
THE 2019 WOMEN'S AGENDA AMBITION REPORT

A survey of more than 1800 women on what they want from their careers, what they believe could get in the way, and some of the structural impediments women still face at work.

Supported by AGSM at the
University of NSW Business School.



ABOUT WOMEN'S AGENDA

Women's Agenda is a 100% female-owned,
independent news hub for career-minded women.

We publish daily news and views regarding how we live and
work, and regularly advocate for measures that can better support
women in the workforce.

We support our journalism by working with clients on strategies they can use
to successfully engage with this audience through content, bespoke events,
advertising, sponsorships and research.

ABOUT AGSM

As Australia's leading graduate school of management, AGSM @
UNSW Business School offers innovative, flexible, world-class
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INTRODUCTION

More pay, more support, less assumptions

The ambitions of women vary dramatically, but our research identifies some overarching themes in what women are looking to achieve.

We've also identified some of the key impediments that may stand in the way of women successfully hitting their goals over the next two years.

The research is based on the more than 1800 responses we received to an online survey run in December 2018 and January 2019 targeted at women, asking a series of questions about ambitions and what, if anything, could get in the way. It follows a similar survey we conducted during the same period two years earlier.

Overall, the results of this study tell us there is no shortage of ambition among women, but for many there is a shortage of support available. Many women also feel squeezed by competing responsibilities.

The lack of support comes from a wide range of sources: including employers, family members, managers, investors, government policies and more.

And the squeeze women are feeling is not just about a lack of time week-to-week, but also feeling squeezed by perceptions and assumptions on just when is the 'right time' to accelerate their career. Indeed, in the responses to this survey, we identified a heightened level of angst and frustration among women, especially stemming from some of the impediments affecting their careers that are beyond their personal control, including difficulties getting ahead while working part time, little to no help on the domestic front, ageism, gender discrimination and more.

We do this research to provide employers with valuable knowledge on what needs to change in order to better support the ambitions of women. Such support can lead to greater women's workforce participation, more work-life satisfaction, and potentially even a narrowing of the gender pay gap.

It can also have a dramatic difference on the mental and physical health of women, especially if support can assist in easing some of the competing pressures women feel.

Employers would be wise to consider some of the key ambitions women have shared in this study and to

especially address any assumptions or biases being made about female staff members.

The first step to supporting women at work might be simpler than many think: just pay them more. More earnings came up as the leading ambition among survey participants. We also found that a high proportion of women are looking to get promoted or take on a new role.

In addition to paying women more, we believe these results show a number of other straightforward fixes employers can aim to introduce – including by immediately addressing discrimination that may be occurring during the hiring and promoting process due to a woman's current circumstances (be that her age, caring responsibilities, returning to the work force, background or something else).

This research provides an excellent snapshot of what women are striving for right now. These ambitions must not be ignored, and should be considered in the wider context of what can be done to grow our economy through the participation of women.



Angela Priestley
Editorial Director

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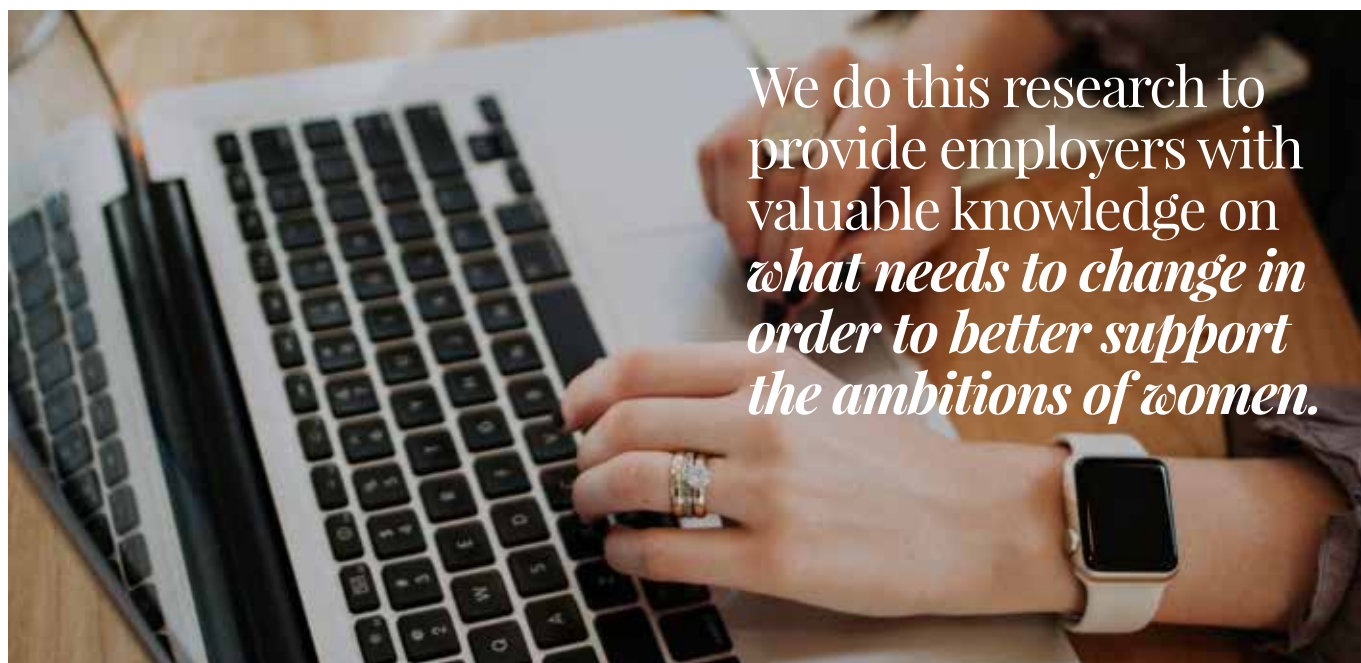


