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# Workplace Stress and Gender Equity for Women in the Trades

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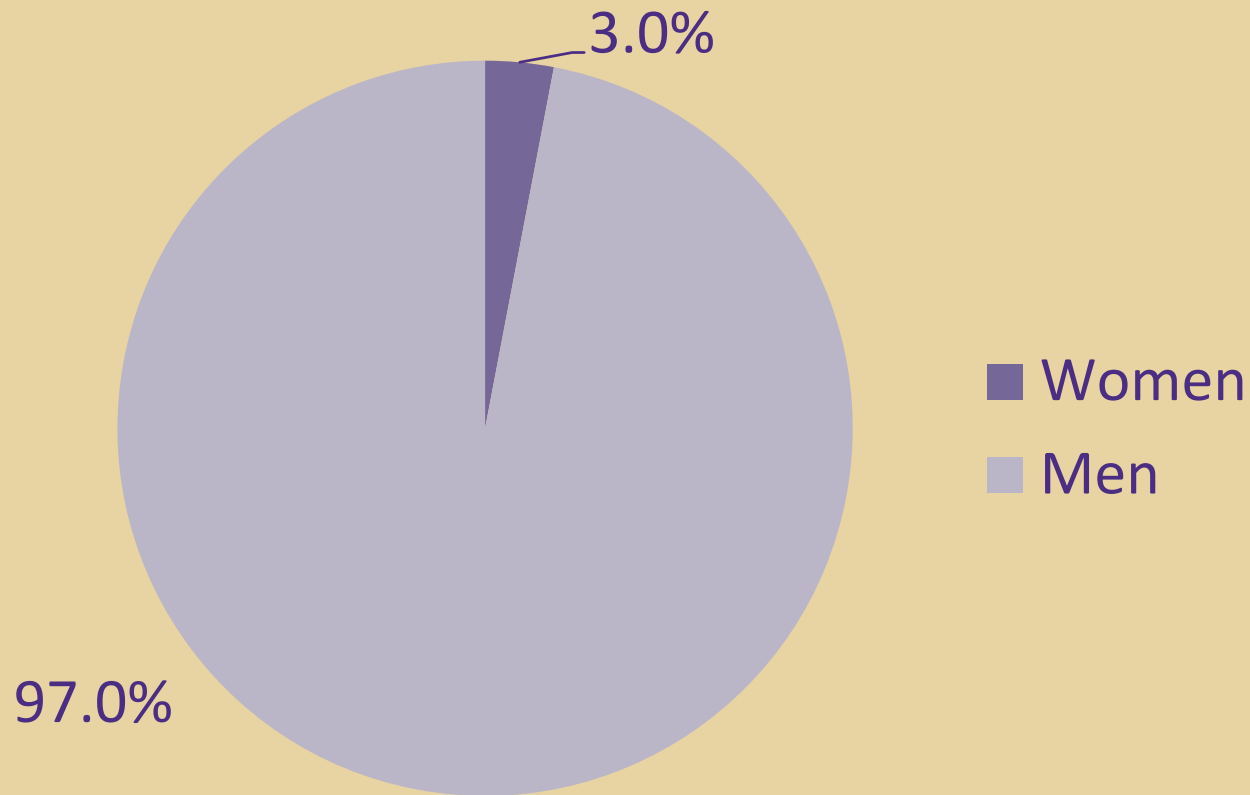
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# Construction's gender imbalance



\*Source: Bureau of Labor Statistics, Occupational employment statistics, occupational employment and wages, May 2017

