



The Changing Landscape of Women in America

This project improved the understanding of work-family variables for female ranchers and farmers, female professionals, and female immigrants in the U.S.; gave these women resources and strategies to help them balance work, family, and personal time; and provided information to human resource departments, service providers, and corporate decision makers to help them develop more effective policies and interventions.

Who cares and why?

Women comprised 49 percent of the U.S. workforce in 2003. Three critical but understudied subpopulations in the workforce include: female ranchers and farmers, female professionals, and female immigrants. In the last 25 years, the percentage of all U.S. farmers who are women more than doubled, rising to over 11 percent. Around 55 percent of all professional workers in the U.S. are female, and in 2001, over half of the more than 1 million immigrants admitted to the U.S. were female. While they play an increasingly vital economic role in their communities, these groups lack role models and social and career blueprints and must forge unique pathways toward fulfillment in their work, family, and personal lives. Relying on popular and local media for guidance, working women often confront stereotypical portrayals of women. It is unknown whether the messages embedded in popular and local media are applicable or helpful to these three groups of women. This project sought to 1) identify the questions, challenges, and needs of the three target populations related to work, family, and personal lives; 2) determine the media messages they receive regarding these arenas; and 3) assess the extent to which these messages help or hurt in the struggle to achieve healthy work, family, and personal lives. This research provides a better understanding of how to support these traditionally underserved populations of women who have a high intensity of commitment to their jobs and careers and are playing increasingly vital economic roles in their communities.



Women have been a critical part of successful agricultural operations and households for centuries. Photo courtesy of USDA.

What has the project done so far?

Project participants have facilitated more than 20 focus groups with approximately 175 subjects total. With these focus groups, W-1167 researchers have been able to look at the types and amount of media the women view, what household and professional roles they play, the issues and challenges they face, and the ways they define personal fulfillment. The focus groups have helped researchers examine patterns among women who have different types of employment, communities, and ethnicities. The team has presented their research at professional conferences, published journal articles and a book chapter, and shared data with legislative groups.

Impact Statements

Improved understanding of work-family variables, helping researchers determine effective ways to measure and examine the experiences of women in the target groups.

Recommended research-based strategies that help women in the three target groups effectively address the challenges of balancing work, family, and personal time, such as improving financial resources, seeking family-friendly policies in the workplace, and finding support from family, friends, and online resources.

Provided practical information to corporate decision makers (e.g., in human resource departments) who develop and implement workplace policies that impact families.

Provided information to service providers such as counselors, therapists, educators, and Extension personnel who work with the target populations of women so that they can develop more effective intervention strategies and more successfully address challenges.

What research is needed?

The information about balancing work, family, and personal time that evolved from this qualitative research needs to be developed into hypotheses and quantitatively tested for further validation of the findings.

Want to know more?

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Edited and designed by Sara Delheimer



Female immigrants often play vital roles in their communities' economies. This woman attends a New Citizens Celebration with the Fleets and Facilities Department of Seattle. Photo courtesy of Seattle Municipal Archives.