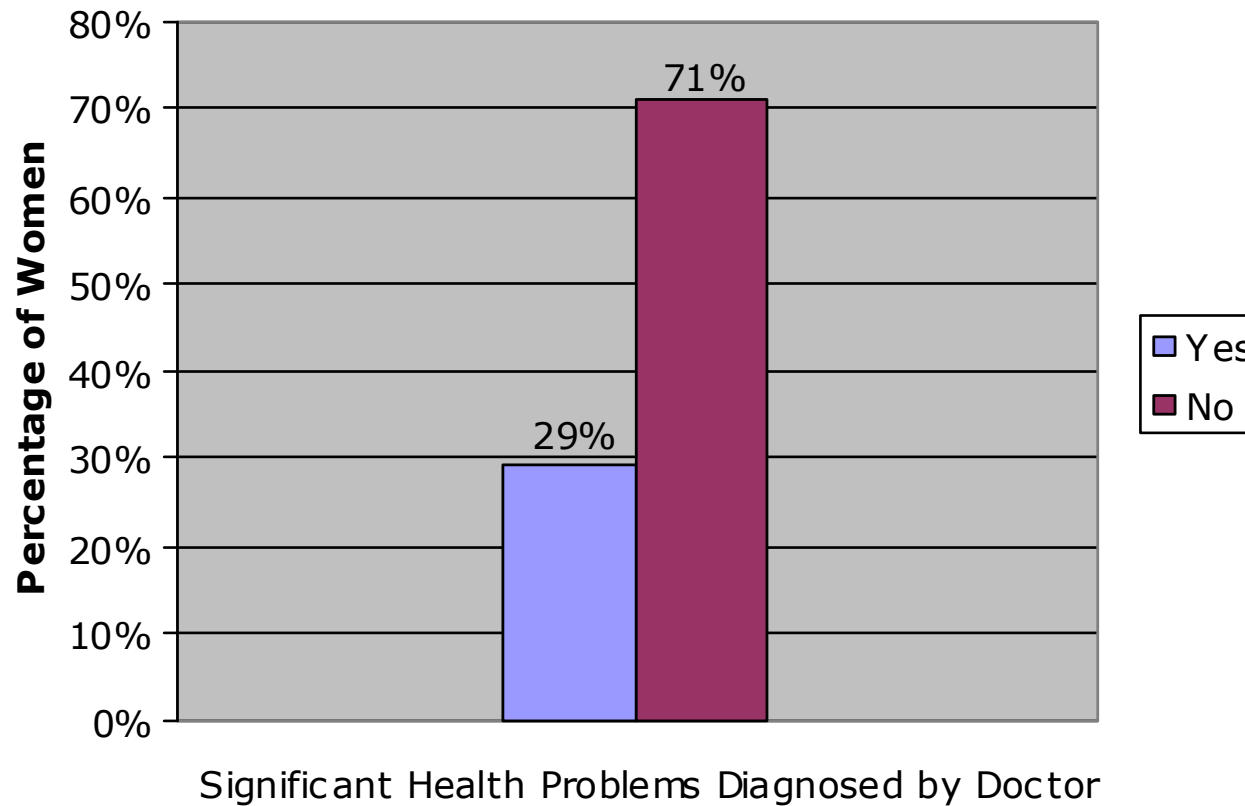
# Final Questionnaire Sample April 2009

- Completed questionnaires - **1247**
- Excluded from further analysis: **335**
  - 102 pre-menopausal
  - 223 undefined
  - 7 premature menopause
  - 3 not in target age group
- Final sample - **912**

