

## **Discuss the nature of, and explanations for, gender inequalities in society.**

Gender inequality discusses how differences between males and females contribute to, or cause, social and cultural differences.

Society has grown to have differences between men and women with greater emphasis of inequality on women.

There is evidence to suggest that women generally tend not to work in skilled jobs in the construction and engineering sectors and few men working in secretarial positions (1996 Labour Force Survey) does this mean that men are more skilled than women. Early research and theorists assumed that inequalities were biologically determined and as a result this natural ability could not be changed. Female employment has tended to increase over the years and they form 44% of all wage earners, (A-level Sociology, 1995). Also, the passing of the legislation act in the 1990s ensured that an improvement, although not equality, in earnings for women. We, now, also tend to see women increasingly holding positions of importance (e.g. a female monarch and a recent female Prime Minister). Despite this women do tend to occupy the less well paid jobs with opportunities of a lesser degree to that of men, which is shown by the fact that few employers have amenities to facilitate female employees with young children.

The department of education released figures showing how women in paid employment had increased from barely 40% in 1971 to well over 55% in 2001.

But why has female employment actually increased? From after the 2<sup>nd</sup> World War there was high demand for labour to rebuild Britain. Here, women entered factories and tended to remain there. During the 60's birth rates were falling and so women could return to work early. Slowly demand for entertainment and leisure also increased and women took up this opportunity as additional income to satisfy their needs. As a result the number of women entering the labor force increased.

Some of the economic cases are due to increased demand during economic causes and cheap dispensable labor in recession. Social factors discuss how feminism has grown together with attitude of equality.

These in tandem include the effect of higher divorce rates, single-parent families, and better living standards. However, although female workers have increased it hasn't been on terms with equality with men. Examples of this are prejudice, discrimination and criticism which, ultimately has arisen from 'male dominance'.

Although it is illegal to do so men still prefer to employ men, due to beliefs that "women are less capable" and that women "are too busy looking after

children to participate fully in the labor market". (Contemporary British Society, 2001). Despite this women employment is still steadily increasing due to early retirements among older men and high rates of unemployment among younger men.

Education is another field where there is gender inequality. For many years girls have had, and are steadily increasing the gap between themselves and boys, better levels of grade attainment at school and further education. Reasons for this could be the educational reforms in the UK since the latter 1980s, which may have helped girls improve their performances. Or even as a result of increased equal opportunities policies in schools.

Studies into equal opportunities resulted in findings that little interest is shown to equal opportunities at schools by governors and inspectors. Also, schools generally perceive changes in gender differences with positive results for gender equity. One important factor that was revealed during this study is that gender difference in schools is related to other aspects of gender inequality, directly, or indirectly, depending on arguments. The most important of these is the segregation of the labor market and inequalities in household labor dividing. And later going onto the fact that women gear themselves towards careers where access for women and bringing up children is facilitated. Riddell & Gaskell (1992) write how gender inequality is embedded in everyday practice. Girls tend to be pulled more to domestic chores than young men, ultimately, making greater contributions to housework and tend to engage in disposable income-based activities such as leisure, than young men.

The bottom-line, so to say, in the education sectors argues that girls' formal achievement continues to improve. However, it does not explain why men continue to have greater earnings than women do, which is an important point to consider.

It must, though, be taken into account that so-called 'woman problems' are given priority at schools and colleges, and not enough time or effort is given to realize 'male problems'. This leaves the males beleaguered. Also, males leaving schools have been greatly affected in terms of employment because the manufacturing industry is slowly becoming exhausted (where more males tend to work) and being replaced with service sector employment in retailing and/or care taking occupations. So in some ways it may be argued that women's roles in society may have been affected boys more than girls'. This, however, is too definite a statement to argue because there are many more points to consider.

In some aspects boys are stereotyped by teachers, rather than girls, as 'trouble-makers' in classes. This often leads to discrimination of boys and evaluations by the teachers as problems with 'family backgrounds' or 'bad school records' etc.

Often teachers will also motivate or de-motivate individuals when they are choosing a subject saying they are "likely to fail", "the subject is not for them" or "they are not the type", even though their strengths may lie with that particular subject(s) or that field. An example of this is that if a girl is choosing Physics or Electronics at A-level a teacher may say "you do not want to do this, the chances are you will fail because it is very hard". Similarly, if a boy is going to choose Performing Arts the teacher may advise them that "that is a girls' subject you don't want to do that".

Gender inequality is usually faced when discussing individuals in a family. The Labor Party, for instance, created plans for the 'welfare to work' for women to gear themselves towards acquiring job skills, thus fewer dependants on state benefits. This was controversial to the government, as the critics' view was that placing emphasis on women tended to stray attention away from the men and so 'pushing' them, to say, out of work. This means women would be less attractive to this sort of man as he is unemployed, which as a result increases births out of wedlock. A study from the Allan Guttmacher Institute revealed that Great Britain has the highest percentage of adolescent births out of wedlock with over 80% with the US behind at 59%. Britain had by far, the highest in the world.

A report by International Planned Parenthood Federation found that 87% births to teenagers was outside marriage. At first it was blamed on lack of employment (again relating back to the fact that women get paid less), and educational opportunities. It also found that 20% are one-parent families and less than half have a 'traditional' father, mother and children family.

This might have meant that 'the family' and its relationships are declining in importance. The traditional viewpoint or the inequality for women and their roles in a family shows how it is alienating to have a housewife role. Oakley (The Sociology of Homework) in her studies showed evidence presenting her argument that gender roles are culturally determined, not biologically, as it was originally perceived. She goes on to say that "there is no evidence showing that some tasks are solely performed, or there to be done, by women in society (except that of giving birth)".

Oakley, in some other studies seeks to explain the exploited position of women in contemporary society. She says, "although there has been a steady growth in the number of women in the work force they are still expected to maintain their role as housewife, which has remained their primary role". Other stereotypes such as the 'role of men is outside the house and women inside' together with other traditional viewpoints limit the occupational chances of women. And the fact that they do most housework despite working full-time are factors that contribute to the fact that families are not 'traditional' anymore, or to the fact that divorces in relationship are initiated by more women than men. This does not mean women are neglecting their children but the fact that men now see women as independent and more able to look after their children. And as Francis

Fukuwama states (The End of Order, 1997) "the old obligation young men once felt for parenting is now replaced by a new freedom and irresponsibility. There is no deficit of mothers and motherhood; there is, however, a serious deficit of fathers and fatherhood".

Why is this happening? Feminists want to resist any return to what they see as the repressive 1950s model, or to economic disincentives for women to work (John Williams, Sociology Review). They want more sharing of work, or home issues and duties. Other functionalists warn that 'female superiority', with reference to work in the home, means that men become almost irrelevant to the family thus changing their stance in society, which would in effect be a gender inequality with discrimination towards men.

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