# Impact of Construction Culture on Worker Well-being

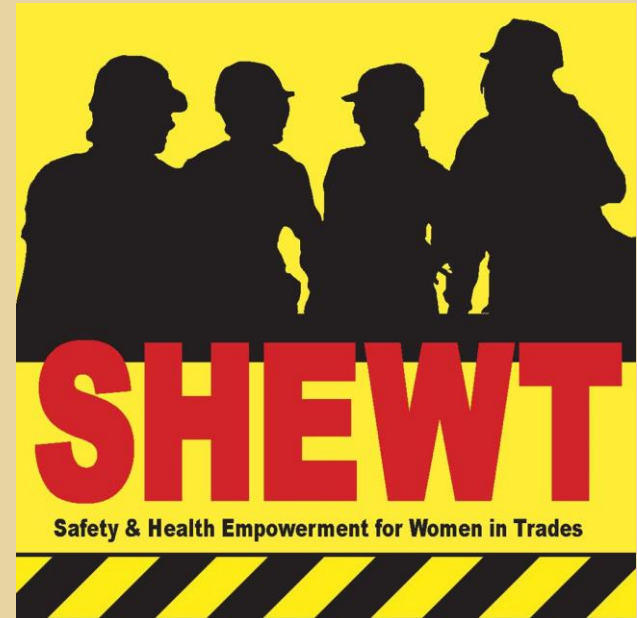
- Construction culture based on hierarchy, competition, and masculine norms
- Workers with low social standing seen as acceptable targets for harassment
- Harassment at work is associated with stress, which is a risk factor for illness and injury
- Workplace harassment also associated with lowered job satisfaction, greater absenteeism and turnover, anxiety, depression

“I have been doing this a long time. It has gotten better but so much of the stress is covert, hard to pin down. The harassment never really stops; you learn to ignore it... Men don’t want us there so it is a constant, unstated hostile environment.”

Journeywoman electrician

# Safety and Health Empowerment for Women in Trades

- Phase I: Research
  - Understand exposures, risks
  - Identify prevention strategies
- Phase II: Pilot Mentoring
  - Recognize risks
  - Advocate for safer work
  - Develop leadership skills
- Phase III: (now)
  - Partner with existing programs
  - Make mentorship sustainable

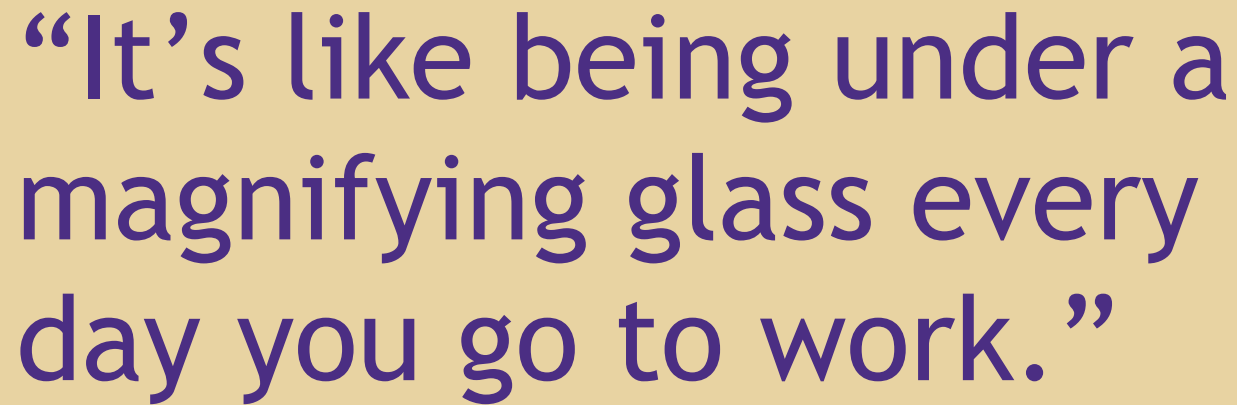


# Focus group themes

- Physical risks
  - Dangerous work environment
  - Complacency
  - Production over safety
- Non-physical risks
  - Job insecurity
  - No paid sick leave
  - Inadequate bathrooms
  - Macho culture

## **Women-specific risks**

- Inadequate PPE
- Physical limitations
- Sexual harassment
- Gender discrimination
- Tokenism
- Overcompensation
- Poor work-life balance
- Fear of reporting



