

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

**COMPLETE REPORT**

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## INTRODUCTION AND PURPOSE

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 and more 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 the survey link was shared widely throughout Northeast Wisconsin by email, social media 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.

## SURVEY FINDINGS

### CURRENT WORK SITUATION AND FUTURE CAREER PLANS

We asked women to report their current position. Many of our respondents worked in front-line positions and just over a third held supervisor or management positions. Figure 1 shows that approximately 15% of respondents report working as a vice president or higher position.

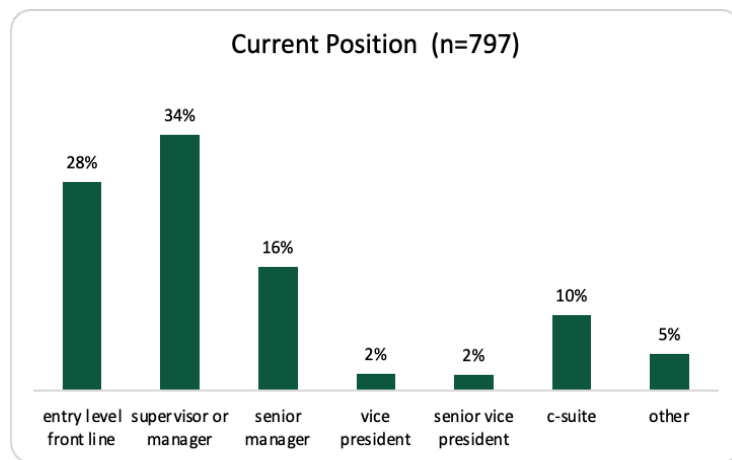


Figure 1

At the time of the survey in summer 2021, 30% of respondents worked remotely. Only 15% expected to continue working remotely that fall (mostly those employed by private businesses). On a scale from 0 to 100, women averaged 76 on overall rating of job satisfaction. Employees in the nonprofit sector indicated a mean job satisfaction level of 78, government employees, 74, and commercial business employees, 76.

We asked women whether or not they were currently considering cutting back on hours or responsibilities, i.e., downshifting their

careers. While 73% were not considering downshifting, 8% definitely or strongly considered doing so and another 18% somewhat considered cutting back on work in the near future. See Figure 2.

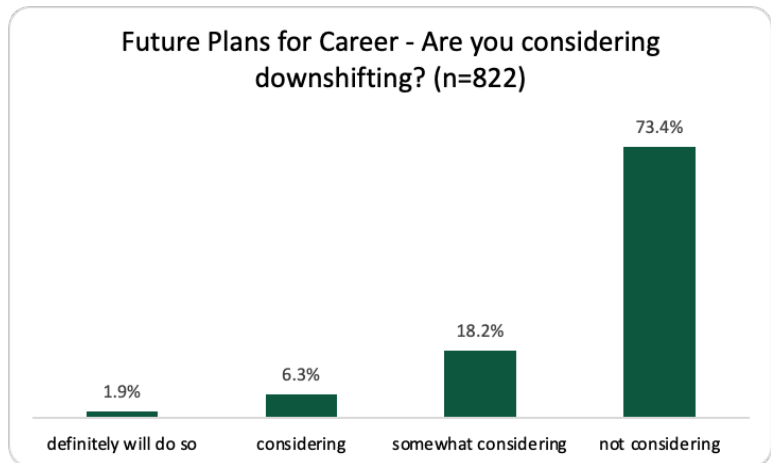


Figure 2

Consideration of cutting back was highest among women with higher educational attainments, higher levels of authority, and greater career longevity. Not surprisingly, the possibility of downshifting was significantly

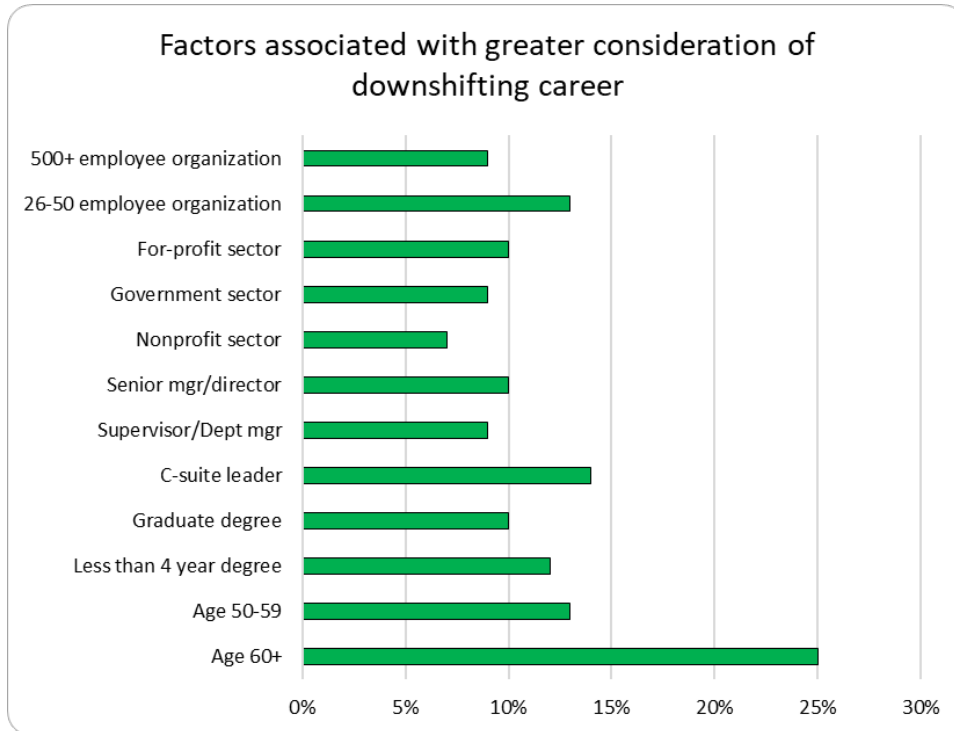


Figure 3

associated with age: 25% of women 60 years and older strongly considered or definitely will downshift compared to 13% of women between the ages of 50-59. Fourteen percent of C-suite leaders definitely or strongly considered downshifting. Twelve percent of women with less than a four year college degree and 10% of those with graduate degrees considered downshifting (while only 6% of those with a Bachelor's degree considered reducing workloads). Organizations

