Factors Impacting Retention and Advancement of Women in Facility Management
The International Facility Management Association

Founded in 1980, the International Facility Management Association (IFMA) is the world’s largest association for facility management (FM) professionals, supporting 23,000 members in more than 100 countries. This diverse membership participates in focused component groups equipped to address their unique situations by region (137 chapters), industry (16 councils) and areas of interest (seven communities). Together they manage more than 839 billion square feet/77.95 billion square meters of property and annually purchase more than US$774 billion in products and services.

IFMA is a key contributor to the development of international FM standards and works with decision makers globally to inform and shape FM-related policy. IFMA provides career resources and continuing education, offers three industry-respected credentials, maintains the largest repository of FM-related content on the web and hosts year-round global events.

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Prepared by the Simplar Foundation

The Simplar Foundation is a collaborative team of faculty and researchers who specialize in facility organizational assessment, performance measurement and analytics, process improvement, and advanced procurement delivery systems. Learn more at simplarfoundation.org.

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In March 2023, in recognition of International Women’s Day, IFMA released its “Women in FM: A Global Salary and Compensation Supplementary Report,” the most comprehensive and detailed analysis on the state of women in facility management. It was the first report of its kind for the FM industry and found that women seeking employment are obtaining FM jobs much faster than men at every job level.

However, with women representing only 20 percent of the FM workforce globally, improving recruitment and retention efforts for women is a high priority for our industry. This new report addresses the pivotal role of mentorship and strategic inclusion initiatives in increasing the representation and retention of women in facility management.

Historically, facility management has been a male-dominated field; however, FM is in the midst of a momentous transformation—one that is expanding roles and cross-functional teamwork; one that is offering vast opportunities for career growth and participation in creating the workplace of the future; and one that is welcoming all those who can bring wide-ranging knowledge, fresh perspectives and a mind for innovation to the built environment. Our industry is being revitalized by a more diverse and inclusive workforce, adding unique viewpoints and new approaches to corporate culture, health and safety, smart and responsible workplaces, and meaningful and rewarding work. Empowering women to excel and advance in FM brings long-term advantages to the employer, the industry and the professionals themselves.

One of the most compelling findings in this report is the proven benefits of mentorship, regardless of gender. This underscores what IFMA has known since its inception—that community support, encouragement, advice and knowledge sharing help build confident, engaged, skilled and passionate industry leaders. IFMA is recognized as the most trusted source of academic and applied research on topics that carry the greatest urgency and importance to facility management professionals worldwide. We collaborate on a global scale with subject matter experts, industries and organizations that believe in improving the built environment through benchmarking and research. We turn information into insights; and in response to new expectations from demand organizations, end-users and regulators, IFMA has accelerated development of educational and informational resources that those in FM and the wider built environment can benefit from now and into the foreseeable future.

Sincerely,

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Introduction

The 2023 Women in Facility Management report by the International Facility Management Association (IFMA) highlighted a critical issue in the Facility Management (FM) industry: the underrepresentation and high attrition rates of women, particularly in senior roles. This trend is concerning, especially when recognizing that the demand for skilled facility professionals is on the rise due to current and future workforce needs. The report emphasized the need to identify and understand the specific factors contributing to the higher turnover rates of women in FM. Addressing these challenges is vital for the growth and sustainability of the FM workforce.

Like many other industries, FM is facing a significant transformation. The impending retirement of a large portion of the workforce, combined with a decline in traditional recruitment sources, presents formidable challenges. The need to attract and retain a diverse workforce, including women and other underrepresented minorities, is becoming more crucial. Employing more women in FM would contribute to societal progress by promoting gender equality and breaking down stereotypes in a traditionally male-dominated field. It would also serve as an inspiration for future generations, showing that FM careers are accessible and rewarding for everyone, regardless of gender. A diverse workforce offers numerous benefits in addition to filling the talent gap. Diversity fosters creativity and innovation, as different viewpoints lead to unique solutions to complex problems. Women’s leadership styles are often characterized by collaboration and inclusivity, which can enhance team dynamics and lead to more effective and cohesive groups. Studies have shown that organizations with diverse leadership teams also tend to perform better financially. This can be attributed to a variety of factors, including better decision-making processes and higher employee satisfaction. Women leaders often have emotional intelligence and communication skills that support employee engagement, and engaged employees are more productive, committed and motivated.

