

Female inequality in the workplace and household

[Sociology](#), [Feminism](#)



Female Inequality in the Workplace and Household Equality between all people, regardless of age, colour or gender is something which every democratic society seeks to achieve in order to permit social justice and human rights, yet in nearly all societies and in all scopes of activity, women are subject to inequalities. This is most often both caused and exacerbated by the presence of discrimination in the family, community and work place. Though the causes and consequences of this may vary from country to country, discrimination against women is widespread, maintained by the existence of deep-rooted religious and traditional practices, beliefs and stereotypes detrimental to women. The unequal division of labour between men and women within the household, the workplace and the public sphere are areas which are greatly explored in detail within the branch of Feminist Economics. The general view within feminist economics is that the division of labour based on gender is unfair and should be eliminated. This paper will examine the different aspects of inequality which women are still subject within the workplace and household, despite all that has been done to eradicate inequality, paying particular attention to the UK, and how these different forms of injustice could possibly be overcome. Women have made great progression within the labour market over the last few decades regarding pay and career progression at work, however many barriers to their success still remain (The Equalities Review, 2007: online). The Equal Pay Legislation was brought into force in the UK in order to address this issue of wage inequality between men and women (Fawcett Society, 2010: online) over 40 years ago, however the problem has not been eradicated. Women make up 64% of the lowest paid workers in Britain leading to a 16. 4% pay

gap between men and women, the largest gender pay gap in the European Union (ONS, 2009). Research shows that there is a gender pay gap of 10. 5% between men and women in full time work, when comparing their median earnings. The gender pay difference between all men and women in work was around 19. 5% in 2010, a decrease from around 19. 8% in 1997 (ONS, 2012). Research conducted by the UK government into the causes of this pay gap showed that 16% of the gap was caused by women taking out time from work in order to look after family and also the from the effects of having worked part time previously, and 21% due to differences in years of full-time work (Home Office, 2012: online). The cause of this particular issue surrounds the fact that women still do the majority of caring and are consequently penalised due the lack of flexible working and the culture of working long (Fawcett Society, 2010: online), thus having to work part time hours in order to fit around their role as carers. This issue is worsened by the fact that women are often faced with negative attitudes, discrimination and even dismissal in their workplace due to their roles or potential roles as mothers or carers (Fawcett Society, 2010: online). A study conducted in 2004 found that nearly a quarter of women who made an employment tribunal claim were dismissed within hours of notifying their employers about their pregnancy, and a fifth of women were also given lower graded jobs after returning from their maternity leave (EOC, 2004: online). There have been attempts to address this issue by the government through the implementation of policies such as the right to request flexible working, the extension of paid maternity and paternity leave and the introduction of Working Tax Credits (WTC). Though these policies have partly successful,

they have been largely confined to the public sector and larger private sector employers (The Equalities Review, 2007: online), and could be improved. Low wages at work combined with the fact that WTC does not cover the full costs of childcare costs means that many mothers are financially disadvantaged when taking up paid employment (WRC, 2007: online). The problem could be addressed further if not eliminated by raising awareness amongst all employers that a modern workplace should offer more than just flexible working, such as the prospect of job shares at senior level and the opportunity for women working flexible or part time hours to have access to training (FawcettSociety. org, 2010: online) in order to develop their skills and better their prospect of promotion, which are more than often opportunities which are available for full time workers. A further reason as to why this pay gap occurs may be due to the different industries and occupations in which women work compared to men, which also contributes 22% towards the gender pay gap (Home Office, 2012: online). For example, women make up more than more 84% of employees in personal services such as care assistants, child-minders and hairdressers and 71% in jobs relating to sales and customer services, whilst 91% of those in skilled trades such as electricians and mechanics, and 66% of managers, professionals and senior officials were men (BBC Business, 2003: online). This difference in the industries and occupations between men and women however may not be as harmless as it seems. It may in fact help induce the barriers that limit women's promotion in the labour market, as the industries in which more women work have fewer prospects of promotion and thus fewer ways to gain higher pay. The reason behind this form of injustice can possibly be

explained through the concept of 'Statistical Discrimination'. This is a theory of inequality between demographic groups based on stereotypes that do not arise from prejudice or racial and gender bias (Andrea Moro, 2010: online). It can be used to explain why women are less likely to be working in certain industries. For instance, in a job that has traditionally been male dominated such as engineering, if a woman and man were to apply for the same job, based on the fact that employers usually place value on job attachment, they would tend to be risk averse and choose applicants that they believe would be better at the job (About. com, 2012: online). This would arise from the fact that employers would more likely to be attuned to applicants of the male gender than women as they would have a better measure of the productivity of male applicants. Thus in evaluating workers that otherwise have the exact same characteristics, employers may prefer hiring male over identical female applicants as they predict probabilistically higher profitability from hiring a man (Andrea Moro, 2010: online), thus instantly stereotyping against women, even though they may not necessarily be gender biased. In real fact, empirical evidence challenges these familiar stereotypes, and confirms that men and women are actually more similar than they are different and that there is much more difference among women and among men than between men and women (FawcettSociety. org, 2009: online). This form of discrimination based on stereotypical beliefs may help explain 36% of the gender pay gap, as it cannot be explained based on any other reason (Home Office, 2012: online). Although it can be argued that women may prefer jobs that involve nurturing and caring, with nursing and teaching being classic examples, which often tend to pay less,

