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# Deloitte Women@Work 2024

## A Global Outlook

Synopsis:

Gender equality in the workplace should be a no-brainer. But a startling number of firms are still struggling to make this a reality.

Now in its fourth year, Deloitte's Women@Work report reveals an uncomfortable truth: women's progress is stagnating, both in and outside the workplace.

"This report is about the workplace - it's also about the wider societal factors that can influence what happens to women in the workplace," says Emma Codd, Chief Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Officer at Deloitte. "And what we learned was really disturbing."

In this podcast Emma Codd joins Jen Hardwick, Senior Editor at FT Longitude, to explore the findings of this pivotal report.

Interview transcript:

**VO:**

*This audio interview is part of Deloitte's Women at Work research for 2024. It is produced by FT Longitude with Deloitte.*

**Jen Hardwick:**

We all know that diverse businesses are better businesses. So why are most firms still falling short on gender equality? This troubling reality is revealed in Deloitte's important report, Women@Work: A Global Outlook. Now in its fourth year, this survey of 5,000 women across 10 countries explores some of the critical workplace and societal factors impacting women's careers. Unfortunately, there's a lot of room for improvement.

Stress levels for working women have increased in the last year with long working hours contributing to poor mental health. Nearly half of women worry for their personal safety at work or while travelling for work, and female health issues such as

menstruation and menopause are still treated as taboo, forcing many to work through distress and pain. The simple fact is that women's progress in the workplace is stagnating. And in 2024, that's not good enough.

So, what can organizations do to correct their course? I'm Jen Hardwick, Senior Editor at FT Longitude. To discuss this research, I'm joined by Emma Codd, Chief Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Officer at Deloitte. Welcome, Emma.

**Emma Codd:**

Thanks, Jen. Great to be here.

**Jen Hardwick:**

Great to be speaking with you today. So obviously, we're now into the fourth year of Deloitte's Women@Work research. What changes have you seen since the last report? And maybe you could tell me some of the key takeaways you see, both positive and negative.

**Emma Codd:**

Yeah, so sadly we haven't seen enough changes since last year's report. We've seen some slight improvements in some areas, but equally we've added some new questions this year which have introduced some really concerning data. For example, the one on personal safety.

So, what have we seen? Well, we've seen that women are still concerned about their rights. And actually this year, we are seeing that some of the women we spoke to have been impacted by an erosion of those rights as well. We see nearly half the women concerned about personal safety. We see mental health is still a real concern, increasing stress levels. Then we come onto the subject of women's health, we see, again, a really concerning story there, but a story that's actually worse this year when it comes to menopause.

Then we move on to household responsibility. What does the report show us this year? Well, really, really uncomfortable, poor data. Women are actually taking on a far greater amount of responsibility in the home, and that is far more significant particularly for those that care for adults.

And then finally, if when we look at the workplace, the workplace is still quite a poor picture. So a very small number of women believe that their employers are taking concrete steps on gender equality.

We saw that hybrid working circumstances are improving across the board, but we also saw that a large number of employers have recently introduced return-to-the-office policies and that some women following the introduction of those policies have had to take steps around their home and working lives.

And then non-inclusive behaviors. We saw that last year, little change there. And actually, what's really concerning this year is only one in 10 women think they can report their experience of a non-inclusive behavior without it affecting their career.

Now, a final bright note is that we have seen a 1% point increase in the number of women who work for gender equality leaders. So that's good. It's only to 6%. It's absolutely not good enough, but let's take every improvement that we can.

**Jen Hardwick:**

Yeah, of course. Good to hear some small bright spots as you say, but plenty not so bright. We did see some of the mental health data shows a slight improvement, although we still see a big reluctance for a lot of women to discuss their mental health at work. So why do you think that is?

**Emma Codd:**

Yeah, I mean you're right. Look, the mental health data is what I would describe as a mixed picture. So there's some improvement. For example, burnouts continue to reduce year-on-year since 2022. So last year, we saw a reduction. This year, we've seen another reduction. That is a good thing. Burnout levels are still there, but a reduction is good.

We see half the women saying stress levels are higher than a year ago. A third have taken time off for mental health, and over half say they don't get adequate support at work. And considering the hours we all spend at work, that's really, really significant finding.

Now, this year we probed a lack of comfort because again, we see a really large number of, the majority of women, two thirds of women do not feel comfortable to talk about mental health at work, whether it's their own mental health. We'll discuss it in general. And this year, we really wanted to better understand why rather than just leave it hanging. And so we asked, why not? And the top reason, that's for one in five of those women that don't feel comfortable, is concern about damage to career progression. So it's around stigma.

They're also worried about discrimination or retaliation. They believe that it will make them vulnerable to being laid off, and one in 10 are basing their concerns on past experience. They've had a poor experience with disclosure in the past. So this is really uncomfortable data.

**Jen Hardwick:**

And I know this year, we actually widened the survey as well to cover the issue of personal safety in and around the workplace. Why did you feel this was so important to include, and could you tell us a bit more about what the data says?

