

USU UWLP Study Shows Top 11 Challenges Utah Women Face

Emmalee Chastain and Julene Reese

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National and statewide studies continue to show that Utah women and girls are not thriving in many critical areas. Identifying and understanding the current challenges women face is crucial if change is to take place.

To help with this, the Utah State University [Utah Women & Leadership Project](#) (UWLP) collected data from 5,212 Utah men and women ages 18 and older from Oct. 1 to Nov. 19, 2025. The 83-question survey was based on existing literature and surveys, expert guidance, and baseline data to assist leaders of [A Bolder Way Forward](#) (BWF), a Utah initiative that helps break down barriers that keep women and girls from thriving. That survey data was used as the basis of the recent report, [11 Major Challenges Utah Women and Girls Face: 2026 Update](#).

Susan Madsen, UWLP founding director and a report author, said the purpose is two-fold.

"We hope to educate readers on the many challenges Utah girls and women experience, and we hope to harness collective efforts and resources to mitigate the challenges," she said.

Madsen said at the end of the survey, 3,470 respondents provided written comments to the open-ended question: "What do you think are the greatest challenges for women

and girls in Utah?" Below are their top 11 categories, beginning with the most-mentioned challenges.

1. *Lack of Recognition/Undervalued* – The most cited challenge (N=1,192) was women and girls being undervalued or experiencing a lack of recognition for their skills, talents, and expertise. Participants felt Utah women and girls were not heard or believed, that they were suppressed from freely expressing themselves, and that some men were threatened by strong women. One respondent stated, "We have a hard time proving we can do just about anything guys can do. They think we're weak or belong in the kitchen. People think so little of us. Our greatest challenge is changing how people see us as women."
2. *Gendered Expectations* – These comments (N=990) included personal, cultural, or social expectations that women should act and behave in a way that aligns with traditional female roles. Noted was the social pressure put on women out of a sense of duty to their family or religion to do what men say and succumb to male domination. One participant commented, "The greatest challenge for women in Utah is getting away from the traditional gender roles, such as all women must be a good homemaker and mother. Not all women want to be stay-at-home wives or moms, but feel pressured into this role either by family or society."
3. *Religious Influence* – Many comments (N=989) linked gender role expectations with religious beliefs or practices. One participant stated, "We have to overcome the heavy influence here to be a stay-at-home mom and not pursue higher education or a career. It is ingrained in women here, partially because of the church, that men are better than women, and women are only meant to serve men and not themselves."
4. *Work-Related Inequities* – Participants (N=941) noted that women have fewer opportunities for employment and fewer advancement opportunities. Inconsistent or nonexistent parental leave was specifically cited, as was an overall lack of workplace support and resources for parents, particularly a lack of skill-development opportunities for women returning to work. One participant commented, "We need to confront outdated stereotypes that restrict career pathways and perpetuate gender disparities in sectors like tech, finance, and leadership."
5. *Balancing Career and Home* – Many comments (N=626) included the challenge of being a working mother and feeling expected to be "Superwoman."

In contrast, others pointed to the stigma of being a working mother. One participant commented, "Utah women are facing an exhausting and unfair burden created by conflicting cultural demands that simultaneously elevate the social status of motherhood while penalizing it economically."

6. *Experiencing Abuse, Assault, or Harassment* – Many participants (N=462) expressed deep concern for the challenges women and girls in Utah face due to abuse, assault, and harassment, with many women sharing their personal experiences. "Utah is above the national average for sexual assault. The physical, emotional, and psychological impacts of violence can last a lifetime, affecting survivors' health, confidence, and sense of safety."
7. *Lack of Support or Opportunities* – Comments (N=434) communicated an overall lack of awareness of available resources, support, or opportunities. One person highlighted where opportunities are lacking even more, due to location. "The rural communities with zero opportunities are where women are struggling and where women are still marginalized."
8. *Difficulty with Self-Worth and Self-Confidence* – Participants (N=410) expressed concern for the deep internal struggles women and girls experience in Utah, particularly the expectation of being and looking "perfect." One person said, "I think women and girls struggle with unachievable beauty and physical and societal standards set by social media. There are a lot of 'influencers' in Utah, and measuring oneself to perceived perfection is very unhealthy."
9. *Lack of Women in Leadership* – Participants (N=372) felt that women leaders were not generally supported in Utah and that there was a need for more women in leadership and positions of power. "There aren't enough female role models for girls—not enough community and government leaders who are women. Female representation matters."
10. *Medical and Health Resource Concerns* – Participants (N=297) expressed concern about the inability of girls and women to make decisions related to their reproductive health care. Regarding mental health, one participant said, "My mental health struggles are often downplayed due to cultural expectations."
11. *Lack of Education or Training* – Some (N=261) mentioned concerns that girls and women in Utah were not encouraged to pursue education outside of gendered or cultural norms, that there was an overall lack of access to affordable education, and

there was a lack of help for those trying to navigate financial aid.

In addition to the above-mentioned categories, other miscellaneous concerns were shared. Some referenced concerns about current politics, while a handful highlighted challenges in relationships and finding supportive partners. Others specifically acknowledged the additional challenges faced by women of color as well as women who identify as LGBTQ+.

Madsen said that many of the reported comments were concerning, showing the gravity of the issues facing Utah women and girls. However, she believes the research study can help shed light on these challenges and educate the public.

"Being able to identify and understand their current challenges is critical for those who want to engage and work together for the common good of supporting women," she said. "When we strengthen the impact of Utah girls and women, we strengthen everyone."

April Townsend, research associate, Utah Women & Leadership Project, co-authored the report.

The "[A Bolder Way Forward](#)" initiative provides opportunities for Utahns to learn and contribute to meaningful change across 18 areas of focus. For more information, visit the UWLP website at utwomen.org. The UWLP is affiliated with [USU Extension](#).

Contact

Emmalee Chastain
Emmalee.Chastain@usu.edu

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