

USDA, Natural Resources Conservation Service Federal Women Program Special Emphasis Program (FWPM-SEP) Caribbean Area – Quarter #4 - September, 2011



A Report to the President and the Congress of the United States by the U.S. Merit Systems Protection Board MAY 2011

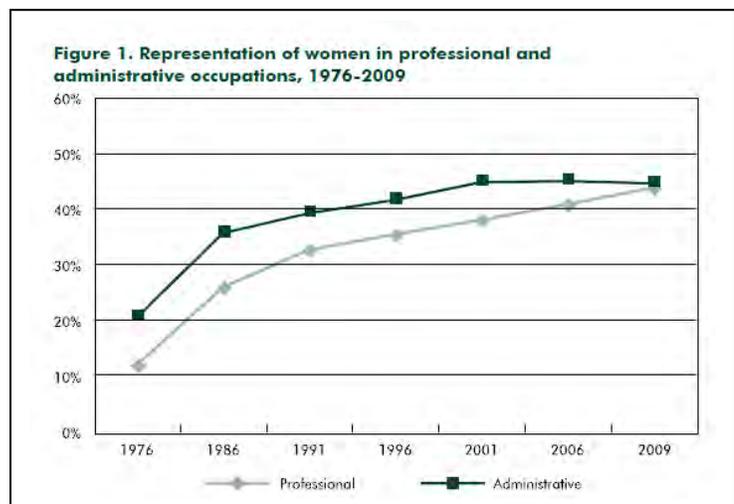
** This article is an abstract of the Original Report to the President, for more information please see the link at the end.

The mission of the MSPB is to protect merit systems in the Federal civil service. To that end, MSPB conducts special studies to assess how effectively Federal Government human resources (HR) policies and practices serve the public interest, to determine whether Federal agencies are managing employees in accordance with the laws and principles that govern the Federal civil service, and to identify and recommend improvements.

This study follows up on that research, to examine the progress that has been made; analyze differences in the representation, career interests, and treatment of women and men in the Federal Government; identify and discuss any remaining barriers to a workforce in which women are fully represented at all levels; and to make recommendations to eliminate those barriers and ensure that the talents of women in Federal agencies are appropriately utilized and recognized.

The representation of women in professional and administrative occupations has increased.

The data in **Figure 1** show that women have made considerable progress in the Federal Government. Women now hold approximately 44 percent of the positions in both professional and administrative occupations, which constitute the pipeline for positions at the highest grade and pay levels, including the Senior Executive Service.



Factors Affecting the Advancement, Recruitment, and Representation of Women

Experience - For a variety of reasons, the Federal Government has sought to reduce the role of length of service (which corresponds roughly with years of Federal experience) in personnel decisions such as advancement, pay, and retention.

Education - Previous MSPB studies have consistently found a strong relationship between education and advancement. Obviously, formal education is required for entry into many of the Federal Government's highest-paying occupations, such as attorney and medical officer (physician).

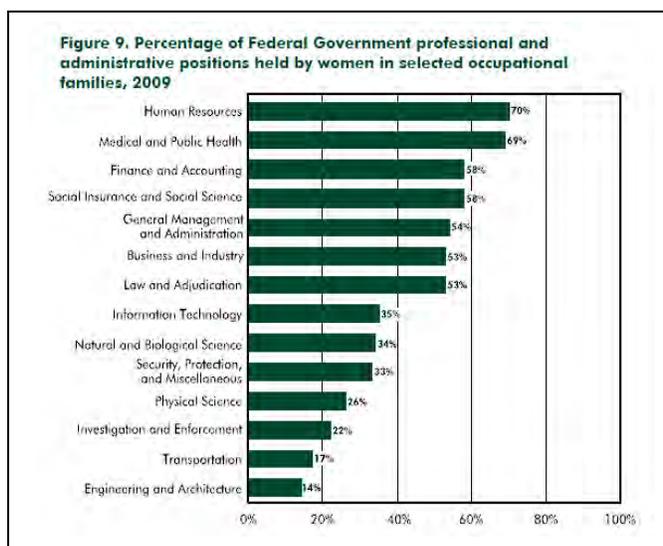
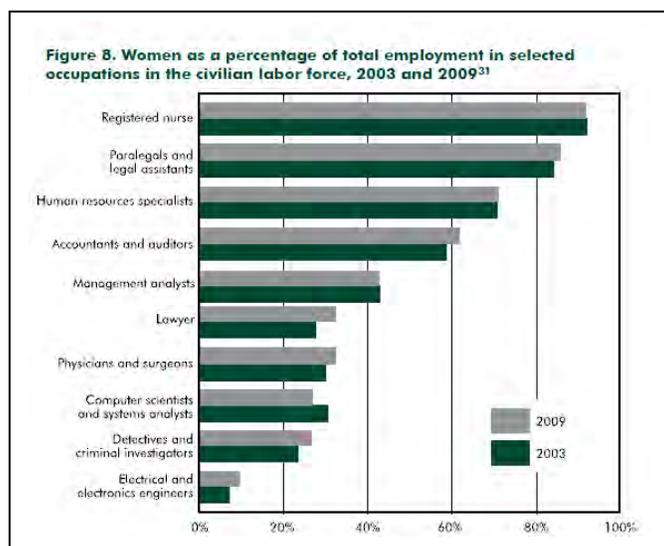
Occupation - Although they may have diminished, historical differences between women and men in societal norms and expectations, career interests and options, and education endure.

