

LAW FIRM EQUITY INITIATIVE

2021 Report

ENGAGE. INSPIRE. TRANSFORM.

Mission

The mission of the IWL at Marquette University is to advance women's leadership locally and globally through pioneering research, innovative programming, and collaborative engagement.

Vision

The vision of the IWL is one of intersectional inclusivity and gender equity. As advocates for justice, we will engage, inspire, and transform students, faculty, staff, and community leaders.

As part of our vision of intersectional inclusivity and gender equity, in 2020 IWL launched the Law Firm Gender Equity Initiative. The initiative seeks to understand gender inequity in legal leadership, form relationships with legal professionals, and create and implement a plan to address these inequities.

THE STUDY

Much like the efforts to track women on boards, this study first seeks to make transparent the number of women in leadership in the Milwaukee legal community. We hope to expand this initiative nationwide, demonstrating over time how transparency, candid conversations, and innovative reform can help Milwaukee become a leading city for female attorneys.

This report tracks the progress of women in the Milwaukee legal community. The study was sent to 49 law firms in the Milwaukee area who employed ten or more attorneys, including at least one female attorney. The data set reflects contributions from the 29 law firms that participated, a 59.2% response rate. Out of the 23 largest law firms in Milwaukee based on total number of local attorneys, 19 firms responded to the survey, and 2 of the next 5 largest law firms also responded.¹ Overall, 21 out of the 28 largest firms in Milwaukee responded to this year's survey, a 75% response rate. Many of these firms maintain offices located both in and outside of Milwaukee; however, the data collection focused solely on the firms' numbers at their Milwaukee office location. The survey asked a variety of questions about demographics at the firms, including progression, rank, and leadership roles.

1. Milwaukee Business Journal Report, 1/21/2021 at 24.

TOTAL REPRESENTATION

These 29 law firms are comprised of 1,108 attorneys. Based on those firms that provided information, 68.9% of attorneys are men, while just over 31.1% are women. For purposes of this study, small firms are those with 1-20 attorneys; medium firms are those with 21-60 attorneys; and large firms are those with 61 or more attorneys.

