

**Job Satisfaction at Community Newspapers:  
Perceptions and Attitudes Among Women**

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Presented at Newspapers and Community-Building Symposium XIX,  
Co-sponsored by the Huck Boyd National Center for Community Media  
at Kansas State University, the National Newspaper Association  
and the NNA Foundation  
NNA Annual Convention and Trade Show  
Phoenix, AZ, Sept. 12-15, 2013

\*The researchers would like to thank the Iowa Newspaper Association for its help with this study.

#### ABSTRACT

This study examines the job satisfaction of women at Iowa newspapers by assessing women's attitudes and perceptions in three distinct areas: job quality, work-life balance, and organizational support. Quantitative and qualitative data were collected through an online survey (n=69) of women in news, advertising, circulation, and management. The findings indicate that job quality is an important and positive aspect of women's job satisfaction while organizational support offers the most room for improvement. The respondents generally were satisfied with their jobs and work-life balance, but low salaries emerged as a significant problem. The respondents also expressed a desire for consistent personnel policies and greater opportunities for advancement. The results are intended to help community newspapers in their efforts to recruit and retain highly skilled women, who continue to be underrepresented in the field.

*Keywords:* Women, newspapers, job satisfaction

If local newspapers are to fully realize their potential for growth, they must continue to attract younger, diverse generations of employees who have the energy and vision to sustain these vital community organizations. Studies have shown that women are an underemployed group across the newspaper business – less likely to be hired and more likely to drop out of a newspaper career than male colleagues – presenting an opportunity for community newspapers interested in attracting a highly skilled, yet underutilized, segment of the workforce. This study examines job satisfaction among women currently working at community newspapers for insight that could help local organizations in their recruitment and retention efforts.

According to the most recent report by the Women’s Media Center, women make up about 37% of full-time newspaper personnel and about 34% of supervisors (Klos, 2013; “Newsroom Employment Census,” 2013), percentages that have been stable for about 15 years even though women now make up 51% of employees in management, professional, and related occupations (“Women in the Labor Force,” 2012). Nationally, women represent about 18% of publishers, 26% of top editors, and 31% of advertising directors at daily newspapers (Arnold, Hendrickson & Linton, 2003), but there is reason to question whether those numbers are higher at community newspapers. In Iowa, for example, which has a strong tradition of community journalism, women make up about 30% of newspaper publishers, 39% of top editors, and 42% of advertising directors.<sup>1</sup>At all types of newspapers, women make up greater proportions of entry-level employees and middle managers than they do senior-level

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<sup>1</sup>Data provided to the author by the Iowa Newspaper Association.

supervisors (Chambers, Steiner & Fleming, 2004, p. 82). In addition, they tend to cluster in areas that are not the usual stepping-stones to higher positions (Hemlinger & Linton, 2002)<sup>2</sup>and are severely underrepresented in the sports and editorial departments (Hardin & Whiteside, 2006; Klos, 2013).

A survey of recent college graduates showed that young women were less interested in a newspaper career than men – 23.5% of the women sought a job on a newspaper vs. 30.3% of men – and far more likely to pursue careers in public relations (Becker, Vlad & Desnoes, 2010). One reason for this might be the survey's finding that young women placed more emphasis on their potential earning power than young men. Equally striking, however, was the survey's finding that young women who wanted a newspaper job had a harder time finding one. Among the graduates who sought a job in newspapers, only 34.2% of the women received an offer vs. 44.3% of the men. (By comparison, the proportion of men and women who received job offers in television were nearly equal.) Women were somewhat less likely to have held an internship at a newspaper during college (16.3% of women vs. 19.5% of men), but this difference alone does not seem large enough to account for their lower share of job offers. The result of the disparity was that six to eight months after graduation, 5% of female journalism and mass communication graduates were working at a newspaper, compared with 8.4% of male graduates. These trends are significant when one considers the increasing number

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<sup>2</sup>That might help explain why women's median salary in news-related jobs is 81% of men's – \$37,731 compared with \$46,758 – while salaries for men and women with less than 15 years' experience are about equal (Weaver, 2003).

of women enrolled in undergraduate journalism and mass communication programs, where they comprise 63.5% of the students (Becker et al., 2010).

