



Overcoming Barriers: Helping Working Moms Overcome Obstacles

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Introduction

Working moms experience obstacles at home and at work. Many women work 40 hours per week and come home to take care of their families. The Mothers Overcome More™ or (M.O.M™) report (University of Phoenix, 2023) provides an overview of the barriers working mothers face while trying to juggle work and taking care of a household. University of Phoenix Career Institute® compiled the report to bring awareness to the obstacles faced by mothers. The report highlights the top stressors experienced by working mothers as well as provides the perceptions the mothers have regarding their current jobs or careers. The research question is: What strategies can organizations use to help working moms overcome obstacles?

The participants in the study consisted of 1500 mothers: 1000 mothers were classified as low-income and 500 were classified as middle to high income. The participants were over the age of 18 and worked full time during the time of the study. The data was collected between July 19 and August 3, 2023. Participants resided in 41 states and the District of Columbia.

The report uses the Self-Sufficiency Standard to determine how much individuals should make to afford basic needs rather than using the poverty threshold. The Self-Sufficiency Standard considers the amount of people in the household, the age of children, and the cost-of-living geographic differences. The size of the households ranged from two individuals to seven. Income ranged from approximately \$30,000 to \$263,000 annually. The state of Indiana had the lowest income reported and New York reported the highest income.

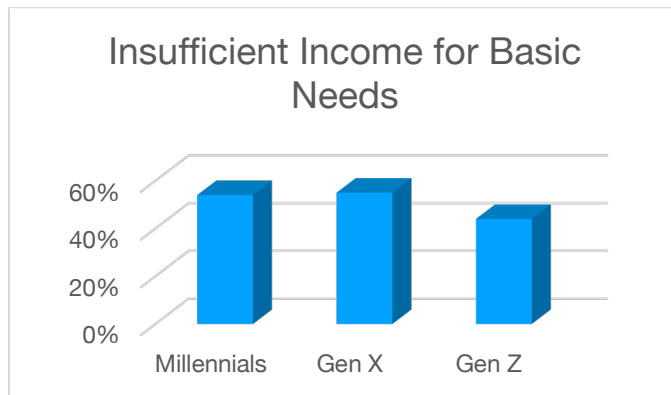
Obstacles Faced by Working Mothers

The participants in the study responded to obstacles faced as working mothers. Low income and middle to high income mothers faced some of the same obstacles. The M.O.M.™

report (University of Phoenix, 2023) showed similar obstacles included finances and their children. The following section contains a breakdown of the obstacles faced by the mothers.

Chen et al. (2021) posited that barriers working mothers face include career development and training, lack of promotion opportunities and inadequate compensation, lack of female mentors, and stereotypes of gender roles. Additional barriers created by organizations include insufficient support from managers, a lack of career planning for women, and the absence of inclusive policies (Sahoo & Lenka, 2016). Horizontal and vertical gender segregation can hinder women from advancing in an industry (Repetti & Hoffman, 2018). Kogovsek and Kogovsek (2015) defined vertical gender segregation as the unseen barriers that prevent women from reaching their full potential which hinders them from obtaining leadership positions or promotions. Because of vertical gender segregation, scarcity exists for women in decision-making positions. Under horizontal gender segregation, women and men perform different types of work. For example, women are underrepresented in the STEM field.

One of the issues faced by working moms is finances. According to the M.O.M.™ report (University of Phoenix, 2023), 74% of low-income mothers and 57% of middle to high income mothers listed personal finances as one of the top stressors. Approximately 68% of low-income mothers and 61% of middle to high income mothers stated not having enough emergency fund savings is a top financial stressor. About 67% of the low-income mothers reported not having enough money to pay for bills. Figure 1 shows the percentage of low-income moms by generation who stated they do not make enough money in their current job to meet basic needs. As shown in the chart over 50% of Millennials and Generation Xers stated their current job does not provide income to meet their basic needs.

