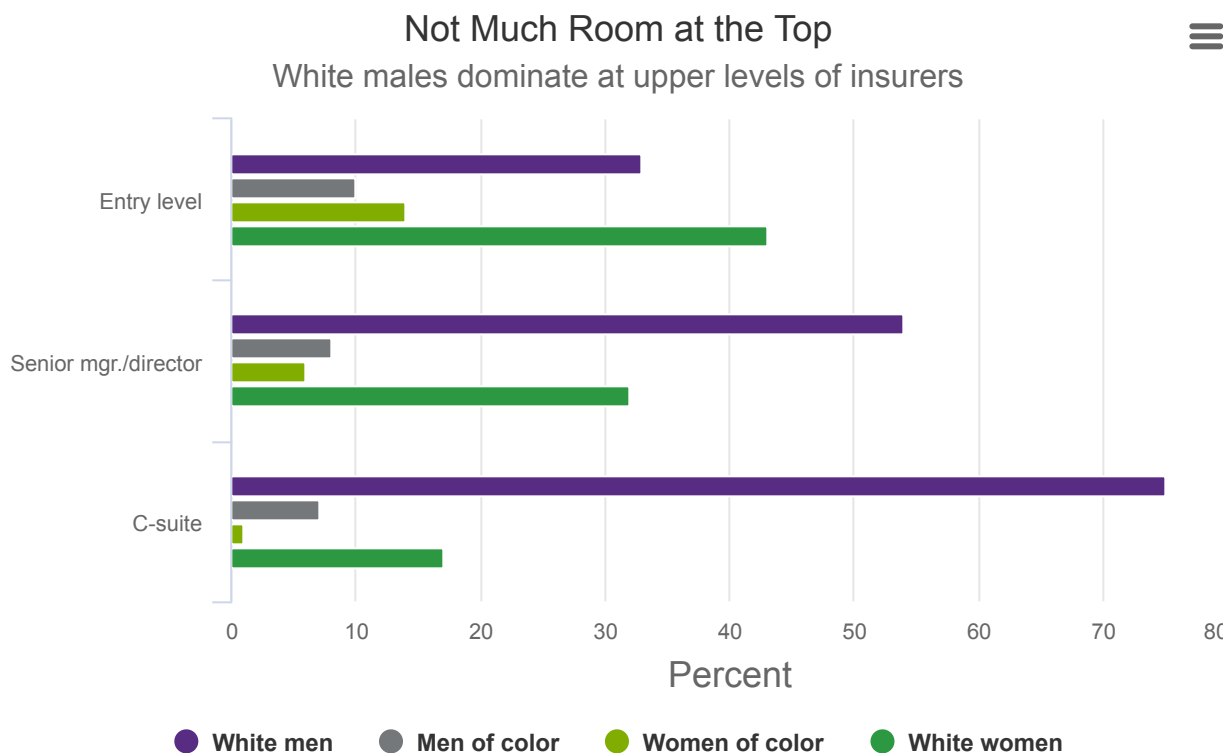


Entry-level Insurance Jobs Mostly Go to Women. C-suite? Not Often.

By Cyril Tuohy September 24, 2018

Almost six in 10 entry-level employees in the insurance industry are women, but at higher levels, their ranks thin out fast.

Among middle managers and senior managers and directors, only 38% of the jobs are held by women, a new report by **McKinsey & Co.** found. At the very top of the industry, only 18% of the coveted C-suite positions that carry the most prestige, money and power are filled by females.



Source: Women in the Workplace 2017, McKinsey and LeanIn.org.

For women trying to climb the career ladder, it may feel like they're staring up at a lot of missing rungs. The journey is tough, long and for many simply fruitless. Among life and annuity companies, women CEOs are a rare find among a group of overwhelmingly white men.

“The lack of women in C-suite positions is a self-perpetuating cycle,” said **Deanna Strable**, executive vice president and CFO at **Principal**, who was quoted in McKinsey’s report. “Because we don’t have many females in the C-suite, young women don’t see role models or potential paths towards executive level leadership.”