with 26-50 employees showed highest levels of intention to downshift (13%) followed by organizations with 500+ employees (9%). Women who definitely or seriously considered downshifting averaged reported level of job satisfaction at 61 (on a 100 point scale) compared to the total sample average of 76. See Figure 3.

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#### CHALLENGES AND NEGATIVE EXPERIENCES AT THE WORKPLACE

Many women expressed challenges in the workplace. Almost half of respondents said feeling burned out is a 'definite' challenge, the strongest response available on the scale (see Figure 4). Thirty-eight percent reported a 'definite' challenge feeling overwhelmed in general, and 31% struggled with their mental health. Caring for children posed a 'definite' challenge for 22% of all respondents (almost half of those surveyed had at least one child at home). Fewer respondents reported challenges with financial insecurity, exposure to COVID-19 at work, or poor health of loved one.

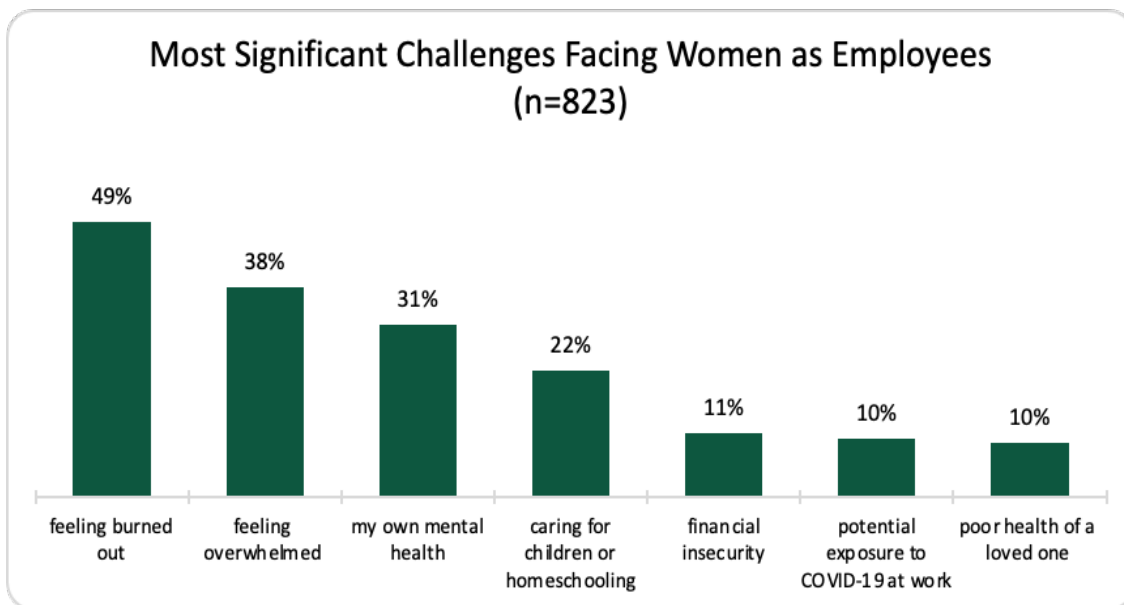


Figure 4

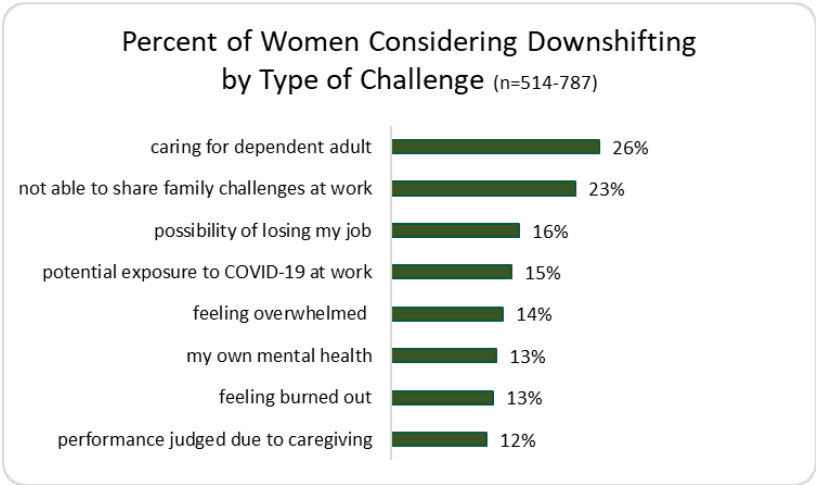


Figure 5

Figure 5 shows that this downshifting was a serious consideration for 26% of women challenged by caring for an adult dependent and 23% of those unable to be open about family struggles at work. The remaining challenges were related to intention to downshift one’s career by between 12-16% of women.