Not only are women less likely to obtain a newspaper job early in their careers, but they are also more likely to leave once they have entered the field. In 2002, 27% of the nation's top female newspaper editors told a researcher they would "definitely" or "probably" depart the newspaper industry entirely – four times the percentage of male editors who said the same thing (Selzer, 2002). Across all media industries, 21% of women have said they intend to leave the field within five years, compared with 16% of men (Weaver et al., 2006). Women who leave newspapers have cited a lack of opportunities for promotion, struggles with a male-dominated culture, and personal experiences with sex discrimination (Elmore, 2007; Everbach & Flournoy, 2007; Nicholson, 2007; Weaver et al., 2006; Walsh-Childers, Chance & Herzog, 1996). Women working at newspapers have also indicated higher levels of burnout and exhaustion than men and lower levels of organizational support (Reinardy, 2009).

Demonstrating a connection between job satisfaction and the desire to advance in one's career, a survey conducted for the American Press Institute and the Pew Center for Civic Journalism found that only 20% of women expressed unequivocal interest in a promotion, but 72% of women said they would consider a promotion if they were given the authority to make changes in their organizations (Selzer, 2002). Still, as Massey and Elmore (2011) pointed out, the relationship between women's job satisfaction and their low retention at newspapers has not been fully explained by the existing research.

Similarly, Becker (2003) concluded that while it is apparent *something* is happening as women continue to enter and leave the field, it is still unclear what that something is: The data give further evidence that there are significant obstacles to full gender equity in America's newsrooms and confirm that for many women the newsrooms of today do not offer what they want from their work and their lives. . . . Enough women are seeking and accepting media jobs to increase the prominence of women in today's newsrooms. Why these women aren't changing newsrooms is something the industry is going to have to examine carefully" (Becker, 2003: 1).

Since the total number of newspaper positions in the United States began falling dramatically in 2006, men and women have lost their jobs in equal proportions (Klos, 2013). This means that not only do women continue to be underrepresented compared with the larger workforce, but now there are fewer women overall in newspaper positions and thus fewer female voices being heard in their communities. Newspapers' retention of women continues to be a concern worth studying. This paper contributes more voices to the discussion about women's job satisfaction at newspapers by collecting qualitative and quantitative data from current newspaperwomen in a state with a strong tradition of daily and weekly community journalism. The objective is to provide news organizations with context and concrete information regarding women's job satisfaction in order to help employers recruit and retain a skilled staff.

### **Literature Review**

Survey results have been somewhat inconclusive regarding the job satisfaction of women newspaper workers, perhaps due to variations in how it is measured. Smucker,

Whisenant and Pedersen (2003) surveyed members of the Association for Women in Sports Media about six elements of their job – pay, promotions, people, supervision, the work itself, and general satisfaction – which the researchers theorized provide a comprehensive perspective on job satisfaction. They found that women working in sports media were, in general, satisfied with their jobs; the respondents answered affirmatively in all areas except one: promotion opportunities. In this area, the women surveyed were more likely to be dissatisfied with their opportunities for advancement the older they were. The researchers concluded that women were entering the field of sports journalism optimistic about their prospects for advancement and becoming disillusioned over time when the opportunities did not come.

Reinardy (2009) used a more nuanced measure of job satisfaction in his survey of women employed by newspapers, including questions related to organizational support and work-life balance, which have emerged as key issues for women in journalism (Elmore, 2007; Everbach & Flournoy, 2007; Nicholson, 2007; “Women’s Role in News Remains Limited,” 2002; Ross, 2001). Using a measure called the Maslach Burnout Inventory, Reinardy found that women who said they intended to leave newspapers reported higher levels of exhaustion, higher levels of cynicism and a lower sense of accomplishment – but he also found evidence that organizational support and overall job satisfaction served to mitigate those negative feelings. When he compared women’s feelings with men’s, he found that women were no more cynical than their male colleagues and no more likely to report a work-life imbalance, but they were significantly more exhausted and felt a lower sense of accomplishment. Reinardy

attributed these feelings to the different social roles placed upon men and women, such as the expectation that women will continue to shoulder a greater share of the housework in two-income families. Reinardy wrote: “Faced with family and childcare issues, sexism, discrimination and the glass ceiling, it appears women are not receiving the organizational encouragement to contend with these issues or perhaps even to remain in journalism” (p. 53).

