



The Young Women and Girls' *Aspiration* Report *

* A Report on the Challenges They Face,
What They Need, Why Representation Matters,
and What We Can Do About It

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A MESSAGE FROM THE PRESIDENT & CEO

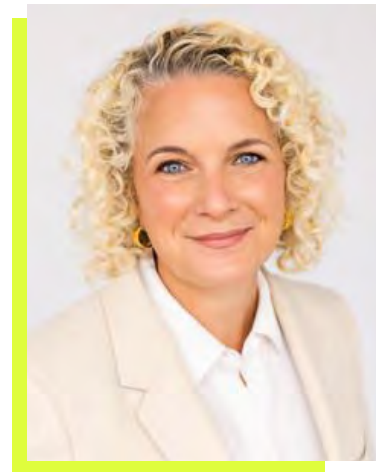
The National Women's History Museum believes that when more women hold decision-making roles across industries, we harness the full strength, leadership, and creativity of all people across the U.S.—essential to tackling today's and tomorrow's challenges. Increased representation leads to better decisions for everyone and drives progress toward closing the gender parity gap.

Our role is to share women's history because when their stories and achievements are visible, more women and girls can see themselves as leaders, innovators, and changemakers. And we believe fostering that vision can translate into action that will drive an increase in representation.

Sadly, though, we remain a long way—over a century away—from gender parity and equal representation. And worse, most Americans (54%) mistakenly believe we've already achieved it.

That's why we launched *She Is Not a Footnote*™, a cause campaign to highlight the urgency of women's underrepresentation and ensure their voices, contributions, and leadership are recognized. As the campaign's first initiative, this report shares insights from young women across the country on the challenges they face in education, the workforce, healthcare, and politics—the very sectors shaping our future. And just as importantly, it shares their ideas for driving meaningful change and expanding opportunities for the next generation.

What we found is urgent. Young women face systemic barriers, wage gaps, and healthcare inequities—challenges that continue to limit their representation. Yet, they remain determined to succeed and are calling for action, not just encouragement. Their voices make one thing clear: Change cannot wait.



With nearly 22 million girls and young women in the U.S. today, their success is America's success. This report isn't just about awareness—it's a blueprint for action. Employers, educators, policymakers, and leaders across industries all have a role to play in removing barriers and building a more inclusive future.

We hope you will use this data to spark conversations, challenge assumptions, and drive meaningful change. Share it with those around you—your colleagues, communities, and networks—to ensure that the needs and aspirations of young women and girls remain at the center of our collective efforts. Our future depends on the actions we take today, including ensuring we have the very best talent at the table and bringing fresh ideas and leadership to every sector.

Join me in supporting this cause and let's create a future where every girl and young woman has the opportunity to lead and succeed.

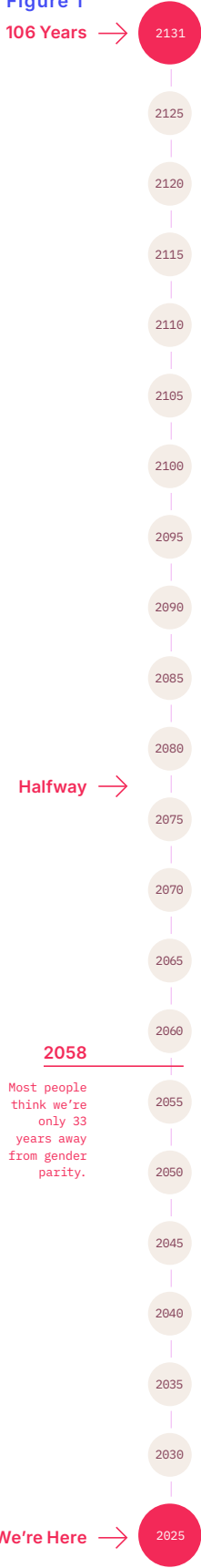
Visit [SHEISNOTAFOOTNOTE.ORG](https://sheisnotafootnote.org) to learn more.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'F. Irwin'.

Frédérique Irwin
President & CEO
National Women's History Museum

Figure 1

106 Years →



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Girls and young women are told they can be anything. But when they look at the workforce, education, government, and healthcare system, they see a world where women are still the exception—not the norm. Underrepresentation isn't a coincidence. It's a system failure.

According to the World Economic Forum (WEF), the U.S. is still **106 years away** ^{FIG. 1} from parity across economic participation, educational attainment, health and survival, and political empowerment.

Yet, most young people don't even realize how dire it is:¹

67% of Gen Z men believe that women already have equality in the U.S., and 47% of Gen Z women agree.

While a mere 9% of Gen Z men believe women will never achieve equality, a sizable 34% of Gen Z women share this belief.

And for those who believe the truth is somewhere in between? They estimate we're 33 years from gender parity—nowhere close to the WEF's staggering 106-year estimate.

The reality? Women are still fighting for every inch of progress. And while they see the challenges ahead, they aren't backing down. Instead, they have bold ideas on how to rise above them and demand the changes that will shape their futures.

This report examines the current state of gender disparities and the voices of more than 1,100 young women (ages 13–27), sharing what they believe would improve representation and revealing just how deep the gaps go—and just how fed up they are. It also offers solutions to and areas of focus for the biggest challenges these young women identified.

2058
 Most people think we're only 33 years away from gender parity.

We're Here →

ECONOMIC PARTICIPATION

We'll work *hard*,
but *not* for less.

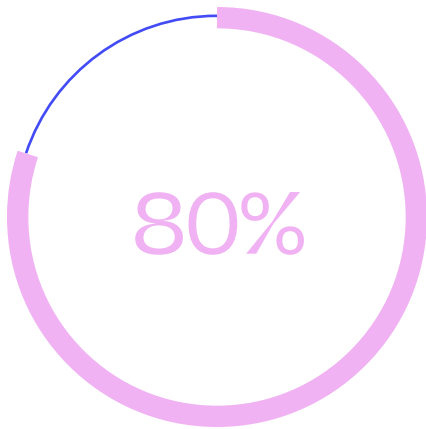


Figure 2

Young women see a workforce where they are expected to work just as hard as men but are rewarded far less. 89% believe men hold most of the advantages, and they aren't imagining it. Here's what else they think:

More than 80% say women face more barriers to advancement than men. [FIG. 2](#)

47% say financial independence is most important when they imagine their future.

Less than half (44%) believe they have the same access to career opportunities as men.

The message young women are getting? Talent and hard work aren't enough. The system is still stacked against them.

They want: Equal pay policies, better support for working mothers, and more representation in leadership.



EDUCATIONAL ATTAINMENT

More *degrees*, same *barriers*.

Women are outpacing men in college degrees, but they aren't getting the same return on investment. A woman with a bachelor's degree still earns about the same as a man with an associate degree.

Women hold two-thirds of the nation's student loan debt.

Only **28%** of girls and young women in our survey believe girls and women get the same financial support for school as boys and young men.

63% say financial barriers limit their education options.

Their top demands? A return on their educational investment, better access to financial aid, and stronger mentorship opportunities.

HEALTH & SURVIVAL

Women's health is an *economic issue*.