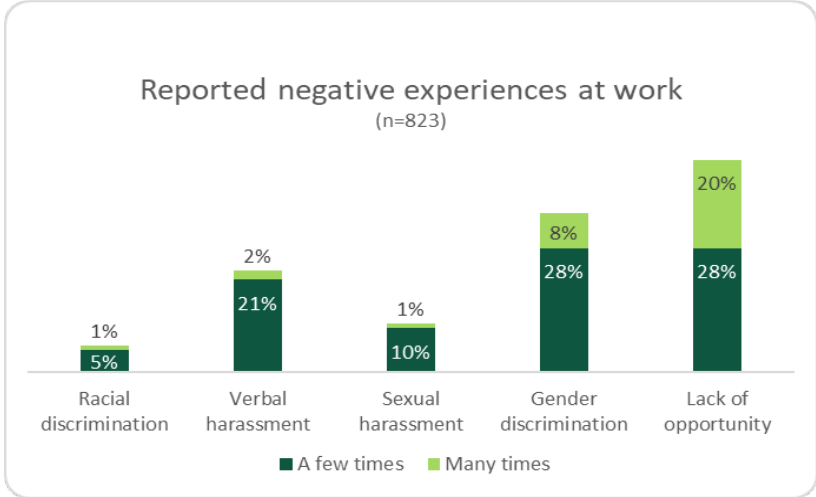


Figure 6

While some women reported harassment or discrimination in the workplace, more significant were the problems of gender discrimination and lack of opportunity at work. Figure 6 shows that over 50% of women experienced a lack of opportunity at work a few times (28%) or many times (20%) while 36% had experienced gender discrimination and another 23% had been verbally harassed a few or many times.

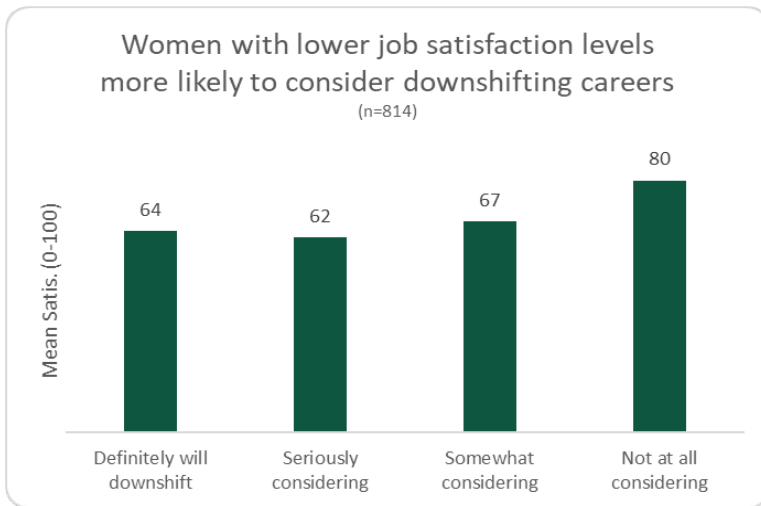


Figure 7

Experiencing negative events at work significantly related to lower job satisfaction and greater intention to downshift one’s career. Individuals reporting a lack of opportunity for growth rated job satisfaction at 61 out of 100 compared to 84 for those who felt they had opportunity for growth. Those who reported many instances of gender discrimination reported mean satisfaction of 63 compared to those who had not experienced gender discrimination (80). Lower job satisfaction, in turn, correlated with the decision whether to downshift one’s career (see Figure 7). We cannot state that low job satisfaction causes women to downshift careers, simply that the two variables are linked.

#### HOME LIFE OF PROFESSIONAL WOMEN

Almost half of respondents had children at home, and 33% of them said caring for children or homeschooling was a definite challenge. However, women with children were *less* likely to cut back their careers: only 6% of women with children seriously considered downshifting compared to 10% of women without children.

Over three-quarters of respondents had a spouse or partner at home. In Figure 8, we see that exactly half of women with children were completely or mostly responsible for care of children and homeschooling while 44% shared

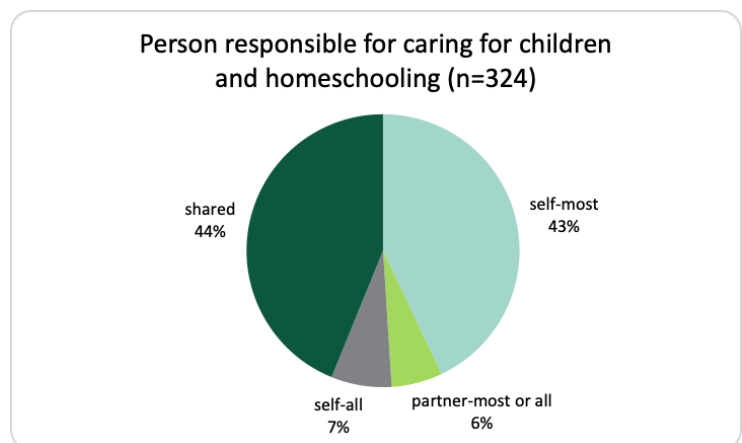


Figure 8

this with their partner. Partners helped out slightly more with errands and chores: 38% of women did all or most chores while 51% of women reported sharing responsibility with partner.

An important survey finding is that 20% of respondents cared for an adult dependent. As expected, this impacted women between the ages of 50-59 the most. The majority of caregiving women (76%) did so up to five hours a week, and 24% provided care for 6 or more hours a week. Twenty-one percent of women who cared for an adult dependent intended to cut back their careers. Earlier, we noted that 26% of women who reported definite challenges due to caring for an adult dependent strongly considered downshifting their careers. Both strong findings point to pressure experienced by these women.

## WORKPLACE BENEFITS

Figure 9 illustrates that employers offered various accommodations and benefits for female workers. Three-quarters of respondents had worked from home while 68% utilized flexible work hours. Women used other benefits including paid leave (38%) and training opportunities (30%). Fewer workers reported updated performance criteria, obtained mental health care, accessed parenting/home school resources, or received financial assistance to work from home. While many women had permission to work from home, only 11% had financial assistance to do so. Mental health counseling was available to 58% of women, yet only 10% availed themselves of the benefit.

