

STEM Moms Project



FINAL REPORT

Is the transition to Motherhood correlated to the issue of retention for mid-career Women in STEM?

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Executive Summary

The STEM Moms Project was a year long focus group to understand the complexities of layering the 'Women in STEM' group on top of the 'Working Parent' group; to understand the challenges within this intersection, why they exist and how Motherhood is a contributing factor to the issue of mid-career Women leaving STEM professions.

This project has confirmed through the fifteen group discussions that working Motherhood in male dominated professions is an incredibly difficult challenge. There are Women who have left the professions, those who are finding it difficult to re-enter the professions following a career pause, some who struggle with the day to day and others who are thriving.

Based on this analysis The STEM Moms Project has identified 3 recommendations for support towards improving the retention of Mothers in STEM professions and by extension Women in STEM.

Recommendation #1 - Increased Support Programs Specific for Mid to Late Career STEM Women

'Women in STEM' programming and supports are mainly targeted at early career and leadership levels. This leaves a gap for Women who fall into neither of these two categories but are looking for support and direction at this stage of their career. Existing programming for managing the transition to parenthood as a STEM professional is minimal. Corporate entities and employers should look to outsource this support as part of health and wellness programs or incorporate it into existing Employee Resource Groups. Not-for-profit Women's groups, organizations and governing bodies should incorporate full-career life cycle programming as well as targeted elements of parenthood support into their existing programs.

Recommendation #2 – Actions for Allyship & Advocacy

Everyone in the surrounding circle of a STEM Mother can act as an ally. Fifteen STEM Moms Project discussions resulted in twelve identified 'actions for allies' which can be applied in the professional and personal environments to support both Working Parents and Women in STEM.

Recommendation #3 – Transformational Considerations for Society

A big picture approach on ways that society can evolve towards supporting working populations with significant resulting impact for Mothers who are also STEM Professionals resulted in the following findings:

- A focus on both continuous career assessment & work-life integration for the full career lifecycle
- An increased spotlight on 'individual contributors who are untitled leaders' & 'dual career families'

This report will serve to highlight a variety of solutions which can be applied towards improving the systems that currently do not work in favor of supporting and advancing the careers of Women who are both STEM professionals and caregivers.

The incremental and transformational approaches described in this report have been inspired by innovation and technology development employed within the energy transition, which incorporates actions to improve upon current conditions, while simultaneously working on transformational game changing solutions – both of which are required to move towards achieving gender parity.

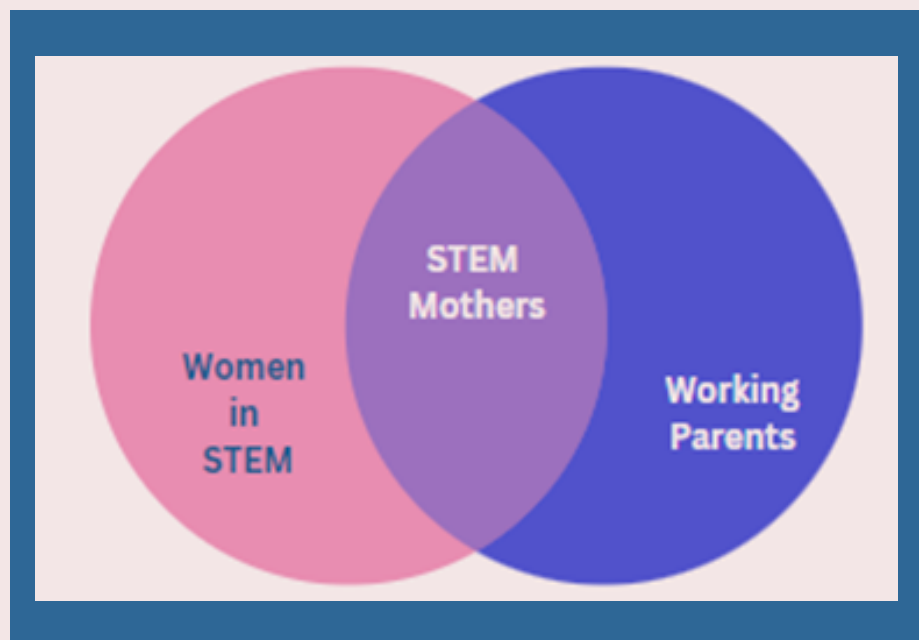
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About the Project

In Feb 2022 the following question was asked via a LinkedIn post – **Is the transition to Motherhood correlated to the issue of retention for mid-career Women in STEM?**

Within weeks of proposing a one-year project to examine the specific issues faced by Canadian STEM Mothers a group was formed and 50+ Women joined the conversation. A list of 40 ‘barriers’ faced by the group was compiled. It included unique challenges that our male peers and spouses did not seem to encounter in a similar capacity.



