

SeekHer Shift

2022 REPORT ON THE STATE
OF WOMEN'S MENTAL HEALTH





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A Letter For Her

To our dear community –

If there's one thing we've come to believe deeply, it's knowing the power in your voice.

Your words that communicate your experience, are a force to be reckoned with. We hope as you navigate this report that you recognize your own voice in it.

We hope it puts to words the feelings you hadn't yet been able to quantify, and that it amplifies the words you've already been saying for years.

May this moment serve as an exhale; as a tangible reminder that you are not alone, and that your voice *matters*.

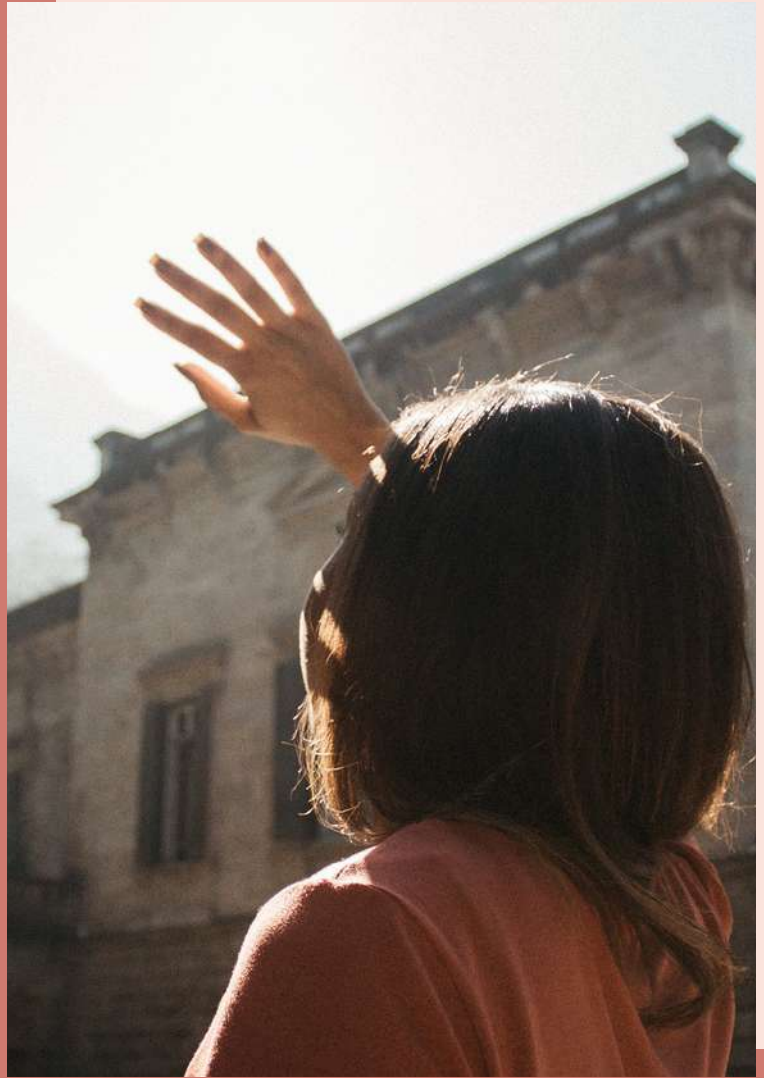
Thank you for sharing your hearts with us.

Thank you for trusting us with your stories.

Thank you for being you.

**You've inspired this.
You've inspired us.**

Across the U.S. and globally, women are facing the brunt of the mental health crisis.



The SeekHer Shift survey sought to unveil the everyday social and emotional weights that impact women's mental well-being - those *little big moments* that they face in their day-to-day.

Empowered by the unified voices of women, we can begin to change the daily inputs that comprise our culture - igniting a shift towards improved mental health.

According to CARE's Rapid Gender Analysis on the impact of the pandemic across 38 countries, women who reported increased mental health hardships were threefold that of men.

In the United States, 1 in 5 women experience a mental health disorder such as anxiety or depression (1). And while the growing mental health crisis touches us all, unipolar depression is twice as common in women than in men (2).

The weight of the world is getting heavier, increasing the burden women carry; many of these mental strains are built-in from a young age.

Three-quarters (75%) of mental health issues are established before the age of 24, and young women have emerged as the highest-risk group for mental illness (1). These statistics are meaningful, but until we pinpoint the why's, we can't begin to untangle them. Until we uncover those 'little big moments' that add up over time, we cannot undo the harm that these moments can cause to a woman's well-being.

We are at the crossroads of change.

The past decade has seen great advancement in women's rights at work and in the home, but as community leaders; we still have a long way to go. We are at the crossroads of change and where we go from here is defining.

As the conversation around womanhood and mental health changes, businesses and organizations must rethink how they lead. Not only do brands and businesses contribute to our economies, they help shape societal norms within the communities they serve and the employee cultures they build.

As COVID continues to rattle the globe, women carry more of the burden. In the United States, women compose over half of essential workers, including 9 out of 10 nurses and nursing assistants and two-thirds of checkout workers at grocery stores and pharmacies(3).

A study at the University of Chicago found that nearly half of women – including more than a quarter of those who had no health-related socioeconomic risks – had experienced incidents or worsening conditions during the early stages of the pandemic (4). For women between the ages of 18-29, that number is even greater; 7 in 10 women say the pandemic has negatively affected their mental health (5).

SeekHer Shift is a moment for women to be heard. It is a movement toward healing and reforming our cultural norms.

We are moving toward a future where the weight of the moment is not piled on women. We are moving toward a time when we no longer carry the burden in silence.

The SeekHer Shift Survey & Report represents the next generation in our collective action for women's rights. We are listening to the challenges that women face and seeking ways in which our society can restructure key cultural components that focus on improving the state of women's mental health.



The goal of this survey was to define the cultural and community shifts by which our society can better support women. To achieve this, we wanted to know how women are feeling and responding in relation to specific areas of their life.

Specifically, we divided the survey into five major sections: career & leadership, self-care, beauty & health, motherhood, and cultural identity. We also wanted to know when women experienced these feelings.

When did career experiences align with feelings of success, or guilt, or isolation? When did women report feeling supported in their role as mothers? How are women responding to social media and brand messaging?

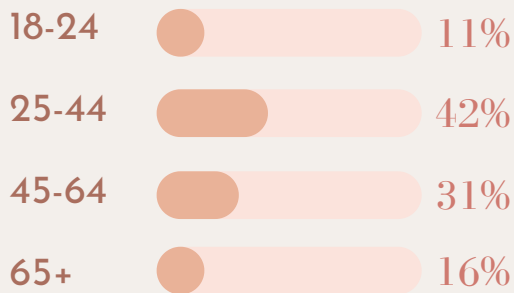
However, we understand that our lives are full of nuances and our experiences are unique. We acknowledge that this survey did not directly address nor capture responses related to the social structures, policies, or institutions that contribute to the oppression of BIPOC communities, more specifically Black women.

Finally, we wanted to know what cultural shifts women reported would be helpful. What changes can we make to improve the state of women's mental health?