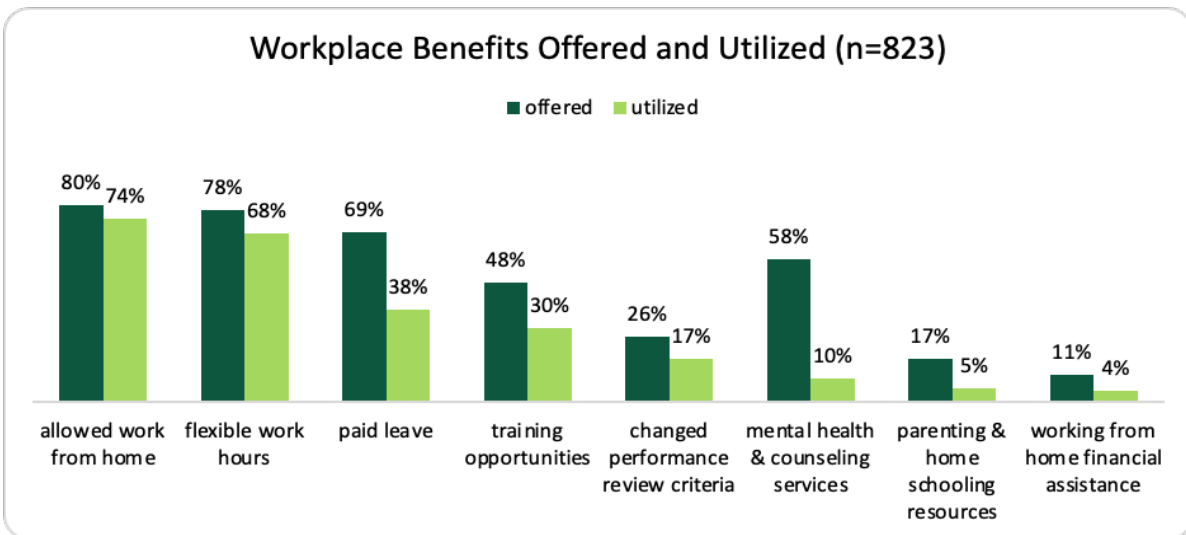


Figure 9

Because of the high reported rates of burnout and mental health concerns described earlier along with the reports of low utilization of mental health care, we explored these issues further. Seventy percent of all respondents stated their employers offered mental health benefits. Figure 10 reports characteristics related to having access to mental health benefits. In organizations with high rates of support for female employees, 76% of women were offered mental health benefits compared with 63% of women in workplaces less supportive of

women (not shown in figure). Employees working in government, very large organizations, and making highest income levels were associated with greater availability of mental health benefits.

As discussed earlier, there was a gap between availability of mental health care and use of this benefit. Figure 11 shows that just over 10% of survey respondents reported using the mental health care benefit offered by an employer. Those who were more likely to use the benefit included

middle aged women, women working for the largest employers, women who bore most of the responsibility for children and household duties, and women caring for adult dependents. Respondents who reported working in workplaces with a 'work comes first' mentality showed much lower usage of counseling treatment benefits.

