2025

WOMEN'S RELATIONAL HEALTH INSTITUTE

2025 Outlook Report

Research, trends, and insights about the ways that women are forming and maintaining platonic, same-sex connections... and the impact it has on their overall health and wellbeing

WOMEN'S RELATIONAL HEALTH INSTITUTE

www.womensrelationalhealthinstitute.com

Women's relational health is the domain of health that speaks to a woman's ability to *perceive, form, and maintain healthy platonic same-sex relationships over time.*

About the Women's Relational Health Report 2025

The goal of this report is to share a compilation of data that offers fresh insights into the current state of women's relational wellness.

One of the key surveys included in this report is from The Women's Relational Health Institute and findings from its "Women's Relational Health Institute 2025 Women's Connection Survey." A 26-item survey was distributed across the Prolific survey platform to investigate the relationship between women's friendships and their health, with a focus on women's experiences within their workplaces. All data were collected on December 19th, 2024, and have a demographic makeup that's reflective of the United States of America's overall demographic composition with regard to age and race.

This report also includes research from the past two years that highlights the state of women's platonic connections, as well as insights from professionals working across various disciplines. Their combined stories and observations paint a fuller picture of the current trends in women's relational health.

For more information

To learn more about the sources and processes used to construct this report, please contact The Women's Relational Health Institute at team@womensrelationalhealthinstitute.com.

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Note from the Director

Things are changing.

Until recently, the mention of "women's health" was limited to issues of pregnancy, menopause, and hormones. But today we're speaking about women's health more broadly, more holistically. We're rethinking all that truly makes a woman *well*.

The pandemic pushed connection science to the forefront, and people seemed to be more open to talking about their desire for quality relationships. And it's a good thing, because the longest running study on happiness has found that the factor that most determines whether you'll be content with your life and healthy in your body is... well, the quality of your relationships.

The way a woman perceives, forms, and maintains relationships over time (relational health) will impact her body, her mind, and her overall life satisfaction. And since **70% of a women's network is made up of other women,** it's worth taking the time to look at the ways that women uniquely communicate, cooperate, and engage in conflict so we can have quality relationships with one another.

This report aims to shed light on these questions and provide helpful insights.

Because it matters.

- The number one cause of death for women is heart disease, and having poor social connections increases your risk by nearly 30%. (Source)
- Women who have female-dominated circles are more likely to land leadership positions that are 2.5 times higher in authority and pay. (Source)
- Women who are able to navigate healthy conflict have greater wellbeing and closer relationships. (Source)
- Women who seek the support of other women in response to emotional distress see a decrease in cortisol (the stress hormone). (Source)
- Women's "positive friend relations" predict better health 23 years later. (Source)

I outlined many of the benefits of women's relationships in the opening chapter of my book, *Fighting for our Friendships: The Science and Art of Conflict and Connection in Women's Relationships*, and it's been a joy to watch women have more intentional conversations around developing skills that will help them have more joyful platonic, same-sex connections.

Note from the Director

cont'd.

Our "Women's Relational Health 2025 Women's Connection Survey" found that women who have strong connections with other women are physically healthier and have fewer bad mental health days. The majority of women say their female friendships offer emotional support, and according to Pew Research Center's latest survey "Men, Women, and Social Connections":

Two-thirds of Americans say all-female social groups have a positive impact on women's well-being.

This is higher than the share saying all-male groups have a positive impact on men's well-being (56%). Americans are also more likely to say women-only groups have a positive impact on society than to say the same about all-male groups (57% vs. 43%).

When a woman's relational health is strong, the benefits extend beyond her personal wellness– it improves society at large.

Thank you for taking the time to review this report. I encourage you to share this with your team, your supervisor, your sister, and your friends as we work together to form deeper connections with one another.

Sincerely,

Danielle Bayard Jackson

Danielle Bayard Jackson
Director, Women's Relational Health Institute

What is Women's Relational Health?

Women's relational health is the ability to perceive, form, and maintain healthy platonic relationships with other women.