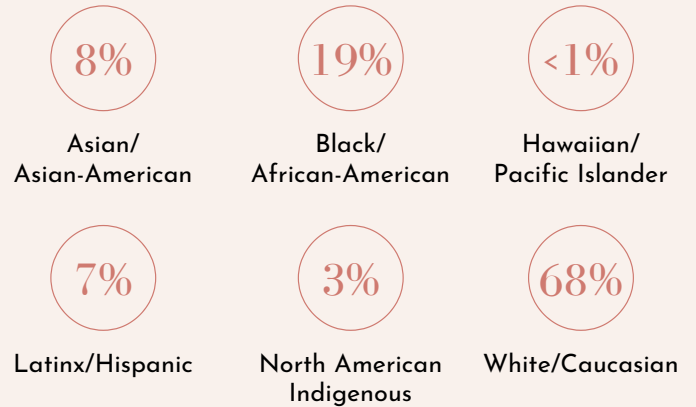
The survey questions were answered through a mixture of multiple choice, binary, and likert scale responses. Open responses were also made available to women who wanted to elaborate on specific experiences, but were not included in the final data analysis. The survey questionnaire was then tested amongst a small group and underwent multiple iterations before it was disseminated through our online network.

We also partnered with Centiment to conduct a robust online survey of U.S.-based women ages 18 and over. Sampling was performed with a 95% confidence level, with respondents widely represented across a broad range of ages, ethnicities, and current life situations. All responses were collected between November 2021 to January 2022. After data processing, a total of 1,127 responses were used in our final analysis.

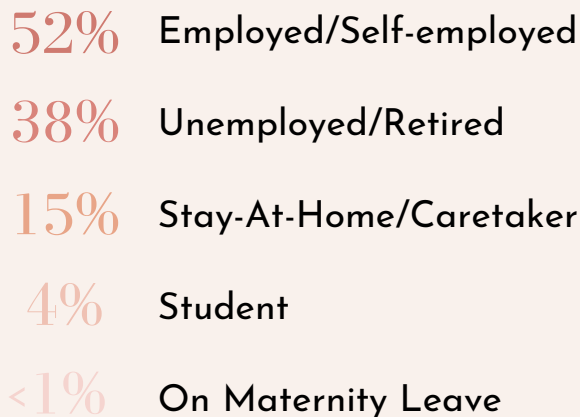
Age



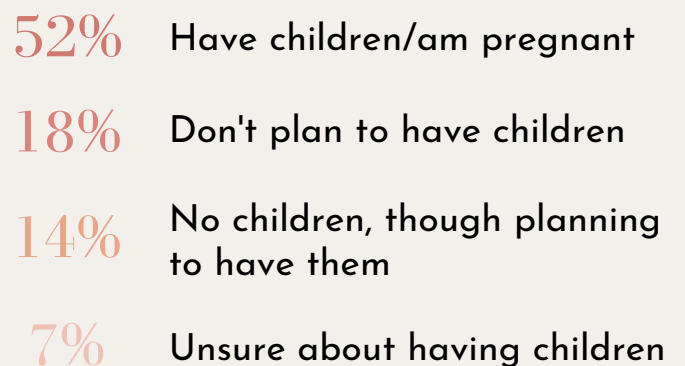
Ethnicity



Work Status



Parental Status

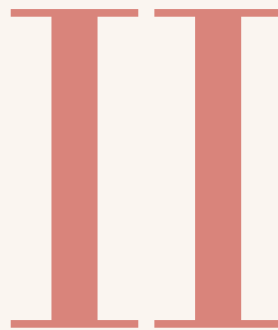


The Report



Understanding Our Shared Feelings and Perspectives

- 2... We feel lonely
- 3... We suffer feelings of guilt
- 4... We feel the need to do it all
- 6... We question our self-worth
- 7... We see mental health as a personal deficit



Societal Structures and Women's Mental Health

- 9... Career
- 11... Motherhood
- 13... Body & beauty standards
- 15... Cultural identity
- 17... Social media



Fundamental Needs to Shift Towards Better Mental Health

- 20... We Need Time
- 22... We Need to Recognize Our Innate Value
- 24... We Need Open Dialogue
- 26... We Need to Define Success On Our Own Terms

IV

Rewriting our Cultural Norms

- 29... Work & Life
- 30... Being A Mother
- 31... Body & Beauty
- 32... Cultural Identity
- 33... Social Media

V

Rebuilding Our Environments

- 35... The Role of Brands
- 38... The Role of Businesses
- 42... The Role of Community

VI

Moving Forward & Conclusion

- 45... End Notes
- 47... Cited References
- 48... Researchers & Review Panel

WE FEEL LONELY

We are living in a culture of loneliness. Despite the desire for community support, the majority of women report feelings of isolation, guilt regarding their own mental health, and the overwhelming need to “do it all.”

While we experience similar struggles, we carry them in a vacuum of isolation. 1 in 3 (37.7%) of women surveyed say they feel alone or misunderstood. Those feelings of loneliness are linked to several negative mental health outcomes, including depression, anxiety, and suicidal ideation (6).

Although the majority of women surveyed expressed the desire for social support and interaction, over half (54.8%) expressed concern for or struggle with their existing social environment, including having no support at all.

Despite growing responsibilities between home life and work life, women are navigating without a safety net of social support. The consequence is their health and well-being.

Data reference – Q43: Which of the following emotions or feelings have you experienced? Q16 Do you currently have a supportive social environment?

WE SUFFER FEELINGS OF GUILT

We are living with chronic guilt. 2 in 5 women (40.8%) feel guilt when attending to their own mental health needs away from work. Over half (57.2%) of women want to practice checking in with themselves, and asking for support without feelings of guilt.

66.3% of women who identified as mothers reported feelings of guilt when staying committed and true to their boundaries, with less than one-third (32.6%) reporting rarely or never feeling guilt.

Although a resounding 89% of women recognize their need for self-care, only half (53.5%) actually take the time for it. When we do, guilt is a heavy tax.

Data references – Q64: How often do you experience guilt when you commit and stay true to your boundaries? Q85: How often do you feel guilty for attending to your own needs away from work? Q66: How can I practice normalizing asking for and receiving support without guilt in order to take care of myself? Q11: How often do you engage in self-care practices that strengthn your emotional and mental well being? Q26: Recall a time when you felt energized from your act of self-care. What about that experience contributed to that moment? Q85 How often do you feel guilty for attending to your own needs away from work (e.g. mental health days, taking time off for personal reasons, self-care? Q14: At what point do you know it's time for self-care?

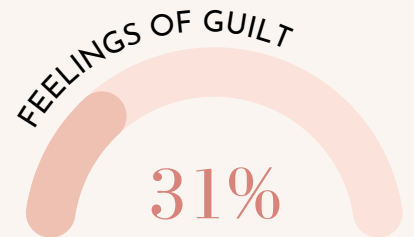
WE FEEL THE NEED TO DO IT ALL

We measure our value by the responsibilities we juggle, and the pressure to do it all is negatively affecting our mental health. In fact, 38% of women believe they are supposed to 'do it all'.

