



Institute for Women's Leadership
Center for Public Affairs
**Women's Career Development
Snapshot Report**

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

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This is a summary report of results of the inaugural survey of working women conducted by the UW-Green Bay Center for Public Affairs on behalf of the Institute for Women's Leadership (IWL). We are gathering data from working women to better understand and provide insights into women's career development in the region. The progress made by women in the workplace over the past decade is threatened by the pandemic and ensuing conditions. Having this understanding enables us to dialog with employers regarding the status of female employees, their concerns and their needs. ***By focusing on women in Wisconsin (particularly in Northeast Wisconsin), our data provides information regarding the current career experiences and support received by area women in their professional careers.*** We looked at aspects of women's work lives such as current experiences, future career plans, satisfaction, workplace challenges, policies and benefits, family support, and workplace support and culture. The IWL plans future surveys on this topic.

In July of 2021 we shared the survey link widely throughout Northeast Wisconsin by email, social media, website postings and press releases. Distribution partners of the IWL and UW-Green Bay included the NEW North board of directors and partners, O'Connor Connective, Insight Magazine, Womens' Funds of the NEW North region, Management Women and other womens' groups. Our goal was to reflect a wide swath of working-area women in many fields. This "snowball" sample explores results on the perspectives of women in this region. More details are shown at the end of this report. Eight-hundred twenty three women completed the survey. Of these, 7% were non-white, 6% owned their business, 30% held senior management or higher positions, 45% had children at home, and 20% cared for an adult dependent.

More than half of the women in our survey reported working 40 or more hours a week while carrying most of the responsibility for children, adult dependents, household chores and errands. A significant proportion of women (15%) planned to continue to work remotely in fall, 2022. Although three-fourths of women do not plan to "downshift their careers" (i.e., reduce their hours or leave the workplace in the near future), 8% of respondents seriously consider doing so and another 18% somewhat consider it. Those most inclined to consider downshifting included:

- women caring for an adult dependent
- women who express burnout, feeling overwhelmed, or concerns with own mental health
- women in C-Suite positions, including many of whom are at older ages

The top three challenges reported by women concerned mental health. Half of our respondents expressed 'definite' feelings of burnout, being overwhelmed, and concerned for one's own mental health. At the same time, while most employers offered counseling and mental health treatment, few women had availed themselves of this benefit. Fifty-eight percent of women stated that their workplace offered mental health and counseling services, yet only 10% of women had used it.

The mean job satisfaction level reported by women was 76 out of a possible high of 100. In workplaces where women faced negative experiences such as harassment or discrimination, job satisfaction fell between 69-72.

The most common negative experiences women reported in the workplace were lack of opportunity (28% 'a few times'; 20% 'many times') and gender discrimination (28% 'a few times;' 8% 'many times').

Employers provide some helpful policies and practices: 34% of women strongly agree that their employer is doing a good job supporting female employees. But there is room for improvement as 16% strongly disagreed, in essence saying that their employers were not supporting female employees at all. Most women in the survey were able to work from home with flexible hours and many utilized paid leave. Few women reported changes to their performance review criteria at work despite the dramatically different situation posed by the pandemic.

Employers have many opportunities to prevent career downshifting of women by being attuned to their particular needs, offering policies and practices to address their personal and family concerns, and leaning into workplace cultural changes where the whole person is accepted. In workplaces 'doing what it takes to support women', only 8% of women seriously considered downshifting careers, compared to 15% of workplaces not supportive of women. If these actions are taken, women may feel less overwhelmed and less burned out. This, in turn, can enable them to continue to have rewarding careers and fulfilling the economy's need for talent.

How can employers support the women who consider downshifting their careers? Employers must consider going beyond the flexible hours which have been extensively used during the pandemic. They must consider innovative and non-traditional supports for women. They must tailor certain benefits to needs of female employees, such as new ways to support their caring for children and adult dependents. They can explore ways to offer mental health services in alternative ways that are normalized and accepted within the workplace. An employment benefit is not helpful if not being used. Another action is to address the culture of the workplace so that women experience greater openness, support and authenticity. We found that one of the major reasons women consider downshifting their career is that they feel they cannot be open about their lives outside of the workplace.

Based on survey results, we suggest a few strategies here:

- **Acquire useful information about employees** to learn how to provide support in meaningful ways.
- **Strengthen the leadership strategies of all supervisors and top leaders** to build open and trusting workplace cultures. Groom *male* leaders to bring out the talent of female team members by supporting them, advocating for them, and creating opportunities for them to develop.
- **Groom women as leaders** and offer greater career development opportunities.
- **Design and implement innovative workplace benefits** that align with what female employees need.

As a region, we must grow a pipeline of women developing in their careers, taking on leadership roles, and maximizing their ability to contribute to their organizations.