

# what *she* said

2024 Executive Summary from the  
Community Survey of Women in the Workplace  
(Forsyth County, North Carolina) conducted by

**REACH**  
Women's Network



# Table of Contents

The Case for Women .....	2
What She Said (Overview of Findings).....	3
Survey Background.....	4
Respondent Demographics .....	4
Job & Employer Satisfaction .....	5
Impacts on Advancement.....	8
Discrimination and Harassment.....	10
Mental Health and Wellbeing .....	11
Employee Benefits .....	12
Factors Influencing a Job Change .....	14
Qualitative Data .....	15
Takeaways .....	16

## COMMUNITY SURVEY of Women in the Workplace

The Community Survey of Women in the Workplace is an initiative of REACH Women's Network, a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization based in Winston-Salem, North Carolina. For questions about this research, to have results presented to your organization, or to support future research initiatives, please contact [info@reachwomensnetwork.org](mailto:info@reachwomensnetwork.org). Learn more at [www.reachwomensnetwork.org](http://www.reachwomensnetwork.org).

©2024 REACH Women's Network

## The Case for Women

Research has shown that organizations with women in positions of leadership are **more profitable**<sup>1-3</sup>, **more innovative** (holding more patents and fostering cultures of collaborative research and development)<sup>4-5</sup>, **more socially and environmentally responsible**<sup>4</sup>, and have **higher employee retention**.<sup>6</sup> Indeed, according to *Harvard Business Review*, adding women to the C-suite changes how companies think, for the better.<sup>7</sup> That's in part because women are more open to change while simultaneously reducing associated risks.

REACH Women's Network hopes that its research efforts will help employers take meaningful steps to ensure their workplaces are truly equitable. This isn't just the right thing to do; it's also good business.

One of the core values of REACH Women's Network reads: *We believe that advancing gender equity is a universal movement and that elevating the voice and influence of women will strengthen the vitality, creativity, productivity, and sustainability of our families, our workplaces, our economy, and our community.*

Where women thrive, businesses and communities thrive.

<sup>1</sup> Cumming, A. (2022, September 29). *Research shows companies with female CEOs are more profitable*. Business Leader. <https://www.businessleader.co.uk/research-shows-companies-female-ceo-more-profitable>

<sup>2</sup> McKinsey & Company. (2020, May). *Diversity wins: How inclusion matters*. <https://www.mckinsey.com/~/media/mckinsey/featured%20insights/diversity%20and%20inclusion/diversity%20wins%20how%20inclusion%20matters/diversity-wins-how-inclusion-matters-vf.pdf>

<sup>3</sup> Amar, S. (2023, February 7). *Why everyone wins with more women in leadership*. Forbes. <https://www.forbes.com/sites/forbesbusinesscouncil/2023/02/07/why-everyone-wins-with-more-women-in-leadership>

<sup>4</sup> Chamorro-Premuzic, T. (2022, March 2). *The business case for women in leadership*. Forbes. <https://www.forbes.com/sites/tomaspremuzic/2022/03/02/the-business-case-for-women-in-leadership>

<sup>5</sup> Sandberg, D. J. (2019, October 16). *When women lead, firms win*. S&P Global. [https://www.spglobal.com/\\_division\\_assets/images/special-editorial/iif-2019/whenwomenlead\\_.pdf](https://www.spglobal.com/_division_assets/images/special-editorial/iif-2019/whenwomenlead_.pdf)

<sup>6</sup> Castrillon, C. (2019, March 24). *Why women-led companies are better for employees*. Forbes. <https://www.forbes.com/sites/carolinecastrillon/2019/03/24/why-women-led-companies-are-better-for-employees>

<sup>7</sup> Post, C., Lokshin, B., & Boone, C. (2021, April 6). *Research: Adding women to the C Suite changes how companies think*. Harvard Business Review. <https://hbr.org/2021/04/research-adding-women-to-the-c-suite-changes-how-companies-think>

## Overview of Findings

Women participating in the Community Survey of Women in the Workplace (CSWW) have generally high satisfaction with their **employer (overall)** and with several other job-related factors including **commute time, flex time**, and their **relationship with their immediate supervisor**.

But the survey also surfaced concerns for working women in Forsyth County. Only about half of respondents are satisfied with their **salary**, with BIPOC women reporting lower satisfaction than White women.

**Advancement** is another key area where women would like to see changes. Advancement opportunities, pace of career advancement, and advancement policies are all falling short. That is especially true for Generation X and for women employed by large organizations.

The majority of women said it was important to be able to **work from home** at least some of the time. An even higher percentage, though, indicated that **flexibility** regarding when work gets done is even more important.

Nearly half of respondents reported that **childcare responsibilities** had negatively impacted their career advancement. Four in ten respondents said their **gender/gender identity** had a negative impact on their career, and about a third indicated their **age** had a negative impact.

Overall respondents believe their **opinion is sought and valued** by their colleagues and supervisors, though lower-income BIPOC women were less likely to hold that opinion.

Three quarters of respondents indicated they had witnessed or experienced **discrimination or harassment** in their current or prior workplace. Bullying and gender discrimination were the most common issues. One in five said they had directly experienced sexual harassment.

Less than half of respondents were satisfied with their employers' **handling of workplace complaints**. That is especially true of women working for large organizations, who also expressed less satisfaction with their employers' commitment to equity around **age/generational inclusion** and **hiring and advancement policies**.