After surveying former newspaperwomen around the country, Willard (2007) reported that 80% of women said they had left their previous positions in search of higher salaries and more opportunities for advancement. The respondents also cited frustrations with management and heavy workloads, but – mitigating the possibility that these women were simply discontented individuals – they reported being so happy in their new positions there was nothing their former employers could do to get them to return. In contrast, a survey of freelance journalists by Massey and Elmore (2011) found that a sizeable number of women – while generally satisfied with their freelance work – had considered re-entering what the researchers called “organized journalism” by taking a staff position rather than continue self-employment. Massey and Elmore surmised that while women enjoyed the flexibility of self-employment, which eliminated many of the work-family conflicts reported by women in journalism, their identification with the work itself was strong enough to make them reconsider. However, Massey and Elmore, using a six-question measure of overall job satisfaction, did not find statistically significant differences between men and women.



Gender has generally been shown to have more explanatory power in studies that capture women's experiences, perceptions and attitudes using qualitative methods, such as in-depth interviews, which allow researchers to ask targeted questions and follow up on the responses. In focus groups with female sports journalists, Hardin and Shain (2005) found a clear differentiation between the women's satisfaction with their choice of careers and their perceptions of their workplaces. While they loved the work itself, they reported experiencing regular harassment and discrimination from male colleagues, sources and fans. They also viewed their gender as a potential asset when they were hired into entry-level positions but a barrier to further promotions. Despite their institutional frustrations, however, they cited work-life conflicts as the likely reason they would leave the field if they ever chose to do so. By its nature, sports journalism requires more travel and irregular hours, which the women found incompatible with their responsibilities as family caretakers.

Several recurring themes have emerged from interviews with women who made the decision to leave newspapers: 1) a male-dominated, exclusionary newsroom culture; 2) news judgment and story assignments that seemed to privilege a male perspective; 3) inadequate salaries and benefits; and 4) organizational practices that made it difficult to balance work and family obligations. Elmore (2009) interviewed former female journalists who had worked at newspapers of varying sizes. Most of the women had worked in newsrooms in which men were the majority, and some described feeling left out of the tight networks that formed among male colleagues. They believed the men's socializing had a professional impact since it facilitated relationships between male

supervisors and junior employees that led to more collaboration and mentoring. Several women described overt discrimination, but most described an environment that was simply insensitive. Even the women who had achieved positions of leadership were described as unsympathetic. According to Elmore, “Without prompting, the women offered the observation that top women editors often ‘acted’ like men, rarely if ever giving any help to women or women’s concerns” (p. 22). The presence of women in leadership roles seemed to make little difference within an institutional culture that privileged qualities usually associated with masculinity, such as toughness, over qualities usually associated with femininity, such as empathy.

In another set of interviews with women who had left journalism, Everbach and Flournoy (2007) found that although the women had been passionate about their work, the long and unusual hours had taken their toll. Some specifically mentioned feeling conflicted between their professional and domestic roles, such as spouse or mother. One interviewee said: “The intensity I used in my job, I didn’t think it was compatible with having a family. Whatever my vision was of being a wife and mother wasn’t compatible with my vision of being a newspaper reporter” (p. 55). Other respondents mentioned low salaries, pay discrimination and a lack of benefits, including maternity leave. These women had simply decided it was too difficult—and not financially rewarding enough—to try to make their occupation compatible with their personal lives. They also cited a newsroom culture that looked down upon anyone who prioritized family over work. Several women had chosen the higher compensation and predictability of public relations and advertising.