Our healthcare system doesn't just fail women—it actively works against them. Young women know it:

77% are worried about healthcare coverage for women. [FIG. 3](#)

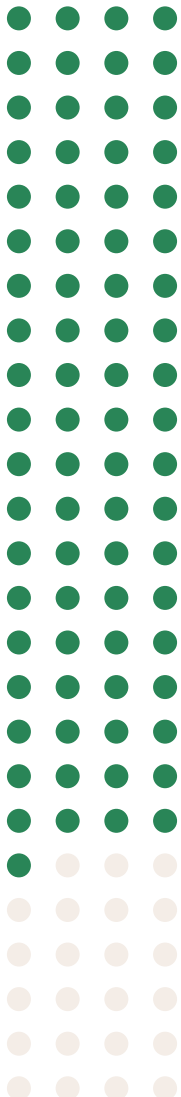
76% feel social pressures impact their mental health and well-being.

Nearly half (**47%**) have struggled with limited mental health resources.

24% of women report feeling dismissed or ignored by healthcare providers.

And when it comes to reproductive healthcare? **36%** say barriers to things like contraception, abortion, and comprehensive education are the biggest system-related healthcare problems young women face today.

Figure 3



But healthcare isn't just about wellness—it's about economic survival. Without access to quality, affordable healthcare, young women struggle to stay in school, keep their jobs, and build financial security. When reproductive rights are restricted, women are forced to make career and education decisions based on access to care, not ambition. Mental health challenges and provider bias further limit opportunities, forcing women to fight for both their health and their livelihoods.

Young women are clear: They want better healthcare policies, mental health resources embedded in schools and workplaces, and stronger protections for reproductive rights.

They want a system that values their health—not one that makes them fight for it.

POLITICAL EMPOWERMENT

It's time to *break the marble ceiling*.

Women make up more than half the population—but are just 28% of Congress and 24% of U.S. governors.

At this rate, it will take nearly a century to reach equal representation in government.

The next generation is ready to change that:

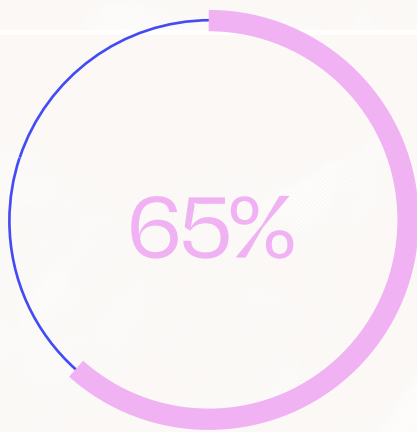


Figure 4

60% feel confident in their ability to lead or advocate for change.

65% want to be more involved in politics or social change. FIG. 4

Only one-third believe women today have as much power as men to create change.

But let's be clear—this isn't just about individual ambition. The system makes it harder for women to lead.

Their top priorities? More women in leadership, better access to political mentorship, and an end to outdated gender biases in elections.

Bottom Line?

Our future thrives with women—it's time to get to work.

It all starts with more representation. When women are equitably represented in decision-making roles across all industries, we harness the full spectrum of talent, leadership, and creativity our nation offers to tackle today's and tomorrow's challenges. That increased representation also leads to better decisions for everyone and progress toward closing the gender parity gap.

As one young woman put it best: "One day, I want to look at Congress, board-rooms, and history books and not have to count the women—because there are just as many as men." The next generation isn't waiting for change; they're demanding action:

Pay them what they're worth.

Level the playing field for educational funding.

Prioritize their healthcare.

Elect them to lead.

The representation gap is real—and it's time to close it. Let's stop debating whether women belong at the table and start ensuring they have a seat. To learn more or make a donation to inspire and empower the next generation of women, visit ShelsNotAFootnote.org.

Economic Participation

We'll work *hard* but *not* for less.

Women are not a “special interest group” in the economy—they are the largest economic driver. And yet, our society is actively holding them back. Despite making up nearly half the labor force, women in the U.S. continue to be underpaid, undervalued, and underrepresented in leadership positions.

The World Economic Forum (WEF) reports North America has closed 75% of the economic gender gap.² Sounds like progress, right? Think again. The 2023 WEF report estimated it would take 95 years³ to reach full gender parity—but in 2024, that number jumped to 106 years.⁴ Instead of moving forward, women are falling behind.

Meanwhile, girls and young women stare at a future where they know they'll have to work twice as hard for half the reward. Our survey of more than 1,100 young women (ages 13–27) found that:

89% believe men hold most of the advantages.⁵

47% say financial independence is one of their top priorities, and 43% say it is having a successful career.⁶

Less than half (44%) believe they have the same access to career opportunities as men.⁷

More than 80% say women face more barriers to advancement than men.⁸

Let's be clear: This isn't a pipeline problem—it's a representation problem. Women graduate at higher rates than men, yet they remain overlooked, underestimated, and missing from leadership where decisions are made. When more women are in leadership, more doors open, more barriers break, and workplaces become more equitable. That's not just good for women—it strengthens the workforce, drives innovation, and keeps more women advancing instead of dropping out.

where we stand—and why it's not enough

Pay Gap? Still Here.

Women in the U.S. earn 82 cents for every dollar a man earns. If you're a Black woman, that drops to 65 cents, and for Latinas, it's 58 cents.⁹

Leadership? Still a Boys' Club.

Women make up just 11% of Fortune 500 CEOs and less than 32% of senior leadership roles.¹⁰ For every 100 men promoted, only 81 women move up.¹¹

Economic Influence? Limited.

Women control 85% of consumer spending,¹² but their representation in financial decision-making is nowhere near that power.

what girls and young women want

Our nation-wide survey asked young women what would actually help them succeed. Their top three responses:¹³

Equal Pay Policies

Because they will work hard, but not for less.

Better Support for Working Mothers

Because childcare is still treated as a woman's problem, not an economic one.

More Representation of Women In Diverse Fields

Because representation in leadership isn't just symbolic, it gives women a voice and changes decision-making.

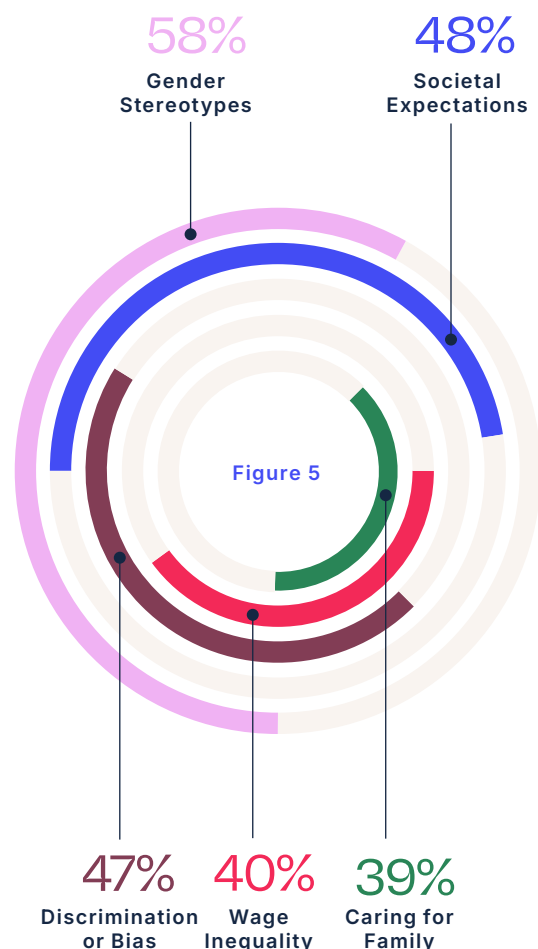
They also overwhelmingly agreed that:

