



The Current Status of Utah Women & Girls:

A Research Synopsis

January 4, 2024

WHITE PAPER | No. 9

UTAH WOMEN &
LEADERSHIP
Project

UtahStateUniversity.

The Current Status of Utah Women & Girls:

A Research Synopsis

Kolene Anderson & Susan R. Madsen | January 4, 2024

Introduction

In 2023, *U.S. News & World Report* rated each state using 71 metrics in eight categories. Utah came out on top, declared as the “Best State Overall,” ranking number one in both economy and fiscal stability categories and boasting scores within the top 10 in three additional categories.¹ In addition, WalletHub dubbed Utah 2023’s Most Charitable State, citing high levels of charitable giving and volunteerism,² and the Center for Disease Control (CDC) reported that Utah has the lowest rate of excessive alcohol use in the nation.³ Each of these ratings highlights impressive characteristics of Utah residents and the state’s leadership. The top rankings emphasize characteristics we can—and should—maintain with pride.

At the same time, however, there are sets of rankings and data that consistently demonstrate that, while Utahns are thriving in many ways, there are vast differences in the way that residents experience Utah’s economic success, leadership opportunities, and even safety and belonging. For the eighth year in a row, WalletHub has named Utah as the worst state in the nation for women’s equality in their report “Best & Worst States for Women’s Equality,” released August 21, 2023.⁴ The 2020 U.S. Women, Peace, and Security Index places Utah in the bottom third (36 out of 51), with inclusion, justice, and security indicators below the national average.⁵ In addition, the *U.S. News & World Report* places Utah 46th of 50th for gender equality.⁶ See the Utah Women & Leadership Project (UWLP) 2021 white paper, *Women’s Equality in Utah*, for a more in-depth discussion of the rankings.

The state boasts a thriving economy, is known throughout the world for breathtaking scenery and outdoor recreation, has a love for and commitment to the arts, provides broad access to quality higher education (at a lower cost than many other states), and houses people who are ready to help by giving time and resources. How is it, then, that one in three Utah women has been sexually assaulted and one in six has been raped?⁷ How is it possible that in a state with strong family-oriented values, one in three women will experience some form of domestic violence during her lifetime?⁸ And why do 36.4% of Utah single

¹ U.S. News & World Report. (2023). Best states 2023: Ranking performance throughout all 50 states. *U.S. News & World Report*. <https://www.usnews.com/media/best-states/overall-rankings-2023.pdf>

² McCann, A. (2023, November 6). *Most charitable states*. WalletHub. <https://wallethub.com/edu/most-and-least-charitable-states/8555>

³ Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. (2023). *Data on excessive drinking*. Alcohol and Public Health Home. <https://www.cdc.gov/alcohol/data-stats.htm>

⁴ McCann, A. (2023, August 21). *Best & worst states for women’s equality*. WalletHub. <https://wallethub.com/edu/best-and-worst-states-for-women-equality/5835>

⁵ Klugman, J., Ortiz, E., Mukhtarova, T., Zhao, J., Gandotra, V., Christien, A., & Fin, K. (2020). *The best and worst states to be a woman: Introducing the U.S. women, peace, and security index 2020*. Georgetown Institute for Women, Peace, and Security. <https://giwps.georgetown.edu/wp-content/uploads/2020/10/The-Best-and-Worst-States-to-Bc-a-Woman.pdf>

⁶ U.S. News & World Report. (n.d.). Best states for gender equality. *U.S. News & World Report*. https://www.usnews.com/news/gender-equality-best-states#overall_results

⁷ Valentine, J. L., & Miles, L. W. (2023, 2022, August 3). *Sexual assault among Utah women: A 2022 update*. Utah Women & Leadership Project. <https://www.usu.edu/uwlp/files/snapshot/42.pdf>

⁸ Wagstaff, C., Leroy, T., Hill, J. C., Hopkin, C., & Darowski, E. S. (2023, March 1). *Domestic violence among Utah women: A 2023 update*. Utah Women & Leadership Project. <https://www.usu.edu/uwlp/files/snapshot/46.pdf>

mothers whose children are under the age five experience poverty?⁹ Factor in any additional minority status (race/ethnicity, sexual orientation, neurodiversity), and many of these statistics become even more alarming.

For more than a decade, the UWLP has been engaged in research, seeking to understand the many anomalies and juxtapositions described above. UWLP researchers, often in partnership with scholars from around the state, have studied everything from substance abuse to civic engagement and sexist comments to opportunities for leadership development. In some areas there has been some growth, with more Utah women completing bachelor's degrees than in 2007, and a slow and steady increase in women's inclusion on state boards and commissions. In many other ways, however, there has been little to no progress, and, in some circumstances, data demonstrate declining trends.

Yet, research continues to show that organizations and entities will increasingly thrive when both men and women hold leadership roles and are provided equitable opportunities and access to resources.¹⁰ Gender inclusivity benefits not only businesses but also entities such as families, churches, state legislatures, city councils, the state government, and the collective society. Studies show numerous benefits in attracting, retaining, promoting, and empowering women within organizations and entities.

Purpose

The purpose of this white paper is to examine five areas—Political and Civic Engagement, Education, Health & Wellbeing, Safety & Security, and Workplace—and summarize significant research that provides insight into the status and experiences of women in Utah, comparing Utah's data to national data where possible. Each area of focus will include an explanation that sets the stage for where we have been as a way of leading up to where we are, bolstered by the most recent available research. Tables showing the most recent findings will be broken into categories that encapsulate the overall status of the area of focus, and a summary of findings will follow each table. Each section will conclude with a list of recommendations for actionable next steps.

The objective is to provide a collection of data points that move the conversation from individuals' perceptions of women's experiences toward data-driven realities that can help Utahns identify and change environments in which women's perspectives, representation, and leadership are either underrepresented or missing entirely. Organized into the five categories, this collection of research summary points provides insight into the interconnectedness of some of the challenges Utah women face, and it asserts that addressing challenges in one area may also alleviate challenges in another. In addition, the research outlines key areas in which Utahns can work to shift the abysmal national rankings of women's equality in the state and help to alleviate the harmful perceptions that Utah is being a good place for women and girls. The research includes data regarding Utah women's lived experiences. Frankly, improving rankings is merely a proxy for addressing well-documented, critical disparities and inequities in the state.

Research Synopsis

1. Community Engagement

In 2014, the UWLP published a series of research briefs that highlighted the status of women in politics, education, and nonprofit leadership roles. At the time, Utah was ranked last in the nation for women in positions of decision making and leadership.¹¹ Subsequent research would explore confidence in women,

⁹ Wood, D. M., Darowski, E. S., Madsen, S. R., & Knapp, G. C. (2022, January 19). *Poverty among Utah women: A 2022 update*. Utah Women & Leadership Project. <https://www.usu.edu/uwlp/files/snapshot/33.pdf>

¹⁰ Madsen, S. R. (2015, January 12). *Why do we need more women leaders in Utah?* Utah Women & Leadership Project. <https://www.usu.edu/uwlp/files/briefs/10-why-do-we-need-more-women-leaders.pdf>

¹¹ Madsen, S. R., & Backus, D. C. (2014, January 8). *The status of women in Utah politics*. Utah Women & Leadership Project. <https://www.usu.edu/uwlp/files/briefs/6-status-of-utah-women-in-politics.pdf>

reasons women would choose to engage in political or community leadership, and connections between leadership, confidence, and educational attainment. The goal of the research was to highlight the unique perspectives and outcomes that could occur if there were more female representation in positions of leadership throughout the state. Since the original research and publications in 2014, more Utah women have moved into leadership roles within politics, boards and commissions, nonprofits, and other areas. The 2014 briefs have been reviewed and updated through the years, and publications exploring women’s voting practices, volunteerism, charitable giving, and government leadership have been added to the corpus of research to help us better understand how women in Utah engage with their local and statewide communities.

