

# Women in medieval europe



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I chose the topic of ‘ Women in Medieval Europe’ to write my essay about. I will attempt to provide some basic knowledge about how the lives of women were very difficult during this time. Some things that will be discussed are the submissions women had to give to men. To start this essay I ask a number of questions, the first one is as follows:

What type of work did women do during this period?

Women that were from poverty stricken homes would have to go out and work with their husbands to bring in more income because his alone was not enough to support their household due to women having multiple children. Women would help their husbands haul hay or plow fields. Poor women did not have shoes to wear so they walked around barefooted and during the winter they would not have any winter clothes to keep them warm so they would wrap themselves in sheets to protect them from the cold. They also took their children to work with them because they could not afford nannies like the wealthy class could.

How was life different for wealthy women during this time?

As with any culture having money always gives you more advantages. Although wealthy women had to obey the same things, such as not speaking unless you were spoken to or only if it was approved by a man first and obey the men. Women of higher classes had jobs to do as well some would have to help run their businesses and if their multiple businesses or properties that the family owned then she would have to help her husband over see them too. Of course they could afford to hire workers but there were something's that had to be handled by them personally. If the women's

husband passed away, then everything was left entirely up to her to take care of. Wealthy women had more advantages even when it came to caring for their children. They had the luxury of hiring nannies for this job. The nannies would even breast-feed their babies for them.

Why would women in this time become a Nun?

Women became nuns in this time because this was a way they could get an education and gain some rights. This was especially popular for the lower class women because this was their only hope of getting a proper education. Becoming a nun meant that she would have to be celibate and the chance of having children would be lost. By becoming a nun women grew their own crops and had their own house. With the education that was provided, they were also able to pursue careers. Many of the poor families that had multiple daughters would make their daughter become a nun because they could not afford to raise them and to ensure that they would get an education. The bad side of this was that once you became a nun it was forbidden for you to leave or have children. Back in this time it was said that “ a woman that could not or would not bear a man’s child was of no use at all”.

What happened to unwed women during this time?

Unmarried women that owned land or multiple properties were considered to have the same rights as men. But if and or when she did get married, then she was forced to give her husband all of her properties and she gave up her rights.

Women that were not married could wear their hair down but the women that were married had to wear their hair in a linen wimple to cover her hair up because this showed sign of modesty.

Women were not able to pick their husbands. Men were able to pick their wives at times. Marriages were very carefully arranged by family members. Marriages were not based on love or emotions. Families would try and arrange marriages between their daughters and sons based on economic factors. These factors would be if they had their own land, if they owned their business or if they come from a wealthy family. So once again money had a great deal to do with influences with other people. It was really a marriage of property and money that the church unified and the families would have a very large crowd of well known people to witness this occasion. This was commonly between the wealthy people but what about marriages between the poor women? The poverty stricken women and men normally married who they pleased because they had nothing to gain or lose. The legal age to get married in the medieval days was 12 for girls and 14 for boys. This was a common age to be married back then because of the expected life span. Due to lack of medical care and medicine, people died at a much younger age than they do today. There were very few reasons that the couple could get divorced. Some of the reasons they could get divorced were if they were not Christians, they were not of legal age, if they had previous promises to another person or the woman could not perform sexual relations. Women had to submit to their husbands whenever he desired for her to.

Were there any powerful women during this time?

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One person could sum this question up and that is Joan of Arc. Joan of Arc was considered a heroic figure in France. She disguised herself as a boy to join the army and became one of the most famous leaders. Women were not allowed to join the army and that is the reason she disguised herself as a boy. Joan had said that she had visions from God and he was calling her to be a warrior. There were other famous women such as Hildegard of Bingen who was considered to be a very famous writer of sacred music in the middle ages, Christine de Pizan was a famous writer and feminist one of her more popular books were “ The Book of the City of Ladies” and last but not least there was Lady Godiva, she was the woman famous for riding nude on a horse through the town of Coventry. She wanted to prove that the towns’ people were honorable and would not look at her being naked. There were a number of much respected Queens during this time, as well as a number of princesses.

Final question that runs through my mind is “ was it really that bad for women”?

My answer would be yes it was extremely bad for women. Women had absolutely no rights at all! Any man in the family could tell her to do something and she had to do it. If she did not do what she was asked to do then she was badly beaten. It was said that a woman that did not obey was “ disobeying God”.

A woman had to give up her land and rights to the man she married. Also women were not even allowed to pick the person they were to marry. Imagine if it was the same way today! So many women are so outspoken and

very independent that we couldn't even think about a man running our entire lives. Not only not being able to speak or do what we want to do but to be badly beaten just because we choose not to. Women were also very often accused of doing very awful things. Some of the accusations were practicing witchery; women would be burn at the stake for this.

#### Conclusion:

The conclusion for my essay is that with all of the research that I have done to see what the lives were like for women during the Medieval Period, I have found that their lives did seem extremely hard and unfair. To justify why this may have been, many would say Christianity. Eve was perceived as the trouble maker and then there was the impurity that many men thought women had because of menstrual cycles. While Christianity might have played a role as to why men thought they could treat women this way, it also provided protection for women as well. It did not allow divorce for any given reason (as it is today). It also did not allow the men to kill their wives. Sure they were able to beat them within an inch of their life but at least they did get to keep their life. There were some kings that treated women fairly and had a great deal of respect for them but there were not a lot of them.

But this was well over a thousand years ago and a lot of things have changed since that time. I am personally, very grateful that they have changed!