

Women In Peace and Security Careers

U.S. Congressional Staffs

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with

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Previous Reports

Women In Peace and Security Careers Series

Women in United Nations Peace Operations: Increasing the Leadership Opportunities (2008)

Progress Report on Women in Peace & Security Careers: U.S. Executive Branch (2010)

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Foreword

This report, *Women in Peace and Security Careers: U.S. Congressional Staffs*, is intended to raise awareness among the policy community about how women are faring on Capitol Hill and what needs to be done to support more women in leadership positions in the legislative policy environment.

This is the third WIIS study in the *Women In Peace and Security Careers* series. Since 2008, WIIS has documented the status of women in leadership positions and women's perspectives on career advancement in United Nations Peace Operations and in the Executive Branch of the U.S. Government. These studies are based on qualitative data gathered from individual interviews and focus groups. The series highlights gaps in women's representation and the voices and experiences of women who are navigating paths to advancement. The series also offers recommendations for peace and security institutions to better support women's participation.

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Executive Summary

The November 2012 elections were record-breaking for women in U.S. politics. More women than ever before were elected in the U.S. Senate and House of Representatives. Although the U.S. Congress is still far from gender parity, women comprised 18.3 percent of the U.S. Congress (20 percent in the Senate and 17.9 percent in the House of Representatives) in the 2014 Congress.¹ This is a slight increase from 2009, when women comprised 16.8 percent of House seats and 17 percent of Senate seats.² The news resulted in a flurry of media coverage in early 2013 about the impact of more women with diverse backgrounds on the legislative process and U.S. policy.

In spite of all the attention on the increased number of female Members of Congress, the participation of women in key staff positions in congressional offices has been virtually ignored. Congressional staffers play powerful and influential roles in shaping laws and policies, but there is very little information about women at these levels.

This WIIS report addresses this gap and focuses not on *women in Congress* but rather on *women working for Congress* and how are they negotiating workplace and advancement challenges on a daily basis. This report offers congressional leaders and offices a deeper understanding of gendered behaviors in their workplaces, and suggests new approaches to supporting female talent on Capitol Hill.

The research for this report coincided with a renewed discussion about women's advancement in the workforce. Indeed, Anne-Marie Slaughter's article "Why Women Still Can't Have it All," which appeared in *The Atlantic* in June 2012 unleashed a contentious national dialogue on the personal trade-offs of professional advancement for women. Dr. Slaughter challenged prevailing feminist wisdom about professional success and called out the larger gender, social and economic factors that are influencing women's career advancement. Dr. Slaughter's personal account of her struggle to reconcile her "dream job" as a senior advisor in the U.S. Department of State with her family needs at home seemed to strike a particularly personal chord for many women in Washington, D.C. and around the country. In March 2013, Facebook COO Sheryl Sandberg released her highly-publicized book, *Lean In*. Her premise was that the gender gap in leadership levels stems from the fact that women are repeatedly holding themselves back throughout their careers. Since then, the discussion on women's leadership in America has continued unabated, as new research and opinions emerge on the role of gender and women's participation across industries and sectors. In February 2014, foreign policy commentator and former Department of Defense senior official Rosa Brooks published "Recline: Why Leaning in Is Killing Us" in *Foreign Policy*. Brooks rejects the assumption that women should always be leaning in, and argues that the pressure on both the workplace and the home front is hurting women. The article was getting significant buzz at the time of publication of this report.

¹ Center for American Women and Politics (CAWP). Fact Sheet: "Women in the U.S. Congress 2014." http://www.cawp.rutgers.edu/fast_facts/levels_of_office/documents/cong.pdf

² Ibid. Archived Fact Sheets. http://www.cawp.rutgers.edu/fast_facts/resources/FactSheetArchive.php

The newfound attention on women’s underrepresentation in leadership positions – in policy and industry – has not left the Washington policy community untouched. Congressional staffers interviewed for this report were enthusiastic to join the dynamic national conversation about women in the workplace.

Our research reveals that overall, female congressional staffers are positive about their career experiences on Capitol Hill. This being said, they also identified some glaring problems that are affecting women’s advancement and leadership opportunities – including lack of transparency around women’s participation; inconsistent human resource policies across offices; endemic biases and gendered behaviors; and poor leadership and management styles. The women who were interviewed for this report shared the common perspective that the United States government should set an example for other institutions and sectors in supporting women’s equal participation at all levels, and that diversity in public service is a prerequisite for good policy and governance.

