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win the arguments



women'scampaign

Some people continue to question the need for women's officers, women's groups/associations and the NUS Women's Campaign and Officer. They also often argue for men's officers, and don't understand why objectification hurts women. This briefing paper is designed to give the basic arguments to help you:

- Win the arguments for feminism
- Win the arguments for Women's Representation
- Win the arguments against Men's Representation
- Win the arguments against Objectification

It is useful to be familiar with their arguments, so this briefing answers some questions that feminists often face. It may be that you know these arguments like the back of your hand, but sometimes they can seem so obvious that you don't know where to start when refuting them.

Please bear in mind that every union's circumstances are different and there is no ideal argument that suits every representative body. If you need any extra support, please do not hesitate to contact Liv Bailey, the National Women's Officer – olivia.bailey@nus.org.uk.

win the arguments for feminism

'Feminism is the struggle to end sexist oppression. Its aim is not to benefit solely any specific group of women, any particular race or class of women. It does not privilege women over men. It has the power to transform in a meaningful way all our lives. Most importantly, feminism is neither a lifestyle, nor a ready-made identity or role one can step into'

bell hooks, 'Feminism: A Movement to End Sexist Oppression', 1984

Feminism is a movement, not an ideology. In the Britain of today, feminism is as it has always been: a loosely aligned coalition of pro-women's liberation groups campaigning across a broad range of platforms and for a wide range of women. Feminism is an expression of the awesome power of women to effect social change when we act in solidarity. Feminism is as visible in Amnesty International, which campaigns for human rights across the globe, as it is in the Fawcett Society, which campaigns for women's representation and participation in public life in the UK. Feminism has no borders and no limits.

What has feminism achieved for women?

Feminist campaigning has contributed to massive social change throughout the twentieth century, improving the conditions of women beyond recognition.

First up, we have **the vote**, which, while we now take it for granted, enabled women to participate for the first time as political constituency. Even now we make up over half of the population, giving us political clout that we haven't yet grasped to its full potential. Today, young women aged 18-24 have the lowest turn-out of every voting group (Office of National Statistics, 2001).

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Contraception and abortion: the oral contraceptive pill was launched in the UK in 1961 and the Abortion Act gave women the right to a legal and safe abortion in 1967. Neither were uncontroversial, but women have greater control over their fertility than they have ever had before.

Equal Pay Act of 1970: making it unlawful for employers to discriminate between men and women in pay and conditions when they are doing the same or similar work. In 1970 the pay gap stood at 37%. Today it is 23%, and is significantly worse for black women.

Sex Discrimination Act of 1975: outlawing discrimination on the grounds of sex and establishing the Equal Opportunities Commission, which was later replaced by the Equality and Human Rights Commission in 2007.

Violence against women: the House of Lords abolished the marital rape exemption in 1991, recognising the existence of rape within marriage. Culturally, violence against women and domestic abuse are recognised as specific forms of violence and dealt with accordingly.

Removing barriers to women in work: Statutory Maternity Pay has existed since 1986 and most recently the Work and Families Act 2006 extended maternity pay and leave and gave more choice in which parent is the primary carer.

Since 2007, all public bodies in England, Scotland and Wales have a **Gender Equality Duty** which requires them to assess whether their policy disproportionately impacts on one gender more than another.

Where are we now?



Feminism has achieved much, and there is much left to achieve. The statistics at the end of this briefing show that there is a lot of work to be done before women can truly be equal with men. Women are not progressing at the same rate and some women are literally more equal than others. Class and race are still huge determinants of women's life experience.

Culturally, we have seen a backlash in attitudes towards women's liberation. Feminism got rid of old oppressive systems of patriarchy but we are seeing the emergence of patriarchy in new and complicated forms, hinging on a resurgence of the objectification of women, a co-opting of the language of equality that takes no account of existing oppression and an elevation of individual, privileged women at the expense of the rest. Women are still penalised for choosing to become mothers, penalised for working in the lowest-paid and most insecure jobs and forced to acknowledge that there is no real penalty in law for rape. Globally, poverty wears a female face and women are stoned and imprisoned for seeking an education or employment or speaking about injustice.