The purpose of this report is to delve deeper into these issues and identify the specific barriers and challenges that women face in FM. By understanding these factors, the industry can develop targeted strategies to retain the current workforce and attract more women into the field. The retention and advancement of women in FM will help fill a workforce gap and leverage the full potential to drive innovation, productivity and financial success in the industry. Insights gained from this report will be instrumental in shaping the future of FM.
Using This Report

This report is a general overview of the factors impacting women working in FM. All responses were self-reported voluntarily. The research team adjusted for outliers or other anomalous data. Please remember, this report represents a sample of the total population.

Acknowledgements

IFMA relies on the willingness and generosity of its members and others to compile data and complete this report. Without this data, there would be no report. Thanks to the dedicated participants for their contribution and continued support of the facility management profession. A committee of subject matter experts worked with IFMA to craft questions and test the survey. The committee members are acknowledged on the inside cover of the report. Nickalos A. Rocha, IFMA’s director of benchmarking, Dr. Steven Call and Dr. Jake Smithwick conducted the survey, validated and analyzed the data, created the tables and graphs and wrote the report.
Methodology

Researchers found factors contributing to retention and succession challenges for women by reviewing previous FM workforce surveys, researching other related literature and gathering input from a panel of subject matter experts. The identified factors include technology adoption, work recognition, career path clarity, job growth opportunities, mentorship and friendship, schedule flexibility, physical work environment, stress and burnout, job security, relationship with supervisor, workplace culture and diversity, meaningfulness of work, support for family responsibilities, sexual harassment, age discrimination and compensation.

The survey was sent electronically to more than 12,400 facility professionals in November 2023. More than 1,000 survey responses were received by December 2023. Given the level of response, IFMA is 95% confident that responses can be generalized to all IFMA member organizations with a margin of error of approximately +/- 5%. As the sample size decreases in some of the tables, the margin of error increases. Survey results by location are not included because either significant differences were not discovered or the sample size was not sufficient. Other gender information is also not included as less than .003% of respondents identified as non-binary.

LIMITATIONS

Note the sample size (N) when interpreting averages or medians, as this is not the same in every table. Percentages may not add to 100 percent due to rounding or the acceptance of multiple responses. In many cases respondents did not answer all questions, so the base numbers differ among the various quantitative findings.

Fully evaluate the presented data in the context in which it is provided. The goal of this report is to raise awareness of the retention and succession challenges facing women in the FM workforce.
Acronyms and Definitions

AVERAGE
The sum or total of all responses divided by the number of respondents. Also referred to as the mean.

AGE DISCRIMINATION
Unfair treatment of individuals based on their age.

CAREER PATH
Professional journey of an individual within their chosen field of work.

CHILD CARE
Care and supervision of a child or multiple children to ensure a safe, nurturing, and developmental environment.

DEVELOPMENT
Activities aimed at creating and sustaining a viable workforce.

ELDER CARE
Care of an older adult to assist with physical, mental, or social needs associated with aging.

EXTENDED CAREER BREAK
Leaving a position in FM and subsequently returning to a FM role at a later time.

JOB LEVELS
- Entry – Professional specialist or manage employees (do not manage supervisors)
- Mid – Manage supervisors who manage others
- Senior – Manage two or more levels of supervisors

JOB INSECURITY
Fear or concern about the stability of their current employment.

MEDIAN
The middle value in a range of responses. One half of all respondents are below this value and one-half are above. The median is also known as the 50th percentile. The median is not as affected by extreme highs or lows in the range as is the average/mean.

MENTOR
An experienced individual who provides guidance, advice, and support to a less experienced person within a professional context.