While the majority of respondents indicated that they have a healthy **work-life balance**, more than 80% said they felt **burned out** at least sometimes; nearly half said they often or almost always feel burned out. Fewer than 60% of respondents believe that their employer genuinely cares about their **wellbeing**, and a third believe that taking advantage of flexible working opportunities would affect their chances for promotion.

On the topic of benefits, respondents ranked **mental health coverage** second only to affordable medical insurance among a long list of possible employee benefits. **Professional development** opportunities ranked third overall on the list, with BIPOC women in particular placing a high emphasis on it.

Women indicated that a **higher salary, workplace culture, and advancement/growth potential** were the most important factors for them when considering a job change.

# Survey Background

In support of its mission to advance economic development and promote gender equity, REACH Women's Network conducted the Community Survey of Women in the Workplace (CSWW) in the fall of 2022. This quantitative study allowed women to anonymously share their thoughts, preferences, and experiences related to job satisfaction and personal and professional barriers impacting their career growth.

The goal of this comprehensive survey was to provide employers with actionable information to support women in the workplace, with an aim toward positioning Winston-Salem as a city where working women thrive.

The survey was funded in part by grants from the Richard J. Reynolds, III and Marie M. Reynolds Foundation, Twin City Development Foundation, and Woody Clinard. Strategic marketing firm Girl on the Roof provided survey strategy, PR, benchmarking, report preparation, and design services. Nonprofit market research firm Forsyth Futures performed independent quantitative analysis.

Top-line survey results were unveiled at the REACH Women's Conference held in April of 2023. More than 300 conference attendees contributed to supplemental qualitative research, the top findings from which are summarized on Page 15 of this report.

Note: After the first public data was released in 2023, further data cleansing was performed by Forsyth Futures to generate more meaningful and actionable data. Consequently, statistics in this report may vary from earlier reports but are actually more accurate expressions of respondent opinions.

# Respondent Demographics

The Community Survey of Women in the Workplace was open to all working women who live and/or work in Winston-Salem/ Forsyth County, North Carolina. Distribution efforts were aimed at securing responses from women representing diversity in age, race/ethnicity, industry, profession, career level, income level, and more. The survey was open from September to December of 2022. The final sample size of qualifying respondents was 687.

**95%** self-identified as a professional woman

**89%** were employed full-time (35+ h/w)

## race/ethnicity

71% white, non-Hispanic  
29% other race/ethnicity or multi-racial (grouped as BIPOC to ensure sufficient sample size for analysis)

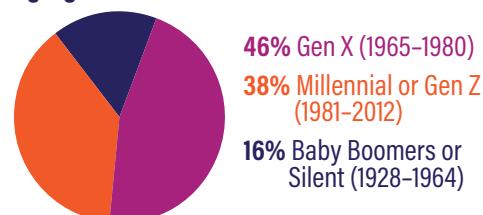
## education

88% have at least a Bachelor's degree  
36% have a Master's degree  
14% have a Doctorate / advanced degree  
<3% have a high school diploma or less

## marital status

60% married  
32% single, divorced, widowed  
8% unmarried, cohabitating

## age/generation



## primary position

37% senior executive or owner  
26% mid-level manager  
23% healthcare / education

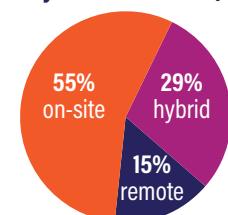
## salary

33% earned <\$50,000  
27% earned \$50,000-\$74,999  
15% earned \$75,000-\$99,999  
19% earned \$100,000-\$199,999  
6% earned \$200,000+

## size of organization

53% large (250+ employees)  
23% mid-sized (20-249 employees)  
21% small (1-19)

## primary work location (4Q23)



# Job & Employer Satisfaction

CSWW respondents were asked to report their level of satisfaction with a number of job and workplace-related factors. Topically relevant responses from women participating in the 2023 national survey by The Conference Board have also been included for comparison.<sup>8</sup>

## Where Women are Most Satisfied

- **Commute to / from work** (83%)  
This is notably higher than the national average of 66% of women reporting satisfaction with their commute.<sup>8</sup>
- **Flexibility in job with respect to time** (83%)  
This is much higher than the national average of 51% of women reporting satisfaction with their employer's flex-time plan.<sup>8</sup>
- **Paid time off of work** (80%)
- **Relationship with their immediate supervisor** (79%)  
In comparison, 62% of women nationally reported satisfaction with their supervisor.<sup>8</sup>
- **Organization for which they work (overall)** (77%)
- **Current role within the organization** (74%)

## Women Least Satisfied with Compensation

Overall, only half of respondents were satisfied with their **base salary/hourly wage**. **BIPOC** women were notably less satisfied (38%) than **White** women (56%), and women **earning less than \$50,000** were less satisfied (33%) than women **earning \$50,000+** (59%). In comparison, The Conference Board reported that 56% of women responding to their 2023 national survey were satisfied with their wages.<sup>8</sup>

**COLOR KEY:** Color coding is used throughout this report to visually highlight statistically significant findings related to **race/ethnicity**, **age/generation**, **organizational size**, and **income level**.