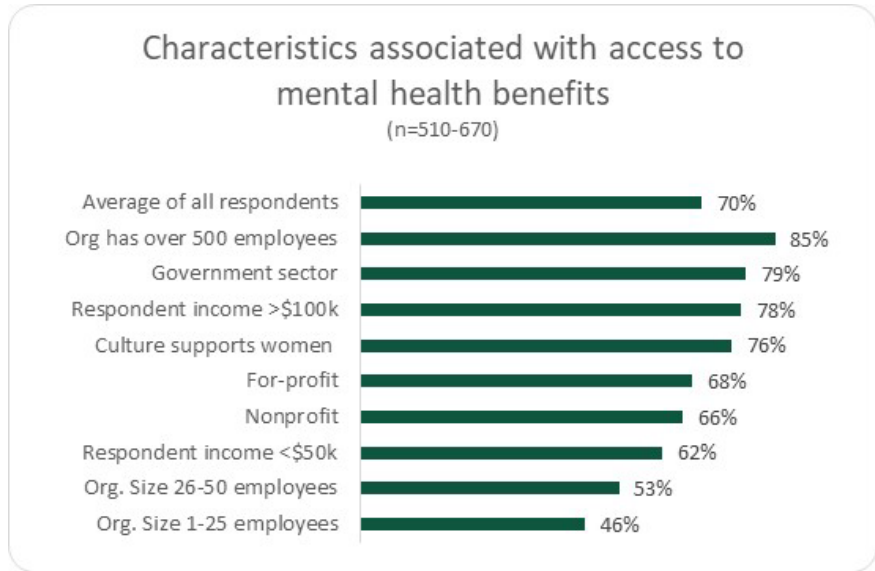


Figure 10

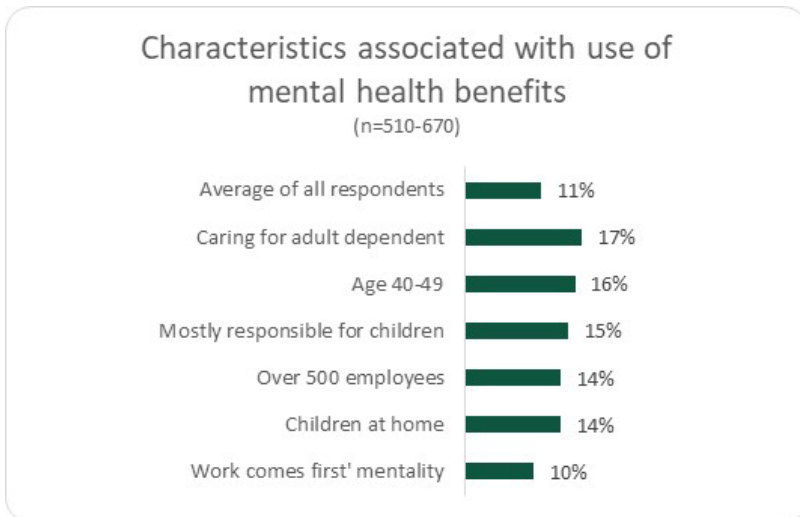


Figure 11



## SUPPORTIVENESS OF WORKPLACE CULTURE

In Figure 12 we see respondents' views of workplace culture, or norms of behavior that can support or undermine employee performance. Just over one-third of women reported that employees are comfortable speaking up constructively and female employees are supported in their workplaces. On the other hand, 16% said that their workplace has a great deal of the attitude 'work comes first' and 13% reported a 'competitive climate.' Interestingly, for each of these items asking about positive aspects of workplace culture, two-thirds to three-fourths of women reported 'somewhat' or 'definitely reflects my workplace.' This indicates room for improvement in cultural attitudes and norms in most work situations.

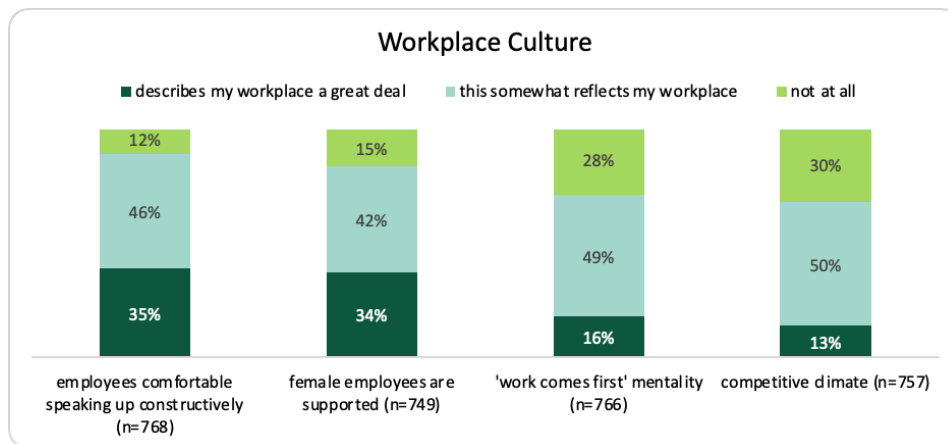


Figure 12

We examined responses to the question "my organization is doing what it takes to support female employees." Overall, 34% of women stated that this support described their organization a great deal, 46% indicated "somewhat," and 16%, "not at all." In organizations where women reported little support, 15% of women seriously consider downshifting their careers compared to only 8% of women in organizations more supportive of women. Figure 13 illustrates that organizations doing what it takes to support women are associated with having females in senior leadership positions. Related statistics show that women whose direct supervisors were female experienced more supportive cultures (43%) compared to women with male supervisors (29%).

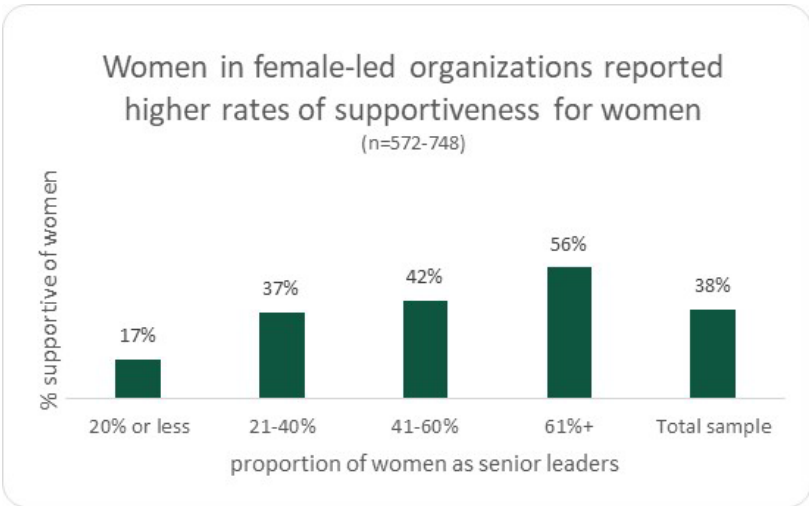


Figure 13

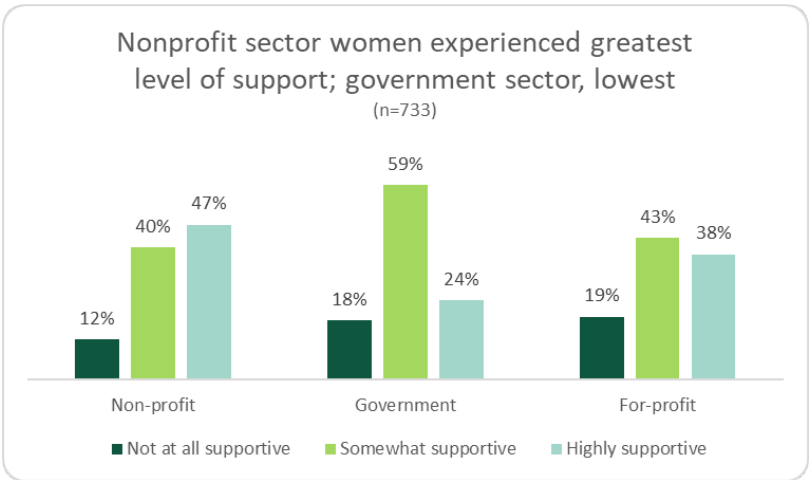


Figure 14

Figure 14 shows that 47% of women working in the nonprofit sector reported a supportive workplace compared to 24% of women in government and 38% of women in the for-profit sector. Fifty-three percent of women working in small businesses (under 25 employees) strongly agreed that “the organization was doing what it takes to support women,” while women in organizations with 201 to 500 employees had the lowest rate (25%). Thirty-percent of women in organizations with over 500 employees said the organization was highly supportive of women.