Key Findings

Workplace Climate and Culture

- Female congressional staffers observe clear disparities in the workplace, particularly in specific policy portfolios where women are significantly underrepresented. Women say that their minority status creates a climate where many are “self-censoring,”³ which is detrimental to their visibility and career advancement.
- Congressional office cultures vary considerably depending on individual leaders. There are no standard policies and practices, and no annual reviews required, and thus no accountability for how managers treat their employees. Women who were interviewed saw this as a major hindrance to creating a more progressive working environment on the Hill.
- The level of support for work-life needs varies depending on Member, office, and issue portfolio. There are inconsistent policies regarding family leave and flexibility, and women view the maternity and paternity leave that is offered as inadequate.

Career Advancement

- The majority of women who participated in this study observed that more men are advancing into senior positions than women, and that men are making higher salaries than women with equal qualifications and job descriptions. Women also perceived that male colleagues are more effectively using self-promotion and negotiation in these workplaces,

³ For purposes of this report, we use the term “self-censoring” to describe the tendency of women to hold back from vocalizing their opinions or ideas in policy meetings or other policy work environments.

leading to more advancement opportunities.⁴ The perceptions are critical factors in shaping women's views about their own leadership and advancement capabilities and opportunities.

- There is a lack of accessible, quantitative data on congressional salaries for specific types of jobs. Interviewees said this makes it difficult to negotiate equitable employment terms or position themselves for career advancement.
- Women said that it is challenging to negotiate needed flexibility after having children, and that many women leave the Hill at these junctures.

Mentorship and Leadership

- Female Members of Congress are not always perceived by female staffers as vocal or supportive of female staffer concerns.
- Women view mentors and personal contacts as vitally important, and yet, women are not benefiting as much as men from them. Although women report that they are mentoring often, there appears to be a lack of mentoring for women at more senior levels of their careers.
- Female staffers express negative reactions to management and leadership approaches in Congress. Access to leadership development opportunities is lacking.

⁴ Recent data on the numbers of women in management positions in congressional offices compared with men support this perception. Also, according to women's leadership research described in *Harvard Business Review*, "second-generation biases" include patterns of interaction that "inadvertently benefit men while putting women at a disadvantage." See Herminia Ibarra, Robin Ely, and Deborah Kolb., "Women Rising: Unseen Barriers," *Harvard Business Review* Sept. 2013.

The Congressional Workplace through Women’s Eyes

Women who were interviewed acknowledged that progress has been made in women’s presence as congressional staffers. Yet, many pointed out that there are still too few female staffers on national security-related committees and too few women with portfolios in such areas as U.S. intelligence. Women’s minority status is perceived as both a positive and a negative factor. Some women said that being one of so few makes them more visible for their accomplishments in male-dominated environments. However, others felt that because of women’s under-representation, women are facing barriers to credibility and visibility as policy experts. They see credibility as fundamentally important to satisfaction at work and advancement opportunities. Close to 40 percent of the women surveyed pointed to credibility as an expert as “essential” element of a fulfilling working environment. Several women observed that this minority status leads women to self-censor in meetings – holding back from voicing perspectives and concerns – because they put too much pressure on themselves as the “only woman” or one of very few in these discussions. The self-censorship makes them less visible among peers and managers and less likely to be tapped for future opportunities.

Female Chiefs of Staff by Gender

U.S. House of Representatives

<i>Democrats</i>	<i>Republicans</i>
44.6% Women	19.1% Women
55.4% Men	80.9% Men

U.S. Senate

<i>Democrats</i>	<i>Republicans</i>
32.8% Women	17.2% Women
67.2% Men	82.8% Men

Source: National Journal. “Women Outnumber Men in Congress, But Men Have Higher Placements.” Jul 11, 2012 (updated Jul. 13, 2012).

A 2012 study by the Congressional Management Foundation found that office culture was very important to almost 79 percent of congressional staffers.⁵ Yet, our research indicates that the work climate for women varies considerably by office. Although very few interviewees mentioned specific examples of gender discrimination, some said that the environment can be sexist, and many said that it remains “an old boys’ network.” Interviewees said that there was sometimes a disregard

⁵ Emma Dumain. “Congressional Staff Survey Details Work-Life Balance Realities, Job Burnout on Capitol Hill,” *Roll Call*, Oct. 24, 2012.

for workplace laws and a lack of accountability for how congressional offices treat their employees. They perceive the lack of any common workplace policies – where there are no rules, no consistency and many variables in leadership approaches – across the institution as a major problem. One interviewee summed it up by saying, “Senators and Members of Congress may be progressive, but it is not a progressive institution.” Interviewees pointed to the fact that the institution of Congress places a high value on precedence and is resistant to change. Another described the culture on Capitol Hill as “a culture of personality” based on “fiefdoms.” Office culture is heavily determined by the personality of the Member and by the leadership approaches of the senior staffers, which can set a positive, or in some cases, a very negative tone. It also influences how well offices can attract and retain talent. Women say that it is common practice to share informal information on the work climate of different offices, and that this plays into their decisions about where to work.