Figure 1*Insufficient Income for Basic Needs*

Insufficient income is an issue because the gender pay gap still exists today. The Pew Research Center (2023) reported that in 2022, women earned .82 cents for every dollar a man earned. The pay gap has not closed much over the past decade. In 2002, the pay gap was .80 cents to every dollar. Gordon et al. (2024) found a gender pay gap exists between women and men in academia; however, it was found that men made less than women in some academia settings. Vecco et al. (2024) examined whether a gender gap exist between women and men in the creative job market. The results showed that a gender pay gap exists even though there weren't any differences in the characteristics of male and female workers.

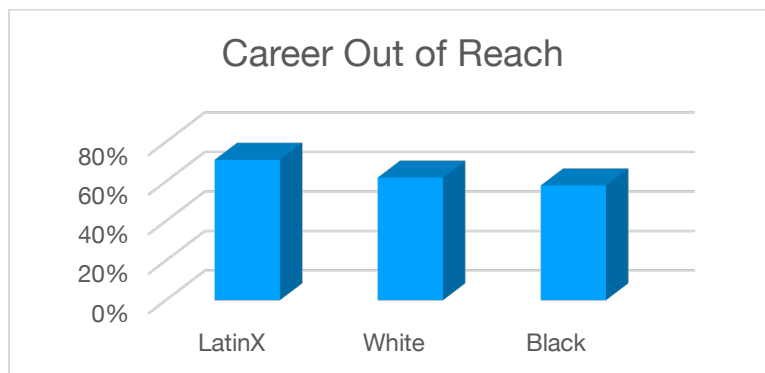
Another obstacle is the way working mothers view their jobs. Low-income moms stated that they have a job. The job is not something the moms wanted to pursue; it is something that was within their reach. Middle to high income moms stated that they have a career. Many middle to high income moms pursued a higher education to achieve career goals. According to the M.O.M. TM report (University of Phoenix, 2023), approximately 65% of the low-income mothers surveyed believe that having a career is a luxury, and 64% believe that pursuing a career is out of reach. Figure 2 shows the breakdown by race of how many low-income mothers believe pursuing a career is out of reach. As shown in the chart, more LatinX believe obtaining a career

is out of reach than White or Black mothers. Low-income mothers struggle with the idea that a career is attainable because they do not have an adequate support system, good role models, or the financial means to obtain the degree or certification needed for that career.

Figure 2 Career Out of Reach

Figure 2

Career Out of Reach



Another issue faced by working mothers is burnout. Burnout is described as the negative emotions and behaviors employees experience toward work (Davis et al., 2013). Burnout leads to decreased morale and lack of job satisfaction. The M.O.M.TM report (University of Phoenix, 2023) reported that 49% of middle to high income mothers experience burnout and 40% do not feel appreciated at work.

A final obstacle faced by working moms is the lack of resources provided by the organizations. Resources include mental health resources, training and development opportunities, health insurance, paid time off, parental leave policies, overtime pay, and schedule flexibility. The M.O.M.TM report (University of Phoenix, 2023) shows that approximately 86% of low-income mothers and 85% of middle to high income mothers believe that having resources at work to assist them is just as important as the amount of wages paid. Around 74% of all mothers surveyed stated if they were given the opportunity to further their education, they would feel

more satisfied at their current job. Additionally, 55% of low-income mothers reported that they would work a low paying job if the job offered daycare assistance.

Mothers from both groups stated they were satisfied with some of the resources provided by the employers. Approximately 79% of middle to high income and 65% low-income mothers reported that they are satisfied with the sick and vacation time provided by the employers. Additionally, 68% of low-income and 69% middle to high income mothers are satisfied with the flexibility of their schedules.

