

CSI 9: Is the UK becoming more gender equal?

Summary

- Women have better outcomes than men in some areas of life: they have longer life expectancy, are more likely to have social support, and are less likely to be unemployed
- However, women are worse off than men in terms of pay, mental health, and the proportion of their lives that are spent disability-free.
- Although men and women experience roughly the same risk of being a victim of any type of crime, women are far more likely to experience 'intimate violence'. Like crime more generally, survey estimates suggest that sexual assault and domestic violence have decreased in the last decade
- The pay gap has been decreasing slowly in the last decade, after a period of stagnation in the 1990s. The most recent narrowing may be a result of greater wage drops for men after the financial crisis
- Men have closed the life expectancy gap and have a modal age of death 1.5 years below that of women. Over the last decade, men have made gains in the proportion of life spent 'disability-free' while women have not
- The last two decades have seen women closing the mental health gap, but it may have grown again recently

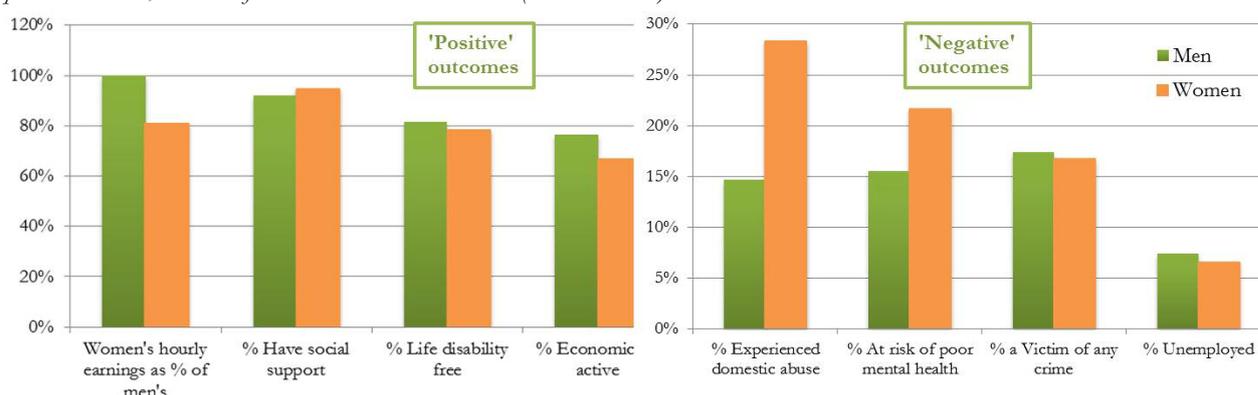
How do things look now?

How are we doing as a society when it comes to gender equality? Are women closing the pay gap? How do men and women fare differently when it comes to life expectancy, happiness, employment, and experiences of crime? This briefing note provides an overview of the differences in the lives of men and women in the UK, we explore whether gaps are closing over time and identify areas of risk; is it possible that progress can go backwards?

We begin with a 'snapshot' of the differences between the lives of men and women on several key indicators, which are divided into positive and negative and shown in Figure 1. The left-hand panel shows that a higher percentage of men are economically active, and that men spend a larger proportion of their lives 'disability free' (82% compared to 79% for women). A large gap is still evident in average earnings; after decades of closing the gap the average hourly wages of women in 2013 were 81% of men's. Women experience better social support - they are more likely to say that they have someone to talk to about personal matters (95% compared to 92%).

Figure 1: Gender differences on range of outcomes

Multiple data sources³, estimates from between 2012 and 2014 (latest available)



On the negative outcomes, we can see that women and men have similar probabilities of being a victim of crime, and of being unemployed (latest figures), though women have slightly lower levels of each. However, there are large disparities on two outcomes; firstly, 22% of women compared to 16% of men are at risk of poor mental health defined as having four or more symptoms of psychological ill-health. Secondly, and where we see the widest gap, is the numbers of men and women who have experienced domestic abuse in their adult lifetime; 15% of men compared to 28% of women. We now turn to explore some of these outcomes in more detail including how they might be changing over time.

How do things look in the context of time?

The last half century has seen rapid changes in the role of women in society. Technological advances have allowed for increased control over fertility and reduced the burden of housework for women, while social

movements and changing attitudes have brought about new opportunities and life choices. One of the outcomes of this period of change is the increase in female participation in the labour market, and Figure 2 shows the steady rise since 1971. The 'gap' between the participation rates of men and women has been at its lowest level of around 10 percentage points for the last five years.