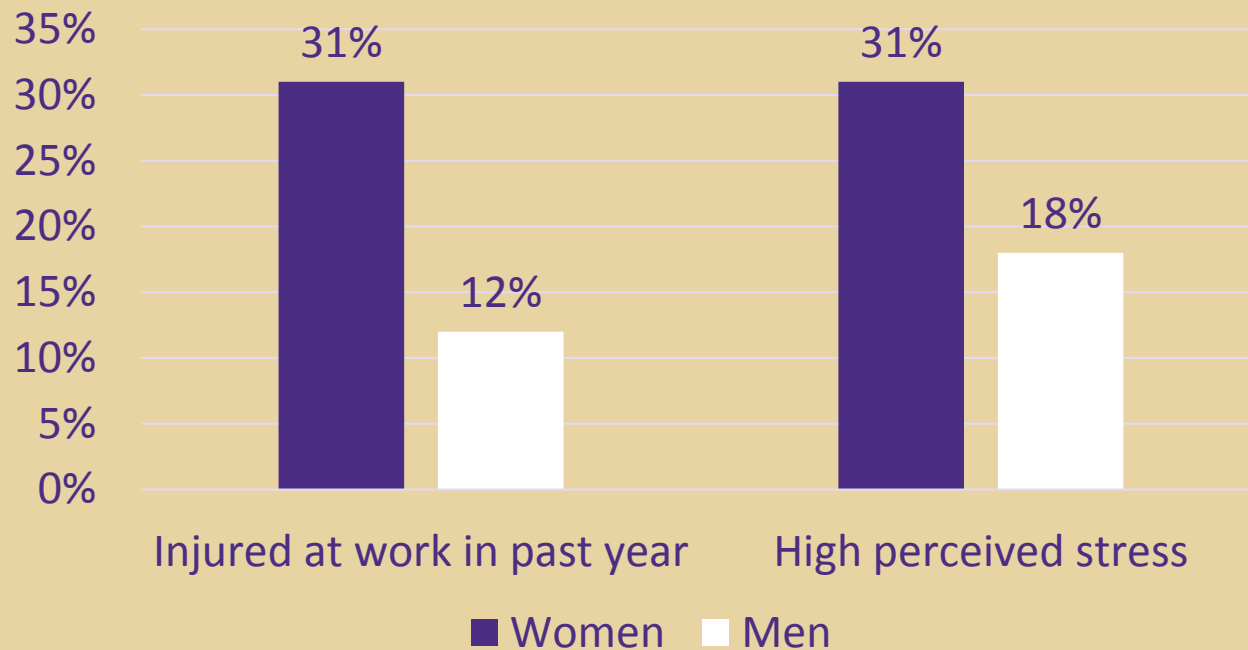
“It’s like being under a magnifying glass every day you go to work.”

Journeywoman carpenter

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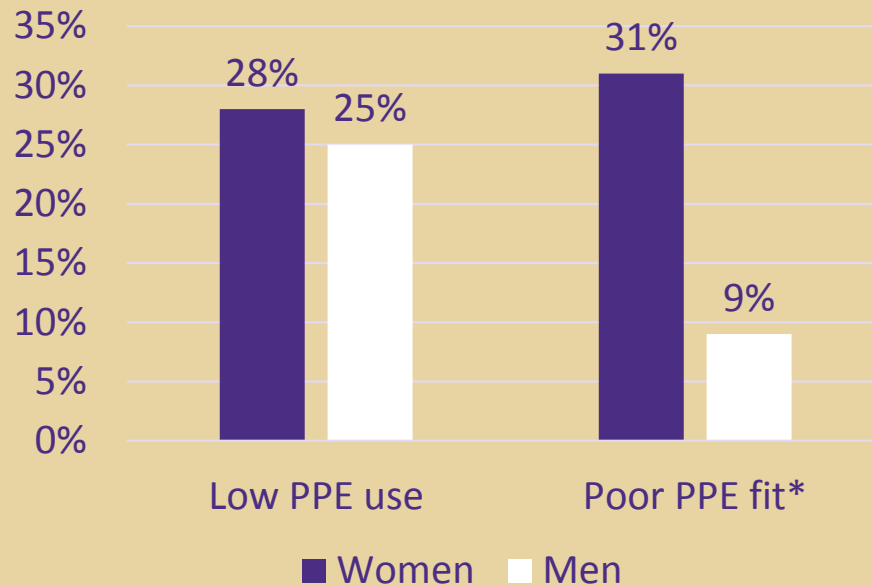
# Survey: key findings

