**Gender Inequality**



**WALT: What is the relationship between gender and inequality?**

* There are gender differences in life chances in the UK.
* In the domestic sphere, women are often given more rights and legal considerations, but in the economic sphere, women are disadvantaged.
* Women are setting up challenges to male domination and many argue that they are now equal with men.
* There are others who believe that the social changes are more cosmetic than deeply embedded into our social structure.

Key questions

(AO1) What evidence is there of gender inequality in UK?

(AO1) How are gender inequalities being challenged by women themselves and by government policies?

(AO2) To what extent do men still dominate much of our culture?

(AO2) What are social implications of gender change in our society?

**Summary of Key Points**

The notion of sexism is a very recent idea in our society. The idea that men were superior to and different from women was so deeply ingrained into much thinking that most people never thought to question it. Throughout the history of ideas, female inferiority has been seen as the natural order of things. There were very few people who challenged this notion until the second half of the last century, in the 1960s and 1970s.

Even today, there are many psychologists and biologists who still believe that there are significant biological differences between the genders. Many of those also suggest that the male role is to be dominant over females. Steven Goldberg (1993) an American sociologist claims that male hormones push men towards world dominance and female hormones create a nurturing instinct in women. This is not a commonly held sociological view, but there are those who do support it. For example, in educational debates, there are still many people who believe that the genders should be educated separately because males and females learn in different ways. Feminists have challenged this type of thinking arguing that it is used as a justification for social injustice. The famous Australian sociologist, Bob Connell has claimed that the differences between male and female psychology and biology are very over-stated. Individual differences are far more significant than whole gender differences.

Misogyny is a term used to describe the fear and hatred that some males have for women. Germaine Greer, a radical feminist, argues that society is misogynistic. Sexism refers to an argument that suggests the biological differences between males and females can be used to justify the unequal and unfair treatment of one gender over another. Another less frequently used term which means something similar is male chauvinism. This term was used in the 1970s to describe the male assumption of superiority that was common at that time. Sexual discrimination is a more serious matter. This is when a person of one gender is favoured in terms of opportunity over another on gender grounds.

### *How are gender roles changing in our society?*

The expected behaviour of the genders has changed throughout the ages and varies from culture to culture. It also changes over time, so women were seen as passive in the 1950s but more active now.

Although working class women have always worked and often in large numbers, their work has generally been low paid and undervalued. Many women worked in factories in heavy industrial jobs until the Factory Acts of the early 1830s and 1840s made it illegal to employ women and children in this way. Women's work then became an extension of their domestic roles as cooks, cleaners and in childcare. Much work was as domestic labourers; women were used as servants and thus did not form part of employment statistics. Thus, although women have always been an important part of the labour force, it is not known in what numbers they worked or what conditions they worked in.

Middle class and wealthy women tended to have more freedom, as long as they did not marry and they had some disposable income of their own. They would not usually have been allowed or expected to have an education beyond that which was necessary to maintain a good conversation or to complete household tasks.

In Britain it was still perfectly legal to pay men more for doing the same work as women until the Equal Pay Act of 1970. The history of the last 40 years has seen an increase in legislation protecting women's rights.

It was not until the 1960s that married or middle class women began to move into the workforce in large numbers. There have been a variety of reasons to explain changes in the role of women in our society: changes in education, norms and values and contraception have all played their part. In addition, in the past, women were often expected to give up their jobs on marriage. However, despite the fact that women are now found in public life in ways that would have been unthinkable 100 years ago, many argue that there is still a long way to go before women can consider themselves the equals of men in our society. There are gaps in political representation; gender pay gaps are still high and women are more likely to live in poverty than men.

### *How equal are the genders in employment?*

Despite the fact that women are now part of the formal workforce in increasing numbers, they tend to be found in low pay sectors of employment (the four C's - cooking, cleaning, caring and check-outs). There are obvious differences in terms of pay and conditions for similar status work for the sexes. Nurses are expected to have university degrees. Yet their conditions of service and pay are significantly worse than for police officers who are traditionally male and for whom lower educational standards are required. The pay gap between doctors and nurses is very extreme.