TOPIC SELECTION

For each discussion a topic was chosen from the list and participants were invited to share how they had personally been impacted by each topic via a private Slack group, Google forms and Instagram. The personal contributions that participants shared evolved from validating that there was a problem, to focusing on solutions and examining how to improve upon the status quo.

THE APPROACH

This project has taken an analytical and problem-solving approach, stripping a problem down to truly understand the root causes affecting the retention of mid-career STEM Mothers. Innovative and design thinking was applied to identify and outline steps towards redesigning current systems for better outcomes.

STEM Moms

Project Topics List

The project list of barriers was quickly compiled as each project participant joined and offered their own personal challenges encountered and their reason for participation.

Within the one-year period from February 2022 – February 2023, 15 discussions were completed, each with 10-40 participant contributions, sharing their own unique experiences specific to the topic.

COMPLETED TOPICS:

1. Burnout culture
2. Ability to speak up
3. Being your authentic self
4. Access to networks
5. Season of life
6. Challenging family situations
 - a. Single parents & co-parent working rotations
 - b. Sandwich generation & children with disabilities
7. Travel + after work
8. The mental load
9. Stereotype labels
10. Being the ONLY
11. Career progression
12. Dual career families
13. Role Models & Mentors
14. Career Gaps
15. Parental Leave Support

The intention of a hyper focus on the intersection of 'Women in STEM' and 'Working Parent' was a hope that the findings will benefit both groups moving forward.

RECOMMENDATION #1

Increased Support Programs Specific for Mid to Late Career STEM Women

STEM Moms Project solutions were not intended to be focused on the Women herself. We live in a time when Women are sold the idea that they are deficient in some manner and that with money, time, and effort they can be 'Fixed'.

However, it was clear that the project participants benefited from community engagement. Women want to be seen and heard; they want to know that their experiences are not abnormal. They need others to lean on – whether it is to hear their stories, to ask for help and guidance or to have their experiences validated. In male dominated workspaces, Women often feel alone. This feeling can be exacerbated when entering Motherhood.

Through the project work, 4 main groups were identified as having capacity to initiative change though direct supports to STEM Mothers and promote retention of mid-career Woman in STEM.

They are:

- 1 | **Corporate Organizations & Employers, - including Employee Resource Groups (ERGs)**
- 2 | **Not-for-profit & Women focused organizations or groups (STEM or industry specific)**
- 3 | **Businesses focused on services for Working Mothers**
- 4 | **Industry Associations & Governing Bodies**

Women in STEM:

EXISTING SUPPORTS

There are a variety of not-for-profit Women in STEM or Women in Industry organizations across Canada. Current programming and offerings are heavily focused on two ends of a spectrum - the university, early career demographic at one end and leadership/management at the other end.

In recent years, industry organizations have highlighted a 'leaky-pipeline' of mid-career STEM Women. There are reports and initiatives to target this specific issue, however targeted programs for STEM professionals beyond the early career stage are limited. This is especially true for programming to support the transition to parenthood.

It is hypothesized that the lack of targeted retention support for mid-late career STEM Women could be due to:

1

A carryover of outdated Women's support programs focusing on **fitting in to get ahead** and hiding your differences. This mentality encourages Women to not discuss their struggles for fear of appearing weak.

2

Organizations not wanting to exclude non-Mothers when discussing 'Women in STEM' issues, striving for an inclusive programming approach by offering broad topics that touch on Motherhood vs. targeted parent-specific supports.

3

Not-for-profit, employee resource groups and grass root efforts rely heavily on volunteers to give their time; **working Mothers in demanding jobs typically do not have free time**, resulting in this specific group being unable to effectively advocate for themselves.

Targeted Support Programs for STEM Mothers

Suggested programming components focusing on motherhood which could be incorporated by employers, employee resource groups, not for profits and governing bodies:

The types of programming offered could look like:

Networking opportunities

- Opportunities to meet fellow and future STEM mothers/parents to form relationships and bonds
- Events to come together to share experiences, meet others and learn

Mentorship programs

- Matching new STEM parents with those more seasoned
- Peer mentorship focused on pairing up individuals in the same stages of their careers
- Cross gender mentorship in an effort to engage male peers and leaders as allies so they can provide insight and support to Women in STEM

Information sessions or workshops

- How to manage the transition to parenthood, what to expect and how to prepare
- Identification of the unique challenges of STEM parenthood with navigation guides
- Managing working parenthood
- Mid-career navigation
- Continuous learning for life & career fulfillment
- How to thrive as a team in a dual career household

Events that include keynote speakers, panelist discussions & fireside chats with opportunities to hear from:

- STEM Parents currently navigating working parenthood
- Untitled leaders who have found success with career/life fulfillment
- Dual career couples and how they prioritize and progress two careers while co-parenting
- STEM mothers who had career gaps and successfully re-entered the workforce

Access to online forums

- A go-to site to ask questions in a community with others going through similar experiences

Note: The above is to be considered like a menu, the intention is not to implement all of these suggestions. However, given time and money resources, compared with your organization's goals to retain women in the workforce, which items can your organization start to work on to make a difference towards your goals?