While there has been slight progress, the intention behind the initial research can still be stated as it was articulated in a 2015 UWLP publication: “Without the active participation of women and the incorporation of women’s perspectives at all levels of decision making, we will not effectively achieve the economic and societal goals of the state and its residents.”¹² Recent rankings still place Utah very low (46th on the Represent Women’s “Gender Parity Index”¹³), so while some progress should be recognized, there is still much more to accomplish. Table 1 provides an overview of the most recent updates regarding the status of political and civic engagement among Utah women.

Table 1. Status of Political and Civic Engagement Among Utah Women

Categories	Status
Nonprofit Leadership	In 2017, 57.0% of nonprofit chief executives in Utah were women, compared to 72.0% nationally. In that same year, 45.3% of board members of nonprofits were women, compared to 48.0% nationally. In Utah, when a nonprofit has a female chief executive, it is more likely that there is a higher percentage of women serving on their board. ¹⁴
Political Leadership	In 2023, women were consistently underrepresented in nearly every level of political leadership positions within the state. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>US Congress</i>: 0.0% of the Utah delegation to Congress was female, compared to 26.9% nationally. • <i>Statewide Executive Office</i>: 20.0% of the Utah SEO seats were held by women, compared to 30.0% nationally. • <i>State Legislature</i>: 26.0% of Utah State legislators were women, compared to 31.1% nationally. • <i>Counties</i>: 15.3% of Utah county commission and council seats were held by women, compared to 54.7% of the predominately full-time elected positions of clerk/auditor, treasurer, recorder, and assessor. • <i>Mayors</i>: 23.8% of Utah mayors were women, which was an 6.5% increase from 2021 and a 14.7% increase from 2017. • <i>City Councils</i>: 29.8% of council members in Utah municipalities were female, which puts Utah below the national average of 32.0%. • <i>Boards of Education</i>: Utah was at least average, if not slightly above, the national average for women holding district board seats.¹⁵

¹²Madsen, S. R. (2015, January 12). *Why do we need more women leaders in Utah?* Utah Women & Leadership Project. <https://www.usu.edu/uwlp/files/briefs/10-why-do-we-need-more-women-leaders.pdf>

¹³ Townsend, A., & Madsen, S. R. (2023, February 16). *The status of women in Utah politics: A 2023 update.* Utah Women & Leadership Project. <https://www.usu.edu/uwlp/files/briefs/49-status-women-utah-politics-2023.pdf>

¹⁴ Madsen, S. R., Hew-Len, A., & Thackeray, A. (2018, February 5). *The status of women leaders in Utah nonprofits: A 2018 update.* Utah Women & Leadership Project. <https://www.usu.edu/uwlp/files/briefs/16-status-of-women-leaders-in-utah-nonprofits-2018.pdf>

¹⁵ Townsend, A., & Madsen, S. R. (2023, February 16). *The status of women in Utah politics: A 2023 update.* Utah Women & Leadership Project. <https://www.usu.edu/uwlp/files/briefs/49-status-women-utah-politics-2023.pdf>

State Boards & Commissions	In 2023, 38.8% of Utah state boards and commissions seats were held by women, an increase of 6.1% since 2019. Of 416 boards and commissions analyzed, 50 (12.0%) have no female appointees (down from 22.6% in 2019), 26 (6.3%) have equal numbers of men and women, 189 (45.4%) have a male majority, and 99 (23.8%) have a female majority, while 52 (12.5%) either have empty seats at the time of reporting or no data available for analysis. ¹⁶
Volunteerism	For the past 14 years in a row, Utah has ranked first in the nation for percentage of residents who regularly volunteer at 51.0% (a full 20 points higher than the national average of 30.3%). Nationally, women’s volunteer rates are six percentage points higher than men’s (27.8% vs. 21.8%), and this gap seems to hold for Utah as well. ¹⁷
Voting Participation	In 2020, 66.6% of eligible female voters in Utah voted, compared to 68.4% of U.S. women—the highest rate achieved over a 14-year period. Utah ranked 33rd of 51 (including the District of Columbia) for the percentage of eligible female voters voting. ¹⁸

The most recent research shows that Utah has high levels of female participation in volunteerism and voting. Slight increases in leadership representation at the local level (boards of education, city councils, and mayors) indicate some progress on two fronts: first, more women are running for office; and second, at least some women are being elected to represent the interests of their local communities. At the county and state levels, very slight gains have been made, apart from representation in the US Senate (Utah has never elected a woman to serve in that capacity). Despite slight gains in these areas, Utah is still below the national average in every state/county elected official demographic as well as nonprofit leadership.

Recommendations to Increase Political and Civic Engagement

1. Build a pipeline of future female leaders and advocates by increasing youth engagement.
2. Decrease the number of Utahns who hold the perception that a woman’s service in a political/community leadership role would negatively impact her family.
3. Increase the number of women holding elected offices in local and state positions.
4. Increase women’s candidate representation in local and state elections.
5. Increase women’s representation on state and local boards, commissions, and committees.
6. Join the efforts of the A Bolder Way Forward for Utah (see the Political & Civic Representation area of focus).

¹⁶ Madsen, S. R., Birchard, N., & Scheffler, B. (2023, October 5). *The status of women on Utah state boards and commissions: A 2023 update*. Utah Women & Leadership Project. <https://www.usu.edu/uwlp/files/briefs/53-status-of-women-on-utah-state-boards-commissions-2023.pdf>

¹⁷ Madsen, S. R., Pierucci, D. C., & Scribner, R. T. (2021, October 27). *Voting and civic engagement among Utah women: A 2021 update*. Utah Women & Leadership Project. <https://www.usu.edu/uwlp/files/snapshot/32.pdf>

¹⁸ Madsen, S. R., Pierucci, D. C., & Scribner, R. T. (2021, October 27).

2. Education

The origins of UWLP are found within Utah’s 2009 statewide initiative to research and increase the number of women attending and graduating with a college degree. In conjunction with the offices of the Utah Commissioner of Higher Education and the Utah Governor, what began as a “one-year” project became an ongoing initiative that, over time, would deliberately expand into strategic areas where women’s leadership and influence were either limited or non-existent.

In 2010, the UWLP published a report examining the trends among women and higher education and highlighted a concerning phenomenon: in the early 1990s, Utah women were enrolling in college at rates several percentage points higher than their national counterparts, but in 2000 that trend reversed, with the percentage of Utah’s female enrollments stalling or decreasing as national enrollments climbed. In 2003, Utah saw the lowest female enrollment percentage since the late 1980s. Adding to dismal news about enrollments was the fact that Utah women were also graduating at lower rates than their national peers—and lower rates than men, both in and out of the state. Of those who were completing degrees, far fewer women were choosing majors in high-paying fields such as science, technology, engineering, math (STEM), and business.