N
The number of cases supplying the data being described.

RETENTION
Strategies aimed at keeping talented employees within a company for as long as possible.

SEXUAL HARASSMENT
Unlawful and unwelcome sexual behavior ranging from verbal comments to physical actions.

SUCCESSION
Strategies undertaken to ensure continuous and effective management of key roles through identification and development of potential successors.

TENURE
Length of time an individual has been employed with a specific employer.

UNDERGRADUATE
College or university education towards the pursuit of a bachelor’s degree.
Accomplishments

With more than 27 years in the Latin American construction and facility management industries, I am the founding partner and president of United Facility Services in Costa Rica, a company of more than 1,000 strong that provides integrated services to emerging markets supporting multinational organizations. As a woman in this region, in a business dominated by men, I focused on clarity of purpose, pioneered best practices and drew strength from my faith to take the company to the top in the country in less than 10 years. Since 2020, I have led IFMA’s LATAM Working Group, aligned with the Americas Advisory Board. Our team’s efforts have resulted in a more visible presence for IFMA in countries where the association was previously unknown. This opened opportunities for me to facilitate webinars, author multiple articles in regional and international publications, and speak at live events in Central and South America, the United States and Europe. As an educator and mentor, I have first-hand involvement in programs that encourage and enrich future generations. I consider my beautiful family to be my greatest accomplishment – a significant source of pride and happiness.

Key Lessons Learned in Your Career

It is always about people. Human will, ingenuity, resourcefulness and adaptability drive technology and transformation; not the other way around. Trust in processes to navigate uncertainty and adapt to change. Transparency is always your best option. Pair humility with courage and passion to lead and enable your team to succeed confidently.

Where Were You 10 Years into Your Career?

I worked very hard to lead and grow a company, developing the “brains, bones and nerves” – our strategy, our structure and our culture.

Words of Wisdom

Gratitude is everything. Begin each day thankful with renewed strength to start again. Find your purpose and adapt it to your career – purpose and perseverance define your mindset and life direction. Whether at work or play, enjoy the power of the present moment.

Fun Facts/Hobbies

I have been playing padel (a mix between tennis and squash) for a year now and love it more and more because it is easy on my injured knees and, as a racquet sport, requires full concentration, which improves my mental health. I’m also winning tournaments against much younger women, which is another mental boost!
Composition of Survey Respondents

Male facility managers from North America comprise 74% of the total sample, followed by Asia and Pacific, Europe, Middle East, Africa and South/Latin America. Eighty-three percent of the women respondents are from North America, followed by Europe, Asia, Middle East, Africa and South/Latin America (Table 1). The majority of respondents are employed in FM (88%). The others were previously employed in FM (6%), unemployed (3%) or retired (4%) (Figure 1). Respondents who left FM for another industry hold similar education levels (bachelor’s degree or higher) to those currently employed in FM. Table 2 shows respondents age by job level and gender.
Tenure and Career Breaks

Men are more likely to have longer tenures in FM than women, working for 15 years compared to 12 years, respectively (Figure 2). There is no noteworthy difference between the portion of men (75%) and women (25%) taking extended career breaks and the overall FM gender mix. Men who take extended career breaks are more likely to do so because of a layoff or to pursue additional education, while women are more likely to take an extended break for child care (Figure 3). There is an equal number of men and women who take career breaks for elder care.

Of those who took an extended career break for a reason other than education, almost 40% do not have an undergraduate degree; seventy-one percent of the overall FM population has at least a bachelor’s degree. As many who take extended career breaks face geographical or scheduling constraints due to child and elderly care, an opportunity exists to benefit those facing geographical or scheduling constraints by creating remote, asynchronous FM undergraduate educational programs to support FM workforce development, retention and succession.
Retention