<sup>8</sup> Eren, S., Schweyer, A., Lin, M., & Li, A. (2023). *Job satisfaction 2023: US worker satisfaction continues to increase*. The Conference Board. <https://www.conference-board.org/pdfdownload.cfm>

When compared to women nationally, working women in Winston-Salem / Forsyth County are notably more satisfied with their commute, the flexibility they have with their time, and their relationship with their immediate supervisor. But in the area of **compensation**, local employers are coming up short.



## Terminology Notes

- Unless otherwise indicated, top-two (e.g., agree and strongly agree) and bottom-two (e.g., disagree and strongly disagree) responses were combined for reporting purposes.
- Large organizations* are defined as those with 250 or more employees; *mid-sized organizations* have 20-249 employees; *small organizations* have 1-19 employees.
- The term *organizations* refers to both nonprofit and for-profit entities.
- White* refers to White/non-Hispanic. *BIPOC* refers to women of color, including multi-racial women who do not identify as White/non-Hispanic.
- Generational breakdowns followed Pew Research guidelines.<sup>9</sup> Millennials and Generation Z (Gen Z) were combined (birth years 1981-2012) for adequate sample size, as were Baby Boomer and Silent Generation (1928-1964). Generation X (Gen X) birth years are 1965-1980.
- References to earnings reflect annual wages.



## Role v. Title

Overall, 74% of respondents were satisfied with their **current role (job description)** within the organization, but that drops to 68% when asked about their satisfaction with their **current level / title** within the organization.

Women working for **mid-sized organizations** were more satisfied (82%) with their current level / title than women working for **large organizations** (61%). Women **earning \$50,000+** were more satisfied (73%) with their current level / title within the organization than women **earning less than \$50,000** (60%).

Overall, 44% of respondents indicated that a **higher title** was very important or absolutely essential if they were considering a job change.

## Hiring and Advancement Policies

Less than half (46%) of respondents were satisfied with their employer's **hiring and advancement policies**; 30% were dissatisfied. Women working for **large organizations** were far less likely to be satisfied (36%) with their employer's hiring and advancement policies than women working for **mid-sized organizations** or **small organizations** (62% and 60% respectively).

## Opinion Sought and Valued

Overall, 82% of respondents agreed that their **opinion is sought and valued by their current work colleagues**, but only 71% agreed their **opinion is sought and valued by their current work supervisor**. **BIPOC** women **earning less than \$50,000** were far more likely to *disagree* that their opinion is sought and valued by their work colleagues.

<sup>9</sup> Pew Research Center. (2015, September 3). *Generations\_2* [Infographic]. [https://www.pewresearch.org/politics/2015/09/03/the-whys-and-hows-of-generations-research/generations\\_2/](https://www.pewresearch.org/politics/2015/09/03/the-whys-and-hows-of-generations-research/generations_2/)

<sup>10</sup> Gurchiek, K. (n.d.). *Fighting the double-whammy of ageism, sexism*. SHRM. <https://www.shrm.org/topics-tools/news/inclusion-equity-diversity/fighting-double-whammy-ageism-sexism>

## Career Advancement Key to Satisfaction

Overall, less than half (46%) of respondents were satisfied with their **advancement opportunities**. This is slightly below national survey data from The Conference Board, which reported that 50% of women responding to their 2023 survey were satisfied with their potential for future growth.<sup>8</sup>

- Women working for **large organizations** were less satisfied with advancement opportunities (40%) than those working for **mid-sized organizations** (58%).
- **Gen X** women were more likely to be dissatisfied with their advancement opportunities than **Millennial and Gen Z** women.

While 53% of overall respondents agreed that they were satisfied with the **pace of their career advancement**, 30% disagreed.

- Women working for **mid-sized organizations** were more likely to report satisfaction with the pace of their career advancement (66%), compared to 46% of women working for **large organizations**.
- **Gen X** women were less likely to report satisfaction with the pace of their career advancement (46%).

Most women (79%) reported receiving a **job promotion** in both title and pay, with 53% saying a promotion had occurred within the previous 3 years. This varied greatly, though, by age, income, and race / ethnicity.

- **White** women **earning less than \$50,000** were the least likely to have received a promotion, with 46% of respondents reporting zero job promotions.
- **Millennials or Gen Z** women were more likely to report receiving a promotion within the previous 3 years, while **Gen X** women were more likely to say it had been 3 or more years since their last promotion. **Gen X** women were also more likely than women overall to express that they were dissatisfied with their employer's **performance review process**.

<sup>11</sup> Manzi, C., Sorgente, A., Reverberi, E., Tagliabue, S., & Gorli, M. (2021). Double jeopardy—analyzing the combined effect of age and gender stereotype threat on older workers. *Frontiers in Psychology*, 11, 606690. DOI: 10.3389/fpsyg.2020.606690

<sup>12</sup> Allcot, D. (2024, January 2). *The average retirement age for men vs. women in 2023*. Yahoo Finance. <https://finance.yahoo.com/news/average-retirement-age-men-vs-113017273.html>

The notable dissatisfaction of Gen X women could be attributed to **gendered ageism**, which the Society for Human Resource Managers says affects women in their 40s and beyond,<sup>10</sup> producing a double jeopardy for Gen X women who feel they should be at a higher level given their years of professional experience.<sup>11</sup> According to the U.S. Census Bureau, the average retirement age for women in the U.S. is 63 (compared to 65 for men).<sup>12</sup> By overlooking women 20+ years before their likely retirement, employers are missing out on the experience and perspective these seasoned professionals offer.



