

***“To what extent have government policies successfully tackled inequalities that affect a group in society?”***

It is clear that gender inequalities have been reduced throughout the UK. Government policies such as the Equality Act of 2010 have been introduced and have successfully reduced some gender inequalities, other policies such as the national minimum wage and the New Deal have also played a role with providing women more equal opportunities in the job sector. However it is very clear that despite these improvements, gender inequalities still exist in the UK today . In 2014 the gender pay gap increased and the number of women working is mainly concentrated in lower paid sectors such as cleaning and catering. Women statistically live longer and live poorer than men despite increases in the health and wealth of the entire nation as a whole. This clearly shows that current government policies have not be completely effective as gender inequalities still exist.

It can clearly be seen that government is tackling gender inequalities as various policies have been introduced to reduce them. In 2010 the government introduced the Equality Act, this act aims to tackle various kinds of discrimination including gender inequality and replaced the Equal Pay Act, Sex Discrimination act and many other gender equal opportunities acts. Under the Equality Act gender is a protected characteristic meaning it is illegal to discriminate in any form against either gender. The main reason for the introduction of the Equality Act was that other forms of gender equality legislation were failing to tackle the glass ceiling. The National Minimum wage was introduced in 1999 and while it was not established with the intention of reducing gender inequality it can be argued that it has contributed to the reduction in gender inequality as it encourages more women to work. Child tax credits are also issued by the government to cover the costs of caring for young children, If the parent has higher financial pressure such as childcare they are eligible to a higher amount of child tax credit, this is also true if they are raising a child with a disability. However however in recent years, especially with the Conservative Liberal Democrat Coalition in current government there have been a variety of benefit cuts with the aim of motivating people into work however critics of the cuts have claimed that these cuts do nothing but push people into poverty this may be one of the key factors to why the gender pay gap has increased in 2014.

Furthermore, it can be argued that these policies have been effective in reducing gender inequalities

as more women are now in work, the female contribution in a two parent family often makes the difference between living in poverty or not and in 2008 nearly as many women were at work than

men. However women tend to work in lower paid sectors of the economy commonly known as the

5 C's; catering, cleaning, caring, clerical and cashiering. For example 75% of catering staff are female. The Sex and Power 2011 shows that even though they outperform males in educational qualifications, men tend to have the managerial positions, it shows that nearly 50% of secondary school teachers are female, yet only around a third of head teachers at secondary level are female.

Due to the lower pay of these sectors women in the UK are twice as more likely to live in poverty

and are more likely to depend on benefits than men. Even if an unemployed woman becomes employed in one of the 5 C's it is likely they will transfer from poverty to working poverty and in some cases such as full time employment they may receive less state benefits.

There has also been a clear improvement in terms of education. Girls leave high school with better

qualifications than boys and perform better while they are there than boys outperforming them in most subjects. This continues into higher education where females receive 60% of higher education

qualifications. Due to this they can often obtain jobs in higher paid industries leading to an increase

in their wealth and social class. This can clearly be seen as the number of females in previously male dominated industries is increasing, for example 40% of accountants are now female.

However women often find it difficult to reach the top of their chosen career path due to the glass ceiling. The glass ceiling is an invisible barrier which prevents women (as well as other disadvantaged groups) from reaching the top of the ladder in their profession. A 2011 study by the Institute of Leadership and Management found that 73% of women managers believed there were barriers preventing them from progressing to top of their chosen career. This can be down to a number of reasons such as the female traditional role of a carer, career breaks during pregnancy and male dominated networks that can be hard for women to break into. This clearly shows that while women are much more successful than men in terms of educational achievement they still suffer from inequalities in higher paid sectors due to factors such as the glass ceiling.

Inequalities can also be seen to be reduced in the terms of the number of female entrepreneurs as

the number of women starting their own businesses is increasing. Michelle Mone is an example of a highly successful female entrepreneur who recently sold her underwear business Ultimo which ships clothing worldwide. She is a role model for women in the UK and encourages them to work hard, pursue higher paid jobs and start their own businesses. However just as in lower end sectors gender inequalities still exist here as the Sex and Power report of 2013 found that there were over 5,600 women 'missing' from more than 31,000 top positions in the UK. One of the most noticeable places where women are 'missing' is the House of Commons where there are 196 missing from 646 MPs. This clearly highlights that even though there are improvements in relation to gender inequalities, it still exists on a wide scale.

To conclude, it is clear that gender inequalities have been reduced in recent years thanks to UK government policies such as the Equality Act, National Minimum Wage, Child Tax Credits as well as changes to the benefit system as can be seen by increasing number of women working and the increasing number of women in higher positions. However gender inequalities still exist as the gender pay gap widened in 2014, females are over-represented in the low paid job market and at the opposite end of the spectrum many women are prevented from accessing higher level positions in their career due to the glass ceiling. This highlights that even though the government has introduced many policies to tackle gender inequalities they still exist throughout the UK as the policies have only been partially successful in reducing gender inequality.