

# Women and environment

[Environment](#), [Ecology](#)



That the relationship between people and the environment is not gender-neutral became clear in the mid-1980s. Some organizations, focusing on the day-to-day lives of communities, argued that the position and concerns of women were invisible in environmental debates and programmes.

The Centre for Science and Environment (CSE based in New Delhi, India, in their The State of India's Environment Report – or the Second Citizens Report of 1984-1985 argued that: Probably no other group is more affected by environmental destruction than poor village women. Every dawn brings with it a long march in search of fuel, fodder and water. It does not matter if the women are old, young or pregnant: crucial household needs have to be met day after weary day. As ecological conditions worsen, the long march becomes even longer and more tiresome. Caught between poverty and environmental destruction, poor rural women in India could well be reaching the limits of physical endurance. (CSE 1985) In that same year of 1985, the second UN Decade for Women Conference was held in Nairobi, Kenya. The Environment Liaison Centre (presently the Environment Liaison Centre International or ELCI) organized a series of workshops on women, environment and development at the NGO Forum.

These workshops were aimed at developing a better understanding of the relationship between women and the physical environment. More than 25 women leaders from all parts of the world – with an audience of women and men many times more – presented their local and regional case studies on women and the global environmental crisis, as well as on women and forests, energy, agriculture, and water management at local level. One of the main conclusions from the workshops was that women bear the highest costs of

the environmental crisis because of their roles in providing water, food and energy at family and community levels. On the other hand, it was shown that women could potentially also make a large contribution to the solution of the crisis, precisely due to their role in the management of those primary resources. The increase in women's power and the sustainability of development are ecologically tied. It is therefore imperative that women are enabled to participate and be involved at all levels of development planning throughout the industrialized and developing worlds, according to the ELC statement to the UN Women's Conference in 1985. Female Participation in the Labor Force over the last century, the issue of women in the workplace has been a tumultuous one.

Early in the 20th century, few women participated in the labor force. A woman's place was at home, taking care of the family and managing the domestic world. It was seen as unfit for women to be in certain professions, and most women did not work, other than going about their daily chores around the house. The Great Depression magnified this fact, as unemployment reached its highest levels in history but women, more than ever, stayed home to look after their husbands who now found themselves without work. World War II brought a complete reversal to this trend. Productivity boomed and the men left their homes, some to work, most to join the war effort. Women, in large masses for the first time, also hit the labor market.

Dubbed "Rosie the Riveter", these women worked at manufacturing plants and at other technological industries that had previously seen only male

employees. With the men off at war, these companies needed women to fill their shoes, and women streamed into the business. Since then, they have not looked back, as women employment in the labor force grew steadily in the four decades after World War II. It was not until very recently that female employment growth rates have leveled out. I hope to explain why this has happened, as well as examining different sectors of the economy and comparing women employment and men employment. Just after World War II the civilian labor force participation for women was a paltry 32%. Today, however, some six decades later that rate has climbed in excess of 70%.

For four solid decades after the war, this rate increased at an astounding rate. Early in the 1990s, however, this rate leveled off. This brought about much speculation as to whether or not women were thus starting to leave the labor force and, if so, what the causes of that might be. In order to look at this hypothesis more closely, we first need to break down the women in the labor force by age: 16-24 year olds, 25-34 year olds, 35-44 year olds, 45-54 year olds, and 55+ years. In the mid 1940's, 35-44 year olds were engaged in the labor force more than any other age group. In the late 1980s and into the early 1990s, this was still the case. Over the last 25 years, however, the younger age groups have exploded onto the work scene, drastically shooting up from a percentage (of women that age in the labor force) of 40 percent in 1970 to nearly 75 percent in the early 1990s.

Until the 1970's, a graph of female participation rates in the labor force would look like an "M", with a large dip coming between the early 20's until the later-child bearing years, the mid 30's. However, with all age groups now

actively participating in the labor force, that graph now looks like an upside down "U". In the early 1990s participation rates of women abruptly flattened out. Initially much thought was given to the fact that more mothers were exiting the labor force temporarily in order to look after their children or become homemakers. Thus analysts turned to specific age groups. They found that there was a significant drop off in labor force participation rates of women ages 16-24. Historically, rates of this age group did follow business cycles, so why the sudden change? The explanation was that more females that age were enrolling in schools.

School enrollment between 1987 and 1993 increased nearly 28 percent, and women in school were less likely to be employed in the labor force. Other age groups continued their slightly upward trend, with the only exception being the 16-24 year olds. One explanation as to why these women decided to attend school rather than remain in the labor force is the recession of the early 1990s. There was a recessionary job market, so the younger, less stable women chose to go back to school rather than seek alternate employment. Since the early 1990s, however, the growth of women entering the labor force has resumed. The makeup of the group of women in the labor force has been influenced more recently than ever before on family structure. In the last ten years, mothers have accounted for most of the rise in women's overall labor force rate.