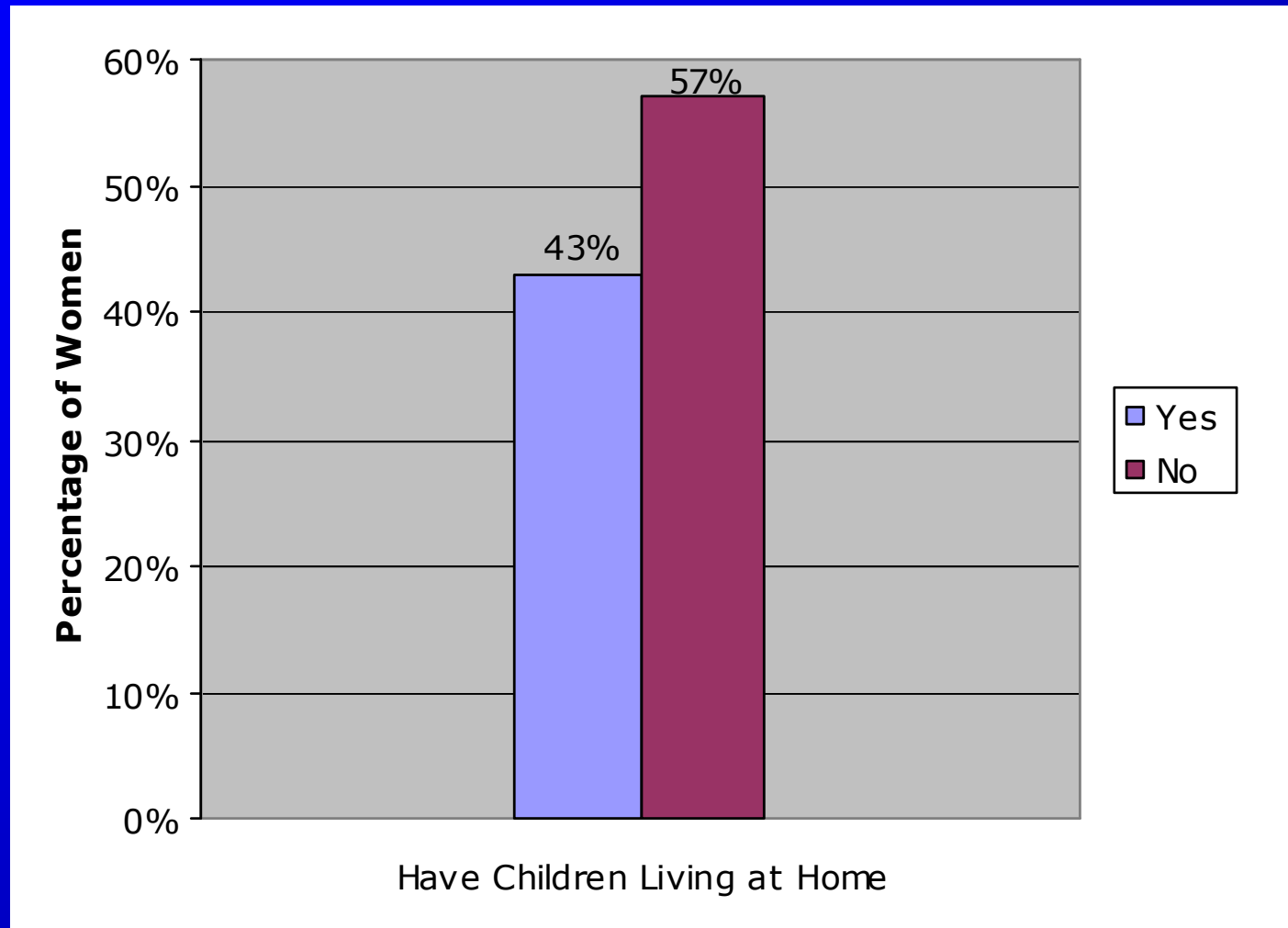
# Menopausal Status



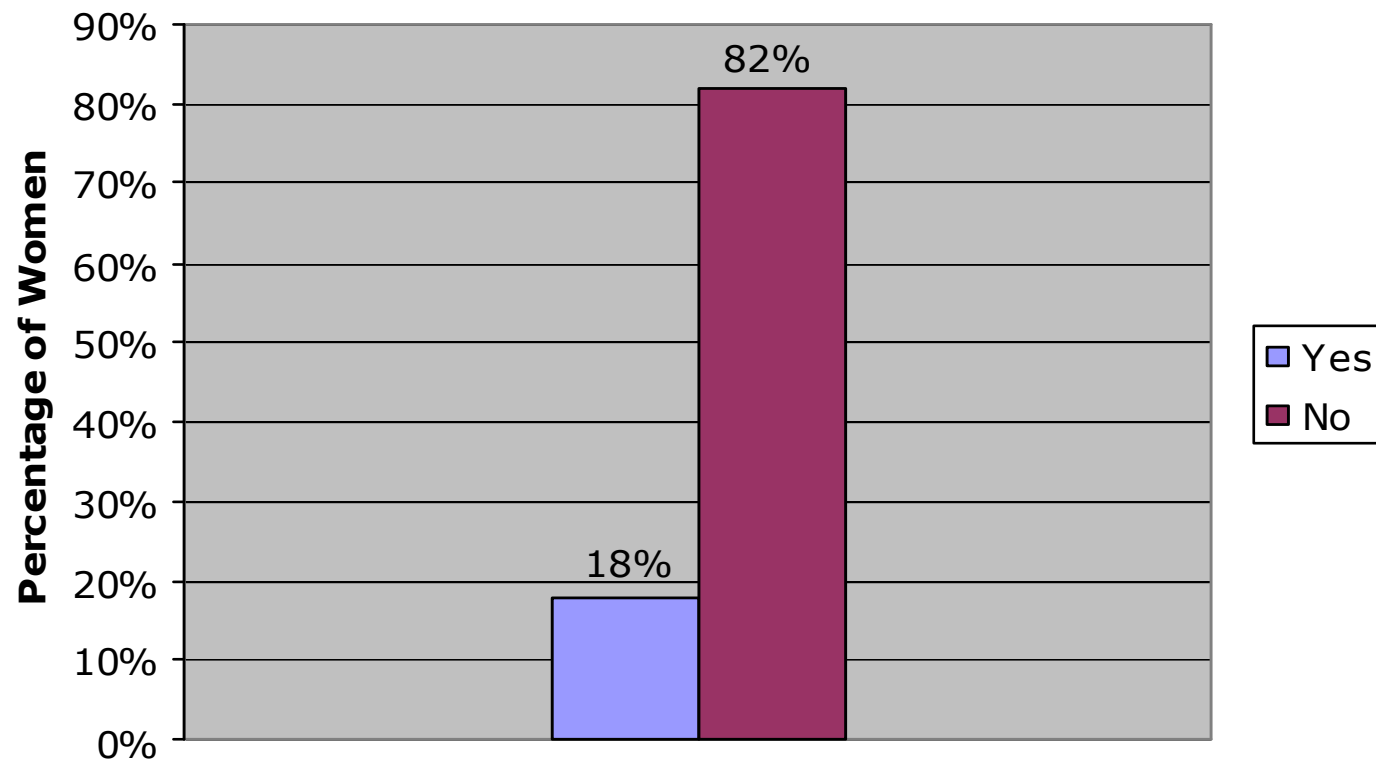
# Significant Health Problems Diagnosed by Doctor



