

WORKING WOMEN NEED A RAISE – AND A BREAK *(from Working America, Community Affiliate of the AFL-CIO)*

The newly released results of the Working America 2008 Ask a Working Woman survey reveal some astonishing facts about America's working women. The survey results – compiled from some 12,000 online responses – paint a picture of women running very close to empty. It's clear that working women are badly in need of both a raise and a break. Some of the survey's key findings about American working women are:

- If they had more available time, they would work another job.
- They have little time just for themselves.
- Above all, they want a raise.
- They talk more to co-workers than to partners, children or friends.
- They see having children impacting negatively on their careers.
- They identify with feminism.

Overall, women are being squeezed hard for both time and money, the survey showed. So much so that financially strapped working women say that if they had more time, they'd find a second job. What things would you do if you had more free time? The survey found:

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| • Work a second job | 50% |
| • Spend more time with family | 43% |
| • Spend more time with friends | 24% |
| • Exercise | 22% |
| • Sleep | 20% |
| • Volunteer | 15% |
| • Take a class | 6% |

But they don't have more time. The Ask a Working Woman survey, the sixth conducted since 1997, found that across America, women have virtually no time for themselves. After work and family responsibilities, nearly half have either no time or less than an hour a day. **In fact, working women talk more with co-workers than they do with their children, parents or friends, or even with their spouses or partners.**

At the same time, increased working hours haven't given women financial security. A majority of women are under so much economic pressure they have credit card debt they say will take at least eight months to pay off. So tight are their budgets that more than half say the thing they need most – more than better health care, child care or pension contributions – is a 10% raise. The survey showed the following as to what would make their life as a working woman substantially easier:

- A 10% raise in your paycheck 53%
- Affordable, high-quality health care 20%
- A pension 8%
- Affordable, high-quality child care 8%
- Paid time off: take care of sick child/relative 6%
- Paid sick days 3%

Overall, women are disappointed with their lack of financial traction. According to the survey, “Two-thirds (66%) say they expected to have less debt, while 59% expected to be making more money and 42% expected to be in a better job.

And, money is critical to nearly all working women, even at the cost of job satisfaction. Seventy-two percent said that if they had a choice between a job that paid better or one that was more fun, they would choose the one with higher pay.

Women work through their work breaks. Some state laws mandate work breaks. But even having work breaks did not necessarily mean women could take them. Thirteen percent said they just worked straight through.

Moreover, women are acutely aware that their chances for job improvement are limited simply because they are women. Nearly half say they know or believe that men are being paid more than women. Worse, two thirds believe that being male, younger or more attractive would increase their chances of promotion. And, 80% say, “having children hurts their career and prospects in the job market” but note that men suffer no such problem if they have children.

Because care giving falls more heavily on women’s shoulders, working women use their benefits to help family members. A majority of survey respondents have some form of paid sick leave. But very many women use their sick days, vacation or other paid leave to care for sick children, parents or other family members. Only 14% say they would or could hire someone else to care for the family member or shift the care-giving responsibility to another member of the family.

Despite the pressures, or perhaps because of them, working women continue to strongly support gains for women as a class. Eighty percent of the respondents say they identify with the goals and ideals of feminism, and 43 percent feel strongly about it. And they are not just hoping for change: 90% say they voted in the last election, and six in 10 support efforts to encourage voting by women.

The survey was conducted in May and June 2008, and women found conditions worsening. “Prices for everything have soared out of control while wages stagnate,” wrote one respondent. Projected economic trends promise to tighten the squeeze on women even further.