



## Women's Wellbeing at Work: Insights from the US Surgeon General's 2022 Framework for Workplace Mental Health and Wellbeing

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Promoting the mental health and wellbeing of women in the workplace remains paramount in today's dynamic post COVID pandemic work landscape, especially with the rise in remote work options. Prioritizing mental health and wellbeing is essential for both employees and employers.

The current U.S. workforce includes more than 160 million individuals, with women accounting for 46.8% of the labor force, work plays a pivotal role in shaping the health, wealth, and overall wellbeing of women. (1,2,3) Ideally, work provides women with the means to support themselves and their families while also offering a sense of purpose, opportunities for growth, and a supportive community. When women thrive in the workplace, they are more likely to experience both physical and mental wellness, contributing positively to their work environments. (4)

Despite external challenges such as economic disparities, educational and medical debt, and housing instability, organizations hold the potential to promote mental health and wellbeing among women in the workforce. Leaders, managers, supervisors, and employees now have an unprecedented opportunity to reevaluate the role of work in women's lives and explore strategies to enhance support systems tailored specifically to women's needs. (5,6) By prioritizing the health and wellbeing of women in the workplace, organizations can create environments where women can thrive personally and professionally.

The US Surgeon General's 2022 report on Workplace Mental Health and Wellbeing offers a comprehensive framework outlining five essential components each complete with two human needs necessary for creating supportive and empowering work environments which may be tailored to women's needs. (7) Let's explore how these five essentials can cultivate workplaces that prioritize women's wellbeing and professional growth.

**Ensuring Protection from Harm (Safety and Security)** Prioritizing workplace safety, especially for women, is crucial for effective performance. Racial and ethnic minority women and migrant workers often face higher risks due to discriminatory practices and workplace violence. Organizations must adhere to regulations, enhance

policies, and collaborate with female workers to ensure safety.

Adequate rest is essential for women's physical and mental health in the workplace. Insufficient rest increases the risk of injuries and burnout. Workplace leaders should consider factors like working hours and provide opportunities for rest to support female employees' wellbeing and productivity.

Supporting mental health is crucial, especially for women, to reduce stigma and offer inclusive cultures. Organizations can achieve this by providing training, enhancing Employee Assistance Programs (EAP), and ensuring comprehensive healthcare coverage. Initiatives like the National Alliance for Mental Illness StigmaFree Company Pledge promote mental health awareness and support for women.

Implementing Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, and Accessibility (DEIA) practices is vital to ensure workplace safety and inclusivity for women. Inclusive cultures foster environments where all female workers feel valued and respected. Employers must offer reasonable accommodations and promote diversity initiatives to empower women professionally and personally.

**Fostering Connection & Community (Social Support and Belonging)** In building vibrant workplace communities, it's crucial to ensure women feel a sense of belonging. Encouraging social interaction and breaking down barriers fosters positive relationships, shielding against bias. Leaders must ally with inclusive environments where every woman feels empowered to voice her thoughts.

Cultivating trust among female colleagues is key. Leaders should create spaces for team members to bond, fostering empathy and support, especially during challenging times. Strong relationships at

work not only boost performance but also drive innovation, underscoring the need for transparent communication between leaders and their teams.

In today's remote or hybrid setups, promoting collaboration is vital. Leaders should champion teamwork, facilitate regular communication, and equip teams with effective collaboration tools. Addressing broader social issues can also strengthen bonds among women, nurturing a supportive environment.



Creating these supportive networks is fundamental for women's mental health and professional growth. By fostering a culture of inclusivity, building trusted relationships, and promoting collaboration, organizations empower women to thrive together.

**Striking Work-Life Harmony (Autonomy and Flexibility)** Achieving balance between work and life requires granting women autonomy over their work methods. Providing flexibility in tasks, schedules, and locations can alleviate conflicts and build trust, underlining the importance of clear communication between employers and employees.

Flexible and predictable work schedules are essential. Unstable hours contribute to financial stress and strain women's physical and mental health. Implementing family-friendly policies can help address these challenges.

Increasing access to paid leave is paramount. Lagging in offering paid medical and family leave, disproportionately affects low-wage workers and minorities. Paid leave not only boosts health but also reduces turnover and presenteeism.

Respecting boundaries between work and personal time is crucial, particularly for women. Establishing



clear boundaries on after-hours communication can prevent burnout, prioritizing the well-being of employees.

Finding harmony between work and life is a common challenge. This third essential underscores the importance of autonomy, flexible schedules, paid leave, and boundary respect. By accommodating women's diverse needs, organizations can enhance job satisfaction and retention among female employees.

**Embracing Mattering at Work (Dignity and Meaning)** Providing women with a living wage is foundational for safeguarding their mental health and well-being. Fair compensation, along with benefits like mental health support and retirement plans, is essential. Research shows that increasing the minimum wage can lead to improved health outcomes, particularly for marginalized groups.

Engaging women in decision-making processes enhances overall well-being. Involving them in setting organizational goals fosters commitment and enthusiasm. Employing engagement surveys can effectively identify and address workers' well-being needs.

Building a culture of gratitude and recognition is critical. Supervisors play a pivotal role in appreciating and acknowledging employees, positively impacting their sense of value and team performance.

Connecting individual work with the organizational mission inspires and reduces stress by giving meaning to work and fostering pride in organizational goals. Leaders should help workers understand their contributions to the mission's success.

Recognizing women's contributions and dignity in the workplace fosters a sense of belonging and purpose. This fourth essential prioritizes fair compensation, engaging women in decision-making, fostering gratitude and recognition, and aligning individual work with the organizational mission. Empowering women enhances morale and organizational commitment.

## **Nurturing Opportunity for Growth (Learning and Accomplishment)**

Providing women with quality training, education, and mentoring is paramount. Many companies overlook the importance of worker learning and growth, but employers can promote it through various programs. Personal encouragement and coaching are also vital for fostering growth.

Creating clear and equitable pathways for career advancement for women is crucial. Transparent career pathways and opportunities foster diversity and inclusion. It's crucial to ensure equitable distribution of opportunities, especially for workers

of color, considering remote and hybrid work arrangements.

Offering relevant, reciprocal feedback is key. Leaders should offer guidance based on workers' strengths and growth opportunities. Creating positive engagement opportunities and equipping leaders with training and resources are essential for effective management and coaching.

Providing learning and advancement opportunities is crucial for women's career development and fulfillment. This fifth essential stresses quality training, mentorship programs, and clear pathways for career progression. By investing in women's

professional growth and recognizing their achievements, organizations foster a culture of excellence and innovation.

In the post-pandemic era, workplaces have a unique chance to prioritize women's mental health and well-being, fostering resilience and success. The Surgeon General's 2022 Framework for Workplace Mental Health & Well-Being provides a blueprint for creating supportive environments. Sustainable change requires committed leadership and centers the voices of women. I encourage you to explore the full report to gain deeper insights into fostering women's well-being in the workplace and building inclusive environments for all.

## REFERENCES:

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