Because of the overwhelming research highlighting increased opportunities for women who attain postsecondary credentials, updates to research on the status of Utah women in education has been consistent and ongoing, with additional insights into the need for financial education, fields that commonly attract women (and the opposite), and communities of women who require ongoing support to meet and/or exceed educational attainment equivalent to their peers.

From the initial research in 2010 to the present, Utah has seen progress with women’s postsecondary enrollment and completion, specifically with baccalaureate degrees, and graduation rates are trending toward those at the national level. More recent research has demonstrated a wide gap between completion of graduate degrees, something that is increasingly necessary for engagement in the Utah workforce. Moreover, degree programs that prepare students for higher-wage jobs—specifically STEM careers—continue to attract fewer women. Another ongoing concern, especially for the potential impact on senior women, is the gap in financial literacy and preparation. In addition, research has highlighted the exaggerated gap for women in Utah who belong to minority communities. Table 2 provides an overview of the most recent updates regarding women and education.

Table 2. The Status of Utah Women and Education

Category	Status
College Degree Attainment	Utah men and women earn bachelor’s degrees at very similar rates (22.6% and 23.4%, respectively). However, Utah has the largest educational attainment gap among advanced degree holders (higher than a bachelor’s degree). Nationally, 13.0% of females and 12.4% of males have obtained a graduate degree. In Utah, only 9.3% of females have obtained a graduate degree, compared to 14.1% of males. ¹⁹
Financial Preparation	Only 30.0% of women and 35.0% of men worldwide show a basic level of financial literacy. There are no gender data available for Utah. Nearly half of Utah women over age 65 are either single or married with a spouse absent

¹⁹ Lim, S., Wright, C., & Darowski, E. (2022, September 21). *Understanding the gender gap in Utah higher education: Quantitative findings*. Utah Women & Leadership Project. <https://www.usu.edu/uwlp/files/briefs/45-understanding-gender-gap-utah-higher-education.pdf>

	(80,000 women total), hence individual financial literacy is critical, especially for senior women. In Utah, the share of payday loans taken out by women is 55%. ²⁰
Math Scores	Math scores for Utah’s eighth graders are low, especially for girls. In 2021 and 2022, Utah ranked 43rd for the disparity between boys and girls in math test scores, and in 2023 that ranking dropped to last place. ²¹ Hence, Utah has the widest gender gap in the nation in eighth grade math scores.
STEM	The total number of students in Utah public institutions who completed STEM degrees has increased through the years, including the number of women who earn these degrees. However, as a percentage of the total graduating class, women increased only 1.0% (from 20.0% to 21.0%) between 2012 and 2017. According to the latest data, the share of degrees earned by women in Utah remains substantially lower than men in all STEM categories and below the national average for women earning STEM degrees. ²²
Racial/Ethnic Minorities	Utah women of color may experience lower rates of high school and college completion, which highlights the need for additional supports and options to meet the individual needs of racial and ethnic groups in Utah. In fact, 23.8% of all Utah women of color obtain only a high school diploma, 40.2% attend some college, and 29% complete bachelor’s degrees. In comparison, <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 33.2% of Utah American Indian women obtain only a high school diploma, 38.0% attend some college, and 11.2% complete bachelor’s degrees. • 32.6% of Utah Pacific Islander women obtain only a high school diploma, 41.1% attend some college, and 18.1% complete bachelor’s degrees. • 30.8% of Utah Hispanic women or Latinas obtain only a high school diploma, 31.0% attend some college, and 13.2% complete bachelor’s degrees. • 26.0% of Utah Black women obtain only a high school diploma, 43.9% attend some college, and 19.0% complete bachelor’s degrees. • 19.8% of Asian women obtain only a high school diploma, 24.8% attend some college, and 44.3% complete bachelor’s degrees.²³
Sexual Minorities	The 2020 Behavioral Risk Factor Surveillance System (BRFSS) survey data show that almost one-quarter of Utah women who identify as being a sexual minority did not graduate from high school—roughly twice the national average and four times higher than Utah women who identify as heterosexual. The gap persists through all levels of higher education: 47.6% of sexual minority women have some education beyond high school compared to 69.3% of heterosexual women, and sexual minority women substantially lag behind heterosexual women in

²⁰ Scribner, R. T., & Madsen, S. R. (2020, April 1). *Women and finances: What Utahns need to know*. Utah Women & Leadership Project. <https://www.usu.edu/uwlp/files/snapshot/29.pdf>

²¹ Madsen, S. R. (2023, August 21). Opinion: Latest data on women’s equality raises questions for Utah. *Deseret News*. <https://www.deseret.com/opinion/2023/8/21/23840039/worst-state-for-gender-equality-utah>

²² Hanewicz, C., Thackeray, S., & Madsen, S. R. (2019, August 1). *Utah women in STEM education: A 2019 update*. Utah Women & Leadership Project. <https://www.usu.edu/uwlp/files/briefs/19-women-in-stem-2019.pdf>

²³ Hill, J., Christensen, M., & Madsen, S. R. (2022, July 6). *The status of Utah American Indian women*. Utah Women & Leadership Project. <https://www.usu.edu/uwlp/files/snapshot/41.pdf>; Hill, J., Christensen, M., & Madsen, S. R. (2022, June 16). *The status of Utah Hispanic or Latina women*. Utah Women & Leadership Project. <https://www.usu.edu/uwlp/files/snapshot/40.pdf>; Hill, J., Christensen, M., & Madsen, S. R. (2022, May 18). *The status of Utah Black women*. Utah Women & Leadership Project. <https://www.usu.edu/uwlp/files/snapshot/38.pdf>; Hill, J., Christensen, M., & Madsen, S. R. (2022, May 4). *The status of Utah Asian women*. Utah Women & Leadership Project. <https://www.usu.edu/uwlp/files/snapshot/37.pdf>; Hill, J., Christensen, M., & Madsen, S. R. (2022, April 14). *The status of Utah Pacific Islander women*. Utah Women & Leadership Project. <https://www.usu.edu/uwlp/files/snapshot/36.pdf>

attaining both some post-high school/associate degree (29.0% compared to 41.2%) and bachelor's degrees or higher (18.6% compared to 28.1%).²⁴

The most recent UWLP research shows that Utah women complete bachelor's degrees at similar or slightly higher rates as Utah males, with the exception of women who are in racial/ethnic and sexual minorities, groups are being left behind. However, Utah has the highest gap in the nation for women who complete advanced degrees. And Utah continues to experience gender segmentation in terms of the degrees awarded in specific fields of study, with a nominal increase in STEM degrees awarded to women. In addition, adequate financial education continues to be an opportunity for all Utahns but is especially important for Utah women over age 65.

Recommendations to Improve Educational Attainment

1. Identify and decrease barriers to educational attainment of all women, with a particular focus on women of color and/or sexual minorities.
2. Increase the number of women who are completing graduate degrees.
3. Increase the number of women who feel prepared to ensure their own financial security and stability.
4. Increase women's completion of high school advanced coursework, and/or career and technical education pathways in preparation for postsecondary education and/or careers.
5. Recruit and retain women in STEM educational programs and offerings.
6. Join the efforts of the A Bolder Way Forward (see the Finance, K-12 Initiatives, Higher Education Attainment, and STEM Fields areas of focus).