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KEY STATISTICS

1813 Responses



47%

HAVE TAKEN A CAREER BREAK OF THREE MONTHS
OR MORE FOR CHILDCARE COMMITMENTS AT
SOME POINT IN THE PAST 10 YEARS

49%

ARE WORKING FULL-TIME FOR AN EMPLOYER

36%

HAVE CHILDREN UNDER THE AGE OF TEN AT HOME

82%

LIVE IN A METROPOLITAN AREA

50%

ARE AGED 30 TO 41

37%

ARE LOOKING TO EARN MORE IN THE NEXT 24 MONTHS

30%

WANT TO GET PROMOTED

51%

BELIEVE 'CONFIDENCE IN MY ABILITIES' COULD HINDER
THEIR CAREER AMBITIONS

25%

SAY GENDER DISCRIMINATION COULD GET IN THE WAY OF
THEIR AMBITIONS



TOP AMBITIONS

FOR WOMEN IN
2019 AND 2020

More money, promotions, further education and better flexible working options are high on the agenda for women in 2019 and 2020.

These were the key responses that came up when we asked respondents to choose from a wide range of ambitions and tick those that best apply to their goals over the next 24 months.

A desire for more pay was top of the ambitions list, with 37 per cent indicating they hoped to earn more in the next 24 months. It's a result that helps dismiss some of the myths and assumptions made about women's ambitions around money.

Women also share a strong desire to get promoted over the next two years, with 30 per cent of respondents ticking this option.



And the desire for change is also high on the agenda. Thirty per cent indicated they are looking for a new role, 26 per cent said they are looking to undertake further education, and a small number (10 per cent) said they are looking to change careers.

Meanwhile, the desire to achieve better flexible working options is also a priority, with a quarter of

respondents (24 per cent) listing this as key to their ambitions over the next two years.

Despite much rhetoric around women starting businesses and the promotion of female entrepreneurs in the media, just 11 per cent of respondents said they are 'looking to start a business in the next two years', with 15 per cent indicating they are currently building a business.

