Women and the Health & Well-being Gap in the Workplace

A 2024 Report from the Conferences for Women, the nation's largest network of women's conferences.

New research shows that 97.63% of women consider health and well-being in the workplace "very" or "extremely" important. However, most don't use employer-provided mental health and well-being offerings. This report identifies the top six reasons, which include concern about confidentiality and negative repercussions, perceived poor quality, lack of time, and a sense that the true problems lie in the workplace culture.

CONFERENCES FOR
WOMEN

Contents

Executive Summary

This first-annual 2024 Conferences for Women Report is based on a survey of women's opinions about health and well-being in the workplace conducted in February and March 2024. The Conferences for Women is the nation's largest network of women's conferences.

A total of 4,385 women responded to the survey. The vast majority of respondents identified as college-educated. Approximately 58% held positions ranging from middle management to the C-suite. Most said they were 30 years old or older. And 49 states were represented.

Women were asked about how important health and well-being in the workplace are to them; how they think mental health impacts their job, and how their job impacts their mental health; how comfortable or uncomfortable they are discussing their mental health in the workplace; their perception of employers' support for mental health and well-being; and the existence of mental health programs in the workplace, whether they use them, and their perceived effectiveness.

Here are some highlights:

- **Importance**. 97.63% of respondents said health and well-being in the workplace were "extremely important" or "very important".
- **Job's impact on mental health and mental health's impact on job**. The percentage of respondents who said their job "somewhat positively" affected their mental health (38.16%) was roughly equivalent to the percentage who said it "somewhat negatively" affected their mental health (36.6%).
- **Use of employer offerings**. While most respondents (81.63%) said "yes" when asked whether their employer has "specific initiatives or programs to address workplace health and well-being," the majority (60.19%) said "no" when asked if they have "ever used any mental health resources provided by your employer."
- **Perceived effectiveness**. Asked about the perceived effectiveness of the programs, only about half (50.58%) of respondents answered. But of those,

many did so positively, with 11.32% saying they were "extremely effective," 37.2% saying they were "moderately effective," and 24.3% saying they were "very effective."

Reasons women don't use employer-provided mental health offerings

In an open-ended question, women were asked: "If you have not used employer-provided mental health programs, why not?" 1503 responded. We categorized their responses into the top six reasons. Two tied for #1.

1. They feared repercussions.
2. They thought the offerings were of poor quality.
3. They preferred to use private resources.
4. They said they had no time to take advantage of the offerings.
5. They said they were difficult to access or navigate.
6. They said the problem did not lie with their mental health but with the conditions of the workplace.

The following report provides more details on the findings, including sampling women's open-ended responses. It also covers how women responded to a question about the impact of attending a Conferences for Women event.
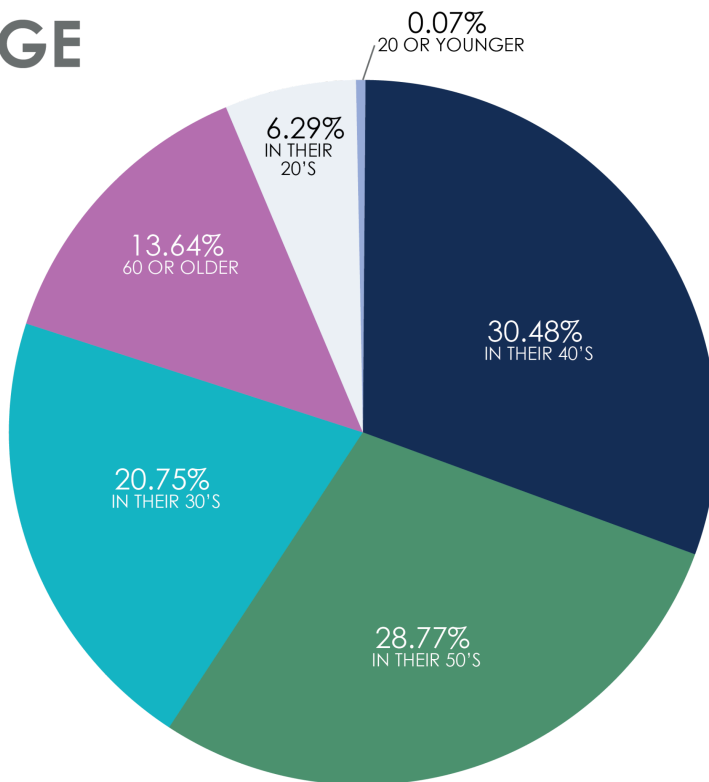
ABOUT THE CONFERENCES FOR WOMEN