For mothers with children between the ages of 6 and 17, an astonishing 77 percent are in the labor force. With children under 6, this percentage understandably dips to 62 points, but both largely higher than a decade ago.

For mothers with infants less than a year old, the percentage entering the labor force has grown nearly 20 percent over the last decade. This trend is a strong reflection of today's societal norms: working for pay is an integral part of many women's lives, as opposed to early in the 20th century when housework was the norm. The 1996 Welfare Reform Bill passed by Congress had an effect on poor and single mothers in the workplace. By trying to move women from welfare to work, the bill encouraged these women to find jobs, thus entering the labor force. Additionally, the real wages of met earning lower incomes has remained stagnant or even slightly fallen in recent years.

The cost of a wife sitting around the house and taking care of the children has risen, so the wives have much more incentive, and need, now to go out and earn on their own. This, in turn, also puts pressure on single mothers to go out and work as well. These women do not necessarily work full-time year-round, but their entrance into the marketplace is a positive for not only them but the women's movement in general. It has gotten to the point, however, that marriage and children (except a pre-school aged child, where mothers tend to stay at home or work minimal hours) now have little effect on whether a not a woman works, and for how long she works. This is the societal norm, although access to other income (e. g. husband's earnings, single vs.

married woman) still has a large effect on a woman's employment options. Women now spend a couple of hours more in the workplace per day than they do caring for their children as opposed to 20 years ago, yet many mothers are still not committed to full-time year-round employment.

Throughout the entire 20th century, women's wages have constantly lagged behind men's wages. If a woman and man were both hired to do the same task, the man would be paid more than the woman. That has been and continues to be the trend in the American capitalist state. One explanation has always been that the men are not only more qualified at the jobs but more efficient. Thus, the argument goes, they should be paid at a higher premium.

Today, however, the wage gap is still existent, and very few would find that argument valid. So why do women still earn less than men, and why are women often discriminated against in the workplace? When a child enters a family, it is the woman who, much more often than not, stays at home and cares for the new baby. When the woman exits the labor force, she does not gain the seniority that she would have otherwise gotten had there been no child. When women return to the labor force, they are less likely to receive on the job training, and thus less likely to increase their productivity and thus level of pay. The absence from the work force, even if only for several months to take care of a newborn child, can depreciate the job skills of women, so when they return back to work they are not as sharp and take some time to regain pre-birth efficiency in the office. Knowing this, employers are less likely to hire women who are in their prime years for giving birth. This also stands for women applying for new jobs; if they left the labor force once before for a child, chances are good that they might do it again.

An employer will see this and thus shy away from hiring the woman, instead perhaps deferring to a man who would remain at work. Employers may even view those who do not take time away from work as more dedicated than women who do, regardless of the reason, and this could be reflected in reduced promotion possibilities, different job assignments, and other actions that could have salary implications. This is certainly not fair to women: it is not their fault that they are biologically the ones who give birth and must frequently look after the children. Regardless, the trend is that those women who do take time off from work often are overlooked for more competitive jobs and receive less pay. I have just established that women are now in the labor force more than ever before. But now that they are working, what kinds of jobs are they doing? In private industry, the breakdown of women compared to men is interesting. In 2000 there were 44 million workers in private industry in the United States, 23.

5 million of which were male, 20.5 million female. A more specific breakdown, however, shows some astounding differences. There were twice as many male officials and managers than there were females (3 million as opposed to 1.5 million). Officials and managers are described as "occupations requiring administrative and managerial personnel who set broad policies, exercise overall responsibility for execution of these policies, etc." Yet the number of workers defined as 'professionals' gives females the numeric advantage, 3.

6 million to 3.4 million. Professionals are described as "occupations requiring either college graduation or experience of such kind. Thus even



though the women labor force tends to be slightly more educated than the male labor force, it is the males who, by a 2: 1 ratio, are in managerial and authoritative positions! In other generic fields, there is also a stark contrast between males and females. Women outnumber men by roughly a 3: 2 ratio in sales, and for office and clerical workers in private industry in the United States in 2000, there were over 5 million females and only slightly over 1 million males. This is no doubt a stereotype, the female secretary or clerical workers, but according to these statistics this stereotype seems to hold true. What reasons are there that so many more females are attracted to, or rather hold, secretarial jobs? There are many.