Women are gradually making their way into the higher paid sectors of employment, but rarely rise to the top of those professions in any significant numbers. In addition, when professions do become feminised, such as teaching, there is often a loss of status and pay for the whole profession. Grimshaw and Rubery (EOC 2007) identified two elements of undervaluation: women tend to be paid less than men for the same performance in the same job and the jobs that they do tend to attract lower wages than men's jobs.

Overall, the pattern is one of gross inequality; according to research published in 1999, one woman in five earned less than £200 a week, compared with one man in 12. At the top of the earnings distribution, just 12 per cent of females made more than £500 a week compared with 27 per cent of males. And those in high-paid occupations were far less likely than their male counterparts to be paid the most. Among top doctors, for instance, 95 per cent of men earned more than £540 a week, a figure reached by only 64 per cent of the women. Although there are slight variations annually, this pattern has remained remarkably consistent over the past ten years.

The World Economic Forum on Women's Equality ranked Britain very low in terms of gender equality; it was the 13th out of 130 countries in 2008. The biggest contributing factor to Britain's declining performance was in the area of pay, with a 4% drop in wage equality. This is despite women generally scoring better than men in terms of educational attainment and educational records.

In 2006, the Equal Opportunities Commission showed that over the 30 years from 1976, there were a quarter of a million employment tribunal cases of sex discrimination with 67 000 related to equal pay. Record numbers of cases were filed after 2000. The EOC claims that many of the problems of gender equality remain. Examples in 2006 include the fact that women working part-time earn nearly 40 per cent less per hour than men working full-time and this has barely changed over the last thirty years. Four out of five part-time workers, mostly women, find themselves stuck in jobs below their potential partly due to the lack of flexible working at more senior levels. Nearly half of pregnant women experience some form of discrimination at work, and 30 000 are forced out of their jobs.

Women and men are protected by gender equality laws in work. The first UK laws relating to pay equality were enacted in the 1970s. Initially the laws tended to look at gender as being an issue for women, but now they protect people of any gender or sexual orientation so they have been broadened in scope. The Equal Opportunities Commission claimed that inequality laws are generally not effective because they are based on people bringing cases against their employers. This is both difficult and expensive. The average cost of legal advice and representation for individuals is £4400, while employers spend an average of £5800 on legal costs for their defence, not including staff time.

In addition, laws designed to give women legal rights during pregnancy and childbirth have been criticised as being counter-productive and restricting women's opportunities by women's organisations on the grounds that the focus on giving mothers rights, rather than giving parents of either gender legal rights. As a result, parenting is still seen as a feminine occupation, despite the fact that a person of either gender may choose to be the prime carer for small children. This keeps mothers out of promotion races and off the career ladder.

Catherine Hakim, a controversial sociologist, famed for rational choice theory has asked for gender neutral policies to be put in place. Individuals make personal life choices and only 25% of women choose to live career-driven lives. She points out that in Sweden, men and women can choose to take parental leave but only women tend to do so. Men still continue to dominate the workplace in Sweden as a result of this. However, in Belgium, all employees are entitled to paid leave that can be used for parenting, further education or anything else. This means that men and women do have more equal choices. In contrast, in Britain, men are the victims of gender equality legislation as they are forced to take on work-driven lives, whereas women can choose to be career or family centred in their daily lives.

### *What gender patterns are emerging in educational attainment?*

Since 1988, girls have begun to outstrip boys in terms of educational attainment at GCSE. The performance gap has stabilised so that on average, girls outperform boys by a factor of around 10%. There are variations for individual subjects, so that results are nearly the same for both genders in Mathematics. Girls tend to do better in language-based subjects and Humanities.

Subject choices are gendered, with males taking science based subjects and girls taking on language based subjects. Girls are more likely to take subjects that are traditionally seen as feminine than boys. They also opt for traditionally masculine subjects but boys rarely take feminised subjects. In the view of the Department for Education and Skills, (2007) the 'different subject choices made by boys and girls may be more marked and have greater longer-term outcomes in terms of subsequent career choices than attainment differences'.