The Conferences for Women is the nation's largest network of women's conferences. More than 55,000 women attend its annual conferences in California, Massachusetts, Pennsylvania, and Texas. Thousands more attend its virtual National Conference for Women gathering in March during Women's History Month. Its sponsors include many top employers.

Research Approach

The Conferences for Women surveyed women in its community from February to March 2024. A total of 4,385 women responded. The vast majority of respondents identified as college-educated. Approximately 58% held positions ranging from middle management to the C-suite. Most were 30 years old or older. And 49 states were represented.
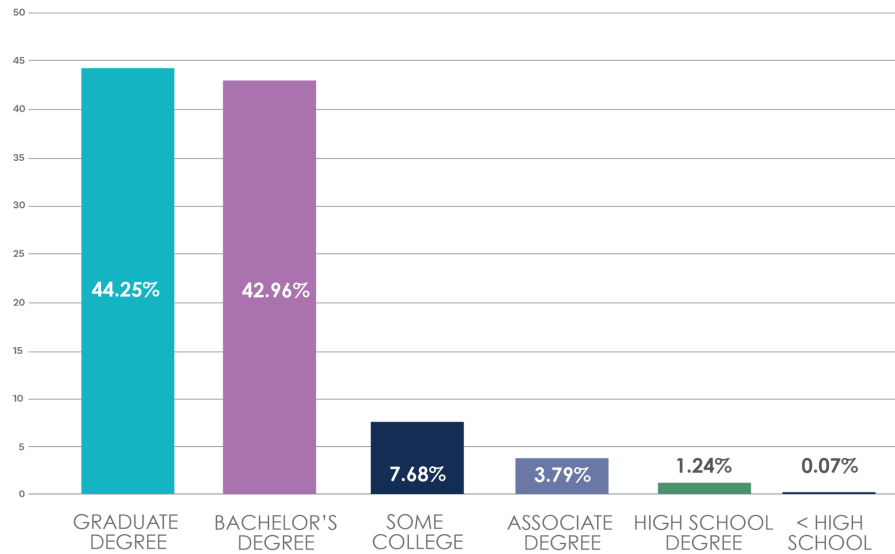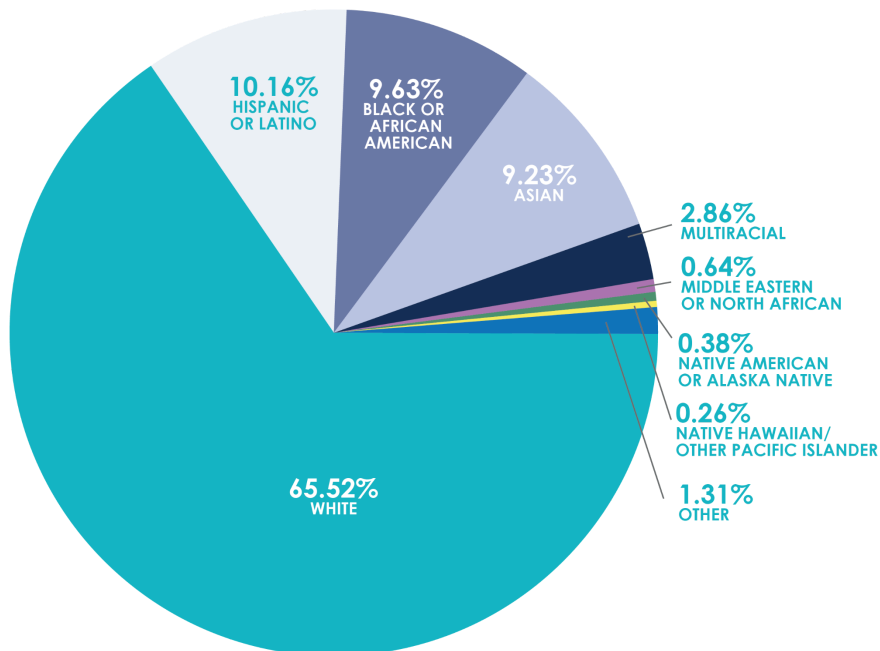
Demographics