Representation Breakdown by Gender

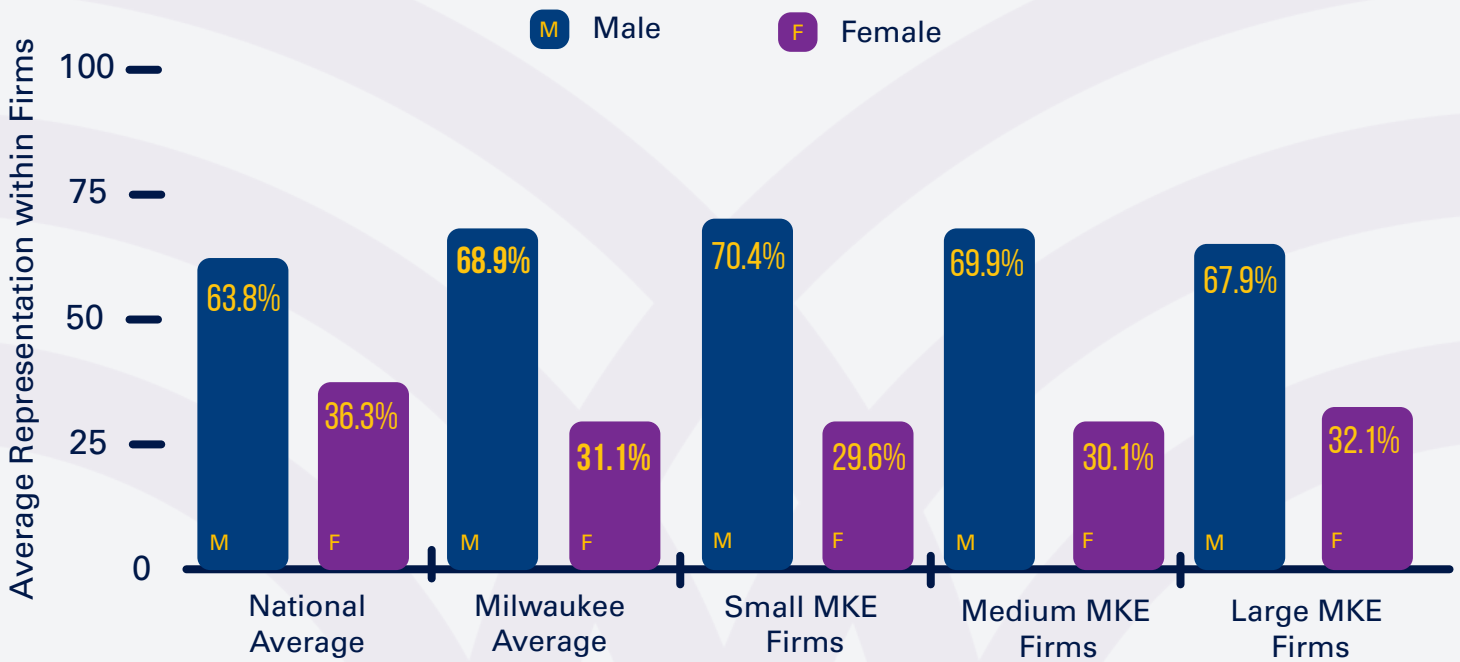


763 Male Attorneys



345 Female Attorneys

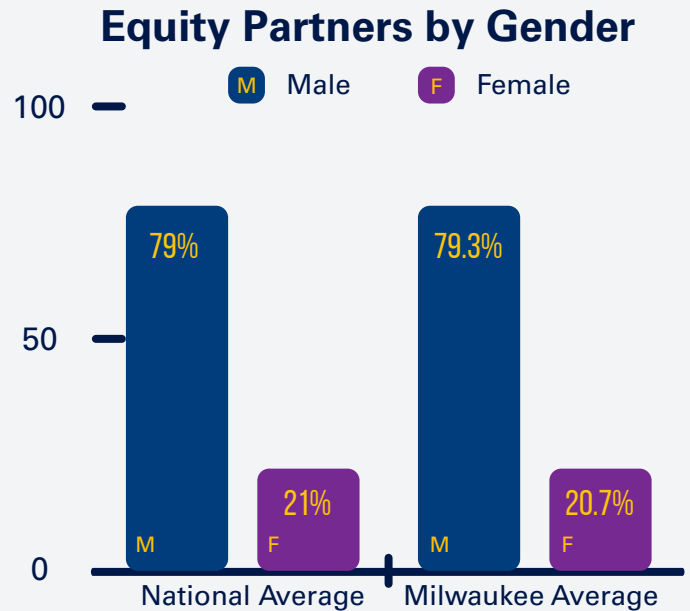
Average Representation by Gender in Firms