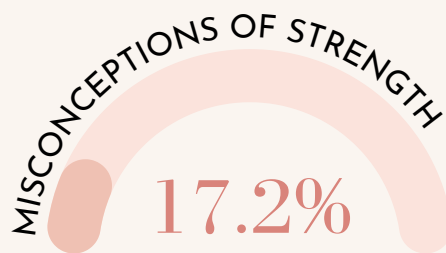
Nearly half (49.5%) of women say their productivity and output dictate whether they deserve time for self-care. We are balancing the weight of flawless bodies, successful careers, and perfect motherhood. So, why aren't we asking for more help and support? Among the top reasons include –



believe it isn't worth it to explain or ask for help



of women feel guilty asking for help



see seeking help as a sign of weakness

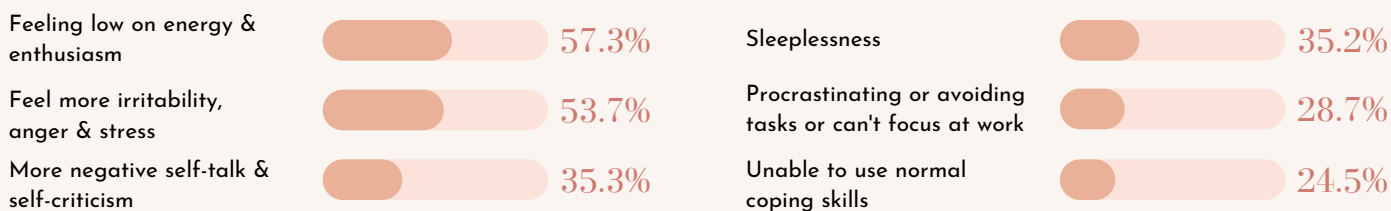
We are juggling infinite balls in the air with our arms tied behind our back. In fact, 69.7% of moms have questioned their value as a mother because they were “overwhelmed with everything.”

Women are constantly trying to be everything for everyone. Despite 63.6% of women acknowledging the need for boundaries, about one-third (34.9%) actually take time for themselves and set them.

This feeds into a vicious negative feedback loop; 1 in 3 women (35.3%) say they experience more negative self-talk and self-criticism when lacking self-care.

Nearly half (49.5%) of women say their productivity and output dictate whether they deserve time for self-care.

What are the most common signs that women notice when they need to slow down for self-care?



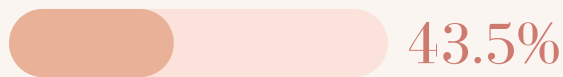
Data references – Q12: My productivity and output dictate whether I deserve time for self-care. Q18: What stops you from seeking others for help or support? Q55: Do you recall a time when you questioned if you were worthy and valuable as a mother? Q62: How often do you create time for yourself and set clear boundaries? Q63: How often do you experience guilt when you prioritize and take time for yourself? Q14: At what point do you know it's time for self-care?

WE QUESTION OUR SELF-WORTH

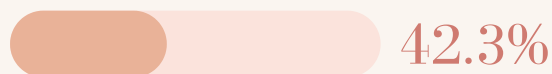
Self-worth is an intrinsic trust in ourselves. To our detriment, women have been taught to rely on the outside world for validation. Caught in a matrix of social, familial, and career pressure, we devalue ourselves when we've fallen short of perfection.

When asked why it feels difficult to show themselves love, compassion or forgiveness when facing an obstacle or challenge, the top 2 reasons are:

It forces me to look at my own behaviors and see where I've been flawed.



I have a hard time loving myself through my imperfections because they make me feel less worthy or valuable as a person.



Additionally, we see ourselves from the outside in; 42.7% of women report evaluating our physical appearance every day and 42.9% of women use beauty and wellness brands to feel more confident and physically better.

Despite the desire to feel good within ourselves, women continuously put other people's comfort and needs ahead of their own.

An overwhelming 84% of women minimize or hide their own emotional experiences because they don't want to burden others.

Data references – Q28: How often do you think about or evaluate your physical appearance (e.g. body size, facial & physical features)? Q37: Which statement best describes your reason for using beauty & wellness products? Q17: How often do you minimize or hide your own emotional experiences or keep them to yourself because you don't want to trouble or burden others? Q24: What feels difficult about showing yourself love, compassion or forgiveness when you are facing an obstacle or challenge in life

WE SEE MENTAL HEALTH AS A PERSONAL DEFICIT

Our perspectives around mental health are taught. We are continuously influenced not only by society and our past generations, but by our own practices of self-compassion and intention to actively care for our well-being.

If we want to shift the tides of mental health, we must acknowledge that our feelings are not personal shortcomings, but rather how we practice caring for ourselves. Although women report positive feelings when they do take time to process their emotions, more than a third (37%) of women report

having never processed their emotions or not feeling successful in their practice. Many women feel energized from moments of emotional processing and report benefits in their day-to-day lives; nearly one-third (32.9%) say they recognize their mental health as equally important to other components of their health and 39.8% recognize deserving care as much as others.

Despite understanding the benefits of self-care, over half (56.3%) of women have difficulty expressing self-love and forgiveness.

Data references – Q20: Do you consider a pause or time for processing your thoughts a form of self-care?, Q21: When was the last time you were intentional about giving yourself time to process your emotions?, Q25: Recall an experience when you gave yourself time to feel or process your feelings without judgment. What about that experience was most valuable to you?, Q26: Recall a time when you felt energized from your act of self-care. What about that experience contributed positively to that moment?

III

Societal Structures and Women's Mental Health

Mental health exists within the constructs of the culture we live in. Our shared feelings exist in relation to our daily responsibilities and the roles we play.

Let's dive deeper into those little big moments that touch us daily – in our careers, motherhood, body & beauty standards, cultural identity, and in our interactions with social media.

Only 31.6% of women say their current workplace creates a safe space to discuss balancing personal and professional responsibilities.



Career is a major part of our collective culture. Without supportive work environments, women are less able to feel safe and valued in their daily lives. While studies have shown that women experience more self-doubt and lower confidence in the workplace, it's imperative to examine how work cultures actually play into those insecurities.

Nearly half of women (41.9%) fear taking personal time away from work due to either concern regarding career penalties, passive-aggressiveness from colleagues or disparaging comments.

More than one-third (36.1%) of working women are actively considering leaving their current role due to unsupportive environments for work-life balance.

Only 31.6% of employed women say their current workplace creates a safe space to discuss balancing personal and professional responsibilities. Less than half of women (46%) say they feel supported to grow in their careers.

This lack of support from their work environment shows; more than one-third (36.1%) of working women are actively considering leaving their current role. The current work culture isn't just bad for health, it's bad for business. The National Women's Law Center (NWLC) noted that 80% of those who dropped out of the job market this past January were women (7).

Data references – Q86: In what ways does your work environment contribute to guilt for attending to your personal needs?, Q91: I have enough support and resources to grow or pivot in my career, Q93: How often do you think about leaving your current workplace to do something completely different?

MOTHERHOOD

69.8% of women with children or plan to have children have encountered challenges and struggles in their journey to becoming a mother.



Feelings and measurements of womanhood continue to be interlocked with ideas and obligations of motherhood. Over one-quarter (29.4%) of women who identified as mothers or soon-to-be mothers report feeling pressured to have children by a certain age and the majority of women (69.8%) with children or who plan to have children have encountered challenges along their journey to becoming a mother, including pregnancy loss, infertility, and postpartum depression.

Motherhood can exacerbate feelings of guilt and inadequacy; 69% of moms can recall a time when they questioned if they were worthy or valuable as a mother and of these mothers, 62.3% say that they feel overwhelmed with everything and are juggling too much.

69% of moms can recall a time when they questioned if they were worthy or valuable as a mother.