Younger et al (2005) point out that some boys indulge in disruptive behaviour as a result of attempts to project a 'macho' image. They often influence their entire peer group and affect the tone and content of lessons. However, overall, gender gaps arise because of differences in male and female literacy skills. Gender gaps are negligible in Mathematics and Science. This is true over time and cross culturally. Gender is not as significant a predictor of educational attainment as is social class, and it is possible that gender is not as significant as ethnicity either.

There has been something of a moral panic about male underachievement in recent years, but large numbers of working class females also under-attain.

Research into education suggests that there are slight differences in the way that girls are socialised towards education and perhaps in the way that they learn. These differences do not fully account for changes in gender attainment patterns within education. A rather more complex process is taking place. Girls' attitudes towards education have been influenced by wider economic and social change in society. There has been considerable pressure on girls to challenge male dominance in the workplace and in education. The rise of single parenthood means that girls can no longer assume that a man will provide them with financial support for life. Furthermore, Arnot at al. (1999) pointed out that girls express desire for independence and do not want to take on traditional female roles. Mirza found that mothers encourage their daughter's education, particularly among the African Caribbean community as it is a route to social mobility. However female attitudinal change has not been matched by equal attitude change on the part of boys, many of whom accept an outmoded notion of gender and gender relationships.

*What gender inequality patterns emerge in the study of criminality?*

Superficially, males are more likely to be the victims of the criminal justice system than women. They are more likely to be criminal and they are more likely to be the victims of crime. In addition, there are significant gender differences in offending behaviour and in the nature of those who are likely to be convicted. According to self report studies, women are far less likely than men to offend (11% to 26%). The peak age for female offending is 15 years as opposed to 19 for men, and women are far more likely to stop offending as they mature than men.

Female offences tend to include fraud and handling stolen goods. Women offenders are often also problem drug users. Women make up approximately 6% of the prison population, and in 2002 there were on average, around 4,300 women in British prisons. 71% of female prisoners are in prison for short sentences of under 12 months. Government statistics suggest that courts have been increasingly prepared to impose custodial sentences on women.

Women in prison are likely to come from deprived or problem backgrounds. They are less likely to be in long term relationships and more likely to have parental responsibilities than other women of a similar age range. In addition, 20% of female prisoners are likely to have experienced the care system as children. Many female prisoners interviewed report that they had experienced abuse as children. Nearly 50% of female prisoners had used crack cocaine or heroin in the year preceding sentence to prison. 15% had previously spent time in mental hospital. Their levels of educational attainment are generally very low compared to the general population though slightly higher than for men in prison.

Men are twice more likely to be the victims of crime than women, but women are far more likely to know their attackers than men. 30% of murder victims were female in 2002. Nearly half of those were women who were killed by a partner or former partner. The 2000 British Crime Survey suggested that probably 5% of women have experienced rape, generally by someone the victim knew well or who was in fact, her partner or former partner.

Women form a significant part of the criminal justice system of the UK, but not in positions of senior management. They are likely to be probation officers, lawyers, magistrates and clerical staff. They are under-represented in senior positions, as judges, or as police officers.

### *Are there gender inequalities in the experience of health?*

The main factor affecting health inequality in the UK is social class. Study after study shows that people born in poor families are low birth weight, are more likely to die as babies, grow up with poor health, are vulnerable to disabling disease and impaired development and they die early. Their children will experience poor life chances so health inequality runs in families. Some of these health inequalities are due to patterns of poor life style so that obesity and smoking related illnesses are also diseases of poverty and deprivation.

There are particular issues associated with gender. Women tend to live longer than males, but they are also likely to experience more years of poor health and disability before mortality. Women sometimes have significant problems accessing health care: transport, caring and childcare cause problems. Women who have diseases normally associated with males such as heart disease tend to be slow obtaining diagnosis and treatment. Women are vulnerable to diagnoses of mental illness and depression.

Men tend to live shorter lives than women but these gender differences are more explicit in areas of deprivation. Men in deprived areas are more than twice as likely to indulge in risk behaviours such as smoking and alcohol consumption. Among Asian populations 23.2% of males smoke compared to 5.3% of women.