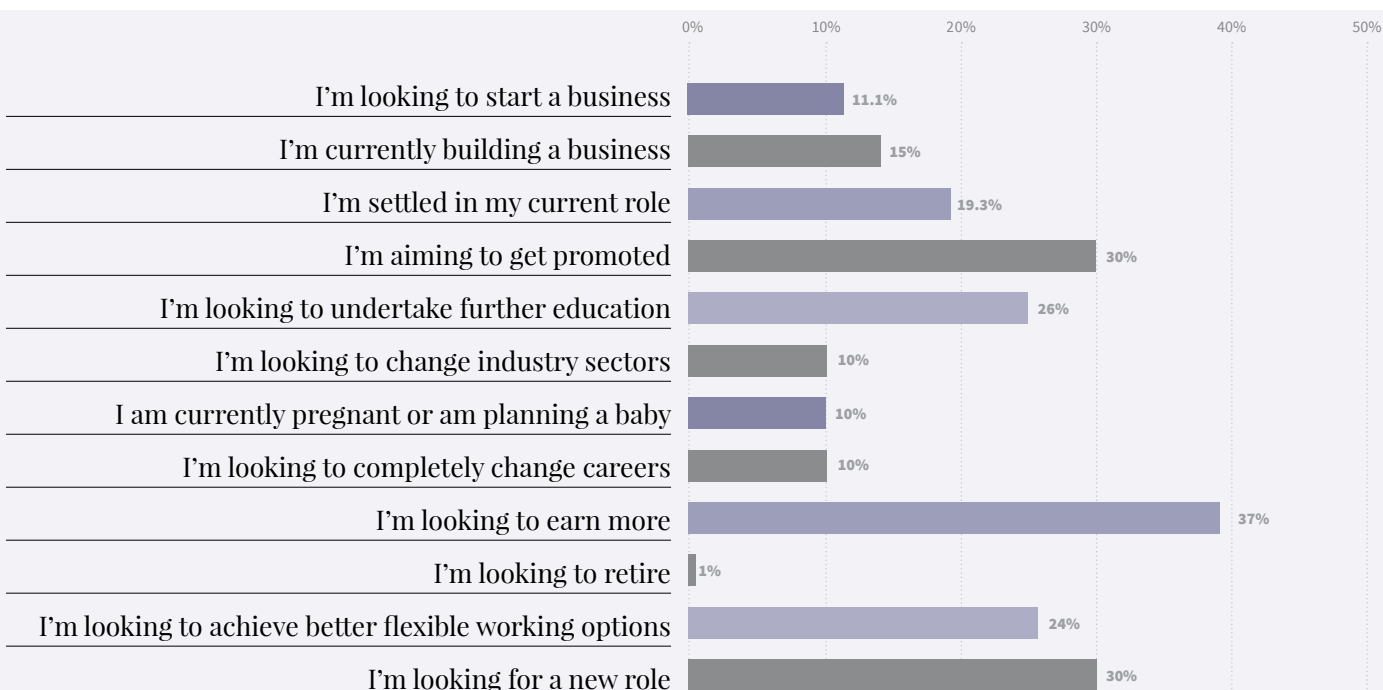
30%

OF WOMEN HOPE TO
GET PROMOTED

26%

ARE LOOKING TO UNDERTAKE
FURTHER EDUCATION

Which of the following best describes your career ambitions for the next two years?





CAREER BREAKS AND CHILDCARE COMMITMENTS

A desire to earn more appears to be an even stronger ambition for those who have taken a career break for childcare commitments at any point in the past ten years.

A little less than half of our survey respondents indicated they have taken such a break.

When we asked this segment about their goals over the next two years, a massive 66 per cent said they are looking to increase their salary and earning potential.

This could be because their salaries and savings have taken a hit during or since taking a career break. It could be due to a desire to catch up on accumulating retirement savings, or perhaps even that they're feeling significantly underpaid (particularly if they are working part time or flexibly).



The desire for more pay came up slightly ahead of achieving work/life balance, with 62 per cent of respondents indicating this is a key goal.

Almost half (46 per cent) are keen on furthering their leadership career, while 17 per cent are looking to change their careers and 16 per cent want to start a business.

Meanwhile, in further evidence ambition doesn't necessarily take a hit after having children, 55 per cent of these women agreed with the statement, "since having kids, I am more ambitious than ever before".

66%

OF WOMEN WHO HAVE TAKEN A CAREER BREAK ARE LOOKING TO INCREASE THEIR SALARY AND EARNING POTENTIAL

What are your main career goals over the next two years?





WHAT'S GETTING **IN THE WAY**

Every woman's experiences and circumstances are different. Women therefore all face their own unique hurdles when it comes to achieving their ambitions.