But this never means we should give up the fight. The internet has made it possible for women to communicate better than ever before, and we have opportunities to act that women that went before could not have dreamed of. We have seen a new uprising of campaigners committed to equality and liberation for women, and we will continue to achieve as long as we are equipped with the determination, the knowledge, the rhetoric, and the light of truth and justice!

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"Perhaps the greatest lie: that you are the generation that has sold out feminism. How wrong, to use the term sold out, when the backlash has been sold to you; when all you are given to sell is yourselves. It is not you who have sold out, for we have nothing to gain, and have gained nothing, from the backlash against us. Which takes our movement, takes the language of our liberation, turns it on its head, and sells it back to us. That is not our liberation..."

Yes, it is a lie that you are the generation that has betrayed feminism, when all around me and all over the world I see young women resisting, against all the odds, women succeeding, women winning. That is what liberation looks like!

And just as the last decades have proved what feminism can do, so will you, and I for one can't wait to see what you are going to do with the next thirty years"

Finn McKay, Founder, London Feminist Network, October 2009

Do I have to call myself a feminist to be involved in the women's movement?

As long as the feminist movement has existed, women have called themselves 'feminists'. People's reasons for calling themselves a feminist vary. Some women say that they are a feminist simply because they believe in equality between men and women, whereas others use different definitions – such as feminism meaning that you are 'anti-patriarchy' (bell hooks). The key thing to remember is that people's reasons for calling themselves feminists are often very personal, and the term means different things to different women. In many ways, the term feminist is what women use to align themselves with the broad aims of the feminist movement, or with specific areas of the feminist campaign that they feel passionately about.

The following quote from Rebecca West is a good illustration of the complicated nature of the term, but also of the term's role as a uniting force for the wide range of feminist views and perspectives.

"I myself have never been able to find out precisely what feminism is; I only know that people call me a feminist whenever I express sentiments that differentiate me from a doormat"

"Mr Chesterton in Hysterics: A Study in Prejudice," *The Clarion*, 14 Nov 1913, reprinted in *The Young Rebecca*, 1982

Those of you who have studied feminist theory will know that there are lots of different 'types' of feminists. These academic definitions are quite restrictive and a bit outdated, but give an idea of some of the different political views held by feminists.

- **Liberal feminists** focus on political and legal reform to fight for equality between men and women. They focus on individual experiences of sexism, and women's ability to fight for equality through their actions and choices in everyday life
- **Socialist feminists** believe that women's liberation can only be achieved once class oppression has ended. This comes from views from thinkers such as Karl Marx who referred to gender oppression as a symptom of class oppression
- **Radical feminists** believe that society is built on a patriarchy that oppresses women. They believe in attacking the underlying causes of sexism in order to overthrow the patriarchy. Many radical feminists are also socialists, but believe in fighting for liberation for all women, as well as fighting for ending class oppression

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There are some women involved in campaigning for women's rights who don't call themselves feminists. There are many reasons for this, but the most often given reason is that feminism comes across as a narrow and exclusive movement that does not welcome the contribution of all women.

The women's movement is not closed to those who don't call themselves feminists – quite the opposite: all women who want to understand better, and campaign against, women's oppression are welcome to get involved!

win the arguments for women's representation

Aren't women equal now?

No! If anything, sexism is becoming more complex, and more engrained in the fabric of our society.