On the flip side, however, there were six times as many male craft workers (skilled labor) than there were female craft workers in 2000. Perhaps females are not attracted to the demanding physical labor of such jobs, much the way males do not like clerical tasks. Historically, males have been overwhelmingly dominant in the field of physical labor. When some women were forced to work in factories for personal financial reasons, they were often despised and treated unequally. This, I am sure, led many females to be extremely not attracted to such professions. Likewise, females have always dominant as office secretaries and the like. Back when women first entered the labor force, these were often the only types of jobs available so they took them.

Today, women still flock to these clerical jobs. Looking at more specific job fields, these same general observations seem to hold true. In the field of engineering and management services, male office officials and managers

greatly outweigh female managers. There are more than twice as many male technicians as female technicians, and over 12 times as many male skilled laborers than female skilled laborers. However, the number of female clerical workers is more than four times that of male clerical workers. Even male operatives (semiskilled workers) outnumber by three times the number of female operatives. These numbers show overwhelmingly that the technical aspect of engineering is enjoyed more by males, while the women are still confined to the office.

In the field of legal services, females outnumber males by a 1.7: 1 ration. Nearly two thirds of all females in this profession, however, are in fact office and clerical workers. Male professionals outnumber female professionals by a wide margin, and the trend shown in the general population holds true here, too. In the field of computers and office equipment, twice as many males as females hold jobs in this area. As usual, the number of female clerical workers greatly outweighs the number of male clerical workers. It comes as no surprise that, in the field of computers, male professionals, technicians, and skilled laborers greatly outweighs the number of female workers in these areas.

The same trends can be seen in other areas such as communications. One profession bucking this trend, however, can be found in hospitals. Women hospital employees outnumber male hospital employees by more than a 3: 1 margin. Additionally, the number of female officials and managers, professionals, and technicians outweigh the numbers for the males, not just in raw numbers but also in terms of percentages. Males, however, still

comprise the vast majority of skilled laborers in this area. It is nice to see, however, an area that goes against the general trend. Even though women seem to be dominant in a few fields of work and very scattered throughout many others, this is a change from a couple generations ago when most women were not even in the labor force.

For women, this fact is definitely a step in the positive direction. Most women now hold jobs in the workplace, and are sustaining them for longer amounts of time than ever before. The next step is for women to immerse themselves in all fields of the labor force, rather than just concentrating on a selective few. This brings responsibility to males, too, to allow for women to reach the upper echelons of the labor force. In a labor force that has been historically dominated by males, this proves to be an intriguing situation over the next decade as more and more women aspire to the officials and managers that they are not today. Women's education from past till now Social Relevance Education has been the stumbling block keeping women from attaining equal status in society, separating them from their male counterparts. It has also been the door to this elusive dream of equality.

Before women gained the right and privilege of higher education they were believed to be lower-class citizens, not worthy of voting or owning property, or any number of other "inalienable rights". It was not only men who believed that women should hold a lower position than they. Queen Victoria said: "I am most anxious to enlist everyone who can speak or write to join in checking this mad, wicked folly of 'Women's Rights', with all its attendant horrors, on which her poor feeble sex is bent, forgetting every sense of

womanly feelings and propriety. Feminists ought to get a good whipping. Were woman to 'unsex' themselves by claiming equality with men, they would become the most hateful, heathen and disgusting of beings and would surely perish without male protection. "(Victorian Station) Without education to empower them, many women believed that they should not hold the power to influence politics or even make decisions about their own property. Women were stripped of their dignity and privileges by men of the community and even by their own husbands.

However, they were finally able to break free from these social constraints through education. It is telling that most of the early feminists were set apart from their complacent sisters by education. They were educated, and through this knowledge gained a sense of self-worth and the power to change history. Higher education is the foundation of the empowered women of today. The struggle for women's education has been an uphill battle that has not yet reached its citadel. This journey took root in the Victorian period and branched even to modern times. During the mid-eighteen hundreds women were expected to live up to a feminine ideal.

This ideology required women to be "pure, pious, domestic and submissive" (Eisenmann Appendix). None of these ideals would be achieved through education. In fact, receiving an education in the Victorian Period was considered an "act of nonconformity" (Solomon xviii). A woman could not fill her preordained place in society if she was wasting her time gaining knowledge. Education was thought to make women discontented with their current status, and possibly even irritated with men (McClelland 12). Education for

women was thought to disrupt the social balance of the time. On the contrary, the earliest push for Victorian women to become educated was because they were mothers of men and eventually teachers of men (Solomon xviii).

It was not until the twentieth century that women began to desire knowledge for themselves as individuals. History of Women in Education In order to understand the women's education movement, it is important to have a brief background of its history. During the time of the ideal subservient woman a few bold women and events stand out as milestones in history. The first is in 1833; Oberlin College was founded. It was the nation's first university to accept women and black students. The next important event was the Seneca Falls Convention in 1848. This convention added fuel to the flame of education and suffrage.

