BUILDING ON BELONGING

NOMA NCARB

Impact of Family Status on Licensure

November 2026

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Impact of Family Status on Licensure

Overview

In September 2023, NCARB and NOMA released an action plan to address disparities on the path to licensure, following several years of research through our joint *Baseline on Belonging* study. As part of the action plan, NCARB and NOMA are conducting additional research that will inform efforts to increase accessibility on the path to licensure. This research included surveys focused on topics like early licensure awareness, firm support for the experience program, mentorship, and the impact of disabilities on licensure progress.

In March 2026, NCARB launched a survey exploring the impact that family status and dependent care have on candidates pursuing licensure. The survey results highlight several areas where firm culture, licensure support, and family status intersect, creating potential barriers to licensure for individuals who provide dependent care.

- **Many architecture firms don't provide benefits that would specifically support those with dependent care responsibilities.** Twenty-two percent of caregivers (those who provide care for an adult or minor dependent) indicated that their firm does not offer health insurance for dependents, and 23% said their firm does not offer any kind of parental leave. Additionally, caregivers were less likely to rate their firm's compensation and paid time off as above average compared to their peers.
- **Respondents with dependents were more likely to have difficulty balancing their personal and professional lives, leading to higher rates of burnout.** Caregivers—especially women caregivers—were significantly more likely than non-caregivers to take unpaid time off or reduce their hours in order to care for their or their dependents' needs. Caregivers were also more likely to disagree that it's easy for employees with dependents at their firm to balance personal and professional responsibilities. Ultimately, caregivers were more likely than non-caregivers to report that they were actively facing burnout—50% of women with dependents reported that they were currently facing burnout at the time of the survey.
- **While the majority of caregivers believed that family status didn't impact the licensure support their firm provided, they were also less likely than non-caregivers to receive all types of licensure support.** Just over a quarter (27%) of caregivers indicated that they believed their family status impacted the licensure support their firm was willing to provide. Caregivers were 12 percentage points less likely than respondents without dependents to say they received access to all areas of the AXP, 12 percentage points less likely to say they received paid time off to take the exam, and 11 percentage points less likely to say they received financial support for exam fees.

- **Ultimately, caregivers were more likely to report challenges related to advancing in the workplace and progressing along the path to licensure.** Likely a result of compounding stressors around licensure support, firm culture, and dependent care responsibilities, 85% of caregivers reported feeling torn between pursuing licensure goals and caring for their families. Additionally, caregivers were 8 percentage points less likely to agree that family status did not impact promotion opportunities at their firm, and 6 percentage points less likely to agree that family status didn't impact access to career development opportunities.
- **While less likely to report issues related to career development or licensure progress, non-caregivers were slightly more likely to believe scheduling and time off were impacted by family status.** Women without dependents were the most likely to believe that family status was a factor when scheduling time off, as well as the most likely to report that employees at their firm were expected to work during time off.

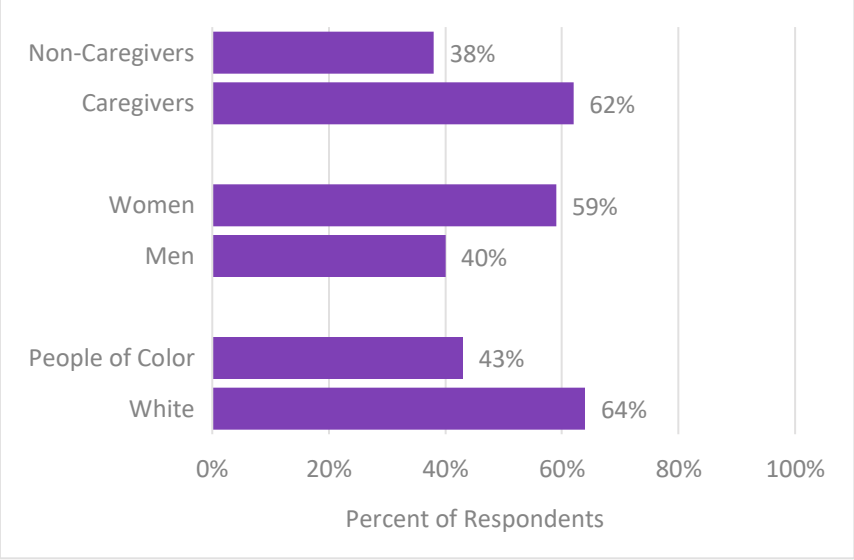
SURVEY STRUCTURE

The survey included questions about the benefits offered by respondents' employers, the intersection of firm culture and family status, and overall work/life balance. In addition, the survey asked questions about the impact of family status on licensure support, as well as the ability of respondents with dependents to pursue their licensure goals.

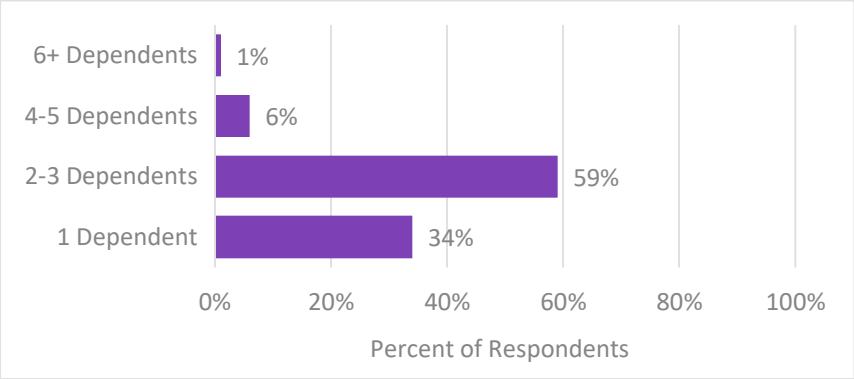
RESPONDENTS

The survey was shared primarily with licensure candidates, architects licensed within the last three years, and individuals who stopped pursuing licensure within the last three years.