# Have Children Living at Home

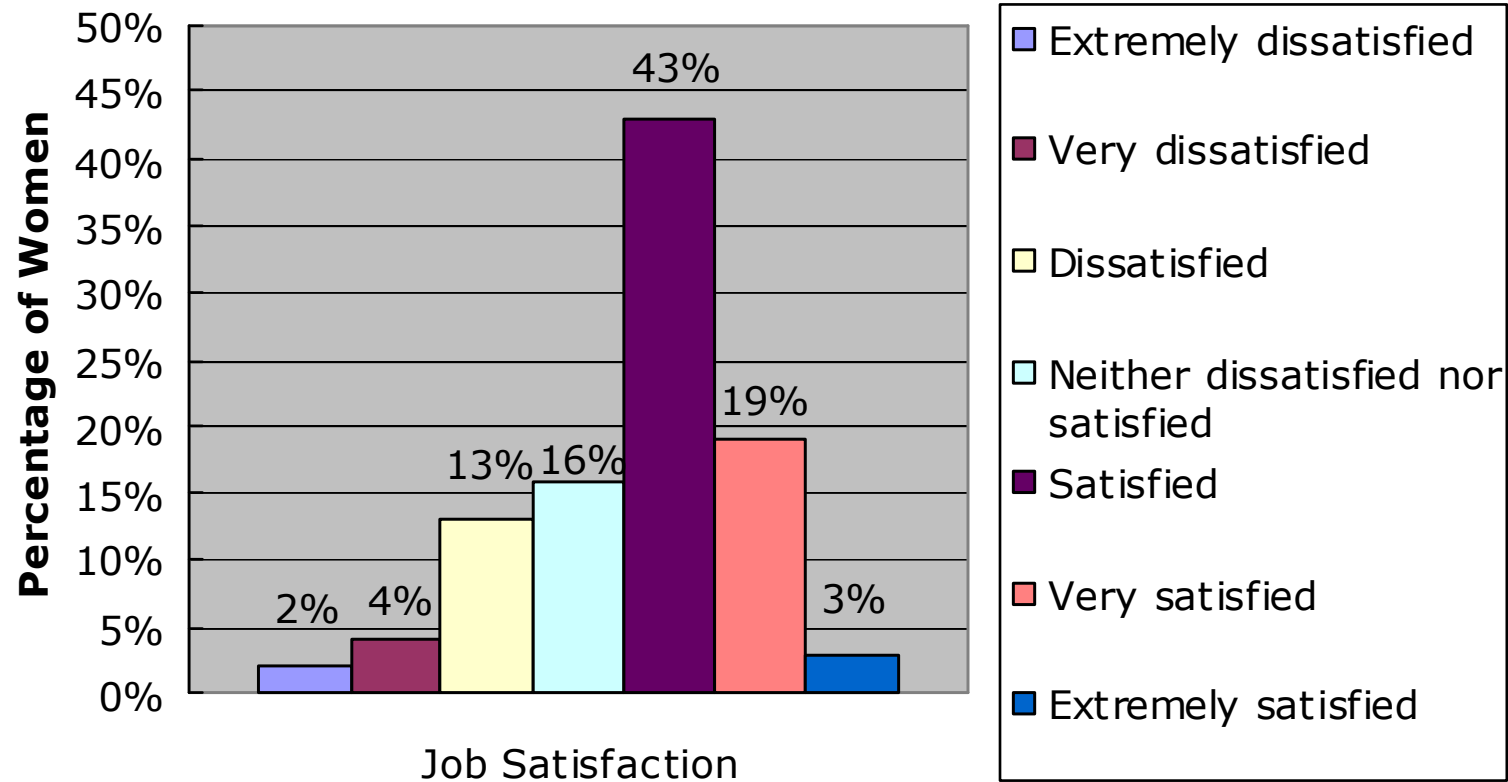


# Care for an Elderly/Disabled Parent/Person

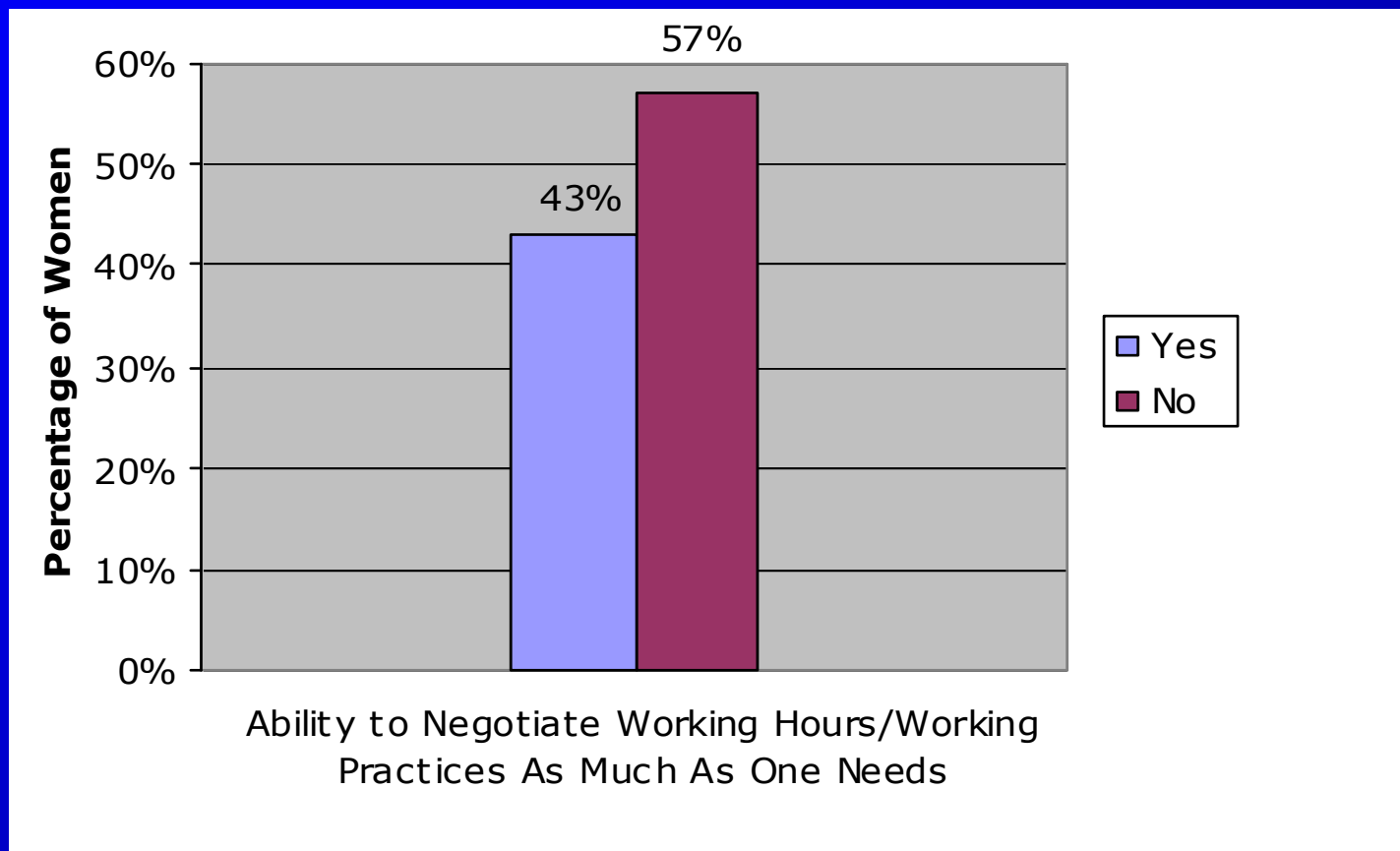


Care for an Elderly/Disabled Parent/Person

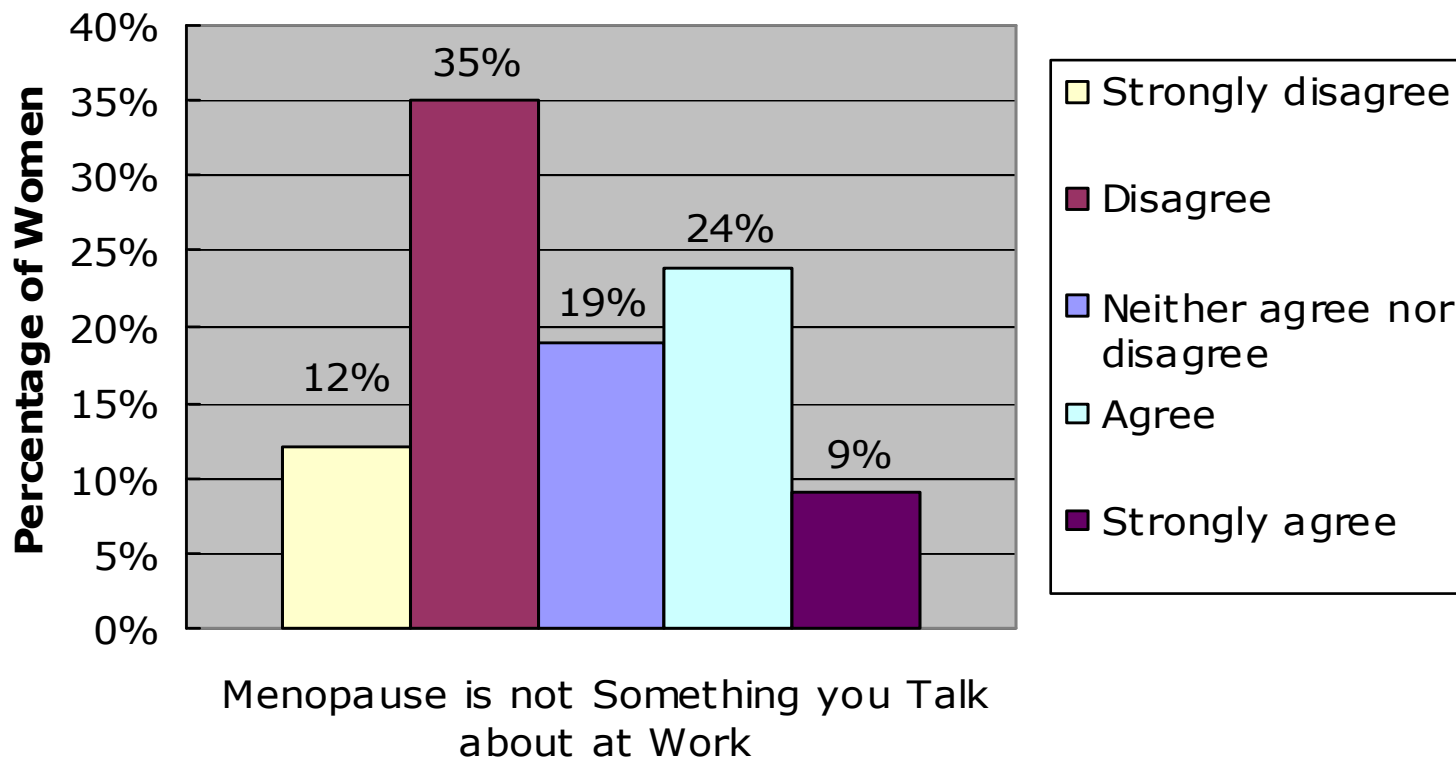