“Senators and Members of Congress may be progressive, but it is not a progressive institution.” – WIIS interviewee

One important theme in the discussions with women on the Hill was how female Members of Congress and other women in leadership in congressional offices interact with women and/or react to issues of concern to women. A number of interviewees said that some of the most difficult Members they have worked for in Congress have been women. Why? They say it is often because those women are so afraid of being labeled negatively if they are viewed as biased *towards* women that they behave in the opposite way: They are harder on female staff. One interviewee observed that among some female Members it is a “rite of passage to do hard hours and lose part of your personal life.” Women also perceived that female Members of Congress often resist aligning themselves with “women’s issues.” Only 7 percent of women surveyed said that female Members of Congress are “very vocal” on behalf of women, although 50 percent of respondents said that female Members can *sometimes* be vocal (depending on the issue). Another 14 percent said that female Members are generally not very vocal on behalf of the concerns of female staff working for Congress. Several examples were given, including the Member who refused to sign on to a request for lactation facilities for breast feeding mothers on the Hill and another Member who regularly schedules staff meetings late into the evening. The focus groups for this study revealed frustration among many women on the Hill that female leaders did not make more of an effort to support female congressional staffers.⁶ This pattern aligns with other data collected by WIIS in policy workplaces that are male-dominated. Women who have reached top levels when there are few other women at those levels tend to shy away from overt agendas that are associated with “women’s issues.” Until more women reach these decision-making levels in “critical mass” (often considered 30 percent or above), it is often uncommon for female senior leaders to feel comfortable directly challenging established cultures, processes, and biases.

⁶ This was a limited study that did not focus on the different perceptions of women about male and female leaders. Yet the interviewees frequently highlighted the actions of female leaders specifically. Further research is needed on women’s opinions regarding both male and female supervisors/leaders in congressional workplaces to fully analyze this issue.

Work-Life Realities

Is it possible to have any semblance of work-life balance on the Hill? The widespread perception is that congressional jobs are not family-friendly. The congressional Management Foundation, a non-partisan organization, released findings from a study on work-life in Congress in 2012. The report, which is based on more than 1,400 interviews, showed that almost 75 percent of congressional staffers were not fully satisfied with the flexibility in their offices, while more than half of the interviewees said that flexibility was important.⁷ The researchers found that the average work week for congressional staffers was 53 hours/week when Congress is in session.⁸

Women interviewed for the WIIS study describe a wide variation in workplace culture in this regard, depending on office, portfolios, and Member. Many women said that personal offices are more unpredictable than committee offices, in general. Women also lamented the lack of maternity and

“Everyone is too afraid to miss out -- feeling like you have to be there all the time or you’re missing something, or you’re upsetting a boss that your salary is dependent on.” – WIIS interviewee on work-life balance challenges on the Hill

paternity leave, and the inconsistency among offices and committees regarding family leave policies. According to the 2010 House Compensation Study, House of Representatives offices offered an average of 7.4 weeks of maternity leave, and 23 percent of offices offered four weeks or less.⁹ Women highlighted the important role of senior staff in

setting a tone for work-life needs. Some said that there are clear generational differences and sometimes also gender differences in approach. Older Members and supervisors – often men – are sometimes less open to telecommuting or flexible schedules. But interviewees said that just one person can make a positive change in an office environment. When a single person at a senior-level chooses to model work-life balance, women report that others follow. Women have observed that male colleagues are making changes to their schedules when they have family to consider; many said that as more men think about these aspects and make career choices with work-life needs in mind, it will improve the environment for everyone. Some of the interviews also pointed out that work-life concerns were not on the agenda of female leaders in Congress, and that male champions are needed to push for a more supportive work-life environment on the Hill.

Women described tensions in the workplace between those with children and those without children. Women with children expressed guilt about leaving before other staff and felt that there was resentment among colleagues. Interestingly, some interviewees pointed to another generational

⁷ Yvonne Wenger. “Congressional Staffers Want Better Balance between Work, Life,” *The Baltimore Sun*, Nov. 4, 2012.

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ ICF International *2010 House Compensation Study*.

http://assets.sunlightfoundation.com.s3.amazonaws.com/policy/staff%20salary/2010_house_compensation_study.pdf. See also, Erica Lovley. “Female Staffers Face Uphill Climb,” *Politico*, Apr. 27, 2010.

tension – that they feel judgment from young people in the office who do not yet have family obligations or those who are single or without children.

