



## The Status of Women in the Workplace in West Michigan Report Highlights

**Key Message:** The research shows that more needs to be done to recruit, retain, and advance women in the workplace in West Michigan.

### Main Themes:

1. A “glass ceiling” does exist for women in West Michigan in executive leadership positions and in the board room.
2. Mentoring, networking, and professional development opportunities are key to women’s advancement.
3. Benefits, programs, and policies that enhance work/life balance can improve the workplace climate and retention.
4. Research participants looked to themselves, employers, and the community to address concerns of women in the workplace in West Michigan.

### General status of working women

- Women represent more than half (55%) of all full-time positions identified by survey respondents. Minority women hold 7% of these positions.
- 50% of management positions across all sectors are held by women; 4% by women of color.
- Women are most prevalent in office and clerical positions of which they represent 89% of employees.
- Women hold 45% of all official/manager positions and 43% of professional positions.
- Women hold less than 20% of laborer, craft worker, and operative positions.

### Senior Level Positions & Corporate Board Placement

- Locally, women hold 21% of senior level positions (VP and above) in the private sector compared to 31% in the public sector and 45% in the nonprofit sector.
- Women are minimally represented as members of private company boards. On average, corporate boards have one female director compared to seven on nonprofit boards.

### Women as Top Wage Earners

- Women hold 28% of the top wage earner positions in the private sector compared to 32% in the public and 54% in the nonprofit sectors. 28% of all employers surveyed indicated no women in top earning positions.
- Of the top five responding industries, health care/pharmaceutical and service employers had the largest percent of top salary earning positions held by women, 58% and 43% respectively.

### Barriers and Opportunities for Retention and Advancement

- Men and women in focus groups identified the same top requirements for advancement into top-level positions: education/credentials, expertise, and experience.
- However, women felt they had to work harder than their male counterparts to learn the rules and language of a male-dominated work culture and to break into social groups.
- Women of color identified different barriers: cultural differences, lack of generational knowledge, and economic barriers.
- Few employers are offering these resources to employees:
  - 90% of employers reported having no formal career advancement programs.
  - 27% have some type of informal mentoring.
  - 26% offer some leadership development programs.

### Barriers to work/life balance

- The “Superwoman Syndrome” permeated almost every female focus group when discussing work/life balance.
- Women discussed that even though companies had “family-friendly” policies at work, it was often against company culture to use the policies without criticism.
- Men reinforced the work it takes to be within the culture of top leadership that demands complete accountability to 24/7 responsibilities.
- This culture can be a barrier to using work/life policies by men and women.

### **Addressing work/life issues**

- Women developed many ways to deal with work/life balance, such as sticking to priorities, outsourcing (nanny, maid, relatives, online shopping), family support (relatives help with childcare, husband stays home with kids), technology (work at home, late night/early morning work sessions).
- However, three of the top five benefits used most by women were only offered by 1 out of every 4 employers:
  - Full-time benefits for part-time staff
  - Health benefits for part-time staff
  - Job sharing
- Less than 10% of employers offered assistance/referrals/services for childcare, dependent care, or elder care.
- Trends in the data showed that the larger the organization, the more likely they were to offer a wide variety of work/life benefits.

### **Solutions: research participants looked to themselves, employers, and the community to address concerns of women in the workplace in West Michigan.**

- Women and men identified mentoring, networking, and professional development opportunities as key to workplace advancement.
- Women would like content rich professional development opportunities that provide a place of networking as a secondary benefit.
- Women are asking for policy changes in the workplace that provide work/life benefits and for organizational support of the policies.
- Several focus groups suggested that the status and concerns of women in the workplace be placed onto the public agenda in the local community.
- Another suggestion to increase public awareness was to showcase women through big events or regular columns in the newspaper or on television that highlight women's efforts and successes. This would provide an avenue for role modeling to other women.
- Women are not only interested in male or female mentors for themselves, but are interested in providing their expertise and experience to other women, college age students, and young girls.
- Women of color asked that education be made available to help minorities gain strategies needed for "success" in the dominant culture, including financial management strategies.
- Women of color identified solutions specific to their barriers:
  - A vehicle to identify sisters in need of a mentor/coach.
  - Role models that are culturally appropriate.
- Male focus groups would like a guide that lists local women qualified for executive and corporate boards.
- Men expressed a need to:
  - hire more women in line positions,
  - provide more flextime for women, formal mentoring programs, childcare, and sexual harassment policies and training opportunities.

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Women's Resource Center (WRC) commissioned the Community Research Institute, housed at the Johnson Center for Philanthropy and Nonprofit Leadership at Grand Valley State University, to establish a baseline understanding of the employment status of women in Kent, Ottawa, and Muskegon Counties.

A multi-method research effort was implemented in 2002. A mailed survey was sent to private, public and nonprofit employers as well as information gathered from eight focus groups and 49 trade and professional associations. For a complete report go to WRC's website: [www.grwrc.org](http://www.grwrc.org).