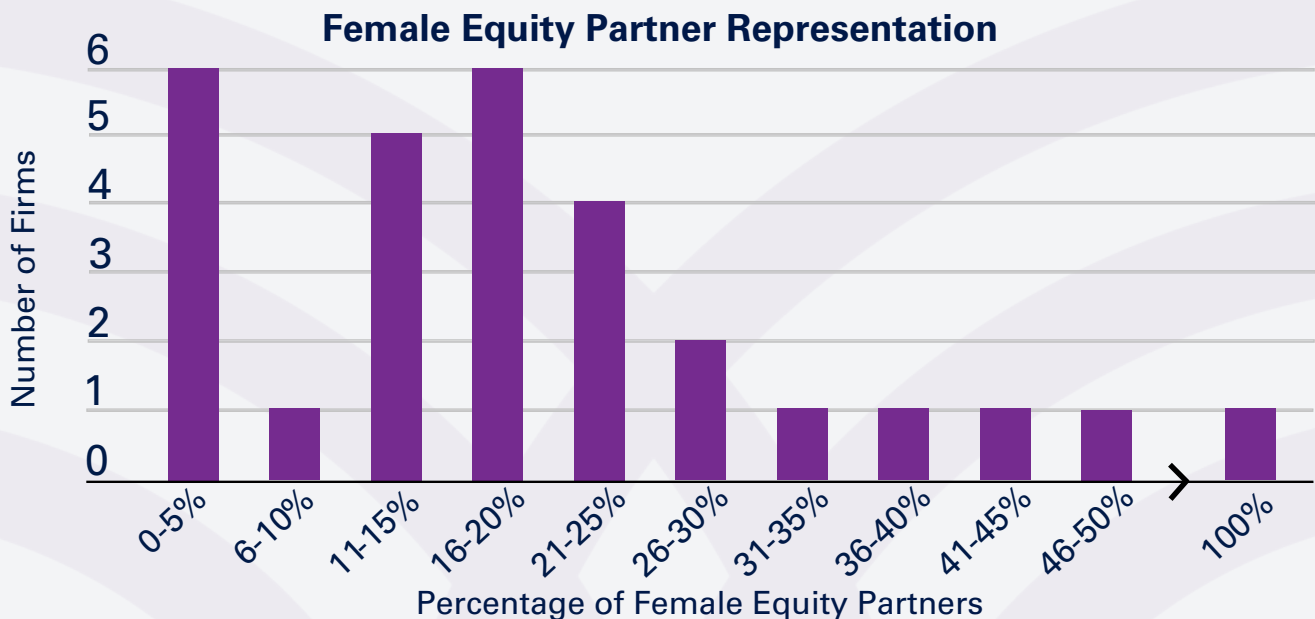
Representation Breakdown by Gender and Firm Size

EQUITY PARTNERS

IWL's findings on Milwaukee female equity partners mirror those of the National Association of Women Lawyers (NAWL), which in its most recent report found that women comprise 21% of all equity partners of all the law firms.² The average percentage of female equity partners in Milwaukee was 20.7%, and this number varied only slightly depending on law firm size, with small firms averaging 20.6%, medium firms averaging 21.1%, and large firms averaging 20.6%.



The graph below shows the number of firms falling in different percentages of female equity partners, demonstrating the variation among law firms in Milwaukee. While the Milwaukee average is approximately 20%, 12 of the 29 firms had less than 15%. On the other hand, 7 of the 29 firms exceed 25% of female equity partners.



The range in percentage of female equity partners also demonstrates the striking differences among firms. For small firms, the range in percentage of female equity partners was 0% to 100%. The range for medium firms was 0% to 44%. Large firms hewed closer to the national and city average, with the percent of equity partners that were female ranging from 10% to 23.5%.

2. NAWL 2020 report at 8.

WOMEN IN LEADERSHIP ROLES

Nationally, women make up 25% of practice group leaders.³ In Milwaukee, women account for a mere 10% of practice group leaders on average, and these figures vary only slightly depending on firm size. On a national scale, women make up 29% of compensation committees, whereas women represent 14% of compensation committee members on average in Milwaukee. Large law firms' compensation committees are on par with the national average (29%), while small and medium-size firms fall well below that rate (11%). Milwaukee hiring committees are comprised of the highest percentage of women, on average and across firm size, out of the leadership roles included in this survey. Overall, women make up 24% of hiring committees in Milwaukee firms. The percentage of women on hiring committees at large law firms (49%) more than double the percentage of women represented on hiring committees in small and medium-sized firms (17%). Finally, out of the 29 firms that responded to the survey, 8 of them had a female managing partner, firm president, or the equivalent in the last decade.

"We applaud Andrea and her team at Marquette for digging into the gender diversity data as understanding the data is a key step on the path forward. We were of course very pleased to learn of our positive results in the study as diversity in all its forms has been a focus for us at Godfrey & Kahn for a long time. And you can bet that it will continue to be a focus for us going forward as we are strong believers in the idea that the more diverse we are as firm, the stronger we become."

