

In an annual discussion about the pipeline to leadership for women in media and news, the data reveal women journalists are losing ground

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On the eve of Women's History Month, The Center for Ethical Leadership in Media (CELM) convened senior news leaders and executives to discuss the pipeline to leadership for women in media and news, and explored organizational strategies and specific tactics news leaders can take to support, retain and elevate women in newsrooms.

For the third year in the row, CELM, formerly The Press Forward, worked with McKinsey & Co. to recruit multiple large North American media and news organizations to participate in the Women in the Workplace study, the most comprehensive study of the state of women in corporate America. In 2020, recruitment resulted in an industry-specific deep-dive, "[Shattering the Glass Screen](#)," authored by McKinsey & Co. The February 24 presentation provided new results from the 2021 "Women in the Workplace" study.

Joining the conversation were participants- mostly senior women at news organizations- from outlets including NPR, The Wall Street Journal, CNN, CNET, Gannett Media and USA Today, Katie Couric Media, Vox Media, E.W. Scripps Company and Bloomberg. Scholars from University of Southern California and University of Texas at Austin, as well as the International Women's Media Foundation and Craig Newmark Philanthropies, also participated. The discussion was held under Chatham House Rules.

Charlotte Relyea and Jess Huang, both with McKinsey & Co., introduced the key findings:

- While the number of women in the pipeline to leadership is above average across all of the media companies surveyed — those numbers are declining year over year since CELM began onboarding news organizations in 2018. Women of color, in particular, are losing ground. The findings support the widely reported trend of women in the workplace stepping back or leaving the workforce entirely during the pandemic.
- Women are more likely to shoulder the burden of caring for others (children, parents) — and that burden increased astronomically during the pandemic. Several of the participants in the briefing noted that inaccessible child care is driving women to leave their journalism jobs.
- But women also are more likely to be saddled with the responsibility for social aspects of their workplaces — such as doing the unremunerated work of planning social gatherings. Women do 60% more to provide emotional support and are twice as likely to spend time on DEI, according to the report. Women also invest more time on developing a pipeline of women leaders; women sponsor more than two-times the number of mentees than men. Even though the work to support employees matters — it reduces turnover and strengthens companies — companies are not likely to recognize or reward DEI and support work.

"The findings are surprising because there have been so many high-profile appointments of women leaders over the last four years, including many "first" network news presidents and editors-in-chiefs at major print and digital outlets," said Carolyn M. Supple, executive director of CELM, who facilitated the discussion.

“Despite this, the research shows women are losing ground in the press- particularly earlier in their careers,” said Supple. “It underscores the importance of data sharing by industry, and convening leaders year after year to measure progress and pinpoint evidenced-based ways to retain, elevate and work inclusively with women.”

Media companies report that they are trying to increase women in the pipeline to leadership — not only by ensuring fair hiring practices but by taking a more comprehensive HR approach, including the review of performance evaluation and promotion processes, which may be informal in the media and therefore lead to bias.

Companies that only focus on the top and not the middle- or the “broken rung”- are not successful in expanding women’s leadership. Furthermore, companies experience greater success when DEI issues are not pigeonholed as social issues but, rather, are incorporated as business imperatives and treat those efforts with key performance indicators. One news leader said that their news organization paid employees who led or organized Employee Resource Groups (ERGs) on top of their normal responsibilities.

Many of the women industry leaders participating in the forum shared that women are increasingly leaving journalism or avoiding the field altogether because of harassment — in the newsroom and in the field, including digitally. Ensuring leadership prioritizes the safety of women is important for them to enter and stay in the field, experts said.

One participant said that women of color, LGBTQ women/people and women with disabilities all lack allies, a sentiment also reflected in the “Women in the Workplace” study. As a result, they face microaggressions.

“If you are a double only [the only woman and only person of a particular race or ethnicity], you’re more likely to experience discrimination and a hostile environment,” said one participant.

There is hope on the horizon. Participants in the discussion shared that some media companies are starting to get it right — by prioritizing a diverse workforce because diversity is essential to ensuring quality news coverage- and thus trust with the public. Several also acknowledged that, as we begin to emerge from the pandemic, there is a new opportunity to improve workplaces.

“As we design the next normal, it’s important that — as we create the new workplace — we make room for participation in that process and that we include flexibility and what employees want out of companies and expect from their workplaces in our new design,” said one news leader.

For more information, see the presentation [here](#). The “Women in the Workplace” study is published annually by McKinsey and LeanIn.org. CELM is currently partnering with McKinsey & Co. to onboard media companies into the 2022 study. To learn more, please contact team@ethicalmedialeadership.org.