

Women Re-entering the Workforce Face Substantial Barriers

Despite their increasing presence in the workforce, women are more likely than men to experience interruptions in their careers. This is due largely to time spent caring for children or elderly family members. Women still face real barriers when re-entering the workforce; many return to less skilled, lower paid positions than those they left.

Women remain much more likely than men to experience career interruptions, largely due to domestic responsibilities.

- One in four women leaves her job around the time of the birth of her first child.¹
- Among mothers with children younger than one year old, only 53.8 percent are in the labor force.²
- Caring for an elderly relative is also often the reason for a gap in workforce involvement. Thirty four million adults (16 percent of population) provide care to adults 50+ years.³ Women are more likely than men to be family caregivers. Studies suggest that between 59 and 75 percent of family caregivers are women.^{4,5,6}
- For women, eldercare has a significant impact on advancement at work. One third of caregivers decrease their work hours, 29 percent pass on promotions, training or assignments, 22 percent take a leave of absence, 20 percent switch from full to part time employment, 16 percent quit and thirteen percent retire early.⁷

When choosing to re-enter the workforce, women face substantial barriers.

- While more than one third (37 percent) of highly qualified women take time out of the workforce, the majority (93 percent) want to return to work. However, this can be more difficult than they anticipate. Only 74 percent succeed in re-entering the workforce and only 40 percent make it back into full time employment.⁸
- Over ninety percent of women who are seeking to re-enter the workforce would welcome training on current technologies and skill sets.⁹
- When asked to describe their hunt for a job after deciding to return to work, 50 percent of mothers said they were frustrated and 18 percent said the experience was depressing.¹⁰
- The affordability of child care services is an issue for many women in deciding whether or when to return to work.¹¹ Among the 22 percent of working poor families headed by single mothers who paid for child care, 40 percent spent at least half of their cash income on child care, and another 25 percent spent 40 to 50 percent.¹²

Displaced homemakers face specific, unique barriers to entering the workforce.

- Displaced homemakers are women who have spent an extended period of time outside of the workforce caring for a family but who have lost their main source of income through divorce, separation or widowhood.¹³
- In 2003, there were 7.3 million displaced homemakers under 65 in the U.S.¹⁴
- Forty two percent of displaced homemakers were in poverty as of 2003. Another 16 percent were near poverty.¹⁵

Women Re-entering, cont.

- Displaced homemakers often lack the education or job training necessary to get jobs that will support themselves or their family. For example, 58 percent of displaced homemakers have not completed education beyond a high school diploma or GED.¹⁶
- A disproportionate number of displaced homemakers are working in low wage positions, with a little more than one half (51%) earning a personal income of less than ten thousand dollars a year. Twenty four percent earn between ten and twenty thousand dollars a year.¹⁷

There are both immediate and long term costs to leaving the job market.

- On average, women lose 18 percent of their earning power when they take time off. This number rises to 37 percent if the absence exceeds three years.¹⁸
- On average, women who take time off lose more than one million dollars over the course of their career.¹⁹ If they take three or more years off, they will lose 37 percent of their earning power.²⁰

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