Those interviewed perceived that women are leaving the Hill when they have children. A 2012 study by the Congressional Management Foundation confirms that work-life concerns are a major factor in staffers considering job transitions. The study also noted that 48 percent of managers said they would leave Congress “to seek a better balance between work and personal life.”¹⁰

Interviewees pointed out that few women are able to negotiate part-time or flexible schedules. One interviewee commented that “you have to be willing to walk away if you try to negotiate flexibility and are told ‘no.’” Others said that it is vitally important to have the confidence to ask what you need. Several women said that they successfully negotiated reasonable hours and personal boundaries regarding responding to work after hours. Many emphasized that they are “always connected” because of technology and that availability helped them to negotiate flexibility. Many said that there is increasing willingness among women staffers on the Hill to more openly talk about these challenges and strategies for work-life balance. More than 30 percent of those surveyed felt that a work environment that is supportive of work-life balance is “essential” to them.

How women respond to the high-pressure, high-demand environment on the Hill varies. While a good number are leaving altogether, according to our discussions, others are attempting to maintain a delicate balance in an environment where hours and expectations are constantly shifting. Many women said that they changed priorities and work strategies when they had children. They did not lessen their commitment to the highest standards of work but began to think differently about how to define their own success. Others said it was very important to choose offices that are known to be work-life friendly and to consciously tailor career choices on the Hill with this factor in mind. Some said that they narrowed their portfolios as one tactic to reduce the pressure to always be in the office. Overall, women who participated in this study said that they were defining success more individually – to be compatible with their own work-life needs. Interestingly, this viewpoint is in direct contrast to the common, “workaholic” definitions of success on Capitol Hill.

“I am interested in the idea of a step-wise approach instead of a straight ladder. It shouldn’t reflect badly on someone to make a career advancement, and then flat-line, and then make another career advancement.” – WIIS interviewee

¹⁰ Dumain, supra.

Career Advancement: The Landscape for Women on the Hill

This study shows that women on the Hill are making career decisions based on a variety of factors and that advancement considerations are high on the list. When asked for the top reasons why they had accepted their current positions, approximately half of them said a higher professional level was the primary deciding factor. More than a third of the women were also motivated by higher salary and the opportunity to work on different substantive issues. Approximately one-fourth of those surveyed said that work-life needs influenced their most recent career move.

Many female staffers see Capitol Hill as offering more opportunities for advancement than the Executive Branch or other organizations. Some women say this is because advancement is faster in Congress than in other sectors, as younger professionals are given more responsibilities than in other workplaces.

But interviewees acknowledged that there is still a very visible underrepresentation of women at senior staff levels, especially in congressional committee offices. More than 60 percent of the women surveyed said that more men are advancing into higher positions compared with women. This perception is confirmed by a Politico study of women in congressional leadership positions. In 2010, Politico reviewed congressional compensation studies and found that even though women are entering congressional staffs in junior levels, there is a significant drop in the number of women in management positions. Politico highlighted that the number of female chiefs of staff in the House of Representatives only increased 6 percent between 2005-2010 and the percentage of female legislative directors increased by only 1 percent in that same period.¹¹

Why has progress stalled? Women who were interviewed said that decision-makers sometimes have unconscious gender bias in hiring and promotions. They also said that women are hitting plateaus at leadership levels and being overlooked for more senior-level opportunities. Many emphasized that it is hard to move up after a certain point. Several said that there is a subtle hesitation in hiring or promoting women with children. Some said that women are often concentrated in policy-focused positions while men more often occupy political positions. These politically-oriented positions enable men to build the relationships that are necessary for advancement. Many said that in order to rectify the advancement gaps for women, the pool of qualified and willing female leaders and experts needs to be expanded, because there is not a deep bench of women to draw from yet in many specific national security areas. An increase in the number of women involved in political campaigns, involvement that often leads to senior positions, could also help bridge some of the unbalance.

A majority of the interviewees also said that there are definite salary differences between men and women on the Hill, and that they have repeatedly observed men making substantially more than women in comparable positions. Much of this differential they attribute to gender differences in how women and men approach self-promotion and negotiations.

¹¹ Lovley, *supra*.

"I notice men getting paid about 10,000-15,000 more for the same jobs on the Hill." – WIIS Survey Respondent

Women observed that men were more skilled and comfortable with self-promotion. This difference was most apparent in informational or job interviews, where women told us that they have seen men and women ask very different questions. According to the interviewees, men tend to ask about higher positions and demonstrate more confidence that they are

qualified for these positions. Women, on the other hand, tend to focus on lower ranking positions, and downplay or underestimate their qualifications for higher positions. Similarly, women saw this same dynamic often play out in negotiations for raises. Interviewees expressed the view that it was more difficult for women to attain raises, and that women are hesitant to pursue raises or negotiate other benefits because there is an attitude on the Hill "that you are replaceable." Those who were interviewed for this study agreed that women are not promoting themselves in the same ways as male counterparts and it is often hurting their advancement in these environments.