The Women's Relational Health Institute has a mission to help women improve the *beliefs, skills, and confidence* required to sustain high-quality relationships with other women. Our gender-specific focus is due to large bodies of research that continue to underscore the unique ways that women connect, communicate, and engage in conflict, and we believe that these factors influence a woman's ability to form meaningful platonic same-sex relationships.

Relational health is often addressed in the context of a child's formative relationships with a caregiver, and how these dynamics influence them over the course of their lifetime. But relational health is something that should be addressed in adulthood as our beliefs, experiences, circumstances, and obligations evolve over time.

WOMEN'S RELATIONAL HEALTH INSTITUTE

The Five Domains of Relational Health

The Five Domains of Relational Health is a framework designed by Danielle Bayard Jackson in partnership with the Women's Relational Health Institute. It includes:

Mindset: Before one can begin forming healthy platonic relationships, she needs to assess her beliefs about connection and unpack self-imposed limitations.

Connection: This domain involves one's skills and ability to form new platonic connections "from scratch".

Momentum: Happiness research from Harvard finds that the number one thing that determines our health and overall life satisfaction is the quality of our relationships– but how exactly do we enhance the quality of the connection in our lives? This domain requires women to examine their ability to create depth in existing relationships.

Conflict: The research tells us that people report feeling closer to one another after navigating healthy conflict together. But some women simply lack the skills necessary to be successful in this area... and their relationships are suffering because of it.

Renewal: This domain explores a woman's ability to recover when relationship dissolution occurs, and move forward with optimism and gratitude.

When a woman's skills, attitudes, and beliefs in each of these domains are strong, she will see improved health and happiness.

Want to see the full framework?

The Institute provides training and consulting on the Five Domains of Women's Relational Health Framework for teams, coaches, and leaders who want to improve the relational health for their respective female-dominated populations, including their employees, clients, students, and members. Learn more at womensrelationalhealthinstitute.com.

Women's Relational Health in the Workplace

Data & Analysis

We continue to see data that draws a direct line between workplace satisfaction and a sense of belonging. Our "Women's' Relational Health Institute 2025 Women's Connection Survey" found that only one-third of women experience a strong sense of workplace belonging, acceptance and satisfaction—and one surprising factor that influences this data?

Women's connections with their female colleagues.

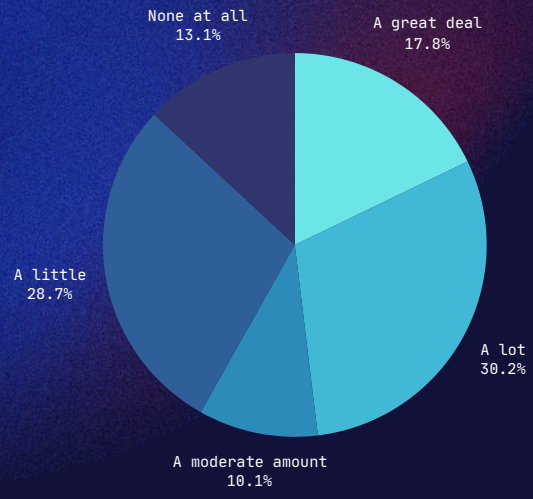
Less than half of women feel well-supported by other women at their jobs.

Another key finding from the "Women's Relational Health Institute 2025 Women's Connection Survey":

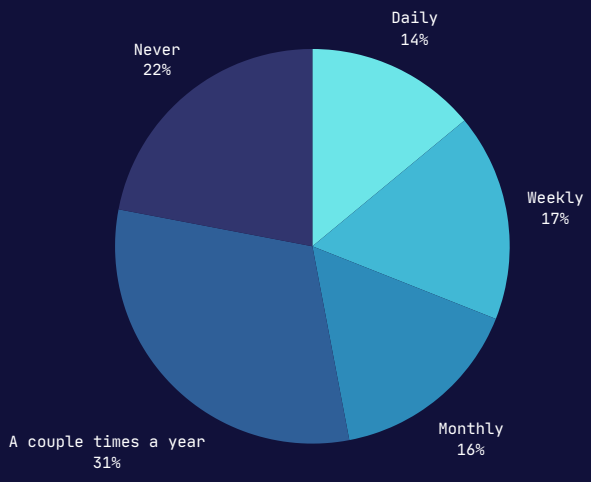
Women who are "frequent connectors" (meeting monthly, daily, or weekly) with female coworkers outside of work (in-person or virtually) report greater job satisfaction.