There were 1,829 total respondents, with strong representation across demographic groups. Forty-three percent of respondents were people of color, and 64% of respondents were white. Note: Some respondents belong to multiple racial or ethnic categories.



Women made up a majority of survey respondents at 59%, and men made up 40%. Note: Approximately 1% of survey respondents identified as nonbinary, which is below NCARB's threshold for minimum sample size (30 individuals). Over 88% of the respondents were actively pursuing licensure.

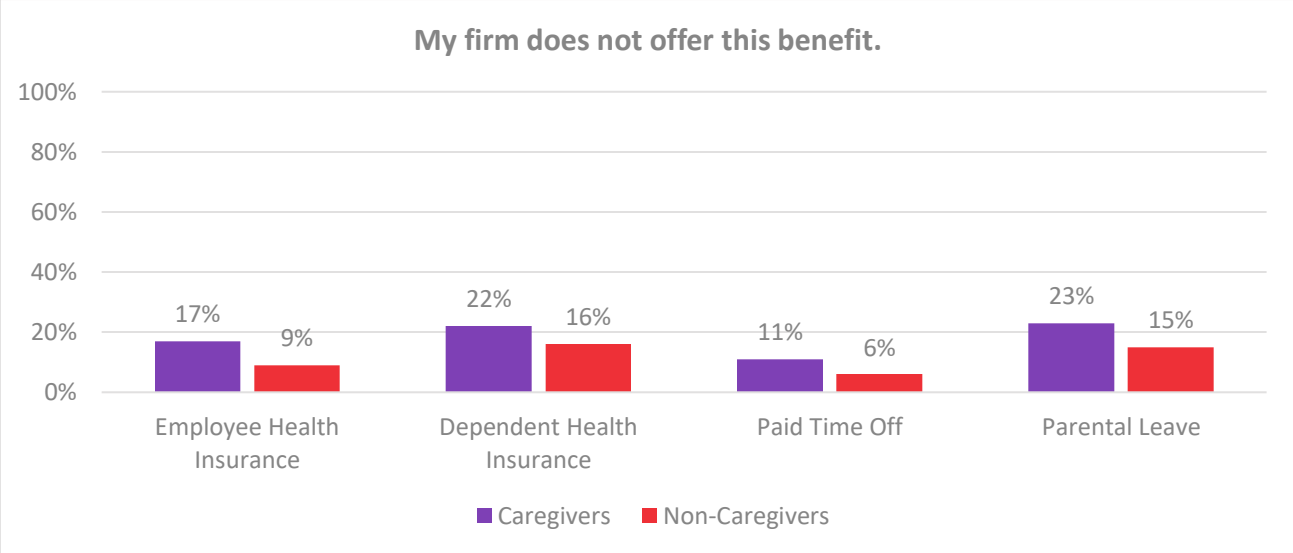


More than 60% of respondents indicated they provided care to one or more dependents, whether adult or child. Of those with dependents, 59% reported providing care to 2-3 dependents, and 34% provided care to one dependent. The remaining 7% had 4 or more dependents.

Most (82%) caregivers identified themselves as primary caregiver to their dependents, with women more likely than men to identify as the primary caregiver (87% and 77%, respectively). Eighty-six percent of caregivers were married or in a long-term partnership, compared to 56% of non-caregivers.

Firm Benefits

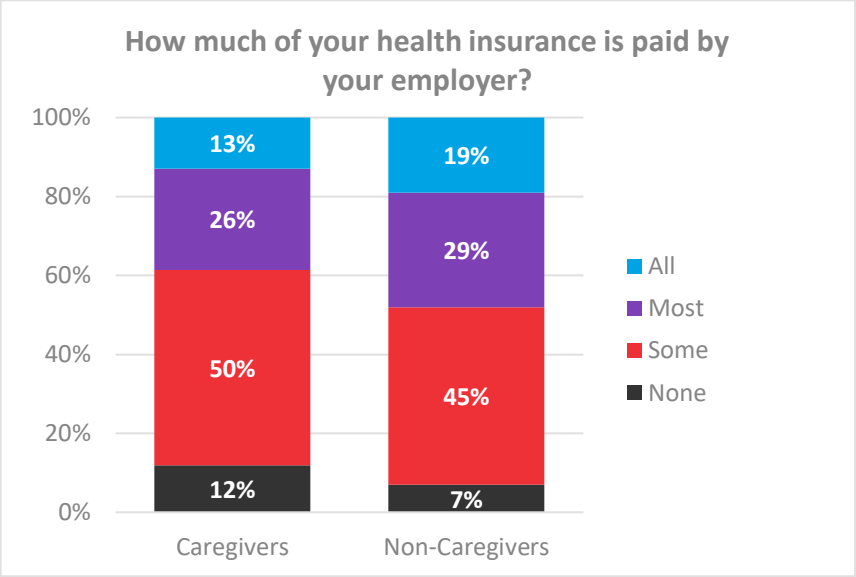
The survey asked respondents to rate their employer's compensation and benefits, ranging from employee health insurance to parental leave. While the majority of respondents rated each item as average or above average, a significant number of respondents noted that their employer did not provide basic benefits. This was especially true for benefits that would support employees with dependent care responsibilities.