It is true that increasingly laws are being passed, and cultures being changed, that give women more equality. In the 1950s it wasn't the norm for women to work, but today it is accepted as usual. However, in contrast, a law passed over 40 years ago to give women equal pay is still not being enforced - the pay gap is currently 23%, and is significantly worse for black women. And it isn't just unequal pay that hampers women in the workplace - women are discriminated against because they have children. Just look at Sir Alan Sugar's recent comments on the issue:

"Everything has gone too far. We have maternity laws where people are entitled to too much. If someone comes into an interview and you think to yourself 'there is a possibility that this woman might have a child and therefore take time off' it is a bit of a psychological negative thought. If they are applying for a position which is very important, then I should imagine that some employers might think 'this is a bit risky'"

<http://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-513264/Sir-Alan-Sugar-Why-I-think-twice-employing-woman.html#ixzz0TdVu4uNm>

Women face horrendous violence. Two women a week are killed by domestic violence in the UK. 1 in 4 women will experience violence at some point in their lives. Approximately 80,000 women suffer rape and attempted rape every year, yet only 5% of rapists are brought to justice. 16% of women will be stalked by a man at some point during their lives.

The advances that women make are always countered by a backlash, and we are seeing a huge backlash at the moment - and that is evidenced by the media's derisive attitude towards feminists. Notional equality does not equate to real equality - and that is the fight that feminists have got to win today.

Surely Women's Officers aren't necessary?

Women are the majority in education, yet the sexism that is endemic in society prevents women getting the most out of their education experience. This is demonstrated in a number of ways, including:

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- Student Parents have to deal with inadequate childcare provision, and inflexible courses
- Students Unions propagate the objectification of women through things like 'pimp n ho' club nights, sexist advertising, strippers and by hosting beauty pageants
- The gender pay gap for women when leaving University or College is 15%
- Sexist notions of 'women's subjects' and 'women's skills'
- There are no policies, and there is very limited support, for women at university or college who experience violence
- Women often feel unsafe on campus, or when walking home from a night out
- Women students face rape and sexual assault
- Women are underrepresented on student union executives, and in other student elected positions - most notably in the small number of women who become student union president

Women's Officers campaign on all these issues and many more - as well as campaigning on issues affecting women in wider society and across the world. Women's Officers provide a specific voice for these issues on student union executives, and without a women's officer many of these issues would not be acted on. This has been proven time and time again on student union executives without women's officers - there has been no focus on gender inequality as important to the student experience.

This also addresses the argument that other women on the student union executive can 'represent women'. The role of women's officer does not exist just so there can be a woman on the executive - it is a political role, with very clear campaigning objectives. Other women on the executive have their own specific briefs, and will be spending their time focussing on those issues. It is not fair to expect that they would spend time campaigning on feminist issues just because they are women members of the executive team.

Can the women's officer be a man?

Women's liberation and equality is about women organising themselves as women and making their own decisions about their own lives. It would be impossible for a man to represent women, as no man, however well informed and sympathetic, can speak with the full authority of experience about issues of concern to women. That is not to say that men cannot be involved in campaigning on issues of concern to women, but they must allow women to define their own priorities.

Isn't an Equal Opportunities Officer better than a Women's Officer?

Many union equal opportunities officers do a great job managing a large portfolio, and the creation of an equal opportunities officer is a useful first step to creating awareness around equalities issues in a union, particularly in smaller colleges where separate liberation officers are not a feasible option. However, this is not the ideal, as it is unrealistic for any one individual to fully understand and represent the needs and interests of all minority groups - women, ethnic minority students, lesbian, gay, bisexual and trans students, disabled students etc. Effective representation needs to include members of disadvantaged groups themselves; otherwise it is open to accusations of tokenism.

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win the arguments against men's representation

If we need a women's officer, why don't we need a men's officer too?

Some people complain that they think it is unequal to have a women's officer and not a men's officer. This argument is based on the misguided notion that equality means everyone having the same, and not everyone being able to achieve the same. The reason women's officers exist is to fight for women to be given equal chances, and to put them on a par with the opportunities afforded to men. Therefore, having a men's officer or a men's campaign actually reinforces the advantage that men have, and makes it harder for the women's campaign to succeed.