AGE

0.07%
20 OR YOUNGER

6.29%
IN THEIR 20'S

13.64%
60 OR OLDER

30.48%
IN THEIR 40'S

20.75%
IN THEIR 30'S

28.77%
IN THEIR 50'S

EDUCATION
HIGHEST LEVEL ATTAINED

Category	Percentage
GRADUATE DEGREE	44.25%
BACHELOR'S DEGREE	42.96%
SOME COLLEGE	7.68%
ASSOCIATE DEGREE	3.79%
HIGH SCHOOL DEGREE	1.24%
< HIGH SCHOOL	0.07%

RACE AND ETHNICITY

- 10.16% HISPANIC OR LATINO
- 9.63% BLACK OR AFRICAN AMERICAN
- 9.23% ASIAN
- 2.86% MULTIRACIAL
- 0.64% MIDDLE EASTERN OR NORTH AFRICAN
- 0.38% NATIVE AMERICAN OR ALASKA NATIVE
- 0.26% NATIVE HAWAIIAN/ OTHER PACIFIC ISLANDER
- 1.31% OTHER
- 65.52% WHITE

GEOGRAPHY

16.85%
WEST

2.73%
MIDWEST

56.74%
NORTHEAST

23.66%
SOUTH

LEVEL OF SENIORITY

3%
ENTRY-LEVEL
POSITIONS

7.39%
OTHER

9.73%
C-SUITE,
EXECUTIVES,
OWNERS

33.4%
MIDDLE
MANAGEMENT

14.83%
SENIOR
MANAGEMENT

31.64%
INTERMEDIATE
(BETWEEN MIDDLE MANAGEMENT
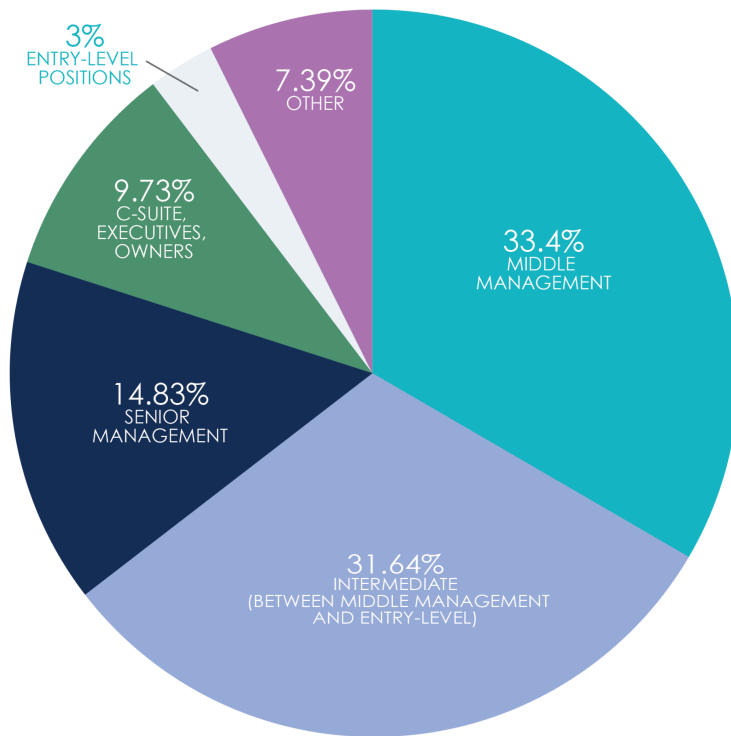AND ENTRY-LEVEL)

About the Conferences for Women

The Conferences for Women is the nation's largest network of women's conferences. It attracts more than 55,000 women annually to its in-person events in Austin, Boston, Philadelphia, and Silicon Valley. It also hosts a national conference, held virtually, during Women's History Month.

