

MarketWatch

Sheryl Sandberg thinks the workplace is 'rigged' against women -- but these steps could fix that

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The 2018 Women in the Workplace survey finds women are unrepresented at every level in corporate America, and it's not getting much better.



Progress for working women isn't just slow — it's stalled.

Only about one in five senior leaders in corporate America is female, and one in 25 is a woman of color, according to the latest [Women in the Workplace survey](#) released Tuesday from LeanIn.org and McKinsey. The report drew on corporate pipeline data from 279 companies employing more than 13 million people, and surveyed more than 64,000 employees about their workplace experience. And the report finds that women are still underrepresented at every level of the corporate ladder — and this gender gap is linked to a greater risk of sexual harassment.

Women face an unlevel playing field as soon as they start working, according to the report. Fewer women are hired at the entry level, as 48% are women, compared to 52% being men. And that gender gap widens as workers climb the corporate ladder. At the senior management/director level, 62% of positions are held by men, compared to women claiming 38%. As a result, there are already significantly fewer women to promote from within, or women with the right experience level to hire from the outside, so men are more likely to be hired or bumped up to more senior positions. "Women can never catch up," the report states, which is a key reason why the C-Suite is 77% male, and just 23% female.

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In fact, the number of women CEOs at Fortune 500 companies dropped 25% from 2017 to 2018, down to 24 from its previous high of 32, [as Fortune recently reported](#), and now make up just under 5% of those CEOs. One in five women told Women in the Workplace that they're usually the only, or one of the only, women in the room at their jobs — which made them almost twice as likely to be sexually harassed at some point in their careers. While 35% of women overall said they had experienced sexual harassment in the workplace, 55% of women in senior leadership, 48% of lesbian women and 45% of women in tech said they had been sexually harassed.



Female workers who reported being the only woman - or one of the only women - in the room also reported higher rates of sexual harassment. (Milkos/iStock)

But more than 80% of women were subject to microaggressions at work, such as someone making a demeaning comment toward them or assuming they were more junior than they really are, compared to 64% of women overall. "I was in the elevator and pressed the button for the executive office. Someone said to me, 'Um, no honey. That's for the executive offices. The interns are going to this floor,'" an anonymous director who spent four years at her company revealed in the report. This doesn't just perpetuate bias and disrespect, but women who experienced microaggressions were also more likely to think about leaving their jobs.

The report notes that these numbers actually could be even worse for women, as most of the participants in this survey were from white-collar jobs. Research has shown that service industry

employees are much more vulnerable to sexual discrimination and harassment. For example, 80% of female restaurant workers experienced harassment from a coworker on the job, while two-thirds were harassed by a manager, according to a study by [Restaurant Opportunities Centers United](#).

ALSO READ: How three powerhouse women are combating sexism in the restaurant industry

The Women in the Workplace report claims that women are doing their part to close the gender gap at work, such as earning more bachelor's degrees than men for more than 30 years, and asking for promotions and negotiating salaries as often as men, contrary to conventional wisdom. So now it's time for companies to do their part, writes Facebook COO and [LeanIn.Org](#) founder Sheryl Sandberg in an op-ed for The Wall Street Journal (which shares the same parent company as Moneyish.)

"That starts with making the business case for diversity ... companies need to explain to employees why making a personal commitment to hire, promote, mentor and support women is good not just for business, but for their own careers," she [wrote](#). "(Then) they need to follow through by reporting on progress and holding managers and leaders accountable for results. Most companies aren't taking these basic yet critical steps to correct their gender gaps."

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The report claims that if companies continue to hire and promote women to manager at current rates, the number of women in management will increase by just 1% over the next decade. But if women were hired and promoted at the same rate as men, that number could jump to 45% in just five years.

"The entire race has become rigged because of those unfair advantages at the start," Sandberg concludes in her column. "Companies need to take bold steps to make the race fair. This begins with establishing clear, consistent criteria for hiring and reviews, because when they are based on subjective impressions or preferences, bias creeps in. Companies should train employees so they understand how unconscious bias can affect who's hired and promoted—and who's not. And they should track outcomes to make sure candidates are being treated fairly."

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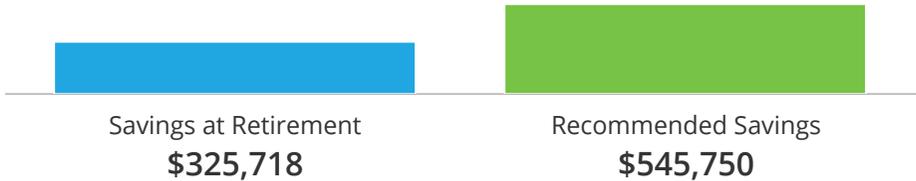
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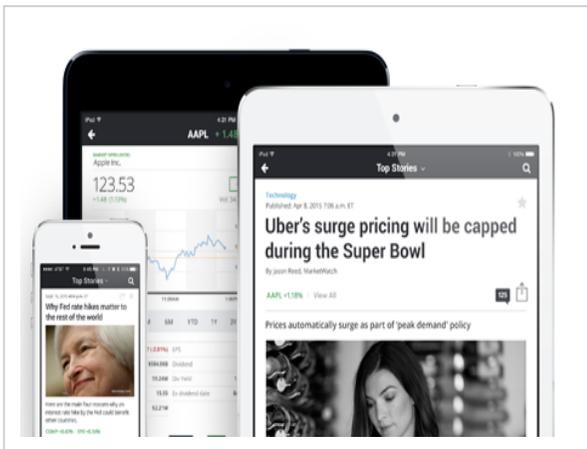
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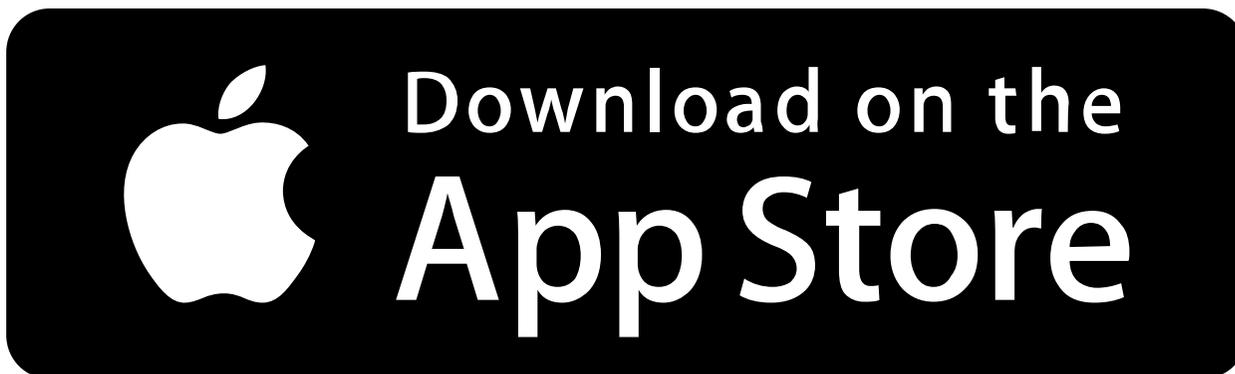
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