“

Women are often hired and promoted based on past accomplishments, while men are hired and promoted based on future potential. This unfair thinking — rooted in what social scientists refer to as ‘**performance bias**’ — can be particularly challenging.”

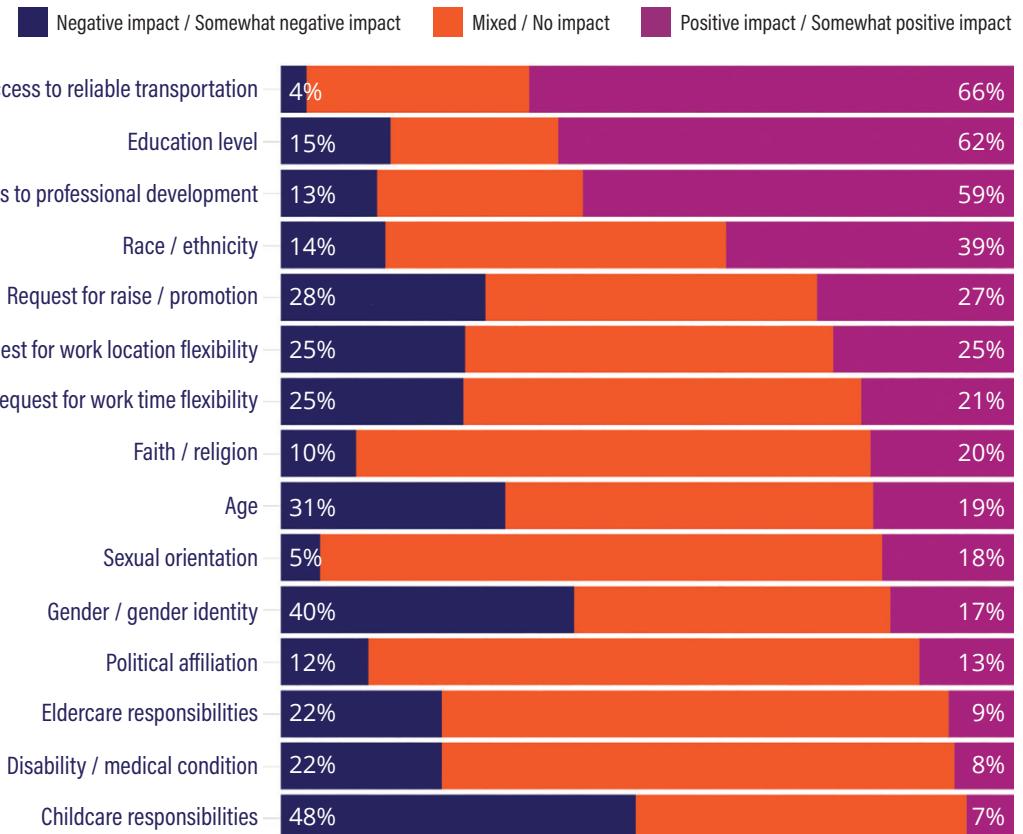
– 2023 Women in the Workplace report  
from McKinsey & Company<sup>13</sup>



## Impacts on Advancement

When asked about factors impacting their career advancement, respondents indicated the **factors with the most positive impact** were access to **reliable transportation** (66%), **education level** (62%), and access to **professional development** (59%). **BIPOC** women were more than twice as likely to say **education level** has had a negative impact.

Overall how have the following factors impacted your ability to advance in your career?



<sup>13</sup> Field, E., Krivkovich, A., Kügele, S., Robinson, N., & Yee, L. (2023, October 5). *Women in the Workplace 2023*. McKinsey & Company. <https://www.mckinsey.com/featured-insights/diversity-and-inclusion/women-in-the-workplace>

## Impact of Gender and Age

When considering factors impacting their career advancement, 40% of respondents said **gender/gender identity** has had a negative impact.

Overall, 31% indicated that **age** has had a negative impact on their advancement. Although 59% of overall respondents were satisfied with their **employer's commitment to age/generational inclusion**, women working for **large organizations** were less likely to be satisfied.

## Impact of Race / Ethnicity

There was considerable variation in responses to how **race / ethnicity** had impacted career advancement. Among **BIPOC** women, 41% said that race / ethnicity has had a negative impact; and the higher their earnings, the more prevalent the impact. **BIPOC** women **earning \$50,000+** were more likely to indicate their race / ethnicity has had a negative impact than **BIPOC** women **earning less than \$50,000**.

Although two thirds of overall respondents expressed satisfaction with their employers' **commitment to racial equity**, **BIPOC** women were less likely to express satisfaction on this point.

## The Motherhood Penalty

While the majority of respondents (82%) indicated that they have not been reprimanded, penalized, or terminated from a job because of the demands of their family responsibilities (real or perceived), about half said that **childcare responsibilities** have had a negative effect on their career advancement.