The women interviewed by Everbach and Flournoy said newsrooms might be able to retain more women if they allowed more flexibility in schedules and were more accommodating of working parents, but that would mean a change in the culture. Similarly, Willard (2007) recommended newspapers adopt a comprehensive approach if they want to increase their employees' job satisfaction. "It is not enough to focus on a single area, such as offering a bit more money or a couple of comp hours," she wrote. "Women at newspapers also need more strong female mentors, greater opportunities for professional development and a better balance of work and personal time" (p. 23).

Given the findings of previous researchers, it seems important to distinguish among several possible areas of job satisfaction. For example, newspaper workers could be satisfied with what they do but not where they do it, or they could be satisfied with both their job and their organization but dissatisfied with the balance between their work and the rest of their lives. The literature points to a three-way delineation: the nature of the work itself; the "goodness of fit" between an employee's work and the rest of her life; and the level of support she receives from her organization. Seeking to build upon and streamline previous work, this study measures job satisfaction in three components identified as job quality, work-life balance, and organizational support.

The concept of job quality has been used by Reinardy (2012) and is based on the work of Hackman and Oldham (1976), who separated employees' perception of their work into four factors: autonomy, variety, importance, and feedback. That is, employees consider themselves to have a good job when it offers them a certain amount of freedom to carry out their responsibilities; when their daily tasks are diverse rather than

monotonous; when they perceive their work to be important, providing a sense of purpose; and when they receive the appropriate amount of feedback from managers. The second component, work-life balance, measures an employee's perception of conflict between her obligations as a professional and her obligations in other roles, as well as the degree to which her work interferes or allows her to pursue outside interests. While some studies have looked specifically at the issue of work-family conflict, this study takes the more neutral approach of characterizing outside interests and obligations as "life" rather than "family" to account for a spectrum of lifestyles and to avoid the assumption that all women have a spouse and two children at home. Finally, the component of organizational support measures women's perceptions of how they are treated in the workplace; what kind of material and moral support they receive from their employers; and how valued they feel as workers.

Based on the concept of job satisfaction described above, the research questions guiding this study are as follows:

RQ1: How do women at community newspapers perceive their job quality?

RQ2: How do women at community newspapers feel about their work-life balance?

RQ3: What kind of support do women at community newspapers say they receive from their organizations?

## **Method**

This study departs from most job satisfaction studies involving newspapers by including women in advertising, circulation, and other departments in addition to

women in the newsroom. Surveying women in all roles provides a well-rounded view of the workforce and helps to isolate factors that may be organizational (one of the central questions of this study) rather than specific to certain job areas. An online survey was sent to 448 members of the Iowa Newspaper Association, which provided a list of email addresses and gave the lead researcher permission to contact its members. In addition, the survey link was shared via the association's and the lead author's Twitter accounts with a message encouraging all current employees at Iowa newspapers to complete the survey and pass it along to others. In all, 139 surveys were returned, 69 of them from women.

The survey collected demographic data about the respondents and included questions related to job description, years of experience, and salary, as well as the type of ownership and circulation of the newspaper. To provide a quantitative measure of job satisfaction, respondents were given a series of 14 statements related to each component: job quality, work-life balance, and organizational support. Respondents were asked to indicate their agreement on a 7-point Likert scale, with 1 indicating strong disagreement and 7 indicating strong agreement. Each category included a mix of affirmative and negative statements to increase internal validity.

The survey also included four open-ended questions that allowed respondents to describe their job satisfaction in their own words. Two of the questions prompted respondents to make connections between their attitudes and their intentions to stay in newspapers or leave the industry. The other two questions prompted respondents to describe what, if anything, they would change about their job or the direction of their

organization. A qualitative analysis was conducted of women's responses to provide nuanced information and context regarding their perceptions and attitudes. Each of the responses was coded for its relevance to job quality, work-life balance, and/or organizational support, and the data were closely examined for themes and patterns that emerged from the statements made by respondents.