Progress has been made (67%).¹⁴

They feel confident in their abilities (nearly 80%), but confidence doesn't override systemic barriers.¹⁵

Their most pressing workplace challenges ^{FIG. 5} include:¹⁶

- Gender stereotypes and underrepresentation (58%)
- Societal expectations and pressure to conform (48%)
- Discrimination or bias in hiring and promotions (47%)
- Wage inequality and lack of transparency (40%)
- Caring for children, parents, or other family members (39%)



“

We need to start the cycle by normalizing women in leadership roles. We also need to accommodate for any areas that cause a gender gap. No woman should be punished in the workplace for starting a family. We need to have more evenly shared responsibilities that don't imply a woman should be getting a pay cut to care for a child.

Survey Respondent

why it matters

The economic cost of gender disparities in the U.S. is staggering. In 2022 alone, working women lost more than \$1.6 trillion due to the gender wage gap—6.3% of the U.S. GDP.¹² This isn't just a "women's issue"—it's a challenge to our nation's strength. If our society keeps sidelining half the workforce, we're settling for less—slower growth, weaker businesses, and wasted potential. If the goal is prosperity, this isn't the way to get there.

The U.S. doesn't have a century to wait. Challenges and opportunities are everywhere. And young women and girls are ready now.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Less talk, more action.

Companies and Policymakers

Pay equity policies that match earnings to qualifications, not gender.

Companies and Industry Leaders

Redefining workplace culture to support women's success. This means ensuring career growth opportunities and making work environments more inclusive at every level.

The question isn't whether women can succeed—it's whether our country will stop holding them back.

Educational Attainment

More *degrees*, same *barriers*.

Women have been given a promise that doesn't always hold up: Work hard, get good grades, earn your degree, and the world will reward you. But the system wasn't built for them to win. Women dominate college campuses, yet they are still shut out of the highest-paying jobs, burdened with more student debt, and paid less than their male counterparts—no matter how many diplomas they stack up.

Figure 6

Median Earnings
of Women with a
Bachelor's Degree

\$57.5K

vs.

\$54.5K

Median Earnings of
Men with Some College
or Associate Degree

The numbers don't lie: Women earn 52% of bachelor's degrees, 57% of master's degrees, and 46% of doctoral degrees.¹⁸ And yet, a woman with a bachelor's degree still earns about the same as a man with an associate degree. Women with a bachelor's have median earnings of \$57.5K relative to men with some college or an associate degree who have median earnings of \$54.5K. [FIG. 6 19](#)
The message? You can be twice as qualified and still make less.

Meanwhile, young women look at their futures and realize the game is rigged. Our survey found that:

Less than half (42%) of young women and girls believe they are as prepared for careers of the future as men and boys.²⁰

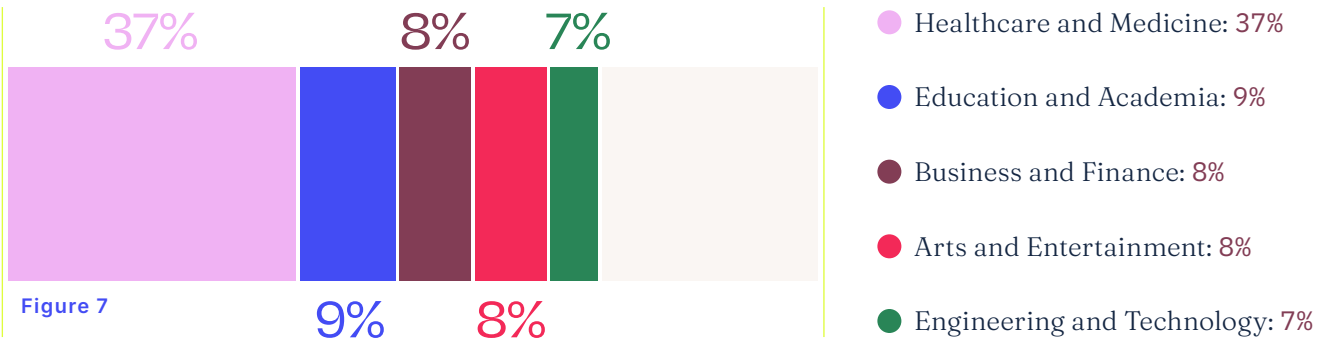
63% say financial barriers limit their educational options, forcing them to make tough choices about their education and career paths. These barriers²¹ disproportionately shape their career choices and economic mobility.

More than 30% believe gender stereotypes have impacted their education, potentially playing a role in how seriously their academic achievements are taken.²²

Only 28% believe girls and young women get the same financial support for school as boys and young men.²³

where we stand—and why it's not enough

The fields young women pursue tell a revealing story. When asked about their areas of study or existing careers [FIG. 7](#), the top five were:²⁴



On the surface, this suggests progress—women are increasingly interested in traditionally male-dominated fields. However, a deeper look exposes a troubling trend: The most common choice, healthcare and medicine (37%), is still primarily confined to roles that require less education and pay less. Only 18% of those pursuing healthcare were on the path to becoming physicians or surgeons—the rest were funneled into lower-paid caregiving roles that have long been seen as “women’s work.” The glass ceiling isn’t just in the boardroom, it starts in the classroom.

Women are getting the degrees—but still getting shortchanged. Women with bachelor’s degrees earn only 70% of what their male counterparts make. Even women with graduate degrees make 28% less than men with the same qualifications.²⁵

The higher the degree, the wider the gap. In fields like business and STEM, women make up nearly half of degree holders but remain underrepresented in leadership and high-paying roles.²⁶

Women are drowning in student debt while waiting for the payoff that never comes. Women hold nearly two-thirds of the \$1.8 trillion student loan debt in the U.S.,²⁷ making it harder to build wealth, buy homes, and invest in their futures.



“

Showcase women in fields that are blue-collar, making them understand that jobs like construction or engineering can be an opportunity and a norm for women.

Survey Respondent

what young women want

Young women aren't just working for degrees—they're fighting for a fair shot at success. Here's what they tell us they want to help them get a fair shot so their education opens doors, not closes them:

BETTER ACCESS TO FINANCIAL AID

Education shouldn't be a lifelong financial prison.

STRONGER MENTORSHIP & SPONSORSHIP OPPORTUNITIES

Career attainment isn't just about degrees; it's about expanding expertise through meaningful learning connections.

A SAFER, MORE INCLUSIVE SCHOOL ENVIRONMENT

Harassment, sexism, and discrimination must be actively prevented to ensure all students can thrive.

GREATER EXPOSURE TO DIVERSE CAREERS & LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT

Young women need opportunities to explore nontraditional fields, gain workforce experience, and build leadership skills.

why it matters

The U.S. economy is bleeding talent by failing to translate women's education into economic power. What's the point of paying for and earning degrees if they don't translate into financial freedom? Closing the wage gap among degree holders could add billions to the economy, fuel innovation, and strengthen businesses across industries.