Adding insult to injury, a National Women's Law Center study found that mothers in the U.S. get paid 71 cents for every dollar their male counterparts make, which adds up to \$16,000 per year in lost wages.<sup>14</sup>

<sup>14</sup> Fox, M. (2019, March 25). *The 'motherhood penalty' is real, and it costs women \$16,000 a year in lost wages*. CNBC. <https://www.cnbc.com/2019/03/25/the-motherhood-penalty-costs-women-16000-a-year-in-lost-wages.html>

<sup>15</sup> Somers, M. (2022, April 12). *Women are less likely than men to be promoted. Here's one reason why*. MIT Sloan. <https://mitsloan.mit.edu/ideas-made-to-matter/women-are-less-likely-men-to-be-promoted-heres-one-reason-why>



MIT Sloan reports that since men are promoted faster than women (even though **women receive higher performance ratings**), men get a head start on the upward climb to management positions.<sup>15</sup>

In their Women in the Workplace 2023 study, McKinsey & Company reported that a major issue for women — especially women of color — is the **"broken rung"** on the career ladder:

*"Women face their biggest hurdle at the first critical step up to manager. This year, for every 100 men promoted from entry level to manager, 87 women were promoted. And this gap is trending the wrong way for women of color: this year, 73 women of color were promoted to manager for every 100 men, down from 82 women of color last year. As a result of this broken rung, women fall behind and can't catch up.<sup>13</sup>*

# 60%

of workplace bullying cases end with the bullied employee resigning, while the aggressor remains at the company. **Workplace bullies** are most often supervisors or managers, though in about a third of cases, colleagues are the tormentors.<sup>16</sup>

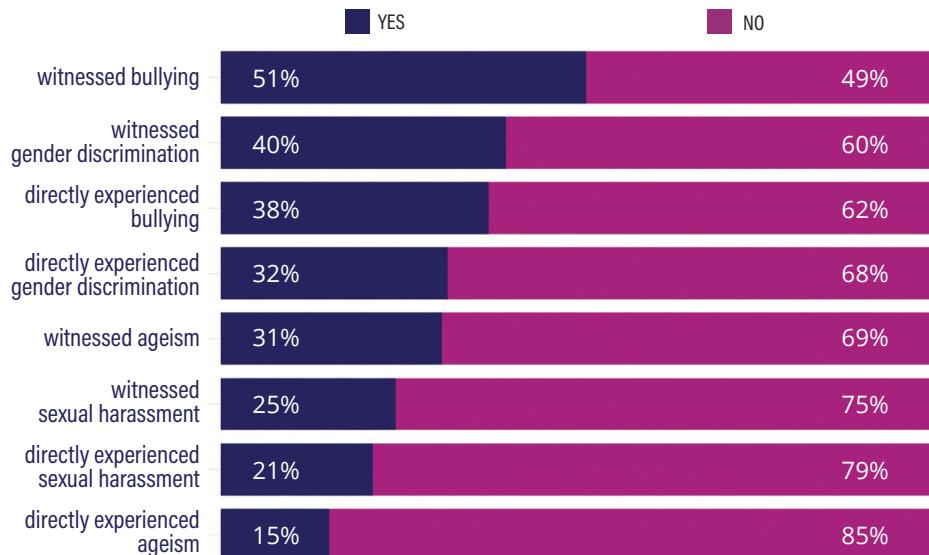


## Discrimination & Harassment

Three quarters of respondents indicated they had witnessed or experienced discrimination or harassment in their current or prior workplace. Overall, 21% had directly experienced **sexual harassment**, while 25% had witnessed it. More than half of respondents (51%) had witnessed **workplace bullying**, while 38% had directly experienced it.

**White** women, women **earning \$50,000+**, and women working for **larger organizations** were all more likely to say they had witnessed or experienced discriminatory practices than **BIPOC** women and **lower-income** women.

In my current or prior workplace, I have... (Check all of the statements that are true.)



Less than half (44%) of CSWW respondents were satisfied with their employers' **handling of workplace complaints**. Women working for **large organizations** were even less likely to be satisfied.

<sup>16</sup> Kelly, J. (2023, November 13). *How to recognize workplace bullying and what to do if you are being tormented*. Forbes. <https://www.forbes.com/sites/jackkelly/2023/11/13/how-to-recognize-workplace-bullying-and-what-to-do-if-you-are-being-tormented/>

# Mental Health and Wellbeing

When asked how often they felt **burned out** at work in the previous few months, 83% of CSWW respondents indicated they felt burned out *at least sometimes*; 47% said *often* or *almost always*. This is above the national average of 43%, reported by McKinsey & Company in their 2022 Women in the Workplace study.<sup>17</sup>

Nearly two thirds (63%) of respondents agreed that they have a **healthy work / life balance**, but 25% disagreed. There were no significant differences in these sentiments across demographic groups.

Overall, 58% of women agreed that their **employer genuinely cares about the mental health and wellbeing of its employees**. Women working for **large organizations** were slightly less likely to agree.

More than four out of five (82%) women consider **mental health care coverage** a *very important* or *absolutely essential* workplace benefit, with no notable differences among respondent groups.