Men are not discriminated against because they are men, so it is worth asking the question what exactly will a men's society do? Experience shows that 'men's groups', rather than existing to break down restrictive gender binaries and empower men to challenge their own normative perceptions of masculinity, actually devote time and resources to 'proving' that feminists peddle hate-filled misogynist rhetoric. For example, a Fathers For Justice campaigner who climbed on to Harriet Harman's roof to protest her policies 'towards fathers' said:

"The Government is ignoring us and has a feminist agenda."

<http://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-1033661/Second-Fathers-4-Justice-roof-protest-Harriet-Harmans-house-month.html>

Men committed to rethinking gender stereotypes, to empowering all humanity to fulfil its potential, and to committing to bringing about full and genuine equality between the sexes would be misguided in thinking that a men's group could ever help to accomplish these aims. Such a demand denotes an utter lack of respect for, and understanding of, the women's movement.

The NUS Liberation campaigns exist to represent and empower individuals who experience discrimination and disadvantage in terms of status and opportunity because they belong to, or are perceived as belonging to, a particular social group. Men are not discriminated against because they are men - therefore having a liberation officer to represent men is completely misguided.

To summarise:

- Having a men's officer doesn't make things 'equal'. Quite the contrary. Men's officers are really only about giving male students more advantage of women students than they already had
- What would a men's officer or a men's campaign actually do? Men aren't discriminated against because they are men
- Men who truly believe in gender equality do not believe that a men's group is a way to achieve those aims. Men who really care will get involved in helping out feminists at their institution

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Aren't you just being sexist towards men?

Often, feminists get called sexist, or 'misandrist' (which means hatred of men or boys, and is the equivalent term to misogynist). This is based, at its core, on some people believing that feminists should not just be campaigning in favour of women's rights, but should spend their time campaigning for men too.

It is also about some people being uncomfortable that there is a movement fighting for the liberation of women from some men, without seeking male perspectives first. The whole point of women uniting and fighting together is that women can define their own experience of oppression, and fight together to defeat it. Not every movement has to include everyone, especially when there is an explicit explanation for the necessity of a woman-centric approach.

Catherine Redfern, founder of feminist blog the f-word, has written an excellent blog on this topic. She writes:

"What this is really about is men accusing feminists of sexism and hypocrisy unless they can prove that they spend exactly half of their time, energy, and resources on campaigning on behalf of men. What this is really about is that if feminism only improves the lives of women, it has no value or importance. What this is really about is that feminism only has value if it works on behalf of men and improves the lives of men. What this is really about is anti-feminist men being threatened by women working for women. What they're really saying is that to talk about women, to focus on women, to point out that something affects women badly; all of this is of no importance or value. It's classic, really - because men are not always the focus of attention of feminism, these anti-feminists can't stand it."

http://www.thefword.org.uk/features/2003/09/feminists_are_sexist

The people who might call you sexist are generally coming from three places:

- **They are trying to get a rise out of you** - This is surprisingly common. Try and engage them in a debate on the issues, and explain why sexist is an inappropriate term to use. Perhaps direct them to some pro-feminist men's websites to read more about the issue, like the White Ribbon Campaign <http://www.whiteribboncampaign.co.uk/>. Or suggest they read one of the many books on the issue, they could try Susan Faludi's 'Stiffed: The Betrayal of the American Man'. If this fails, move on - you have far better things to do with your time
- **They don't understand what feminism is about** - Take a similar approach to above. Try and engage them in a discussion on the issues, and you'll be surprised how quickly you can bring them around
- **They are just generally obnoxious** - In this situation ignoring them is generally the best course of action, and potentially a discreetly hoisted middle finger salute!

How can men get involved in feminism?

Different women's groups will make different decisions on the level of involvement men can have in their campaign. In the NUS women's campaign men can attend some events but decision making and some campaigning events are attended exclusively by women. Often a good way to make a compromise on this issue is to allow men to join your women's group, but restrict decision making to women only, and to keep some activities reserved for self defining women only.