We teach girls that education is the key to success. It's time to stop dangling the key and start opening the door.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Fewer promises— *more solutions.*

Policymakers and Educators

Scholarships and financial aid reform—so debt doesn't outweigh degrees.

Companies and Industry Leaders

Recruitment and retention programs for women in high-paying, male-dominated fields—because talent should dictate opportunity, not outdated norms.

The question isn't whether women will complete their education. The question is: Why is our society still making women fight to turn their hard-earned degrees into real opportunities?

Health & Survival

Women's health is an *economic* issue.

Women's health isn't just a personal concern—it's economic, political, and societal. Yet, the healthcare system continues to treat women's healthcare as an afterthought. Despite medical advancements, women face higher healthcare costs, delayed diagnoses, and inadequate research that ignores their unique needs. When healthcare fails women, it weakens the entire economy.

Figure 8

where we stand—and why it's not enough

Out-of-Pocket
Healthcare Costs
for Women

\$1,344

VS.

\$1,035

Out-of-Pocket
Healthcare Costs
for Men

The gender health gap is real. Women are more likely to experience misdiagnoses, longer wait times for pain treatment, and dismissals of their symptoms. Conditions like endometriosis, autoimmune disorders, and heart disease are routinely underdiagnosed or mismanaged. **26%** of women report feeling dismissed or ignored by healthcare providers,²⁸ compared to **18%** of men.

For women 18–34 with chronic health conditions, getting care isn't just a battle—it's a trial. Nearly half (**49%**) felt they had to prove their symptoms were real, while **38%** said doctors flat-out ignored or dismissed them.²⁹

Mental health must be prioritized. **37%** of women report being diagnosed with depression, compared to **20%** of men. Teenage girls are particularly vulnerable, with **29%** experiencing major depressive episodes—more than double the rate for teenage boys.³⁰

Women pay more for healthcare. They spend **30%** more in out-of-pocket healthcare costs than men (\$1,344 vs. \$1,035). **FIG. 8 31**

what young women want

Young women aren't just concerned about healthcare—they're calling out a system that isn't built for them. A quarter (25%) of young women say health and well-being are where gender inequality hits hardest.³² While 56% report having access to the care they need,³³ only 28% believe women receive the same quality of treatment as men.³⁴

The numbers don't lie:

77% are worried about healthcare coverage for women

76% feel social pressures impact their mental health and well-being

Nearly half (47%) have struggled with limited mental health resources

Add to that 46% who have personally experienced discrimination or bias in healthcare,³⁵ only 33% believe girls and women are as healthy as boys and men in their community,³⁶ and only 28% think women in their community receive the same quality of healthcare as men.³⁷ The system isn't just failing women. It's actively working against them.³⁸

Our survey also asked young women what they see as today's biggest systemic healthcare problem. Their top responses:³⁹

Barriers to Reproductive Healthcare

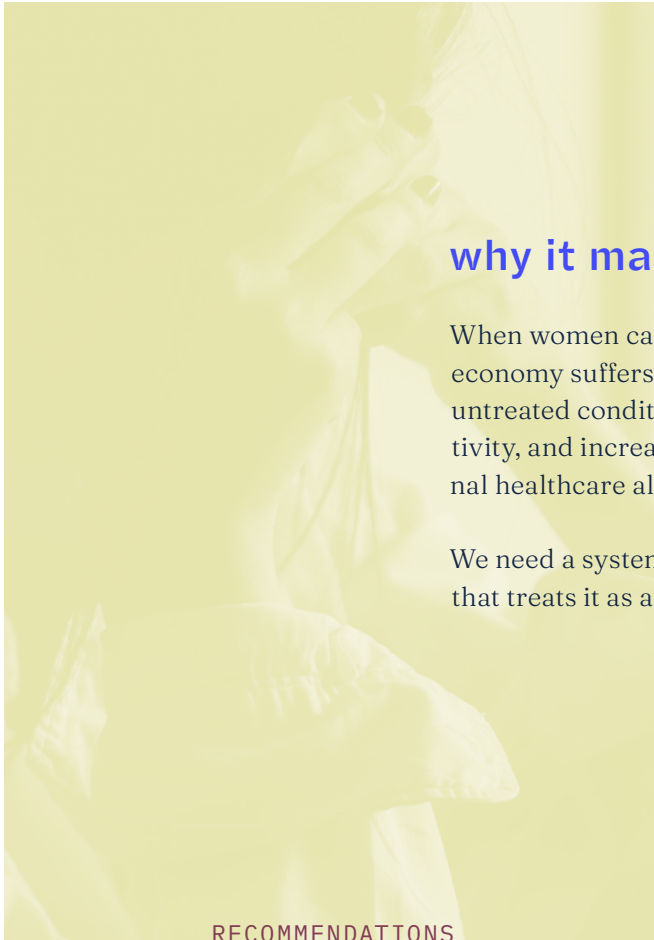
36% of young women identified obstacles to accessing services such as contraception, abortion, and comprehensive education as a major healthcare challenge. These barriers don't just limit choices—they create long-term health risks, economic instability, and reinforce systemic inequities in care.

Discrimination or Bias in Healthcare

24% of young women reported that bias in healthcare, including dismissed symptoms, ignored pain, and brushed-aside concerns, is a significant problem, leading to misdiagnoses, delayed treatment, and worse health outcomes—proving that bias in healthcare isn't just frustrating, it's dangerous.

Access to Affordable Healthcare

20% of young women say healthcare costs are a critical barrier to necessary care. Rising insurance premiums, out-of-pocket expenses, and limited coverage options leave them without vital services. For many, affordability isn't just a challenge—it's a barrier to determining whether they get treatment.



why it matters

When women can't access quality healthcare, the entire economy suffers. Missed diagnoses, chronic pain, and untreated conditions lead to lost wages, lower productivity, and increased financial strain. Inadequate maternal healthcare alone costs the U.S. billions every year.⁴⁰

We need a system that values women's health—not one that treats it as an afterthought.

Stop overlooking women's health.

Policymakers and Insurers

Eliminate gender-based pricing gaps—because women shouldn't have to pay more for the same care.

Schools, Employers and Community Leaders

Make mental health resources readily available and accessible—embed support in schools and communities so women can get help before a crisis hits.

The question isn't if women deserve better healthcare. The question is: When will our society stop making women fight for it?

Political Empowerment

It's time to *break* the marble ceiling.

Women may be more than half the population, but they still fight for an equal seat at the table. Despite historic milestones, true political parity remains out of reach. Women are underrepresented in every level of government, outspent in elections, and too often shut out of the decision-making rooms where policies that shape their lives are made.

where we stand—and why it's not enough

Women make up just 28% of Congress—far from proportional representation.⁴¹

125 (29%) of 435 members of the U.S. House of Representatives are women.

26 (26%) of 100 members of the U.S. Senate are women.

Only 12 out of 50 (24%) U.S. governors are women.