The report, titled “Closing the Gap,” surveyed more than 14,000 employees at 39 North American financial services companies employing about 1.2 million people.

When Life Annuity Specialist ran a [roundup](#) of CEO compensation at some of the largest publicly traded U.S. life insurers in May, all 16 – from **James Belardi** of **Athene** to **Steven Kandarian** of **MetLife** – were men. About a third took home a compensation package of more than \$10 million last year, led by \$44.7 million for **AIG’s Brian Duperreault**.

Welcomed at Bottom, Locked Out at Top

At the entry level, the McKinsey report found that insurance companies attract a higher percentage of women (57%) than either asset management or wholesale banking firms (48%), or banks and consumer finance companies (51%).

In the end, women made up about the same percentage of C-suite chieftains whether they worked for an insurer, a bank or consumer finance firm, or an asset management company, the report found.

Women of color were very poorly represented among all financial services firms, a category that includes insurers, as they went further up the ladder. They made up 21% of entry-level workers, but a mere 1% of the top executives.

White men followed the opposite trajectory: they took only 31% of all entry-level positions, but 73% of C-suite jobs, the research found.

“Many of the findings on the headwinds women continue to face in progressing in financial services mirror the broader trends we see across industries, and therefore were disappointing but not surprising,” **Alexis Krivkovich**, one of the authors of the report, said in an email.

The problems start early on, she suggested: For every 100 women who receive that first promotion, 124 men do.

Effects of 'Early Inequity'

“This early inequity has compound effects on constraining available female talent for more senior roles over time,” she said.

In addition, there are differences between what women early in their careers and their more seasoned counterparts describe as the key factors for success, said Krivkovich, a partner in McKinsey’s financial services practice.

Early-tenure women are more likely to weigh more heavily soft skills such as communication and being a team player, but more seasoned women put more emphasis on strong leadership skills and sponsorship, Krivkovich said.

In the life insurance industry, some women do manage to win the top job. **Deanna Mulligan** runs the show as CEO of **Guardian Life** in New York. At **Penn Mutual**, not only does **Eileen McDonnell** serve as chief executive, but the CFO and Treasurer is **Susan Deakins**.

Women also occupy other key roles. At **Prudential**, **Salene Hitchcock-Gear** is president of individual life insurance and **Caroline Feeney** heads the individual solutions group. **Lori Fouché**, former president of group insurance at Prudential and former CEO of **Fireman’s Fund**, was appointed CEO of retail and institutional services at **TIAA** in 2015.

“Women want to see success and see what that looks like and those women are the epitome of that,” said **Angela Ribuffo**, president of **Women in Financial Services**, which works to attract, develop and advance the careers of women.

Women are “a little frustrated” because progress isn’t coming as fast as many would like or had hoped, Ribuffo said.

Obstacles to Women Rising

Putting more women in the upper echelons makes sense, according to **Daralee Barbera**, executive VP of business development for **GAMA International**, a professional development organization serving the financial services industry. That's partly because the more the demographics of the people at the top resemble their customers the better, she said.

“Even as advisors, we should reflect who the clients are,” said Barbera, co-author of “Women Matter – The Why and How of Gender Diversity in Financial Services.” “When you take the first step in the door, you need to have people feel like they belong.”

Obstacles to women breaching the C-suite fortress are well-known.

Access to senior leadership remains uneven, even at the highest levels, and balancing family and work becomes more challenging as families grow, the McKinsey consultants wrote.

Insurers need to enhance sponsorship and mentorship programs, eliminate the bias in reviews and promotions, offer employees more flexibility in work-life balance and set and meet gender targets, the McKinsey consultants suggested.

“Moving toward gender parity at the top will require corporate leaders – both male and female – to view gender equality as a strategic priority, and one that is integrated into the organization’s day-to-day work,” the authors wrote.

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