Nicholas P. Wahl
President & Managing Partner
Godfrey & Kahn

Percentage of Women in Leadership Roles by Firm Size

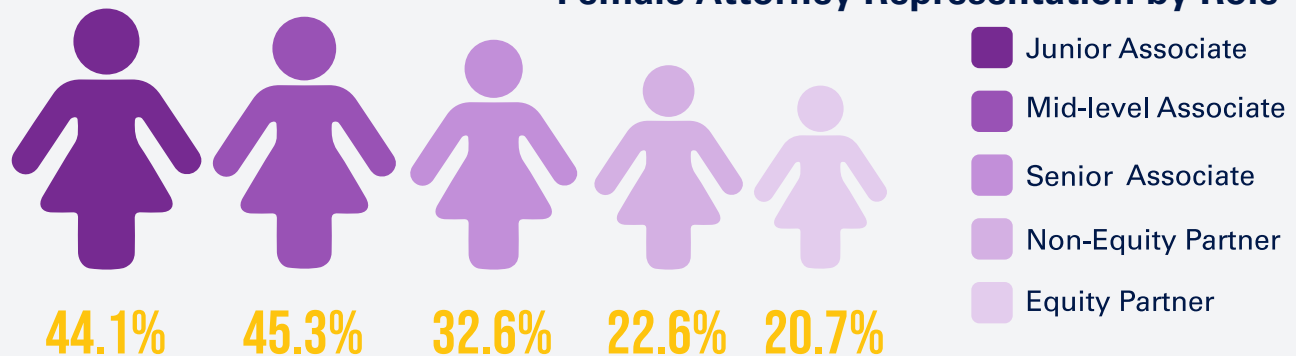


3. NAWL 2020 report at 9.

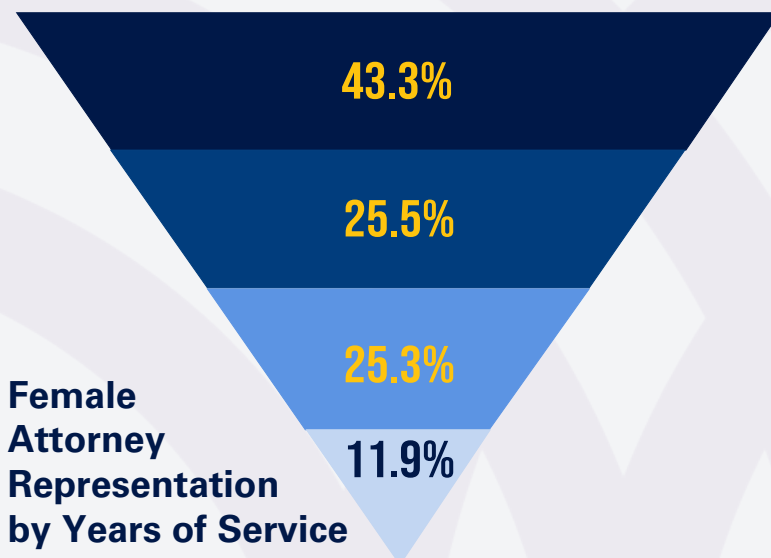
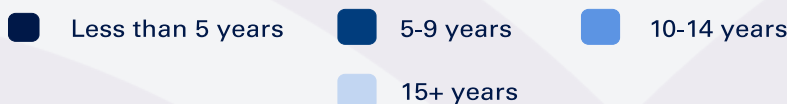
CAREER PROGRESSION

As the graphic below depicts, the number of women attorneys at Milwaukee firms from junior associate to equity partner decreases as the rank increases. On average, women account for 44.1% of junior associates at Milwaukee firms. The higher the rank, the lower the percentage of female attorneys, as women make up an average of 45.3% of mid-level associates and only 32.6% of senior associates. The number decreases further as women comprise 22.6% of non-equity partners and 20.7% of equity partners.