The combination of external and internal demands creates a futile cycle of what-if's; even in our successes, we question our worth. Nearly one-third of women (31.7%) say this questioning of value comes from feelings of guilt - a feeling that has become the lifeblood of womanhood.

Despite the need for community support, most women (61.3%) say that perfectionism is perpetuated by other moms. Rather than supporting one another, we are competing. The challenges are both external and internal; over half (57%) of women feel the need to “bounce back” to the body they had before having children.

Data references – Q42: Have you endured challenges and struggles through your journey of becoming a mom?, Q43: Which of the following emotions or feelings have you experienced? Q55: Do you recall a time when you questioned if you were worthy and valuable as a mother?, Q56: What led to that thought?, Q54: The idea that perfect motherhood exists is perpetuated MOST by, Q57: Do you constantly feel the need to bounce back or return to the body you had before you had children/wanted children?

BODY & BEAUTY STANDARDS

74.2% of women can recall being self-conscious about their looks before beginning high school.



In addition to doing it all, women feel the need to look good doing it. Women share a concern for appearances, with 68.7% evaluating their looks on a weekly basis. The preoccupation with beauty standards is baked in; 74.2% of women can recall being self-conscious about their looks before beginning high school.

Not only are beauty standards and pressures enforced from an early age; they also haunt us into adulthood.

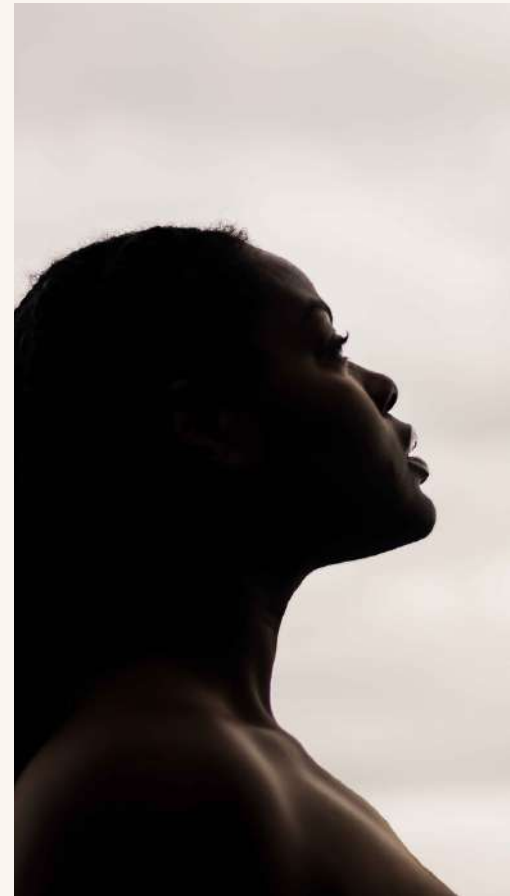
39% of women feel unhappy with their appearance or "like a failure" when brands market products to "fix" and "improve" their appearance.

Nearly one third (32.2%) of women say they worry about getting old and one-quarter of women (26.8%) say they are uncomfortable with their physical appearance changing.

Notably, women are influenced by societal beauty standards and the brands that perpetuate them; 39% of women feel unhappy with their appearance or "like a failure" when brands market products to "fix" and "improve" their appearance.

Data references – Q28: How often do you think about or evaluate your physical appearance (e.g. body size, facial & physical features)?, Q27: Around what school-age group do you remember being conscious about the way you looked (e.g. body size, facial & physical features)?, Q29: Please select up to 3 statements that most describe how you feel towards aging?, Q38: Which statements describe your negative experiences when beauty & wellness brands market their products through the idea that you need to fix or improve your body and appearance?

61.2% of BIPOC women say their cultural identity has impacted their social & professional opportunities.



Womanhood is a complex characterization of our identity. Additionally, for BIPOC women, intersecting identities are often faced with gender-based challenges that are often compounded by obstacles of racial bias, discrimination, and erasure that create additional barriers to success.

As we seek to amplify voices, it's important to understand the impact of cultural identities within marginalized groups. One-quarter (25.7%) of women surveyed self-identified as belonging to a marginalized racial or ethnic group, with 70.2% saying they have navigated differing or competing cultural expectations from friends and family.

While career challenges are often linked to gender bias, marginalized women are affected more than others. 61.2% say their cultural identity has impacted their social and professional opportunities.

Only one-third
(33.9%) of non-
marginalized women
report having ever
acted as an ally to a
marginalized group.

Despite their challenges, 49.8% of women who self-identify as belonging to a marginalized racial or ethnic group want to engage in discovering and building knowledge around their cultural identities, while 48.8% want to learn and build relationships with other cultural identities outside of their own.

None of us can do it alone. Yet only one-third (33.9%) of non-marginalized women report having ever acted as an ally to a marginalized group.

Data references – Q68: Do you identify as someone in a marginalized racial or ethnic group?, Q69: I have navigated different (competing at times) cultural expectations from friends and family, Q70: My cultural identity has impacted my social/professional opportunities, Q80: Do you believe you have ever acted as an ally for a marginalized group?

Nearly one-quarter (23.1%) of women say that social media gives them a sense of community.



Media has changed what it means to be social. Roughly half of women (55.8%) say they've actively taken time away from social media. Still, the new social is not all bad; 31.8% of women say that social media can remind them to take time for self-care and mental health. Nearly one-quarter (25.5%) of women say that social media gives them a sense of community and connection.

This feeling of belonging can be powerful. While it can have a positive effect, it can also be negative – dependent on the messaging. Regarding the negative impacts of social media, 32.1% of women say social media makes them feel inadequate and isolated.

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Social media also has a strong impact on beauty standards. 31.8% of women say their body image and self-esteem are negatively impacted by social media. The effects are more than physical, with 17.2% saying they have developed uninformed and unhealthy eating habits in response to trends on social platforms.

Social media isn't inherently bad, but it is powerful. The infinitely expanding space of social networking means we can't always see its impact until it's too late.

Data references – Q33: Have you ever taken intentional time away from social media?, Q34: What feelings have you experienced as a result of being on social media?, Q35: Please select the statements that most describe how you feel about social media and how it impacts our cultural messaging on body & beauty standards.

WE NEED TIME

Time is our most limited resource, and women especially feel the strain. Nearly all women surveyed (89%) recognize the value of self-love and self-forgiveness, yet over half of them say they simply don't have the time to practice it. Only 40.5% of women have recently taken time to practice self-love and forgiveness.