Women are vulnerable to self-harming, but young men are more likely than women to commit suicide. Males are far less likely to visit a doctor than women and to leave obtaining a diagnosis for serious illness until it is too late to treat. Men are nearly twice as likely as women to develop one of the ten most common cancers that men and women 'share' and about twice as likely to die from it.

In addition, it is argued that men are more likely to be engaged in risky employment and to have diets that are high in fats and low in fruit and vegetables. Being overweight and obese is more marked among manual, semi-skilled, unskilled and unemployed groups of men, linked to poorer diets and less exercise. There is a significant North/South divide, with men in the North being significantly more overweight. It is also possible that men are vulnerable to social stress linked to their working lives and their status in society. A study, by Newcastle University, found that more 50 year old men than women were clinically depressed.

### *What about women and political representation?*

There are few women MPs in the Westminster Parliament, though the introduction of all women short lists of candidates for some constituencies has been effective in increasing female representation. Women remain less than 20% of all MPs. The Liberal Democrats and the Labour Party have a better record of electing women than the Conservative Party in the UK. The UK Parliament has one of the worst records in the EU, being behind new member countries such as Lithuania and Latvia in this respect.

The Welsh Assembly has a better record for female presence with approximately half of all AMs being female. In 2003, Welsh Labour had all women short-lists in six constituency seats and Plaid Cymru took positive action to include women. The Welsh Liberal Democrats and the Welsh Conservatives were encouraging of women, and this suggests that positive political action to encourage women is effective because in 2003, there was equal gender representation in the Welsh Assembly.

The Fawcett Society and other women's groups have long pressed for there to be more women in Parliament. There is a clear failure of representation if the needs of more than half the population are represented by fewer than 20% of Parliamentary members. Women are more likely to vote when there are female candidates and they are more likely to vote than men.

The reasons for the under-representation of women in Parliament appear to be a combination of both cultural and social reasons. Parliament uses a very confrontational style of debate that many women MPs claim they find uncomfortable to work in. The Fawcett Society surveyed female MPs after the 1997 election and found many women MPs complaining of 'yob culture' and 'public school attitudes' among the men. Women are less likely to have experience of high paid, high status work of the kind that MPs are often drawn from. It is also argued that the long and antisocial hours expected of MPs work against the needs of women who may be caring for children and family members. It is also argued that many constituency selection groups are made up of men who are prejudiced against women. They are rarely given safe seats to win.

### *What is the relationship between gender and poverty?*

Research from the Fawcett Society and others shows that there are clear links between gender and poverty. Women are slightly more likely to experience poverty and more women live in households that are poorer than men.

The reasons for this poverty tend to be related to low income when in work. Women with children are more likely to be poor than women without children, they earn less and take on part-time casual work.

The distribution of money within households can leave some women short of cash. In low income households, money is often directed at the children and the man, so women will do without to support their families. Scullion and Hillyard (2005) in a study in Northern Ireland found that women in poverty are more likely to economise on food than men in poverty. Also more women (42%) than men (27%) skimp on food and clothing so others can have more.

Payne and Pantazis found similar patterns in the Breadline Britain Survey. They claimed that men and women seem to have a different understanding of poverty and of the things which are necessary to avoid poverty, so men will see money that women spend on children as being part of the woman's own personal spending money. Craig and Glendinning, (1990) found that women report not heating a home while they are on their own, especially during the day in order to save money for their families.

The factors that propel women into poverty are often related to their family situation: teenage pregnancy, divorce, separation, lone parenthood and old age. Government policy aimed at solving this problem is intended to encourage lone mothers back into the workplace. In 2008, Work and Pensions secretary, Peter Hain MP confirmed plans that would require all lone parents on benefit to look for a job once their children reach age seven, from 2010. However, low-paid and insecure employment also increases the risk of poverty. Between 1994 and 1997 a third of working-age adults living in poverty for two years or more were in low paid employment.