Women of color face even greater barriers—only 60 currently serve in Congress:

9 Asian American/Pacific Islander

29 Black

19 Latina

2 Middle Eastern/Northern African

1 Native American/Alaska Native/
Native Hawaiian

Money in politics remains a major hurdle. Women candidates raise on average 29% less than their male counterparts⁴²—and elections are only getting more expensive.

what young women want

Young women are ready to lead—but they know the system is stacked against them. When asked about their role in political empowerment:⁴³

60% feel confident in their ability to lead or advocate for change.

65% are interested in becoming more involved in politics or social change.

Yet, 82% say women are not equally represented in government and leadership roles.

Only one-third (32%) believe women today have as much power to create change as men.

While 61% of young women expressed interest in taking on a bigger role in politics, only 5% shared that they intended to work in or already work in government or public service.

When asked what would most empower them to take on a bigger role in politics or civic engagement, their top responses were:⁴⁴

SEEING MORE WOMEN IN LEADERSHIP ROLES

Because representation shapes reality. (29%)

MORE OPPORTUNITIES TO PARTICIPATE IN COMMUNITY ADVOCACY

Because political engagement starts locally. (19%)

ACCESS TO LEADERSHIP TRAINING AND MENTORSHIP

Because learning to lead should never be a privilege. (11%)

CIVIC EDUCATION IN SCHOOLS

Because understanding the system is the first step in changing it. (11%)



“

Encourage more [young women and girls] about the idea that women can and should be in politics.

Survey Respondent

Sadly, only **3%** said they had what they need to empower them, and **11%** said they weren't interested in taking on a bigger role in politics or civic engagement. If women don't step up, others will make decisions for them. That's not just a missed opportunity, it's a power gap that keeps the status quo firmly in place.

Young women overwhelmingly look to leaders from their own lifetime for inspiration—proof that history has sidelined too many of the women who paved the way. How can the next generation follow in their footsteps if we don't know their names?

When asked what it would take to see more women in leadership, young women made it clear: This isn't just about ambition—it's about dismantling the barriers that keep them out.

Individual

Women need the same access and support as men to run, lead, and shape policy.

Community

Leadership shouldn't be a closed-door club. Women need real mentorship, networking, and leadership training opportunities, not empty gestures.

Cultural

It's time to shatter outdated gender norms, call out misogyny, and demand better representation of women in power. How women are portrayed in media influences how they are perceived as leaders.

Systemic

From equal pay laws to campaign finance reform, policies need to stop penalizing women for seeking the same opportunities as men.

**Only 3%
of survey
respondents
said they
had what
they need to
empower them.**

why it matters

When women aren't equally represented in politics, the consequences are real. Healthcare, education, and economic opportunity policies are decided without the voices of those most impacted. Women bring different perspectives to governance, prioritizing issues like paid family leave, healthcare access, and education reform—yet they remain a minority in the rooms where these decisions happen.

Parity isn't just about fairness—it's about building a democracy that reflects the people it serves.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Representation can't *wait*.

Donors, Political Parties, and Advocacy Groups

Increase funding and resources for women candidates—running for office shouldn't be just for the privileged.

Policymakers, Political Organizations, and Leadership Programs

Expand mentorship and leadership programs for women in politics—support networks create stronger candidates and stronger leaders.

Media Outlets, Journalists, and Political Analysts

Challenge systemic biases in coverage and public perception—outdated gender norms shouldn't define electability.

The question isn't if women belong in leadership. The question is: Why is the U.S. still treating women like outsiders in their own democracy?

The Urgency of Now

Representation *can't wait.*

“No matter what issue you care about—economic growth, innovation, healthcare, education, or national security—if half the population is sidelined, we are setting ourselves up for failure. The challenges of today and tomorrow demand all of the talent, leadership, and creativity we have. Yet, women remain underrepresented in every arena that shapes our future. This isn't just a women's issue—it's a national issue.”

Frédérique Irwin

The U.S. is still 106 years away from gender parity, yet too many people believe the fight is already over. While 67% of Gen Z men think women already have equality in the U.S., the lived reality of young women tells a different story. A country that only taps into half its talent, half its leadership, and half its problem solvers is choosing to be weaker. If we want to build a stronger, more competitive, and more innovative nation, we need all voices at the table—starting now.

The cost of underrepresentation.

In the Workforce

Women are still paid less than men, make up only **11%** of Fortune 500 CEOs, and face greater barriers to leadership. **89%** of young women believe men hold most of the advantages in the workforce.

In Education

Women are earning more degrees than ever, yet student loan debt, financial barriers, and career pipeline inequities hold them back from achieving true career advancement and economic mobility.

In Healthcare

37% of young women report barriers to reproductive healthcare, **47%** struggle with mental health resources, and **46%** say they have been impacted by discrimination or bias in healthcare. Without accessible, affordable healthcare, young women are forced to make career and education decisions based on survival, not ambition.

In Politics

Women make up more than half the population but hold only **28%** of seats in Congress. At this rate, it will take nearly a century to achieve equal representation in government. Young women want to lead, but they see a system rigged against them.

A future that *reflects* everyone.

You know what's amazing? Young women aren't discouraged—they're optimistic. They know that representation isn't just about fairness—it's about power, policy, and progress.

But they can't do it alone. Structural barriers must be dismantled, policies must change, and society must stop treating equality like an eventual inevitability rather than an urgent necessity.

The time to act is *now*.

Pay women what they're worth.

No more wage gaps. No more lost opportunities.

Fund their education.

Ensure young women have the financial support they need to succeed.

Prioritize their healthcare.

A system that dismisses women's health is a system that must be reformed.

Elect and support women leaders.

Political representation can't wait another hundred years.

The National Women's History Museum refuses to let women be a footnote in history—they ARE a part of the story. Through our new campaign, *She is Not a Footnote**, we highlight the urgency of underrepresentation. This campaign isn't just about awareness—it's a call to action, encouraging all those who advocate for and are in support of women and girls to come together, unified behind this message.

The campaign also ensures that women's contributions are recognized, amplified, and woven into our nation's history and future narrative. It ensures that everyone sees the potential of girls and young women so that they take their rightful place in shaping our future. Through research, history education, and storytelling, we are pushing for a world where young women don't have to fight twice as hard to get half as much. As one young woman told us, "One day, we won't need Women's History Month—because women's achievements will be woven into every story we tell."

If you're fired up about this cause, now is the time to take action.

Visit ShelsNotAFootnote.org to learn more and shape a future where every girl and young woman's story is seen, heard, and celebrated.

EDITOR'S NOTES AND METHODOLOGY

Understanding the *data* in this report.

Data Sources and Methodology

This report brings together expertise from three organizations: The National Women's History Museum, which leads the initiative; the Center for the Advancement of Women at Mount Saint Mary's University Los Angeles, which provided key data insights primarily sourced from the U.S. Census Bureau's American Community Survey (ACS) 2023; and DoSomething Strategic, which conducted a nationwide survey of young women ages 13–27 between December 2024 and January 2025 to capture their perspectives on gender equity. This collaboration ensures a data-driven, youth-informed analysis of gender disparities and aspirations.

Clarity and Accessibility

This report rounds most figures to whole numbers and does not include margins of error. Readers should exercise caution when comparing numbers that are close in value. The original sources cited provide specific margins of error.