Figure 4 shows that a greater portion of women (31%) worked in FM previously and currently work in another industry. Women working in FM are less likely to be unemployed, relative to the overall gender mix, suggesting a strong industry demand for women facility professionals. Women (11%) are significantly less likely than men (89%) to retire from FM, even when adjusting for age, suggesting that women are leaving FM at a higher rate than men. Women are more likely than men to leave FM during mid- and senior-level career points (Figure 5).
Accomplishments
I have moved or opened more than 20 offices including Dubai, London, Paris and Singapore. I run the mentorship program for the Chicago Chapter of IFMA and at R.J. O’Brien. My awards include Global Above and Beyond from Sonnenschein law firm for a US$10 million renovation, and Facility of the Year, Distinguished Leader and Outstanding Achievement awards from IFMA’s Chicago Chapter. I have held every seat on the chapter’s executive board of directors and continue to be active on the board. I am also a member of IFMA’s Corporate Facilities Council.

Key Lessons Learned in Your Career
Seek out a mentor. Aspire to learn from someone who is successful, then make it happen for yourself. Advocate for yourself and earn a seat at the table. Set goals as well as a path to achieve them. Think strategically. Follow your dreams. Never stop learning. Becoming a Certified Facility Manager® has opened many doors for me, including being the chosen candidate for my last two jobs. It has also helped me on my path as an IFMA leader.

Where Were You 10 Years into Your Career?
I was the facilities administrator at an international law firm.

Words of Wisdom
Always pay it forward; it is very rewarding. Be a leader and lead by example. Remember, if it’s going to be, it’s up to me! Share your knowledge with others through mentorship, serving on panels, writing articles, and presenting at IFMA meetings and conferences. Volunteer and get involved in your local IFMA chapter. Always meet deadlines and come prepared for meetings. Stand out from others by volunteering for projects, then lead them on time and within budget. Always communicate with your team and boss. Earn a reputation for being dependable and the one people come to for assistance because they know you will get the job done.

Fun Facts/Hobbies
I’m married to my high school sweetheart. We enjoy traveling and spending time with our four children, our grandchild and our black Lab, Maddy.
Factors Impacting Retention and Succession

This report identified factors impacting FM retention and succession by considering differences (>20% change) between respondents currently working in FM and those who left. These significant agreement differences were examined regardless of gender. The factors for both men and women include: frequent stress/burnout, lack of support for family responsibilities, inflexible work schedule, job insecurity and age discrimination.

In addition to the factors impacting FM retention for either gender, women are impacted by sexual harassment and pay dissatisfaction (Figure 6); eight percent of women respondents who work in FM have experienced sexual harassment in the profession, compared to 17% who left FM. And they become more satisfied with pay (51% of women in entry-level FM roles are satisfied with pay while 67% of women in mid and senior level roles are satisfied with pay). Men are impacted by unclear career paths and limited growth opportunities (Figure 7); sixty-four percent of men respondents who work in FM agree that they have a clear career path compared to 28% who left FM.

More than 90% of women respondents who experienced sexual harassment were from North America, and the harassment is more prevalent with seniority. A woman in a mid- or senior-level role in FM is three times more likely (12%) to experience sexual harassment than a woman in an entry-level role (4%). While it is unclear if these higher levels of sexual harassment are simply due to being in the workplace for longer, this may be a reason for the higher percentage of women leaving mid- and high-level careers.

Factors that seem to encourage FMs to continue their careers in the industry include a safe work environment, friendly co-workers, good relationships with managers, meaningful work, satisfactory recognition and a diverse/equitable/inclusive culture.

Factors for Increased Retention

- Safe work environment
- Friendly co-workers
- Good relationships with managers
- Meaningful work
- Satisfactory recognition
- Diverse/equitable/inclusive culture
Figure 6: Significant Factors Decreasing Retention of Women — Agreement by Employment Status

- Sexual harassment: Working in FM 8%, Left FM 17%
- Age discrimination: Working in FM 13%, Left FM 22%
- Pay satisfaction: Working in FM 63%, Left FM 39%
- Job security: Working in FM 84%, Left FM 50%
- Flexible work schedule: Working in FM 83%, Left FM 61%
- Employer supports family responsibilities: Working in FM 93%, Left FM 72%
- Stress/Burnout: Working in FM 78%, Left FM 63%