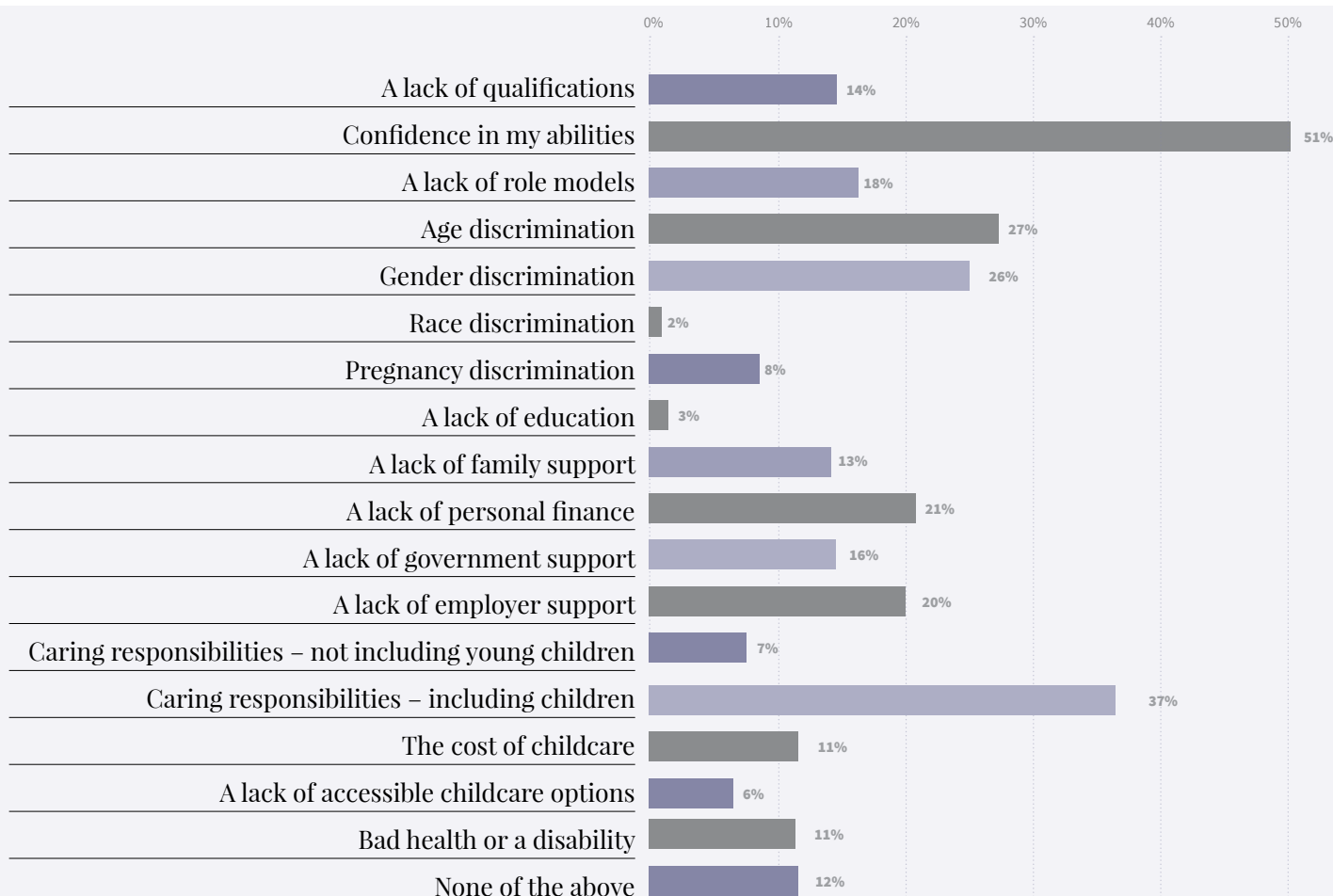
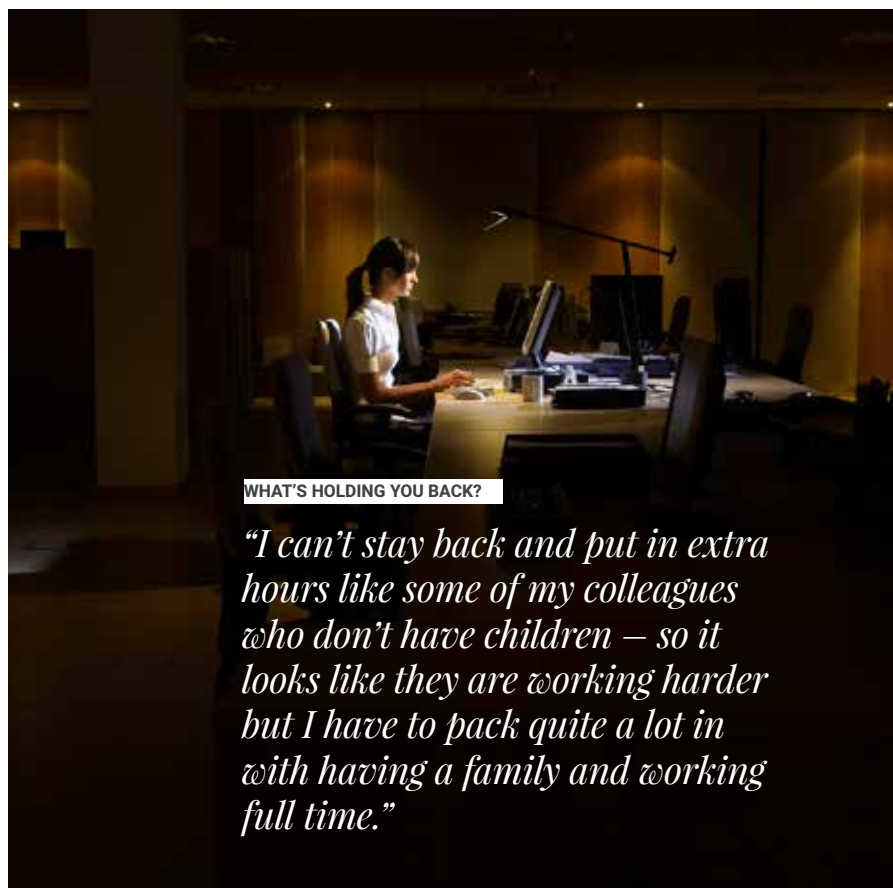
But we found there are a number of underlying factors getting in the way of the key goals indicated by the full cohort of women we surveyed.

The one inhibitor that came up more than anything else for women was confidence, with 51 per cent of respondents ticking this as something that could hinder their ambitions.