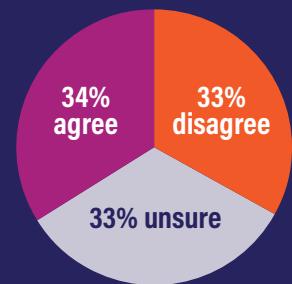
## Women Fear Using Benefits

One third of respondents agreed that **requesting or taking advantage of flexible working opportunities would affect their chances for promotion**; one third (33%) disagreed, and the remainder said they weren't sure. While these numbers are troubling, Deloitte reported that in 2023, 97% of the 5,000 women they surveyed believe that requesting or taking advantage of flexible working opportunities affects their likelihood of promotion.<sup>18</sup>

**Millennials and Gen Z** women, the generations most likely to have young children in their households, were more likely to believe (42%) that requesting or taking advantage of flexible working opportunities would harm their chances for promotion. Women with **lower salaries** were also more likely to share this belief.



Requesting or taking advantage of flexible working opportunities would effect chances for promotion.



“

*Women agree they want more flexibility, and importantly, they want it without judgment.*

– Julia Townsend, Co-president of REACH Women's Network

<sup>17</sup> McKinsey & Company. (2022). *Women in the Workplace 2022*. <https://www.mckinsey.com/~/media/mckinsey/featured%20insights/diversity%20and%20inclusion/women%20in%20the%20workplace%202022/women-in-the-workplace-2022.pdf>

<sup>18</sup> Parmelee, M. (2023, April 25). *Empowering women at work*. Deloitte Insights. <https://www2.deloitte.com/uk/en/insights/topics/talent/work-life-balance-for-women.html>

In an American Psychological Association survey, 80% of workers agreed that employers' **support for mental health** influences their decision when they're looking for a job.<sup>19</sup>

Many large employers today offer **Employee Assistance Programs (EAPs)**, which are usually provided at no cost to employees. EAPs often include support and resources related to mental health, child and elder care, adoption assistance, and financial and legal problems. But many employees don't know about these programs, and those who use them are rarely satisfied with them.<sup>19</sup>

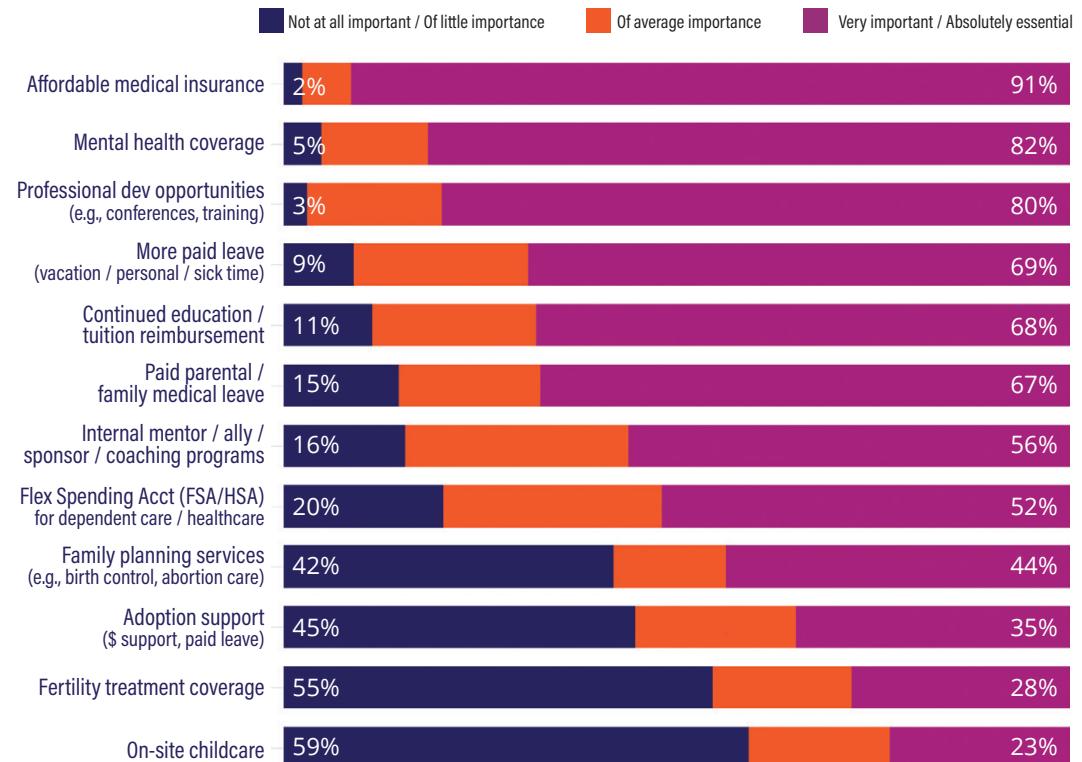


## Employee Benefits

When presented with a list of potential workplace benefits, women felt that the most important benefits were **affordable medical insurance** (91% *very important or absolutely essential*), **mental health insurance** (82%), and **professional development opportunities** (80%).

**BIPOC** women were more likely to prioritize **professional development opportunities** (88%) than respondents in general. For **BIPOC** women **earning \$50,000+**, that rose to 93%. **BIPOC** women were also more likely to prioritize **continued education (tuition reimbursement)**, at 81%, compared to 63% of **White** women.