Figure 7: Significant Factors Decreasing Retention of Men — Agreement by Employment Status

- Age discrimination: Working in FM 9%, Left FM 18%
- Clear career path: Working in FM 64%, Left FM 28%
- Career growth opportunities: Working in FM 67%, Left FM 51%
- Flexible work schedule: Working in FM 80%, Left FM 54%
- Job security: Working in FM 86%, Left FM 56%
- Stress/Burnout: Working in FM 73%, Left FM 49%
- Employer supports family responsibilities: Working in FM 92%, Left FM 76%
Sectors

The most common sectors for facility professionals are government, education, healthcare and banking/investments. Figure 8 depicts the link between actual pay (line graph) and pay satisfaction (bar graph). FMs in the education sector report the lowest salaries and the lowest satisfaction with pay, regardless of gender. There does not appear to be a significant difference between pay satisfaction when looking at each sector individually. While age discrimination impacts both men and women across sectors, men working in the education and banking/investment sectors are much more likely to report age discrimination than women (Figure 9). Age discrimination does not appear to be an issue of certain sectors simply having older workers as each sector had an average respondent age between 49-52.
Sexual Harassment

Studies suggest more than 40% of women and 15% of men experience sexual harassment in the workplace. In FM, 2% of men and 7% of women report sexual harassment, which means it is either happening less often than in other industries or is being underreported. Respondents report sexual harassment more frequently in the education and government sectors (Figure 10).

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Addressing Retention and Succession Challenges

Mentoring

The critical aspects of mentorship and its profound impact on retention and progression contribute to the stability and growth of facility professionals. Facility Managers who have mentors are less likely to experience or perceive the negative influences impacting workforce retention and succession, regardless of gender. Men in FM are less likely to have a mentor than women (Figure 11).

Figure 11: Portion of Respondents with Mentors by Gender

35% Men
47% Women
Table 3: Factor Agreement for Women in FM by Mentor Status

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Key Factor</th>
<th>No Mentor</th>
<th>Mentor</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Flexible work schedule</td>
<td>80%</td>
<td>84%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Feels frequent stress/burnout</td>
<td>70%</td>
<td>*58%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Job security</td>
<td>70%</td>
<td>*91%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Employer supports family responsibilities</td>
<td>88%</td>
<td>98%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Experience age discrimination</td>
<td>18%</td>
<td>*9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Experience sexual harassment</td>
<td>11%</td>
<td>6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Satisfied with pay</td>
<td>60%</td>
<td>64%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Statistically significant per Pearson Chi-square Test with \( p < 0.05 \)

Table 4: Factor Agreement for Men in FM by Mentor status

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Key Factor</th>
<th>No Mentor</th>
<th>Mentor</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Flexible work schedule</td>
<td>77%</td>
<td>82%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Feels frequent stress/burnout</td>
<td>56%</td>
<td>*42%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Job security</td>
<td>82%</td>
<td>89%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Employer supports family responsibilities</td>
<td>88%</td>
<td>96%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Experience age discrimination</td>
<td>11%</td>
<td>*6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Clear career path</td>
<td>46%</td>
<td>*81%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Career growth opportunities</td>
<td>56%</td>
<td>*83%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Mentoree Benefits