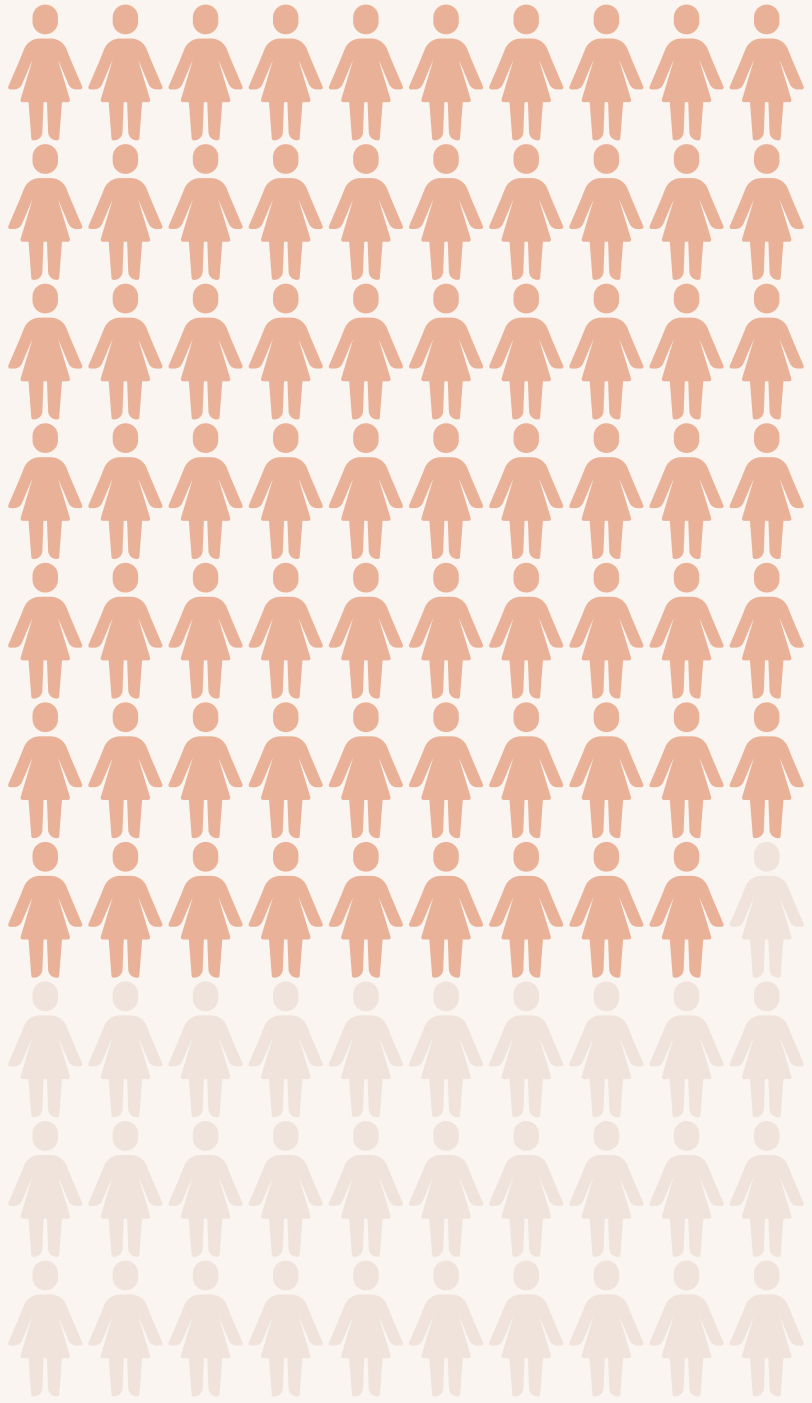
When given the time to process their emotions without fear of judgment, their experiences were rewarding. 42.9% of women felt a weight lifted, 38.8% found more clarity in their problem-solving & ability to move forward, 36.2% became more self-aware, and 29.7% say that they stopped punishing themselves.

When mothers were asked what they miss most about life before children, the answer is consistently time; whether it be for sleep (43.2%), having alone time (41.8%), uninterrupted time (40.4%) quality time with family, friends, and partners (39.6%) or simply going to the bathroom alone (25.1%).

Mothers especially need time, and yet when they take it for themselves they are buried in feelings of guilt. 68.6% say they experience feelings of guilt when taking time for themselves. Time is our greatest asset and with new moms and working mothers at higher risk for mental health disorders since the start of the pandemic, women often feel like time is running out.

Data references – Q22: Do you consider self-love, self-forgiveness, and self-compassion a form of self-care? Q23: When was the last time you expressed self-love and self-forgiveness?, Q25: Recall an experience when you gave yourself time to feel or process your feelings without judgment. What about that experience was most valuable to you? Q48: What are your fondest memories before having children/wanting to have children?, Q63: How often do you experience guilt when you prioritize and take time for yourself?

68.6% of mothers say they experience feelings of guilt when taking time for themselves.



WE NEED TO RECOGNIZE OUR INNATE VALUE

We know we need to feel innately deserving of our own love to care for our well-being. Over half of women (59.4%) have difficulty or challenges in expressing self-compassion or self-forgiveness. We need to actively embrace that we are innately deserving of love and care, and yet, we often tie our innate value to our performance in the many roles we juggle and how perfectly we perform them.

43.5% of women struggle to love themselves through challenging times because it forces them to see where they may be flawed. 42.3% say they have difficulty showing themselves forgiveness and self-love because their imperfections make them feel less worthy or valuable as a person. 26.8% withhold self-compassion as a way to keep themselves accountable from 'failing'.

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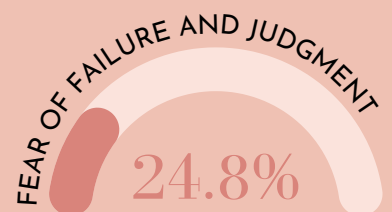
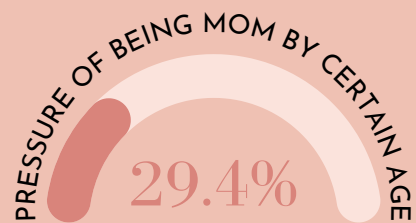
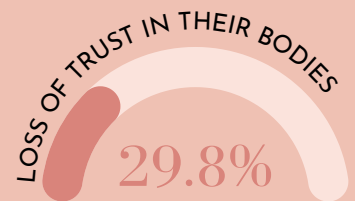
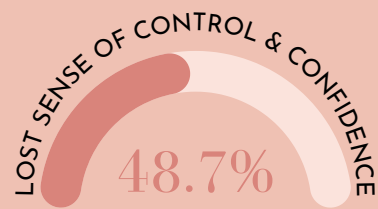
While we struggle to show ourselves love and compassion, 43.2% would like to tell their future selves that they are worthy and deserving of their work-life successes. In fact, 41.9% would like to remind themselves that their productivity is not a measure of human value, nor indicate their worthiness as a contributor to society.

Data references – Q21: When was the last time you were intentional about giving yourself time to process your emotions?, Q22: Do you consider self-love, self-forgiveness, and self-compassion a form of self-care?, Q90: What reminders would you like to tell your future self about juggling work and life?, Q23: When was the last time you expressed self-love and self-forgiveness?, Q24: What feels difficult about showing yourself love, compassion or forgiveness when you are facing an obstacle or challenge in life?

WE NEED OPEN DIALOGUE

Women endure many similar challenges. Yet oftentimes, their struggles are augmented by silence – especially on the journey to motherhood and for those who identify as belonging to a marginalized racial or ethnic group. Of the nearly 70% of women who say they struggled in their journey of becoming a mother, a resounding 37.7% say they felt alone and misunderstood in their experience.

In fact, only 27.5% recognize that a village of connection will help them move forward from the disappointment and loss that's oft-experienced. As common as these struggles are, women remain isolated without openly talking about their difficulties in becoming a mother. These include -



More than half (56.2%) believe that breaking the silence regarding their own mental health will help break cultural stigmas.

Our cultural identities and familial histories also play a significant role in our outlook toward mental health. The vast majority of women who identify as belonging to a marginalized racial or ethnic group (80.6%) grew up believing that mental health issues were stigmatized and viewed as a personal deficit.