COULD THIS HELP WITH THE LEAKY PIPELINE?

It is recommended that employers examine the opportunity to design support for STEM Women for the full career life cycle regardless of rank or leadership title. It is also recommended that employers offer support to STEM Mothers & working parents as part of their career development, health, and wellness programs.



Employers could outsource this support and programming to organizations with existing programs designed for this purpose. In lieu of specialized programs, smaller employers should consider offering time and budget for employees to engage with this specialized support external to the company.



There have been multiple provincial and government funding opportunities for initiatives focused on increasing the representation of Women in the workforce [i.e. Feminist Response Recovery Fund in 2021].



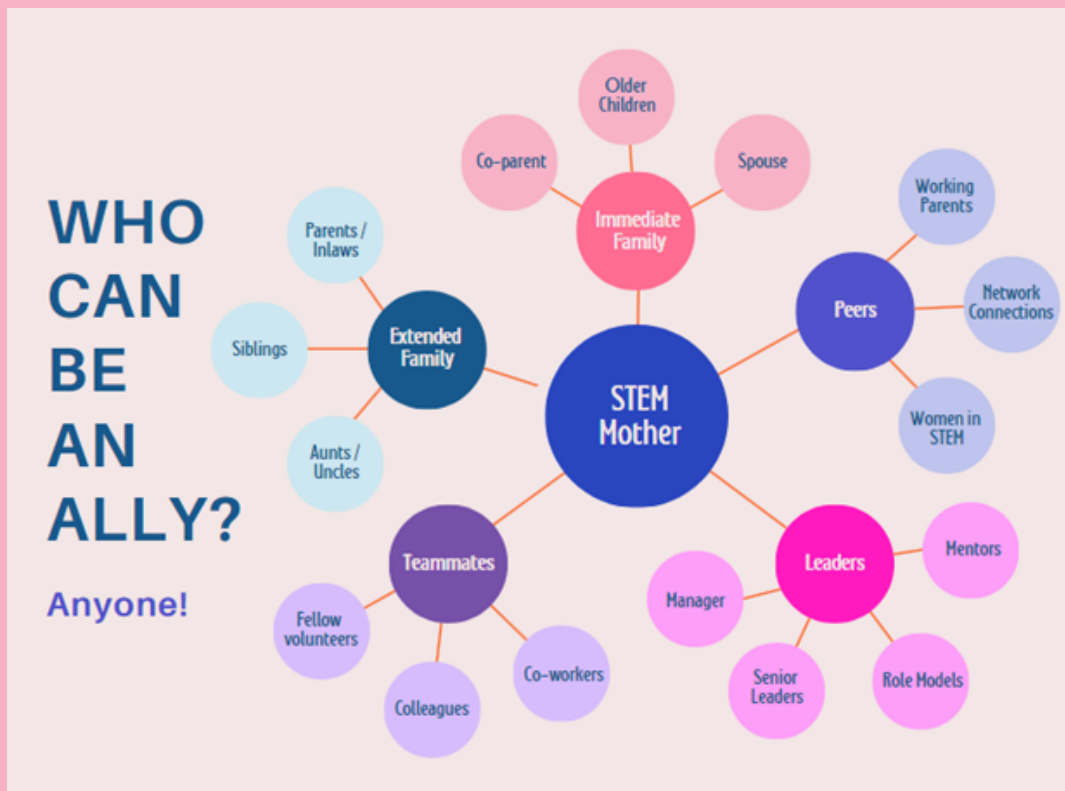
If Women-focused organizations availed of government funding opportunities, could they work together to develop targeted programming to support Women in STEM at the mid-career to retirement levels, with specific components for managing the transition to parenthood – could this help with the leaky pipeline?

CALL TO ACTION:

- *As a corporate entity, employer or Employee Resource Group how can you better support working parents and Women in STEM towards improving the retention of Women within your organization?*
- *As a not-for-profit, woman's group focused entity or industry association, how can you evolve your programming to improve support focused on parents, striving to improve retention of mid-career women in STEM?*

RECOMMENDATION #2

Actions for Allies Allyship, Advocacy & Action



The power and potential to create change exists with everyone in the surrounding circle of a STEM Mother. The project identified that two people have the potential to make the biggest impact on a STEM Mother's ability to thrive in her role as both professional and parent; her direct leader and her co-parent. In addition to these two individuals, there are various others encountered in her 'day to day' interactions who can empower and create change.

WHO CAN BE AN ALLY?

These individuals are largely captured by the following categories:

- Leaders
 - Managers
 - Senior leaders
 - Role Models
 - Mentors
- Immediate Family
 - Co-parent or spouse
 - Older Children
- Teammates
 - Co-workers
 - Colleagues
 - Fellow volunteers
- Peers
 - Women in STEM
 - Network connections
 - Working parents
 - Friends
 - Neighbours
- Extended Family
 - Parents & In-laws
 - Siblings
 - Aunts / Uncles
 - Nephews / Nieces

There are several actions identified per STEM Moms Project topic. Results for the application of these actions will vary depending on the individual and their unique situation.

