'Medical Misogyny' Condemns Women to Years of Gynaecological Pain, MPs Told

By Tobi Thomas, *The Guardian*, December 10th, 2024

Women and girls are enduring years of pain because their reproductive conditions are being dismissed due to “medical misogyny”, according to a damning parliamentary report. The report, by the Women and Equalities committee, found that gynaecological conditions such as endometriosis and adenomyosis are treated with inadequate care due to a “pervasive stigma”, a lack of education by healthcare professionals and “medical misogyny”.

The Commons select committee found that symptoms are often “normalised” and it can take years for women to get a diagnosis and treatment. The report said women were being left in pain and discomfort that “interferes with every aspect of their daily lives”, including their education, careers, relationships and fertility, while their conditions worsen. It also found there to be a “clear lack of awareness and understanding of women’s reproductive health conditions among primary healthcare practitioners” and concluded that gynaecological care is not being treated as a priority. The report calls for the government to allocate more funding for research into women’s reproductive health conditions.

Endometriosis affects one in 10 women in the UK and is caused by tissue similar to the lining of the uterus growing elsewhere in the body, often resulting in chronic pelvic pain and painful periods. Adenomyosis causes the lining of the uterus to grow into its muscular wall, which again causes painful symptoms.

Sarah Owen, Labour MP for Luton North and chair of the Women and Equalities committee, said the report was a “wake-up call” for the government and the NHS, adding: “Our inquiry has shown misogyny in medicine is leaving women in pain and their conditions undiagnosed. Women are finding their symptoms dismissed, are waiting years for life-changing treatment and in too many cases are being put through trauma-inducing procedures. All the while, their conditions worsen and become more complicated to treat.”

Zainab Kaleemullah, a 35-year-old civil servant, was diagnosed with endometriosis and adenomyosis in 2022, despite having experienced the painful symptoms such as heavy periods, nausea and chronic anaemia associated with the diseases for a decade.

In the time before being officially diagnosed, Kaleemullah found her symptoms to be dismissed by healthcare professionals. “I would go to the GP constantly, I was misdiagnosed with depression and irritable bowel syndrome, I was sort of given the impression that it was all in my head and this was completely normal for women to be experiencing,” she said.

Emma Cox, the chief executive of Endometriosis UK, said her charity welcomed the report and its recommendations. She added: “These [recommendations] should give hope to those impacted by endometriosis and menstrual health conditions that their voice is being heard.”

An NHS England spokesperson said: “Too often in the NHS we hear of women whose health concerns have been dismissed, which is why we are taking action to improve services for women, including rolling out women’s health hubs across the country. The hubs are giving thousands more women access to specialist support in the community which not only improves access and women’s experiences of care, but also helps to upskill healthcare professionals with a full range of staff working in one place. ”