

# Corporate America still isn't making progress on gender equality

BY REBECCA RUIZ SEP 30, 2015 MASHABLE.COM



If corporate America continues promoting women to executive positions at the current rate, it will take more than 100 years for gender parity to reach the C-suite.

That bleak statistic is one of several insights into workplace gender equity from a new study conducted by [LeanIn.org](http://LeanIn.org) and McKinsey & Company.

"[Women in the Workplace](#)" analyzed promotion trends and survey data from 118 companies and nearly 30,000 employees. The study concludes that despite heightened attention to gender inequality in businesses and boardrooms around the country, women are still underrepresented at every level in the corporate pipeline.

Women may have trouble reaching the highest level of leadership because, compared to men, fewer of them hold jobs directly related to core operations and loss-and-profit responsibility. These roles are more likely to lead to C-Suite promotions, according to the data.

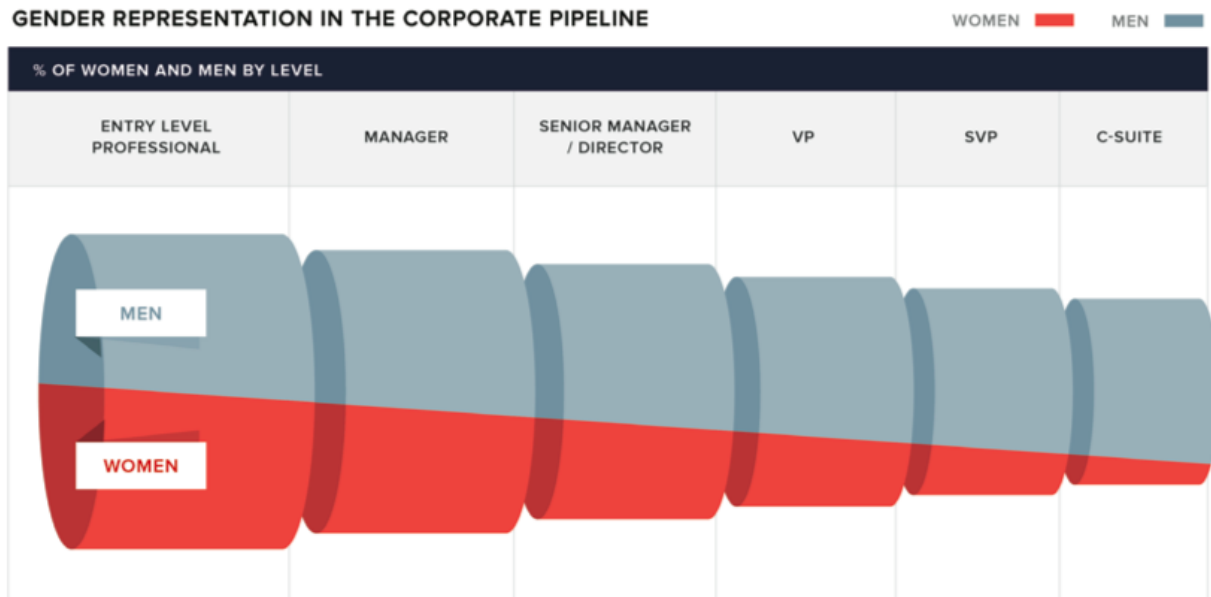


IMAGE: [WOMEN IN THE WORKPLACE / LEANIN.ORG](#)

Moreover, the report suggests, the conventional wisdom about why this is happening is wrong. While we typically think women drop out of the workforce or don't reach executive leadership because they prioritize family over work, the study's results point to an alternative explanation.

First, women are leaving their companies at the same or lower rates than men. Second, while senior-level women are less interested in advancing than their male peers, women in general are wary of the "stress and pressure" of an executive job.

More than half of women with and without children didn't want the all-consuming responsibilities that come with leadership. Men also worried about the same issue, but by several fewer percentage points. Meanwhile, the same portion of men and women with children said they didn't want an executive position because it would be difficult to balance family and work.