Women's connections with their female coworkers – inside and outside of work – make a difference in how they feel about their jobs overall.

How supported do you feel by other women at your job?



How often do you connect with the women at your job outside of work?



Women's Relational Health in the Workplace (cont'd.)

Data & Analysis

Our research also finds:

Women's relationships with female coworkers have a greater impact on their overall wellbeing than their relationships with male coworkers.

In other words, if a woman has poor relationships with the *women* at her job, she'll experience more job dissatisfaction and anxiety than if she had poor relationships with the *men* at her job,

Women in Leadership

Women in leadership report greater feelings of workplace belonging and job satisfaction compared to women who are *not* in leadership roles.

And, interestingly, for women in leadership, having quality relationships with women at work has a *greater impact* on *them* than it does on women who are not in leadership roles.

Overall, while most people value connection in the workplace, women report prioritizing workplace relationships more than men.

Organizations will need to find ways to meet the needs of this group to improve engagement and retention.

Women's Relational Health in the Workplace (cont'd.)

Data & Analysis

"Women in the workplace are struggling to find balance, feeling guilty when they need to take care of themselves.There's a great need for practical tools to interpret emotions as signals rather than suppressing them."

-Dr. Terah Davis-Henderson

Dr. Terah Davis-Henderson is a nationally certified counselor and Chief Mental Health and Wellness Educator at Live with Lyfe.

Mental health provider ComPsych found that leaves related to mental health increased by 300% increased by 300% from 2017 to 2023. Most of these leaves were taken by women, specifically Millennial women (33%) and Gen X (30%).

While there has been increased attention on the impacts of burnout on productivity and employee satisfaction,

Little attention has been given to the ways that social support helps to prevent burnout.

We encourage workplace leaders to develop strategies for burnout prevention in an attempt to:

- increase women's performance
- increase employees' individual wellbeing
- improve the organization's retention rates

The "Women's Relational Health Institute 2025 Women's Connection Survey" revealed the impact of women's same-sex work connections on their overall job satisfaction. Designing onboarding and engagement programs that speak to the unique ways women connect with one another might be more effective in creating strong bonds and feelings of belonging within the organization, especially if it's a female-dominated space.

Women's Relational Health in the Workplace

Institute Predictions for 2025

As research continues to show the importance of connections for workplace wellbeing (especially for women's platonic same-sex relationships), you can expect to see more:

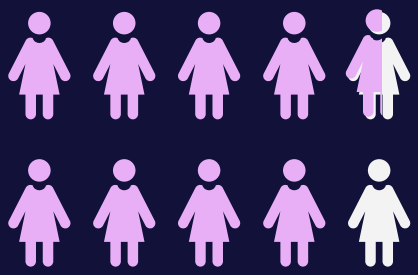
- Digitized mental health solutions and telehealth platforms to build momentum as a stopgap solution for rising mental health service demands
- Workplace mental health initiatives; companies will continue to expand efforts to reduce stigma and prioritize employee well-being
- Niche support, moving from general workplace wellbeing training to wellbeing support that speaks to women's unique challenges and conditions

Women's Relational Health: Personal Friendships

Data & Analysis

According to the "Women's Relational Health Institute 2025 Women's Connection Survey," women's friendship quality *and* quantity positively predict health outcomes. (Women with more friends report more satisfaction than women with fewer friends.)