### How important are /would be the following workplace benefits to YOU personally?



<sup>19</sup> Stahl, A. (2023, May 9). *4 things to know about your mental health benefits at work*. Forbes. <https://www.forbes.com/sites/ashleystahl/2023/05/09/4-things-to-know-about-your-mental-health-benefits-at-work/>

## Workplace Flexibility — Time and Space

When asked to evaluate workplace flexibility benefits, 77% of respondents said **flex time** (same total hours with greater schedule flexibility) was very important or absolutely essential. In contrast, only 23% of women prioritized the ability to work a **reduced number of hours** (part-time / job share). This indicates that women don't want to work fewer hours; instead, they want more flexibility around the hours they work. In fact, only 35% of respondents prioritized **less required overtime**; **Millennial and Gen Z** women were more likely to prioritize **less required overtime** than **Gen X** women.

When it comes to flexibility regarding *where* work happens, two thirds of respondents indicated that the **opportunity to work from home** at least occasionally was very important or absolutely essential. Women **earning \$50,000+** were even more likely (70%) to indicate that this benefit is very important.

## Family Planning

Not surprisingly, **Millennial and Gen Z** women placed higher importance on family planning benefits than their older peers. (Percentages represent respondents who indicated the benefit is very important or absolutely essential.)

- **Paid parental leave / family medical leave:** 67% overall, compared to 80% **Millennial and Gen Z**
- **Family planning services** (e.g., including birth control, abortion care): 44% overall, compared to 64% of **Millennial and Gen Z**
- **Adoption support:** 35% overall, compared to 49% of **Millennial and Gen Z**
- **Fertility treatment coverage:** 28% overall, compared to 42% of **Millennial and Gen Z**
- **On-site childcare:** 23% overall, compared to 33% of **Millennial and Gen Z** and 17% of **Gen X**

A 2023 global workplace benefits study by Deloitte made a notable discovery: "For organizations that want to retain and engage women in the workforce, **when work takes place is emerging as one of the new priorities.**"<sup>18</sup>

McKinsey's 2023 Women in the Workplace study confirmed that the ability to work remotely led to both enhanced productivity and better work-life balance, with a majority of women (and men) reporting less fatigue and burnout when working remotely.<sup>19</sup>

Even so, more employers — especially large ones — are requiring employees to return to in-office work. According to research, though, this move has not been helping big companies make more money.<sup>20</sup>

Mark Ma, an associate professor of business administration at the University of Pittsburgh, said, "*Return-to-office mandates are more common among male and more powerful CEOs, and in some cases, it's a power play. The managers are trying to grab power back from the employees in this employer-employee relationship by asking them back to the office.*"<sup>20</sup>

”

<sup>20</sup> National Public Radio. (2024, January 30). *Has remote work really been tragic for big companies' bottom lines?* <https://www.npr.org/2024/01/30/1227828564/has-remote-work-really-been-tragic-for-big-companies-bottom-lines>



“

With exceptionally talented women now in the workforce, leaders are turning their efforts towards greater levels of female recruitment as one approach to plug gaps, win the war for talent in today's skills crunch, and gain competitive advantage...

Some 78% of large organizations said they're actively seeking to hire more women — especially into more experienced and senior positions. As organizations fight to attract female talent — particularly at levels and in sectors where they're currently underrepresented — we're now seeing **competition for female talent** escalate to a whole new level."

– PwC, *Winning the Fight for Female Talent*<sup>21</sup>

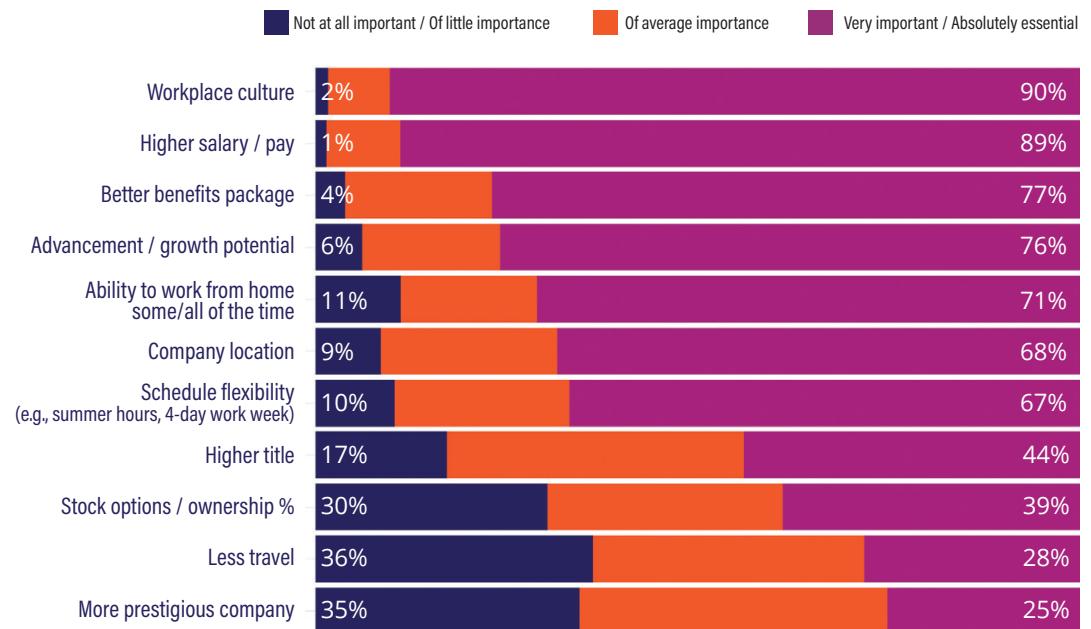
<sup>21</sup> PwC. (2017, March). *Winning the fight for female talent*.  
<https://www.pwc.com/gx/en/about/diversity/iwd/iwd-female-talent-report-web.pdf>

## Factors Influencing Job Change

When respondents were asked about the most important factors to them when considering a job change, workplace culture and salary were consistently at the top. Women were least concerned with the prestige of the employer. (Percentages below represent respondents who indicated the benefit is *very important* or *absolutely essential*.)