# Job Satisfaction



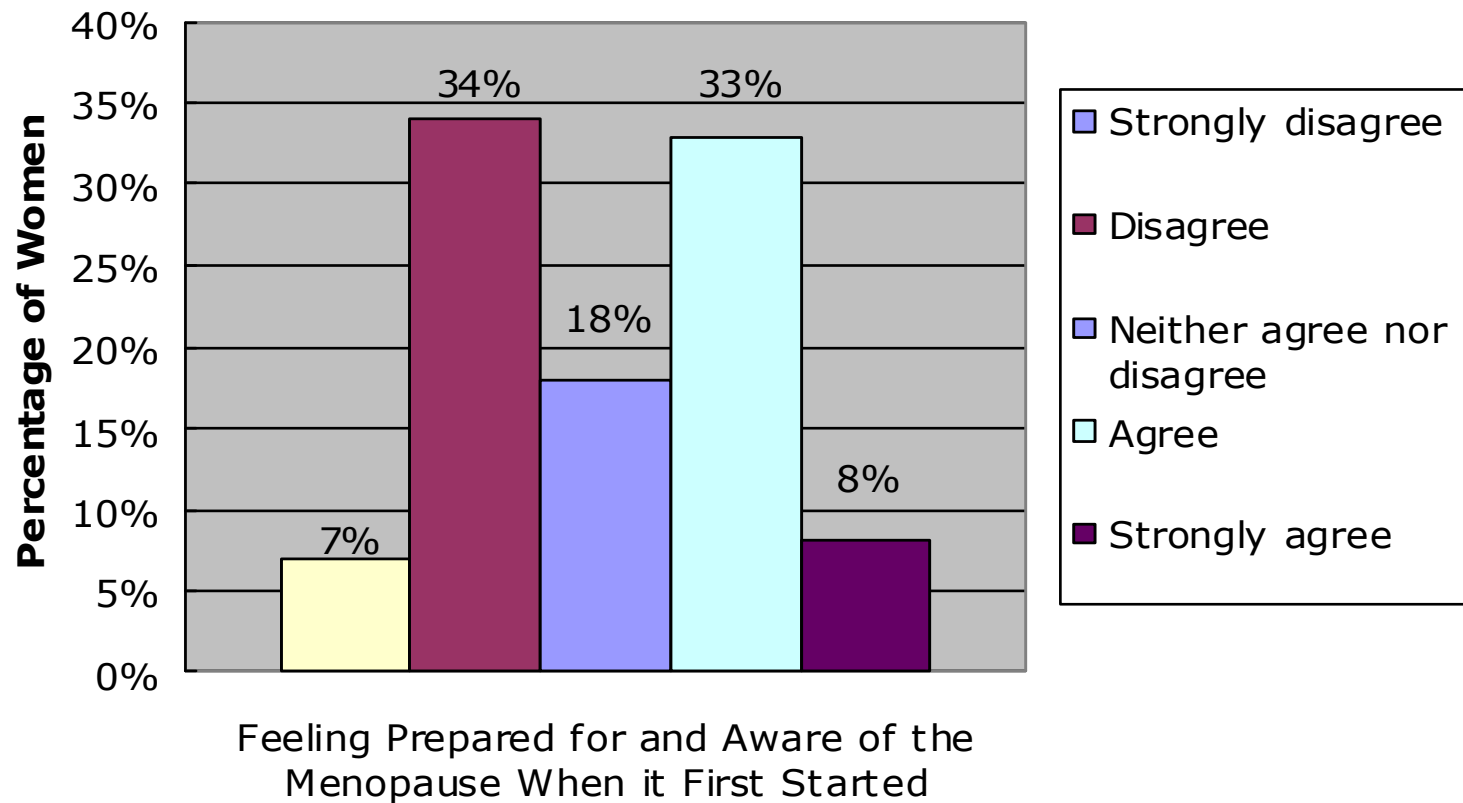
# Ability to Negotiate Working Hours/Working Practices As Much As One Needs



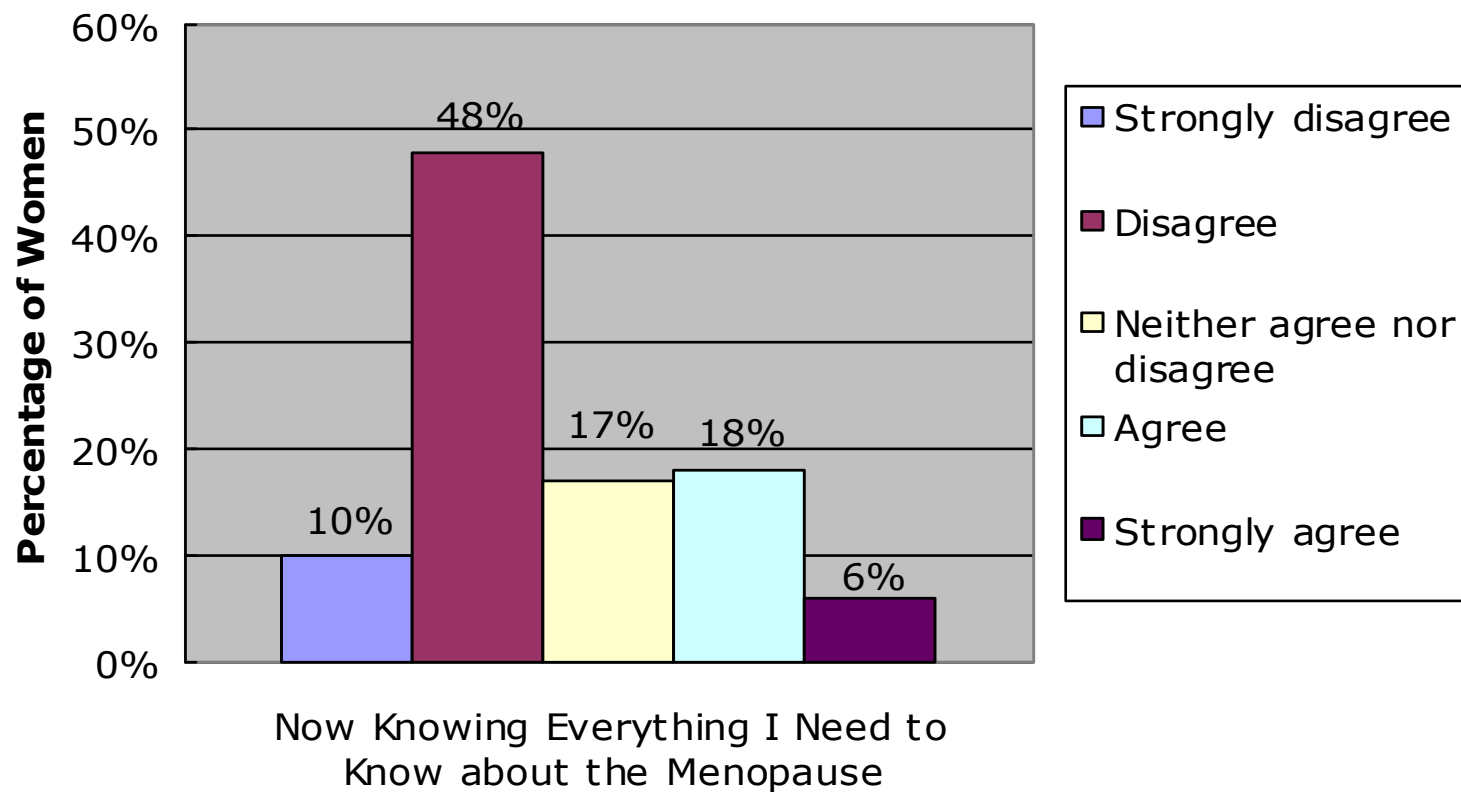
# Menopause - "Not Something you Talk about at Work"