Survey Limitations

Survey-based data reflect the accuracy of respondents' self-reported answers. Many surveys ask detailed or knowledge-based questions, and responses can vary based on individuals' interpretations, experiences, and understanding. While we assume respondents answer truthfully, differences in perception and knowledge should be considered when analyzing results.

Refer to the Sources

For full transparency, the endnotes provide citations and direct links to the original data sources. Readers seeking more details on methodology, error margins, or specific datasets are encouraged to consult these references.

DoSomething Strategic Survey Methodology

The Young Women and Girls' Aspiration Report was conducted as a collaborative initiative between the National Women's History Museum and DoSomething Strategic. Drawing inspiration from the World Economic Forum's Global Gender Gap Index, the survey aimed to evaluate gender equity from the perspectives of young women across the United States. The survey comprised a series of Likert-scale, multiple choice, and open-ended questions to capture a broad spectrum of experiences and perceptions.

Sample and Procedure

The survey targeted young women, ages 13–27, and was completed by 1,546 respondents from December 2024 to January 2025. It was distributed via email and SMS to DoSomething membership and NWHM email lists, and posted on social media platforms to maximize outreach. Participants were offered a chance to win a \$50 gift card as an incentive to increase response rates. After screening for eligibility (age and U.S. residency) and

removing duplicate or untrustworthy responses, 1,127 participants were included in the final dataset for analysis. The final sample consisted of **21%** participants aged 13–17, **50%** aged 18–21, and **29%** aged 22–27. Racial composition was **47%** White, **18%** Black, **18%** Hispanic, **7%** Asian, and **7%** identifying as another race. Gender identification was **95%** women and **4%** nonbinary, with **16%** from rural and **84%** from suburban or urban areas.

Data Analysis

Jamovi version 2.3.28.0 was used to analyze quantitative data. Descriptive statistics were used to understand young women's perceptions of the state of gender equity in education, the workplace, healthcare, and political empowerment. Open-ended survey responses were categorized into distinct professional career categories using MotherDuck OpenAI Integration to gain a deeper understanding of the career aspirations and current roles of young women. This initial framework was then manually reviewed to ensure accuracy and proper classification. Qualitative responses were also coded and analyzed to identify common themes and narratives related to aspirations, perceived barriers, and solutions. Additionally, other open-ended questions featured as quotes in the report were manually reviewed.

Recruitment

The survey sample size encompasses a diverse range of participants in terms of age, race/ethnicity, and geographic distribution. This sample was primarily sourced from outreach conducted to DoSomething members and the National Women's History Museum's network through email, social media, and SMS outreach. This may reflect individuals who tend to be more actively engaged in civic and social justice issues. Additionally, the exclusion of young women without internet access may limit the generalizability of these findings. These limitations should be taken into account when interpreting the results.

REPORT CREDITS

About Us

National Women's History Museum

WomensHistory.org

The National Women's History Museum is an innovative museum dedicated to uncovering, interpreting, and celebrating women's diverse contributions to society. Our work serves to inspire both current and future generations to take action to increase representation and inclusivity of women, and in doing so, drive tangible value for all.

The National Women's History Museum fills in major omissions of women in history books and K-12 education, providing scholarly content and educational programming for teachers, students, and parents. We reach more than five million visitors each year through our online content and education programming and, in March 2023, mounted our first physical exhibit at the Martin Luther King Jr. Memorial Library in downtown Washington, DC, *We Who Believe in Freedom: Black Feminist DC*. The Museum is a non-partisan, nonprofit 501(c)3.

*she is not a footnote**

ShelsNotAFootnote.org

The National Women's History Museum is committed to addressing the underrepresentation of women—a critical social issue that many overlook. While 54% of Americans believe we have achieved gender equity, the reality is stark: The United States is still 106 years away from gender parity, according to the World Economic Forum.

Women's invisibility in history is directly tied to their lack of representation in key areas of society—from political leadership to economic participation and STEM fields. We plan to change that by bringing women's stories to the forefront and inspiring systemic progress.

Launching in March 2025, *She Is Not a Footnote** is a bold, collaborative campaign designed to close the gap in how women are represented in history and empower the next generation of leaders. Together with our partners, we will ignite the potential, power, and future of girls and young women across the nation.

Authors

Frédérique Irwin

Frédérique Irwin is the president and CEO of the National Women's History Museum, bringing over 25 years of leadership in strategic management, nonprofit and commercial operations, and social impact. Before joining the Museum, she served as managing director of Impact Strategy at the Sorenson Impact Center, where she forged high-level partnerships and spearheaded initiatives to advance equity in higher education and women's entrepreneurship.

Shanna Duncan

Shanna Duncan, the editor of the report, is a communications consultant with over 20 years of experience supporting organizations and individuals dedicated to driving social impact by crafting compelling narratives that inspire action. Her work focuses on amplifying underrepresented stories and shaping public discourse to foster lasting change.

Research Contributors

The Center for the Advancement of Women at Mount Saint Mary's University

[MSMU.edu/CAW](https://msmu.edu/CAW)

The Center for the Advancement of Women at Mount Saint Mary's University is a hub for gender equity research, advocacy, and leadership development. Its vision is to find solutions to persistent gender inequities and work with partners to eradicate those inequities in our lifetime. That goal includes eliminating obstacles that women face in the workplace, in their communities, in the media, and beyond to make a positive difference in the lives of women and girls in California and our nation. The Center also creates public programming, research guides, and training opportunities to engage more partners in its work.

About Mount Saint Mary's University

[MSMU.edu](https://msmu.edu)

Mount Saint Mary's is the only women's university in Los Angeles and one of the most diverse in the nation. The University is known nationally for its research on gender equality, its innovative health and science programs, and its commitment to community service. As a leading liberal arts institution, Mount Saint Mary's provides year-round, flexible, and online programs at the undergraduate and graduate level. Weekend, evening, and graduate programs are offered to both women and men. Mount alums are engaged and active global citizens who use their knowledge and skills to better themselves, their communities, and the world.

DoSomething Strategic

DoSomethingStrategic.work

DoSomething Strategic (DSS) has partnered with mission-driven brands and organizations to support them in developing effective youth engagement strategies. As the consulting arm of DoSomething, DSS draws on over 30 years of insights from engaging young people 13–25 in taking action in their community and real-time data derived from their database of nearly one million members.

Acknowledgments

Thank you to Women Connect4Good for supporting the funding of this research.

Women Connect4Good

DrNancyOReilly.com

We are committed to increasing women's empowerment and achieving gender equality. Supporting women is about much more than equal rights, and Women Connect4Good, Inc., is a 501(c)3 with a single mission: Women (and men) supporting women, without exclusion. That means all women, regardless of race, ethnicity, age, socioeconomic background, sexual orientation, abilities, or any other aspect of their identity. It means working to ensure that all women have access to education, healthcare, housing, and employment opportunities, and putting an end to violence against women and girls, and discrimination in all forms. It means connecting with other organizations working for the advancement of women and girls and increasing our reach, so no woman's voice goes unheard.

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APPENDIX

Survey Data

DoSomething Strategic

CHART 1

How would you rate gender equality in the US?

