

Workplace Environments Continue to Stifle Women’s Advancement, No Matter Their Age

The 2024 Summer CHP is the first to gather data on generational lived experience in the workplace. Looking at different generations highlights one underlying issue: the current systems do not adequately support women’s growth and advancement to positions of leadership no matter their age.

The data reveals that in Gen Z, a staggering 74% of women hold entry-level positions compared to just 57% of their male counterparts. One generation older, millennials show a somewhat more balanced picture, with men slightly more likely to occupy higher positions than women. Among Gen X, 40% of men are in first-level senior management roles, compared to only 22% of women. This 18% gap underscores the barriers that Gen X women still face in climbing the corporate ladder, suggesting that systemic issues such as gender bias in hiring practices and unequal access to career development opportunities are at play.

These statistics are bleak but not surprising. They align directly with trends observed in our Annual Report Card, which noted a decline in the representation of women in senior management roles since 2021. The CHP results further confirm that women are still not progressing to management levels at the same rate as men, contributing to the overall decrease in female representation in senior leadership.

Unequal pay has been a long struggle, and despite some progress, Canada still has a long way to go. In this CHP, we learn that Gen Z women are more likely to mention unequal pay (52%) than Millennials (44%) or Gen X (42%) as reasons for women leaving the workforce. The CHP qualitative answers provide more context. One person wrote, “Poorly paid for the amount of work to be done in addition to what it demands emotionally” and another “Too many responsibilities for pay that isn’t worth the extra effort. With the taxes and the budget cuts in every industry, it’s just not worth it.”

Faced with a lack of recognition for their work, sexual harassment, and persistent pay inequalities, women are increasingly opting for roles with less responsibility and lower pay; thus, stifling their career advancement and limiting Canada’s increased prosperity. Indeed, 57% of women point towards job-related reasons for stepping back from their positions or not considering a senior role. What is more, women are making it clear to employers that flexibility, work-life balance, and support in the workplace are non-negotiable. Millennial women give more importance to work-life balance (38%) and Gen X women give slightly more importance to family (33%). One respondent shared, “Work life balance was not respected in the company. It was expected to be on call 24 seven with no leniency or empathy towards family responsibilities.”

Women are challenging the patriarchal corporate workplace model and reshaping the narrative of what it looks like to be successful in today’s world. For women, work-life balance (70%), family (70%), and doing a job they like (66%) are factors that are much more relevant to feeling successful compared to men. The myth that “women can have it all” is a deeply flawed concept that puts extra pressure on women to balance everything perfectly, without asking for help and without additional support.

The world is evolving, and workplaces must adapt accordingly. To support this shift, employers need policies that ensure work-life balance is respected while allowing for career advancement. Organizations must not only offer flexible work arrangements, comprehensive family support programs, and ongoing training, but they need to change their culture. If the trend highlighted in this CHP continues, women will continue being left behind. The absence of women in positions of leadership damages not only economic growth but the well-being of the entire nation.