Compared to men, women reported a higher risk of injury at work in the past year and high levels of stress





# Survey: PPE fit



\*Women and men are significantly different at  $p < 0.05$   
Women (n=198), men (n=93)

Of women who did not feel comfortable asking for better PPE, more than half listed **“fear of being labeled complainer by coworkers”** or **“fear of layoff”** as the primary reason

# Survey: psychosocial exposures

	Women (n=198) %	Men (n=93) %	
<b>Gender Discrimination***</b>			
Yes	43	4	
<b>Bullying***</b>			
Yes	39	16	
<b>Sexual Harassment</b>			
High (<25 <sup>th</sup> percentile)	30	N/A	
<b>Overcompensation</b>			
High (<25 <sup>th</sup> percentile)	36	29	
<b>Work/Life Balance</b>			
Poor (<25 <sup>th</sup> percentile)	43	33	
<b>Isolation</b>			
High (<25 <sup>th</sup> percentile)	35	31	
<b>Safety Climate</b>			
Low (<25 <sup>th</sup> percentile)	27	17	
<b>Social Support</b>			
Low (<25 <sup>th</sup> percentile)	29	17	

\*p<0.05 \*\*p<0.01

\*\*\*p<0.001

N/A questions not asked of men

Independent sample chi-square.

# Key SHEWT finding: overcompensation, bullying, and gender discrimination are occupational safety and health Issues

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- Injury risk more than doubled for women who reported gender discrimination or bullying
- Tradeswomen who overcompensated were more than four times as likely to report injury at work compared to those who did not

# Mentoring



Leadership skills for women to succeed in apprenticeships

Mentor training to change cultural norms

Women's retention to shift gender imbalance

Identifying harassing and unsafe behaviors

Problem-solving skills to help address issues before they develop

Provide support for women who experience harassment and other health/safety hazards