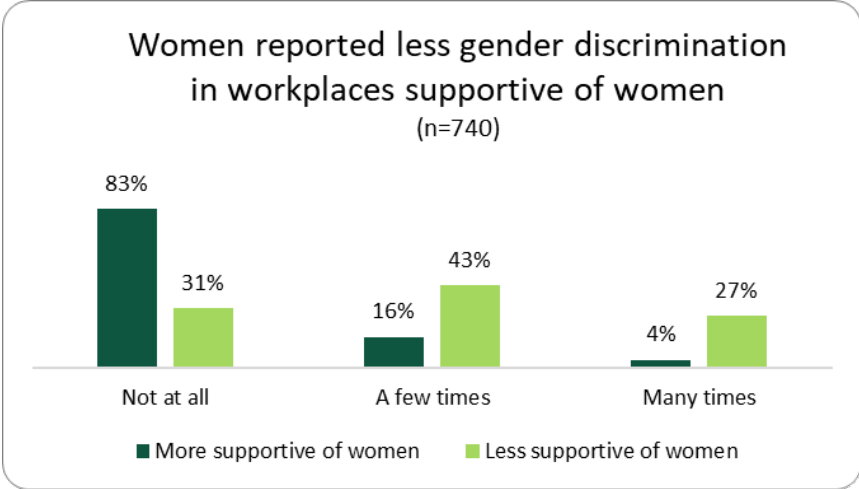


Figure 15

Organizations with a ‘great deal’ of support for women differ from those with little support in terms of gender discrimination. Gender discrimination is less likely to be reported by women in organizations that do what it takes to support women employees, shown in Figure 15. In organizations with greater support for women, only 4% of women reported many times of gender discrimination compared to 27% in less-supportive settings.

Likewise, there is a relationship between feeling that the workplace was ‘doing what it takes to support women’ and other cultural conditions. Support for women is positively (and in most cases, statistically significantly) related to presence of mentoring relationships, advocacy of managers on behalf of women, opportunities for career advancement, and optimism about career potential. See Figure 16.

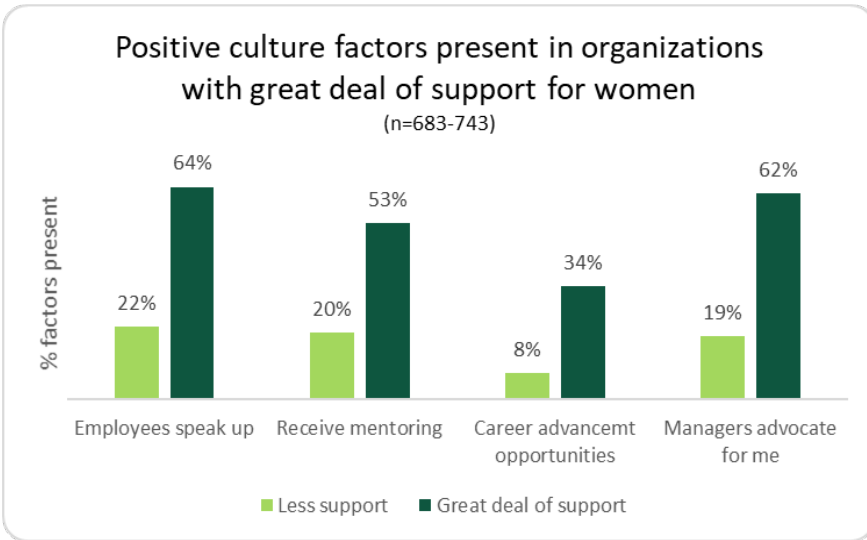


Figure 16

What form of organizational support do women experience? In Figure 17, we see that 29% of respondents strongly agreed that managers advocated for them, 27% had a positive mentoring relationship, 25% were optimistic about their career potential, and 15% had opportunities for advancement.