Does that mean women in general lack confidence? Not necessarily, and it's telling that almost half (49

per cent) of women did not tick this box. Still, when examined next to other data collected in this research, that figure on confidence may point to other issues going on that are potentially limiting self-confidence, including discrimination and a lack of support. A quarter (27 per cent) said age discrimination could get in the way, while a further 26 per cent said gender discrimination could be an obstacle.

Meanwhile, one in five (20 per cent) of respondents said a lack of employer support could stand in the way of their ambitions, 18 per cent suggested a lack of role models could hurt, while 11 per cent said bad health or a disability could inhibit them.



WHAT'S HOLDING YOU BACK?

“Skills discrimination – employers not recognising transferable skills.”

And, unsurprisingly, a huge number (37 per cent) feel that child caring responsibilities will make achieving their ambitions challenging.

Women also noted a lack of education, family support, finance and government support, as well as the cost of childcare as potential hurdles.

When asked to indicate ‘other’ challenges, a number of clear trends emerged in the short answer responses: bad managers and leadership, the ‘boys club’, bullying, archaic recruitment practices, employers that don’t value different experiences, a lack of part time and flexible work options, solo parenting, disability discrimination, as well as domestic violence and financial abuse.

A lack of time (and energy) also came up repeatedly, with a number of women speaking out about the support and time required for high school aged kids, which is different (and often overlooked) in favour of discussing time restraints for women with young kids.

Distance and location from job centres also came up as a challenge; often connected with time restraints, with some women saying long commutes and distance simply make pursuing some opportunities impossible.



WHAT'S HOLDING YOU BACK?

“Both age and gender discrimination seem to play a part in my technical capabilities being questioned, despite being the most formally educated in my division.”

A photograph of a woman sitting on a bed with a baby. She is holding a tablet and looking at the screen. A laptop is open on the bed next to her. The baby is lying down, partially covered by a blanket.

WHAT COULD HURT FOR **WOMEN WITH KIDS?**

So what key challenges could stand in the way of women who've taken time out of the workforce in the past ten years for

When we asked women who have taken such career breaks about their biggest single expected challenge in reaching their goals, the key words and terms that came up included time, lack of support, confidence, age and responsibilities – as well as finances and balance, and the need to spend more time with kids.

From there, we identified a number of trends in the answers – many of which point to systemic issues in our current system of work.

WHAT'S HOLDING YOU BACK?

“A leadership career takes time and commitment, so do children. It is also about emotional energy, to have a demanding job and still be patient with young children. I worry about my parenting every day.”

Women spoke about bad management and a lack of support at work. They opened up about age discrimination (which some declared starts at 40), solo and single parenting, and a loss of confidence following the exclusion they felt in the workplace after having a child. The cost of childcare – and a lack of rebates available for those requiring nannies – came up, as did the constant push to achieve some kind of balance in life, and manage competing pulls on energy and time, including the patience and emotional energy required for parenting.

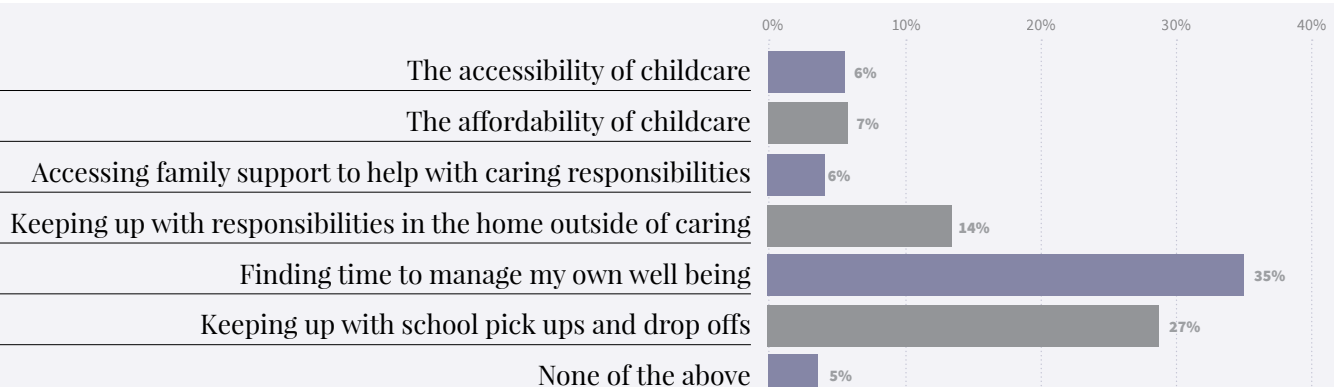
The lack of real career opportunities for those that need to work part time was also mentioned repeatedly.

When asked about their biggest challenge upon returning to work, 35 per cent listed ‘finding time to manage my own wellbeing’ ahead of everything else.