85% of women report better mental health due to strong female friendships



Women's Relational Health Institute 2025 Women's Connection Survey

Relational satisfaction

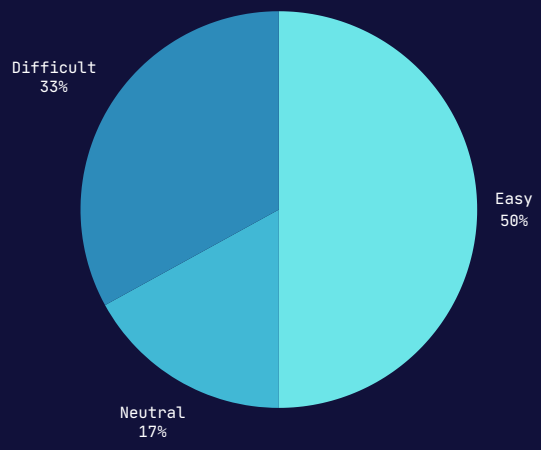
A 2023 Pew Research Center survey finds:

55% of women say they have between 1 and 4 close friends; 36% of women say they have 5 or more close friends.

According to the "Women's Relational Health Institute 2025 Women's Connection Survey," 79% of women are currently satisfied with their female friendships, yet:

Nearly 34% of women find it difficult to connect meaningfully with other women.

How easy or difficult is it for you to form meaningful connections with other women?



Women's Relational Health Institute 2025 Women's Connection Survey

Women's Relational Health: Personal Friendships (cont'd.)

Data & Analysis

Relational conflict

Women's friendships dissolve at a higher rate than men's, but they involve more platonic intimacy.

A 2022 study by the American Psychological Association found that 42% of U.S. adults feel dissatisfied with their friendships, citing lack of depth, unmet expectations, and infrequent communication as primary reasons.

This dissatisfaction is particularly prevalent among women aged 25–40, who also report feeling burdened by societal expectations to maintain emotional labor in their friendships.

According to the "Three Affinities of Female Friendship" (*Fighting for our Friendships: The Science and Art of Conflict and Connection in Women's Friendships*, 2024) relational conflict between women typically emerges when there is a perceived lack or imbalance in one of three areas.

- Symmetry (feelings of sameness, reciprocity, and egalitarianism)
- Support (offerings of emotional help and solidarity)
- Secrecy (mutual self-disclosure in an exclusive "vault" of trust and mutual prioritization)

The ways that women navigate these issues depend largely on factors like attachment style, conflict style, and their overall beliefs and expectations around relational friction.

One common conflict response for women in their friendships is people-pleasing.

According to a 2023 report by the Journal of Counseling Psychology, 71% of women surveyed admitted to engaging in people-pleasing behaviors to avoid conflict or rejection, which leads to increased anxiety and decreased self-esteem. Relationally, this leads to resentment and emotional burnout.

We've also seen an increase in behaviors that indirectly address the issue, including giving the silent treatment, ghosting, and passive aggression.

Women's Relational Health: Personal Friendships

Data & Analysis

"A significant focus of my work is with individuals experiencing ambiguous grief, the complex and often unrecognized grief that arises from the loss of relationships, roles, or expectations without a clear or tangible resolution."

-Joann Venant, LMHC

Joann "Jojo" Venant, LMHC is a Orlando-based mental health counselor primarily supporting women through difficult relationship transitions.

Therapists also report seeing a recurring struggle with [women] not knowing when or how to walk away from relationships that no longer serve them. And their avoidance often creates a ripple effect, straining friendships as uncommunicated expectations clash with reality.

This is consistent with research from Anna Machin that shows women tend to have higher expectations than men in their platonic and romantic relationships, and when left uncommunicated, this can lead to higher levels of relational dissatisfaction.

"Surprisingly, I've noticed how pride and lack of clarification lead to breakups, even in relationships that had potential," says Joann Venant. "Friendships are also increasingly being treated as transactional, with many expecting their friends to fill emotional gaps left by romantic partners."

Women's Relational Health: Personal Friendships (cont'd.)

Data & Analysis

Relational support and mental health

Our "Women's Relational Health Institute 2025 Women's Connection Survey" found that despite the friction women sometimes experience in their friendships, overall women's close friendships help them feel better.

Nearly 60% of women attribute their physical health improvement to their female friendships, and women with more satisfying female friendships report more good mental health days in the past month.