3. Health & Wellbeing

Since UWLP's beginnings in 2010, when research primarily focused on women and education, other interesting insights have emerged, including the entanglement of health, safety, family, workplace, education, and leadership. Research expanded into these other areas, and UWLP has released 14 reports on various topics related to women's health, the majority of which have been published within the last three years.

This research highlights the many physical and mental health challenges women and girls face. Comparisons to earlier research indicate a slight upward trend for mammography, which is positive; However, recent research from the Centers for Disease Control (CDC) alerts us to another pressing challenge: the mental health crisis among teen girls,²⁵ which is also reflected in Utah data.²⁶ As UWLP continues to explore the health and wellbeing of Utah girls, it will be increasingly important to note how often mental health comes up in the research, which underscores the importance of having access to affordable, quality mental health resources and of normalizing—and prioritizing—their use. Table 3 provides an overview of the most recent updates regarding women and their health and wellbeing.

²⁴ Geist, C., Christensen, M., & Madsen, S. R. (2022, February 17). *The economic circumstances of sexual minority women in Utah*. Utah Women & Leadership Project. <https://www.usu.edu/uwlp/files/snapshot/34.pdf>

²⁵ Division of Adolescent and School Health. (2023). *Youth risk behavior survey: Data summary and trends report*. Centers for Disease Control. https://www.cdc.gov/healthyouth/data/yrbs/pdf/YRBS_Data-Summary-Trends_Report2023_508.pdf

²⁶ Centers for Disease Control. (2023). *High school YRBS: Utah 2021 and United States 2021 results*. <https://shorturl.at/tDJO6>

Table 3. Status of Utah Women’s Health & Wellbeing

Focus Area	Status
Cosmetic Surgery	Utah has the nation’s sixth-highest number of plastic surgeons per capita. Some suggest that many graduates of the University of Utah’s top-ranked plastic surgery residency program stay in Utah because of the market. Utah also has the highest fertility rate and stands among the highest breast-feeding rates. Perhaps it is no surprise that, according to one researcher, many Utah mothers respond to cultural pressure to undergo the “Mommy Makeover,” which local doctors advertise as a solution to young mothers’ bodies “trashed” by motherhood. ²⁷
Eating Disorders	Worldwide, eating disorders (ED) are more common in women than in men, and the same is true for Utah. A recent study analyzed data covering 1995 to 2015 from the Utah Population Database, which links to medical records, statewide hospitalization records, and driver’s license records. Among the analytic sample of 4,606 individuals aged 12–55 with a known ED, 90.8% were female. ²⁸
Fertility	According to WalletHub, Utah is in 10th place for being a baby-friendly state. ²⁹ For the last 50 years, Utah’s total fertility rate (TFR) has been consistently ahead of the national average, with Utahns having the highest birth rates. Utah women outpaced the nation the most in 1980, having 1.3 more children than the average American woman. Starting around 2010, however, that gap began to narrow as total fertility rates in the state and nation began to decline. In 2020, the difference between Utah and the nation was 0.3. Compared to 50 years ago, Utah’s TFR is 42.4% lower, and the nation’s rate is 36.0% lower. ³⁰
Mammography	Utah is among the three lowest states for mammography screening rates. In 2020, only 62.7% of Utah women aged 40 and older had received a mammogram within the two previous years, compared with 69.0% of U.S. women. ³¹
Mental Health	According to 2021 Utah data from the Behavioral Risk Factor Surveillance System, adult Utah women have a higher lifetime prevalence of clinically diagnosed depression (32.1%) than adult men in the state (16.3%). ³² In addition, WalletHub ranks Utah at 49th when considering the depression rate for women. ³³ Among Utah women of color, mental health resources were among the most frequently referenced unmet need, with particular emphasis on not being able to find therapists of the same race/ethnicity who could relate to the challenges of being a minority female in Utah. ³⁴
Perinatal Mood & Anxiety Disorders	A 2017–2019 report found that 42.8% of Utah women who delivered a live infant reported depression and/or anxiety before pregnancy, while pregnant, or

²⁷ Madsen, S. R., Dillion, J., & Scribner, R. T. (2017, April 10). *Cosmetic surgery and body image among Utah women*. Utah Women & Leadership Project. <https://www.usu.edu/uwlp/files/snapshot/20.pdf>

²⁸ Miyairi, M., Baghasian, S., & Wilde, S. (2023, January 5). *Eating disorders among Utah Women*. Utah Women & Leadership Project. <https://www.usu.edu/uwlp/files/snapshot/45.pdf>

²⁹ Madsen, S. R. (2023, March 20). Susan R. Madsen: Ranking the best and worst state for women. *The Salt Lake Tribune*. <https://www.sltrib.com/opinion/commentary/2023/03/20/susan-r-madsen-ranking-best-worst/>

³⁰ Pieper, K., Seager, M. N., & Blackburn, R. (2023, April 4). *Utah women and fertility: Trends and changes from 1970–2021*. Utah Women & Leadership Project. <https://www.usu.edu/uwlp/files/snapshot/47.pdf>

³¹ Bhowmick, C., & Wilde, S. (2023, May 18). *Mammography among Utah women: A 2023 update*. Utah Women & Leadership Project. <https://www.usu.edu/uwlp/files/snapshot/49.pdf>

³² Denton, R., Wilde, S., & Harmer, M. (2023, May 4). *Maternal mental health among Utah women*. Utah Women & Leadership Project. <https://www.usu.edu/uwlp/files/snapshot/48.pdf>

³³ Madsen, S. R. (2023, March 20).

³⁴ See *Community Conversation Summaries* reports, Utah Women & Leadership Project. <https://www.usu.edu/uwlp/research/partnered-reports>

	shortly after giving birth. Younger mothers reported postpartum depression symptoms more than older mothers did. For example, 32.9% of mothers who were 18–19 years old reported postpartum depression symptoms, compared to 15.3% and 8.4% of mothers who were 35–39 and over 40 years old, respectively. ³⁵
Physical Activity	Physical activity among Utah youth grades 9–12 show that while only 28.0% of boys meet the recommended levels set by the state, girls are engaging in physical activity even less than their male counterparts; 14.0% of girls meet recommended levels of activity. Among other factors, research highlights that most physical education classes consist primarily of competitive sports, which rank among the least favored activity for women and girls, whose preferences are yoga, walking, biking, and dancing. ³⁶
Preventative Healthcare	When considering the states with the best healthcare systems (using cost, access, and outcomes as the criteria), WalletHub ranks Utah in the top five states for overall scores and number one in the outcomes criteria. ³⁷ And yet, even with this high position, Utah ranks 49th (out of 51) for women’s preventive healthcare. ³⁸
Quality of Healthcare	Utah women are generally healthy (ranked 12th for share of women with good or better health and 17th for share of women who are obese). However, the quality of care provided to women when they need it has opportunity for improvement, as the quality of women’s hospitals in Utah is ranked at 42nd. ³⁹
Substance Use	In 2016, Utahns died from a drug overdose at a rate above the national average; Utah was the 19th-highest state that year. Regarding use of all illicit drugs more generally, Utah rates are below the national average, but when considering only the misuse of prescription drugs, the rate for Utahns has been higher than the national average. A 2014 study of prescription opioid use during pregnancy, among women receiving Medicaid, showed that Utah had the highest rate in the nation for pregnant women receiving an opioid prescription, at twice the national rate. ⁴⁰
Social Safety	Women who occupied one or more marginalized social categories (low income, ethnic/racial minority, sexual minority) reported higher levels of community violence exposure, childhood adversity, everyday disrespect, and ostracization, all of which negatively impact the individual’s levels of social safety. Alarming, social safety was significantly related to both suicidal ideation and behavior independent of other factors. Specifically, women who were below the sample mean for social safety had approximately twice the odds of suicidal ideation and suicide attempts as women who were above the sample mean on social safety. Social safety was a more powerful predictor of suicidality than any other examined predictor. ⁴¹

³⁵ Denton, R., Wilde, S., & Harmer, M. (2023, May 4).