WHAT'S HOLDING YOU BACK?

“Just the sheer exhaustion of running home after cramming a 7 hour work day into 5.5 hours, then starting my second job (the family night shift) for another 5.5 hours.”

Thinking about your priorities outside of work, what was or do you anticipate being, the biggest challenge on your return to work?





CAREER BREAKS & **DISCRIMINATION**

So how do women who've taken career breaks in the past ten years for caring purposes feel about their current career options?

We found that there is some anxiety and concern, especially when it comes to changing careers or jobs, and particularly if they need to work part time or flexibly.

More than half (55 per cent) agreed or strongly agreed with the statement: "I am more ambitious than ever before". Many women at this life stage are also feeling ready to move and change, with 45 per cent declaring they have or are considering leaving the career they had before having children, and half (54 per cent) agreeing that they have or are considering starting a new business since having kids.

But such ambitions are not easy to pursue. More than half of this cohort (54 per cent) said they agreed or strongly agreed with the statement: “I would like to change roles but am concerned about accessing flexible work arrangements”. This may see some women staying put in a role they are unhappy or unsatisfied with.

Almost three in five women at this point in their lives (58 per cent) agreed that they, “feel like my career is on hold due to caring commitments”. Almost half (49 per cent) agreed that they are not sure what they can do to progress their career at this stage in their lives.

Women are still putting off returning to work and taking on additional days due to the cost of childcare, with 28 percent agreeing with this statement.

Still, it was reassuring to see that a good portion of this group (68 per cent) believe they have flexible work conditions that support their caring arrangements.

Discrimination after kids

Discrimination came up repeatedly in this survey from the full cohort of respondents whether they had kids or not, with respondents reporting a wide range of different forms of discrimination experienced.

For this study, we dived deeper into how discrimination is believed to have stood in the way of women who have recently had children.

As we’ve previously learnt from the Human Rights Commission, one in two women report experiencing discrimination either during pregnancy, while on maternity leave or shortly after returning to work. We wanted to delve into just what type of discrimination women believe they have experienced – and if it extends beyond the early



One in two women report experiencing discrimination either during pregnancy, while on maternity leave or shortly after returning to work.

years of parenting, and into the need to work part time or flexibility.

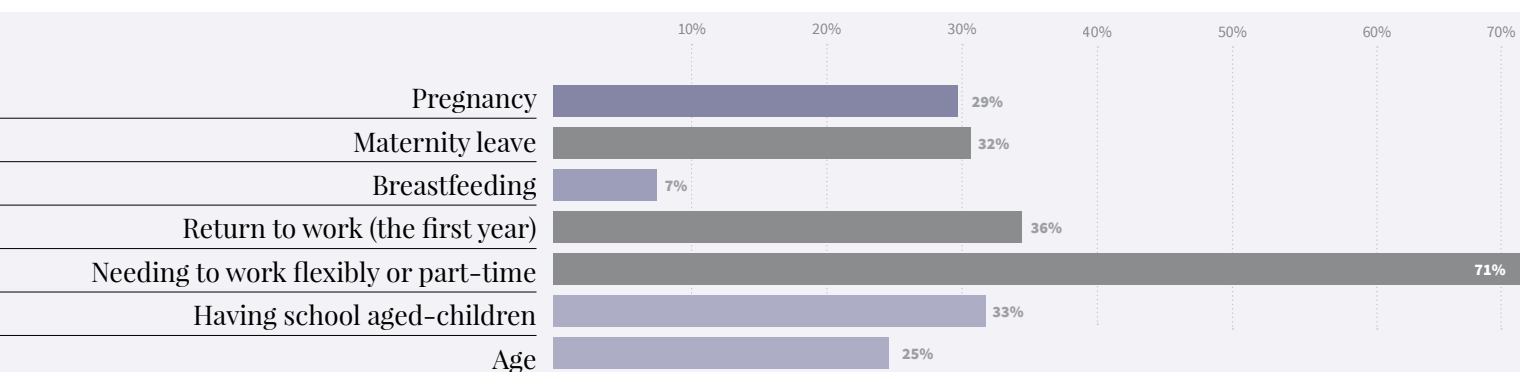
A massive 71 per cent of those respondents who have taken a career break in the past ten years agreed they had at some point felt discriminated against in the workplace due to their need to work part time or flexibly.

Thirty six per cent said they felt they had been discriminated against during the first year of returning to work after having a baby, 32 per cent said it had occurring during maternity leave, 29 per cent during pregnancy, and 33 per cent due to having school-aged children.

A quarter of this group of respondents said they have felt discriminated against due to their age.

All this despite 58 per cent of respondents saying that their current or immediate past employer has family friendly AND gender diversity policies in place.