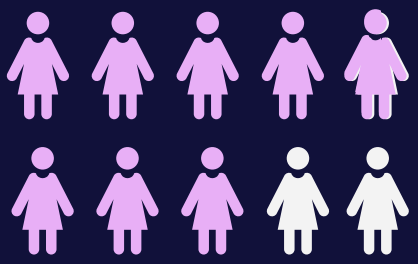
This same survey found that 60% of women say they receive emotional support from their friends.

Overall, our research finds that women who have:

- more friends
- greater friendship satisfaction
- greater emotional support

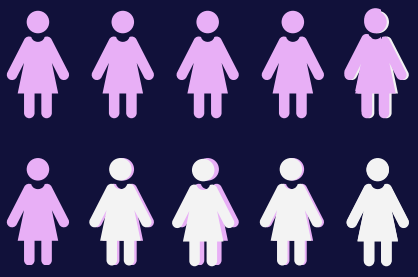
... are happier and healthier than women who have fewer friends, less friendship satisfaction, and enjoy less emotional support from friends.

80% of women report having "a few or more" *close* friends



Women's Relational Health Institute 2025 Women's Connection Survey

60% of women report receiving adequate emotional support from their female friends



Women's Relational Health Institute 2025 Women's Connection Survey

Women's Relational Health: Personal Friendships

Institute Predictions for 2025

With a growing interest global interest in wellness and connection, there will be increased attention directed toward navigating the complexities of female friendships. Based on trending social content, therapist insights, and emerging data, we have the following predictions for this new year:

- Focus on friendship wellness; with loneliness being labeled a public health concern, we expect more emphasis on cultivating meaningful friendships
- An influx of women seeking support for relational trauma and learning how to create healthier boundaries
- Increased breakups in misaligned relationships; as people prioritize mental well-being, they'll be more likely to end relationships that don't align with their values
- Focus on the mental health repercussions of friendship breakdowns, which are often underrepresented in mainstream conversations about grief (ambiguous grief)

Women's Relational Health: Women's Organizations

Data & Analysis

Women's organizations – specifically sororities – work to create an environment where their members feel seen and supported. This is especially critical as the Foundation For Fraternal Excellence 2025 Women's Report finds that the top three reasons women will leave an organization are:

- Not feeling connected to other members
- The emergence of social hierarchies/ cliques
- Disapproval of leadership

This is consistent with research that finds that men often prioritize status of membership over relationships within the organization; women are the opposite, prioritizing relationships within the organization over the status over the organization itself. (Source)

Anxiety may account for some women's decision to leave an organization– at least for Gen Z. The 2024 Amplify Sorority Report finds that 65% of Gen Z women who are interested in college describe themselves as loyal but 44% describe themselves as anxious.

This anxiety might drive an expectation of instant depth and connection, but when this doesn't happen, it can be discouraging.

Women's Relational Health: Women's Organizations (cont'd)

Data & Analysis

"Working with sorority chapters and communities across the country of various sizes and cultures, I see a common theme of comparison.

But I do see breakthroughs in comparison and competition [for] women who invest in deep individual relationships. "

-Cassie Little

Cassie Little is the founder of Her Sorority Journey, an organization that believes in the power of the sorority experience to develop strong leadership skills for college women.

Comparison can get in the way of women forming connections in women's organizations, but the spirit of competition dissipates when members connect with like-minded others in a more meaningful way.

Members of The Women's Relational Health Institute have seen many of these same issues and principles across various types of women's organizations: member associations, junior leagues, and other philanthropic, social, and professional groups.

When female-dominated groups are in place, it's important for leaders and organizers to be informed of the *unique* ways that women cooperate, communicate, and engage in conflict in order to build deep connections among the group.

Women's Relational Health: Women's Organizations

Institute Predictions for 2025

With a rise of community and wellness content, the Women's Relational Health Institute predicts that women's groups will:

- Re-evaluate "traditions", unproductive programming, and unrealistic member expectations as members begin to prioritize genuine connection and personal wellness.