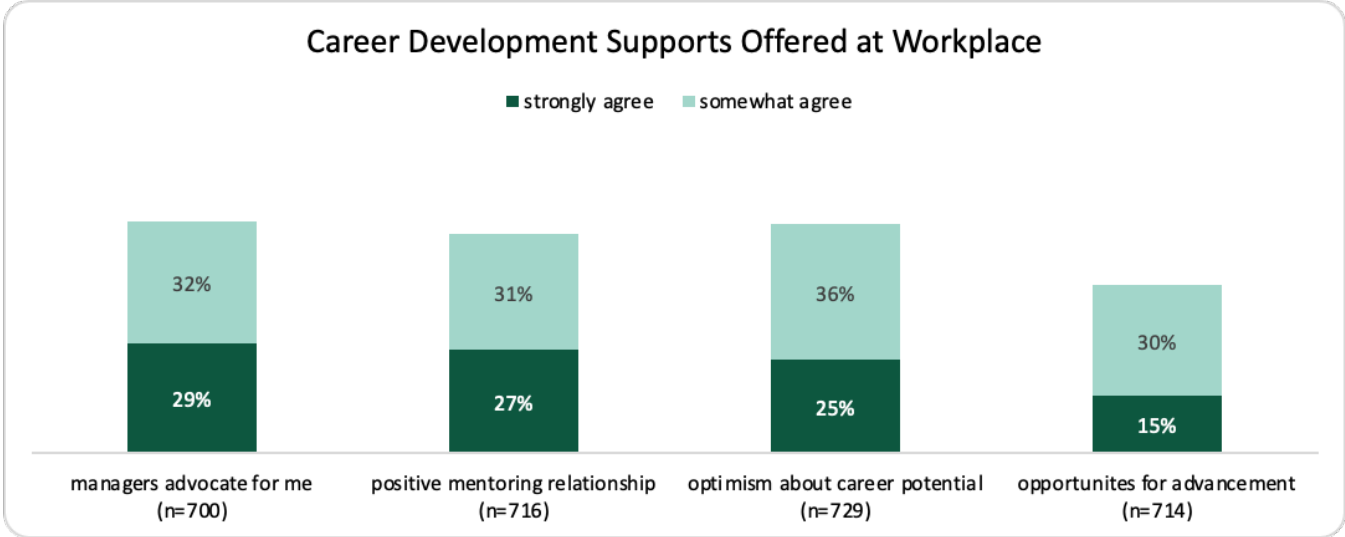


Figure 17

## WOMEN-OWNED BUSINESSES

Of the 53 business owners who responded to the survey, 11% were definitely considering downshifting their careers compared to 8% of non-owners. While business owners and non-owners reported similar rates of challenges in the workplace, 36% of business owners experienced challenges caring for an adult dependent compared to only 23% of nonowners. Half (50%) of business owners reported that “feeling overwhelmed in general” was a definite challenge compared to 37% of non-owners.

On the other hand, women who worked in their own businesses were less likely to report the workplace had a “work comes first mentality” (58%) compared to 70% of non-owner women. Sixty-two percent of business owners reported that their workplace is doing what it takes to support female employees “a great deal,” compared to 36% of non-owner respondents.

Finally, Figure 18 shows that business owners report greater sense of support and opportunity than non-owners.

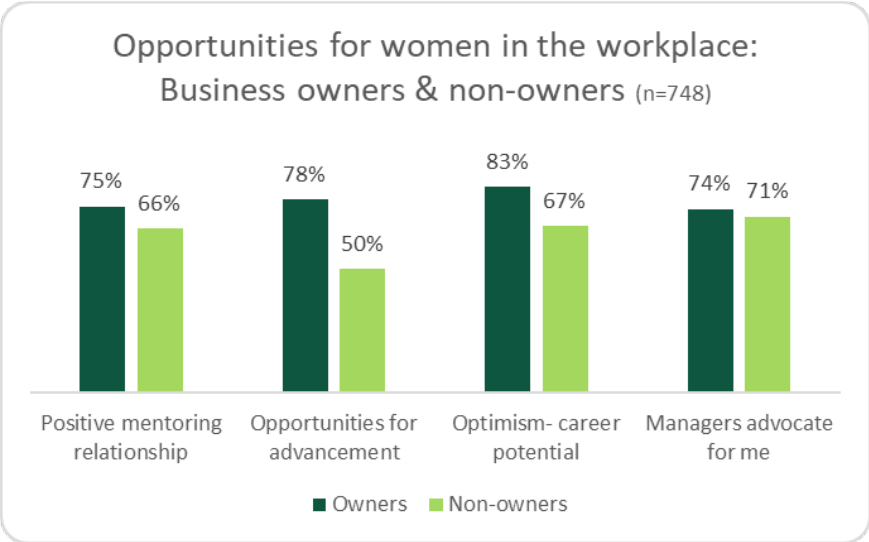


Figure 18

## IMPLICATIONS

There are many implications of the findings presented in this report. Organizations in the region must prioritize the support of female employees, listen to the needs that they express, and innovate new ways to provide the support. Failure to do so threatens the success of organizations across all sectors of the economy, who are already struggling to recruit and retain the staff that they need. Notable numbers of women, some of them among the most experienced leaders, currently consider downshifting their careers.

The single most important implication of the survey is that **women employees are under pressure at home and at work**. With changes and new demands occurring in both spheres of women's lives, workplaces with outdated human resources policies and "work comes first", competitive climates will not work well for many women. **Workplaces that succeed in supporting and developing female employees** will supply the policies and benefits that directly confront women's challenges, offer a culture of openness and respect, enable career development opportunities, and recognize the significant commitment that women carry in their home lives.

We highlight some of the major findings here:

- **Women reported high levels of burnout, feelings of being overwhelmed, and concerns about their own mental health.** More than half of women reported working over 40 hours a week and assumed significant responsibility to care for children as well as adult dependents. Few women have utilized employer mental health benefits. Many workplaces have added or expanded benefits and policies to allow working from home, flexible hours and mental health resources, yet many organizations continue to lag in offering these common benefits.
- **Overall, respondents reported job satisfaction averaging 76 on a 100 point scale.** Women reported lower satisfaction where they see their workplaces not supporting women, lacking career opportunities, or allowing a negative workplace culture. Women seriously considering downshifting reported average satisfaction of 62.
- **Almost one-fourth of women considered downshifting their careers** (and especially women at the zenith of their careers, who have risen to top positions, have advanced degrees, or owned a business). Women caring for an adult dependent had highest rates of intended career cutback as well as women with lower levels of job satisfaction.
- **Workplace culture and leadership played important roles in supporting female employees.** Perhaps one of the most telling survey questions asked women respond to the statement, "my workplace is doing what it takes to support female employees." Over one third of respondents said this was "a great deal like my workplace" and another third reported, "somewhat like my workplace." Variables related to supportive workplaces included having higher proportions of female leaders, more managers that advocate for women, presence of positive mentoring relationships, and opportunities for advancement.

