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Women leaders experiencing serious wellbeing decline

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Women in professional and leadership roles are about 25% more likely than men to report lower levels of work-related wellbeing, and they're less likely to feel they have a clear direction or vision for their careers, new research has found.

Global Leadership Wellbeing Solutions (GLWS) drew on data from more than 8,000 respondents (most of whom are based in Australia) for its report, [The Gender Wellbeing Gap 2025](#), which shows female leaders consistently report poorer wellbeing than their male counterparts.

The long-term wellbeing trajectory is concerning for everyone, irrespective of gender, the report says.



Audrey McGibbon, GLWS

"However, it is also clear that the trends among women are more acute, raising serious health concerns and posing significant risks to leadership sustainability, workplace culture, and organisational performance."

The report defines true gender equality as being measured "not only by opportunity, representation and reward but also by wellbeing", and it charts the "concerning descent" of women's wellbeing since 2016, across four subjective wellbeing (SWB) measures: work wellbeing, personal wellbeing, life satisfaction and happiness.

Figure 1. Long-term patterns of women's diminishing wellbeing



Source: The Gender Wellbeing Gap 2025

For three out of the four SWB measures, findings were significantly worse for women in leadership and professional roles than for men.

But women did not report their happiness levels in "a materially different way from those experienced by men", despite lower levels of wellbeing and satisfaction, making happiness the only SWB measure that *didn't* show a gender difference.

"Even the most cheerful and positive are wilting"

The report's authors, GLWS psychologists **Audrey McGibbon** and **Carly Arkinstall**, say their research in recent years shows "a marked decline in women's belief that it is possible to balance work and life demands without a detrimental impact to wellbeing".

McGibbon attributes the decline to unrelenting, excessive demands and expectations, both real and self-imposed, that are a consequence of "massive, ongoing changes in society and business", from governance to legislation to AI.

Cultivating hope and "grounded optimism" is a good strategy that helps protect wellbeing, she tells HR Daily, however, "even the most cheerful and positive are wilting".



Carly Arkinstall, GLWS

Both men and women have felt the strain, but the data shows women's perceptions of their work-life balance and work-life conflicts are significantly worse than men's, on 14 of the survey's 22 "balance and boundaries" measures.

The authors say the findings support the argument that women face "more severe" challenges than men in juggling all of their responsibilities.

Women also scored lower on "meaning, purpose and direction"; and "resilience and equanimity". The only dimension where they significantly outscored men was "authentic relationships".

"Here, women report better wellbeing and a greater presence of positive, protective, and restorative resources, alongside fewer negative demands, risks, or stressors," the authors say. "This suggests that, despite challenging work demands, women continue to invest in and nurture key personal relationships."

In the area of stress, emotional turmoil, depression and [self-doubt](#), however, the toll on women was 30% higher than for their male colleagues.

Women were also 34% more likely to feel uncertain about their career direction compared to men, and the percentage who "always", "usually" or "sometimes" felt they didn't have "a clear direction or vision for how they wanted their careers to evolve" was 47%, compared to 35% of men.

Only 7.5% of professional women report very high work-related wellbeing

Meanwhile, the proportion of professional women reporting very *high* levels of work-related wellbeing has dropped by 54.8% since 2016, falling to a new low of 7.5%, the report shows.

Further, the proportion thriving or reporting very high wellbeing in their personal lives dropped by 25.8% to 11.6%.

The researchers say "vitality and energy" was the lowest scoring wellbeing dimension, and the area of most pronounced decline, which potentially signals unsustainable work demands and practices.

Gains *were* noted, since 2023, for authentic relationships and balance and boundaries, but the increases were "too modest to offset the broader declines".

According to McGibbon and Arkinstall, practical steps employers can take in response to the findings include:

- identifying and addressing systemic barriers contributing to gender disparity, and co-creating strategies to dismantle them;
- creating more inclusive environments by encouraging individual and collective questioning of assumptions about, and [understanding of, power dynamics](#);
- getting "[loud and sincere](#)" [about work-life balance](#) by challenging ways flexible work policies and options might impact senior women versus men, or how prevailing work ethics might pressure people to conform;
- enhancing leadership development via [targeted programs that address the specific challenges women face](#);
- [surfacing power dynamics by encouraging awareness](#) of their existence and their impact;
- connecting the [importance of gender equality to broader organisational goals](#) and individual purpose; and
- providing training and resources to [build individual skills, resilience](#) and positive protective coping strategies.

[The Gender Wellbeing Gap 2025](#), Global Leadership Wellbeing Solutions, November 2025