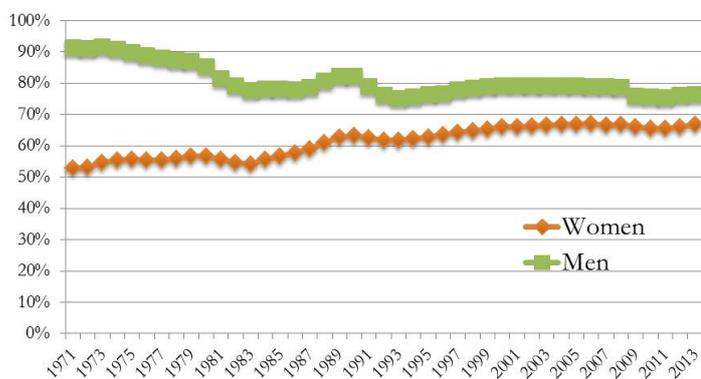


Figure 2: The proportion of women in the labour market rose from 53% in 1971 to 67% in 2013

Source: IFS - UK Labour Force Survey

Although labour market participation is higher among men than women, men experience higher levels of unemployment.

On average the difference in unemployment rates is around two percentage points, but it is evident that the gap widened during the economic recessions of the early 1990s and 2008. In this sense, it appears that men are more likely to be negatively affected by the macro-economic context.

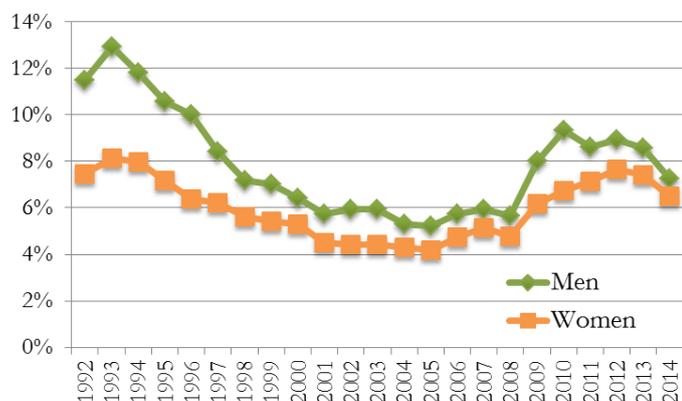


Figure 3 –The unemployment gap widens at times of recession

Source: UK Labour Force Survey

Is the pay gap closing?

The Equal Pay Act of 1970 was followed by a steep rise in the pay of women relative to men, and the pay gap closed considerably from that point onⁱⁱ. We concentrate on the past two decades in Figure 4 and show median hourly wages of men and women with income adjusted for inflation. The trend, firstly, in the level of wages for both men and women was in an upward direction from 1993 until the onset of the Great Recession. However, it is evident that the wages of women have been and still are well below those of men; the latest figures show the average hourly pay for men is £12.03 compared to £9.71 for women. The blue line plots the progress of the gap which has been moving in a downward direction over the last decade, i.e. the gap has been getting smaller. The

Measuring the pay gap

The gender pay gap is rather complicated to measure. Many more women than men, for example, work part-time in order to manage child-care or other reasons (hence we show hourly rather than weekly wages in Figure 4). There are more women than men in the public sector and particularly in 'caring' professions which are low-paid, while there are more men than women in 'revenue-generating' professions. But does this mean the gap is 'OK', or justifiable? Many would argue that the type of work that women do is under-valued and that the gender pay-gap should not be vindicated by this line of reasoning. The International Labour Organisation (ILO) have analysed the reasons behind the pay gaps in developed countries, and have shown that even after taking into account the level of economic activity, type of occupation, experience, education and work intensity a substantial pay gap still exists in the UK. Further, after accounting for these characteristics, the UK has the fifth highest unexplained pay gap among the 30 developed nations compared. Thus, the gap cannot be dismissed as a result of the choices that women make, and while the gap is narrowing, comparison with other countries highlights that we still have work to do.

It is also important to think beyond the pay gap to the economic situation of those outside the labour market, particularly in light of the austerity measures, the full effect of which are yet to be felt. Women are heavier users of public services, either directly or indirectly for those they are caring for, and as such are likely to feel the effects of the spending cuts to a greater degree than men. (See note v for references and further reading)

pay gap in 2013 was at its lowest level for 20 years. The recent narrowing, whilst undoubtedly a move in the right direction, may have come about because the wages of men fell further than those of women as a consequence of the financial crisis. This is perhaps because of the higher proportion of women in the public sector where real earnings fell by a smaller amount after the crisis compared to the private sectorⁱⁱⁱ.