Literature Review

Various researchers conducted studies to explore ways to reduce burnout at the workplace. Lee et al. (2018) and Lanham et al. (2012) found that an inverse relationship exists with gratitude and burnout. Lanham et al. further found that including hope as a control variable caused the inverse relationship between gratitude and burnout to disappear. Delaney (2018) found that self-compassion training helped lower burnout. Dempsey et al. (2023) conducted a study to identify interventions for burnout experienced by Canadian pharmacy residents. The interventions were placed in two categories: individual-led and organization-directed. Based on the results, the most common intervention strategy offered by the pharmacy was a mentorship program. Approximately 73% of the residents used this strategy. Other top strategies included self-care workshops, discussion groups, and workload adjustments.

Leonard and Kelly (2022) examined how single mothers manage scarce resources. The study contained 32 participants broken into three groups: mothers actively managing (MAM), mothers only managing (MOM), and mothers under managing (MUM). The goal of the study was to understand the attitudes single mothers have toward work, education, training, and welfare. Each group of participants experienced scarcity of resources; however, each group

managed scarce resources differently. The MAMs group contained degrees, were fully employed, and had two children or less. The MOMs group had some form of higher education, received low pay, expressed that work was a source of stress and anxiety, and felt unappreciated at work. The MUMs group did not feel a sense of life satisfaction, had low self-belief and self-esteem, had poor mental health and experienced depression, and had poor money management skills. The results showed that MOMs and MAMs effectively managed strategies for handling scarce resources while the MUMs group did not.

Recommendations for Overcoming the Obstacles

Organizations can use several strategies to help women overcome some of the obstacles they face in the workplace. First, organizations should take measures to move away from stereotypes. One way to overcome stereotypes is by having open discussions with top management and maintaining open lines of communication with employees. Conducting open discussions could help minimize any bias between female and male leadership. For example, one may consider women leaders as emotional making them less effective in the leadership role. Maintaining an open dialogue and understanding the dynamics of female leaders could help erase the negative stigma of women being emotional.

Second, organizations should ensure that a gender balance exists in the hiring and promotions processes. For example, the organization could use the blind resume technique when reviewing candidates for a position. Under the blind resume technique, leaders do not see the names on the resume; the leader only sees the qualifications and previous positions held by the candidate. Leaders can also apply objective criteria for the selection process. Leaders of the organization should put policies in place in the hiring and evaluation process to maintain gender equality. Additionally, leaders should modify the language in performance evaluations.

Researchers have used human capital theory to argue that biases exist against women in the hiring process (Bobbit-Zeher, 2011; Bohnet et al., 2015).

Working mothers have transferable skills that they acquired from managing a household that they can use in the workplace. Table 1 contains the top 10 skills low income and middle to high income mothers reported on the M.O.M.TM report (University of Phoenix, 2023). As shown in the table, multitasking is the number one skill for both income groups. Employers should consider the skills mothers acquired from managing a household when considering them as a potential employee or for promotions.

Table 1

Top Skills

Low Income Skills	Middle to High Income Skills
Multitasking	Multitasking
Problem-solving	Flexibility
Decision-making	Time Management
Communication	Problem-solving
Flexibility	Adaptability
Time Management	Decision-making
Adaptability	Organization
Stress Management	Budgeting
Budgeting	Communication
Organization	Stress Management

Lastly, employers can provide solutions to prevent burnout. Some solutions include providing benefits, facilitating work-life balance, and support and staying connected with employees. In addition to the standard health benefits given to employees, some organizations provide flexible work schedules, four-day work weeks, and remote work options. Additionally, leaders in the organization should maintain an open dialogue with employees to understand the underlying causes of employee burnout.

Conclusion

Women face obstacles in the workplace and being a mother adds another barrier to the obstacles faced. It was found in the M.O.M.TM report (University of Phoenix, 2023) that low income and middle to high income mothers experience financial stressors such as having an insufficient amount of money in an emergency savings account. Additionally, low-income mothers see obtaining a career as a luxury while middle to high income mothers experience burnout at the workplace. Various researchers agreed with the findings. Organizations can help working mothers overcome obstacles faced by maintaining an open door of communication, minimizing the gender pay gap, and providing resources. Additionally, organizations should ensure they are fostering an environment that is conducive to work-life balance.

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