- **Workplace culture:** 90% overall and 95% of women working for **mid-sized organizations**
- **Higher salary / pay:** 89% overall and 95% of **BIPOC** women
- **Advancement / growth potential:** 76% overall compared to 81% of women working for **large organizations** and 84% of **BIPOC** women
- **Better benefits package:** 77% overall and 87% of **BIPOC** women
- **Workspace flexibility** (ability to work from home some/all of the time): 71% overall

### How important would the following factors be to you in considering a potential job change?



# Qualitative Data

During the 2023 REACH Women's Conference, 320 women were asked to respond to 2 questions. Their thematic responses are below.

## What can employers do to improve workplace culture for women?

- Pay women equitably and show appreciation for their contributions.
- Elevate more women — especially BIPOC women — to leadership roles (exec and board) and to roles that positively model work/life integration and contribute to an organizational culture of empathy.
- Recognize and tear down biased and racist practices and behaviors that hinder the advancement of women. Develop advancement policies and career ladders that respect the perspectives, talents, and leadership styles of women.
- Support mentorship / coaching programs, continuing education, and development opportunities, and allow women the time to do them.
- Support organizations like REACH Women's Network whose educational and networking programs help connect and develop women.
- Pay for family medical leave including maternity/paternity and eldercare.
- Designate space for nursing and menopause rooms.

## What can employers do to reduce stress levels in the workplace?

- Staff properly; backfill positions; acknowledge workload and be realistic with expectations; recognize that not everything is urgent.
- Allow for hybrid/remote work (no judgment) and trust work will get done.
- Reduce meetings; mandate meeting-free days and/or time blocks.
- Model clear, honest, open, empathetic communication that shows sincere care for employees; be supportive before being critical.
- Respect time off and normalize PTO and healthy boundaries by limiting emails during evenings, weekends, and vacations.
- Promote wellness (fitness/gym) and self-care within and outside of work.
- Designate meditation/quiet rooms and no-agenda/connection areas.
- Provide mental health coverage and EAP services with therapy/coaching.
- Designate a team service day outside the office to build connection.
- Mandate mental health days to reduce burnout.

## Top 5 to Help Women Thrive:

- **Workplace Flexibility (Time and Location)**
- **Advancement Opportunities**
- **Higher Pay**
- **Affordable Health and Mental Health Benefits**
- **Respect for Work/Life Boundaries**



# Takeaways for Employers

The clear link between workplace wellbeing and company profitability has been validated by research.<sup>22</sup> Since employers stand to gain from the enhanced productivity, innovation, and creativity that result from overall employee wellbeing and healthier work-life integration, workplace culture, policies (like flex-time and remote working options), and benefits (including mental health care coverage) should be evaluated with this in mind.

Women aren't seeking less accountability or a lower bar; quite the contrary. They are willing to put in the work required to advance within an organization; but they want a clear roadmap for that advancement, equitable pay, and more flexibility around where and when their work happens.

McKinsey & Company found that employers significantly underrate the importance of flexible work options.<sup>13</sup> Even for companies that offer flexible work options and encourage work-life balance in company meetings, the organization's culture may send a different message.

Women want their employers to respect and normalize remote/hybrid work, flex time, mental health days, lunch breaks (including walks), evening/weekend boundaries, and the use of vacation time. These culture shifts need to be modeled from the top of an organization so women have less fear of negative consequences.

Women don't need more tips on how to integrate the demands of work, family, and volunteer responsibilities. They need authentic and meaningful support from their employers — support that recognizes and respects their contributions to the workplace and the community around them.

<sup>22</sup> De Neve, J-E., Kaats, M., Ward, G. (2023). *Workplace Wellbeing and Firm Performance*. University of Oxford Wellbeing Research Centre Working Paper 2304. [doi.org/10.5287/ora-bpkbjayvk](https://doi.org/10.5287/ora-bpkbjayvk)

# Takeaways for Women

- Actively advocate for, lift up, and mentor other women, including women of color, in your company and networks.
- Give other women credit for their work and highlight their contributions.
- Understand and advocate for more equitable advancement practices and performance review processes within your organization.
- Advocate for yourself and share your accomplishments and expertise within your organization and beyond.
- Actively seek professional development opportunities and step up for high-profile projects.
- Maximize relationships with mentors, sponsors, and allies.
- Build a strong network through REACH Women's Network and other like-minded organizations. Ask others for introductions to strategically expand your network.
- Volunteer in the community to increase your sphere of influence, skills and experience.
- Join or initiate a women's group in your organization.
- Educate yourself on CSWW research, McKinsey's Women in the Workplace Study, and other studies.
- REACH up in your career. REACH over to each other. REACH out for a stronger community, and REACH back to other women on the journey.



[reachwomensnetwork.org](https://reachwomensnetwork.org)

©2024 REACH Women's Network