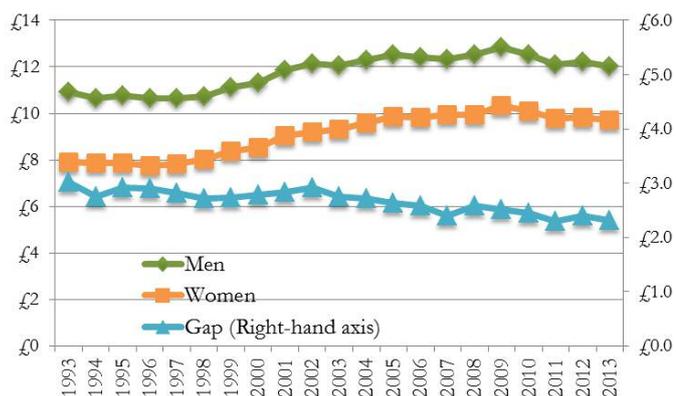


Figure 4: The gender pay gap has been closing, particularly over the last decade
Real median hourly wages (excludes earnings from self-employment)
Source: IFS calculations using Labour Force Survey

Experiences of Crime

In the past, men have been victims of crime more commonly than women, though that gap seems to have closed and men and women reported around the same level in 2013/14. However, much of the crime against women may be ‘hidden’. It is known, for example, that domestic abuse and sexual assault in particular are underestimated both by police figures and in the overall ‘victimisation rate’ from surveys (as shown in Figure 1). However, since 2004/5 the Crime Survey for England and Wales has included a confidential ‘self-complete’ module on intimate violence allowing the prevalence of these crimes to be estimated. This includes domestic abuse and sexual assault. Of those answering these questions (adults aged between 16 and 59), 15% of men and 28% of women said they had experienced some form of domestic abuse in their adult lifetime, and 3.6% of men and 19.9% of women had experienced some form of sexual assault (including attempts). Thus, it appears that this form of crime is not uncommon and is more frequently experienced by women. As this data series began in 2004/5 we can only ascertain change over the last decade; but Figure 5 shows that, as observed with crime more generally (see briefing note CSI 4), that intimate violence may also be in decline^{iv}.

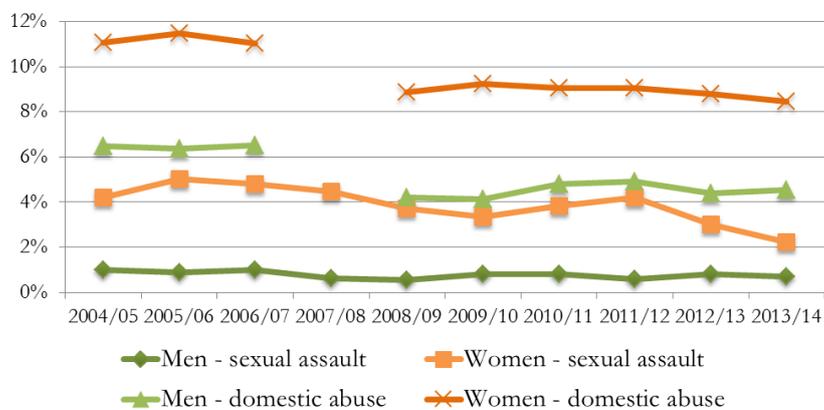


Figure 5: The level of domestic abuse and sexual assault has declined slightly over the last decade, though still mainly the experience of women
CSEW – experience in last 12 months (not in lifetime as per Figure 1)

Life expectancy

There has been a well-documented gap in the life expectancy of men and women, with men dying at a younger age, on average, than women in every year since records began. In recent decades it has become evident that men are closing that gap, and today the modal (most common, discounting deaths before the age of 10) age of death among men (89.0) is just 1.5 years younger than women (90.5). This pattern probably reflects advances in cardiovascular health, which has historically been a bigger killer of men than women.

Figure 6: Men are ‘catching up’ with women in the most common age of death (excluding childhood)
Source: Human Mortality Database

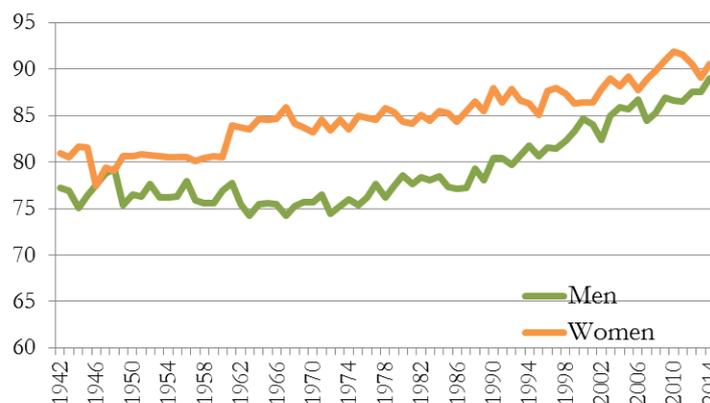
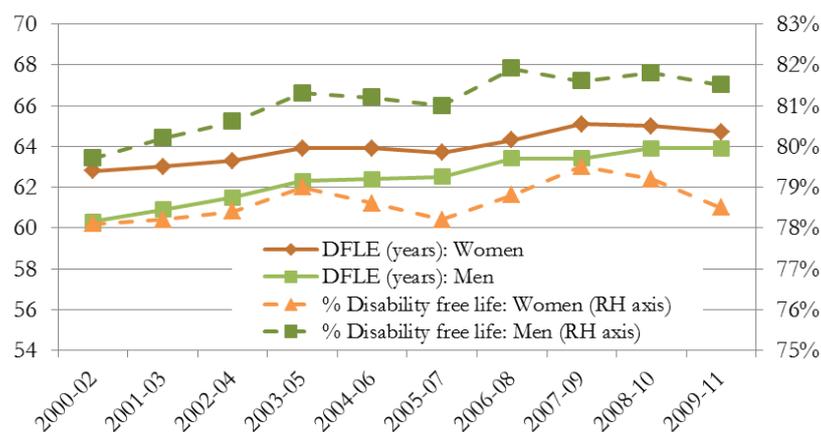