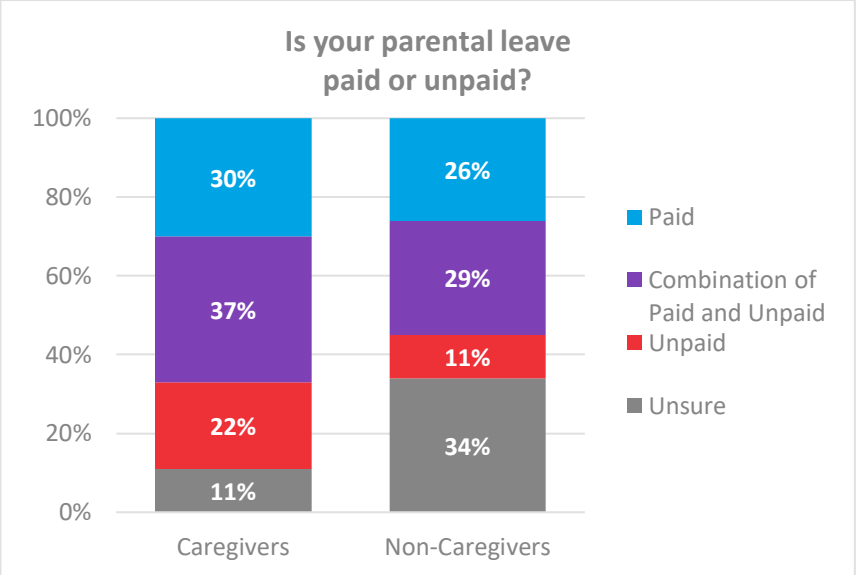


Respondents with dependents were more likely than non-caregivers to report that their employer did not provide all types of benefits, including dependent health insurance, paid time off, and parental leave.

When asked to rate their firm's employee health insurance, 14% of all respondents noted that their firm did not provide health insurance—including 17% of caregivers and 9% of non-caregivers. A larger proportion of respondents reported that their firm didn't offer dependent health insurance, including 22% of caregivers and 16% of non-caregivers.

When rating their firm's paid time off, 11% of caregivers indicated their firm doesn't offer this benefit, compared to just 6% of non-caregivers. Additionally, 23% of caregivers and 15% of non-caregivers reported that their firm doesn't offer any kind of parental leave (including paid or unpaid).





> ***"Paternity leave is only two weeks. This is not enough time to assist a mother to care for a baby and allow her to recover from giving birth. It is also not enough time to help a mother manage daily tasks."***
>
> —Man with dependents

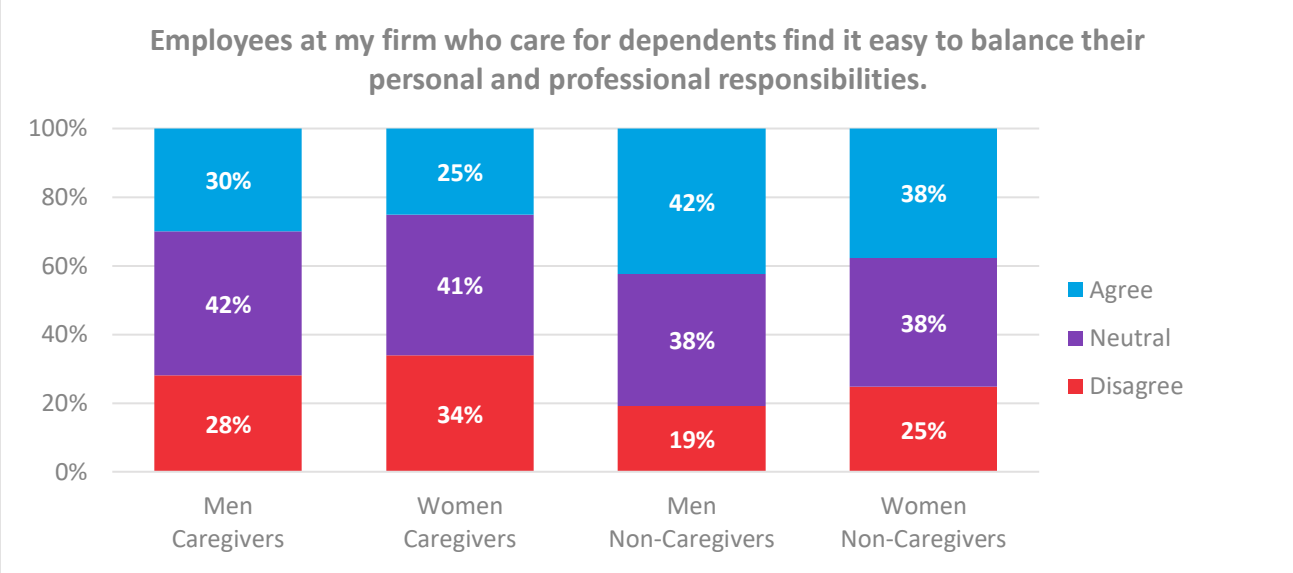
Respondents whose employers provide employee health insurance or parental leave were asked to indicate what portion of each was paid by the employer. Again, caregivers were more likely to report that their firm paid none of their health insurance (12% of caregivers vs. 7% of non-caregivers), and significantly more likely to report that their firm paid none of their parental leave (22% of caregivers vs. 11% of non-caregivers). However, more than a third of non-caregivers were unsure about their firm's parental leave offerings. Less than a third (28%) of all respondents reported that their firm paid for employees' full parental leave.

When asked to rate their pay and compensation, caregivers were less likely to select above average compared to their non-caregiver peers (14% vs. 19%), and slightly less likely to rate their firm's paid time off as above average (17% vs. 19%).