³⁶ Buesser, K., Myrer, R., & Madsen, S. R. (2021, August 2). *Utah girls, young women, and physical activity*. Utah Women & Leadership Project. <https://www.usu.edu/uwlp/files/snapshot/30.pdf>

³⁷ McCann, A. (2023, July 31). *Best & worst states for health care*. WalletHub. <https://wallethub.com/edu/states-with-best-health-care/23457>

³⁸ Madsen, S. R. (2023, March 20).

³⁹ Madsen, S. R. (2023, March 20).

⁴⁰ Scribner, R. T. & Madsen, S. R. (2018, November 1). *Substance use disorders among Utah women*. Utah Women & Leadership Project. <https://www.usu.edu/uwlp/files/snapshot/26.pdf>

⁴¹ Diamond, L. (2023, March 16). *Safety first: the health implications of social belonging among Utah women*. Utah Women & Leadership Project. <https://www.usu.edu/uwlp/files/briefs/50-health-implications-social-belonging-utah-women.pdf>

Suicide	Utah ranked ninth in the US in age-adjusted suicide rates in 2020, and suicide ranks eighth in leading causes of death for Utahns. In 2020, Utah reported 136 female deaths due to suicide with an age-adjusted rate of 8.9 per 100,000. In fact, the CDC estimated 3,339 years of potential female life lost in Utah due to suicide in 2020. ⁴²
---------	---

The health and wellbeing of Utah’s women and girls is an area of research that needs ongoing attention and examination. Rates of participation in preventative healthcare treatment, specifically mammograms, is below the national average. In contrast, Utah’s cosmetic surgery market (with elective procedures at the top of list) is booming. Of particular concern is data highlighting increasing and/or unmet needs of adequately addressing mental health among women and girls in the state, particularly for those who identify as part of a minority community. As women in our state continue to have babies at higher rates and at younger ages than their national counterparts, it is increasingly important to understand how perinatal mood and anxiety disorders may impact Utah families. Finally, health issues such as substance use, disordered eating, or suicidal behaviors will demand additional mental health resources to respond to the unique needs of those individuals (and families) who are experiencing them. Although no UWLP data has been published, an important area of emerging focus is wellbeing within the home and family environment, which includes equitable relations in the areas of decision making and action taking, caregiving responsibilities, domestic and emotional labor, communication, and sex.

- Recommendations to Improve Health & Wellbeing**
1. Expand activities in physical education classes to move beyond traditional competitive sports.
 2. Improve feelings of social safety and belonging for women and girls (and their families) who are part of a marginalized community.
 3. Increase body-positive, body-kindness messaging in schools, communities, and institutions.
 4. Increase women’s access to and utilization of healthcare resources, including preventive healthcare.
 5. Join the efforts of the [A Bolder Way Forward](#) (see the [Health Across the Lifespan](#) and [Home & Family](#) areas of focus).

4. Safety & Security

In the 1950s, psychologist Abraham Maslow was studying human motivation and developed what is known as Maslow’s Hierarchy of Needs. While the model may have its flaws, Maslow articulated something critical to address in the path forward for Utah women and girls: when basic needs are not being met, it becomes increasingly difficult for an individual to move beyond survival. In 2016, UWLP published the first research snapshot providing an overview of Utah women’s experiences with poverty. This would be a pivotal turning point for the discussion about the strengthening the impact of women and girls because, as Maslow’s Hierarchy suggests, when Utah women and girls are expending energy on surviving poverty, domestic violence, sexual abuse and/or sexual assault, homelessness, or adverse childhood experiences—many of which are happening concurrently—there is little energy left to concentrate on education, leadership development, or other endeavors that can position women to be the spaces and places that create additional opportunities in their futures.

⁴² Hodson, K., Bhowmick, C., Jenkins, C., & Madsen, S. R. (2022, September 7). *Suicide among Utah girls and women*. Utah Women & Leadership Project. <https://www.usu.edu/uwlp/files/snapshot/43.pdf>

Bringing attention to issues of safety and security has led to slight improvement in some respects, while other areas have little to no improvement or have reached new lows. Rates of poverty among Utah single mother-led households has decreased slightly, nearly every sexual assault kit is now being submitted for testing, and lethality assessments are becoming routine for law enforcement when responding to domestic situations. Each of these signifies a step toward ensuring the safety of Utah’s women and girls, but much more progress needs to happen to move the state from responding to problems of safety and security into a space of preventing those problems from occurring at all. Prevention will require much more engagement at every level of Utah, from individuals to communities, advocates, business leaders, and lawmakers.

Utah’s women and girls cannot thrive when levels of sexual violence, domestic violence, adverse childhood experiences, and child sexual abuse are above the national average. It is critical for Utahns to see a full picture of the current trends toward violence and trauma that not only harm women and girls but also detrimentally impact families. Utah can—and must—do better.

In multiple areas of women’s safety and security, Utah performs worse than the national average. A glance at the numbers tells a consistent story: many Utah women are not experiencing safety and security, and if they are part of a minority group, the percentages are even worse. Table 4 provides an overview of the most recent updates regarding the safety and security of women and girls in Utah.

Table 4. Status of Utah Women’s Safety & Security

Focus Area	Status
Adverse Childhood Experiences	Exposure to four or more Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs) is strongly linked to negative health and life outcomes. While Utahns’ exposure to 0–3 ACEs is on par with national averages, Utahns’ exposure to four or more ACEs is above the national average (Utah has the seventh-highest ACEs score in the US). ⁴³ According to a 2019 state health assessment report, Utah women and girls experience disproportionate exposure to ACEs, with 18.3% of females reporting four or more ACEs compared to 13.9% of males. ⁴⁴
Child Sexual Abuse	In 2021, 21.4% of Utah school girls reported that within the previous year, they had experienced unwanted kissing, touching, or being forced to have sexual intercourse one or more times. This is higher than the national average for high school females (17.9%). Additional data tell the same story, with 19.2% of adult females in Utah reporting one or more incidences of sexual abuse over their lifetime, with racial/ethnic and sexual minorities experiencing the highest prevalence. ⁴⁵
Domestic Violence	In Utah, 33.6% of women will experience contact sexual violence, physical violence, and/or stalking in her lifetime, and 41.6% will experience psychological aggression. The National Incident-Based Reporting System (NIBRS) data indicates an increase of 15.7% of Utah incidence reports from 2017–2021, with the largest year-over-year increase in 2020 (up 8.8%). Unfortunately, as is the trend with many safety and security challenges, Utah women of color are disproportionately affected by domestic violence, with

⁴³ Swedo, E. A., Aslam, M., Dahlberg, L. L., Niolon, P. H., Guinn, A. S., Simon, T. R., & Mercy, J. A. (2023). Prevalence of adverse childhood experiences among U.S. adults—Behavioral risk factor surveillance system, 2011–2020. *Morbidity and Mortality Weekly Report*, 72(26), 707–715. <https://doi.org/10.15585/mmwr.mm7226a2>

