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While the number of women working in construction has remained consistent for nearly two decades, a recent survey of over 500 women in the industry reveals a largely positive experience.

Women represent just 11% of the construction workforce, which means that around 1 million women are working in the industry as of 2021. Both the number of women and their percentage share has remained largely unchanged since at least 2003 according to the Bureau of Labor Statistics.

Despite working in a male-dominated field, however, the majority of women in construction report having opportunities for advancement, feeling valued for their contributions, and enjoying their jobs. Nonetheless, problems remain for some women, who note a lack of mentors and the negative effects of an "old boys' club" on their workplaces.

Women are a key part of the construction workforce, and executives who understand how to support career growth, stamp out harassment, and listen to diverse voices are likely to see the fruits of their efforts.

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Overall, 80% of women surveyed who work in construction say they love their job - and more than three-quarters of them say



the role of women in construction is changing. These women work in diverse roles, including accounting, credit management, sales, labor, and executive leadership.

The construction industry appeals to women for a variety of reasons, from opportunities for problem-solving to the joys of working on building projects that provide real world benefits to their communities.

Others say they chose the field specifically for the challenge: One accountant for a subcontractor notes, "Construction will keep you busy 24/7."

Finally, a contingent of women reports that they do not mind being in the minority, but sometimes prefer working

for the better.

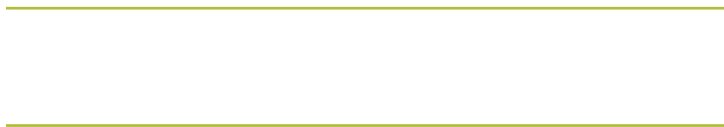
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predominantly with men. "I like the guys I work with. They crack me up," says a controller working for a subcontractor in Wisconsin.



While, fortunately, more than 80% of women in construction feel that their supervisor would support them if they reported harassment, the existence of widespread harassment remains a concern. Many women attribute this behavior to the ongoing effects of an “old boys’ club,” and say that the behaviors most often come from their older colleagues.

“[There is] the old-school mentality of some of our older subcontractors,” notes one office administrator, while a woman working for a general contractor added, “I would like to point out that most of my issues with sexual harassment, sexism, and misogyny have been from the older generation of males.”

PROPORTIONING WOMEN IN CONSTRUCTION IS GOOD FOR BUSINESS

Overall, women working in construction report a positive job experience, and that’s great for the construction industry. However, concerns about respect and harassment threaten to erode the positive changes that the industry has experienced. Furthermore, stereotypes about women in labor and specialized trades represent a significant obstacle for an industry in desperate need of workers.

With the construction industry facing a historic labor shortage, the industry’s female workforce may prove a pivotal resource.

On average, around one of every five women working in construction has a job in labor or production - and there is a huge untapped potential to recruit additional women for jobsite roles that require specialized knowledge. Construction executives would do well to explore avenues for recruiting more women to their labor forces, helping to offset the massive decrease in workers that began with the COVID-19 pandemic.

McKinsey notes “expand[ing] the pool of available labor by doubling down on accessing diverse talent” is one of the key pillars of solving the worker shortage in construction.

Many women of color and women with children have left the labor force in recent years due to bias in hiring practices and a lack of child care options. Construction companies that offer training programs to historically marginalized communities and provide health and child care to their employees are likely to attract talent that has generally avoided the industry.

Importantly, only around one in every five workers in the construction industry perform business, management, or finance roles - however, four in five women in construction are in these areas. That means women account for around 40% of construction business roles even though they only represent 10% of the entire industry.

Accordingly, constructive executives must be sensitive to their workplace culture and pay equity, key issues to women who play an outsized role in supporting the business side of construction. By quickly addressing harassment, ensuring that women are paid fairly, and working to weigh all voices equally in company discussions, construction companies can help support the female staff that keep their businesses humming.

The future is bright for women in construction - but continued growth depends on careful action and strong leadership. 