These actions can be viewed as reactive solutions – how can we improve upon current conditions in the short term while working on gender equity in the long term.

ACTIONS FOR ALLIES

The following is a list of 12 actions for allies to consider implementing in their day to day professional and personal interactions with STEM Mothers:

1. Don't Make Assumptions

Leaders and teammates should never make assumptions about the wants, needs or situation for anyone within their team. Leaders should ask and not assume, even when the assumptions are being made with good intentions. We can never know what another person might want or need if we don't offer them the opportunity to share.

2. Psychological Safety

Psychological safety is the assurance that you will not be punished or humiliated for speaking up with ideas or for asking questions. It is an environment where you are comfortable to be yourself and are not fearful of making a mistake. You can ask for accommodations and assistance with your challenges without fear of negative implications. It requires trust and respect.

3. Compassionate Curiosity

Leaders should be compassionately curious and lead with empathy. Leading with empathy is being able to understand and relate to the emotions and experiences of the people you are leading. It involves being aware of their needs, concerns, and feelings when communicating with them and considering all the contributing factors to any situation. When a leader leads with empathy, they can put themselves in the others' shoes, listen actively, and communicate in a way that shows they care about their team members as individuals.

4. Workplace Flexibility

Game Changer for Working Parents

Workplace flexibility when combined with objective-based performance roles can be a game changer for working parents. The ability to shift working hours, or locations (remote work options) to meet your personal needs while also enabling you to meet your work objectives truly sets an individual up for work-life integration success.

The Gift of Time

Much of the Project discussions around the ability to work from home focused on the additional time, money and stress saved from not having work commutes. Using commute time to get tasks done around the home, to have more personal free time for health and wellbeing, running errands or the ability to spend that additional time working is an advantage not experienced when one is required to commute to an office. The same can be said when given the ability to adjust working hours to meet childcare demands, especially when the working hours are able to avoid the dreaded 'rush-hour'.

Post Pandemic

As the pandemic fades into history, we are seeing a significant push from organizations for their staff to return to the office. It is our hope with this report that the STEM Moms Project can serve as a trusted and valid resource for STEM Moms to point to in supporting their asks for workplace flexibility, without being made to feel like a burden or to experience "othering" by the organization.

The pandemic has levelled the playing field for STEM Moms in some ways by adding extra capacity as described above. This in turn benefits the organization as the employee is enabled to better focus their work hours into providing direct benefit in the way of quality and efficiency in the work completed.

ACTIONS FOR ALLIES

5. Boundary Setting

Having leaders and teammates who set their own boundaries, encourage you to set your own and respect them once set is a healthy and productive workspace. Boundaries help to alleviate burnout cultures where employees are expected to be 'on', accessible and available always. Having the ability to recharge or fully focus on home life is key to successful work-life integration.

Successful boundary setting requires psychological safety; leaders and teammates should never assume what someone's boundaries are or why they might be set. When in doubt, leaders and peers can apply compassionate curiosity combined with empathetic leadership and thorough communication to understand the situation.

6. Sharing Personal Experiences

When individuals are struggling with a situation, the simple act of having someone else share their own personal relevant experiences can be the support and validation required. It helps to reassure that the experience is not an isolated situation or feeling. Having teammates, leaders and peers share their own story is both an act of empathy and mentorship.

7. Lead with Vulnerability

When leaders and teammates create psychologically safe spaces that encourage vulnerability in the workplace, it sends a signal that it is ok for team members to be vulnerable. When individuals are given permission to lower their defences and be transparent and forthcoming with what they need, they are showing vulnerability. This creates an environment where the individual can show up as their authentic self, ask for the assistance they might require, and have the potential to thrive.

8. Act as a Mentor or Sponsor

Anyone can be a mentor and any interaction can be an act of mentorship.

Traditionally, mentorship has been thought of as a formal relationship between two individuals, one senior and one junior. But mentorship does not have to follow a rigidly defined format.

A mentor can be a manager or leader, teammates, peers, friends.

Having a call or a coffee and lending an ear can be an act of mentorship.

Mentorship helps to normalize and navigate experiences. There must be trust and connection between the two parties for the relationship to be beneficial. A mentor is someone to confide in and ask for advice or assistance. Someone who provides support and encouragement, helping you to navigate your career. A mentor can also be a role model.

Woman in STEM can find it difficult to access to mentors, especially if they're wanting to connect with a senior woman in STEM. Thus, participants felt that accessibility and finding the right fit is a challenge to successful mentorship.

As such, acting as a mentor, regardless of gender, in any capacity to STEM Women and especially those who are Mothers, to share your own experiences and offer insight and support is a valuable action.