⁴⁴ Utah Department of Health Office of Public Health Assessment. (2020). *Utah state health assessment 2019*. Utah Department of Health. <https://ibis.health.utah.gov/ibisph-view/pdf/oph/publication/SHARReport2019.pdf>

⁴⁵ Utah Department of Health & Human Services. (2023). *IBIS-PH-complete health indicator report—Child sexual abuse, self-reported*. Utah Department of Health & Human Services. https://ibis.health.utah.gov/ibisph-view/indicator/complete_profile/ChildAbuseSx1.html

	Black and multiracial women experiencing higher rates (40.0% and 50.0%, respectively), and Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander, and Native American women experiencing dramatically higher rates (68.0% and 84.0%, respectively). ⁴⁶
Homelessness	Women made up 39.0% (9,368 of 24,037) of the individuals who accessed homeless services in Utah in 2021. Of the 9,368 women, approximately 23.0% (2,153) were under the age of 18. And when comparing female homelessness by race percentages to overall female by race percentages in Utah, Hispanic women; Black, African American, and African women; American Indian and Alaska Native women; and Pacific Islander and Native Hawaiian women are disproportionately affected by homelessness. ⁴⁷
Poverty	Overall, Utah women live in poverty at a lower rate than the national average (9.6% vs. 13.5%, respectively), and 2019 U.S. Census data ranks Utah’s poverty rate as second-lowest in the nation. However, when factoring in homes where a woman is the designated “head of household” with no spouse present, that percentage increases to 19.2%. When children under age 18 are present, the percentage rises to 27.4%, and when all of a home’s children are under age 5, the poverty rate is 36.4%—a stark contrast to women in married-couple families, in which only 4.0% live in poverty. Other demographic factors also have an influence. For example, in all racial groups except Asians and Native Hawaiians and other Pacific Islanders, Utah women experience poverty at higher percentages than Utah men. And in all age groups across the U.S. and in Utah, female poverty rates are higher than male poverty rates. Young age groups are vulnerable to poverty, and, compared to men, older women are particularly vulnerable. ⁴⁸
Sexual Assault	According to the Federal Bureau of Investigation’s (FBI) Uniform Crime Reporting (UCR) database, rape is the only violent crime in Utah with higher rates (55.5 per 100,000 people) than the national average (42.6 per 100,000 people). In fact, Utah is ranked 9th out of the 50 US states for number of rapes per capita. The high number of rapes reported in the data is especially concerning as only 11.8% of individuals who have experienced rape or sexual assault in Utah reported the crime to law enforcement. ⁴⁹ WalletHub ranks Utah at 43th for prevalence of rape victimization among women. ⁵⁰
Sexual Harassment	Sexual harassment continues to occur in United States workplaces despite being prohibited by law for decades. During the federal fiscal year 2021, 8,191 sexual harassment claims were filed with the federal government and companion state government agencies that administer sexual harassment laws. Fifty-eight of these were filed in Utah. In 2019, pre-pandemic, 11,283 claims were filed nationwide, including 90 filed in Utah. The highest number of U.S. sexual harassment claims filed—16,245—occurred in 1997, and the highest number filed in Utah—186—occurred in 2003. These numbers represent only a tiny fraction of workplace sexual harassment, but data are challenging to collect to

⁴⁶ Wagstaff, C., Leroy, T., Hill, J.C., Hopkin, C., & Darowski, E. S. (2023, March 1). *Domestic violence among Utah women: A 2023 update*. Utah Women & Leadership Project. <https://www.usu.edu/uwlp/files/snapshot/46.pdf>

⁴⁷ Pierucci, C., Darowski, E., & Madsen, S. R. (2022, December 7). *Homelessness among Utah women*. Utah Women & Leadership Project. <https://www.usu.edu/uwlp/files/snapshot/44.pdf>

⁴⁸ Wood, D. G., Darowski, E., Madsen, S. R., & Knapp, G. C. (2022, January 19). *Poverty among Utah women: A 2022 update*. Utah Women & Leadership Project. <https://www.usu.edu/uwlp/files/snapshot/33.pdf>

⁴⁹ Valentine, J. L., & Miles, L. W. (2022, August 3). *Sexual assault among Utah women: A 2022 update*. Utah Women & Leadership Project. <https://www.usu.edu/uwlp/files/snapshot/42.pdf>

⁵⁰ Madsen, S. R. (2023, March 20).

	provide an accurate number of instances. A 2016 federal report showed that 58.0% of women have experienced sex-based harassment, but only 30% reported to a supervisor, and only 6.0% to 13.0% of individuals file a formal legal complaint. ⁵¹
--	--

In summary, Utah women and girls experience higher rates of adverse experiences in childhood (including sexual abuse), domestic violence, sexual assault than not only Utah men, but also than women in the nation. Rates of poverty and homelessness are lower than national average, except in the situation of single mothers with young children, where the gap with the national average nearly closes.

Recommendations to Increase Safety and Security

1. Decrease all forms of violence against women and girls.
2. Increase access to and utilization of crisis services for women.
3. Increase access to and utilization of prevention programming for potential/prior perpetrators of child sexual abuse, domestic violence, or sexual assault.
4. Provide additional programs and support for single mothers, especially those with young children.
5. Join the efforts of the A Bolder Way Forward (see the Child Sexual Abuse, Domestic Violence, Poverty & Homelessness, Sexual Assault, and Sexual Harassment & Gender-Based Discrimination areas of focus).

5. Workplace

Utah has always been a place where women and men work hard to build homes and communities in which families will thrive. In the 1950s, much of the work women performed was within their homes, with 24.5% of Utah women (14 and older) working outside of the home. Over time, Utah women have increased their participation in the workforce for a variety of reasons, including shifts with family dynamics, job loss of a partner, the increasing costs of living expenses, and women’s own rising aspirations to contribute in the labor force. Also, as college graduation rates increased among Utah women, so did workforce participation, which could indicate a shift in expectations in terms of women preparing for a career and/or of increased confidence that stems from increased academic preparation and success. Either way, more women are working, both nationally and in Utah.

The research, then, is not about advocating for or against women working, but rather that as women are participating in whatever way they and their families choose (be it with unpaid or paid work, or a combination of both), they are appropriately recognized for their effort, growth, skills, and leadership. In addition, decades of research highlight the advantages of having women as coworkers, managers, and executives in the workforce. Inclusive workspaces are critical so that women can lend the expertise, work ethic, and leadership that will help Utah businesses, organizations, and families succeed. The UWLP’s research not only highlights the advantages of working with and for women but also recognizes the barriers that women face, including childcare, gender bias, underrepresentation, occupational segregation, and the gender wage gap (with its accompanying complexities).

