

# On the Current Social Status of Women in Britain

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**Abstract:** Since the Second World War, through the efforts of the government and all sections of society, the social status of ordinary women in Britain has improved considerably and they have won legal equality with men. However, the fact remains that there is still inequality between men and women in British society. These imbalances are mainly in the areas of income, employment, and even language and culture, and health. This article, through the collection of various news reports and the analysis of data from the UK National Statistics, exposes the fact that women are still underprivileged compared to men in British society today. It aims to correct the common misconception that women in the UK have a higher status than men and to provide a more objective understanding of the current situation of women's lives in the UK.

**Keywords:** British Women; Social Status; Gender Inequality

## 1. Introduction

The UK is perceived as a highly inclusive country, which supports LGBT groups (Lesbians, Gays, Bisexuals, and Transgender), emphasizes gender equality and has made much effort to do so. Since 1868, when nine female students were admitted to the University College London, six of whom received degrees in the following year and became the first group of women in the UK to gain higher academic qualifications, since then, women gradually rose in social status and became active in all walks of life, especially after the Second World War.

Elizabeth II, as one of the representatives of women, is also the Queen of England and the head of state. Even today, 16 countries around the world, including the UK, honor her as their Queen. In certain senses, therefore, the Queen is the highest-ranking royal leader in the world. Meanwhile, the plain female citizen, they are also changing their traditional image: many of them are smoking, drinking and clubbing, and are no longer focused on their families as they once were. Some women are even becoming the perpetrators of domestic violence. According to Office for national statistics, the proportion of men who are victims of domestic violence is increasing. Also, when couple divorce, half of the family property is automatically divided to the woman. Usually, the man will be responsible for his ex-wife's alimony until she remarries or finds stable employment. On the streets of the UK today, numerous men are caring for children, some of whom are full-time dads, and they see this as common and they are happy to look after their families in this case, can we assume that men and women in the UK have become completely equal or even that women have a higher status than men?

The answer, absolutely, is no. In fact, there has never been gender equality in Britain. This can be seen in the succession to the throne, income, employment, language and culture, and even health.

## 2. Areas of Gender Inequality

### 2.1. About the Succession to the Throne

Firstly, Elizabeth II became Queen of England primarily because she happened to be the eldest child and the first in line to the throne. The fact that she succeeded to the throne as a result of the British succession system has nothing to do with her gender, and it cannot be asserted that British women are superior to men. This is because the principle of primogeniture and male over female in the Middle Ages was abolished by a series of Succession Acts in 1925, which established equal succession rights for the eldest son or daughter. In other words, the oldest of the king's children is the first heir to the throne. In the past, when there was already a male heir to the crown, women of royal birth were often the subject of political alliances with powerful neighbors. Queen Mary I of England, for example,

was betrothed to the Dauphin of France by her father, Henry VIII, when she was still a child. She became the Queen only after her half-brother, King Edward VI, died prematurely and she was pushed to the throne by her ministers. As for civilian women, although there is full equality between men and women at the legal level, in fact, women still face all sorts of discrimination and are unable to obtain true gender equality.

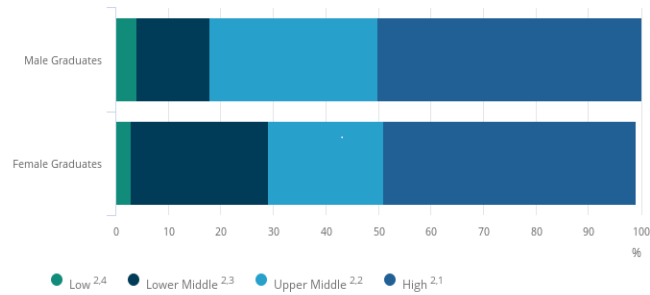
### ***2.2. On the Income Side***

Gender inequality in the UK is mainly manifested in income aspect. The UK has the highest female labor market participation rate of any developed country. But unfortunately, female employees have always suffered the injustice of being paid differently for the same work compared to their male counterparts. A scandal broke in 2017 about the disparity between the earnings of male and female anchors at the BBC. In the list of 200 people earning more than 150,000 which BBC was forced to reveal, top executives, actors, hosts, writers and technicians were included, but only 1/3 were women. According to the above list, Chris Evans, former presenter of BBC's *The Crazy Car Show*, earned the most, at least 2.2 million. While, the presenter of *Strictly Come Dancing* Claudia Winkleman was the highest-paid female employee, taking in over 450,000, this was only a fifth of what Evans earned<sup>[1]</sup>.

