

# UWM study explores why women leave engineering careers

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While only one in 10 male engineers leave their field by the time they reach their 30s, about one in four women are not working in engineering despite having completed the necessary education.

A study getting under way at the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee (UWM) will explore the reasons for the relatively large gap between the number of women who obtain engineering degrees but leave the field or never enter, and those who pursue careers and remain.

Most of the research on effective interventions for women in engineering has focused on increasing women's choice of engineering as a major, says Nadya Fouad, UWM Distinguished Professor of [Educational Psychology](#). "But now that more women are completing degrees in the field, an equally important issue concerns retention," she says.

POWER (Project on Women Engineers' Retention) is an [online survey](#) of women alumni from more than 30 universities that have awarded the most bachelor's degrees in engineering to women ([www.nsfpower.org](http://www.nsfpower.org)).

But the survey is open to all women who have completed at least a bachelor's degree in engineering, whether or not they have worked as engineers.

This is the first systematic study of women's retention in engineering, says Fouad. She and co-author Romila Singh, UWM assistant professor

of business, will investigate three areas of self-confidence - engineering tasks, work/family balance and workplace climate - for women in different stages of their careers (5, 10, 15 and 20 years post-graduation).

The study is supported by a half-million-dollar grant from the National Science Foundation. NSF also funded a previous study by a team of vocational psychologists, including Fouad, that identified factors that steer girls toward or away from math and science in middle and high school.

Findings of the engineering study will be used to design and implement effective policies or interventions to help increase the retention of women in engineering careers.

"If we are better able to understand the factors influencing career decisions among these [women](#), we'll be better able to support their careers," says Fouad.

The POWER survey asks participants about their workplace, their thoughts about their careers, their efforts to balance work and nonwork activities, and several other topics. It takes about 30 minutes, and respondents can complete it all at once or come back to the Website later to finish.

Source: University of Wisconsin - Milwaukee

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