These findings point to important actions needed by organizations in the region, regardless of size or economic sector. Despite the disruptions of our current economy, there is a great deal employers can contribute to women's job satisfaction and prospects for career development. We suggest a few strategies here:

- **Acquire useful information about employees:** their concerns and needs, job satisfaction, use of benefits, and feelings about aspects of work culture. Employers might conduct employee surveys, focus groups, and analyze organizational data so that they can monitor how employees are doing and learn how to provide support in meaningful ways.
- **Strengthen the leadership strategies of all supervisors and top leaders** so that they know how to build open and trusting workplace cultures. Understand and implement organizational behaviors that support women in their career development. Address the competitive workplace norms of “work comes first” and verbal harassment. 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 and pathways – a significant shortfall that this survey revealed. While between 50-60% of women agreed that their workplaces offered mentoring, support from managers and career development opportunities, many women do not experience this support. Doing so is linked with higher job satisfaction.
- **Design and implement new forms of workplace benefits** that align with what female employees need. Despite the radical transformation of the workplace since early 2020, less than one fourth of women reported that their performance review system had been updated. In what ways might a workplace support a working mother or one caring for an aging parent, aside from flexible time? How might mental health concerns be addressed, outside of the traditional Employee Assistance Program, which overburdened women may not take the time to utilize?

The women in the workplace that are most at risk of downshifting are those with higher education levels, business owners, and C-suite leaders. We can't afford to lose them. We must grow a pipeline of women developing in their careers, taking on leadership roles, and maximizing their contributions. These women are essential to help our organizations thrive, and in turn, to enhance the quality of life in our region. We believe that organizations in our region are up to the challenge of building workplaces that benefit from the talents of ALL their employees.

## SURVEY METHODS AND SAMPLE CHARACTERISTICS

Taking approximately 10 minutes to complete electronically, the survey covered women's current position and working situation, workplace policies and culture, challenges they faced regarding work, home life and responsibilities as well as descriptive data. We intentionally included a number of survey items that closely resembled the survey questions that McKinsey & Company used in their study of Women in the Workplace. Our report, “Comparison of NEW Corporate Women to National Data” looks at similarities and differences in responses to the national survey and responses of our regional corporate women.

This survey was approved by UW-Green Bay's Institutional Review Board on June 14, 2021 and a link was distributed to stakeholders, staying open until July 30. We received 856 initial responses which were cleaned and verified as complete, unduplicated responses, leaving us with 823 complete surveys available for analysis.

The 823 respondents reflected a wide range of women. The proportion of responses received from women working in government and nonprofit organizations over-represent the known proportions in the workforce. We can use this non-probability sample to understand the major workplace and career-related issues for women in this region. The following attributes characterize our respondents (see Figure 19):

- 38% of respondents report that they work in the commercial sector, 30% in nonprofit organizations, and 23% in government or education<sup>1</sup>
- 55% of respondents earn less than \$70,000, 21% earn \$70-99,999 and 15% earn over \$100,000
- 85% describe themselves as white, 7% as non-white, and 8% did not specify race/ethnicity
- 33% have greater than a 4 year degree, 45% have a 4 year degree, and 14% have less than 4 year degree
- The mean age of respondents is 43. One-fourth of respondents are over age 50 and 38% are 30-49 years.
- Most respondents worked more than 40 hours per week

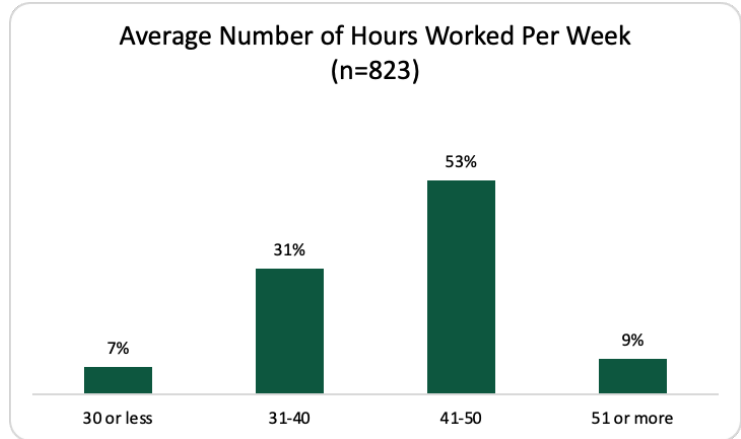


Figure 19

In Figure 20, one can see that respondents represent very large organizations, with almost half working in businesses with over 250 employees. We would expect large and small employers to differ in terms of policies and culture. Our Complete Report explores these expected differences.

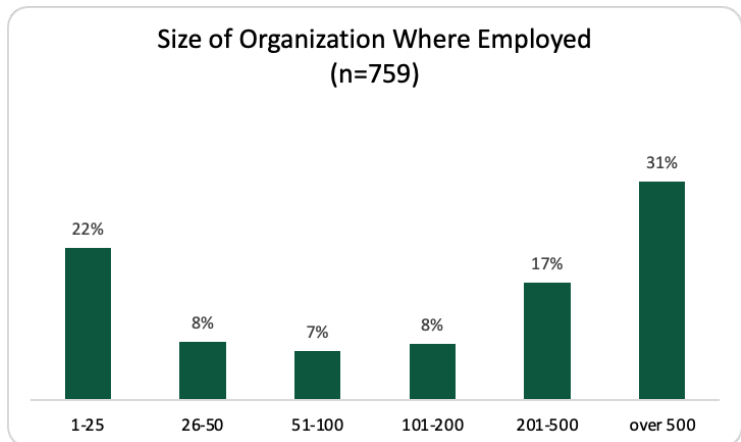


Figure 20

<sup>1</sup> There is some discrepancy between respondents' reported sector of work on two different survey questions. The number shown here reflects their self report to the question "In which sector are you employed?"