

Motherhood Penalty? Women Twice as Likely to Lose Promotions Due to Caregiving Duties

Motherhood penalty persists: Women are three times more likely to experience career disruption after parental leave. How can employers close the gap?

The Jobseeker logo, featuring the word "Jobseeker" in a bold, blue, sans-serif font. The "e" in "seeker" is stylized with a curved line underneath it, resembling a smile.

AMSTERDAM, NETHERLANDS, March 5, 2025 /EINPresswire.com/ -- After a

quarter-century of International Women's Days since the turn of the millennium, enduring inequalities in the workplace remain.

“

Pregnancy made it unfavorable to continue my work as I was seen as a person who won't be fully available anytime they are needed.”

Anonymous female employee

Twice as many women report being overlooked for promotion on their return to work from parental and caregiving leave, compared to men. General career disruption post-caregiving leave is three times higher for women than men. These are just two of the key statistics revealed in a new study that shines a light on the gender differences in workplace experience that still exist across the US.

Key findings

A new [study from Jobseeker](#) to mark International Women's Day 2025 provides revealing findings on the state of the gender gap in US employment. The study surveyed 1,000 US workers online, asking them about their real-life experiences in the workplace, including how pay, promotions and company policy shape their working lives.

The results reveal that, despite some progress in gender equality, women still regularly feel overlooked in both hiring and promotions, experience salary disparity and feel disadvantaged by workplace culture and policies related to parental leave and caregiving.

Motherhood slows career progression

Jobseeker's study showcases the different experiences of men and women when it comes to taking parental leave, and subsequently returning to work. Despite parental leave being equal

for men and women under US federal law, women are more likely to take time off work than men for childcare responsibilities (30% vs. 23%). Furthermore, they're more likely to take unpaid leave to care for children or family members (22% vs. 14%). Women also tend to take longer parental leave than men (10% of women taking six months or more, compared to 2% of men).

While a culture of parental leave being more for women than men prevails, additional career consequences for taking parental leave also persist. Women are more likely to feel they lack support from their employer during their parental leave (34%, compared to 48% of men).

One female respondent commented:

“Pregnancy made it unfavorable to continue my work as I was seen as a person who won't be fully available anytime they are needed.”

Upon returning to work, a total of 15% of women report experiencing subtle career disruption, while just 5% of men report the same experience. When it comes to career progression, 15% of women believe caregiving responsibilities have blocked them from being promoted, while only 8% of men report the same.

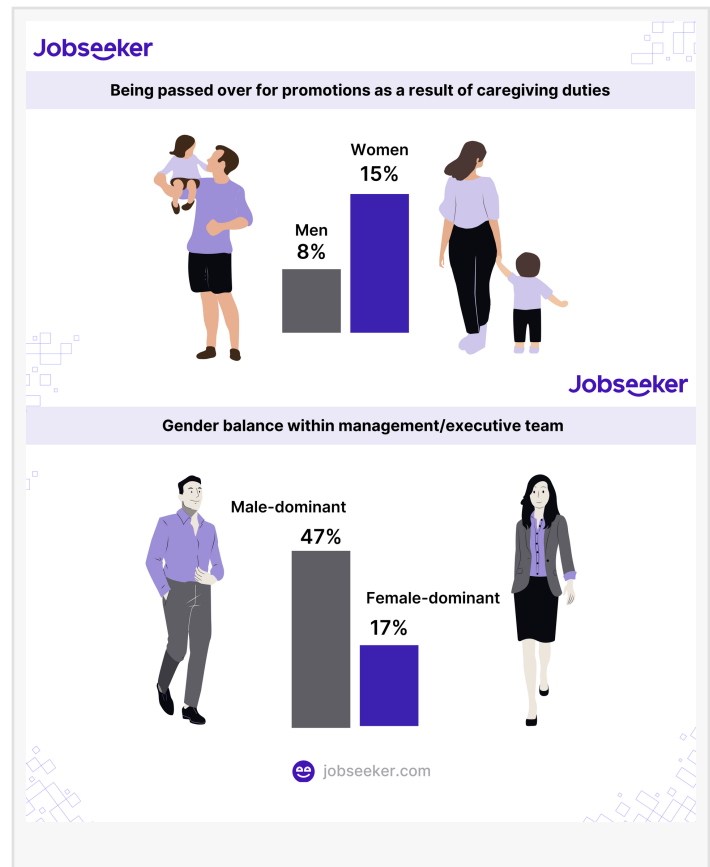
This was supported by qualitative findings from the study, with one female respondent stating:

“I feel like my gender influenced my workplace journey because of having to take leave for my children. I feel the pressure and worry about losing my job for my own healthcare and/or for my children.”

How Employers and HR Teams Can Support Working Parents and Reduce the Career Progression Deficit

Based on Jobseeker experts, employers and HR teams can respond to this enduring imbalance between the workplace experiences of men and women by implementing some or all of the following measures:

Normalize parental leave: Encouraging both men and women to take full advantage of parental leave opportunities could help to rebalance the gender differences in taking leave, the amount



of time taken, and gendered attitudes towards parental leave that can affect career progression.

Provide clear return-to-work support: Implementing a structured process for returning to work following parental leave can help employees feel better supported. It can also help workers transition more smoothly back into work, preventing them from being sidelined and missing career progression opportunities.

Train managers to reduce bias: Introducing training on unconscious bias can reduce or eliminate discrimination against employees returning from caregiving leave, while also ensuring women and men receive equal access to career progression opportunities.

Set transparent salary bands and career progression criteria: Publishing transparent salary bands for all roles will prevent hidden wage gaps. Introducing clear guidance on performance reviews, assessment and promotion requirements can also address the lack of access to career progression for women, particularly following parental leave.

Implement flexible work arrangements: Around [50% of American workers](#) said they will be focusing on improving their work-life balance. Offering flexible work options such as hybrid work, flexible hours, and job-sharing can help employees manage both their careers and caregiving responsibilities without sacrificing professional growth. Companies that integrate flexibility into their workplace policies are [more likely to retain talent](#), improve employee well-being, and create a more inclusive environment.

Ensure equal access to leadership-building opportunities: Affording equal access to activities that can help employees develop their skill set and progress their career can redress the imbalance in career progression between women and men. This could mean rotating high-impact responsibilities between team members, implementing structured leadership programs or diversifying networking opportunities and team bonding activities.

Reyhaneh Mansouri
Jobseeker.com
reyhaneh@jobseeker.com

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