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Depending on the level of involvement men have in your campaign, there are a variety of different ways that men can get involved in the running of your campaign. Some examples of activities that they could run are a discussion on being pro-feminist or feminist men, talking to other men about respecting women, or being in charge of organising the logistics of the rally after a self defining women only reclaim the night march. Look at some of the ideas of the London Pro Feminist Men's group - <http://londonprofeministmensgroup.blogspot.com/>.

It is also important that feminists and women's rights campaigners are able to articulate to men who don't get involved in the women's campaign the kinds of things that they can do to help. You could suggest some of the following:

- When walking behind a woman on the street on a dark night, cross over
- Help to raise male consciousness of the problem of sexual violence
- Take women seriously when they describe how it feels to be in fear - even when it seems unnecessary or paranoid
- Speak out about the pernicious associations between masculinity and violence
- Call your friends out when they objectify a woman
- Don't ignore violence against women when you see it or hear of it - make sure you report it

These can be easy or hard things to do - and they are not things that women can do for men. At the same time, men can't end the oppression of women - women have to do that for themselves.

win the arguments **against objectification**

The NUS Women's Campaign is arguing that students' unions should be a space where women should not have to experience objectification. This means standing against university beauty pageants, events structured around women's objectification or exploitation such as 'pimp 'n' ho' nights, and the sale and distribution of so-called 'lads' mags' on campus or in the Union.

Objectification is shorthand for occasions when someone is judged or represented, not as a human being with intelligence, morals and personality, but just a body, or even just dissociated body parts, displayed for the pleasure of the viewer. Anyone can be objectified but it happens far, far more to women than to men. Objectification deprives women of their power to define what is beautiful, what is sexy, what is desirable, and places this power in the hands of the (male) viewer/judge.

The obvious arena where this occurs is in porn industry, the glamour industry (lad's mags and Page 3), and increasingly the music industry, where women are depicted as instruments of male sexual pleasure. Popular culture is also saturated with images of thin women in sexualised poses, gazing into the middle distance positioned near a brand logo. The women presented in these images of passive, flawless femininity are not real women - they have been professionally made up and digitally enhanced - but they are quickly becoming our internal benchmark for female beauty and female sexuality.

At the same time, we are seeing the 'pornification' of everyday life, where pole-dancing is presented as a fun way to get fit, trips to lap-dancing clubs are seen as a bona-fide and harmless way of entertaining business clients, painful and dangerous breast enhancement surgery is presented as a way of boosting women's self-esteem and high heels and Playboy-branded clothing are available to young girls as soon as they are old enough to watch a TV advertisement.

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Media images in film, television and magazines shape our expectations, and when women are objectified, we begin to see this as normal and appropriate. This has ramifications for how women are valued in real life and what men perceive to be the appropriate treatment of women.

The effects of objectification are:

- The proliferation of an impossible - and very narrow, ethnocentric - standard of beauty alongside messages telling women that they have the power to meet the standard through their own efforts - eating less, buying the right cosmetics, and if those don't work, through surgery. Women who are devoting their energy and money to being 'beautiful' have less opportunity to make their voices heard politically
- An unhealthy and restrictive model of sexuality that depicts women not as active and desiring, but merely the passive looked-upon, an object of male desire whose only desire is to serve the pleasure of men

What about women's right to choose what they wear and how they behave? Are feminists just jealous of sexy women?

The idea that feminists are trampling women's rights to behave as they like is a red herring. Likewise, arguing that women are 'empowered' by pole dancing lessons, naked calendars and sexy lingerie is too much of a generalisation. Just because someone says they know one or two women who enjoy it does not prove that every woman is therefore automatically required to put up and shut up. Women are empowered when they define their own sexuality and sexual expression, and when they are not penalised for avoiding mainstream definitions. The 'right' to get naked and exhibit yourself for male pleasure is not addressed in the Geneva Convention on Human Rights, but just because a woman has chosen to do it does not make it right or OK for every woman.