# Feeling Prepared for and Aware of the Menopause When it First Started



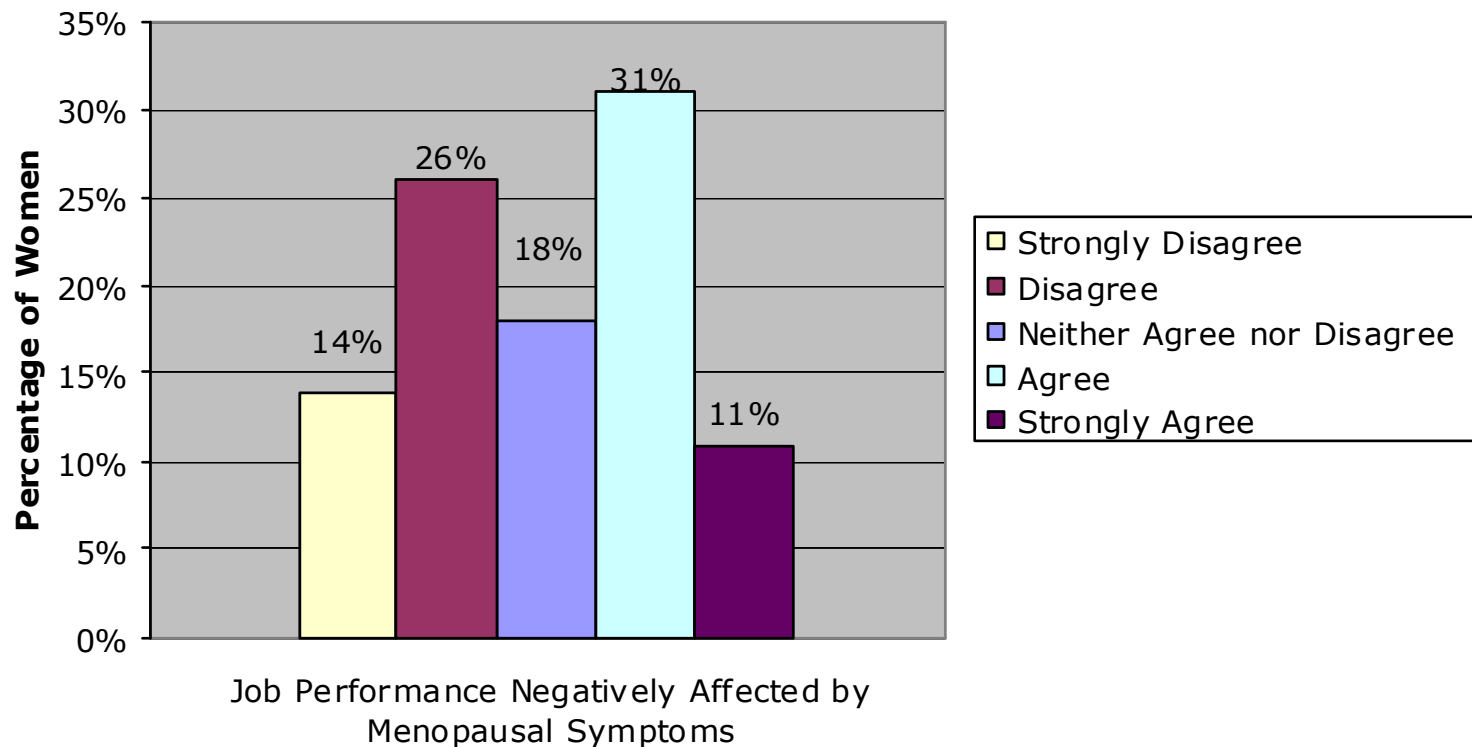
# Now Knowing "Everything I Need to Know about the Menopause"