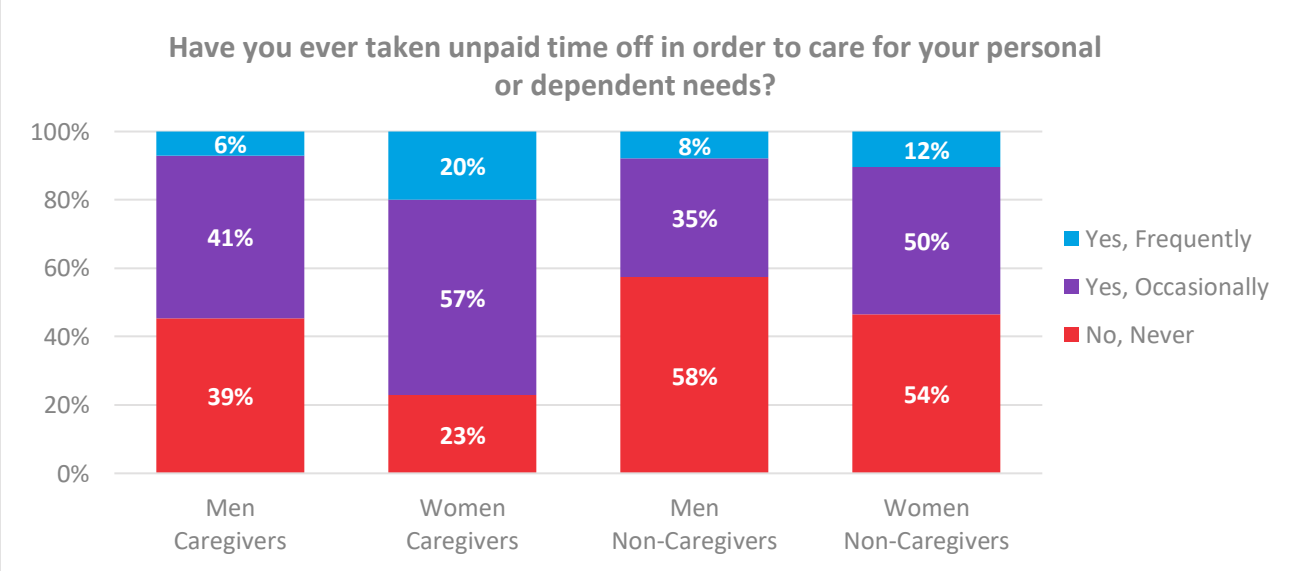
Together, these data points highlight that for many caregivers, challenges based on family status begin at a foundational level: What benefits are their employers willing (or able) to offer?

Work/Life Balance

The survey included several questions around respondents' work/life balance, including topics like balancing personal and professional responsibilities, taking unpaid time off, and facing burnout. **The results revealed that caregivers, especially women, were more likely than non-caregivers to face challenges balancing their personal and professional lives, ultimately leading to higher rates of burnout.** At the time of the survey, 50% of women with dependents reported that they were actively experiencing burnout, compared to 32% of men without dependents.

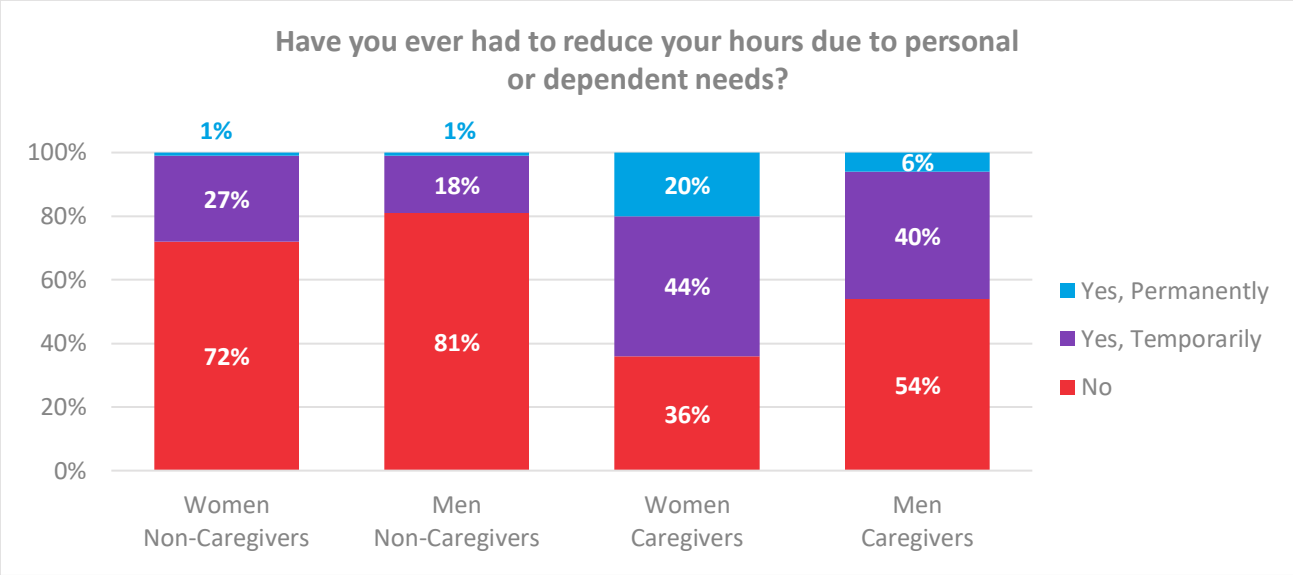


When asked to rate their agreement with the statement: "Employees at my firm who care for dependents find it easy to balance their personal and professional responsibilities," 29% of all respondents disagreed. However, breaking this down by gender and caregiver status revealed a significant difference in opinion, with only 19% of men who aren't caregivers agreeing, compared to 34% of women who are caregivers.



Women with dependents were also more likely to report having to take unpaid time off or reduce hours in order to care for their personal dependent needs.

