
THE 2017
WOMEN'S AGENDA
**AMBITION
REPORT**

*A survey of more than 2000
women on what they want
from their careers, and what
they think could get in the way*



ABOUT WOMEN'S AGENDA

Women's Agenda is a hub for professional women and female entrepreneurs.

We publish daily news and views regarding how we live and work, and regularly advocate for measures that can better support women in the workforce.

We work with our clients to ensure they can successfully engage with this niche audience through content, bespoke events, advertising, sponsorships and social media.



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INTRODUCTION

Pay us more, support our ambitions

No two women are the same when it comes to their ambitions.

But we can see some trends regarding what Australian women want from their careers, and what they believe could get in the way of them achieving success.

And with such trends, we can bust some myths and stereotypes regarding women and work.

We asked more than 2000 women across the country to share some thoughts on their career aspirations, to get a macro snapshot of what currently motivates women and identify some of the hurdles getting in their way.

Interestingly, despite ongoing conversations regarding what workplaces can better do to support women within their ranks, when it comes to the ambitions of female employees helping them might be simpler than they think: Just pay them more.

Almost 40% of survey respondents (39.14%) ticked 'looking to earn more' as one of their ambitions for the next 24 months. It came up well ahead of other options like 'aiming to get a promotion (32.74%), and looking to 'achieve better flexible working options' (22.48%).

But given a list of options regarding the obstacles women believe may get in the way of their careers, just over half (51%) ticked a 'lack of confidence', while 30.88% ticked 'caring responsibilities, including children', 24.43% ticked a 'lack of employer support' and 23.23% ticked a 'lack of personal finance'. Other perceived and regularly discussed hurdles were ticked less frequently like a 'lack of role models' (17.3%), and a 'lack of qualifications' (15.54%).

This report offers a snapshot of women's ambition in 2017. While future versions of this study will aim to significantly increase the sample size, and also include men to garner some comparisons between genders, we believe this iteration offers an excellent overview of what's driving women now.

The findings demonstrate a high level of ambition among Australian women.

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KEY STATISTICS

2098 Responses

31%

HAVE YOUNG CHILDREN AT HOME
UNDER THE AGE OF 10

37%

HAVE TAKEN A CAREER BREAK
FOR CHILDCARE COMMITMENTS AT
ANY POINT IN THE PAST 10 YEARS

51%

DESCRIBE THEMSELVES AS
WORKING FULL TIME FOR AN EMPLOYER

18%

DESCRIBE THEMSELVES AS
WORKING PART TIME FOR AN EMPLOYER

37%

ARE AGED 26 TO 35

88%

SAY THEY LIVE IN A
METROPOLITAN AREA

82%

BELIEVE WORKING PART TIME HAS (OR COULD HAVE) AN
IMPACT ON THEIR CAREER

27%

ARE FEELING 'LESS OPTIMISTIC' ABOUT WORKPLACE
GENDER EQUALITY NOW THAN AT THE END OF 2015

33%

SAY THEY ARE 'AIMING TO GET PROMOTED'
IN THE NEXT TWO YEARS

39%

SAY THEY ARE 'LOOKING TO EARN MORE'
IN THE NEXT TWO YEARS

51%

SAID 'CONFIDENCE IN MY ABILITIES'
COULD POTENTIALLY HINDER THEIR AMBITIONS OVER THE
NEXT TWO YEARS

93%

RATED 'A DIVERSE WORKPLACE CULTURE' AS 'IMPORTANT'
OR 'VERY IMPORTANT' AT SOME POINT IN THEIR CAREERS

92%

RATED 'VISIBLE FEMALE ROLE MODELS' AS 'IMPORTANT' OR
'VERY IMPORTANT' AT SOME POINT IN THEIR CAREERS

TOP AMBITIONS FOR WOMEN IN 2017

Women across Australia are ambitious and have a wide range of goals to meet over the next two years.

A few recurrent themes emerged from those surveyed, particularly regarding money, promotions and education.

When asked to choose from a range of ambitions and tick the ones which best apply to them within the next 24 months (multiple responses allowed), 39.14% said they're 'looking to earn more.' This was the most popular response.

From there, 32.7% said they're 'aiming to get promoted', 32.27% said they're 'looking for a new role', and 30.07% said they're 'looking to undertake further education'.