The Seneca Falls Declaration has been called "the single most important document of the nineteenth-century American woman's movement". At the convention a declaration concerning women's rights was adopted modeling the Declaration of Independence. Appearing in addition to issues of suffrage were issues of education and employment. The Declaration of Sentiments states: He has monopolized nearly all the profitable employments, and from those she is permitted to follow, she receives but a scanty remuneration. He closes against her all the avenues to wealth and distinction, which he considers most honorable to himself. As a teacher of theology, medicine, or law, she is not known. He has denied her the facilities for obtaining a thorough education - all colleges being closed against her.

(Schneir 77) This event is of utmost importance to the women's rights movement. It laid the foundation for future achievements even though suffrage was not achieved until 1920. After the Seneca Falls Convention women continued to achieve milestones in education. In 1877, Helen Magill became the first woman in the United States to earn her Ph. D. By 1880, women comprised eighty percent of all elementary school educators, and by 1910 women made up 39 percent of all collegiate undergraduate students and even 20 percent of all college faculty. Finally, in 1920 women's suffrage was achieved, giving women a secure foothold in society.

In 1945, the first woman was accepted to Harvard Medical School, and by 1972 Title XI was passed to help end the discrimination based on sex for any educational program that received federal funding. In 1980 women equaled men in numbers enrolled in colleges with 51 percent. Finally, in 1996 Virginia Military Institute was forced by the Supreme Court to become coeducational (Eisenmann appendix). There are many other events along the path to education that helped women achieve the status they enjoy today. This brief chronology merely traces a few of the hundreds of thousands of victories women had to win in order to become educated. Reasons for Oppression One of the main values that necessitated all of this arduous labor in order to simply become educated was that, people feared that the social system would break down if women were allowed to be educated. They worried that women would cease to fulfill their traditional roles if they received a higher education.

It was even thought that a woman risked brain fever or sterility if she became educated (Delamont 109). These Victorian ideas seem ridiculous from a twentieth century perspective, but educated women today still have to deal with a certain measure of social stigma. It is often overlooked, however, because it has been adapted to fit the social constraints of today. They are forced at times to choose to live up to the dreams of their education or to live up to the societal implications of being a mother and wife (Solomon xix). This is only one of many reasons that the fight for adequate woman's education is far from over. University of Texas Compared to Cambridge The fact that the need for reform in women's education is not over is illustrated in two parallel cases. During the early feminist movement and the beginnings of the reform of women's education, the best case to study is Cambridge in England.

At the time this university had established authority in academia there was not a comparable university in the United States. Therefore, it is necessary to compare universities across the boundaries of nations. Women first gained notoriety at Cambridge when in the 1860's Emily Davies was successful in her campaign to allow women to attend Cambridge University. However, they did not have the same status as the male students there (Acker 51). Even though Cambridge was one of the first universities to encourage women to study they did not award women the same degrees as men upon completion of the same tests (Vicinus 117). This is a testament to the slow but steady progress of women in education. These women were dedicated and willing to study despite sub-par compensation upon completion of school.

It was not until 1947 that women were admitted to Cambridge as equal members (Acker 51). While it was a promising start for women in the Victorian period to even be allowed to study, it is necessary to evaluate the staggering length of time this progress took to occur. It took almost a century for women to gain the same recognition as men. In light of these facts, it is dangerous to assume that women today have equal educational opportunity. As little as fifty-five years ago women were celebrating the fact that they could finally earn a degree at Cambridge University. That is not a very distant past. When asked if women at The University of Texas still face issues of educational bias, the answer is an unequivocal yes.

Women make up almost half of the undergraduate student population at forty-nine percent. Sadly, these women are outnumbered in fields that have traditionally been male-dominated such as architecture and medicine. However, the average grade point average of women is higher than men in every field of study (Office of Inst. . This makes it clear that it is not a discrepancy of ability that keeps women from pursuing these vocations. There must be some sort of lingering Victorian attitudes that keep women from living up to their potential. Women today aspire to more diverse areas of study and vocation.

However, they are realistic about what the world has in store for them and therefore gravitate towards more typically female professions (Kramarae 489). Another important fact is that the percentage of women faculty is a meager 33 percent (Office of Inst. Research has found that students tend to seek out classrooms and vocations in which they will feel comfortable and



successful. Some students report avoiding courses that are overwhelmingly male because of the unwelcome feeling they experience in the classroom. How can women feel comfortable pursuing any field of study when male mentors and educators surround them and when the only contributions taught are those of males (Kramarae 498)? The battle for women's education will not be won until women feel free and comfortable to pursue any academic field.