

WOMEN IN JEWISH COMMUNAL SERVICE

Can the Goal of Increasing Women in Leadership Roles Become a Reality?

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Over 1,000 women responded to a survey about career advancement in Jewish communal service that was distributed by the World Council after its last Quadrennial, in which limited attention was given to this issue. The respondents, a well-read, well-educated group that is dedicated to Jewish communal service as a career, ranked the creation of mentoring opportunities and workshops to guide women's career advancement as the highest priorities for the World Council's agenda. Indeed, since the last Quadrennial, the World Council has increased the number of female board members, assigned increased visibility to career advancement on the Executive Committee's agenda, and made a commitment to addressing women's issues in depth at the upcoming Quadrennial.

In achieving its goal of bringing together Jewish communal professionals from around the world, the 1994 Quadrennial Meeting of the World Council of Jewish Communal Services also brought together a group of women, many of whom had not met before. As they explored the concrete and critical issues of service delivery, demography, continuity, and development within the international Jewish communal enterprise, the underlying demography of these meetings was also noted. Concerns were raised about the modest number of women who were participants, the embarrassingly small number of women on the dais, reflecting the World Council executive committee, and the limited attention given to women's service and career advancement issues. (There was only one session at the 1994 Quadrennial on women's career and service delivery issues.)

In a rapidly organized meeting of interested women at the Quadrennial, frustration was evident—frustration that even now in the mid-1990s, the issues of women in leadership roles had not even emerged on the World Council agenda. To many, it felt like discussions of the previous two decades where

the need to raise awareness and consciousness was a clear priority.

As a first step, it was agreed that a mailing list of women who attended this meeting would be created to provide the foundation for networking. Another immediate goal was to set up a meeting with the World Council President to discuss this overwhelming sense of concern about women in Jewish communal service.

That meeting was held during the actual Quadrennial. The President's positive response produced an increase in the number of women on the Board soon thereafter from 6 to 23. Given the concomitant increase in the number of Board members in general, this represented an increase in the percentage of women from 11 to 26 percent.

Another result of that initial meeting was that the World Council added the issue of enhancing women's involvement to its overall agenda. So that World Council could better respond to issues of women's career advancement and education and develop services and programs to meet the special needs of women in Jewish communal service, it was agreed that a survey would be developed as a

Table 1. Age of Respondents (n=1029)

	<u>Number</u>	<u>Percentage (%)</u>
Under 30 years	133	12.9
30-39 years	214	20.8
40-49 years	356	34.6
50-59 years	239	23.2
60+	83	8.2
Missing data	3	.3

first step. In addition to providing information about women's perspectives and expectations of World Council, the survey would also provide an opportunity to learn more about women who have chosen Jewish communal service as a career.

The survey questions asked for basic demographic information, education, work history, conference attendance behavior, personal goals for World Council, and individual areas of related interest. A draft of the survey was reviewed by the World Council Executive Committee, Joint Distribution Committee-Brookdale staff (in Israel), European colleagues, and a committee created in New York to provide support for this project (for a listing of committee members, see Acknowledgments). The surveys were subsequently translated into Hebrew, Russian, French and Spanish.

From a practical perspective, the goal was to obtain the broadest response possible. As there were no data bases on women in Jewish communal service from which to create either a cross-sectional or stratified sample, distribution of the survey relied on existing mailing lists (the JCSA and its Affiliated Professional Associations, World Council, European Councils, etc.) and requests to recipients of the survey to circulate it among women working in their agencies.

Over a period of four months in 1995 approximately 4,500 letters were mailed, each with three surveys attached. This number however, may be misleading, as individuals were asked to duplicate and share the survey with colleagues. Consequently, no comments

can be made about response rates or representativeness of the sample.

CHARACTERISTICS OF RESPONDENTS

A total of 1,029 women responded to the survey, reflecting, we believe, strong interest in the issues of women in our field.

Of the 1,029 responses received, 93 percent were from U.S. women, with 3 percent from Canada, 2 percent from Israel, and 2 percent from other parts of the world. The age distribution was a normal bell curve, with the largest group of respondents aged 40 to 49 years (Table 1). This group of women was very well educated, with more than half earning a Master's degree (Table 2). Unfortunately, it is difficult to draw conclusions about the field of study of survey respondents because 30 percent indicated that their field of study was "other." Among those who did respond, the most frequently cited fields were social work (27%), education (21%), administration (13%), and Jewish studies (8%).