How Much Less Do Women Make in Congressional Offices?

U.S. House of Representatives

<i>Democrats</i>	<i>Republicans</i>	<i>All House Staff</i>
\$1,474 less/year	\$10,093 less/year	\$5,863 less/year

U.S. Senate

<i>Democrats</i>	<i>Republicans</i>	<i>All Senate Staff</i>
\$4,916 less/year	\$9,806 less/year	\$7,278 less/year

Source: National Journal. "How Congressional Republicans and Democrats Pay Women." Matt Berman. Jul. 11, 2012 (updated on Jul. 13, 2012).

Building Relationships: Mentors and Networks

Women on the Hill seem to agree that building mentoring relationships and expanding professional contacts is vitally important for success. The vast majority of women surveyed and interviewed for

“From what I’ve seen, the most effective ways to obtain enhancing positions are via a tight relationship with one or two influential Members [of Congress] and/or a broad network.” – WIIS Survey Respondent

this study said that the most effective way to identify new professional opportunities is through mentors and contacts. More than 60 percent reported that mentors and contacts had reached out to them directly to share potential job opportunities, and 43 percent had found it effective to reach out to their contacts when seeking a career move. More than 10 percent of the women surveyed considered formal job listings as “never effective” in the foreign policy/national security arena.

The interviews showed that women see major differences in how men approach mentoring and network-building. Women described a culture of informal information-sharing on Capitol Hill – a culture that has been more difficult for women to break into and benefit from. Although some described positive experiences of colleagues and managers sharing their advice openly, many highlighted a lack of mentoring culture in Congress. One interviewee described it as a “kill or be killed environment.” Another interviewee said that because relationships are closely interconnected with political power, there is a tendency for staffers to “husband their contacts” – keeping their networks close and hesitating to share connections. Some interviews also shared the opinion that women especially are not helping one another as much as they should.

Women recognize the importance of broadening professional networks for advancement. Some felt that formal networking may be “less instinctive” to women than to male counterparts. Others pointed out that those with children are often at a disadvantage in networking on the Hill because so many of these informal opportunities occur after working hours.

Women perceive that men are more assertive in asking for mentoring help. Several women pointed out that they have only seen men request informational interviews in their offices. They acknowledged that women feel less comfortable seeking out mentorship and stressed that women need to be more proactive in seeking contacts and opportunities.

“Usually by the time [a job] gets onto a list serve, it’s too late.” – WIIS interviewee

Interviewees described a spectrum of mentorship approaches. They pointed to “orientation” mentoring as essential for new staffers to understand the unique processes on the Hill and how to navigate them. They highlighted professional mentorship to deepen an understanding of how

institutions work. Yet, they stressed the importance of a third category of mentorship – “sponsorship” (more proactive mentorship of individuals) – as the key to advancement. Almost three-fourths of the women said that the best help that mentors have provided is directly recommending them for specific opportunities (i.e. sponsorship). Mentorship that consisted of general work advice was only helpful to about 5 percent of the respondents. The women also place high-value on mentors who had made direct introductions to new contacts, guided them to success in particular work environments, actively encouraged and sometimes pushed them to take on new opportunities, and helped them through specific work or personal challenges.

Approximately 80 percent of the women who participated in this study reported that they have had and currently have mentors. The majority of these mentoring relationships were developed by working in the same office (86 percent of those surveyed). Women also built mentoring relationships with others with whom they worked at the same organization (36 percent), by proactively reaching out to individuals whom they respected (36 percent), through introductions by a common contact (27 percent), by participating in volunteer or other organizational activities outside of work (18 percent), or benefiting from mentoring by family and friends (14 percent).

But the research shows that there are unmet mentoring needs as women advance in their careers on the Hill. The WIIS survey shows that about half of the interviewees had benefited from mentoring in the first 10 years of their careers but showed a steady drop in mentorship opportunities after that career point. Only 30 percent of the women reported that they had received mentoring between 11-15 years into their careers, and only 7 percent pointed to mentoring after 15 years of experience. This gap points to a very real disparity in sponsorship for women when they need it most – while navigating management roles and making important career decisions about leadership opportunities.