Resources to treat stress and other mental health conditions

# SHEWT pilot mentoring program

## Aims:

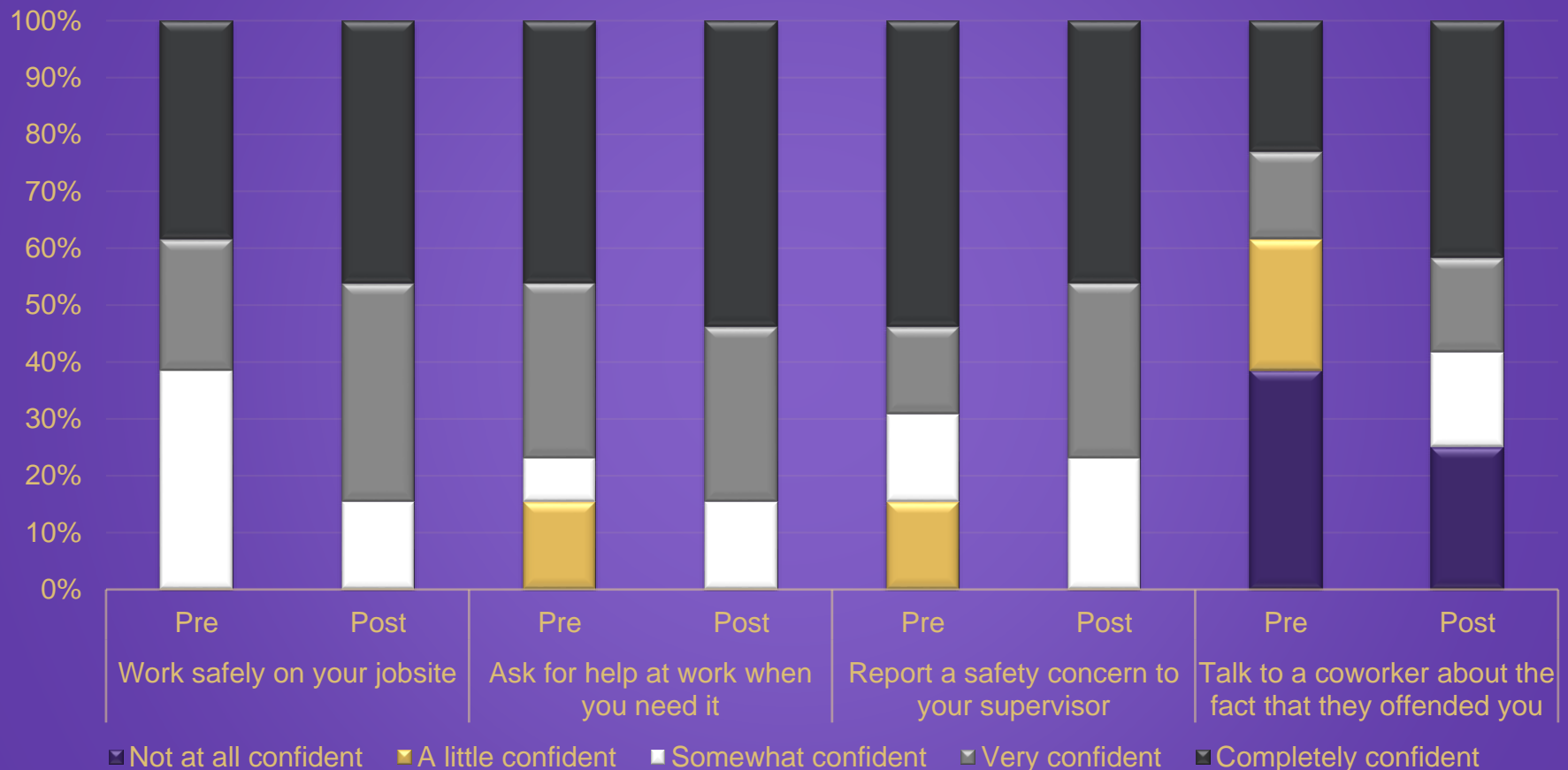
- To empower women apprentices to recognize their stressors and advocate for safe worksites
- To increase awareness of how the male-dominated trades culture affects women's safety
- To evaluate the effectiveness of a structured mentoring program focused on women's health and safety in the trades

# SHEWT pilot mentoring program

- 15 mentors
  - 10 journeywomen and 5 journeymen
  - Carpenters, Electricians, Ironworkers, Laborers, Pipe trades
- 24 mentees (women apprentices)
- Mentors received three trainings
  - Active listening, proactive problem solving, implicit bias, building trust, resource sharing
- Voluntary matching
- 6-months of regular check-ins
- Pre-Post Evaluation with mentees

# Mentorship evaluation results: mentee self-reports

## Confidence in your ability to:



# SHEWT pilot mentoring program

- Lessons learned
  - Role of mentors in providing emotional support
  - Building trust takes time
  - Training for mentees
  - Mentoring as “getting ahead” not “needing help”
- Challenges with program
  - Mentee cancellations
  - Mentor/mentee communication barriers



# Advocating for safety and gender equity as women workers



**“Even when I’ve just done it,  
I don’t know if I can do it”**

# Advocating for safety and gender equity as women workers

- Preparing to advocate for yourself (new job, promotion, safety concern, etc.)
  - Describing skills and duties
  - Journaling
  - Focusing on the positive
  - Help from other women

# Acknowledgements

- This project was made possible by the support of our community partners:
  - Washington Women in Trades
  - Washington State Labor Education and Research Center
  - Labor Education and Research Center at the University of Oregon
  - Washington State Building & Construction Trades Council's Pre-Apprenticeship Construction Education (PACE) program
  - Leaders from local unions and apprenticeship programs