The Conferences for Women is a women-led, nonpartisan, nonprofit organization dedicated to advancing women in the workplace and beyond. It regularly attracts top women leaders as keynoters, from Nobel Peace Prize laureates and Pulitzer Prize-winning authors to Academy and Emmy Award-winning actors to CEOs.

A study conducted by best-selling author Shawn Achor and published in *The Harvard Business Review* in 2018 found that attendees of Conferences for Women events were three times more likely to receive a 10% or higher pay increase within one year and were twice as likely to receive a promotion.

The study further showed that 78% of attendees reported feeling "more optimistic about the future," and 71% said they felt "more connected to others" after attending.

In 2024, the Conferences for Women again surveyed its community to determine what issue was most important to them–and the overwhelming #1 priority was health and well-being. A resounding **97.63%** said they considered health and well-being in the workplace **"extremely important" or "very" important.**

Part I

Quantitative Findings Related to Health and Well-being in the Workplace

This survey asked women about how important health and well-being in the workplace are to them; how they think mental health impacts their job, and their job impacts their mental health; how comfortable or uncomfortable they are discussing their mental health in the workplace; their perception of their employer's support for mental health and well-being; and the existence of mental health programs in the workplace, whether they use them, and their perceived effectiveness.

Here are a few highlights, followed by detailed findings:

- 97.63% of respondents said health and well-being in the workplace were "extremely important" or "very important."
- The percentage of respondents who said their job "somewhat positively" affected their mental health (38.16%) was roughly equivalent to the percent who said it "somewhat negatively" affected their mental health (36.6%).
- While most respondents (81.63%) said their employer has mental health programs or initiatives, the majority (60.19%) said they did not use them.
- Asked about the perceived effectiveness of the programs, only about half (50.58%) of respondents answered. But of those, many did so positively, with 11.32% saying they were "extremely effective," 37.2% saying they were "moderately effective," and 24.3% saying they were "very effective."

Importance

Women were asked: "How important do you consider health and well-being in the workplace?" Of the 4,385 who responded to this question:

- 70.13% said it is "extremely important."
- 27.50% said it is "very important."
- 2.23% said it was "somewhat important."
- No one said it was "not so important" or "not important at all."

As stated above, 97.63% of respondents said health and well-being in the workplace were "extremely important" or "very important."

Perception of Job's Impact on Mental Health

Women were asked: "How does your job affect your mental health?" Of the 4,366 who responded:

- 38.16% said "somewhat positively."
- 36.6% said "somewhat negatively."
- 14.09% said "extremely positively."
- 5.63% said "extremely negatively."
- 5.52% said "neither positively or negatively."

Comfort Discussing Mental Health Issues in the Workplace

Women were asked: "How comfortable do you feel discussing mental health concerns with your employer or colleagues?" Of the 4,373 who responded:

- 26.21% said "comfortable."
- 26.11% said "uncomfortable."
- 25.63% said "neutral."
- 11.18% said "very comfortable."
- 10.86% said "very uncomfortable."

Perception of Employer's Support for Mental Health & Well-Being

Women were asked: "How supportive do you feel your employer is regarding mental health and well-being in the workplace?" Of the 4,358 who responded:

- 29.53% said "moderately supportive."

- 28.29% said "very supportive."
- 18.77% said "somewhat supportive."
- 16.43% said "extremely supportive."
- 6.93% said "not supportive at all."

Number of Employers That Have Mental Health Programs

Women were asked: "Does your employer have specific initiatives or programs to address workplace health and well-being (for example, counseling services, Employee Assistance Programs, etc.)?" Of the 4,361 who responded:

- 81.63% said their employer has mental health programs or initiatives.
- 10.43% said their employer does not.
- 7.93% said they were unsure.

Women's Use of Employer-Provided Mental Health Resources

Women were asked: "Have you ever used any mental health resources provided by your employer?" Of the 4,361 who responded:

- 39.31% said they have used them.
- 60.19% said they have not.