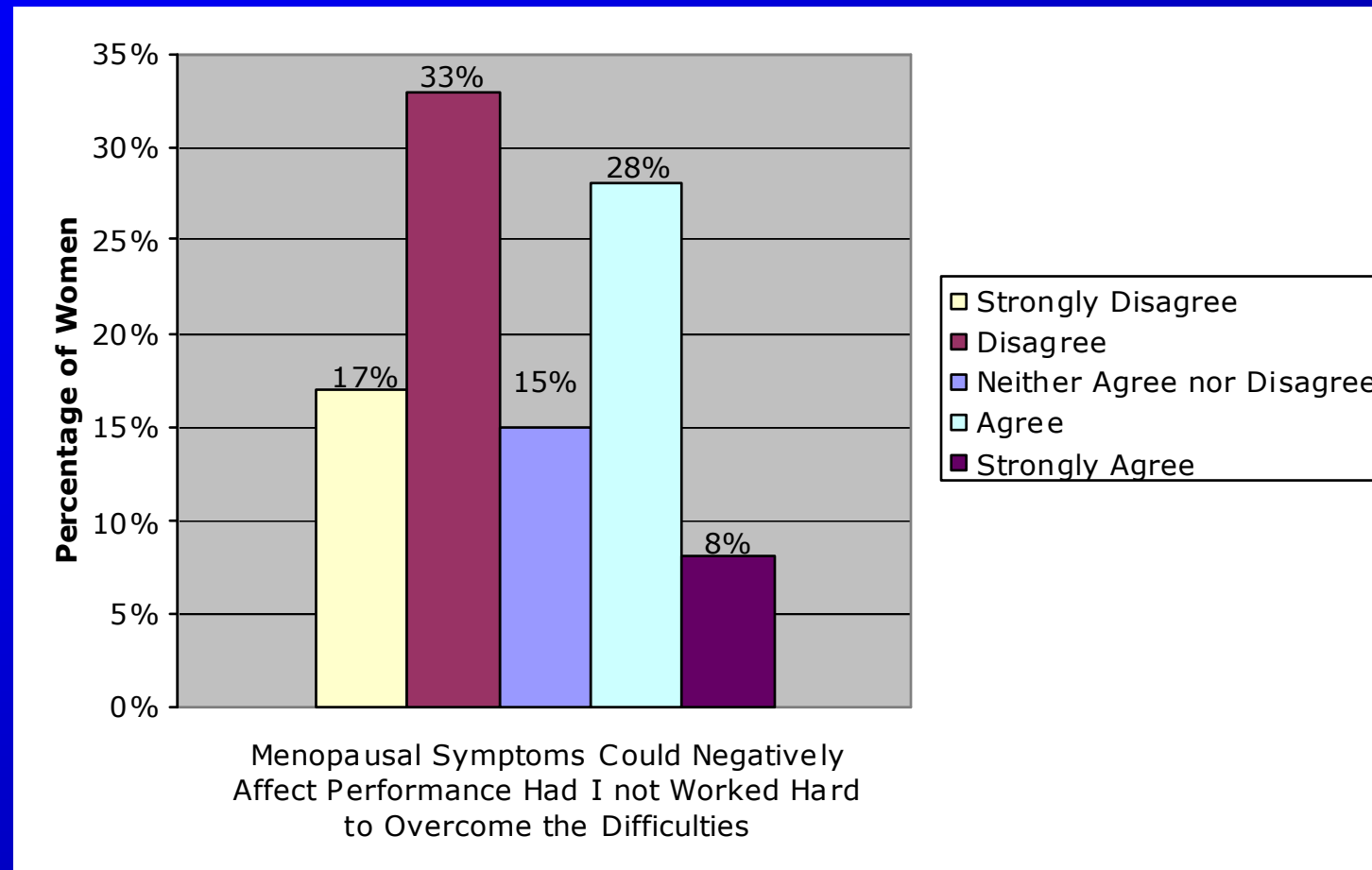
# Perceived Impact of Symptoms on Work

Symptoms	%
Poor concentration	51
Tiredness, poor memory	51
Feeling low/depressed	42
Lowered confidence	39
Sleep disturbances	37
Irritability	36
Hot flushes	35

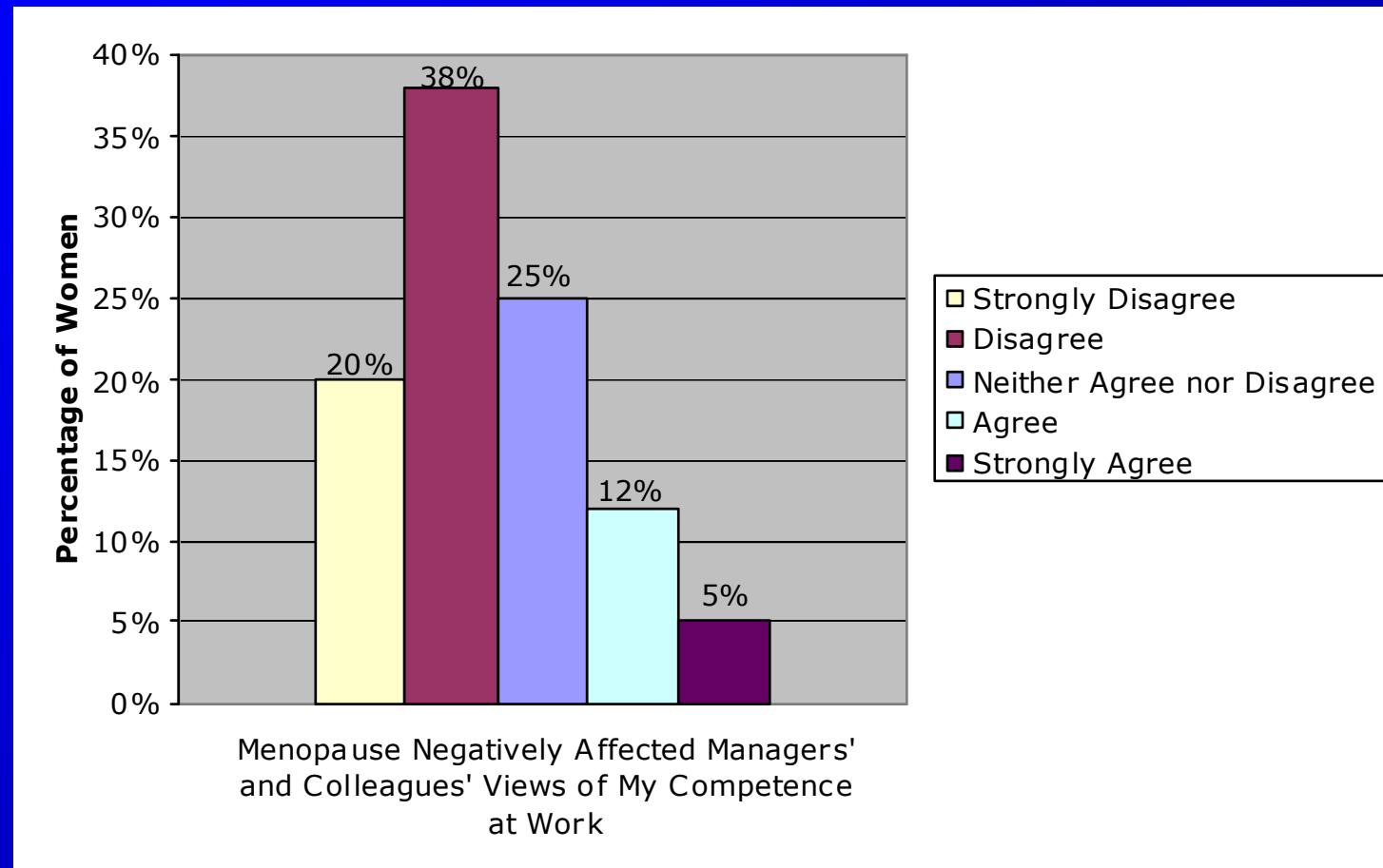
# Job Performance Negatively Affected by Menopausal Symptoms