The most recent research signals that Utah is a great place for women to own a business or to lead within higher education and/or K-12 environments. In addition, Utah has the highest volume of women working

⁵¹ Hudman, K., Hatch, T., & Johnson, E. (2022, August 11). *Addressing workplace sexual harassment: Public policy solutions for Utah*. Utah Women & Leadership Project. <https://www.usu.edu/uwlp/files/wp/no-6.pdf>

part-time jobs. Women are, however, facing barriers that have proven to be challenging to remove. The availability and affordability of childcare looms over Utah families. Although some data show that Utah women experience gender bias in the workplace at about the same rates as women around the world, other research has found that there is significantly more bias in more religious and conservative cultures.⁵² In fact, one recent UWLP study confirmed that Utah men are generally less aware of gender bias than their global counterparts. And representation at all levels of leadership (outside of education) and in STEM fields is remarkably low, and, in some cases, men outnumber women nine to one. Factor in the state’s gender wage gap (which is the among the most egregious in the nation) and the time women spend doing unpaid work (above and beyond work they do in their “day job,” whether inside or outside the home), and it becomes clear that there are opportunities for Utah businesses and organizations to shift practices to be more inviting to and inclusive of women.

Table 5. Status of Utah Women in the Workplace

Focus Area	Status
Business Leadership	Combining all business leader categories (i.e., CEO, president, top manager) in 2018, Utah women held 55 of 853 (6.4%) of top leadership roles within companies employing 100 or more people. Of 748 board of director seats, only 90 females (12.0%) were serving in that role in 2023. ⁵³ WalletHub places Utah at 48th in the disparity in women’s share of executive positions. ⁵⁴
Childcare	Overall, 67.7% of Utah women—aged 20 to 64 with children under age 18—are participating in the labor force, and in a recent survey 49.0% of women said they themselves or another parent or guardian would work more if they could find high-quality, affordable childcare. Availability is major challenge, with an estimated 77.0% of Utahns (compared to 51.0% nationally) living in a childcare desert—defined as “any census tract with more than 50 children under age 5 that contains either no childcare providers or so few options that there are more than three times as many children as licensed childcare slots.” Affordability continues to be a substantial barrier, and Utah is one of 33 states where infant care costs more than in-state tuition at a four-year public college. A typical Utah family paying for care of two children would spend 24.7% of their income on childcare. These hardships are exaggerated for single-parent households (the majority being mothers), student parents, or those needing care during irregular hours. ⁵⁵
Entrepreneurship	In 2019, the state’s thriving economy contributed to Utah’s ascent to 6th in the nation in economic clout for women-owned businesses, and 5th for revenue growth (19.2%), 10th in employment growth (7.6%), and 12th in growth by number of firms (12.0%). Salt Lake City was also ranked the #1 metropolitan area in the growth of employment vitality in women-owned businesses. ⁵⁶ However, in

⁵² Sitzmann, T., & Campbell, E. M. (2021). The hidden cost of prayer: Religiosity and the gender wage gap. *Academy of Management Journal*, 64(4), 1016–1048. <https://doi.org/10.5465/amj.2019.1254>

⁵³ Madsen, S. R., Quayle, S., & Scribner, R. T. (2018, May 2). *The status of women leaders in Utah businesses: A 2018 update*. Utah Women & Leadership Project. <https://www.usu.edu/uwlp/files/briefs/17-status-of-women-leaders-in-utah-business-2018.pdf>

⁵⁴ Madsen, S. R. (2023, August 21).

⁵⁵ Blackburn, R. C., & Darowski, E. S. (2023, November 1). *Childcare—what Utahns need to know now: A 2023 update*. Utah Women & Leadership Project. <https://www.usu.edu/uwlp/files/snapshot/51.pdf>

⁵⁶ Townsend, A. Madsen, S. R., & Wallace, A. M. (2020, May 5). *The status of women and entrepreneurship in Utah: A 2020 update*. Utah Women & Leadership Project. <https://www.usu.edu/uwlp/files/briefs/22-status-of-women-and-entrepreneurship.pdf>

	terms of entrepreneurship-rate disparity, Utah does not fare well, ranking 48th in WalletHub’s percentage of women-owned businesses. ⁵⁷
Gender Bias	Utah women experience elements of gender bias in the workplace that are not perceived to the same degree by Utah men. The findings align with other published data about men’s and women’s perceptions of gender bias, indicating gender-bias differences are not limited to Utah. However, Utah men have slightly lower awareness of gender bias compared to global men. ⁵⁸
Gender Pay Gap	Nationally, women earn 16–18% less than men. In Utah, however, women earn approximately 30% less than men. ⁵⁹ WalletHub puts Utah in the 51st-ranking spot for the widest gender pay gap—dead last in the country. ⁶⁰
Government Leadership	In 2020, UWLP published a series of reports on the status of women leadership in government. A summary is included here: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>State of Utah</i>: Women held 39.3% of supervisory, managerial, and leadership position in Utah State government. No other states have published comparison data. • <i>Counties</i>: Women held 42.5% of supervisory, managerial, and executive leadership positions in Utah’s county governments. We were unable to locate recent comparable data specifically for women in county governments from other states. • <i>Cities and Towns</i>: Women held only 29.1% of supervisory, managerial, and executive leadership position in Utah’s municipal governments. All national data located were outdated. • <i>Qualitative Experiences</i>: UWLP conducted a study of Utah women’s experiences (N=435) working in government settings and found the biggest challenges they faced included biased attitudes, lack of organizational support, stifled voices, pay equity issues, caregiver responsibilities, hiring and interview processes, and social exclusion.
Higher Education Leadership	Some progress has been made for women in Utah higher educational leadership: 50.0% of degree-granting college and university presidents are women (33.0% nationally), along with 37.4% of presidents’ cabinets (37.3% nationally), 20.0% of chief academic officers/provosts (44.0% nationally), 42.9% associate/assistant chief academic officers (50.0% nationally), 29.2% vice presidents (40.0% nationally); and 38.2% academic deans (40% nationally). ⁶¹
K-12 Leadership	In 2022, 50.0% of Utah state and district leadership positions were filled by women. At that time, 60.0% (59.0% nationally) of leaders on the State Board of Education were women, 46.6% (43.3% nationally ⁶²) on district boards of education, and 12.2% (26.7% nationally) of district superintendents. At the school

⁵⁷ Gonzalez, J. (2023, February 27). *Best & worst states for women*. WalletHub. <https://wallethub.com/edu/best-and-worst-states-for-women/10728>

⁵⁸ Knaggs, H. (2023, June 7). *Perceptions of gender bias in the Utah workplace*. Utah Women & Leadership Project. <https://www.usu.edu/uwlp/files/briefs/51-perceptions-gender-bias-utah-workplace.pdf>

⁵⁹ Winkel, R., Darowski, E., S., Christensen, M., & Madsen, S. R. (2021, October 5). *Utah gender wage gap: A 2021 update*. Utah Women & Leadership Project. <https://www.usu.edu/uwlp/files/snapshot/31.pdf>

⁶⁰ Kiernan, J. S. (2023, May 1). *Best & worst states for working moms*. WalletHub. <https://wallethub.com/edu/best-states-for-working-moms/3565>

⁶¹ Hauck, N. E., Hill, J. C., Townsend, A., & Madsen, S. R. (2021, April 21). *The status of women leaders in Utah higher education: A 2021 update*. Utah Women & Leadership Project. <https://www.usu.edu/uwlp/files/briefs/31-women-leaders-utah-higher-education-2021.pdf>