Do you feel you have ever been discriminated against in the workplace (or when applying for work) due to any of the following:



THE **INCENTIVES** THAT MATTER

Visible female leaders, flexible work

We presented all respondents with a number of employer-incentives to find out just how important each of them had been to their careers, whether they have had children or not.

Flexible work, a diverse workplace culture and visible female leadership all came up at the top of the list of importance, with more than eight in ten respondents listing these as 'important' or 'very important'.

Interestingly, these options came up well ahead of incentives that are often touted by employers as key to their gender diversity initiatives, including leadership training courses (important to 72 per cent of respondents) and mentoring and sponsorship programs (68 per cent). Although these things can also help foster the diverse workplace culture and visible female leadership that respondents consider so important.

Paid parental leave was ticked as 'important' or 'very important' to the careers of 55 per cent of respondents – also a relatively low result, but one that may reflect whether women have had, or hope to have, children.

86% Say **flexible work options** have been 'important' or 'very important' at some point in their careers

55% Say **paid parental leave** has been 'important' or 'very important'

72% Say **leadership training courses** has been 'important' or 'very important'

68% Say **mentoring and sponsorship** programs has been 'important' or 'very important'

86% Say **visible female role models** have been 'important' or 'very important'

87% Say a **diverse workplace culture** has been 'important' or 'very important'

58% Say opportunities for **employer-paid further tertiary education** has been 'important' or 'very important'

SO WHAT CAN **EMPLOYERS** DO?

A comprehensive look at the ambitions of women, and the perceived impediments that may get in the way, presents employers with an excellent opportunity to reconsider workplace policies, incentives and cultural adjustments that can help.

The key things declared important or very important to women's careers in this research include a diverse workplace culture, visible female role models and flexible work options.

Clear pathways for promotion were also found to be essential for women, something that visible female leaders may be able to demonstrate and support.

All of the above came well ahead of sponsorship and mentoring programs, as well as other forms of training programs – and yet these are often what employers use as a key fix for attaining women. While these things were still considered beneficial, it could be cultural fixes that matter more, along with the trickle-down effects that come from having diverse leaders visible to those further down the chain.

These results also show a significant opportunity for employers to support the careers and better advocate for the talents and expertise of part time employees – a segment of the workforce that is largely made up of women. Just like making more diverse leaders visible, there is an opportunity here for employers to showcase and elevate how leaders are doing their roles part time and flexibly.

But above and beyond everything, employers must address all forms of discrimination affecting the hiring, retaining, promoting and support of their employees.

Eight areas employers can get started on

There are numerous strategies employers can use to support the ambitions of women. Here are eight priority areas, based on the findings of this study.

Equal Pay

Given a desire for more pay came up as the number one ambition for women in this survey (as it did in our 2017 research), equal pay seems like an obvious place for employers to start on supporting the ambitions of their female workforce.

We know that an increasing number of employers are now undertaking gender pay audits across their workforces, thanks to data from the Workplace Gender Equality Agency, and more are putting in action plans to address the gaps discovered.

We've also seen some excellent examples in the past year, including from Energy Australia, of employers looking to immediately rectify any gender pay gaps that come up.

Employers large and small should complete comprehensive pay audits across their employee base to identify gaps – and consider strategies for rectifying the problem. They should also consider if women working part time and flexibly are being fairly rewarded for the contributions. Are they able to access bonuses and salary increases? Are assumptions being made about their 'right' to request more pay, due to their status of working part time?



Address ageism

Ageism is happening in Australia, and it's particularly detrimental to the earning capacity of women who may have had to take a number of years out of the workforce to care for children.

Employers must address how ageism is affecting their hiring processes and the opportunities offered to women. They should immediately ensure the skills, expertise and potential of women are

not being discounted due to a lengthy career break, time out of the industry or a desire/need to change careers a few decades after entering the workforce.

In both our 2017 and 2019 reports we heard from countless women in their late forties and fifties who believe ageism could be standing in the way of their ambitions. In some cases, these women have retrained, earned

additional university qualifications and had indicated that they were the most ready they had ever been in their careers to pursue big positions with extensive responsibilities. They have decades of work ahead of them and a desire to go full steam at their careers – and yet they are being overlooked and ignored at the first hurdle, in recruitment. This could be the most underestimated segment of the workforce and employers are missing out.



We heard from countless women in their late forties and fifties who believe ageism could be standing in the way of their ambitions.

Value and support the careers of part time employees

It's one thing to be able to access opportunities for part time work, another altogether to be able to accelerate your career while working part time.

As we heard from our survey respondents over and over again, part time work is perceived to be career limiting. Women working part time are feeling overlooked for promotions and pay rises, and often out of the loop on important strategic decisions. Women feel like they can't progress working part time, and that they are not taken seriously. They also noted having to feel grateful for the opportunity to work part time (despite the fact they are also receiving just part of the wage) and therefore like they can't request additional support and

opportunities.