this may in fact show a deeper form of discrimination and may in fact be a self-fulfilling prophecy- women are forced into these occupations with the belief that they will be less likely to get a higher paying job in a more male dominated profession. Furthermore, it can be argued that these particular professions preferred by women may pay less precisely because they are preferred by women (Filip Spagnoli, p. a. p blog, 2008: online). This form of discrimination has been used to argue the 'glass ceiling' concept that women face in many businesses which have traditionally been male dominated. It describes a situation where women are unable to climb up any higher in their jobs, in other words be promoted to a higher status, due to an invisible barrier which already exists within the business having been erected merely due to the reason that it was already a male institution (EconGuru, 2006: online). Whilst many people may agree that women are disadvantaged due to this reason, others argue that it is a concept which is overstated and that there are other reasons which explain why women are less likely to be promoted than their male colleagues, such as taking a career break in order to have or look after their children (EconGuru, 2006: online). This however just revives the previous argument that more changed should be made in the current working system to give equal opportunity to both men and women to share the position of 'caring'. The key behind overcoming prejudice however lies in educating people. Julie Mellor, former chairwoman of the Equal Opportunities Commission (EOC), urged that the UK needs to do much more than what is already being done in order to give women the same chances in life as men. She also put forward the idea that the education system may form the path to overcome prejudice by

challenging outdated ideas about men and women's role in the labour market. Although efforts have been made to encourage young girls to go into the higher paid jobs, through education and careers advice, this alone has not been enough to break perceptions regarding what are considered 'men's jobs' and 'women's jobs' (FawcettSociety. org, 2010: online). In order to shift perceptions, educating young people about gender equality from an early age would help prevent stereotypes about men's and women's worth at work at a later stage. Educating young people, and putting regulations into place combined with government led public awareness campaigns would help raise the profile of the issue to everyone and would be an effective way of helping to change the cultures and attitudes regarding equal pay, while supporting existing legislation (FawcettSociety. org, 2010: online). Employers themselves can play a big role in the elimination of inequality faced by women. The workplace is somewhere which gets infiltrated with norms, cultures and attitudes as people move from private life into the public sphere which often results in bullying and discrimination. It is the employer's responsibility to address this issue which often damage the work environment and makes it difficult for individuals to flourish. Addressing these issues at the place of work where many spent much of their day may be key in influencing attitudes both outside the workplace and at work (FawcettSociety. org, 2009: online). It is not only in the workplace that women are faced with inequality, but this form of injustice also exists in many households. Research have shown that the sharing of domestic responsibilities between the husband and wife, or unmarried couples living together are extremely unequal with the burden of unpaid housework being

shouldered by women. Analysis carried out by Thinktank, an Institute for Public Policy Research shows 80% of married women do more household chores, while just 10% of men do the same amount of cleaning and washing as their wife. Just over 1 out of 10 women say that their husbands do more work than they do whilst 5 out of 10 - 50% of women do 13 hours of unpaid housework a week (The Guardian, 2012: online). These patterns of the unequal division of unpaid housework have only changed slightly over the past few decades even though the number of active women in the labour market have changed. Empirical investigations have shown that the sharing of domestic responsibilities between the husband and wife, or unmarried couples living together are affected by the presence of children, women's employment and gender role attitudes (GeNet working paper 41, 2010: online) with the job load is significantly increasing for women on the birth of a child. In order for this unequal balance of household work to close, not only do men need to contribute more, but the gender pay gap in the labour market needs to close. Research shows that as women earn more, their bargaining power with their partner's increases. One traditional view within feminist economics is that the work which women do in the household needs to be valued more, however the IPPR say that in order to achieve the goal of equality within the household, feminist goals must pass through husbands and fathers (The Guardian, 2012: online). This can be achieved through the men having the right to work more flexibly and to take longer parental leave, thus having the chance to take on a greater responsibility for caring for their children and home. Wage discrimination against women, barriers limiting women's promotion and the unequal division of unpaid housework by

husband & wife are all therefore real problems which need real solutions in order to allow equality between men and women and give equal worth to women for the jobs that they do which are often no less than what men do. This solutions lie in educating people about the problem of gender discrimination which still continue to exist in order to change attitudes, break norms and shift perceptions about the respective roles and value of men and women. Another important solution involves in giving men a greater opportunity to share responsibilities in the household and be more involved with caring for their children. Bibliography About. Com. (2012). Economics: Statistical Discrimination. Available: <http://economics.about.com/od/economicsglossary/g/statdis.htm>. Last accessed: 03/12/12

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