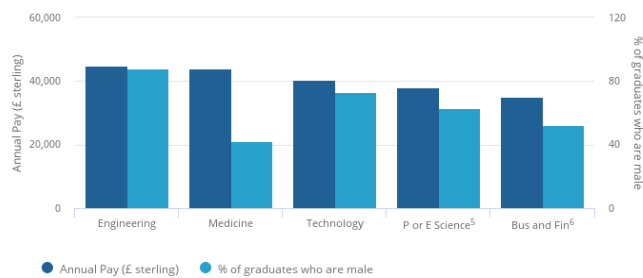
The TUC, the UK's largest trade union, recently published a report saying that there is income inequality between men and women in British society, with women earning on average 15.4% less than men. It will take more than 30 years to bridge this gap in the UK. A previous report by the Institute for Fiscal Studies also showed that the gender pay gap in the UK has "barely changed" in the last 25 years. The extent of the gender earnings gap varies across different occupations in the UK. In finance and insurance, the gap between men's and women's earnings reaches 32.2%, which is equivalent to four months' salary for a woman in the same industry. Even in female-dominated fields such as education and health care, women still generally earn less than men<sup>[2]</sup>.

### ***2.3. In Employment***

Gender equality has also never been present in employment, which is closely linked to income. According to data from the Office for National Statistics, among graduates between 21 to 64, who have a level of higher education above A level standard, male graduates had higher employment rates (86%) than females (79%) from July to September 2017. The employment rate for female graduates may be slightly lower because they were more likely to state that they were out of the labor force to look after the family and/or home; 11% of female graduates stated this compared with 2% of male graduates. (data from Office for National Statistics) Focusing on male and female graduates in work, the percentage of male and female graduates in high-skill and low-skill jobs were similar. However, female graduates were less likely to be in upper-middle-skill jobs and more likely to be in lower-middle-skill jobs. Overall from July to September 2017, of all female graduates, 33% were working part-time while compared with only 8% of male graduates. While 47% of people working in lower-middle-skill roles were working part-time, only 17% and 19% of people in upper-middle-skill and high-skill roles were. (as shown in Figure 1) Furthermore, out of the top five subjects associated with the highest average gross annual earnings, four of them were subjects that male graduates are more likely to have studied than female graduates: medicine, engineering, technology and physical or environmental subjects. (as shown in Figure 2)



*Figure 1: Male and female graduates, by skill level of their job  
 July to September 2017, UK  
 source: Labour Force survey*



*Figure 2: Average annual pay for graduates with undergraduate degrees in medicine, physical or environmental science, maths or computer science, engineering or architecture and percentage who are male  
 July to September 2017, UK  
 Source: Office for National statistics*

Even in recent decades, there has been a commitment at all levels of British society to advance gender equality. The forces that produce gender inequality have not been eliminated, such as job segregation, discrimination against women and mothers, and traditional practices and ideologies of parenting that can be seen in most workplaces around us. All of these factors faced by female employees have varying degrees of severity in each occupation. For example, in the case of blue-collar occupations, discrimination against women is more frequent than in white-collar jobs. However, white-collar women experience more discrimination in their role as mothers than blue-collar women. Women face a variety of hidden gender discrimination, yet it is difficult to have evidence of discrimination by employers, which makes it more difficult to defend their rights. The COVID-19 epidemic of recent years has pushed female employees, who are already at a disadvantage in the workplace, to an even worse situation.

On 8 March 2021, The Guardian published a survey entitled “Half of the Women in the UK fear equality is going back to 1970s”. The poll was conducted by Mumsnet in London for International Women's Day. The results of the poll show that women across the UK are voicing a “cry of despair”, with more than half believing that women's equality at work, at home and in society is in danger of

going back to the 1970s. The burden on women in the UK was made heavier by the anti-epidemic blockade measures. 70% of mothers with male partners among those surveyed took on all or most of the home-schooling work; three-quarters of women said that male partners were more likely to work uninterrupted hours during the epidemic blockade (a figure that matches the findings of the Institute for Fiscal Studies); one in five working mothers said that they had to reduce their working hours to cope with increased childcare, and more than a third of those surveyed said that their careers had suffered in a way that their partners had not experienced<sup>[3]</sup>. The poll also reveals the disparity between men and women in the UK when it comes to housework. (as shown in Figure 3) Women do most of the housework in areas such as laundry, food shopping, house cleaning and tidying. As the human capital theory claims that the “gender pay gap was, historically at least, chiefly the result of women having lower 'human capital' than men - that is, lower knowledge, skills or job experience”<sup>[4]</sup>, thus limiting women career choices by social pressures and expectations and being passed on from one generation to the next.