Perceived Effectiveness

Women were asked: "If yes (they used employer-provided mental health programs), how effective do you think they are?" Of the 2,218 who responded:

- 37.2% said they were "moderately effective."
- 24.3% said they were "very effective."
- 17.4% said they were "somewhat effective."
- 11.32% said they were "extremely effective."
- 9.78% said they were "not effective at all."

Part II

Discussion of Top Reasons Women Do Not Use Employer-Provided Mental Health Resources

In an open-ended question, women were asked: "If you have not used employer-provided mental health programs, why not?"1503 responded. We categorized their responses into the top six reasons. Two tied for #1. They were:

1. They thought the offerings were of poor quality. (201)
2. (Tied for #1) They feared repercussions from using them. (201)
3. They preferred to use private resources. (119)
4. They said they had no time to take advantage of the offerings. (87)
5. They said they were difficult to access or navigate. (70)
6. They said the problem did not lie with their mental health but with the conditions of the workplace. (56)

The remaining responses spanned a variety of other reasons.

What follows is a sampling of the responses by category:

#1: Fear of Repercussions

Of those who spoke of not using services because of a fear of repercussions (tied #1 response), here's a sampling of what respondents said:

- *"Poor mental health is frequently viewed as a sign of weakness or a defect (despite what some companies say), so I'd rather not have anything pertaining to my mental health linked to something within my company."*
- *"If they don't listen or support you with work issues, why would I want to trust them with my mental health?"*
- *"In reading the fine print of the mental health resources provided by my company, I learned that data is shared between the resources and the*

company (so the company can be informed of what resources are being used and how often). My company claims that it does not look at that data, but I absolutely do not trust that it would not be used against me (or other employees) at some point."
- *"Anytime someone knows of a "weakness" you have, you are labeled and talked about, and you can not escape this."*
- *"I know people who have used them, and they always lost their jobs even though the information was supposed to be confidential. It's well known that if you "use" the resource, you'll be terminated at some point within the year."*
- *"The CFO actively moderates any services used and will judge."*
- *"I have had colleagues who have had nervous breakdowns and informed our employer. Instead of help, they were asked to step down or take unpaid time off. Eventually, the said employees were let go."*
- *"The knowledge that you've utilized such resources can be used against you during economic downturns such as layoffs."*
- *"The stigma of using available mental health days, especially as a woman in a male-dominated field. It felt as though my supervisor took my need to use them as proof that women can't cut it."*

#2 (tied with #1): The Offerings are of Poor Quality: Too Basic, Limited, People Have Had Bad Experiences, or They Perceive Them as Just for Show

Of those who said they were of poor quality, most (123 of 221) said that they were too basic or limited. Forty-six said that they had had a bad experience with them. Twenty-five said they were just for show, and others offered other miscellaneous reasons.

Here are some of the things those who said offerings were too basic or limited had to say:

Too Basic/Limited

- *"EAPs are not effective at all. They need to stop being promoted as a benefit to employees."*
- *"They provide very basic advice you can get by watching any YouTube video or listening to a podcast."*
- *"They were cookie-cutter and a time suck."*
- *"The information was sparse and outdated."*
- *"It is an app that asks how we feel today. It's inadequate."*
- *"They are generic, vague, and thin on useful information."*
- *"Their idea of mental health is free ice cream and massage chairs once a year to show appreciation."*
- *"These programs are difficult to access and offer minimal benefits. For example, a free yoga class takes place on the other side of the city during lunchtime in a location with no locker rooms. Or group counseling sessions with coworkers -- awkward!"*

Bad Experiences

- *"The therapist was glib."*
- *"The counselors do not remember from one session to the next."*
- *"Mine seemed completely devoid of any warmth and connection."*
- *"I was sent to a counselor who asked me if I 'had accepted Jesus into my heart.' WHAT?!?!??!?!"*
- *"The counselor I was set up to meet did not attend our appointment. He made me uncomfortable during our conversations leading up to the appointment. I don't know why I went to the appointment other than desperation, but it was probably a blessing he didn't show up."*

It's Just for Show

- *"They feel performative. The mental health resources provided by my employer seem to be 'because this looks good' and not 'because our employees matter.'"*
- *"I don't believe in the sincerity of the programs."*
- *"These services are used as lip service to justify unethical and uncaring corporate behavior. It's a complete smokescreen."*
- *"The programs are irrelevant and seem more like 'mental health washing.'"*

- *"The programs are programs to check a box. They aren't helpful. Simply a PR program."*
- *"I believe my company makes an effort for show, but does not care about staff health."*

#3: Use Private Resources

The third most common reason respondents said they did not use mental health services offered by their employers was that they previously had or preferred to use private counselors.