The media glamourises porn culture and the sex industry through stories of high-earning glamour models and strippers and ignores the realities of the exploitation of some women in the sex industry. 'Choices' are made in a range of contexts. Does a Hollyoaks starlet told by her agent she will enhance her career if she strips off in Maxim have a choice? Yes, in principle, but that choice is not a straightforward one. One of the purposes of feminist argument is to point out how women's choices are limited.

The feminist critique is of a culture that sells a certain kind of 'sexiness' - youthful, busty, thin, (usually) white, able-bodied, wearing very few clothes - as the ONLY acceptable form and marginalises women who do not match that model while still encouraging them to spend their time and money on trying to meet the impossible standard.

The beneficiaries of the range of surgical and non-surgical methods of beauty enhancement that women are encouraged to use such as Botox, and the media that peddle them through TV programmes and magazine articles that show women how to 'make the most' of their bodies are not individual women, but the media industry, the beauty industry, the pharmaceutical industry and the cosmetic surgery industry. Women as a group are not helped by the beauty industry or by objectification, whatever individual woman may choose to do.

It is possible to support women's right to choose what to do with their body - a key tenet of feminism - as well as to criticise a culture and industry that is designed to restrict women's choices, and that tries to fit women in to narrow and unrealistic standards of beauty.

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Isn't all this just a bit of fun role-play that hurts nobody?

The impact on women of seeing themselves represented as objects and being encouraged to objectify themselves is not strictly quantifiable. But it is far from being a bit of fun. Sex-object culture shapes how men and women experience female sexuality. Men are given the message that women enjoy being treated as objects to be abused. Women are given the messages that their principle value is only in how they look, and that men have the power to confer value on them or remove value from them, depending on their behaviour. For example, FHM's website encourages women to upload 'sexy' photos that male viewers can rate as part of their 'High Street Honey's' competition.

Research reported in the Guardian in 2009 found that when men looked at pictures of women in bikinis, the part of their brain normally associated with using tools like spanners were activated, suggesting that instead of seeing the women as people to interact with, the men's brains associated them with objects to be used. The study also showed that the men who scored highly in a sexism test had the lowest level of activity in the part of the brain that deals with human interaction and understanding other people's emotions and intentions. The American Psychological Association Task Force on the Sexualisation of Girls reported in 2007 that emphasis on an unattainable body image damages the health and self-image of girls and young women, and can lead to eating disorders, anxiety and depression. More chillingly, Object report that Maxim has previously written that 'a lot of women fantasise about things like being raped'.

Isn't campaigning against lads mags and beauty pageants censorship? What about freedom of speech?

Another red herring. The Women's campaign is not advocating the censorship of lads' mags. Anyone who wants to read one can find multiple outlets, not least the Internet, personal subscription or the local newsagent. This is about creating a less toxic environment for women in which they do not have to be confronted with half-naked pictures on a daily basis in a union that purports to represent their interests. Likewise, beauty pageants set 'sexy' women in competition against each other while excluding the vast majority of 'normal' women from participation and reinforcing the dominant standard of beauty.

Feminists do not have the power to limit the freedom of speech of others, and especially not the freedom of speech of media and advertising worth billions of pounds and thoroughly embedded in mainstream culture. But unions don't have to unthinkingly reflect the mainstream - unions should be a positive space for ALL students.

But women read lads' mags too - it gives them a insight into the male worldview

It would be as dangerous to think that lads' mags represent the male world view as to think that glossy fashion mags represent the female world view. Lads' mags encourage young men to construct their sense of masculinity off the back of the objectification of women, denying men the chance to develop a healthy, positive view of sex, and excluding men who would rather engage with women as people rather than things. Thinking that there is any one single 'male' or 'female' world view is a response to a media narrative that attempts to homogenise as far as possible, because the more homogenised we are, the more units of the same product can be sold. Diversity is costly.