9. Clear & Transparent Communication

Eliminate Miscommunication

Transparency promotes open communication between leadership and employees to help eliminate miscommunication and prevent the making of unproductive assumptions. When you ask the individual how they feel, what they want or need, you are providing an opportunity for clear communication.

Reduce Feelings of Isolation

This is especially important during parental leaves when an employee may feel disconnected from work and the team. While some employers cut communication for legal purposes, this mostly creates feelings of isolation and disconnection. When organizational changes occur, the employee on leave can feel a sense of anxiety or stress about how they may be impacted.

Return to Work Plans Post Leave

While the lack of communication can be an oversight, leaders and HR professionals should consider the impact of any change for the employee on leave. When leaders are preparing resourcing plans, they should include the employee in the discussions as much as possible, especially when it comes to returning to work and the assigned role.

10. Connect Individuals with Information & Opportunities

Anyone can support a STEM Mother when it comes to connecting them with people, opportunities, or resources. Being a Woman in a male dominated profession, many Mothers might not know others going through similar life changes. Relating to individuals in the same stage of career and/or life can create a sense of comfort and community.

If you know two or more people who share life and career stages, connect them!

If you come across a great opportunity for someone on parental leave or someone who has taken a career pause, send them the posting. Connect them with a hiring manager, share more information about the opportunity, company, or position. If you encounter courses, events, or community initiatives, reach out to the individual to share the information.

11. Be Open to Connect

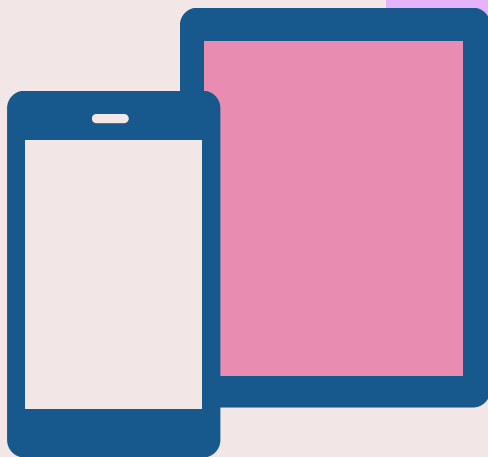
Anyone can take a call, be a listening ear, share experiences, advice, and guidance. If a STEM Mother in your network reaches out to ask for a call, you should make time for this request. Doing so is an act of mentorship.

This includes: a peer or co-worker on leave, someone preparing for leave, a person learning how to navigate working with young children or someone who is trying to manage extracurriculars for older children while also advancing a career.

12. Supportive Workplaces Cultures

Workplaces that openly support mental well being, work-life balance and family-career integration, are often productive and supportive work environments. These environments already apply the actions outlined above. They recognize that each employee has a unique situation and that a one size fits all approach is not going to work for everyone. But, most importantly, it is an assurance to the individual that they matter, they are valued, and that the organization is willing to support them.

These Actions for Allies can create significant change if they are enacted at all organizational levels and within homes. Individual actions, such as being open to connect with a colleague at the same life stage, can collectively have a large impact on gender equity in STEM at the organizational or societal level.



These approaches should be the norm in workplaces – not just for STEM Mothers but for everyone.

Actions for Allies:

Co-Parents & Families

The above section captures actions for allies in the workplace, however allyship in the home is equally as important - safe environment to ask for what you need, a partnership where both parents feel successful, and assistance from extended family members is key.

Support offered by co-parents and family could look like:

For Co-Parents, Partners & Spouses

- Share the parental leave
- Regularly discuss career aspirations as a team and prioritize both to advance each partners careers in an equitable manner
- Being aware of, acknowledging and assisting with invisible work, proactively
- Use of effective COMMUNICATION - receiving and giving
- Being open to using organization tools for family schedules and tasks and revisit to adjust the process as necessary
- Having a teamwork mentality
- Being assertive about making contributions - especially if the mother is having trouble 'letting go'; help her to set the boundary
- Offer equitable support for household and childcare responsibilities – Share daily responsibilities like drop offs and pickups, extra-curriculars, meal prep
- Take turns to take time off for childcare disruptions, illness, appointments, etc
- Step up and take on equal responsibility of household and parenting responsibilities
- Be an active participant in scheduling, appointments, kids activities, vacation planning, schoolwork, social activities
- Be supportive when your partner needs to work evenings, weekends or travel
- Be open to out-sourcing if necessary; nanny, cleaner, food services, lawn care etc

Grandparents, Extended Family, Friends & Neighbours:

- Step in to help with childcare and household responsibilities
- For friends - sharing what works for you or even your own struggles
- For family – help where you can with the household and child tasks; transportation, childcare, chores, errands, sick day coverage, etc..