“At the senior ranks, personal contacts are the most essential element in finding a good fit -- by a long shot.” – WIIS Survey Respondent

Women said that the majority of their mentors and sponsors were men with well-established careers in the policy community. Why? Some women pointed out that there is a much smaller pool of women at top levels in congressional offices, so available and willing female mentors and sponsors are “few and far between.” However, it should be noted that the survey results differed from the focus groups on this point. In the survey, about 38 percent of respondents said that they had more male mentors, while 33 percent said they had more female mentors, and 29 percent said that they had been mentored by men and women equally. Nevertheless, women expressed the need for more skill-building among women as to how they can mentor and sponsor each other. Women who were interviewed placed high importance on peer mentoring, which they said was often more comfortable for women and could be extremely helpful at every career stage on Capitol Hill. An example was given of a group of female staffers who meet once or twice each month and give each other advice and support.

Almost 90 percent of the women who participated in this study said that they are mentoring others. Although about one-third of those surveyed were mentoring women more often than men, the

majority of the respondents reported that they are mentoring both women and men. Similarly to their own mentors, the majority of women met their mentees by working in the same office. Interviewees said that mentoring policies and programs differ by office, and some offices had developed internal initiatives that were working well for women.

The Leadership Deficit in Congress

Gallop reports a downward trend in public opinion of Congress since 2010. At the start of 2014 approval was just 13 percent, compared with a historical average of 33 percent.¹² While the average American views Congress as an institution lacking the necessary leadership to tackle the country's problems, how do women who work within this institution view their own managers and leaders in Congress? Not much differently. Women described a culture in Congress that does not encourage or reward good management.

“In an environment that’s so high stakes, I’ve encountered a lot of people who don’t handle pressure and don’t handle conflict very well... they don’t have the skill sets [to lead].” – WIIS interviewee

Although leadership styles and approaches vary considerably across offices, women stated that overall “most Members don’t manage well.” One interviewee said that “policy and politics always trump management” on the Hill. In addition to Members of Congress who are often lacking in management skills, the problem is also apparent at all levels of senior leadership. Women observed that subject matter experts are advanced into leadership positions in offices without any management skill sets. Often, experts are micromanagers when they find themselves in management positions. These individuals are “good at policy, but not people.” As a result, many of these offices have a constant revolving door of outgoing, disgruntled staff.

Some interviewees shared the opinion that women may lead differently, but the majority said leadership styles do not hinge on gender. However, women voiced some gender-specific concerns relating to their own leadership development. The majority expressed that they struggle with their own leadership styles and approaches. They also highlighted the difficulty in balancing “likeability and respect” as female leaders, remarking that men in similar positions more easily gain respect.

Overall, women felt that it is extremely detrimental that there is no formal management training for senior staff on the Hill and that there are few opportunities to learn best practices as they develop their own leadership styles. Approximately 50 percent of those surveyed identified access to leadership and professional development as very important or essential in a work environment, yet few are getting these types of opportunities on the Hill. Among those women who reported that they sought out leadership and management training, almost all of them obtained the training off the Hill by other organizations. One of the most critical skill sets for success on the Hill, according to those interviewed, is collaborative leadership. Building relationships, cooperative partnerships, and

¹² See Gallup Politics. Jan 14, 2014, at <http://www.gallup.com/poll/166838/congress-job-approval-starts-2014.aspx>

constituencies of support are fundamental for congressional staffers. Women staffers said it is unfortunate that so little attention is focused on honing these skills.

Conclusion

Although this study was limited in scope, it offers a unique glimpse into how women at the mid-senior levels of congressional offices are viewing the policy environments in which they work and their opportunities for professional growth and career progression. Overall, women who participated in this study had a positive view of their experiences working for Congress, yet they were also vocal about the obstacles for women – institutional, cultural, and individual – that are impeding leadership opportunities. In some ways, women working on Capitol Hill face similar challenges as other women across organizations and sectors, especially in terms of attaining visibility, building mentoring relationships, and learning leadership approaches. Yet, female congressional staffers also grapple with a workplace that is defined by the individual ambitions and personalities of Congressional Members, and is often unaccountable, inconsistent, wedded to tradition, and resistant to change. The increase in female Members of Congress is only half the women’s leadership story on Capitol Hill. To understand the status of women in the U.S. legislative branch, it is crucial to hear from female staffers.

The genesis for this report came from the female staffers themselves, and their reaction to this project was overwhelmingly positive. There are too few opportunities for women in these policy roles to share their perspectives about the challenges and possible solutions to women’s underrepresentation, beyond hallway conversation. With the current debate about the progress of women in leadership roles and trade-offs that women continue to face in achieving success in the workforce, it is important to remember that our most important insights and most effective solutions to under-representation must be rooted in the experiences of the women themselves. The first step is to ask them. The second is to listen and begin to take concrete steps to reverse the stark gender disparities that remain in the upper echelons of U.S. policymaking. It is our hope that this short report contributes to that process – for the U.S. Congress but also other policy environments in the international security field.