### **Findings**

On average, the women who responded to this survey were older, more experienced, and working at smaller newspapers than those who have responded to other job satisfaction surveys. Two-thirds of the respondents (66.7%) were 45 or older, and the majority of them (65.2%) were married. More than three-fourths of respondents (76.8%) worked at newspapers with circulations of less than 10,000; 65.2% reported in-state ownership of their organizations; while 29% worked for large, out-of-state corporate owners. There was a broad range of experience among the women surveyed, although 42% had been working in the newspaper industry for 16 or more years and the vast majority had a bachelor's degree or some college education. Almost half of the respondents (47.8%) said they planned to remain in the industry until they retired, probably reflecting the older demographic surveyed, but 39.1% said they planned to stay five years or less; of those, 13% said they were currently looking for other opportunities. Despite the age and experience of the respondents, 76.8% reported annual salaries of less than \$40,000 while working full time.

*Job Quality.* The highest-scoring aspect of job satisfaction for the women surveyed was job quality. On the quantitative scales, the respondents answered positively on

measures related to the importance, variety and autonomy of their jobs, expressing a strong belief that their jobs mattered to the organizations and communities they served (table 1). Respondents were more neutral regarding the feedback they received about their work and their optimism toward the newspaper industry and their organizations.

Survey statement	Average agreement (7=strongly agree; 1=strongly disagree)
I believe what I do matters to the organization.	6.12
I believe what I do matters to the community	6.03
I make many decisions independently at work.	5.88
I am satisfied with the variety of work activities I do.	5.49
I am interested in taking on more responsibility in my organization.	4.82
I am optimistic about the direction my organization is taking.	4.62
I receive the right amount of recognition for my job performance.	4.55
I am optimistic about the future of the news industry.	4.51
I am satisfied with my professional growth.	4.49
I do not get enough time to work on tasks that I value.	4.20
I do not receive enough feedback on how I could improve performance.	4.14
The demands of job my leave little time to learn new skills.	3.98
I am confident that if I want to advance in my career, I will have the opportunity to do so.	3.52
I often feel as if someone is looking over my shoulder.	3.38

Table 1. Average scores on statements regarding job quality.

An overwhelming 84% of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that what they do matters to the community, and 82.6% agreed or strongly agreed that what they do

matters to the organization. The respondents also indicated a satisfactory level of autonomy and variety at work. Overall, those surveyed were fulfilled by the nature of their work and expressed pride in what they did. The score indicating the least satisfaction in the area of job quality came on the statement regarding future opportunities; almost half of respondents (47.8%) disagreed or strongly disagreed they would be given a chance to advance in their organizations if they had the desire, and only three of 69 respondents reported they had been promoted to a new job title in the past year. In part, this might reflect the small size and local ownership of community newspapers, where there is more overlap of roles and fewer positions available. However, this finding aligns with other studies that have found women to be disappointed, in general, with their prospects for advancement at newspapers.

The importance of job quality was also reflected in the open-ended responses, where respondents were asked to elaborate on their reasons for wanting to remain in newspapers or leave the field. A full 36.2% of respondents used some version of the words "like," "love," or "enjoy" to describe their feelings toward their work, and others used similarly positive words. Several respondents said they valued the challenge and variety in their jobs, including the opportunity to interact with members of the community. Others took pride in their many years of experience (or, less affirmatively, simply felt it was too late in their careers to try something new). A common theme in the open-ended responses was the respondents' belief in the importance of newspapers within their communities; women in both news and advertising viewed their work as an important public service. Some of the responses were as follows:



**Survey question: If you plan to continue working in the newspaper industry, what is your reason for staying?**

"I really enjoy the challenges/changes that the industry is facing right now and I strongly believe in the power of newspapers for news and advertising."

"I enjoy working with people and hearing their stories. It allows you to touch the lives of others when you least expect it."

"Newspapers still provide the best source of local information—both news and advertising—and they matter!"

"Belief in the ongoing, important role a community newspaper plays in the strength of that community; continuing to capitalize on the expertise that comes from 37 years in this field."