It's worth noting that despite the rise of social discourse and media attention on female entrepreneurs, just 10.74% reported they're 'looking to start a business', while 11.69% said they're 'currently building a business'. Changing industries also did not come up as a significant trend, with just 11.89% saying they're 'looking to change industry sectors'.

WHAT'S YOUR AMBITION?

"I have a great business, I'm doing a PhD, already have a family. Now it's time to write a book and give back."

Flexibility is still hot on the minds of a large proportion of women, with 22.48% saying they're 'looking to achieve better flexible working options'. Around one in ten (12.12%) indicated they're planning on having a baby in the next two years.

Meanwhile, 10.07% of respondents specified additional ambitions not listed as an option, specifying other goals such as: participating in community projects, pursuing more freelance and short term contracts, volunteer work, looking for job share partners, taking a gap year, completing PhDs, writing books and securing fulltime employment.

WHAT'S GETTING IN THE WAY?

Perceived ambition hurdles

While respondents reported having a wide variety of ambitions, they also pinpointed numerous factors that could obstruct them from achieving their goals.

Confidence came up as the number one factor, with more than half of respondents (51%) ticking 'confidence in my abilities' as an obstacle in the way of their ambitions over the next 24 months.

But it's not necessarily a lack of qualifications that's the issue, with just 15.54% ticking this as a potential problem. Interestingly, almost double that figure (30.07%) saw further education as an ambition over the next 24 months.

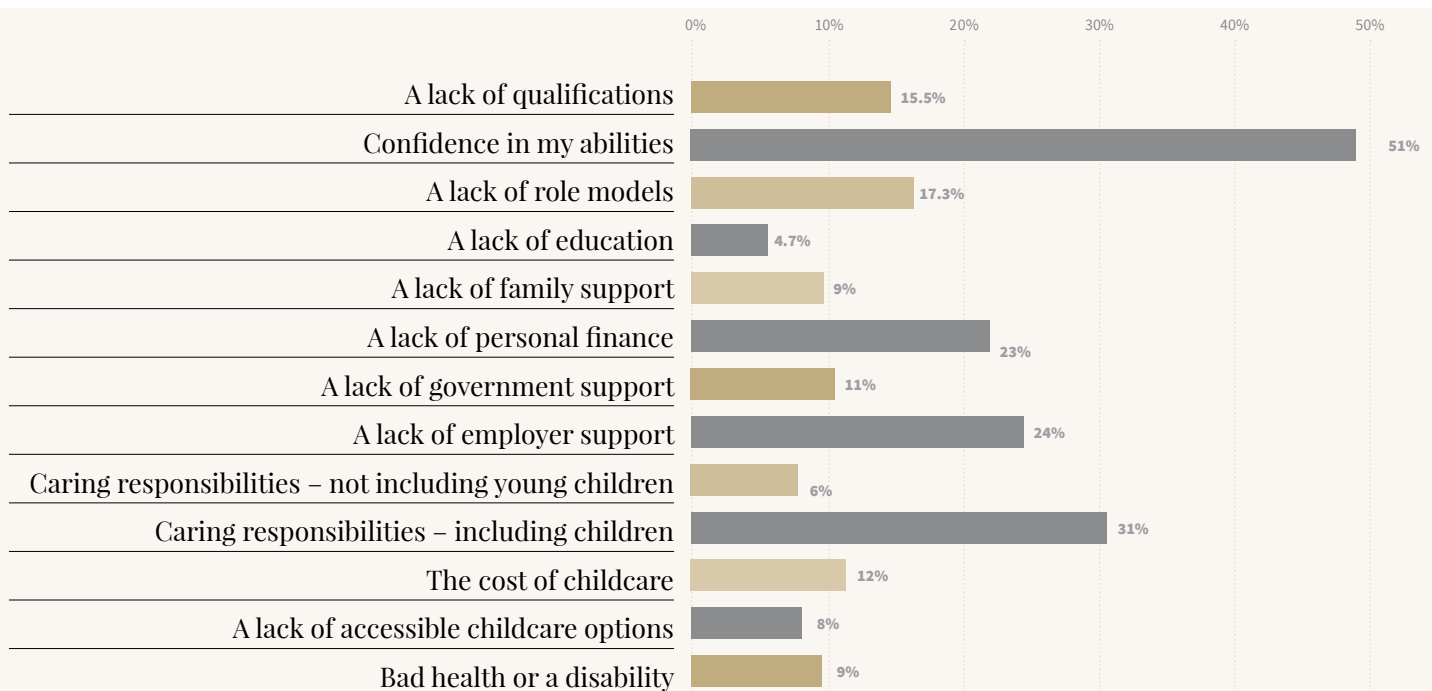
Only 17.3% of respondents listed that a 'lack of role models' could be a problem.