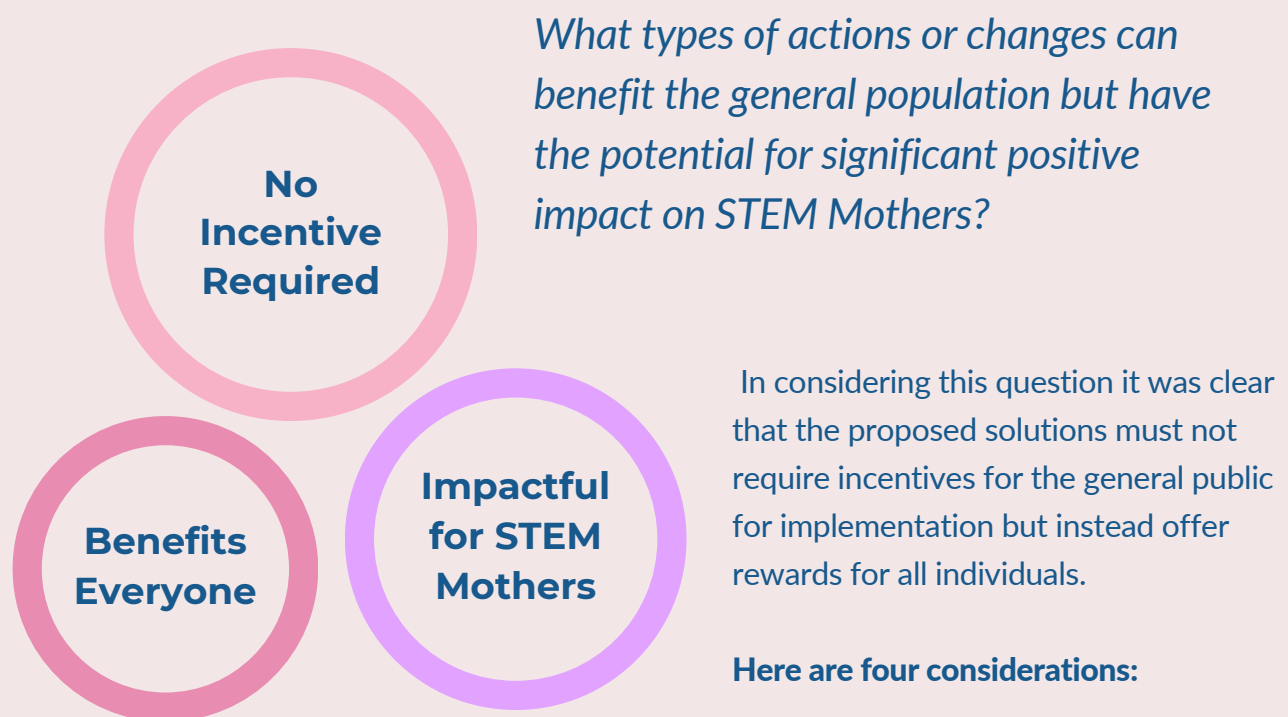
CALL TO ACTION: What first action will you can take to show your allyship to both Women in STEM and Working Parents?

RECOMMENDATION #3

Transformational Considerations for Society

Most of the actions described thus far are focused on allies doing the right thing simply because 'diversity is good for everyone'. While this is true, this incentive may not motivate the general public, or even organizational leadership, to take initiative, even if the data shows positive impacts

Approaching the problem from an alternative angle:



CONSIDERATION #1:

Continuous Career Assessment for the Full Career Lifecycle

In university there is a hyper focus on what you want to do with your life. You choose a degree, graduate, and gain employment in a valuable career direction. Some people go through several iterations, others hop on the career treadmill.

The typical questions asked to get to this point are in the realm of:

- 1 | **WHAT DO I LIKE TO DO?**
- 2 | **WHAT AM I GOOD AT?**
- 3 | **HOW CAN I MAKE AN IMPACT**
- 4 | **WHAT TYPE OF LIFESTYLE WILL THIS OPTION PROVIDE ME?**

This process is focused on deep analysis and self reflection. It requires time and energy to complete; like any task or process if you do not continue to repeat it, you will become out of practice.

CONTINUOUS CAREER ASSESSMENT FOR THE FULL CAREER LIFECYCLE

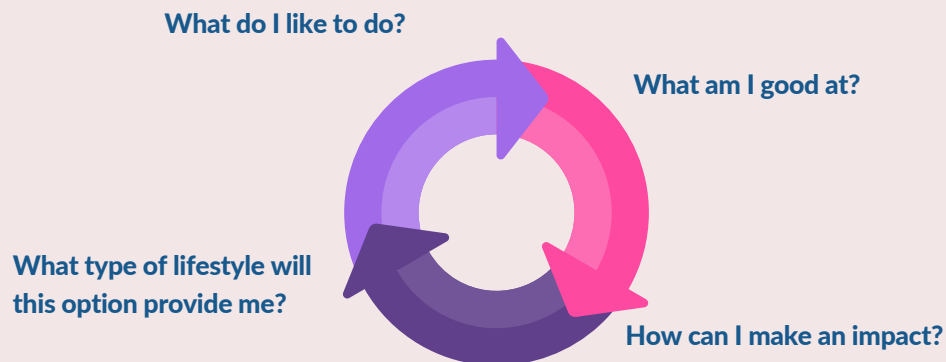
Enter the mid-career phase where some people become disenfranchised with their lot and start to wonder what other paths might exist. If you are working, this process will take a significant portion of your free time. And if you are working and parenting this will require an effort on what is likely a time deficit. The pauses resulting from parental leaves, combined with a change in personal priorities can result in questioning what you want to do and the impact you want to make during your life.