Nearly 60% of men who are not caregivers and 39% of men who are caregivers reported that they'd never had to take unpaid time off to care for personal or dependent needs—compared to just 23% of women who are caregivers. One in every five women caregivers reported having to *frequently* take unpaid time off, nearly double the proportion of men caregivers.



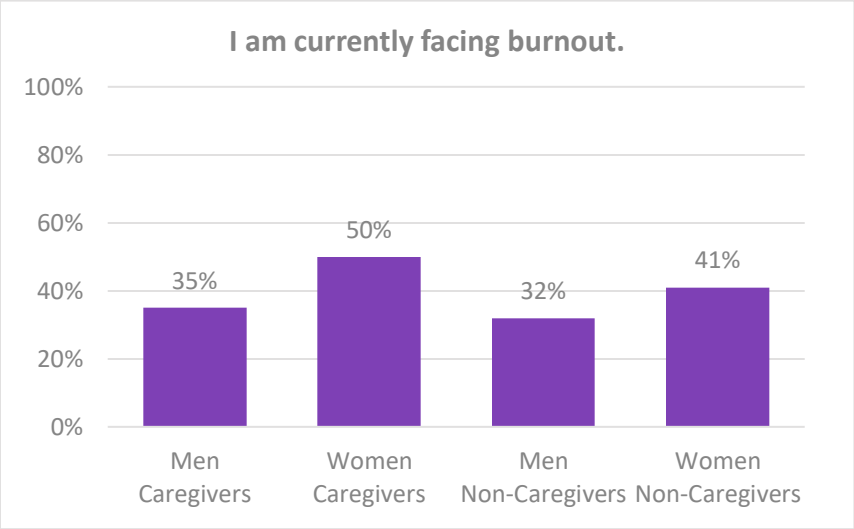
Nearly two-thirds (64%) of women who are caregivers reported having to permanently or temporarily reduce their hours due to personal or dependent care needs—compared to just 19% of men who were not caregivers, 28% of women who were not caregivers, and 46% of men who were caregivers.

When viewed together, these findings suggest that while men with dependents are sometime faced with choosing between maintaining their professional or private life, this burden far more frequently falls on women with dependents.

Respondents were also asked if they'd ever faced burnout due to the pressure of their personal and professional responsibilities. Only 9% of all respondents reported that they had never faced burnout, with the majority of respondents reporting that they were either currently and/or had previously faced burnout.

> ***"Although our firm does offer flexibility for working parents, it is difficult to balance working full time with all the demands of being a client leader, studio leader, etc., and dependent children in school and multiple activities."***
>
> —Woman with dependents

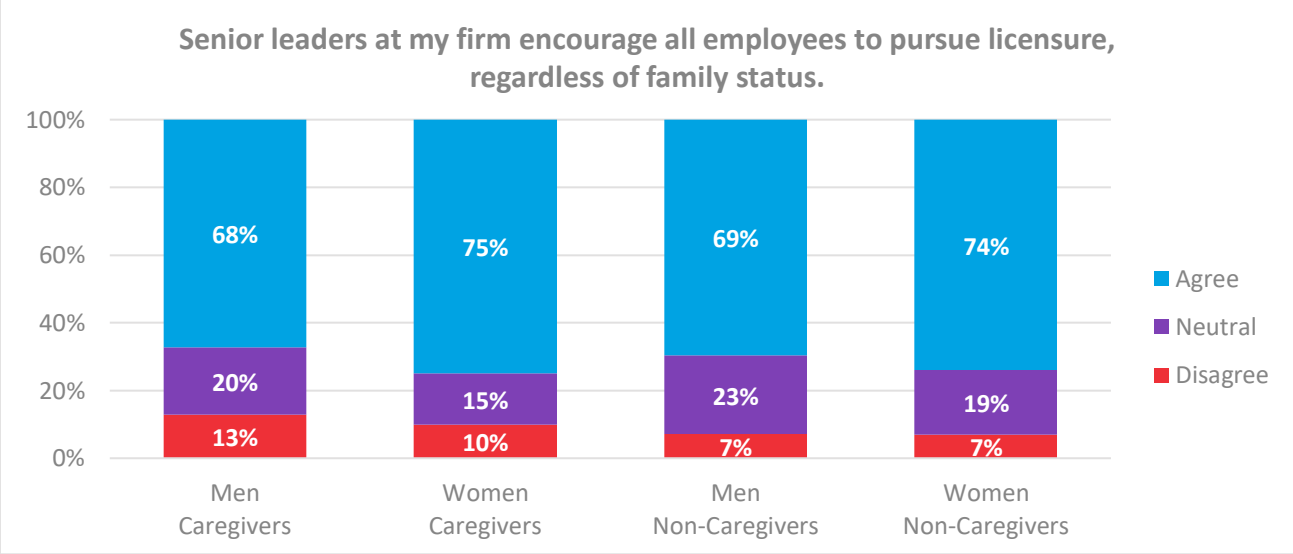
While 60% of all respondents reported facing burnout at some point in the past, 41% were experiencing burnout at the time of the survey—including 50% of women with dependents. This is 18 percentage points higher than men without dependents. Ultimately, this highlights that while burnout rates are high across the architecture industry, they are especially high for women who provide care for their dependents.



