

explain how women's lives were affected by world war 1 essay sample

[War](#)



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Before World War 1 women across Britain mainly worked in domestic service as maids and only 25% of women worked a job. Working class women were expected to sustain family life. 11% of these worked in domestic service.

Upper class women did not work and were usually tended to by their personal female domestic servants. But most women wanted equality in the work place and in society and so campaigned through the Suffragettes, protesting for women's rights. When Britain went to war in 1914 the Suffragettes stopped campaigning and backed their men. Men from all over England and Wales left their jobs and signed up to join the ranks and help the war effort in combat. Women had to fill the jobs that men left vacant as not to allow huge economic collapse and to maintain production of food stuffs (The Women's Land Army), and also ammunition and explosives for the men fighting on the front. Source A2 shows the jobs women had in domestic service decrease from 1.6 million in 1914 to 1.2 million in 1918.

And jobs in industry rise from 2.1 million to 3 million women working in industrial factories by 1918. These official government statistics compare the jobs of women before and after the war in all areas of work. Giving increases and decreases of female employment in Britain. There is reason to question the reliability of this source as statistics can be manipulated to suit the purposes of governments at this time. Jobs in the war occupied by women mainly consisted of working in munitions factories. Source A3 shows this.

Even though the origin of the source is unknown the source is still very useful as it supports my own knowledge of many women working in munitions. The source also shows no immediate danger in the work environment and the work doesn't look particularly hard. This could be the

limitation of the source as it could mean the photograph is potentially staged as I know from research that work in munitions was usually hard and dangerous.

The photograph doesn't show any purpose so we can assume it could have been exploited to give false insight into the munitions work place and encourage women to work and contribute to the war effort. Jobs had to change during the war as during pre Great War time jobs were occupied and dominated by males. Traditional British society meant that the role of women was to marry and complete stay at home jobs whilst the male went out and worked for wages. Or a single woman would work in domestic service tending to the sick or the rich. When Britain declared war men from all over the British Isles joined the army voluntarily and many joined due to conscription laws. Of the 5 million men from England and Wales alone most would have left some sort of job. These vacancies were left for wives and aspiring independent women to occupy, as shown in source A1. " Women filled the gaps" men left behind.

With the origin of this source being a GCSE history resource we can be confident that information is accurate as historians teaching the course will have made this resource to provide sufficient resources for pupils to work with. The purpose is to educate and inform people of World War 1 and how the role of women changed. Potential limitations of the source could be that the information is not statistical enough to provide substantial evidence that what the content says is true. The source is brief regarding factual numbers but is still very useful as I already know that from other research source A1 is

similar to many other sources. The war brought about much change for women and the roles they played in British society during and after World War 1. The money women were making in munitions especially increased from a 55p average wage to £1. 25 a week for the average munitions worker (female). This all happened within a 5 year time period between 1914- 1919.

This increase in wages brought changes in society as more money meant more freedom and freedom for women during 1914-1918 was a chance to express themselves and turn the tables on expectations according to sexuality. Source A6 shows both the money earned by the women and how it changed behaviour. Women paying for a man's drink pre war was unheard of, and very 'untraditional'. Even more so a woman sitting in a pub drinking with the rest of the men was seen to be some as outrageous. The source comes from a World War 1 soldier's experience. His memories recorded for a book in 1990. The source gives us examples of how female munitions workers could be earning "ten times" the pay of a full army Corporal. The source is very useful and gives us an idea of how women were beginning to overcome sexism in the workplace and the battle for fair paid wages, overcoming the (what used to be acceptable) social tradition of sexist economical injustice.

The limitations to the source is that its recorded nearly 72 years after the war the finished. Memory may have faded or the story may even be exaggerated for the book. Although there were many positives towards women from the war, the work they had to do in munitions was sometimes dangerous and unfairly paid. Not only in munitions but many work places

were using female labour as a cheap source of efficient product manufacture. In some cases would work 70 hours a week. Source A8 shows the unhealthy working conditions and long hours the London Aircraft painters had to endure and also the low 15 shilling a week wage. The source is useful as it shows how women were exploited and mistreated during the war period. The author (Sylvia Pankhurst) wrote in a history book to inform people of the poor treatment of women during World War 1 (written in 1932) .

But she was also a campaigner for women's rights making the content possibly biased and exaggerated to turn her reader's sympathy towards women's equality. But the source still gives valid information that supports other research that says working conditions were sometimes unfair. To conclude World War 1 brought about much change for women. The jobs women occupied when the men left to fight contributed to many changes in society. Most of which were positive. Women had more freedom to do what they wanted and the introduction of birth control meant that women could now partake in family planning and hold off the traditional housewife role. These changes and higher wages encouraged spending and a more 'relaxed' female society and attitudes towards women in the workplace and all over Britain.

In 1918 women were given the vote, although there were restrictions (had to be over 30 years of age and own land) this eligibility was a large step in securing equal rights for women in the future British society. But some of the work was bad and exploited women as cheap labour. Men could earn 50%

more than women doing the same job. The workplace was dangerous, especially in munitions factories where 300 women died in an incident where the chemicals became unstable and caused a huge explosion. Not to mention the amounts of women poisoned by the sulfur and lead. But regardless, the negatives that women endured and persevered through during the war helped change the position of women in Britain indefinitely and have changed and influenced many people's views and attitudes towards women across the globe.