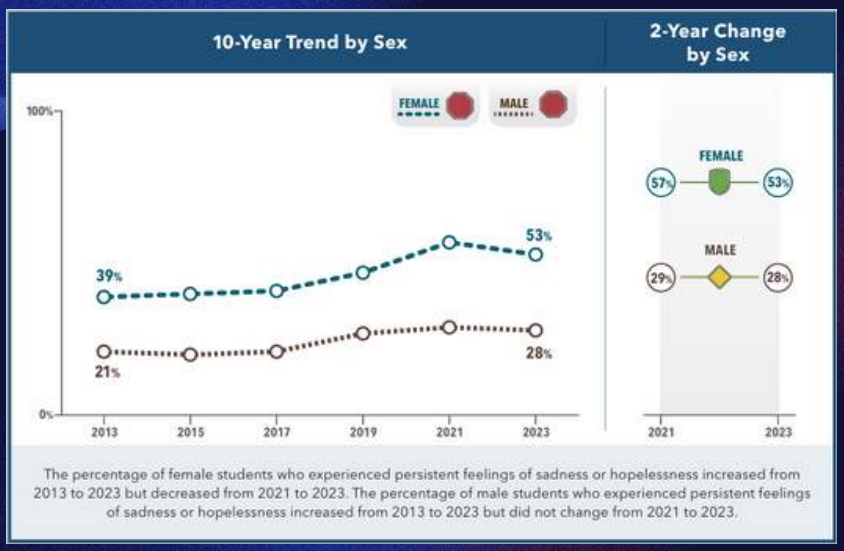
- Offer programming that develops its members personally, emotionally, relationally, or professionally. Without it, the organization risks members feeling disconnected from the experience... and opting out.

- Even if a woman's organization is professional in nature, members will prioritize opportunities to connect more deeply with other individuals, looking to the group to fulfill social needs that are likely going unmet in their personal lives.

Women's Relational Health: Teen Girls

Data & Analysis

The latest CDC Youth Risk Behavior report finds that there has been a slight decline in the number of teen girls who say they feel persistently lonely and hopeless. This is great news because feelings of connectedness and optimism inspire prosocial behaviors... which lead to the formation of more quality connections.



The percentage of female students who experienced persistent feelings of sadness or hopelessness increased from 2013 to 2023 but decreased from 2021 to 2023. The percentage of male students who experienced persistent feelings of sadness or hopelessness increased from 2013 to 2023 but did not change from 2021 to 2023.

But there has been a rise in anxiety and risk aversion among this group as well-- and it directly impacts young girls' relational resilience.

Forming friendships and navigating healthy conflict requires vulnerability, self-efficacy, and a strong sense of self. But these aspects of relational health are severely impacted by an unwillingness to take risks (vulnerability) or a tendency to succumb to negative self-criticism and comparison.

Many attribute this trend to social media use, and teachers have seen firsthand the ways that it impacts young girls' female friendships.

Nearly half of teens say they are online almost constantly, up from 24% a decade ago. This share has stayed consistent over the past few years. (Source)

Women's Relational Health: Teen Girls (cont'd)

Data & Analysis

But there are costs and benefits to teen girls' social media use. When they are facing struggles that feel unique and overwhelming, social media can show them they're not alone. It also helps them to explore who they are, share their voice, and connect with like-minded others.

But features like "likes" and "friending" can play a major role in their dopamine and reward cycle and can impact everything from a young women's self-esteem to her sleep patterns to her anxiety levels.

Miriam Tinberg is the co-founder and co-facilitator of the social club "Please, No Small Talk". Miriam's insights on social media culture have been highly sought after by companies like *The Atlantic* and Spotify.

As young women turn to social media for guidance on life and relationships, the posting and consumption culture might have a negative impact on their overall relational health.

"[The videos that are performing well on the algorithm are typically those that don't include much nuance.] The platforms attempt to "steal" our attention, but nuance requires slowness and thoughtfulness. Unfortunately, this is of course leading to more polarization and echo chambers. It's really unsettling."

-Miriam Tinberg

Women's Relational Health Teen Girls (cont'd)

Data & Analysis

"In my current school district, there's been an increase in the number of female students who prefer online school post Covid, because they experience a lot of social anxiety at school.