> ***"The workload is not balanced with caretaker responsibilities. If financially you can't cut yours down, parents end up working after dinner most days, leading to burnout and absolutely no time for pursuing licensure."***
>
> —Woman with dependents

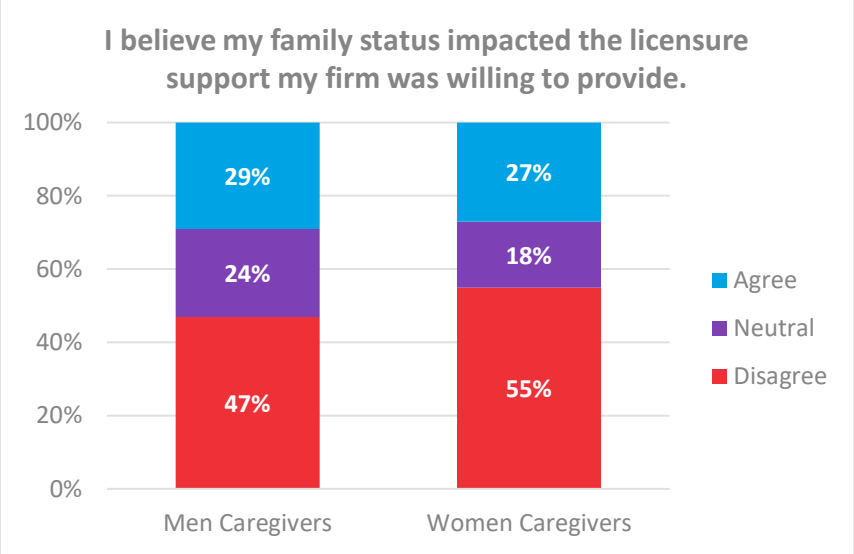
Licensure Support

The survey also explored the type of licensure support provided by firms, as well as whether respondents generally felt their firm's licensure support was impacted by family status. While the majority of caregivers (51%) did not believe that their firm's licensure support was affected by family status, the **survey results show that caregivers were less likely to receive all types of licensure support.** This includes access to the variety of experience areas needed to complete the AXP, financial support for the exam, and more.



When asked to rate their agreement with the statement: "Senior leaders at my firm encourage all employees to pursue licensure, regardless of family status," the majority of respondents—regardless of gender or caregiver status—agreed.

Men who are caregivers were slightly more likely to disagree (13%) compared to women who were caregivers (10%) and non-caregivers (7% for both men and women).

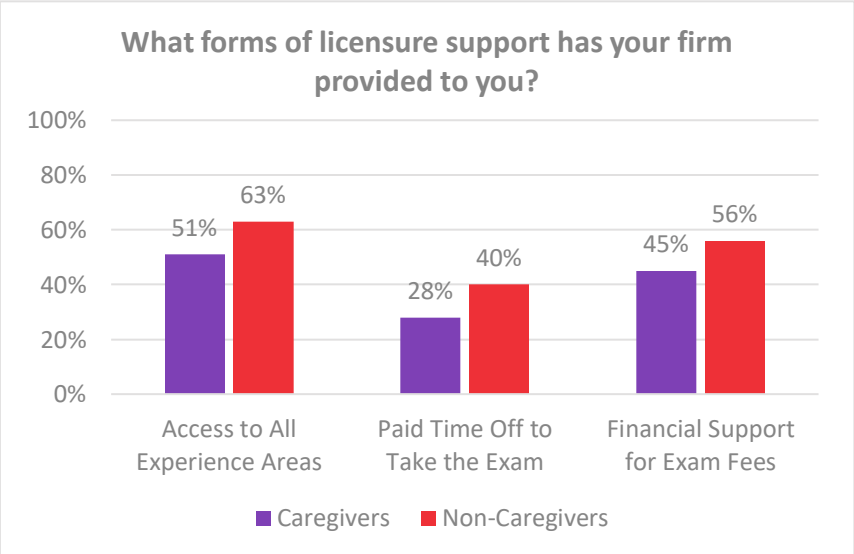


"I don't think family status has hindered my development, but more so the length of time it would take me to get to licensure due to family responsibilities and amount of required study time."

—Man with dependents

When asked if their family status impacted the licensure support their firm was willing to provide, men caregivers were slightly more likely than women caregivers to indicate they believed it *had* had an impact. However, less than a third of both men and women with dependents felt their family status affected their firm's licensure support.

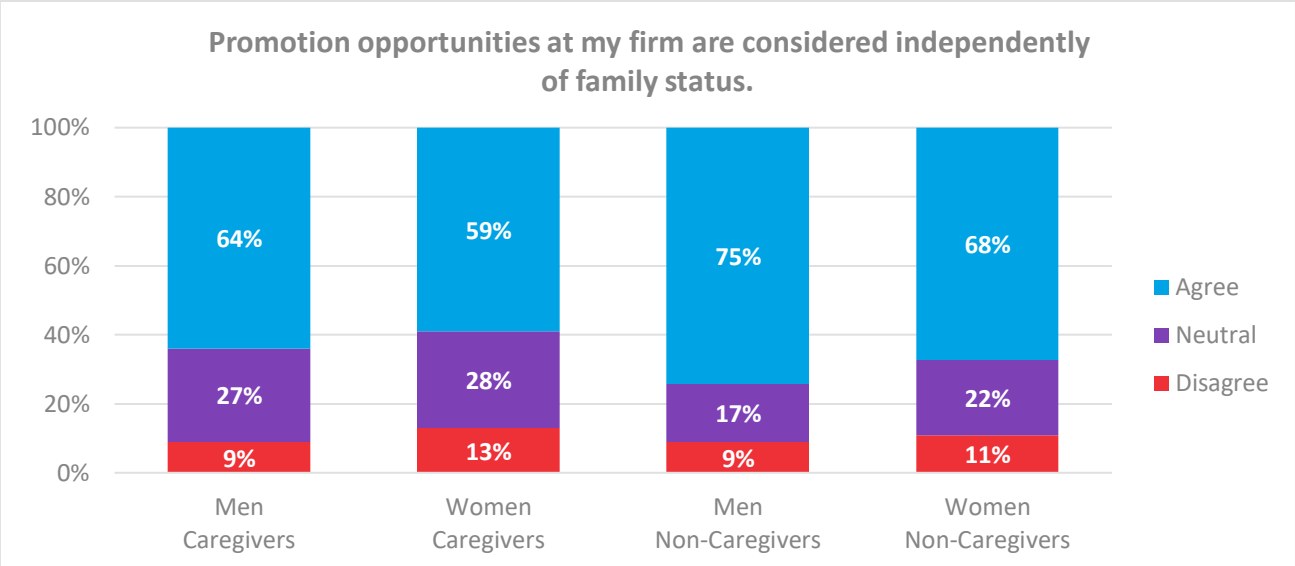
When asked to select the types of licensure support they received from their firm, caregivers were less likely to report receiving all types of licensure support compared to their non-caregiver peers. This disparity was especially true when it came to receiving access to all experience areas needed to complete the AXP, paid time off to take the exam, and financial support for exam fees.