The majority of respondents worked in UJA/federation settings (24%), a Jewish Community Center/"Y"/camp (23%), or a family service agency (18.7%). Approximately two-thirds of the respondents (67%) were in management-level positions. Specifically, 40 percent were managers, 15 percent directors, and 13 percent associate or assistant directors.

As a group these women have significant longevity in their present position; the average number of years in that position was 5.3

Table 2. Education Level (n=1029)

	<u>Number</u>	<u>Percentage (%)</u>
Bachelor's degree	292	28.4
Master's degree	573	59.7
Doctoral degree	40	3.9
Post-graduate certificate	49	4.4
Professional degree	15	1.5
Other	50	4.9
Missing data	14	1.4

(Table 3). The average number of years in the field of Jewish communal service was 10.5 (Table 4).

Clearly, the respondents saw themselves as having a career in Jewish communal service, with 83 percent responding positively to that question. The greatest interest in Jewish communal service as a career was expressed by those working in community relations/community development organizations (97%) and Jewish Community Centers/Y's and camps (94%). The least interest was expressed by those working in health care/long-term care and/or housing (76%).

When asked the annual budget of their agencies, 22 percent left this question blank. It should be noted that the majority of respondents who did not indicate their agency's annual budget were staff members rather than managers, and their lack of response may reflect their lack of interest or knowledge in this area. Of those responding to the

question, the majority worked in agencies with annual budgets of less than \$10 million (84.4%). Of those working in agencies with annual operating budgets that exceed \$10 million dollars, almost half were in a UJA/federation setting.

Respondents to this survey read an average of three Jewish periodicals per month and attended an average of two to three conferences on Jewish topics in the last two years.

To further clarify the characteristics of the women responding to the survey, a series of cross-tabulations were performed. Although several interesting trends were noted, extrapolations beyond this sample should be made with caution since the characteristics of the total population are unknown. Findings include the following:

- Those in entry-level positions at UJA/federations, the Jewish Community Center, and Jewish community relations fields

Table 3. Years in Current Position (n=1029)

	<u>Number</u>	<u>Percentage (%)</u>
1-5 years	327	31.8
6-10 years	241	23.3
11-19 years	264	29.9
20+	138	13.9
Missing data	59	5.7

Table 4. Years in the Field of Jewish Communal Service (n=1029)

	<u>Number</u>	<u>Percentage (%)</u>
1-3 years	450	43.7
4-6 years	247	24.0
7-9 years	123	11.9
10+	159	15.5
Missing data	50	4.9

were more likely to have bachelors degrees only. Those in social service/agencies were more likely to have completed their masters degree.

- More younger workers (less than 30 years of age) than would be expected by chance were working at UJA/federation settings, suggesting that this is an entry point into the field.
- A social work degree is not necessarily the primary educational entre into the field. Only 27 percent of all respondents had a degree in social work. Notably, 21 percent had a degree in education, 13 percent in administration, and 31 percent in all other areas (psychology, counseling, business, etc.).
- Of the 143 respondents in a director-level position, approximately 25 percent worked in agencies with budgets of less than \$500,000 per year and 7 percent in agencies with budgets greater than \$10 million per year. Of those at the associate or assistant director level (120 or 15% of all respondents), only 20 percent were in agencies with operating budgets greater than \$10 million.
- Of those same individuals in a director position, 20 percent had a degree in administration and 46 percent a degree that we could only categorize as "other." Of those 399 women who were "managers," 26 percent had a degree in education, 31 percent in "other," and 25 percent in social work.
- Not surprisingly, years in the field (average=10.5 years) and age were directly related; that is, increasing age predicts

increasing years in the field ($p < .0001$). Relatedly, years in the field were related to current position ($p < .0001$), with increased years in the field related to upper management positions. It is noteworthy that these variables (age, years in field, current position) were unrelated to the field of study.

TOPICS OF INTEREST

Respondents were asked about their interest in a range of topics relating to Jewish communal service, career advancement, and "balancing personal and professional life." These questions were included to provide content and direction for the next World Council Quadrennial, other regional workshops and meetings, newsletters, and journal articles.

Respondents were asked to rate their interest in these topics, using a Likert scale from which a summative and topic-specific level of interest were calculated. Scores of 1 (not interest at all) to 10 (very interested) were possible.