The importance of job quality to overall satisfaction also came through in the negative comments respondents made about their jobs, as respondents expressed frustration with tasks they considered tedious or outside their responsibilities. Several mentioned an increase in the amount of paperwork they had been asked to complete, which they found to be a distraction from more important responsibilities:

**Survey question: If you plan to exit the newspaper industry, what is your reason for leaving?**

"If I leave it would be because of so many changes and demands and reports we have to do that it is starting to get overwhelming which is taking a toll on all employees."

**Survey question: What, if anything, would you change about your job?**

"Less of the tedious work that could be done by someone who is paid less. Let me do the in-depth work that I know I can do better than anyone else here."

It would appear that newspaper employees are passionate about their work, which gives them an internal reservoir of motivation that benefits an organization and helps offset negative factors in their level of job satisfaction. However, this also might mean their morale takes a harder hit when they are asked to spend time on tasks they do not

consider relevant to their mission. Newspaper workers identify strongly with their work, which they perceive as a form of civic engagement; any tasks that tamper with this sense of purpose are likely to have a negative impact on their job satisfaction.

*Work-life balance.* The issue of work-life balance was not particularly salient to the women surveyed here (table 2). The average responses to the statements regarding work-life balance were largely neutral, whether the statement was phrased positively or negatively. For example, 56.5% of respondents agreed or strongly agreed with the statement, "I am satisfied with the balance between my work and my personal life"; 21.7% disagreed or strongly disagreed; and 15.9% were neutral. In fact, more women cited the flexibility of their schedules as a positive aspect of their jobs; 73.9% agreed or strongly agreed they had flexibility in scheduling their work hours.

Survey statement	Average agreement (7=strongly agree; 1=strongly disagree)
I have flexibility in scheduling my work hours.	5.60
I am satisfied with the balance between my work and my personal life.	4.71
My work schedule makes it relatively easy to fulfill family responsibilities.	4.67
After work, I come home too tired to do some of the things I would like to do.	4.38
I have so much work to do that it takes away from my personal interests.	3.92
I have to put off doing things I like to do because of work-related demands.	3.82
My work schedule often conflicts with my personal life.	3.57
Because my work is so demanding, at times I am irritable at home.	3.68
My work takes up time that I would like to spend with my family or friends.	3.62
Due to work-related duties, I frequently have to make changes to my personal plans.	3.58
The demands of my job make it difficult to relax at home.	3.51
My job makes it difficult to be the kind of spouse, parent or friend I would like to be.	3.29
My job produces strain that makes it difficult to fulfill my personal obligations.	3.15
My family and friends dislike how preoccupied I am with my work.	3.13

Table 2. Average scores on statements regarding work-life balance.

It would appear that a significant number of community news organizations trust the professionals they hire to do their work whenever and however they see fit, focusing on employees' output rather than their adherence to a strict schedule. This has a positive impact on job satisfaction and is cited by women as a benefit of newspaper work. In the open-ended responses, several women pointed to their family-friendly schedules,

ability to work part time, and convenient locations as reasons they would continue to work in newspapers. While other respondents mentioned the inconvenience of working or traveling at night – one woman even reported working seven days a week – *all but one* of those responses focused primarily on the issue of low or unfair compensation, making the chief complaint one of organizational support rather than work-life balance. Some of the responses were as follows:

**Survey question: If you plan to continue working in the newspaper industry, what is your reason for staying?**

“Fits in well with my family schedule, flexibility, creative opportunities, like my co-workers, close to home – which means little travel time.”

“Convenience of hours and flexibility.”

**Survey question: What, if anything, would you change about your job?**

“No night hours, higher pay, more vacation time.”

“In a perfect world I wish I were done earlier to have family time earlier in the evening.”

In sum, the respondents did not feel overworked so much as they felt underpaid; indeed, low pay (discussed in the next section) was the most pressing problem with job satisfaction identified by this study. Counter to studies that have shown work-life balance to be an acute problem for female journalists, this study indicated that women at community newspapers, as a group, do not experience such tension. Further, it would appear that, at least in the aggregate, community newspapers are generally supportive of popular practices such as flexible scheduling and telecommuting.