Surprisingly, the cost and accessibility of childcare did not come up as an overwhelming trend, despite 30.88% indicating caring responsibilities could prove challenging: 11.57% listed the 'cost of childcare' as an obstacle, while 7.84% listed a 'lack of accessible childcare options'.

Money and support are issues for some women in achieving their ambitions, with 23.23% indicating a 'a lack of personal finance' could get in the way, almost a quarter (24.43%) suggesting a 'lack of employer support' as a potential hindrance, 11.04% stating a 'lack of government support', and 8.99% noting a 'lack of family support'.

It was concerning to see almost one in ten women (9.32%) indicated 'bad health or a disability' could prevent them from pursuing certain ambitions .

Just over one in ten are feeling confident in their ambitions, with 13.19% declaring 'none of the above will stop me'.



The perceived hurdles further explored

Asked to outline in detail the obstacles that stood in the way of their ambitions, several themes emerged in the responses from women – some of them alarming.

Ageism featured repeatedly, especially from respondents aged between 45 and 55 who were looking to get back into the workforce, or back into more demanding positions (such as leadership) after taking career breaks. While the survey didn't produce specific data on this trend, we anecdotally sensed there's an 'ambition squeeze' affecting some women.

This 'squeeze' is being felt by women who have taken career breaks or backed off from demanding roles and leadership responsibilities to raise children. Now re-entering the workforce, they are fearful that their age will inhibit them from career success.

Other trends which emerged from these responses included: a lack of time to achieve career ambitions, feeling exhausted, lack of support from a partner/husband, and a shortage of roles and opportunities in their field.

.....
51%

OF WOMEN SAY
'CONFIDENCE IN MY
ABILITIES' COULD GET IN THE
WAY OF THEM ACHIEVING
THEIR CAREER AMBITIONS
OVER THE NEXT 24 MONTHS

What else could stop you? Respondents share more:

"Exhaustion!"

"Wanting to qualify for maternity leave in the future, so can't change roles."

"I am only 51, but that plays in my decisions. Can I advance with the times? Do I want more pressure at this time in my life?"

"I work in a very senior role and going part time is simply not possible. I am 63 and would like to wind down to retirement, but that would not be possible unless I resign from this role and take on a much more junior role. But I'm unlikely to get one of those roles as I'll be considered 'over qualified'"

"A lack of transparent and merit-based decision-making processes in my organisation."

"My career profile doesn't match my age."

"Enough time! Work hours are too long."

"My CV no longer being a straight line."

"Ageism. I am 54."

"No one will want to hire me if I'm trying to get pregnant or am pregnant."

"I have a teen son with a disability that results in severe behavior problems. I desperately need respite but I'm unable to access any."

"Employers do not seem to value previous unpaid experience and disqualify experience from 'before kids.'"

"I am now over 50 (54) so worried about whether someone will employ me."

"Difficulty working in a field where long hours are essential with a young child."

WHAT'S YOUR AMBITION?

"I'm looking to become more valuable in my current role."

HOW WOMEN ARE FEELING 2017

While some women feel optimistic about their careers in 2017, most think there is still much to be done to advance women in the workforce and bridge the gender gap.

When asked if they felt more or less optimistic about gender equality at work now than at the end of 2015, just over one in five (21.11%) expressed feeling 'more optimistic'.

Starkly, more than a quarter (26.44%) said they're feeling 'less optimistic' while 52.34% said they're feeling 'about the same'.

27%

OF WOMEN ARE FEELING
LESS OPTIMISTIC NOW THAN
AT THE END OF 2015.

WHAT'S YOUR AMBITION?

"I'm looking for secure employment following 12 years of short-term contracts and casual work."

EMPLOYMENT INCENTIVES THAT HELP

While just over half of respondents (51%) indicated ‘confidence in my abilities’ could affect their capacity to achieve ambitions, they didn’t necessarily see it as an employer’s responsibility to help.