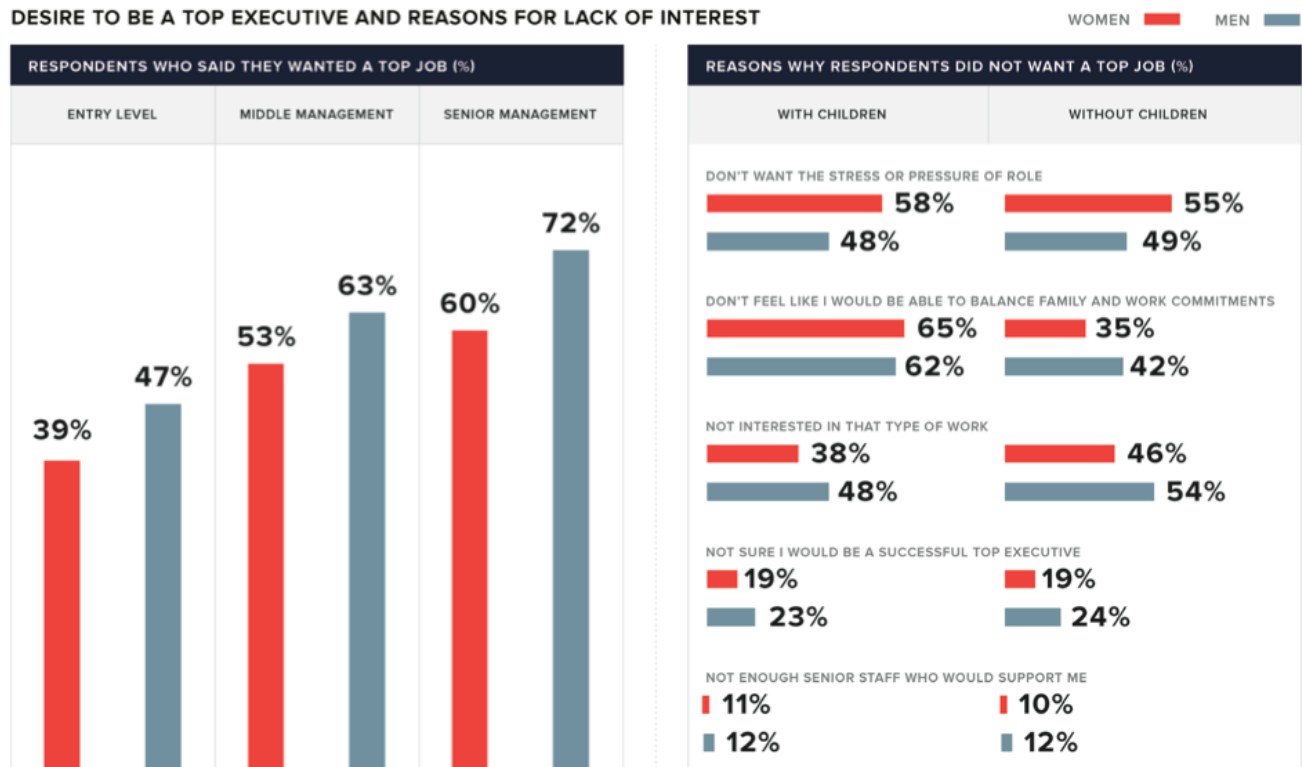


IMAGE: WOMENINTHEWORKPLACE.COM

Rachel Thomas, president of LeanIn.org, believes the focus on "stress and pressure" reflects a workplace culture that inherently puts women at a disadvantage, making it a particularly grueling process for them to reach high-powered positions.

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“The path to leadership is disproportionately stressful for women,” says Thomas. “This links back to findings on an uneven playing field — women report a very different experience.”

Women, according to the report, are four times more likely than men to think their gender negatively impacts their opportunities to advance and almost three times as likely than men to report personally missing out on an assignment, promotion or raise.

Research indeed shows that women face several implicit biases at work. Women who are successful are often seen as **less likable**. Mothers are frequently seen by their peers as **less competent and committed**. Women **receive** less credit for success and are blamed more for failure.

Women of color may confront additional barriers to promotion. Black, Hispanic and Asian women are on average 43% and 16% more interested in becoming a top executive than white women and white men, respectively. Yet, half of black women say they received senior-level support to advance their career compared to two-thirds of white, Asian and Hispanic women.

"This is an amazing untapped well," says Thomas. "[These women] are highly ambitious and really excited, but they're just not getting the support they need."

The report outlines numerous long-term culture changes to help companies achieve gender equality.

Among the obstacles are low participation rates in programs and benefits that provide work-life balance but are often stigmatized; employee perceptions that workplace parity isn't a priority of their CEO; and attitudes amongst men that gender diversity is important, but disbelief that women have fewer opportunities at work.

Training and transparency are imperative, says Thomas. Managers, in particular, need instruction on how to identify their own biases. Companies need to start showing what roles women fill and how frequently they advance.

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"Organizations cannot change what they don't see," she says, "and employees can't understand what they don't see as well."

The report also recommends tracking key metrics that demonstrate outcomes like attrition, compensation and employee satisfaction.

But even well-intentioned companies may fail at putting equal numbers of women in top-level jobs if they approach that mission with scattershot initiatives.

"There are no piecemeal solutions," says Thomas. "Corporate America will get there, but it will take a comprehensive effort."