Over half (53%) of these women don't feel comfortable engaging in dialogue with family about mental health, primarily out of fear for a lack of understanding (46.5%), mistiming (39.6%), or hurt feelings (32.4%).

While isolation deepens gaps and cultural barriers in mental health, open dialogue helps to heal them. 47.5% of marginalized women say they felt supported to seek mental health support after hearing others' stories, and more than half (56.2%) believe that breaking the silence regarding their own mental health challenges will help break cultural stigmas.

We can't have an inclusive conversation about mental health without engaging with allies who will amplify the voices of marginalized groups. After all, womanhood comes in various shapes, sizes, ethnicities, zip codes, and lifestyles – all of whom deserve to be respected and celebrated. Nearly half (48.7%) of women want to be a better ally but are unsure how, while 47.8% of women would consider asking questions of themselves to better understand how their own biases have shaped and impacted their actions in order to become a better ally.

Data references – Q75: Growing up, mental health was stigmatized and seen as a personal deficit? Q42: Have you endured challenges and struggles through your journey of becoming a mom?, Q43: Which of the following emotions or feelings have you experienced?, Q77: What prevents you from engaging in dialogue with your family about mental health?, Q78: What encourages you to seek support for your mental health?, Q79: I can help break generational cycles of stigma around mental health for myself and my family by?, Q81: Are you interested in becoming a better ally?, Q82: Which of the following would you consider doing to be a better ally?

WE NEED TO DEFINE SUCCESS ON OUR OWN TERMS

Shifting the narrative starts by defining success on our own terms, rather than by outdated cultural norms. It's time to affirm our own worthiness and value, instead of letting societal expectations define them for us.

While the pressure to meet societal standards impacts every area of life, women are aware of the importance of self-affirmation. In our work cultures, 2 in 5 women (41%) say they would stop comparing themselves with others to help minimize feelings of 'imposter syndrome'.

In motherhood, 57.4% of women say that acknowledging growth and change in their lived experiences can help them move forward from disappointment and loss that ~70% of women experience along their journey of becoming a mom.

While many women with children are challenged with juggling their multiple roles and identities, 54.2% say that it helps to remember that motherhood is an experience and not their fixed identity.

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their younger selves
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unique and beautiful.

Social media can act as a constant barrage of external expectations of how our bodies and lifestyles should be. 1 in 3 women (33.8%) say they will be more mindful of how social media creates harmful environments of comparison and hierarchy. 1 in 4 women (28.4%) say they will actively cut down on social media that is toxic, harmful, and perpetuates unhelpful thoughts of comparison.

Because much of our self-worth develops early on, 46.3% of women say they would want to tell their younger selves that each body is unique and beautiful.

Data references – Q88: What would be most helpful to you when dealing with "imposter syndrome" to find value in yourself?, Q44: Which of the following statements are most helpful in moving forward from disappointment and loss?, Q51: We do not have fixed identities. Which affirmations help you shift towards embracing and nurturing the multiple sides of your identity?, Q36: What are some ways in which you'd like to start practicing healthier self-expression and engagement on social media?, Q31: What do you wish your younger self knew that would have made an impact on your views on body image and beauty?

IV

Rewriting our Cultural Norms

Throughout the SeekHer Shift survey, we asked women not only what hurt them, but *what would help them*.

To put the fundamental needs of Section III into practice, women are sharing how they're ready to shift their values & beliefs in 5 key areas: career, motherhood, body & beauty, cultural identity, social media.

WORK & LIFE

The pandemic has hit women especially hard; one reason for this is the balance between familial responsibilities and career responsibilities.

For women to “do it all” we need to redefine what “all” actually is. For many, life is a juggling act where one won't know when a ball is dropped until after the fact.

Given the opportunity to caution their future selves on work-life balance, nearly 2 in 5 women (39.5%) would spend more time with loved ones and 41.9% would tell themselves that their productivity output is not a measurement of their value.

Attitudes toward self-worth was a major theme, with 42.6% of women saying they'd tell their future selves that missteps are part of the process and don't make them any less worthy of sitting at the table.

Given the opportunity to caution their future selves on work-life balance, 41.9% of women would tell themselves that their productivity output is not a measurement of their value.

Data references – Q61: Which affirmation most speaks to you about releasing the idea of a perfect mother, partner, or woman? ,Q52: What are you excited to do for yourself in order to honor your journey as a mother?

BEING A MOTHER



It's past time for the idea of the perfect mother to fall by the wayside. Among other things, motherhood is messy despite the 'supermom' ideals that our culture perpetuates. It often comes at a cost to their self-care, career ambitions, and confidence in their value and worth.

More than half (55.1%) of mothers say they would benefit from acknowledging that perfection is unrealistic and 40.5% want to remind themselves that it's healthy to relax and have fun.

Over half of moms surveyed (52.7%) want to learn new ways of connecting with themselves and 47.1% want to find new ways of connecting with their friends, family, or partner.

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BODY & BEAUTY



From a young age, women are inundated with messaging around ideal body & beauty standards. However, women have an opportunity to reshape the world by teaching future generations what they wish they had known.

With 1 in 4 women (24.3%) saying they recall feeling self-conscious about their physical appearance and bodies by elementary school, nearly half (48.3%) wish they were taught that their bodies are meant to change and that weight fluctuates.

49.9% wish they had more support in building their confidence and working through their body insecurities, while 44.4% say that reassurance of their inherent value and worth would have been helpful when their younger bodies were viewed negatively.

48.3% of women wish they were taught that their bodies are meant to change and that weight fluctuations are normal.

Data references – Q27: Around what school-age group do you remember being conscious about the way you looked (e.g. body size, facial & physical features)?, Q31: What do you wish your younger self knew that would have made an impact on your views on body image and beauty?

CULTURAL IDENTITY

For women who identify within a marginalized racial or ethnic group, there are additional challenges that affect their state of well-being. The increased emotional tax that BIPOC women face when navigating systemic bias, discrimination, and even police violence can negatively impact their mental health (8).

With 70.2% of BIPOC women navigating competing cultural expectations from their family and friends, what would be most supportive for their mental health and help them better cultivate their sense of identity and belonging?

Over half (52%) say they felt heard and recognized when they were encouraged to be their authentic selves, with 43.9% feeling valued when their individuality was lauded and celebrated. 64.4% say they feel most encouraged to seek support for their mental health when they understand that asking for help doesn't make them weak – but rather, it helps them process their lived experience in a system designed to homogenize who they are.

Over half of women (52%) who identify within a marginalized group felt heard and recognized when they were encouraged to be their authentic selves.

Data references – Q73: Recall an experience in which you were recognized, felt heard, and valued. What practices did you value most? Q69: I have navigated different (competing at times) cultural expectations from friends and family. Q78: What encourages you to seek support for your mental health?

SOCIAL MEDIA

Our need for meaningful connections extends beyond our close relationships and to the realms of social media. It's why women are recognizing the importance of practicing healthier self-expression and engagement in the online world.

1 in 3 women (33.8%) report wanting to be mindful of how social media creates harmful environments of comparison and hierarchy.

Data references – Q36: What are some ways in which you'd like to start practicing healthier self-expression and engagement on social media?

1 in 3 women are changing the way they interact with social platforms, with 33.9% wanting to focus more on their "real-life" friends and 33.8% saying they want to be mindful of how social media creates harmful environments of comparison and hierarchy.