#4: No Time

The fourth most common reason was that they said respondents said they had no time. Here is a sampling of their responses:

- *"I feel extremely burnt out at work, but I have not used these tools and don't even have time to set up those appointments."*
- *"Part of the drain on my mental health has been the constant overwork and having too many responsibilities. I can barely find time some days to eat or take a break, let alone look into the services and resources offered."*
- *"Calm is sponsored by my employer and integrated into Zoom, but nobody ever uses it. No time for CALM."*
- *"The timing of some of these meetings and programs does not work around daily job duties, and my organization prioritizes job duties."*
- *"Many other work 'priorities' have deadlines and direct implications for performance and pay."*
- *"I'm always too busy to make time for my mental health."*
- *"With the pace of the workplace, it is difficult to have free time to participate in activities during business hours. Employers are consistently asking for more with less."*
- *"Not enough time because part of the issue is the constant heavy workload."*

#5: Difficult to Navigate or Access

- *"They're difficult to find and even more difficult to navigate. Managers aren't well versed in how to help navigate or even how to discuss the need for resources."*
- *"It's too much work to jump through all of the hurdles to try to get help and treat my issues."*
- *"The resources are difficult to find; one resource often sends you to another."*
- *"The rules regarding how benefits can be applied make them less easy to use. These rules can change without clear notice from one year to the next."*

#6: It's the Workplace that is the Problem

- *"Since the company's policies for work affect my mental health, providing offerings instead of better work conditions is a non-starter."*
- *"No services can overcome US culture's priority on business-first mentality and human needs second."*
- *"It's frequent degrading stressors that don't have a solution except for resigning."*
- *"Their efficacy is limited by the fact that the workload is too heavy. It's mathematics."*
- *"Employers must address why people are being impacted mentally - especially women in the workforce. The services provided seem like a Band-Aid."*
- *"If you have a toxic manager, it doesn't matter how much therapy you pursue. You're consuming toxic poison every day."*
- *"If my company's policies regarding the work affect my mental health, providing mental health resources instead of fixing the policies seems like a fad, not a solution."*
- *"All the resources in the world aren't enough if expectations are still unreasonable. With what time am I supposed to take advantage of the resources? In the minutes between doing the work of 5 people and crying in the bathroom?"*
- *"They seem to rely on us using mental health resources to get by rather than treating them as a safety net for the worst of times and building a culture of healthy working life."*

- *"It is hard to open up about problems in my life when most involve not making enough money to survive or eat on a daily basis."*
- *"I think the mental health and well-being benefits my company offers are nice, but ignore things like bad management, undercompensation, and overworking."*
- *"These offerings are just band-aids on a gaping wound. We need to change the workplace instead of offering Headspace memberships to deal with unreasonable employer expectations."*

Part III:

The Conferences for Women's Impact on Mental Health and Well-Being

Survey results

Women were asked: "If you have attended a Conferences for Women event in the past, would you say the sense of community and educational opportunities provided by the Conferences for Women support your well-being?" Of the 3,639 who answered:

- 77.91% said attending a conference positively supported their well-being
- 1.95% said it did not
- 20.14% said they were not sure

Conferences for Women organizers plan to integrate well-being programming at both in-person and virtual conference offerings in the coming year. They will also bring back a new and improved Wellness Hub at the in-person Conferences. And, they will launch a free wellness offering for the Conferences for Women community in partnership with a best-in-class provider of performance and well-being support.

CONTACT

To arrange media interviews or for more information, please contact Lisa Bennett, Communications Director, at
LBennett@ConferencesforWomen.org.