*Organizational support.* The women surveyed were generally satisfied with the intangible support they received from their organizations, indicating they are treated

respectfully and shown consideration (table 3). More than two-thirds of respondents (68.1%) agreed or strongly agreed that people in their organizations cared about their well-being, and 71% agreed or strongly agreed they were treated with respect. A somewhat lower proportion felt valued by their organizations: 52.2% agreed or strongly agreed that their organizations valued their contributions, while 23.2% disagreed and the remaining 24.6% were neutral.

<b>Survey statement</b>	<b>Average agreement (7=strongly agree; 1=strongly disagree)</b>
I am treated with respect at my workplace.	5.56
People in my organization care about my well-being.	5.42
Most people are treated with respect at my workplace.	5.40
The decisions I make are supported by others in the organization.	5.22
The organization takes pride in my accomplishments.	5.10
People in my organization want me to be satisfied at work.	4.90
The organization values my contribution to its well-being.	4.70
I have witnessed someone else being treated inappropriately while carrying out his or her job duties.	3.60
I have been treated inappropriately at least once while carrying out my job duties.	3.59
I have a mentor at my workplace.	3.11
Even if I did the best job possible, people at my organization would fail to notice.	3.11
The organization would ignore any complaint from me.	2.92
I have witnessed someone else being sexually harassed in the workplace.	1.60
I have been sexually harassed in the workplace.	1.32

Table 3. Average scores on statements regarding organizational support.

However, the study did reveal significant problems regarding two specific issues: pay and professionalism. Fewer than half of the respondents (43.5%) reported receiving a pay increase in the previous year, yet 71% reported taking on additional responsibilities. In the open-ended responses, 39.1% of the women surveyed mentioned low compensation as a significant source of dissatisfaction. Many drew a stark picture of survival, their language – phrases such as “I can’t continue” and “I will be forced to” – conveying the economic realities at play:

**Survey question: If you plan to exit the newspaper industry, what is your reason for leaving?**

“I am actively seeking other employment because of the poor wages. I can’t continue to work in a job that pays wages that qualify my children for reduced cost lunch at school. I like the work but I can’t afford to do it much longer.”

“Pay is inadequate with the continuing cost of everything and a pay cut 4 years ago did not help me financially.”

“If I do not get a raise soon, or offered more hours, I will be forced to look for another job. I am currently part-time and have been for over a year and a half.”

**Survey question: What, if anything, would you change about your job?**

“I know most people in this field aren’t making a lot of money, that’s not why we go into it. But when I can’t make ends meet while working 60 hours a week . . . that takes a lot out of me emotionally.”

“I would receive a wage that supports a modest middle class lifestyle without requiring a second job. I have been in this position for 17 years and worked a second job for eight of them.”

Several respondents pointed to a pay reduction that likely occurred with the financial crisis of 2008 and the recession that followed, which has kept wages down across many sectors of the U.S. workforce. Many respondents mentioned the economic pressures

bearing down on newspapers, in particular; some described a bleak outlook for the industry. "I don't think I can change anything. Newspapers will eventually become obsolete," one woman wrote. However, many respondents had concrete suggestions for improving their organizations, such as more consistent personnel policies and a greater emphasis on Web-based technology.

Professionalism proved to be particularly salient for these women; a striking number of open-ended responses called for formal goal-setting and personnel policies. It might seem counterintuitive to managers that employees would want more oversight, but a significant number of respondents yearned for consistent policies that would be applied to all employees equally, which they hoped would clarify expectations and ensure an equitable distribution of the workload. In addition, only 26.1% of respondents agreed or strongly agreed they had a mentor at their workplace, and several respondents volunteered they would like one. The responses pointed toward a desire for more job-based structure in the form of organizational goals, plans and policies:

**Survey question: What, if anything, would you change about your job?**

"I'd like to have more concrete rules/policies from HR in order to supervise my staff members more effectively."