29.6% say it's important to live in the moment when they're out and about, while one-quarter of women (28.4%) are actively cutting down on social media that is toxic and perpetuates unhelpful thoughts of comparison.

THE ROLE OF BRANDS

OUR WORLDS ARE BRANDED.

One of the many roles that women hold is that of CEO of their household; women control as much as 85% of purchasing power across multiple categories (9) and most women are seeking a change in their interaction with brands.

After all, within our individuality exists a shared imprint of the messaging we've grown with. Raised in a culture of labels, our desired appearances are influenced by the beauty & wellness brands that we follow, support, and believe in. As we walk towards a more inclusive future, brands have both a responsibility and an opportunity. How can we move away from labels that piece us apart and towards a narrative that celebrates our individuality, our humanity, and our unity?

Go Beyond Looks

The majority of women (90.9%) want wellness brands that emphasize feeling – rather than looking – better, both physically and emotionally. In fact, 68% of women surveyed have experienced some

form of negative feelings in response to messaging around “fixing women’s bodies”. When presented with this form of messaging, women reported experiencing stress & anxiety that they're a failure and feeling manipulated into thinking they have a problem.

It is indeed a paradox – despite a growing \$4.2T global wellness market, mental health disorders continue to rise and disproportionately impact women. In fact, women are nearly twice as likely as men to suffer from mental health disorders such as anxiety, depression, and eating disorders. There is growing interest in how modern wellness brands – or the “Wellness-Industrial Complex” oft-deemed as a contributor of harmful body-based health standards (10) – influence the mental health of their consumers, particularly those whom they primarily target: women.

Brands must learn to evolve past emphasizing the 'problems' their products aim to be solutions for, and consider the harmful realities of appealing to fear and control.

90.9% of women want wellness brands that emphasize feeling — rather than looking — better, both physically and emotionally.

Celebrate Uniqueness & Authenticity

Women consistently show the desire for more supportive messaging that celebrates their whole, unique personhood – rather than messages that reduce them to their various parts and sizes.

In fact, 64.5% of women want brands to instill the message that their body deserves care and respect, no matter what size, shape, or level of capability. Nearly half (42%) of women want messaging that promotes the value that wellness is not about changing themselves, but rather about being more true to themselves.

Women are depending on the brands they've come to trust to act as leaders. We are seeking brands that focus on our unique strengths rather than pinpointing our perceived outer flaws. We want brands that highlight our uniqueness while uniting us in our journey of womanhood.



Data references – Q39: Which statements would be more helpful for brands to emphasize as a sustainable way to support your well-being?, Q38: Which statements describe your negative experiences when beauty & wellness brands market their products through the idea that you need to fix or improve your body and appearance? Q31: Recall a moment when you were young and you felt that your body was viewed negatively. What would have been helpful for you at that moment?

Empower Women To Live, Not Conform

Women want brands that celebrate the various shapes of womanhood and connect wellness with feelings of self-worth. Nearly half (48.9%) of women surveyed believed that wellness should be less focused on appearance, and more on satisfaction, enjoyment, and pleasure. 42% say they want brands to emphasize that wellness is not about changing themselves, but rather it's about being more of themselves.

It's particularly notable that 19.9% of women acknowledge body image ideals are highly linked to oppressive social systems and power constructs, a nod to the growing recognition that our modern-day obsession of equating thinness with wellness is tied to racial inferiority (11).

Women also want to feel empowered in their individuality and celebrate progress over perfection. Nearly half of women surveyed (48.4%) want brands to celebrate that every small change is a step in the right direction.

We are seeking brands that resoundingly listen to women and respond with a narrative aligned with our innate deserving to live our best lives, just as we are.

THE ROLE OF BUSINESSES

WORKPLACES BENEFIT FROM WOMEN EMPLOYEES.

Within the limits of today's workplace, our survey highlights why women often face more work, pressure, and feelings of guilt that negatively impact their mental health, which is a reflection of a company's culture.

Since the beginning of the pandemic, (as of October 2021), nearly 3 million women had left the workforce (12). During a moment when women are leaving the workforce in droves, companies are searching for ways to keep them, and to bring them back. What can businesses focus on to retain women employees in their workforce?

Create Inclusive Cultures

Diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) has increasingly become a fundamental part of work culture. Gender-diverse teams have higher profits and higher average revenues than male-dominated teams. Women in the workplace also correlate with across the board higher job satisfaction, more meaningful work, less burnout, and more organizational dedication (13). Yet, while

workplaces benefit from women on their team, company culture is seldom gender-inclusive.

Beyond increasing diversity and representation, inclusivity lies within the organization's social environment, but within organizational structures. In order to move beyond performative DEI initiatives, organizations must strive to address workplace equity – auditing and rewriting policies toward inclusion, training programs, career mentorship, and performance management, which can be a breeding ground for non-inclusive behaviors (14).

Non-inclusive behaviors can often leave those on the receiving end feeling undervalued and unsafe when they are consistently present at the workplace.

In fact, only 6.9% of women surveyed reported never experiencing non-inclusive behavior in the workplace.

Among the top non-inclusive behaviors experienced by women: poor communication (31.2%) making assumptions

before fact-checking (25%), playing favorites (22.2%), and not respecting others and their time (18%). By making intentional shifts in their social work environments, businesses can make huge strides in helping all employees feel safe and included.

Cultivate Trust & Respect

If companies want to benefit from women on their teams, they can begin by listening and opening the lines of communication around their needs. When asked what would help them feel more encouraged, supported, and creative at work, 40.4% of women are seeking validation and support from upper management or peers. 28.2% of women want their workplaces to stop promoting feelings of guilt.

Women also need autonomy over their time; over one-quarter (30.6%) of women say that their work would greatly benefit from a flexible schedule. Just under one-third (32%) of women want more time away from work, and 27.3% say having more independence over their work helps them stay motivated.

The message is clear: when leadership cultures promote trust and respect, they naturally inspire creativity and productivity that keeps a business moving forward.

Data references – Q87: Let's talk about non-inclusive behaviors, which can often leave us feeling undervalued and unsafe when they are consistently present at the workplace. At any point in time, which of these have you experienced?, Q97: What attributes are the most important that you look for in leaders and mentors?, Q98: What helps you feel encouraged, supported, and more creative at your workplace?

Develop Meaningful Mentor Relationships

With gender inequalities continuing to impact women at the workplace, the value of mentorship is needed now more than ever and recognized as a protective factor for mental health. Studies show it's a win-win: 87% of both mentors and mentees feel empowered by the relationship, and report greater confidence & career satisfaction (15).

In fact, women are in need of mentors. 40% of women say they don't have enough mentors in their life whom they value and look up to. Just over half (55%) say they are engaging with a mentor on a somewhat regular basis.

Among the top traits women most value in leaders and mentors are being a good listener (64.1%), being knowledgeable (50.6%), honesty & candor (50%), and being non-judgmental (32.8%).

Whether through peer-to-peer support or a company-commissioned program, creating more mentorship opportunities can foster growth within individuals that amplify a positive ripple effect throughout the company.



Q88: What would be most helpful to you when dealing with "imposter syndrome" to find value in yourself?, Q96: How often do you engage with or communicate with your mentors?