Recommendations

Women who were interviewed and surveyed shared a number of recommendations for congressional leaders and outside organizations to better support women's advancement opportunities on Capitol Hill. Here are some of them.

Workplace Climate and Culture

- Implement fora to encourage inter-generational dialogue between junior and senior staff and to discuss positive standards and best practices in the workplace.
- Create mechanisms for staff-supervisor reviews and feedback.
- Collect and make available information on family leave policies for each congressional office.
- Standardize leave policies, and institute forward-leaning maternity and paternity programs.
- Implement flexible working arrangements such as remote working options during congressional recess periods.
- Encourage offices to create meaningful part-time opportunities to attract and retain female talent.

Career Advancement

- Collect and make available gender-disaggregated data on number of women and salaries of men and women in congressional staffs.
- Develop guidance on salary ranges for each job category in Congress.
- Develop opportunities to participate in formal exchanges with the Executive Branch.
- Highlight female expertise by publishing a directory of women and their expertise areas.

Mentorship and Leadership

- Increase networking opportunities among women.
 - Build formal networks of women across government.
 - Implement policy-focused conferences or events specifically designed for women to network with one another.
- Provide leadership and professional development training, on such topics as:
 - Becoming an effective mentee and mentor.
 - Building your personal narrative.
 - Marketing and promoting yourself.
 - Navigating career transitions.
 - Embracing feminine leadership qualities.
 - Understanding the leadership spectrum and leadership styles.
 - Supporting work-life balance in the workplace.
 - Practicing cultural and gender sensitivity.

Annex I: Methodology

During June-September 2012, the WIIS team conducted a series of focus groups, interviews, and an online survey of women working for the U.S. Senate and the House of Representatives, from both Democratic and Republican staffs. Approximately 30 staffers participated in the study. WIIS interviewed and surveyed women working on congressional committees with jurisdiction over foreign policy and national security issues and women working on portfolios in these areas on personal Member staffs.

Approximately 60 percent of those surveyed had worked for Congress for less than 6 years. Approximately, 28 percent had worked for Congress more than 10 years, and a fewer number had worked on the Hill between 6-10 years. Approximately 50 percent of those surveyed were in Professional Staffer positions, while 11 percent were in Legislative Assistant positions. The remaining 39 percent surveyed were in various director, advisor and counsel positions. Similarly, the majority of those interviewed currently occupy mid-senior level positions. Among those surveyed and interviewed, the majority had experience in both committee and personal congressional member offices.

Annex II: Networking Resources for Female Congressional Staff

Women’s Congressional Staff Association (WCSA):

WCSA is an official U.S. House of Representatives-recognized, bipartisan congressional staff organization dedicated to promoting career development opportunities for female congressional staffers.” WCSA includes more than 800 members who work in congressional offices ranging from junior to senior levels. WCSA organizes events such as networking opportunities and skills workshops.

<http://www.womenscsa.com/>

Capitol Mamas Group

The purpose of Capitol Mamas is to give working Hill moms and former Hill moms a forum in which they can get to know each other and serve a resource for one another, personally and professionally. Capitol Mamas is a group that will allow women to foster friendships, network, find mentors and mutual support, share information, and learn best practices – to help each other be better working moms. When women in Washington have children, unfortunately, they mostly lose the opportunity to socialize and network after-hours. Drinks or dinner after work is not an option for most of them. They lose opportunities to compare notes with colleagues, stay on top of issues of interest, and to meet people (especially other women) who could serve as valuable professional resources for them. Capitol Mamas intends to schedule its social and educational events to accommodate the working mother’s schedule, mainly with short events that occur during the lunch hour, or immediately following the end of the business day, always on or close to Capitol Hill.

<http://capitolmamas.blogspot.com/p/about.html>

Annex III: Professional Development Programs for Congressional Staff

Stennis Congressional Staff Fellows Program, Stennis Center for Public Service Leadership

The Stennis Fellows Program is a practical, bipartisan leadership development experience for senior-level staff of the United States Congress. Established in the 103rd Congress (1993-1994), the Stennis Fellows Program brings together chiefs of staff, committee staff directors, legislative directors, and others to explore ways to improve the effectiveness of those who work on Capitol Hill.

<http://www.stennis.gov/stennis-fellows>

National Defense University, Center for Applied Strategic Learning, National Security Strategy Course

The NSSC is a six-session course on Capitol Hill for Congressional staff which brings in distinguished NDU Professors to lecture and lead discussions on national security strategy building. The course ends with a CASL exercise on a strategic national security topic.