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'In a world ordered by sexual imbalance, pleasure in looking has been split between active/male and passive/female. The determining male gaze projects its phantasy on to the female form which is styled accordingly. In their traditional exhibitionist role women are simultaneously looked at and displayed, with their appearance coded for strong visual and erotic impact...'

Laura Mulvey, Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema, 1975

Want to know more?

There are lots of books and websites that tackle these issues. To start off, consider looking at Naomi Wolf, *The Beauty Myth* (1991); Susie Orbach, *Bodies* (2009); or Object's website - www.object.org.uk.

win the arguments **with the facts**

In higher education, 81% of computer science students are male, and 86% of engineering and technology students are male. 82% of education students are women

'Facts about women and men in Great Britain 2006', EOC

Women make up 13.2% of university vice chancellors

'Sex and Power: who runs Britain? 2007', EOC, January 2007

Women make up 27.5% of FE college principals in 2005

'Sex and Power: who runs Britain? 2007', EOC, January 2007

The gender pay gap currently stands at 22.6 % which means that women are paid on mean average just 77.4% of men's hourly earnings

Women and Work Commission, July 2009

On average, Pakistani and Bangladeshi women earn only 56 per cent of the average hourly wage of White men

Fawcett Society, Black and Minority Ethnic Women in the UK, 2005

The part-time pay gap (which compares women's part-time pay to men's full-time pay) is 39.9 per cent which means that women who work part-time are paid on mean average just 60.1% of men's hourly earnings

'Annual Survey of Hours and Earnings, 2008', Office for National Statistics

On average, two women a week are killed by a violent partner or ex-partner. This constitutes nearly 40% of all female homicide victims

Povey, (ed.), 2005; Home Office, 1999; Department of Health, 2005

16% of women experience stalking at some time in their lives

'Key Indicators of Women's Position in Britain', November 2002, Women and Equality Unit, DTI

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One in four women experience domestic violence at some point in their lives

'Safety and Justice: the Government's proposals on domestic violence', June 2003, Home Office

Approximately 80,000 women suffer rape and attempted rape every year

Walby and Allen, 'Domestic Violence, Sexual Assault and Stalking: Findings from the British Crime Survey', 2004

The latest conviction rate for is 5.3% - the lowest on record

'Rape – the Facts', Fawcett Society, April 2007

The current number of women MPs is 125, 19% of all MPs

'Women in Parliament and the Government', House of Commons Library 2009

Although black women form about four per cent of the population, they make up just 0.3 per cent of MPs

Fawcett Society, Black and Minority Ethnic Women in the UK, 2005

One in three people believe a woman is responsible for violence committed against her if she is wearing 'revealing clothing'

www.object.org.uk

Only 3% of women in the UK are happy with their body

www.object.org.uk

77 per cent support a woman's right to choose an abortion in the first three months of pregnancy

An opinion poll conducted by GFK/NOP and commissioned by Abortion Rights and the Joseph Rowntree Reform Trust, March 2007

Pregnant women do not currently have the legal right to an abortion on request. Whether a pregnant woman can have an abortion depends upon the decision of two doctors, to only one doctor who considers it immediately necessary to save her life, or prevent grave permanent injury to her physical or mental health

For more information on abortion legislation, see www.abortionrights.org.uk

The 1967 Abortion Act only applies to England, Scotland and Wales. It has never been extended to Northern Ireland

For more information on abortion legislation, see www.abortionrights.org.uk

Need more help?

The NUS Women's Campaign is here for you! If you want any help with campaigns you are running, or even just want to talk something through – get in touch!

Email – olivia.bailey@nus.org.uk or women@nus.org.uk

Web – www.officeronline.co.uk/women or www.nus.org.uk/Campaigns/Womens/

Address - **NUS HQ, Centro 3, 19 Mandela Street, London NW1 0DU**

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