1127 out of 1127 answered

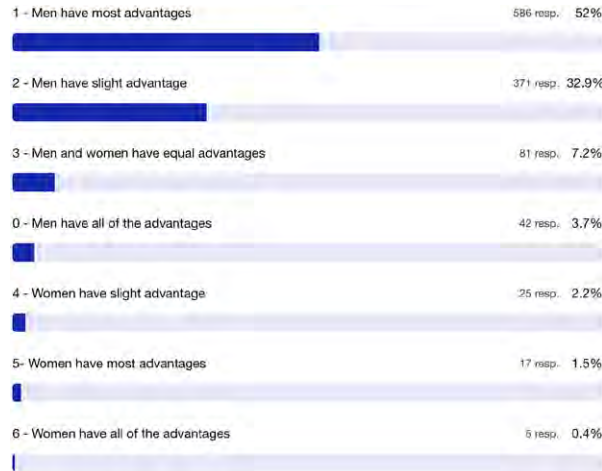


CHART 2

In which area do you think gender inequality is most evident?

1127 out of 1127 answered

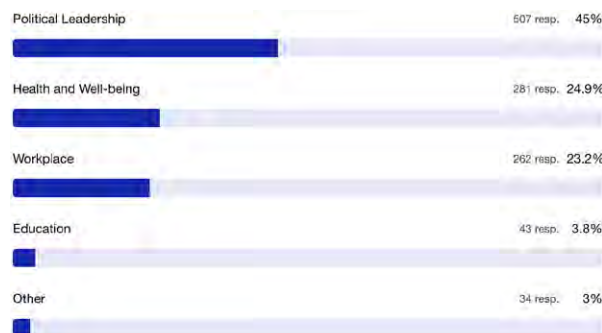


CHART 3

When you imagine your future, what is most important to you?

1127 out of 1127 answered

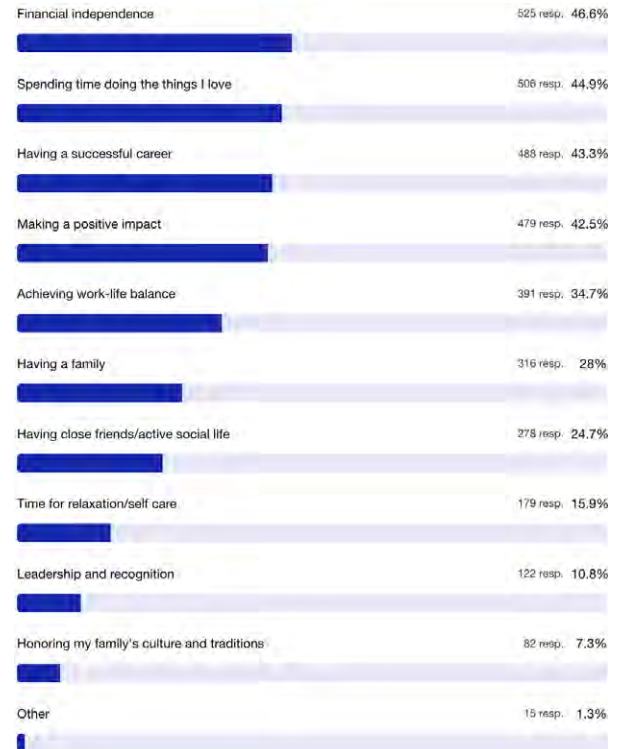


CHART 4

What career are you interested in pursuing or currently pursuing?

Open Ended

[VIEW QUESTION](#)

CHART 5

Do you mostly agree or disagree with the following statements?

1127 out of 1127 answered

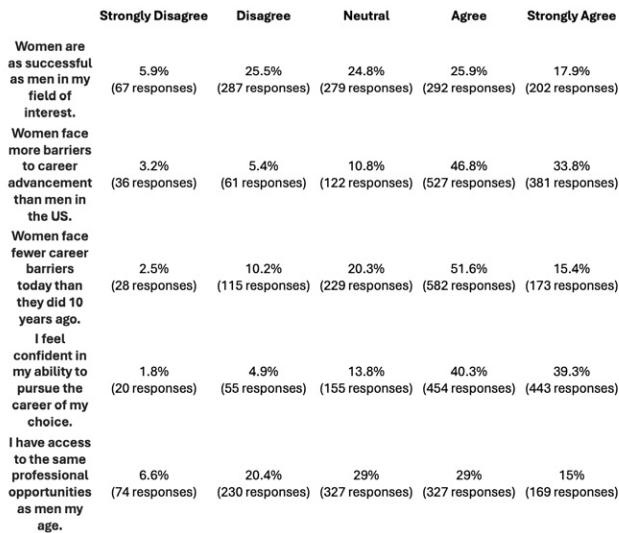


CHART 6

What are the most pressing challenges facing women in the workplace now?

1127 out of 1127 answered

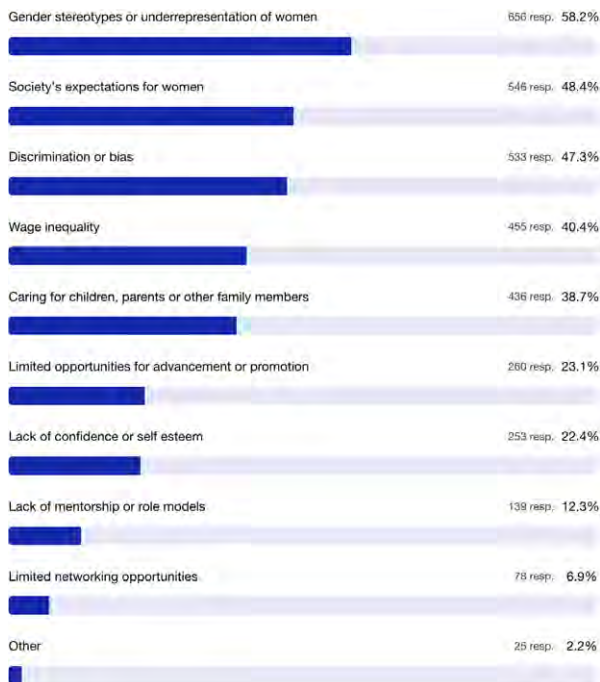


CHART 7

What do you think would most improve economic opportunities for yourself and other women?

1127 out of 1127 answered



CHART 8

Do you mostly agree or disagree with the following statements?

1127 out of 1127 answered

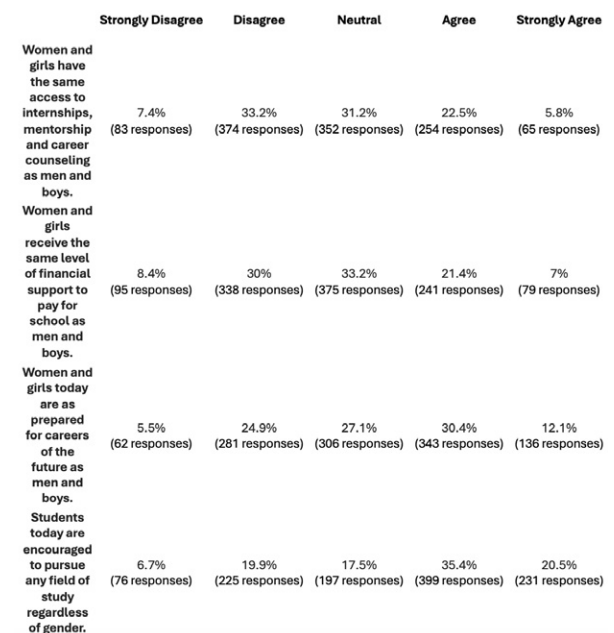


CHART 9

Has your education been impacted by any of the following?