Asked to rate the importance of a list of nine employment incentives, we found no single option was favoured. Instead, women relied on a diverse range of incentives to help bolster their careers.

The incentives rated as most important included a diverse workforce, visible role models and workplace flexibility.

Almost half of respondents (49.67%) rated ‘Flexible work options’ as ‘very important’ at some point during their careers (followed by a further 36.14% citing it as important), while 57.14% said the same thing about ‘visible female role models’ (and another 35.19% labeling it as important); 52.34% said a ‘diverse workplace culture’ was ‘very important’ (along with a further 40.64% stating this as important), and 50.65% indicated ‘clear pathways for promotions were also ‘very important’ (along with 39.78% stating this as important).

WHAT'S YOUR AMBITION?

“I’m looking for switching from part-time to full-time.”

When summing up those who indicated ‘important’ or ‘very important’ on a number of different employer incentives, some dominating trends emerged:

- 93.07% rated ‘a diverse workplace culture’ as ‘important’ or ‘very important’.
- 92.34% rated ‘visible female role models’ as ‘important’ or ‘very important’.
- 90.43% rated ‘clear pathways for promotions’ as ‘important’ or ‘very important’.
- 85.81% rated ‘flexible work options’: as ‘important’ or ‘very important’.
- 68.27% rated ‘opportunities for employer paid further tertiary education’ as ‘important’ or ‘very important’.
- 52.96% rated ‘paid parental leave’ as ‘important’ or ‘very important’.
- 51.2% rated ‘paid carers leave’ as ‘important’ or ‘very important’.
- 77.8% rated ‘leadership training courses’ as ‘important’ or ‘very important’.
- 77.08% rated ‘mentoring and sponsorship programs’ as ‘important’ or ‘very important’.

Meanwhile, despite organisations using paid parental leave policies to promote their workplaces to women, almost half of respondents (47.94%) rated this as ‘not important’. Mentoring and sponsorship programs were also not for everyone, with almost a quarter (22.92%) saying these were ‘not important’, while a further 22.2% said the same thing about ‘leadership training courses’.

How important have each of the following employment incentives been to you at any point in your career?

Flexible work options	14% not important	36% important	50% very important
Paid parental leave	47% not important	22% important	30% very important
Paid carers leave	49% not important	31% important	20% very important
Leadership training courses	22% not important	44% important	33% very important
Mentoring and sponsorship programs	23% not important	43% important	34% very important
Visible female role models	8% not important	35% important	57% very important
A diverse workplace culture	7% not important	40% important	52% very important
Opportunities for employer-paid further tertiary education	32% not important	39% important	29 very important
Clear pathways for promotions	10% not important	40% important	51% very important

Perceptions of part time and flexible work

While attaining flexible work arrangements was cited as an ambition for many women, a large percentage of respondents also expressed concerns about part time work .

More than four in five (81.63%) of respondents said they believed ‘working part time had (or could have) an impact on their career.

Just 8.56% said no, and 9.81% indicated they were not sure.

WHAT'S YOUR AMBITION?

“I’m exploring ethical passive income ideas. My plan is to have enough to travel more and work remotely.”

CAREER BREAKS AND AMBITION

We delved deeper into those who indicated they had taken a career break to raise children over the past 10 years to get greater insights into their ambitions over the medium term (three to five years). More than one third of all respondents (37.17%) fell into this category

37%

OF RESPONDENTS HAVE
TAKEN A CAREER BREAK
FOR CHILD RAISING
PURPOSES AT
SOME POINT IN THE
PAST 10 YEARS.

Once again, salary emerged as a priority, with 73.71% listing 'increasing my salary and earning potential' as a key ambition.

However, in this cohort of women, 'achieving work/life balance' also emerged as a popular option with 67.41% ticking this field.

Meanwhile, 39.86% cited 'aiming to give back and help others' as an ambition, and 24.76% said 'starting/completing a tertiary qualification' was also a key priority.

From there, 52.73% ticked 'furthering my leadership career'.

Starting a new business was also more popular, with 16.22% indicating they'd like to do that over the next few years.

WHAT'S YOUR AMBITION?

"I'm undertaking further education to consolidate my career. I'm not looking for a promotion, but work that is interesting and valuable."

CHALLENGES AFTER CAREER BREAKS

We asked respondents who had taken career breaks in the past 10 years to outline their single biggest challenge in reaching their current career goals.