70.8% of women say that having a welcoming, judgment-free space will motivate them to speak up at work.

Encourage Their Authenticity

Studies show that women – especially those in marginalized groups – find it more difficult to accept their accomplishments and their self-doubt and feelings of being an 'imposter' are more pronounced. This is especially true when operating in male-dominated spaces where the men themselves are rarely questioned for their competence, contributions, or leadership style (16).

To encourage more women to recognize their place at the table, over one-quarter (29.2%) say that it can be helped by understanding how their work environment contributes and plays a role in those insecurities. 33.3% recognize the importance of creating workplaces that celebrate our vast range of perspectives and cultural differences. In fact, 70.8% say that having a welcoming, judgment-free space will motivate them to speak up more at work.

The current corporate model is outdated; it's time to catch up to the needs of employees - not just for their sake, but with the purpose of helping teams reach their fullest potential.

Q88: What would be most helpful to you when dealing with "imposter syndrome" to find value in yourself?, Q99: What would help motivate and inspire you to exercise your authentic voice and speak up even when it's challenging?

THE ROLE OF COMMUNITY

WELLNESS IS ABOUT COMMUNITY.

When we suffer from poor mental health, we often suffer in solitude. The SeekHer Shift Survey reiterated our need for community and the barriers that keep us isolated: fear of vulnerability, pressure to do it all, guilt for our own needs, gaps of understanding between cultures, and feeling lost within our often competing roles & identities.

Our loneliness is killing us, and the strength to reach for help just might save a life.

After all, mental health is not simply an individualistic problem. It's about our sense of safety, security, and belonging – the way we experience our identities in relation to the community around us. This understanding allows a fuller picture to emerge, showing us how social environments and communities play a large contributing role to our well-being. So what are actionable steps we can take in our community interactions?

Invite Others To Share Their Stories

Each time one of us lets our guard down, we inspire and invite others to do the same. When asked to recall a time when they vulnerably opened up about their struggles, 1 in 3 women (36.8%) say that others reached out to show their support and offered to help. 23.9% say that it created a safe space for others to feel comfortable to open up.

Every time we ask someone to hear our story, we invite them to tell theirs. Each and every difficult conversation we have helps build the bridge to greater understanding, more inclusivity, and a sense of belonging.

Learn To Be Partners & Allies

Changing the state of women's mental health is not just the responsibility of women. Our innate human need for safety and security goes beyond just feeling physically safe, and permeates into our roles as partners & mothers, employees & bosses. We want security at home and at work; we want to feel safe asking for help.



Data references – Q19: Recall a time when you were nervous, yet demonstrated vulnerability by opening up about something you were struggling with. What are some of the outcomes that resulted from that? Q82: Which of the following would you consider doing to be a better ally?

As we evaluate our role as women, we cannot forget the influence of our own practices of allyship and partnership so others feel supported, especially for marginalized groups. When asked what actions they would consider doing to be a better ally, 47.8% of women who self-identified as non-marginalized say they will ask questions to better understand how their biases have shaped and impacted their thoughts and actions. Another 37% say they want to be more aware and mindful of how their social advantage may be contributing to oppressive systems.

Welcome Everyone To The Table

As we continue to amplify equity & inclusivity, we must also extend this to all persons. We cannot continue to view our world through a binary lens when it in fact exists on a continuum. We are not simply seeking a shift in the narrative of womanhood but in our relation to our peers & fellow humans - regardless of race, ethnicity, gender identity, sexual orientation, disability, and other diverse backgrounds.

After all, the power of community care is what propels our society forward as a whole.

VI

Moving Forward & Conclusion

Mental health *is* health. Beyond revealing the weights that women carry, the SeekHer Shift survey offers insights on how to heal and more importantly, how brands, businesses, and communities can reform their environments to better support their healing.

Yes, we can feel lonely.

Yes, we carry guilt and yes, we measure our worth by what we give, rather than by who we are.

Yes, we are ready for a shift.



Our work is just beginning.

SeekHer Foundation launched this survey with the goal of discovering the ways in which our society can restructure key cultural components and redefine societal expectations for women.

Our shared feelings come from a place of strife and struggle in a world that wasn't designed for women. While it can often feel helpless, we must understand that we are not helpless. Most importantly, we must see that we're not alone in this mental health crisis.

The collective action for women must include our peers across the gender spectrum, our workplaces, our social and legal systems, as well as the brands and community leaders that influence our cultural tides. Though the necessary actions are obvious, the work ahead is nuanced and challenging – a reminder that the common role women often take on as caretakers must include themselves. For this to happen, both societal standards and

work cultures must adapt to include our needs in the conversation. Women are an asset; let's stop treating them as a liability. The current work model will need to adapt and evolve into one that listens and cares for its human capital. Beyond compassion, we need businesses and organizations to use their voice to activate changes in a system that have historically fostered inequities.

We also need to confront the reality that women face obstacles and discrimination in various degrees – how we look, our racial and ethnic backgrounds, income and education, sexual orientation, and our age are independent variables in the struggle. Our intersectional identities must be acknowledged.

Not only does society need to listen to women — we also need to listen to each other.

We are standing at the crossroads of change, and where we go from here will define us. After all, society and socialization are intermixed.

With a growing degree of our social world existing in the matrix of social media and brand messaging, we need to realize the responsibility and opportunity of these outlets.

No consumer industries have a greater opportunity for positive change than beauty and health & wellness, yet current messaging often pressure women to 'look good' rather than to *feel good*.

Not only is this messaging damaging to women, but also to brands as women are gaining awareness and seeking products that speak to their strengths rather than to their perceived flaws.



Change without purpose is not enough. The SeekHer Shift survey seeks to give women a moment to be heard, but that is just the beginning. We are standing at the crossroads of change and where we go from here will define us.

Through policies, programs, services, and sociocultural change, the findings within this survey will continue to offer opportunities to move forward with practical guidance, informed social initiatives, and a collective shift that benefits our society as a whole.

Because now is the time #WeHearHer.

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SeekHer Foundation is a non-profit organization on a mission to power more women for the greater good. As an advocacy project powered by the social impact collective WellSeek, we're reimagining communities & workplaces to better support women's mental health.



DR. MONICA MO

As the founder & Executive Director of SeekHer Foundation, Dr. Mo spearheaded and co-authored the SeekHer Shift Survey Initiative & Report to dissect the intersectional experiences impacting women's mental health and rewrite cultural norms that better support women in our workplaces and communities.



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As SeekHer's Lead of Communications & Storytelling, Jennifer is the lead co-author of the SeekHer Shift Report on the State of Women's Mental Health. Her experience as a health & medical journalist lent a rich narrative and context to the quantified data throughout the Report.



KATE HERMOSURA

Kate serves as the Research & Impact Lead for the SeekHer Shift Survey Report on the State of Women's Mental Health. As a critical feminist scholar and DEI practitioner, she co-authored and led the survey design & data analysis that contributed to the Report's key findings.



MARI MIRANDA

Mari serves as SeekHer's Digital Marketing & Communications Lead. She's the main designer of the Report and curated the survey experience to ensure that women felt safe, encouraged, and understood as they shared their voices.

As leading researchers and clinicians, our independent review panel provided critical feedback as we designed our survey and developed the report by sharing their intersectional perspectives to widen our lens of women's mental health. We are immensely grateful for their insight & wisdom in shaping this study.



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The END