



POLITEIA

22 Charing Cross Road, WC2H 0QP
E mail: info@politeia.co.uk Telephone: 0207 240 5070

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Publication: 12 noon, Monday 17 July 2006

Women Suffer from Misguided Policies! In Education, Work and Maternity, Women are the Losers, says Politeia Pamphlet

Women, we hear, are doing better than ever before, and often better than men. In education, more females go to university than men and get higher grades. In work, almost half the labour force is female. Even motherhood has now been organised to help women in work return and earn. The 'work life' balance at the heart of policy is part of the Government's feminist agenda.

But is it working? In *Forever Enslaved? Female Dependency and the State*, Politeia's Director, Dr. Sheila Lawlor, examines the evidence in the three central areas of education, work and motherhood, and warns there is cause for concern.

The study suggests that at school and university girls may be losing out. Fewer girls at A-level are taking maths, physics or even modern languages than a decade ago and more choose the 'soft options' like media studies and drama. The Government's culture of targets and numbers, designed to prove female success, may conceal a worrying trend. In avoiding the more demanding subjects female aspirations 'do not appear to be as high as they were a decade ago, nor as high as men's'. Women may be 'part of a growing academic and intellectual ghetto'.

At work, women are in lower-paid, lower-level, often part-time, jobs and tend to earn less than men. Though the explanations are many, the author suggests that official policy may entrench the position. Many women may be caught in a dependency trap. The benefits for the low-paid and families with children mostly go to women, who are in danger of being locked into a downward spiral of employment for life.

Motherhood too has been reorganised, so that new mothers take fixed breaks from work before returning to earn. But the measures for extended maternity leave at the heart of the government's 'work-life balance' policy may have misfired. Women's earnings drop, their careers are interrupted, and given family commitments, they have difficulty developing their profession for the long term. Employers may worry about recruiting or promoting potential mothers. The present arrangements mean that women may well suffer from the arrangements supposed to help them, leading to short, and longer-term dependency.

The study concludes that in the three vital areas of policy, the treatment of women 'as a race apart' has misfired with consequences damaging to their interests – short and long term. A new direction is needed where women are no longer pressed into premature dependency by the state, but can freely balance their commitments and interests over the longer term. In particular, the law should avoid a sectional divisive flavour. For, 'if UK governments are ... to help women take their place as full human beings, they must stop treating them as a minority case'.

A conference to discuss the themes took place at 12 noon-1p.m, Monday 17 July with Rt Hon Theresa May MP, Shadow Leader of the House of Commons, John Kampfner, Editor, *The New Statesman*, Allison Pearson, Columnist and Author, *I Don't Know How She Does It: The Life of Kate Reddy, Working Mother*; and Dr Sheila Lawlor, Director, Politeia.

Forever Enslaved? Female Dependency and the State, by Sheila Lawlor, is published by Politeia, 22 Charing Cross Rd, WC2H 0QP at £5.00. An e-version of the text is attached. If you would like a hard copy or have any enquiries please contact Sheila Lawlor at Politeia or Olivia Boyd, Press Officer on 0207 240 5070/07977 272 193, e-mail, info@politeia.co.uk.

***The author:** Dr Sheila Lawlor, Director, Politeia