This time, trends like job security (including security of existing flexible arrangements) balancing family, exhaustion, and juggling caring responsibilities emerged as clear standouts in these comments.

Some mentioned the double whammy of caring for children and elderly parents, while a number of women noted that as single parents, they simply did not have the time and space to pursue ambitious career goals. Age did not factor significantly here, although some noted confidence and self belief as an issue.

When asked their single biggest challenge, some respondents commented:

"It's exhausting keeping it all going."

"Continue flexibility under a new boss."

"Opportunities are rare, and part timers are undervalued."

"Single mum – need balance. Childcare available but expensive more I work less gov support & beliefs about child rearing = conflict."

"Part time work limiting career progression."

"Stamina to work double shift at home and at work."

"I'm the main breadwinner but I still do more caring and domestic labour than my husband."

"My husband does not take my career aspirations seriously ..., thinks I should be happy to stay at home with our child."

"Childcare for my twins, per annum, is up to \$48k and no flexibility (I work full time, as does my husband) Took almost 3 years to get one place, for both of them as the quality of centres never have two spots open ... It's awful for families of multiples, at one stage we were doing 2 drop offs and two pick ups after work and dealing."

"I was made redundant at 7 months pregnant so finding a flexible part time, well paying job will be the most difficult things. Because they just don't exist."

"Being able to actually take advantage of flexible work arrangements without being seen as a bludger for not working all the hours in the world."

"Lazy husband leaving most housework/childminding to me."

"Can't leave for a new role due to fear of not being able to access flexibility."

"Uncertain that new organizational leadership will enable me to work flexibly."

"Workplace culture Currently work for a director who is extremely supportive and family friendly, she has three children. She is about to move on and new management has different view."

"Being promoted. I can only work part time but I still want to progress."

"Can't travel with small kids. Hinders work. Can't access ad hoc childcare."

"Having my contribution (over 3 decades) to my family valued by my husband."

"Perceptions that as a mother I won't be as productive. Also balancing work and family and the expectations of my job."

"My organisational culture (does not genuinely value women with family commitments), access to affordable childcare."

WORKPLACE POLICIES

Do they work?

It seems a good number of organisations have policies in place to support women. The question is whether these are effective enough to also support the ambitions of women, especially those with caring responsibilities.

When asked about their employer's 'family friendly' and 'gender diversity' policies, 59.05% of women who had taken a career break over the past 10 years to raise children, said they worked in an environment where 'both' types of policies were available. A further 15.01% said their employer had 'family friendly' only policies in place, while 3.37% said their employer had 'gender diversity' only policies in place.

Still, a concerning 22.58% (or almost one in five) of these women reported working in an environment with neither 'family friendly' or gender diversity policies in place. However, it's important to note that some respondents would be working for themselves or studying.

So were these workplace policies enough?

An encouraging 43.15% of women who said they had access to such policies also said they were enough to support their career break and return to work.

Still, one in five (26.41%) said that although the policies were available, they were not adequate enough to offer the support they needed.

WHAT'S YOUR AMBITION?

"I am aiming to increase my hours which had to be reduced after having my children."

WHERE TO FROM HERE

We believe the findings of this study prove that women in Australia are ambitious no matter what their age, their employment status, or whether they have children or not. They reflect deeply on their careers and are in tune with what set-backs they face and what tools they require to succeed.

Indeed, age is no barrier to ambition. If anything, the women we surveyed suggested age was being perceived, unnecessarily, as a problem. Just because some women put their careers on hold while raising children, didn't mean those same women weren't willing to pursue big roles, opportunities and salaries later.

This study also underscores the appeal from Australian women to have their pay increased, with almost 40% (39.14%) of respondents noting their desire to 'earn more' in the next 24 months. Still, with almost 60% of women not ticking this as a core objective, the study also proves that women are driven by several career objectives—not just financial gains.

Pursuing goals like 'looking for a new role' (32.27%), 'looking to undertake further education (30.07%) and 'looking to achieve better flexible working options (22.48%) ranked highly.

One of the most surprising outcomes of this study was the number of women (around 51%) who said their own confidence could get in the way of them achieving their ambitions over the next two years.

What's leading to confidence being an issue? And can anything be done about it?

