

1975

**Are we
there yet?**

30 years of
closing the gap
between women
and men

2005

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On International Women's Day in 1971,
thousands of people paraded through London

30 years ago a flurry of new laws were introduced in the UK aimed at creating equality for women.

In 1975 the Equal Pay Act came into force, the Sex Discrimination Act was passed and the Equal Opportunities Commission was established. In the same year the Employment Protection Act 1975 made maternity leave a statutory right. One year later the Sexual Offences Amendment Act was passed.

More generally the 1970s were a time of great change for women in this country, with a huge surge of interest in women's rights and intense activism. It was a time of great optimism too – there was a hope among many in the women's movement that if only they pushed hard enough they would see equality for their daughters' generation.

In this review, we look at how much has really changed 30 years later. We find that while there are many successes to celebrate, there is still a great deal further to go to close the inequality gaps between women and men.

30 years on – employment and pay

There are now equal numbers of women and men in employment – but that does not mean that there is equality at work.

The hourly pay gap between women and men stands at 18.4% (compared to 29% in 1975). And for part-time work, the gap has hardly changed at all over the past 30 years – it was 42% in 1975 and it's 40% now. The gap is even bigger for Black and Minority Ethnic Women.

30 years on – home and family life

In some respects, home and family life is very different now. The percentage of married women has dropped from 74% in 1979 to 49%. The average number of children per household has gone down from two in 1971 to 1.8 in 2001. Instead, many more couples cohabit.

But it is also striking how little has changed at home for many women. We have had a revolution in the large numbers of women going out to work. But there has not been a mirroring of the revolution, with men moving equally into traditional female roles in the home.

We now need a revolution in men's lives too – this would be of benefit not only to women with male partners, but to all women and to men who want a better work-life balance.

30 years on – violence against women

In the 1970s the issue of violence against women, became a hot political topic.

In 1971 the first women's refuge for women fleeing violent relationships opened and by 1977 there were 200 refuges in the UK. In 1975 the Sexual Offences Act provided anonymity in the law for victims of rape and in 1976 the first specific legislation on domestic violence was introduced.

30 years later, we have a much greater understanding of violence against women in its many forms. But it's still a huge problem to society. In 1977 the rape conviction level was 33%. Now it hovers just above 5%.

Fawcett is part of an unprecedented coalition of women's organisations, formed this year, to campaign for an integrated strategy to end violence against women.

30 years on – women and politics

In 1975, just 4% of MPs were women. This figure crept up very slowly to 9% by 1992. But it was only after the 1997 election that the percentage of women MPs almost doubled overnight.

The impact of the increase in women MPs cannot be denied. Since the influx of women into Parliament in 1997, issues such as violence against women, childcare and work-life balance have moved quickly up the political agenda.

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Looking to the future

Fawcett's vision is of a world in which both women and men can enjoy equality at work, at home and in public life.

We believe that some of the challenges for the next few years will be:

Creating a revolution in men's lives to mirror the revolution we have seen in women's lives over the past 30 years.

Convincing women and men that there is still work to do, overcoming the myth that gender equality has been won.

Placing greater value on the unpaid caring work that keeps society going.

Finally ending violence against women and the harm it does to society as a whole.

Keeping up with our changing society, taking in the diverse needs of women today.

For a more detailed list of Fawcett's policy demands, read our Manifesto for Equality, available on our website at www.fawcettsociety.org.uk

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