Congressional Security Scholars, Truman National Security Project

The Congressional Security Scholars Program is a premier leadership development program for Hill staffers, intended to build a generation of congressional staff with a broad understanding of current defense, foreign policy and national security issues.

Congressional Partnership Program, Partnership for a Secure America

This opportunity is for Congressional staff interested in generating dialogue and developing the skills and relationships required to advance bipartisanship on national security and foreign policy issues. Through policy seminars and networking activities, this unique program aims to equip the next generation of foreign policy and security experts to respect differences, build common ground and achieve US national interests.

<http://www.psaonline.org/article.php?id=491>

Heritage Congressional Fellowship Program, The Heritage Foundation

HCF is an educational program designed to give junior congressional staffers the tools to develop, promote, and defend conservative principles and policies. Our graduates understand America's First Principles, have a firm grounding in policy, and possess the practical job skills to advance their careers.

<http://www.heritage.org/about/congressional-fellowship/heritage-congressional-fellowship>

The Woodrow Wilson Foreign Policy Fellowship

The Woodrow Wilson Foreign Policy Fellowship is a highly competitive program offering qualified mid- to senior congressional staff an opportunity for in-depth focus and engagement on critical foreign policy issues relevant to the Congressional agenda. The Fellowship Program is also open to exceptional rising leaders who staff other U.S. policymakers who are keenly interested in foreign policy issues.

<http://www.wilsoncenter.org/about-the-foreign-policy-fellowship-program>

About Women In International Security

Women In International Security (WIIS) is the only global network actively advancing women's leadership, at all stages of their careers, in the international peace and security field.

Women in International Security (WIIS) is a nonpartisan membership organization dedicated to enhancing the participation, influence and effectiveness of women in the field of international affairs and security and encouraging more women to enter the field. WIIS currently has six U.S. chapters and 18 international affiliates, as well as members around the world. These chapters and affiliates are groups of volunteers who work to further WIIS' purpose across the United States and internationally by organizing events such as debates, discussions and seminars on topics related to women and international peace and security.

WIIS was founded in 1987 by a small group of women holding senior government and academic positions as a response to the lack of support for women in the male-dominated foreign policy and defense environments. It has since expanded to include new areas of expertise, reflecting the expanding definition of international security. Since WIIS was founded, women have advanced to increasingly important roles in the field of international security. However, despite international commitments to include women in peace and security decision-making at all levels, equal representation of women is not yet a reality, especially at senior levels of policymaking. In the majority of security policymaking institutions, women hold less than 30 percent of senior leadership positions. Entry into the profession is not necessarily translating into advancement into leadership positions in key peace and security institutions. The lack of female representation in decision-making positions means that the United States and the international community are missing the diversity of expertise and perspectives that are desperately needed in this field. The contributions that women have made and could potentially make to international peace and security are just beginning to be recognized. WIIS is working to ensure that this recognition translates into leadership opportunities for women around the world.

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Jolynn Shoemaker is a Non-Residential Fellow at SIPRI North America and CSIS. She was director of Women in International Security (WIIS) from January 2006 – January 2013. Before joining WIIS, she worked for the Institute for Inclusive Security, an organization dedicated to increasing women’s participation in peace processes. Ms. Shoemaker has served in policy and legal positions in the U.S. government. She worked in the Office of the Secretary of Defense, focusing on the Balkans region. She also worked as an attorney in the General Counsel’s Office for International Affairs in the Office of the Secretary of Defense, where she negotiated international agreements to prevent the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction.

Ms. Shoemaker was a Presidential Management Fellow in the U.S. Department of State, Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor, where she was responsible for monitoring human rights and asylum issues in Africa. She holds a J.D. and an M.A. (security studies) from Georgetown University and a B.A. from University of California at San Diego. She has published extensively on women, peace, and security and women’s leadership, and she is a member of the New York Bar, a term member of the Council on Foreign Relations, and a Truman National Security Fellow.

Marie-Laure Poiré



Marie-Laure Poiré has been with the Communications Office of The Hague Institute for Global Justice since February 2014. She was a program advisor for SIPRI-North America, working closely with the Executive Director on initiatives related to the operations of Women In International Security (WIIS). Prior to that, she was the assistant director of WIIS, where she designed and implemented hundreds of programs aimed at communicating, briefing, and informing partners and supporters (including large and small scale events, roundtables, experts consultations), from the private, public and non-profit sectors, on gender-related security issues while also providing them with leadership, mentorship, and professional development and training. She has a Master of Arts in Security Studies from the Security Studies Program at Georgetown University with an emphasis on human security issues.