When individuals, regardless of gender or caregiving status, are routinely assessing their career fulfillment and are armed with resources and skills to initiate and act towards course corrections, they are likely to be more satisfied in their careers. When individuals are fulfilled, they are more engaged and productive employees.

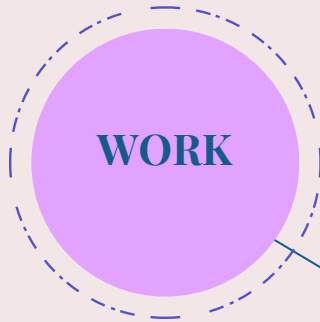


If the above was normalized as a society, Mothers might be less likely to question their career path when thrown off the career treadmill. A move towards normalizing this approach would benefit all but has the potential for increased positive impact for Women in STEM, especially Mothers.



CONSIDERATION #2:

Work-Life Balance Assessment for the Full Career Lifecycle



WORK

Work life balance is a topic, which traditionally has been directed towards **Women**, but work life balance is beneficial for all. We know that many individuals have preferences for working hours and locations depending on when and where they work best during the day.

By normalizing the integration of your work life with your personal life from the start of your career, this enables an individual to **hone their skills at managing and integrating their many competing life demands**. This could look like a regular mid-day meet up with a local running group or having a volunteer commitment on a bi-weekly basis.

LIFE

Everyone has personal lives that blend into their professional ones. When work cultures provide flexible arrangements to support and encourage this, on the basis that objectives and deliverables are met, they are enabling their employees to thrive.

BALANCE

Parents are often caught off guard with the demands of caregiving – especially in high demand STEM professions. It is difficult to balance the two – **as a society, we do not normalize this as being an issue for men, even though men also struggle with this stage of life, especially in dual career households.**

INTEGRATION

Work-Life Balance Assessment for the Full Career Lifecycle

If work-life balance was normalized and prioritized as a society, and regular check-ins were incorporated into employee reviews, parents would be better equipped to handle the transition to working parenthood.

They would have the skill-sets and mental space to integrate both their life and work in a culture where everyone, regardless of gender or caregiving status, is enabled to thrive in managing competing life demands.



This would predominantly benefit Women, many of whom find this to be an incredibly stressful career stage leading to feelings of isolation and overwhelm.

CONSIDERATION #3:

Elevate Contributions of the Untitled Leader

From the start of our career, we are sold the idea that success is a leadership title. This is validated in the fact that attention and recognition is reserved for titled leaders – these are the people invited to share their voices and stories.

Missing from the narrative is the Untitled Leader. Many individual contributors are untitled leaders; those who make steady solid contributions to their teams, provide support and stability, have a strong knowledge base and technical skillsets. They lead through influence everyday to progress and manage initiatives and projects. The value that untitled leaders contribute is in some cases comparable to those with management titles.

Unfortunately, the value contributed by these individuals is not often equated with career success. Having the opportunity to choose a career path where you enjoy the work, feel proud of the value you add, while also achieving a manageable work-life formula is arguably a mark of life success.

By labelling career success as a leadership position and title, some individuals may feel like they have failed, if they do not achieve leadership on their anticipated timeline. The stories and experiences of everyday working people need to be shared to validate the challenges faced by many but to also normalize this viable career path.

Redefining success will highlight that finding a work-life integration where one feels proud of both their personal and professional lives is an achievement in itself - a fulfilling and rewarding balance.

Elevate Contributions of the Untitled Leader

For consideration:

1

Would less emphasis on titled leadership roles enable individuals to focus on the impact they are making in the roles and teams that they are in, enabling them to thrive?

2

Would the ability to thrive result in more Women in STEM finding meaningful roles?

3

Could support to 'stay in the game' regardless of level in the hierarchy result in more Women in the pipeline to fill leadership positions?

4

To support the efforts of achieving more Women in leadership positions, should we focus less on the 'what' [getting Women into the leadership roles] and more on the 'how' [**supporting them where they are now for retention to set them up for future success**]?

CONSIDERATION #4

An Increased Spotlight on Dual Career Families

Almost all project participants had a co-parent who was also a professional, often one with an equally demanding career. Most were married and in dual-career homes where child and household responsibilities were shared in some manner. Many participants also reported that their male STEM peers at work are known to juggle work and parenting.