Although all the items were of interest and scored 7.2 or better on this 10-point Likert scale, the five items of greatest interest were

1. Jewish communal service (8.3)
2. Jewish communal issues (8.2) (e.g. resettlement, Jewish continuity)
3. Increasing professional visibility (8.0)
4. Jewish communal services as a career (7.7)
5. Networking with women about career advancement (7.6).

In the main, levels of interest were consistent

across level of education and varied only slightly between groups clustered by age, field of study, agencies' annual operating budget, and current position, with these exceptions:

- Interest in increased professional visibility ($p < .0001$), Jewish communal service as a career ($p < .01$), networking with women about career advancement ($p < .0001$), balancing professional and personal lives ($p < .0001$), and advancement in Jewish communal service ($p < .0001$) was strongest in younger women (i.e., those less than 30 years of age) and decreased with each older age cohort.
- Individuals whose field of study was Jewish studies were more interested in Jewish communal issues ($p < .05$) and Jewish communal service as a career ($p < .05$) than any other group.
- Similarly, those who worked in agencies with an annual operating budget of from \$2 to 10 million were also most interested in Jewish communal issues ($p < .01$) and Jewish communal service as a career ($p < .001$).
- Those who saw themselves as having a career in Jewish communal service were much more interested in all areas and topics than those who did not see this as

their career ($p < .0001$).

Greatest overall interest in these topics, calculated by creating a summative level of interest scale, was expressed by those women working in community relations/community organizations and Jewish Community Centers/Y's and camps. The least overall interest was expressed by those in health care/long term care/housing and Jewish education ($p < .001$).

The final survey question asked respondents to rank their priorities for the World Council's agenda. Creating mentoring opportunities and workshops to guide women's career advancement were ranked highest by all respondents across demographic and experiential cohorts (Table 5).

There were two areas where the view of the World Council agenda varied significantly:

1. *Special Practice Column*—Those individuals who had attained the highest level of education/degree ranked the Special Practice Column in the *Journal of Jewish Communal Service* as the highest priority.
2. *Female Trustees*—Those with greater management responsibilities placed "increasing the number of women on the board of World Council" higher on the

Table 5. Average Rank Order for World Council' Women's Agenda

<u>Item</u>	<u>Average Rank Order¹</u>
Create mentor opportunities	6.5
Create workshops to guide women's advancement in the workplace	6.4
Create a Special Practice column in <i>Journal of Jewish Communal Service</i>	5.5
Increase the number of women on the World Council board	5.4
Increase the number of women attending conferences	5.4
Develop support groups for women	5.2
Indexed directory of women in Jewish communal service	5.0
Develop World Council newsletter	5.0
Develop internet capability	4.7

¹On a 1-9 rank order scale with 9 as the highest rating

World Council agenda. With increasing age, women also noted the importance of this agenda item.

DISCUSSION AND IMPACT

As we noted earlier, the conclusions from this data can best be viewed in the context of this sample. However, the authors had the opportunity to talk with other professionals in national organizations, Affiliated Professional Associations, and the Advisory Committee to help form this article's conclusions. This discussion section is therefore broadened beyond the data analyzed.

The number of responses from North American women to an organization about which few had heard reflects significant interest in the topic and we believe a real desire for action and response. It may also suggest a sense of frustration that these issues remain without the priority they deserve—but that may be editorial projection.

Although the North American response was strong, the response of European and Israeli women was markedly weak. We believe this low response reflects our inability to successfully engage European and Israeli leadership in this process. Any future studies will give greater attention to the international nature of the World Council.

However, given the sizeable number of responses, the data are of keen interest. It provided an overview of a well-educated, well-read sample of women dedicated to Jewish communal service as a career. However, it is clear that this is not a homogeneous group, and there are key differences in interests and priorities for World Council across fields of practice and by age. Age differences reflect, we believe, the realities of family responsibilities, career achievements, and career paths.

Interestingly, the impact of age on World Council priorities was not linear. For example it was the youngest (less than 30 years) and oldest (60 plus years) respondents who gave greatest priority to developing support groups for women. Those women aged 55 to 59 years saw the priority of increasing women

attending conferences as a higher priority than all other age groups.

Our preconceived notion about social work being the degree by which one enters the field is not correct. Social work (27%), education (21%), and Jewish studies (8%) only account for 56 percent of all respondents. The fact that 30 percent of all respondents responded "other" to their degree and training suggests that we need to better understand the educational background of women in the field and its intrinsic strengths and limitations. Further, encouragement for continued education is particularly critical at federations, Jewish Community Centers, and community relations agencies where undergraduate degrees are more the norm.