We cannot underestimate the power of the part time workforce, nor overlook the skills, expertise and potential of women who can't put in a 'full time' week – often due to their own caring responsibilities.

While employers can and should do more to support part time staff – a significant cultural change within organisations needs to occur in order to make this possible. Our survey respondents reported that their employers often pay lip service to part time and flexible work, but then it's certain managers and colleagues who make them feel like their input is less valued. The support needs to start at the top, and filter down to every line manager and well into every team.



The support needs to start at the top, and filter down to every line manager and well into every team.



Eliminate pregnancy discrimination

Pregnancy discrimination is alive and well in Australia, as our survey respondents indicated and as we know from Human Rights Commission data.

We heard from more than a dozen women in our study who said they were made redundant while pregnant or shortly after returning to work. Three women said they were made redundant in the first week that they returned after having a baby. It was also shocking to hear from women who had been directly asked, "Are you keeping the baby" when informing their manager of a pregnancy, as well as numerous other appalling comments.

The results indicate many managers lack a basic understanding on the law, and are ignorant about the value lost if women leave at this point in their careers. Many also appear to lack knowledge on communication and support mechanisms that can help.

Identify other forms of discrimination in recruitment practices and elsewhere

Women reported a number of different forms of discrimination in our survey that they believe have stood, or will stand, in the way of their ambitions. These included discrimination due to disability, ill health, location and appearance -- in addition to ageism, gender, race, sexuality, pregnancy and caring responsibilities.

Employers should help managers and recruiters identify a wide range of biases that could be getting in the way of them attaining and retaining the best talent. Managers must be educated to recognise discrimination, to better understand the benefits of diversity -- and to respect staff differences. Employers must also ensure appropriate avenues for staff to report discrimination.

Raise the importance of diversity and inclusion

It's clear that culturally diverse workplaces are seen as a seriously valuable asset for women in their careers.

Creating a culturally diverse workplace starts at the recruitment process (and could be hindered by the language and images shared in job ads), and then stems into how employees feel valued and treated and what leadership and development opportunities are offered. It also involves ensuring the input, ideas and concerns of all staff members are considered.

There is no single tick-a-box approach to attaining and retaining diversity in the workplace. It's a mindset that must be engrained in all teams and at all levels – one

bad manager or colleague can quickly transform an employee's entire experience of feeling included and valued.

Team leaders and managers have a huge role to play in ensuring all staff feel included and able to voice their opinions, ideas and concerns – no matter what their gender, their cultural background, age, working status or other identifying features. Employers should consider a list of tactics that can be given to team leaders to empower them to promote inclusion: such as the option to set rules on meetings (like making them 'interruption free' and only scheduled during certain times), and ideas for better celebrating the success of individuals.

Elevate and spotlight the careers and work of a diverse range of staff

Story-telling is a powerful option for employers that are looking to raise the profiles of their staff members.

This can occur both internally and externally

Employers that work with the media should look to put a range of different employees forward when it comes to responding to enquiries from journalists, promoting staff in their PR activities and also when nominating for awards or putting talent forward for events.

Internally, employers should use their communication channels (including company newsletters and blog pages) to profile the work and careers of a wide range of staff. This gives those being profiled an immediate sense of feeling included and valued, and those reading such profiles seeing a wider range of staff elevated and celebrated (rather than just the CEO or senior leadership team).

End the assumptions

Finally, employers must take steps to end assumptions being made by colleagues, managers and leaders about staff in their organisations.

These can be the assumptions that lead to various forms of discrimination. They can be flippant comments, or decisions made about staff that never include their input, that ultimately hinder or even destroy opportunities for employees.

Employers can equip managers with strategies that help eliminate these assumptions. First up, by applying

a list of questions such managers can ask themselves to test their own biases, and to better consider a wider pool of candidates when assigning opportunities and projects to staff – or considering new roles and promotions.

Other strategies for staff leaders could be to have them set a regular pattern of one-on-ones with team members that enable them to ask questions, get a better understanding of their ambitions and determine how they feel about their current work patterns.

ABOUT THIS RESEARCH

This research was undertaken by the team at Women's Agenda, published by the independent and 100% female-owned Agenda Media. The research received support from AGSM, part of the University of NSW Business School.

We received 1813 responses during late December 2018 and January 2019 through our five-minute online survey involving a mix of multiple choice and long-answer questions. We followed up with a number of participants who indicated they were happy to share more on their experiences. We plan on further follow-ups with survey respondents throughout 2019. The data was collated at the beginning of February.

We conducted a similar version of this survey in December 2016/January 2017, but adjusted some questions and included some additional themes in order to better reflect the feedback we received to the initial research and immediate concerns we wanted to address in 2019. We've received additional feedback in 2019 that will again be applied to future iterations of this study, and hope to better explore further issues that came up in this study in later research.