

## Gender Inequality in the UK



Can you spot the Moravian Sister at this recent demonstration in London?

Many of us who are now in leadership roles within our Churches can remember a time when men held most of the “important” jobs in congregations. Gender inequality is in the news, mainly because of jobs and pay.

### **What is gender inequality?**

It is treating men and women differently and disadvantageously, under similar circumstances, on the basis of gender. It may happen in education, jobs, and pay.

### **What has the Government done about gender inequality?**

The Sex Discrimination Act of 1975 protects individuals from being discriminated against in employment, training, education, the provision and sale of goods, facilities and services, premises and the exercise of public

functions, due to their gender. The Equal Pay Act of 1970 requires equal pay for equal work regardless of an individual's gender. From 2017, employers with 250 or more employees must publish and report specific figures about their gender pay gap.

## **So does gender inequality still exist?**

### **In education**

Boys lag behind girls at important educational milestones. The gap is wider for those who receive free school meals. Girls outperform boys in headline GCSE results. Young women are more likely to enrol at university. In 2016 the gender gap in favour of women was the highest on record. In England, young women are 36% more likely to apply to university and when both sexes are from disadvantaged backgrounds young women are 58% more likely to apply.

### **At work:**

Despite the equal education opportunities for young women, the UK has a persistent gender pay gap caused by:

**Discrimination:** some women are still paid less than men for the same work. Discrimination, particularly around pregnancy and maternity leave, is common, with 54,000 women forced to leave their job every year after becoming a mother.

**Caring responsibilities:** Women play a greater role in caring for children, as well as for sick or elderly relatives. As a result more women work part time, and these jobs are typically lower paid, insecure, and have fewer progression opportunities.

**A divided labour market:** Women are still more likely to be in low paid and low skilled jobs, affecting labour market segregation. 80% of those working in the low paid care and leisure sector are women, while only 10% of those in the better paid skilled trades are women.

**Men in the most senior roles:** Men make up the majority of those in the highest paid and most senior roles. Currently, there is much more equality in the numbers of women and men entering the legal and accountancy professions and training as doctors for example, but in general women still don't progress to the top jobs.

### **Pensions:**

Men and women's state pensions start at different ages (in women's favour), but men are still more likely to have a better pension from work because of their greater work record.

## Is gender inequality the price women pay for choosing family responsibilities over career?

Many women choose to step aside from their full time jobs when they have a family. Employers would say that they waste resources training and promoting women who then leave or go part time.

This allows men to get ahead, so that when women re-enter full time work, they have been permanently left behind. It is also common for men to demand pay rises they think they deserve. Women are often unwilling to make such demands.

## Is it all the fault of men then?

The new 2017 reporting requirement has embarrassed many large employers, as it shows clearly womens' low pay, but the employers say it is **jobs** which are low paid not **women**.

Some women from overseas have to take cleaning, catering and caring type jobs which don't require good language skills - and they are absolutely crucial to the NHS.

Many young women actively choose low status jobs in the caring professions e.g. nursing, and in the leisure industry e.g. beauticians and hairdressers.

Many genuinely love their work, and, along with "stay at home mothers", believe their work has a value which society does not recognise.

## Gender inequality does exist, can it ever be completely removed?

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Some of the information in this paper came from the Fawcett Society.