Women voiced feeling a lack of support on different fronts when it came to achieving their ambitions--frustration, exhaustion and powerlessness—feelings which could likely align with the prevalent confidence deficit.

It's here especially that employers can offer more support, particularly those who're looking to attain and retain talented female staff members, and especially with one in four respondents (24.43%) declaring a 'lack of employer support' could get in the way of them achieving their ambitions over the next 24 months. While employers can and should address female employees who're feeling this way, they should also proactively address some of the other issues women believe are getting in the way, such as: a lack of role models (17.3%) and a lack of personal finance (23.23%).

In future studies, we plan to explore further what's affecting the confidence of women, as well as whether fluctuations in such confidence levels change over time and can be attributed to certain circumstances and events. We'd like to see what can be done to avoid women's confidence levels dropping in the first place.

Key contacts for more information on this report, or if you'd like to explore options for further supporting this research.

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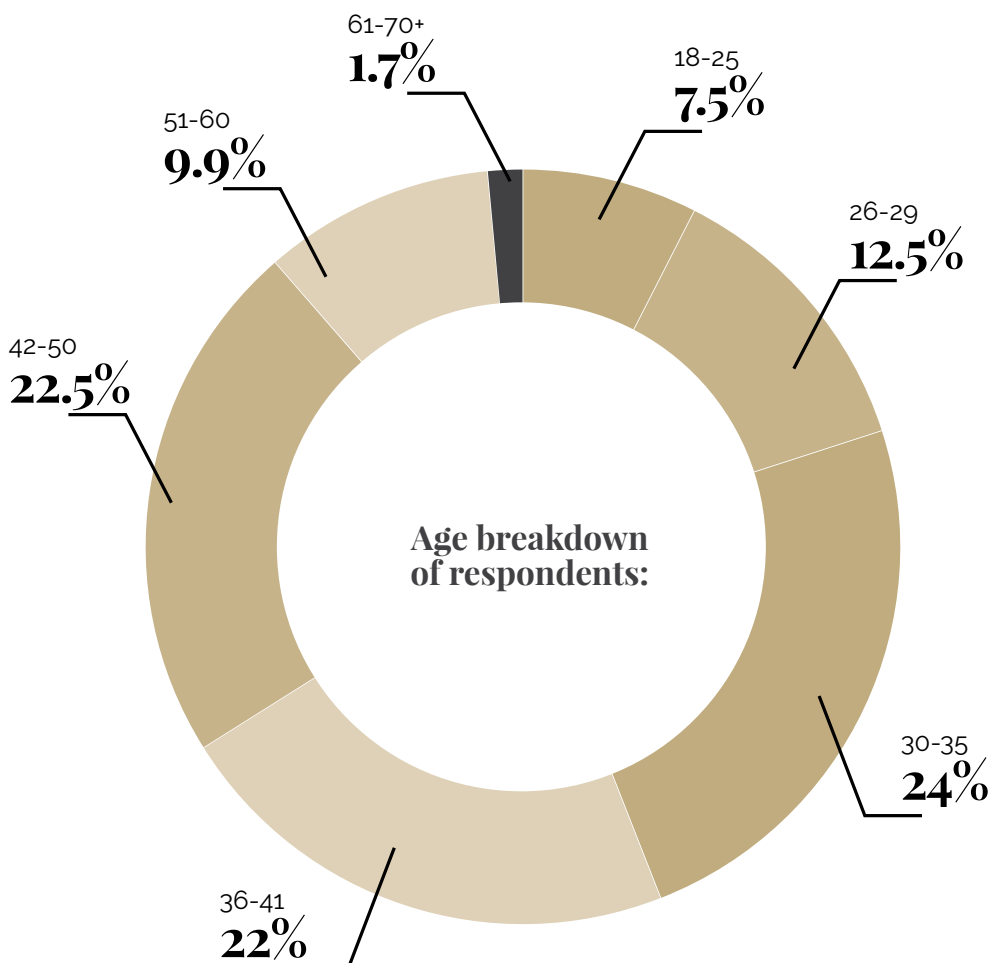
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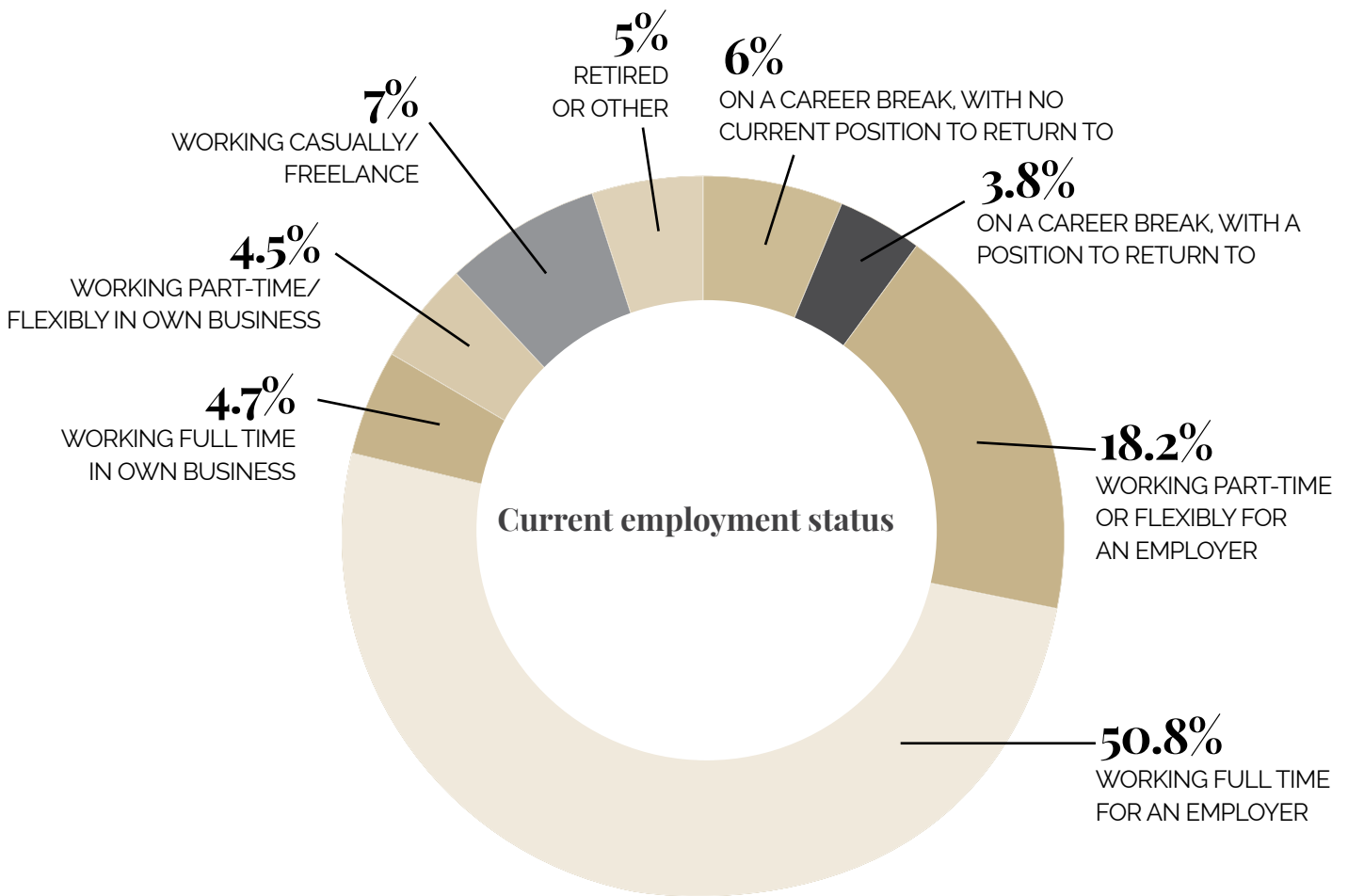
We conducted this study online between December 2016 and January 2017 and received 2098 completed responses. The majority of responses came through targeted social media campaigns. We conducted a number of follow up phone calls with survey respondents to get additional quotes for this report.

87.88% indicated they lived in a metropolitan area, 9.67% said they live in regional towns, and the remaining 2.46% described their location as rural or remote.

Meanwhile, 31.35% reported having children at home under the age of 10, while 37.17% had taken a career break for childcare commitments at some point in the past 10 years.

Respondents reported working across a wide range of industries and sectors, with 'education and training' leading at 18.81% followed by public sector 13.99% and not-for-profit and community work (12.9%)





Employed by sector