However, men are not regularly asked how they do it all, assumptions are not made about their decisions to stay committed to their careers upon entering parenthood. Businesses offering support and guidance for working dads are basically nonexistent. And yet we know balancing a career and children is no easy task. There are many societal expectations which cause Women to face significant challenges in their careers after having children – but Fathers in dual career households are not exempt.

And yet the narrative of the Working Father is near non-existent in mainstream media. We are inundated with the term ‘Working Mother’ and the endless content selling the idea that with a little more effort, help or money Women can ‘have it all.’

We are left with dual career parents who must learn on the fly how to equitably share the parenting load while attempting to progress both careers.

An Increased Spotlight on Dual Career Families

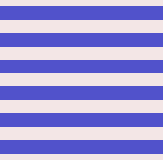
For consideration:

1 |

- **What if, as a society we normalized the efforts required for work and life in dual career families?**
 - Would it better prepare those coming behind?
 - Would workplaces be more family friendly?
 - Would more STEM Women be able to navigate the transition to parenthood?
-

2 |

- **What if there was more support for men to feel secure in striving to be present and involved Fathers while also having fulfilling careers?**
 - Would this emphasis have a positive impact on Women in male dominated spaces?
 - Would it have a positive impact on Fathers who want to be more involved in their children's lives?
 - Would it positively impact children and families overall?
-



Barriers to Project Participation

Although there was great success achieved during this project in terms of building community and clearly identifying major themes resulting in clear recommendations, there was also a secondary learning of Mothers facing significant barriers to improving their conditions, seemingly because **the movement falls squarely on them to impact change.**

Barriers that were identified are included here, but are not exhaustive and do not yet go a layer deeper to show demographic intersections where the barriers are exasperated.

The project quickly gained momentum, but as the months passed, time became an obvious constraint amongst project participants. They found it difficult to partake in the discussions due to work demands, childcare & family responsibilities. It became painstakingly evident that **Mothers who work in high-demand roles** and have a co-parent who is also attempting to advance their career, **are operating on a time deficit.**

Other challenges for engaging participants include an expression of a lack of motivation for the topic connected to the idea that sharing within the project was not making a difference, therefore not an efficient use of valuable time and energy. Others shared the difficulty of revisiting past experiences and unpleasant feelings where unfair treatment was experienced.

Participants admitted to holding back their contributions thinking their personal experiences are insignificant and unimportant. Some shared feelings of shame & disappointment, that career success has not taken the desired or anticipated path. Many of the discussions include deeply private and personal matters and sharing those details within a group felt like a violation of loyalty & privacy to their co-parent or leader. Some participants privately shared a fear of judgement – or that a contribution might reveal an identifying feature.

Several people privately reached out to share support and encouragement but declined to participate due to the polarizing nature of DEI initiatives or the public approach of the project in sharing discussion findings via social media channels.

And some STEM Mothers declined participation, stating that being a Woman or Mother in STEM was not an issue for them and questioning if it really is an issue at all.

CLOSING REMARKS

This report strives to outline the high-level learnings from this year long endeavor to understand how Motherhood might contribute to the issue of retention for mid-career Women in STEM.

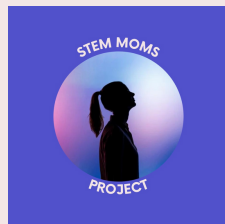
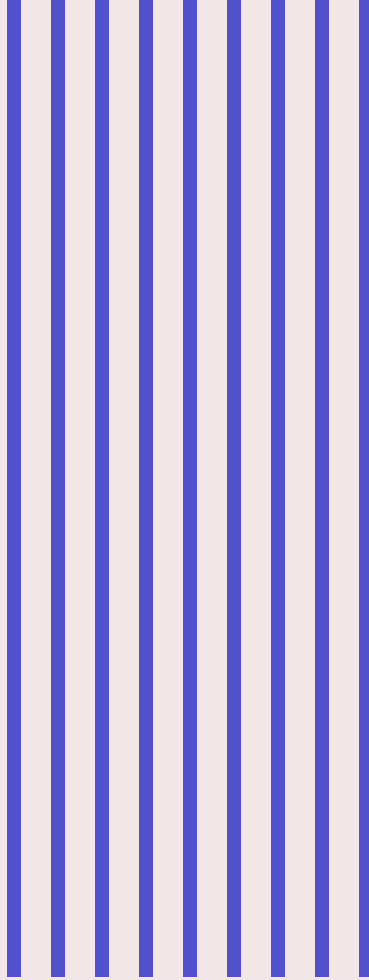
Yes, Mothers face amplified challenges compared to their STEM peers.

These findings propose viable next steps to create change towards retention of mid-career Women in STEM.

CALL TO ACTION



What next step will you take to support the STEM Women and Working Parents in your work and life teams?



‘What kind of mechanisms can be set within our teams, culture and company that would drive momentum to change this undercurrent?’

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