Table 2 shows that women are much less likely than men to be employed in the highest-paying occupations. While women are a majority of employees in professional and administrative occupations that have a median salary between \$70,000 and \$79,999, they remain a distinct minority in occupations with a median salary of \$90,000 or above.

Table 2. Employment of women in professional and administrative occupations, with occupations grouped by median salary, 2009³⁷

Median Salary	Employees (1,000s)	Women
\$69,999 and below	104	42%
\$70,000–\$79,999	405	58%
\$80,000–\$89,999	245	45%
\$90,000–\$99,999	161	29%
\$100,000 and above	188	28%

As illustrated in **Figure 8** and **Figure 9**, that history is reflected in vast differences across occupations in the representation of women in both the civilian labor force and Federal Government. Change is occurring, but on a field-by-field and occupation-by-occupation basis, numerical parity between men and women is the exception rather than the norm.



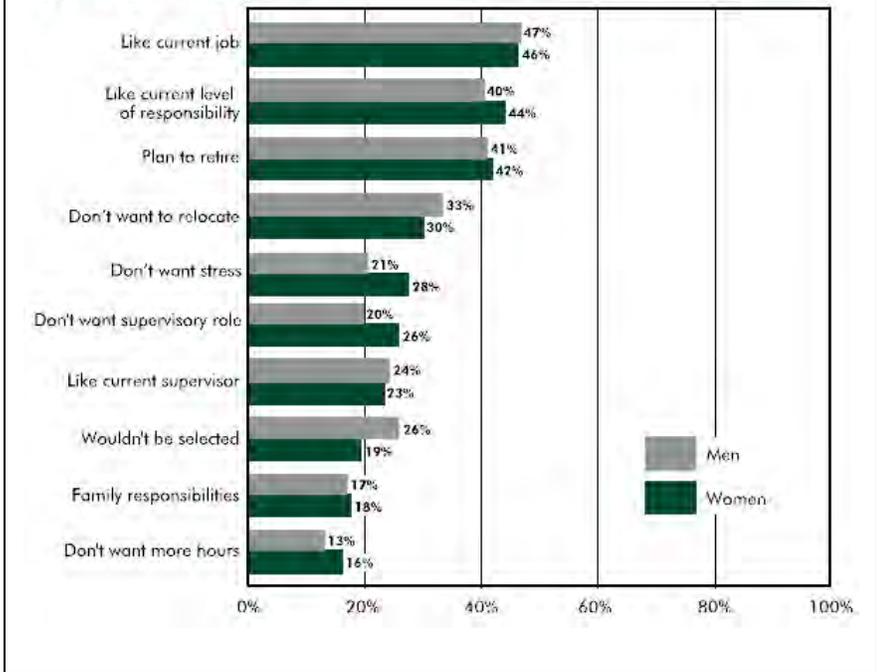
Interest in Career Advancement

Both women and men are interested in advancement.

Women and men have similar reasons for not seeking advancement.

Figure 16 shows that there was much common ground among women and men who indicated that they did not intend to seek a higher-level position. The broad reasons cited, in descending order of frequency, were: (1) satisfaction with the current position; (2) desire to avoid a requirement or feature of a higher-level position; (3) belief that selection was unlikely; and (4) work-life concerns.

Figure 16. Federal employees' reasons for not seeking a higher-level position, by sex, CAS 2007⁷³



Within this general agreement, there were some differences between women and men. Women were somewhat more likely to cite stress or supervisory responsibilities as a reason not to seek advancement, while men were more likely to cite relocation or poor chances of selection.

Summary There is no single route to career success. The importance of a particular career accelerator will depend on the employee's career goals, previous education and accomplishments, and the unique requirements and demands of an employee's organization, occupation, and position. But clearly, any employee seeking advancement should demonstrate—through performance, expressions of interest, and personal development—readiness for higher-level responsibilities. Any employee seeking advancement should identify the specific requirements for success in her or his chosen career field and strive to meet them.

Conclusions and Recommendations

Women have made substantial progress in the Federal Government - Much has changed for the better since MSPB's 1992 study on the employment and advancement of women in the Federal Government. The representation of women in professional and administrative occupations has increased; the "pay gap" has narrowed; the accession of women to the Senior Executive Service has outpaced our past projections.

Women are increasingly competitive in terms of experience and education.

The glass ceiling has been fractured, but it has not been shattered.

Discrimination and stereotypes have diminished, but have not yet disappeared.

The glass ceiling persists for reasons other than discrimination.

Agencies may face demographic challenges to achieving gender balance in their workforces.

Recruitment decisions can affect the employment and advancement of women in the Federal Government.

Federal employees—both women and men—are ambitious and dedicated.

Work/life issues are increasingly important to all employees, although these issues may have special relevance to the recruitment, retention, and advancement of women.

Many issues relevant to the fair treatment, full utilization, and advancement of women are universal.



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** For detailed information:



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