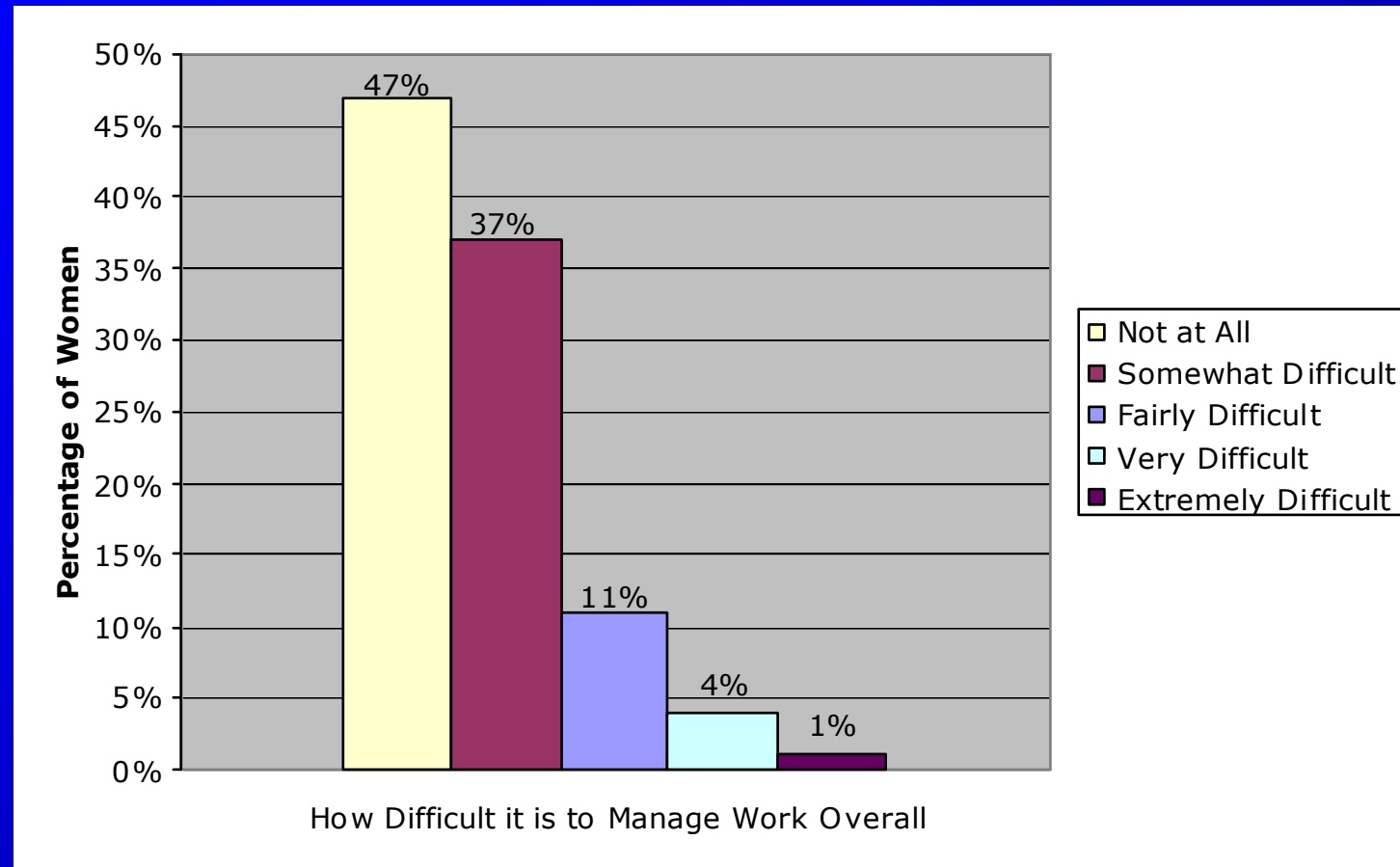
# Menopause "Could have Negatively Affected Performance if had not Worked Hard to Overcome Difficulties"