Caregivers were 12 percentage points less likely than non-caregivers to say they received access to all areas of experience needed to complete the AXP, 12 percentage points less likely to say they received paid time off to take the exam, and 11 percentage points less likely to say they received financial support for exam fees. This disparity was similar regardless of gender.

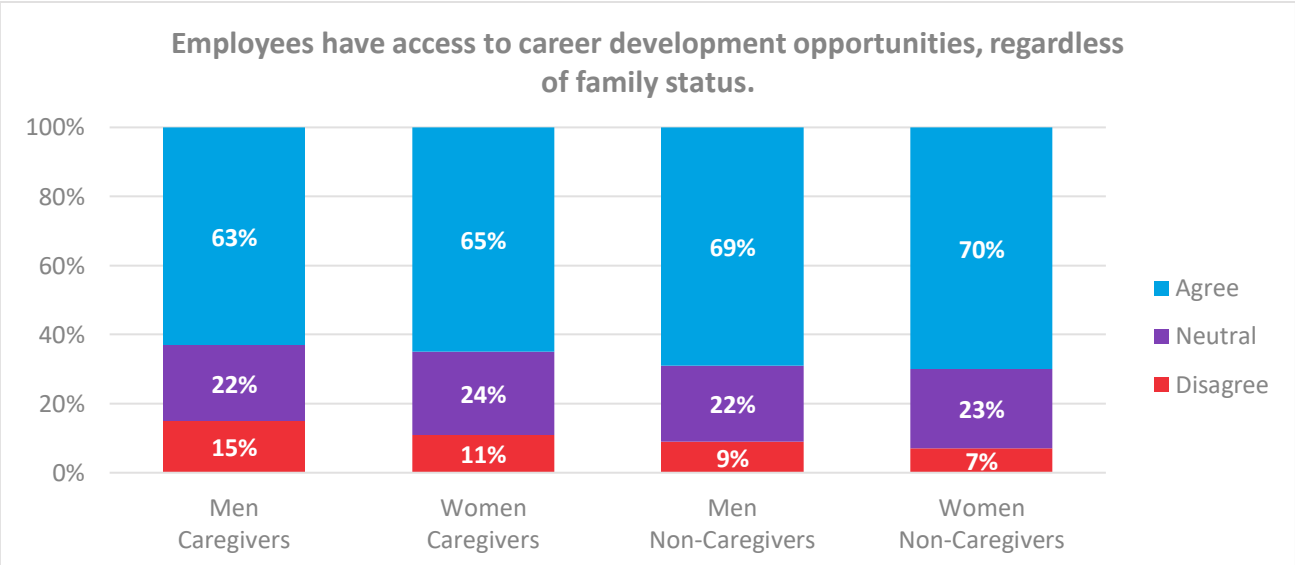
Professional Advancement

The survey included several questions designed to gather insight into respondents' career advancement, including licensure progress. **Caregivers were more likely than non-caregivers to report that family status impacted promotion and career development opportunities at their firm.** Likely a result of compounding stressors around licensure support, firm culture, and dependent care responsibilities, 85% of caregivers reported feeling torn between pursuing licensure goals and caring for their families.



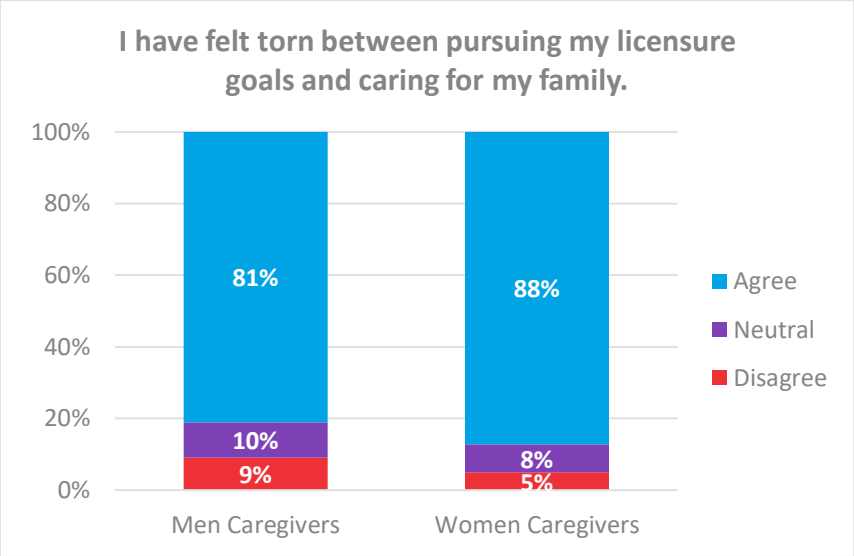
When asked to rate their agreement with the statement: "Promotion opportunities at my firm are considered independently of family status," women and men with dependents were both less likely to agree compared to women and men without dependents.