⁶² Ballotpedia. (2022, August 24). *Analysis of school district and board member characteristics, 2022*. Ballotpedia. https://ballotpedia.org/Analysis_of_school_district_and_board_member_characteristics,_2022#Gender_composition_of_school_boards

	level, 29.0% of high school principals, 35.4% of high school assistant principals, 34.7% of middle/junior high principals, 49.3% of middle/junior high assistant principals, and 58.3% of elementary school principals were women; these are slightly below the national average. ⁶³
Labor Force Participation	Women comprise 44.2% of the total labor force in Utah, compared to 47.4% nationally. Interestingly, Utah women participate in the labor force at a higher rate than their US counterparts during their late teens and early 20s, but, beginning at age 25 (when many women are having children), Utah women’s participation rate dips below the national average, a trend that continues through age 54. In addition, Utah has the largest population of women who work part-time (36.4% compared to 28.7% nationally) ⁶⁴ and scores well in terms of rankings for women’s unemployment (ranked 1st in the nation by WalletHub). ⁶⁵
STEM Jobs	Salt Lake City is ranked the second-best city in the country for professional opportunities in STEM. Utah women, however, hold only 21.0% of STEM sector jobs vs. 27.0% for women nationally. ⁶⁶
Unpaid Care Work	U.S. women who participate in unpaid work average 4.92 hours per day vs. 3.79 hours per day for US men. The gap in Utah is wider: Utah women spend 5.55 hours per day in unpaid work vs. 3.22 hours for Utah men. In Utah, and in most countries around the world, the daily combined hours of paid and unpaid work are higher for women. ⁶⁷

Overall, the majority of Utah women are in the workforce, despite challenges with flexible schedules, childcare, gender bias, and wage gap, as well as time spent doing unpaid care work. They are, however, underrepresented in business leadership and STEM fields, though they have made slight progress in educational leadership (both K-12 and higher education), and Utah ranks high for being a good place for women-owned businesses in some respects.

Recommendations to Improve the Workplace

1. Adopt and adhere to policies regarding equitable pay and labor and to address existing discrepancies.
2. Assign equivalent value to the workforce skills developed and refined by working in the home (i.e., interpersonal and communication skills, time and project management, strategic planning, budgeting, etc.).
3. Implement mentoring and leadership development programs for girls.
4. Increase availability and affordability of quality childcare and pre-K educational options.
5. Increase availability of professional and meaningful part-time positions and allow for flexible work schedules/environments for all positions.
6. Learn to recognize and challenge bias in practices related to hiring, promoting, and mentoring.

⁶³ Payne, H., Buesser, K., & Madsen, S. R. (2022, July 20). *The status of women leaders in Utah public education (K-12): A 2022 update*. Utah Women & Leadership Project. <https://www.usu.edu/uwlp/files/briefs/44-women-leaders-utah-public-education-k-12-2022.pdf>

⁶⁴ Blackburn, R., Townsend, A., & Madsen, S. R. (2023, December 6). *Labor force participation among Utah women: A 2023 update*. Utah Women & Leadership Project. <https://www.usu.edu/uwlp/files/snapshot/52.pdf>

⁶⁵ Madsen, S. R. (2023, March 20).

⁶⁶ Winkel, R., & Madsen, S. R. (2022, June 2). *Utah women and STEM: A 2022 update*. Utah Women & Leadership Project. <https://www.usu.edu/uwlp/files/snapshot/39.pdf>

⁶⁷ Madsen, S. R., & Scribner, R. T. (2017, June 5). *Unpaid care work among Utah women*. Utah Women & Leadership Project. <https://www.usu.edu/uwlp/files/snapshot/21.pdf>

7. Recruit and retain women for management and leadership positions.
8. Join the efforts of the A Bolder Way Forward (see the Childcare, Entrepreneurship, Gender Pay Gap, Leadership Development, Organizational Strategies & Workplace Culture, and Workforce Development areas of focus).

Conclusion

In Utah, some gender-based aspects are generally going well. However, to sustain the success of Utah and to make our communities places where children and families thrive, change must occur. We simply cannot continue to tolerate sexual or physical violence against women and girls. We cannot expect to cultivate and retain the talent needed to sustain our innovative businesses and organizations if we do not do more to create spaces and environments where women and girls can be part of that success and flourish.

Overall, although the needle has moved slightly in a few areas, at current rates, notable progress is two, three, or even four decades—generations—away. It is time for Utah to embrace A Bolder Way Forward (BWF). The primary aim of a BWF is to be a vehicle of change for Utah women and girls and their families. This initiative includes 18 areas of focus (spokes), which fall into five broader categories:

1. Education (3 spokes): Finance, Higher Education Attainment, and K-12 Initiatives
2. Community Engagement (1 spoke, 3 subspokes): Political Representation, Boards and Commissions, and Civic Engagement/Advocacy
3. Safety & Security (5 spokes): Child Sexual Abuse, Domestic Violence, Poverty and Homelessness, Sexual Assault, and Sexual Harassment and Gender-Based Discrimination
4. Health and Wellbeing (2 spokes): Health Across the Lifespan (8 subspokes), and Home and Family
5. Workplace (7 spokes): Childcare/Pre-K, Entrepreneurship, Gender Pay Gap, Leadership Development, Organizational Strategies and Workplace Cultures, STEM Fields, and Workforce Development).

Each spoke, a key area where change needs to occur, is a movement with a coalition that can make the whole greater than the sum of its parts. In addition, the rim of the wheel represents four overarching issues—sexism, identity (i.e., age, disability, LGBTQ+, neuroequality, race and ethnicity, refugees and immigrants, and veterans and service women), culture (i.e., arts and music, interfaith, and women’s history), and male allyship—that permeate and influence each spoke. More details can be found at www.abolderwayforward.org.

We cannot hope that conditions will improve if we are not willing to make bold strides toward change that will positively affect Utah’s women and girls. The BWF vision is not to lift girls and women at the expense of boys and men—that is the scarcity mentality. Instead, we believe that there is enough for everyone through cooperation and collaboration: the abundance mentality. As Utahns—old and young, male and female, married and single, urban and rural—collectively work toward improving conditions for women and encouraging and supporting them in leadership roles, we improve the lives of not only women and girls, but all Utahns.

The Utah Women & Leadership Project’s core mission is to strengthen the impact of Utah girls and women, with a foundational focus on producing relevant, trustworthy, and applicable research for decision makers and residents (see www.utwomen.org for more information).

Authors: Kolene Anderson is the Associate Director at the Utah Women & Leadership Project. Before working with UWLP, she was a researcher and writer at Saprea, a local nonprofit fighting child sexual

abuse and its impacts. She is a life-long resident of Utah and is honored to be an advocate for women, girls, and families across the state. Dr. Susan R. Madsen is considered one of the top global scholars and thought leaders on the topic of women's leadership, has authored or edited seven books, and has published hundreds of articles, chapters, and reports. Her research has been cited in the *U.S. News and World Report*, *The Atlantic*, *The New York Times*, *Parenting Magazine*, *Chronicle of Higher Education*, and *The Washington Post*. She is also a regular contributor to *Forbes* and local and state newspapers. Professor Madsen is the Karen Haight Huntsman Endowed Professor of Leadership in the Jon M. Huntsman School of Business at Utah State University and the Founding Director of the Utah Women & Leadership Project; she also serves on many nonprofit and community boards.

Acknowledgements: Special thanks to the Beesley Family Foundation, Women Giving Circle, and Elect Women Utah for their support for this work.

This white paper is intended to be a dynamic document. Updates and additions to this research synopsis will take place quarterly. Email kolene.anderson@usu.edu for data that can be added to this publication or to obtain an earlier version of this document.

Copyright © 2024 Utah Women & Leadership Project