The data are striking in its consistency with other studies (see for example Weiner, 1995) in quantifying the number of women in key leadership roles. Specifically, 15 percent of the respondents were directors and another 13 percent associate or assistant directors.

The survey findings provide direction for World Council in terms of their 1998 Quadrennial, written materials, and regional conferences. Jewish communal service and issues, professional visibility, and advancement are clearly areas about which women want information and an opportunity to network. Mentoring and workshops are viewed as viable and important opportunities.

To be most useful though, this discussion needs to go beyond its original goal of information seeking for World Council to comment on the findings from the perspective of women's career advancement in general.

The 1996 Catalyst Census of Women Corporate Officers and Partners noted that of the 978 women corporate officers in vice president level titles, only 28 percent held positions with profit and loss or revenue-generating responsibilities. They raised the issue of the potential existence of "glass walls" wherein invisible barriers in corporate culture keep women from attaining jobs with line responsibilities that ultimately lead to the executive suite.

This concern resonates with our data from an unusual perspective. In answer to the

question about agency budget, 223 (21.7%) women could not or did not respond. We think this was reflective of a lack of knowledge. It therefore becomes incumbent upon women to take courses in financial management (Weiner, 1995) and to obtain positions with line responsibility; it is also critical that, even in entry-level positions, women understand the financial definitions and underpinnings of their agencies. Budgets, sources of reimbursement, and expense categories are relevant to all staff and create an understanding of the financial context of agency functions.

Mentoring was identified as the highest priority by these respondents. This is a theme in Jewish communal service literature (Isserman & Holstein, 1994; Silverstein & Tannenbaum, 1955) and management literature in general (White, 1992). Although some attempts have been made within Jewish communal service (Weiner, 1995), they have not yet been successful.

"Balancing personal and professional life" was not as important to these respondents as the authors had anticipated. Perhaps these women do not see this as World Council responsibility. Or perhaps, as Steinitz (1996-97) suggests, these women believe that the longer hours and increased responsibilities are a prerequisite of career advancement and can only be seen as a personal responsibility. Perhaps in the extreme, women who have the most difficulty achieving balance may not have had the time or inclination to respond to this survey.

WORLD COUNCIL ACCOMPLISHMENTS

The World Council has responded positively to concerns about women's career advancement by increasing the number of female board members, assigning increased visibility of this issue on the Executive Committee's agenda, and making a commitment that the 1998 World Council Quadrennial program will address women's issues seriously and in depth.

In addition, the *Journal of Jewish Communal Service* has agreed to include a special practice feature on women's career advancement in each issue.

Finally, the survey data have been shared with several Affiliated Professional Associations and agency groups. Interest has been evoked both intellectually and programmatically. Although this survey is not the catalyst, the efforts of the Association of Jewish Community Organization Personnel and its own newsletter and special feature on women and the Council on Jewish Federations Women's Professional Advancement Initiative are important steps forward.

However, these steps must be viewed as just that, especially in light of the conclusion in the recent study on "Power and Parity: Women on the Boards of Major American Jewish Organizations" by Ma'yan: The Jewish Women's Project. Their report discusses the "myth of progress" and concludes that change will not happen without intervention (Ma'yan, 1998).

CONCLUDING COMMENTS

The National Commission on American Jewish Women (1995) has developed a vision for achieving equity in which "Jewish women will sit at the table as full partners with men, sharing in leadership, decision making and all endeavors that support the Jewish community. They will assume equal responsibility and be rewarded as equals."

To achieve this vision, the priorities raised in this survey have to be a focus and not an afterthought on our agendas. With 1,029 women responding to a survey, sponsored by an organization about which many had never heard, there is a dramatic cry for action. As we struggle with issues of Jewish continuity and community we cannot ignore the role, responsibility, and value of women as full and equal partners. To do so denies our collective strengths, possibilities, and potential. The real question to us, as authors, and individuals in the field, is how do we really mobilize ourselves to respond in a meaningful way — and how soon.

POSTSCRIPT

This study emerged from the 1994 World Council Quadrennia; therefore a comment about the 1998 Quadrennia is important. This year's conference will feature site visits to agencies whose focus is services to women, a key panel presentation on women's career advancement, scheduled networking opportunities, and the encouragement of women to present papers within the author's forum. The interest and support of the World Council Executive Committee have been strong, consistent, and appreciated.

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