**Emma Codd:**

Yeah, I mean, look. As with all my work, there's personal drivers, and there's societal drivers and workplace drivers. And I suppose to start from the personal driver, I'm part of an incredible organization. We really care about our people. We do the utmost for the safety of our people, but I have even been in situations where I've been concerned when I'm travelling somewhere. And so we wanted to probe that and to better understand. We also wanted to further probe last year's point that their number one concern was women's rights and an erosion of those rights. So we wanted to better understand which rights specifically were worrying them. And what it showed us in particular was that 29% of women believe that their right to live free of violence in their country has worsened, and 13% say that this has personally impacted them.

Now, you therefore want to see how that translates to the workplace. This report is about the workplace. It's also about the wider societal factors that can influence what happens to women in the workplace. And what we learned was really disturbing. We learned that nearly half of women are worried about their safety when they're at work, when they're travelling for work, or when they're travelling to and from work. That has to change.

**Jen Hardwick:**

And we also found this year even fewer women are feeling comfortable to discuss the challenges of menopause and menstruation than they did in our survey data last year. So why do you think women's health issues are still being stigmatized in the post-Me Too era? What tangible changes would you like to see in this going forward?

**Emma Codd:**

Yeah, I mean, look. The data was... I was really hoping we'd see improved data on this this year. And what we saw instead was that the numbers staying around the same for women with menstrual disorders. That's around 40%. We saw double the number of women working through pain and symptoms associated with menopause. And then 30% of women that have fertility challenges are just putting their heads down and working through it. And then as you say, we saw worsening experiences with disclosure as well. So we saw fewer women saying that they got support from their employer following disclosure.

Now, look. I again come this from lived experience as well, having suffered from severe endometriosis for much of my life and now being a woman who is in menopause. And I would say our women's health is a deeply personal thing, and it's our choice as to whether we wish to disclose or not. However, for those that do want to disclose, we need to be able to make sure that they feel able to do that at work without worrying about personal experience.

And if I think about my own experience, I didn't disclose my endometriosis at work. And why didn't I? Embarrassment, a bit of self-stigma, having to use the word periods to mainly male leaders. And so there were many reasons that contributed to that. If it was today, I would disclose in my own workplace.

So in terms of what we can do to change that, look, we have to focus on... We've got to use the word periods. We've got to do that right away from school age. I'm always telling my daughters that we must talk about that. It's a key part of our health. We need people to feel comfortable to disclose. We need leaders to be enabled to have a conversation without being concerned or worried that they might say the wrong thing. So we need to enable them to do that. And then we need to make sure there are policies and processes that support everybody and that support women's health challenges. They're there and, as we can see from the data, they are very, very significant.

**Jen Hardwick:**

Yeah, absolutely. And I think you're right. It's about starting early as well with some of this terminology.

**Emma Codd:**

Talk about periods. That's so important. That one word, we've got to talk about it.

**Jen Hardwick:**

Definitely. Well, I know you said at the start we've seen a very slight improvement in the number of gender equality leaders, which is positive to see we've got that 1% increase. So what do you think are the most important steps that all employers should be taking in order to get themselves into that 6% of those leaders?

**Emma Codd:**

Yeah... Look. Last year, we hadn't seen an increase, so that's really important. Let's just look at what makes... When we say that a woman works for a gender equality leader, how have we determined that? And effectively, this was something we came up with four years ago when we noticed a trend in the data. Where we had a small group of women that were far more engaged, believed they were far more productive. Many, many things that just showed that they were having a really significantly positive experience in the workplace.

And what we noticed, there were three statements that these women replied positively to all three. Not to one or two, but all three of them. First one is confidence about reporting non-inclusive behaviors without any concern about career impact or reprisal. Second one is that the woman feels supported by their employer when it comes to work-life balance and responsibilities with other commitments outside work. The third one is that they believe that their career is progressing as fast as they'd like it to do. And the difference in the data between the experience of these women and the experience of those women who actually answer negatively to all three statements is incredible. So it's very, very data-driven insight that we've got.

And so those questions give a backdrop to the most important steps. The first one is culture, what I call an everyday culture, one where people just simply don't face those behaviors. But where they do, there is a process in place. They feel able to speak up.

And think about the data points, the one in 10. One in 10 believe that they could speak up without career impact. Only one in 10. So that has to change. And that they're comfortable that the right action will be taken regardless of seniority. So that's the first thing.

The second thing is a focus on flexible working and the ways to enable work-life balance. Flexible working, yes this is about policies, of course. But actually, it's about leaders enabling it. It's about culture. It's about environment. We all know that all it takes is a raised eyebrow by a leader when you actually want to go and to do something in your outside life, that's really important. That's all it takes to undermine a really good policy.

And then finally, it's a focus on enabling opportunities for women. So that's sponsorship. That's visibility to opportunities as they arrive. So those three things... There are many, many more things. We need to be talking about mental health. We need to be talking about women's health. There are so many other things, but the data-driven insight that we're getting is showing that those three things are particularly critical.

**Jen Hardwick:**

Yeah, absolutely. Well, thanks so much for talking us through all of that, and thanks for a great conversation all round, really great conversation today, and it's been great to speak with you, so thank you.

**Emma Codd:**

Thanks, Jen.

**VO:**

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