

Brief Communications

Career Mobility: Perceptions and Observations (A Survey of Women in Jewish Communal Service)

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The CJCS Committee on Opportunities for Women in Jewish Communal Service conducted a survey to obtain an overview of the professional qualifications, career goals, geographic mobility and advancement possibilities of women in the field. An earlier study disclosed striking disparities in position and salary between men and women in Jewish communal service. In an effort to shed some light on the issues, the women members of CJCS were asked to answer several key questions, including interest in career advancement, willingness to move to another community if necessary and perceptions of barriers, if any, to their advancement.

A questionnaire was enclosed in the mailing of *Concurrents* in December, 1978 to 3,000 members of CJCS, of whom one-third are estimated to be women. Responses were received from 196 women in various fields represented in the CJCS membership. Of these, 180 were usable for tabulation.

Who Are the Respondents

Six percent of those who answered the questionnaire are executives, nine percent sub-executives, 49 percent supervisors or department heads and 36 percent line staff or entry level workers. More than half of the women have had more than two years experience in their present jobs, some in excess of five years and still others in excess of 10 years. In relation to years of service in their present agency, almost two-thirds have more than two years of service and over half of this group more than five years. Although many have been in their present position a relatively

short time, one out of four women have been in the field ten or more years.

Two out of three women surveyed have an MSW or other post-graduate degree. The other third have Bachelor's degrees and a few have PhDs.

Career Advancement and Geographic Mobility

The great majority, eight out of 10, are interested in career advancement and four out of 10 indicated a willingness to relocate to another community if necessary. The interest in career advancement was almost equally strong in all fields but there were variations in fields of service with respect to geographic mobility. In the Federation and Youth Services fields, a very high proportion, over two-thirds, indicated geographic mobility. In contrast, 80 percent of the women employed in family service agencies responded in the negative to this question.

Women's Perceptions as to the Opportunities for Advancement

Most of the women, seven out of 10, believe their *agency* supports the concept of career advancement for women but almost all perceive barriers to advancement in the *field*. It is difficult to reconcile these seemingly contradictory responses.

The distinction between agency and field broke down in the outpouring of responses to an open-ended questions, asking that those who perceived barriers in the field comment on the nature of these obstacles. A great deal of strong feeling came through, including resentment at the differences in salaries paid to men

and women.

**“The Rhetoric Is Changing.
The Roles Remain the Same”**

The overriding opinion expressed in no uncertain terms was that the major barrier to the advancement of women to leadership positions was sex discrimination. This was attributed directly to boards, to male executives or more generally, to prevailing practices in Jewish communal service. The disillusionment conveyed by many comments is captured in the words of one woman quoted above.

Sex discrimination and Board opposition accounted for 70 percent of the responses to the question about barriers. Other factors mentioned in descending order of frequency were family responsibility, mobility, women's reluctance to accept executive and administrative positions, tradition and lack of personnel policies and affirmative action.

Implications of the Survey

The findings of the survey are important in opening up for closer examination several important facts about women and their potential for advancement that have been submerged in the glib explanations for the paucity of women in leadership positions. There has been a readiness to accept the sweeping generalizations that there are no

qualified women, that women are reluctant to assume greater responsibility, that women aren't "mobile," without challenging the basis for these statements.

The survey establishes the fact that there *are* women who are professionally qualified, are interested in career advancement and are prepared to relocate to another community in the interest of upward job mobility. The survey sample was too small as a basis for projections, but there are enough to warrant systematic efforts by local agencies and national organizations to identify these women and offer them opportunities for advancement.

The survey also points up a sharp divergence in perception of personnel policies and practices between women professionals and agency executives and boards. There is serious cause for concern in the fact that at the same time that many women are expressing their belief that there is widespread discrimination against them, many agency executives and boards have approved the Proclamation on Equal Professional Advancement for Women in Jewish Communal Service. There is obviously a critical need to take steps to implement the principles embodied in the Proclamation through personnel policies and practices that will eliminate discrimination and ensure equal opportunity for all.