"Make rules that apply to all. Expect people to follow the rules. PUNISH people."

"I would like a mentor and more oversight. Right now, I am in charge of a lot, including my own proofreading, and it really taxes my mind from being a better writer and editor when I'm worrying about all steps of the process with no one else to catch mistakes."

"I would like to see us more goal-oriented in the long-term than how to get the paper out each week and every man for himself."

"I would like to have expectations set further in advance and have more notice of management's travel plans."

Respondents also indicated a strong desire to meet the professional standards defined by their fields. One emergent theme related to the growing dominance of social and mobile media and a perceived reluctance or inability on the part of community newspapers to make optimal use of this technology. Almost 60% of the women reported learning a new skill in the previous year that had helped them professionally, but they expressed frustration with co-workers or decision makers who didn't adapt as readily to changes in the media environment. These respondents acknowledged the investment required to make greater use of Web technology and the scarcity of resources available, but they viewed the expenditures as a necessity if their organizations were to survive and exhibit the level of quality they expected:

**Survey question: What, if anything, would you change about the direction of your organization?**

"I would encourage them to invest in improving our news products rather than always looking at ways to cut."

"Hiring well educated or highly trained personnel for advertising, design, layout."

"Faster pace to infuse electronic publishing in everyone's frame of mind inside the company."

"We need to look more to the future and include social media as well as print."

"We like to TALK about our dedication to our website—but our webmaster is merely another addition to the advertising side of the operation. It is not the webmaster's job to do ANYTHING news related, so those responsibilities fall to a newsroom that has half as many reporters today as it did when I began working here."

"We are already committed to a quality publication, but I see that might be changing. I want continued dedication to being the best newspaper and providing the best news coverage."



## Discussion

This analysis was part of a larger study of job satisfaction at Iowa newspapers that allowed an initial, immersive look at one section of the data. It is the goal of the researchers to examine the rest of the data, especially the open-ended responses, for gender differences and other patterns. Additional studies might look for similarities and differences on the quantitative measures among media professionals in other fields, such as broadcasting, or among newspaper employees in other regions of the country. A chief limitation of this study was the sample size, which prevents broad, industry-wide generalizations. Nevertheless, the study identified two major areas for improvement that would likely increase the job satisfaction of female employees at community newspapers: pay and professionalism.

While low compensation is a problem across the industry, it appears to be especially acute at community newspapers—many of which are located in rural areas, where they are confronted with declining populations and a shrinking base of advertisers. Solving the problem of resources will no doubt require creativity as community newspapers look for ways to multiply their revenue streams and capitalize on the competitive advantage offered by their local news coverage. It is outside the scope of this study to suggest how that might be accomplished, but it is our conclusion that taking a wait-and-see approach will cost newspapers their best employees.

A less expensive way to enhance the job satisfaction of female employees would be to ensure personnel policies are followed consistently and to formalize mentoring and goal-setting programs. The women surveyed here indicated a strong desire for

structured guidelines, which protect underrepresented groups in the workplace by making institutional knowledge and expectations independent of interpersonal relationships (from which some employees might feel excluded). In addition, community newspapers that do not already mentor their junior employees might consider institutionalizing the practice. At small organizations, senior employees might draw on their professional networks to put new employees in contact with someone outside the organization who is willing to serve as a trusted source of advice. At midsize or larger organizations, every new employee might be assigned a mentor who would be willing to field questions or meet for coffee on a regular basis.

It is important to note how highly these women valued their newspaper jobs for the autonomy, variety, importance, and flexibility they provided, which helped the women achieve a satisfactory balance between their work and their personal lives. Community organizations should highlight these factors when recruiting employees, especially women. What community newspapers cannot offer in salary or resources, they might (at least partially) make up for in intangible rewards, such as prominence in the community and an appealing lifestyle. Newspaper work continues to be interesting, fulfilling and vitally important – we should all hope the field continues to attract a talented and committed workforce.

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