Figure 7 shows trends in ‘disability-free life expectancy’ (DFLE). Like with life expectancy more generally, this is slightly higher for women than men. Men have made significant improvements in DFLE in the past decade that

have exceeded their improvements in overall longevity, whereas rates of improvement for women have been slower. Although women are continuing to live longer, therefore, they appear to be spending a greater proportion of their lives in disability (21% compared to 18%).

Figure 7: Women have higher ‘disability-free life expectancy’, but the gap is narrowing. Men live a greater proportion of their life disability-free and this gap may be widening

Source: ONS/ General lifestyle survey



Subjective well-being

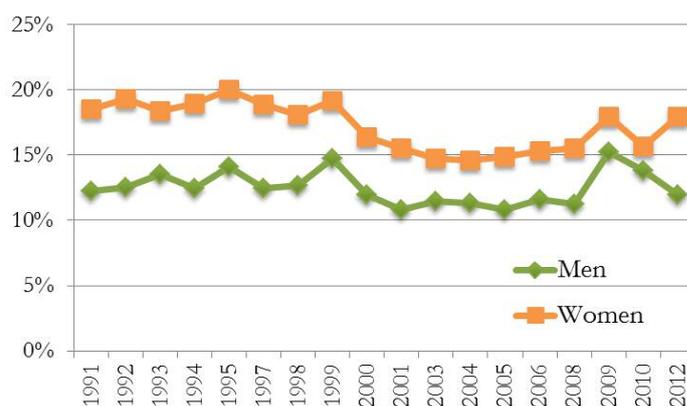
The factors described above: our earnings, social relationships, health, and experiences of crime are all important contributors to our quality of life, our opportunity to be happy and free of mental health issues. Finally then, in Figure 8 we plot, over two decades, the percentage of men and women who exhibit four or more symptoms of psychological ill-health and are thereby at risk of mental health problems. Throughout this period women have been at higher risk of psychological ill-health than men, a difference of 7 percentage points at its widest (1992) and 2 percentage points at its narrowest (2010). The risk for both men and women was lower in the 2000s compared to the 1990s but greater gains for women meant that the gap became narrower. In the aftermath of the Great Recession, however, this trend is disrupted. Men took a bigger ‘hit’ to their mental health as we can see in 2009 and 2010. The most recent estimates shown (from 2012) suggest that the mental health of men is back to around its pre-recession level. The percentage of women at risk, on the other hand, had returned to its new improved standard of around 15% in 2010 but by 2012 had increased to 18%. Is the mental health of women losing headway and returning to its 1990s level? It is too early to draw firm conclusions, but it is certain that we should keep an eye on the gap.

Figure 8: The risk of psychological ill-health is higher for women than men, a gap that may have been closing until recently

Source: HSE

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ⁱ Data from British Social Attitudes Survey, UKHLS, CSEW, ONS, European Social Survey (UK); Income data provided by the IFS

ⁱⁱ Harkness, S. *The gender earnings gap: evidence from the UK Fiscal Studies* 17.2 (1996)

ⁱⁱⁱ See J. Cribb and R. Joyce, *Earnings since the recession* (2015)

^{iv} These trends are in contrast to the police recorded figures which have shown a recent increase in rape and sexual offences. It is thought that this can be explained by changes in recording by the police and an increase in the willingness of victims to come forward – see *Crime Statistics, Focus on Violent Crime and Sexual Offences, 2013/14* ONS

^v Rubery, J and Grimshaw, D. *The 40-year pursuit of equal pay: a case of constantly moving goalposts* Cambridge Journal of Economics (2014)/ ILO *Global Wage Report 2014/15: Wages and income inequality* (2015)/ Annesley, Claire. *Campaigning against the cuts: gender equality movements in tough times* The Political Quarterly (2012)/ ONS *Comparison of UK and EU at-risk-of-poverty rates, 2005-2010* (2012)