Female Attorney Representation by Role



Examining the progression of tenure instead of position reflects a similar story. Of the attorneys in Milwaukee that have been at a law firm for less than 5 years, women are 43.3%. The percentage of female attorneys drops as the number of years increases, as the graphic below shows. The percentage of women at a firm for 5-9 years and 10-14 years is virtually the same at 25.5% and 25.3% respectively. However, the percentage of female attorneys who stay at the same firm for over 15 years plummets to 11.9%.



"I believe our achievement [in retaining female attorneys] is in large part attributable to our firm's success in maintaining a top-notch reputation, while still promoting a family-friendly work environment in which all attorneys are given significant latitude and flexibility in their practice."

Oyvind Wistrom
Shareholder and President
of the Board of Directors of
Lindner & Marsack, S.C.

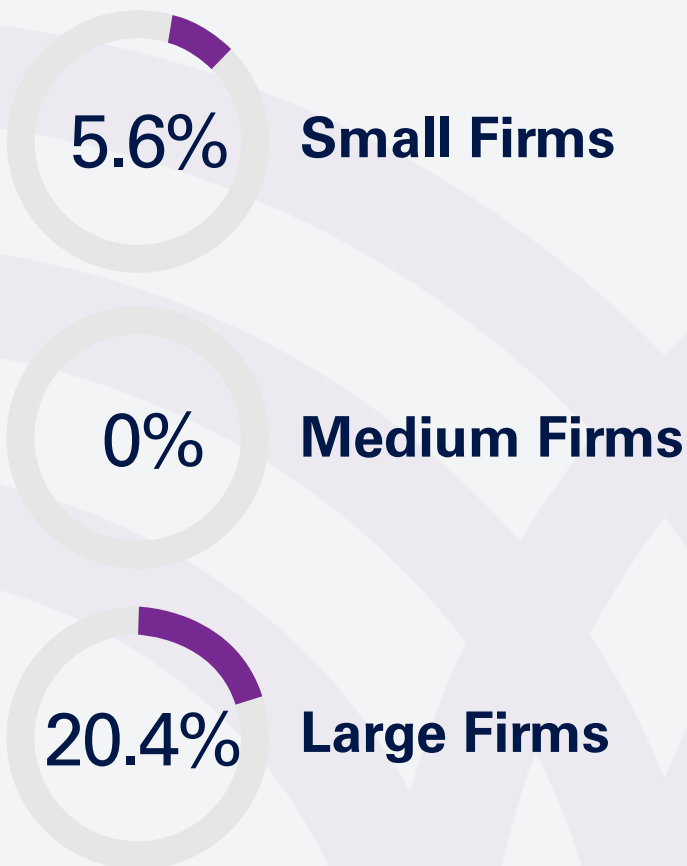
Interestingly, the range in percentage of female attorneys at the firm for 15+ years is quite large depending on firm size. The overall range is 0%-37.5%. Broken down even further, that range is 0%-18.2% for small firms, 0%-37.5% for medium firms, and 16.7%-31.9% for large firms.

WOMEN'S EARNINGS

Women in the Top 20% of Earning Partners

On average, women make up 7.1% of the top fifth of earners at Milwaukee firms. Below, the data has been further broken down by firm size. A majority of the firms (68.9%) do not have any women considered to be top fifth of earners. Among those that do, there are no more than three women who fall into that category.

Attorney Representation Amongst Top Earners



“Opportunities for advancement have direct impact on compensation. The gender pay gap is real and it’s wrong. For that to change we need women in positions of influence so we can affect positive change and get to a place of equality in the workplace. I’m thrilled to work for a firm filled with strong, intelligent, and hardworking women.”

Holly R. Mullin
Managing Partner
Sterling Law Offices, S.C.

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