1127 out of 1127 answered



CHART 10

What is the one thing schools can do to better prepare young women for future success?

Open Ended

CHART D11

Do you mostly agree or disagree with the following statements?

1127 out of 1127 answered

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
I have access to the healthcare services that I need.	6.4% (72 responses)	18.1% (204 responses)	19.6% (221 responses)	38.6% (435 responses)	17.3% (195 responses)
I'm concerned about healthcare coverage for women and girls in this country.	3.7% (42 responses)	6.6% (74 responses)	12.9% (145 responses)	26.6% (300 responses)	50.2% (566 responses)
Girls and women are as healthy as boys and men in my community.	9.5% (107 responses)	26.4% (298 responses)	30.9% (348 responses)	23.1% (260 responses)	10.1% (114 responses)
Women in my community receive the same quality of healthcare as men.	15.4% (173 responses)	30.1% (339 responses)	26.6% (300 responses)	20.5% (231 responses)	7.5% (84 responses)
Societal pressures impact my mental health and well-being.	2.8% (32 responses)	6% (68 responses)	14.5% (163 responses)	34.9% (393 responses)	41.8% (471 responses)

CHART 12

Have you been affected by any of the following?

1127 out of 1127 answered

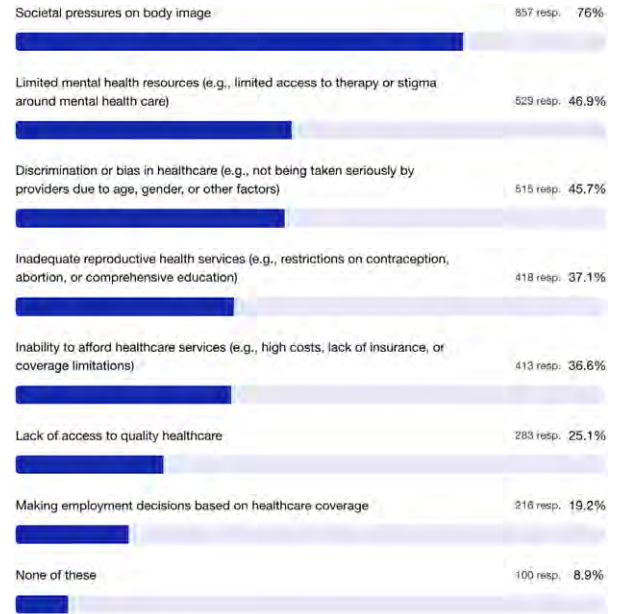


CHART 13

What do you think is the biggest systems-related healthcare problem young women face today?

1127 out of 1127 answered



CHART 14

Do you mostly agree or disagree with the following statements?

1127 out of 1127 answered

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
I feel confident in my ability to lead or advocate for change.	2.6% (29 responses)	13.5% (152 responses)	23.6% (266 responses)	40.4% (455 responses)	20% (225 responses)
I am interested in becoming more involved in politics or creating social change.	2.8% (31 responses)	9.6% (108 responses)	22.5% (254 responses)	39.2% (442 responses)	25.9% (292 responses)
Women are equally represented in government and leadership roles.	42.4% (478 responses)	39.2% (442 responses)	11% (124 responses)	4.5% (51 responses)	2.8% (32 responses)
Women today have as much power to create change as men.	15.4% (173 responses)	32.1% (362 responses)	21.3% (240 responses)	17.7% (200 responses)	13.5% (152 responses)
Women today are more empowered to engage in politics than previous generations.	2.9% (33 responses)	7.1% (80 responses)	14% (158 responses)	42.9% (483 responses)	33.1% (373 responses)

CHART 15

What would most empower you to take on a bigger role in politics or civic engagement?

1127 out of 1127 answered

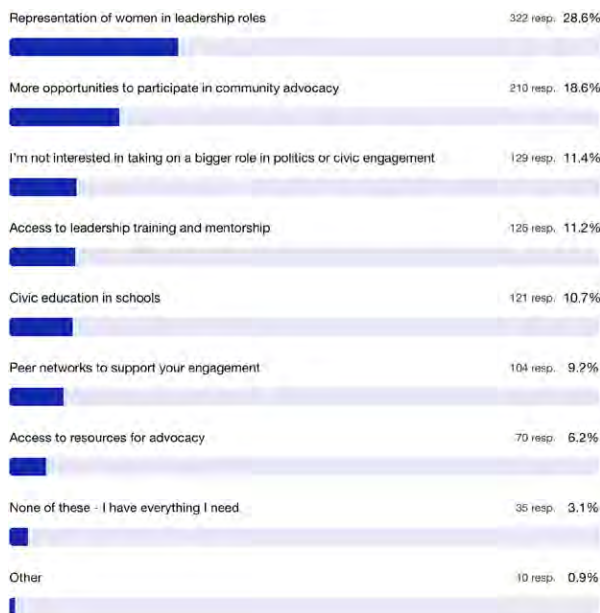


CHART D16

Who inspires you most as a political or community leader (past or present) and why?

1127 out of 1127 answered

[VIEW QUESTION](#)

CHART D17

What would it take to see more girls and women in leadership roles across the country?

1127 out of 1127 answered

[VIEW QUESTION](#)

[VIEW FULL RESULTS](#)

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- 4 World Economic Forum. (2024).
- 5 Chart 1: How would you rate gender equity in the U.S.?
- 6 Chart 3: When you imagine your future, what is most important to you?
- 7 Chart 5: Do you mostly agree or disagree with the following statement: I have access to the same professional opportunities as men my age.
- 8 Chart 5: Do you mostly agree or disagree with the following statement: Women face more barriers to career advancement than men in the U.S.
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- 20 Chart 8: Do you mostly agree or disagree with the following statements: Women and girls today are as prepared for careers of the future as men and boys.
- 21 Chart 9: Has your education been impacted by any of the following: Financial barriers
- 22 Chart 9: Has your education been impacted by any of the following: Gender stereotypes or bias
- 23 Chart 8: Do you mostly agree or disagree with the following statement: Women and girls receive the same level of financial support to pay for school as men and boys.
- 24 Chart 4: What career are you interested in pursuing or currently pursuing?
- 25 Table M6: *Median Earnings and Educational Attainment of U.S. Workers with Earnings: 2023 (workers 25 and older)*. Source: U.S. Census Bureau. 2023 American Community Survey 1-Year Estimates
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- 33 Chart 11: Do you mostly agree or disagree with the following statements? I have access to the healthcare services that I need.
- 34 Chart 11: Do you mostly agree or disagree with the following statements? Women in my community receive the same quality of healthcare as men.
- 35 Chart 12: Have you been affected by any of the following: Discrimination or bias in healthcare
- 36 Chart 11: Do you mostly agree or disagree with the following statements: Girls and women are as healthy as boys in my community.
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