There's also been a rise in behavior problems, and I believe there's a connection."

-Sasha Fowler, M. Ed

Sasha Fowler, M.Ed is a high school teacher and founder of BLOOM Girls Club Inc, a nonprofit that provides young women with programming that centers around community-building, mentorship, and leadership development.

Young girls are a source of great emotional support for one another, but that connection often deteriorates under the strain of:

- Unresolved internal struggles with issues like insecurity, comparison, and low self-worth
- Friendship dissolution rooted in negative conflict from social media, including: feeling left out of social gatherings, perceiving social slights via post subtext, and friendship jealousy
- Lack of resources to navigate emotional distress

Women's Relational Health: Teen Girls

Institute Predictions for 2025

The Women's Relational Health Institute predicts that– i*f left unchecked*– high schools will continue to see issues with teen girls' absenteeism, disruptive behavior, and interpersonal conflict.

To prevent this, we believe that in 2025, schools will increasingly incorporate:

- Gender-specific mentorship programs in partnership with PhD students, nonprofits, and athletic organizations
- On-site "task forces" and PLC (professional learning communities) for teachers and staff looking for ways to support girls with encouragement and resources
- Programs and curriculum to support students' relational health and socio-emotional learning to offset the growing demand on school counselors and to equip students to manage emotional distress. These focus areas will likely include education and tools to help teen girls:
    - Identify and regulate emotions
    - Navigate tough conversations
    - Set boundaries and express needs
    - Demonstrate resilience after perceived rejection

Conclusion and Recommendations

The research presented in our outlook report is a combination of discoveries from our "Women's Relational Health Institute 2025 Women's Connection Survey" as well as expert observations and findings from multiple institutions that provide helpful insight into the state of women's relational health.

Across demographics and contexts, we are seeing a need for women to receive increased emotional support, be equipped with tools to manage emotional distress, and experience quality connections.

Key takeaways and recommendations

	Recommendations
1	IN HER WORKPLACE: If women have poor relationships with other women in the workplace, it impacts their sense of job satisfaction more than if they had poor relationships with their male counterparts. Teams will see improved retention, engagement and morale by incorporating knowledge of the unique ways that women cooperate, communicate, and engage in conflict.
2	IN HER PERSONAL LIFE: Women receive emotional support and platonic intimacy in their female friendships, but they often struggle to find ways to navigate healthy conflict in order to increase their relational satisfaction.
3	IN HER WOMEN'S ORGANIZATION: Re-evaluate "traditions" that don't provide personal or relational development, because women tend to prioritize *relationships* within an organization over the *status* of membership.
4	IN HER TEEN'S WORLD: Gender-specific mentorship programs and school curriculum should focus on offering tools for teen girls to manage emotional distress, comparison, and conflict resolution.

Next steps

The Women's Relational Health Institute is here to help.

ABOUT US

Our research finds that poor relational health for women in predominately female spaces leads to anxiety, low job satisfaction, and unhappiness. The Women's Relational Health Institute is the first organization offering specialized support in this area.

With evidence-based strategies, consulting, workshops, and certification programs, we exist to help those in leadership build stronger bonds between the women on their teams. Because not only does it lead to an overall lack of engagement, harmony, and retention, but it also impacts the ladies' individual wellbeing and sense of self.

[Learn more **here** or send us a message at team@womensrelationalhealthinstitute.com.

Certification

We offer exclusive programs for women who want to be certified as women's relational health coaches. Currently we are training professors, pastors, therapists, and life coaches who believe they'd benefit from knowing more research and strategies to help their female clients with issues of conflict and connection.

Consulting

Female-dominated organizations bring us in to train their leadership team on women's connection research, and then we customize strategies to build trust and connection among its members. This improves retention, morale, and engagement.

Speaking

Do you have an upcoming conference, summit, or team meeting where your audience would benefit from an engaging (and inspiring!) presentation highlighting the data from this report? We'll connect you with members from our team.

Workshops

We can work with your members to facilitate open discussions as they work to co-create individual and team plans that enhance their relational health. This can be customized for various ages, ethnicities, and industries.