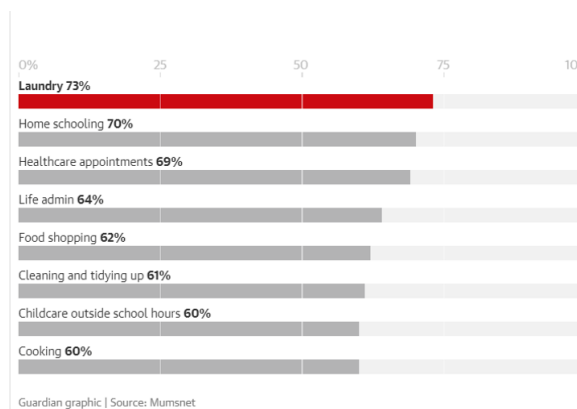


Figure 3: 73% of women who live with a male partner say they do all or most of the laundry

Source: Mumsnet

#### 2.4. In Language and Culture

Inequality between men and women in the UK also occurs in many areas other than income and employment, such as language and culture, and even health. Language is a mirror of the real world, and gender bias is always reflected in the language. Linguistic disparities manifest themselves in the form of linguistic sexism. This can be seen in the definition of sexism: the Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary explains "prejudice or discrimination against people: esp. women, because of their sex. That is, sexism is only one-sided discrimination against women<sup>[5]</sup>. The generalization of masculine words in the English vocabulary treats women as exceptions. This of course has to do with the traditional thinking that it is often men who are prestigious and whose achievements are seen as exceptional. If a woman achieves fame, the media will always make a big deal of it. So much so that whenever a famous woman is mentioned anywhere, the word "woman" is always added to her title to emphasize her gender. For instance, when the King of England happens to be a woman, she is often called “Queen” rather than “King”; there are also many professional terms ending in “-man”: chairman, fireman, policeman, etc. The people who work in these occupations can be both male and female. The words chairwoman, firewoman, and policewoman are always used to underline their gender. Some words in English also convey the idea of treating women as subordinate to men. In many English-speaking countries, it is customary for a woman to take her husband's surname after marriage. The English still follow this agreed rule today. For according to the Bible, Eve was derived from one of Adam's ribs. This undoubtedly established the perception that women were part of the male race from the very beginning. This phenomenon is found in some pairs of nouns in English, e.g. author/authoress, male/female, hero/heroine, actor/actress, etc. It is easy to see that in English when men and women must use different forms of the same noun, the word denoting the masculine gender is usually unmarked, i.e. the noun itself; whereas words denoting the feminine are obtained by adding an adherent morpheme to the masculine word. This construction reveals a subconscious bias. Moreover, in Western culture, witchcraft is always considered to be evil and those who use it are the embodiment of the devil. But strangely enough, most of the scenes we see in films are of groups of supposedly righteous men

searching for witches in the dark and threatening to burn them to death. We can't help but wonder: are women the only ones who use witchcraft and not men? Are all witches evil and deserved to be killed? It is clear from this that in today's Western linguistic culture there are still pervasive elements of discrimination against women that are far more deeply rooted than racial prejudices.

### **2.5. In Terms of Health**

In terms of health, it is estimated that 124, 000 men and 70, 000 women are hospitalized each year in the UK due to heart disease. Professor Gayle says that from the first moment of a heart attack, men and women are diagnosed differently. If you are a woman, you are more than 50 percent more likely to be misdiagnosed initially than a man. The same is true for the range of treatments and diagnoses that follow, resulting in a greater chance of death for women with heart problems. The Heart Foundation, a British charity, says that heart disease is often thought of as primarily a male disease. But more women die from heart disease than from breast cancer. Researchers at the University of Leeds and in Sweden have analyzed Swedish online sources and concluded that women are generally less likely to receive the same post-heart attack care as men. A new study shows that if women received the same attention and care after a heart attack as men, it would significantly reduce the death rate from heart attacks of women<sup>[6]</sup>. For whatever reason, hospitals are treating gender-specific cardiac patients differently, and this is giving rise to a damaging impact on the normal process of treatment for female patients. In this way alone, British society is far from reaching the stage of gender equality.

### **3. Conclusion**

Underneath the inclusive attitude and the face of equality between men and women that British society presents to the world lie many social problems, with de facto inequality between men and women being one of the most serious. The epidemic that began in 2020 has increased unemployment among women, leading to unrewarding household chores and increasing the financial burden on women. There is also persistent discrimination against women in the English language and culture, and even in health, women are far more likely to be misdiagnosed with heart disease than men, and they often do not receive the same level of care as men. The facts of gender disparity show that the UK still has a long way to go in advancing gender equality.

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