Overall, women with dependents were slightly more likely to disagree compared to their peers (13% of women with dependents vs. 9% of men without dependents).



Similarly, when asked to rate their agreement with the statement: "Employees have access to career development opportunities, regardless of family status," men and women with dependents were less likely to agree than those without. However, in this instance, men with dependents were the most likely to disagree at 15%, compared to 7% of women without dependents, 9% of men without dependents, and 11% of women with dependents.

In responses to open text questions, many caregivers indicated that they either couldn't balance family responsibilities with career advancement opportunities or that their firm perceived employees with dependents as less dedicated. However, it's worth noting that some respondents reported seeing an opposing bias that favored employees with dependents, with one respondent reporting, "Married parents in my office are usually given more promotions as they are perceived [as] more stable."



"Opportunities existed; however, due to family commitments, I could not meet the demands that the company put on me in order to take advantage of such opportunities, so I was overlooked and passed on."

—Woman with dependents

When asked if they felt torn between pursuing licensure goals and caring for their family, 85% of respondents with dependents indicated that they had. Women were 7 percentage points more likely to agree than men (88% of women compared to 81% of men).

Women were also slightly more likely than men to feel that their dependent care responsibilities impacted their ability to:

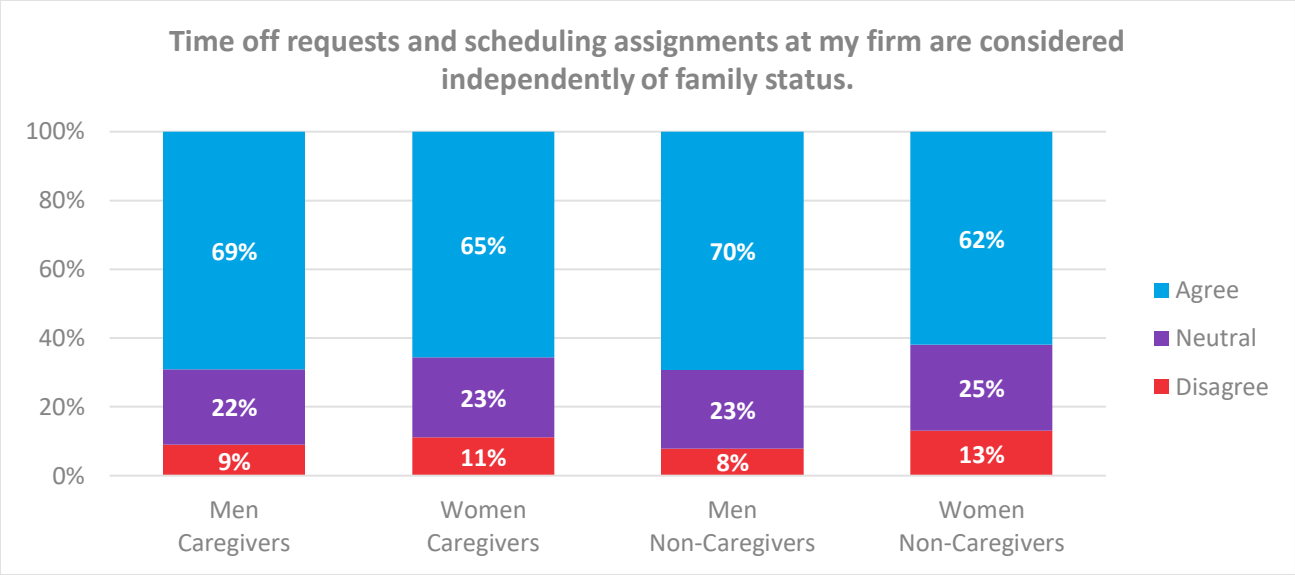
- Gain experience in all areas of the AXP (49% of women vs. 47% of men)
- Schedule exam appointments (78% of women vs. 69% of men)
- Prepare for the exam (94% of women vs. 88% of men)

"I completed my AXP hours before having a baby. Now that I have a child, I either have to choose spending time with my baby or studying for the ARE."

—Woman with dependents

Scheduling and Time Off

While respondents with dependents were generally more likely to report challenges throughout the survey, **there were a few areas where those without dependents had a more negative experience—specifically regarding scheduling and time off.** Women who aren't caregivers were the most likely to believe that family status was a factor when scheduling time off, and the most likely to report that employees at their firm were expected to work during time off.



When asked to rate their agreement with the statement: "Time off requests and scheduling assignments at my firm are considered independently of family status," women without dependents were the most likely to disagree at 13%.

Similarly, when rating their agreement with the statement "Employees at my firm are not expected to work when taking paid time off," women without dependents were 6 percentage points more likely to disagree compared to their male peers (both with and without dependents).

Many open text responses from both men and women without dependents highlighted firms' reliance on employees without dependents, especially when it came to working late hours.

> ***"Senior management tends to prioritize strict working hours for those with children and more overtime for those without."***
>
> —Woman without dependents

Next Steps

Overall, the findings from this survey reveal a variety of challenges faced by individuals with dependents working in architecture—particularly those who are actively working toward licensure while caring for dependents. In recent years, NCARB has adjusted several policies within key programs to improve accessibility, including retiring the exam's rolling clock policy and adjusting the experience program's reporting requirement to allow experience older than five years. Both of these previous policies were mentioned throughout survey responses as having especially impacted respondents with dependents.

As NCARB continues to re-envision the process of becoming an architect through our Pathways to Practice effort, we aim to ensure the path to licensure is accessible for individuals of all career and family backgrounds. The findings from this survey will help inform NCARB's work to develop programmatic requirements and policies in the years ahead.