# Menopause “Negatively Affected Managers’ and Colleagues’ Views of my Competence at Work”



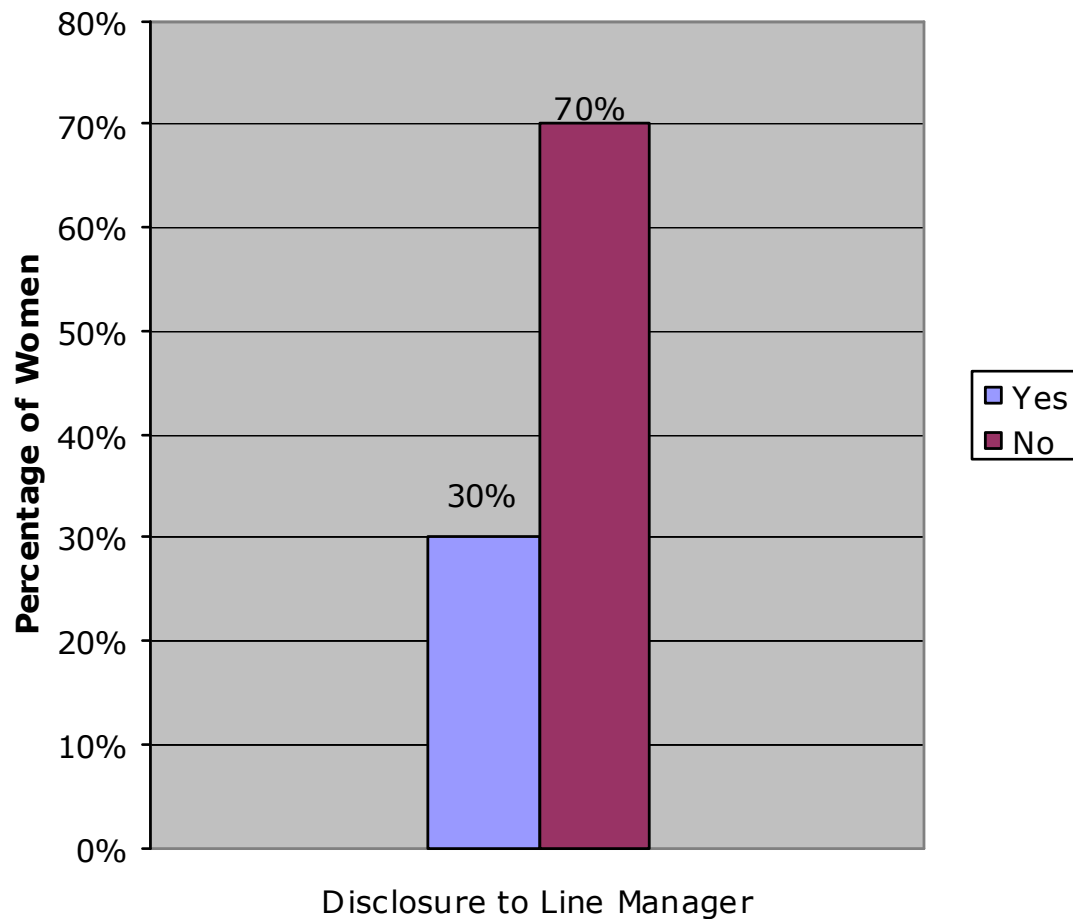
# Difficulty Managing Work Overall



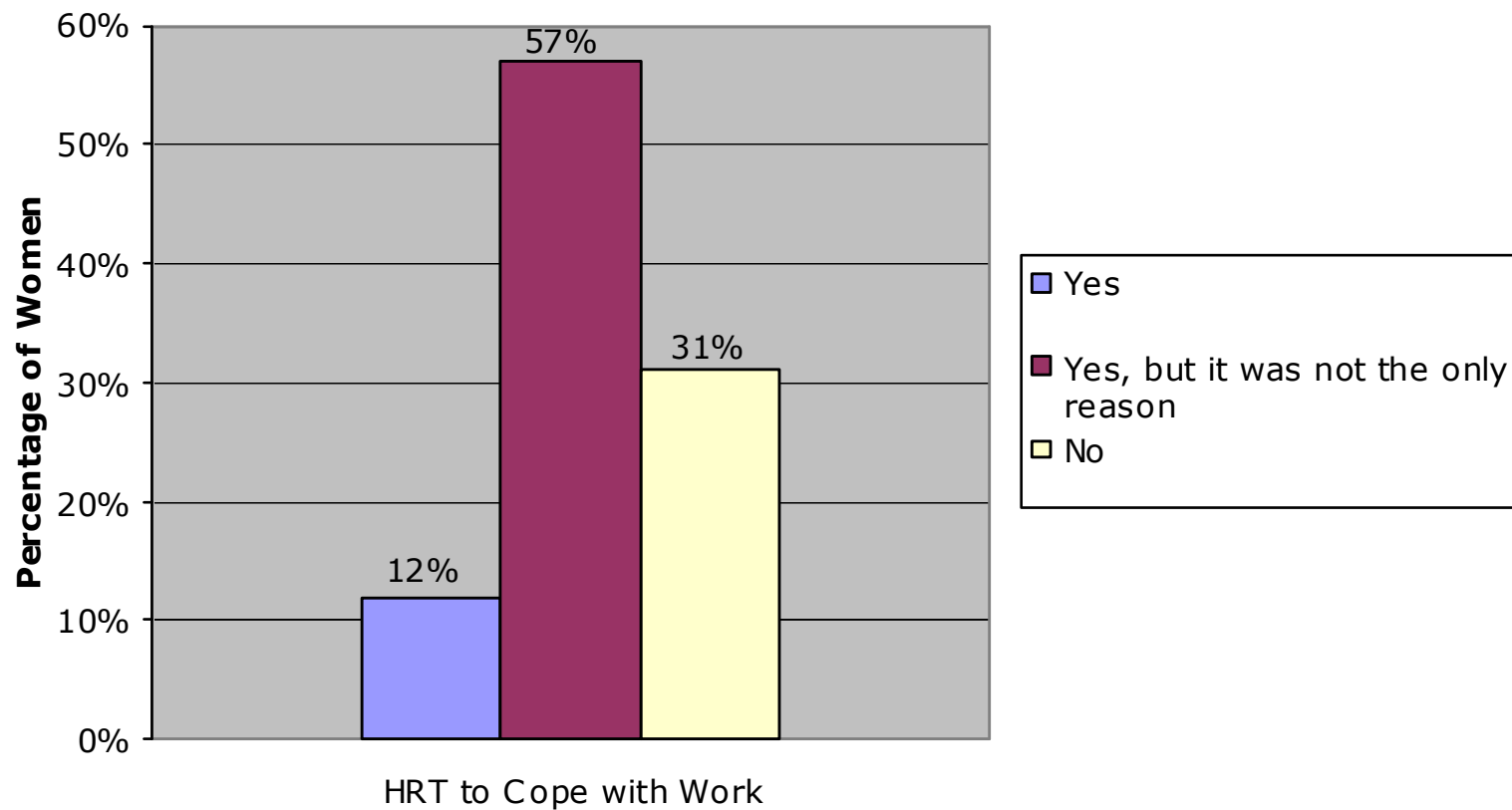
# Work Situations Making Coping with Hot Flushes More Difficult

	%
Working in hot/unventilated environment	75
Formal meetings	67
Doing high visibility work	48
Learning new things/procedures (e.g. presentations)	46
Tasks requiring attention to fine detail	39
Working in a shared office	38
Working to a deadline	35

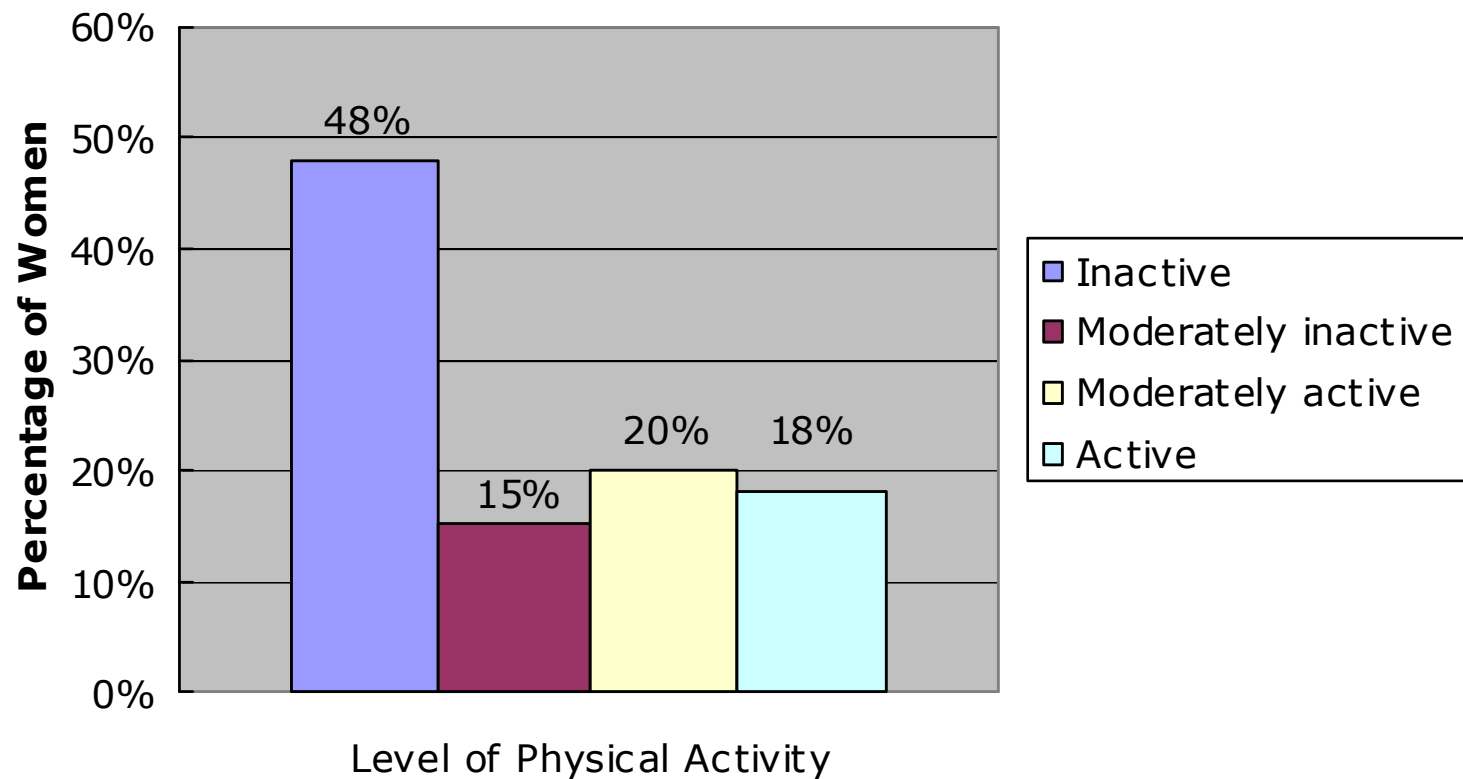
# Disclosure to Line Manager



# HRT to Cope with Work



# Level of Physical Activity



## Further Analysis – *eg. Physical Activity*

- Women who exercise say it helps them cope with symptoms
- Women who exercise less likely to report that the menopause makes life in general and work difficult to cope with
- Women who exercise report significantly better well-being (GHQ) than those who do not

# Physical, Organisational & Psychosocial Adjustments at Work

	%
Greater awareness among managers of menopause as a possible OH issue	75
Flexible working hours	63
Formal info/advice about the menopause & how to cope at work from my employer	58
Better ventilation/air conditioning /temperature in my usual work environment	55
Informal support for women going through the menopause	52
Allowing working at home	49
A rest area	40



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THANK YOU