Men and women in FM with mentors (both formal and informal) experience significantly lower levels of stress/burnout and age discrimination than those without. Women with mentors feel significantly more secure about their jobs (91%) compared to those without mentors (70%). Men with mentors have significantly more clarity around their career path and their opportunity for job growth (81%) compared to men without mentors (46%). Promoting mentorship in FM could improve the work experience and promote retention and advancement. Tables 3 and 4 show the effect of having a mentor on key retention and succession factors.
Accomplishments
Over my 30-year tenure in Facilities Management (FM), I’ve traversed a diverse array of sectors. Central to my journey has been the privilege of leading dynamic teams and mentoring aspiring professionals, a legacy I hold dear. Reflecting on my formative years, I owe a debt of gratitude to a remarkable female mentor whose wisdom steered me through the labyrinth of my inaugural role. Her guidance ignited a flame within me that continues to illuminate my path. Navigating the predominantly male landscape of my industry, I’ve carved out a niche of success, both individually and collectively. From my crowning as the BIFM Rising Star in 2006 to clinching spots on prestigious lists like FM Middle East’s Top 10 Women in FM 2011 and the esteemed FM ME – The Top 50 Influential People in the GCC Facilities Management Industry in 2012 and 2014, I’ve consistently shattered glass ceilings. In 2017, I fortified my expertise by attaining a Masters in Emergency and Disaster Management, delving into the theoretical underpinnings of the hands-on practices honed over decades. This academic pursuit not only enriched my understanding but also afforded me the opportunity to impart knowledge as an educator, perpetuating the cycle of learning and growth.

Key Lessons Learned in Your Career
In my extensive journey through Facilities Management (FM), one invaluable lesson has towered above the rest: people are the cornerstone of success. Without their dedication and expertise, the seamless delivery of effective, efficient, and high-quality services to our customer base remains an elusive goal.

Where Were You 10 Years into Your Career?
Ten years into my career, I assumed the role of Operations Manager at Pfizer’s UK headquarters, marking a significant turning point. Transitioning to the client side within a renowned multinational corporation presented a myriad of learning opportunities. Immersed in this dynamic environment, I cultivated skills in adaptability, cross-cultural communication, and strategic thinking, laying the foundation for continued professional growth.

Words of Wisdom
Lead by example and model the behavior you expect. Never task others to do something you wouldn’t undertake yourself. The behavior you demonstrate sets the standard for what you can rightfully expect in return.

Fun Facts/Hobbies
Being in the Middle East with such great weather, I love to be on the water paddle boarding or under the water scuba diving.
Conclusion and Call to Action

Career longevity and progression has a pronounced gender disparity in FM. Men exhibit longer tenures, and typically pursue further education when taking extended career breaks. In contrast, women are taking career breaks for child care responsibilities and lack undergraduate degrees. This presents employers an opportunity to retain more women facility managers by offering greater child care benefits. For women who ultimately take extended career breaks, supporting online delivery of FM undergraduate programs facilitate higher educational attainment and bolster career advancement upon reentry into FM. Less than half who took extended breaks for non-educational reasons hold an undergraduate degree, a stark contrast to the majority of the FM workforce who hold at least a bachelor’s degree.

Women are markedly less likely to retire from FM roles, even while adjusting for age differences. This trend underscores both a lack of women entering the profession and a significant exodus of women from FM. Many women who enter FM eventually seek opportunities in other industries at a disproportionately higher rate than men. Even though women with experience in FM are less likely to be unemployed, women are more likely to exit FM prior to reaching senior-level career stages. Frequent stress/burnout, lack of support for family responsibilities, inflexible work schedules, job insecurity and age discrimination influence retention regardless of gender. Women report challenges such as sexual harassment and pay dissatisfaction, while men report issues with unclear career paths and limited growth opportunities. Female respondents who experience sexual harassment are in mid- or senior-level positions, suggesting an increase in harassment with career advancement. This could explain why women choose to leave the industry.

The critical aspects of mentorship and its profound impact on retention and progression contribute to the stability and growth of facility professionals. Both men and women in FM with mentors are less likely to experience — or perceive — negative influences impacting workforce retention and succession. Both men and women with mentors experience significantly lower levels of stress/burnout and age discrimination. Furthermore, women with mentors feel significantly more secure about their jobs, and men with mentors have significantly more clarity around their career path and opportunity for job growth. Promoting mentorship in FM could improve the work experience and promote retention and advancement. Such initiatives are not only vital for improving the FM experience for women but also play a crucial role in fostering the overall sustainability and growth of the FM workforce.

Promoting mentorship in FM could improve the work experience and promote retention and advancement.