According to the Joseph Rowntree Foundation, women are more likely to rely on state pensions. Arber and Cooper (1999) found that women are far more likely to have been in low status employment with few rights or benefits. In addition, married, widowed or divorced women are more likely than men to have been responsible for caring, and thus have disrupted employment records. In contrast, never married women are the group most likely to have paid into an occupational pension, as they are most likely to have been engaged in pensionable employment throughout their working lives (Arber, 2004).

Theoretical explanations of gender inequality

Adapted from a post on the Student Room website, highly recommended as a useful source of support

**Liberal feminism** - gender role socialisation is responsible for gender inequality (Anne Oakley) and the idea that it reproduces sexual divisions of labour

However, Sue Sharpe's research on young girl's priorities implies that they're taking more independence for their education and career - contributing to the feminisation of the economy. Liberal feminism as a cultural explanation assumes that women passively accept gender role socialisation and doesn't explore the extent to which they resist it.

**Marxist feminism** - Women are exploited by the ruling class and they benefit capitalism by being a reserve army of labour who are easily employed and fired, supported by the (EOC 2005) finding that 44% of women work part-time compared with men, 11% of men work part time - revealing that women make up part time ancillary workers filing in employment gaps.

However, doesn't explain why women take these roles or why they are used as a reserve army of labour. Moreso, Zimmerman identifies traditional masculine values of employers that explain why women experience inequality e.g. he found that employers didn't want to employ women because of their domestic roles which meant they would be taking time out for child care and marriage and traditionally women should be reliant on men and so were less likely to be put forward for promotions. Reflected by findings of the ONS - only 8.7% of women make up senior judges and only 9.1% national newspaper editors.

**Radical feminism** - explores interpersonal relationships with men and women that used to be private can now be seen in wider society - Walby points out that women are free to be exploited in wider society. Also that government policy like the Sex Discrimination act are too feeble and push women into domestic roles

Bhavani - class, ethnicity are just as influential than gender. DfES reveal that 48% of boys gained 5 A\*-C grades at GCSE from middle class backgrounds compared with 36% of A.C. boys from working class backgrounds

Thoughts:

Where do we draw the line? Which identity is more influential in explaining inequalities, class or gender?

PAIRED WORK

**Key concepts**

 Define the key concepts and ideas. Then make Quiz Quiz trade Cards and test each other

Anti-social personality disorder

Constituency

Custodial sentence

Disposable income

Feminised

Gender

Gender aware

Gender bias

Gender equality

Gender neutral policies

Gender pay gap

Gender sensitive

Health inequality

Male chauvinism

Misogyny

Sexism

Sexual discrimination

Yob culture

**Independent Study**

**Compulsory**

* Make separate revision cards for each of the researchers and theories mentioned in these notes
* Use textbooks to research two different studies in two different areas of inequality and make detailed examination notes from them.
* Practice writing short examination answers with four paragraphs based on these areas of inequality.

**Rally Coach** 

1. What are the physical and biological differences between the genders? This question requires some careful thought and is not as easy as it seems!
2. Do biological differences between the genders justify differences in laws and educational opportunities?
3. Why is it difficult to know much about the history of women in work in Victorian times?
4. What have been the most significant changes in the lives of women over the last 100 years?
5. Which employment sectors tend to be associated with women?
6. Why have equality laws been criticised by the Equal Opportunities Commission and by women?
7. How effective have Equality Laws been in changing attitudes towards women in work?
8. What is rational choice theory?
9. What is the gender gap in terms of attainment at GCSE?
10. What are the causes of female improvement in educational attainment?
11. To what extent is female attainment in education matched by success in the workplace?
12. What are the social characteristics of women who are imprisoned?
13. What differences are there between male and female victimisation?
14. Should male and female criminals receive different treatment?
15. What single social factor is most significant in terms of health equality in the UK?
16. What differences are there in the experience of health by gender?
17. Why are smoking and obesity linked to poverty?
18. Why is it important that women be fully represented in law making bodies?
19. What barriers are there to the election of women to law making institutions in society?
20. How could women be encouraged to participate in politics?
21. Why are women more vulnerable to poverty than men?
22. What social factors make a person vulnerable to poverty?
23. What has government policy done to attempt to solve problems of poverty for women and children?
24. Why are women vulnerable to poverty in old age?