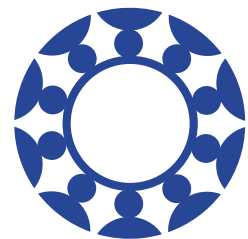




# Speak up for equality!



Since 1895

National Council  
of Women GB

A resource for student changemakers

# Welcome to the National Council of Women's resource for student changemakers

This guide is designed to give you the knowledge and inspiration to turn your passion for equality into change-making activities. We hope that it will be a springboard for you to start discussions, raise awareness, and engage in action to improve society! What are you waiting for?

This resource was compiled and edited by Helena Trenkić, Georgia Rayner, and Penny Bennett, on behalf of the National Council of Women GB. Contributions were made by Savannah Dixon, Amy Reast, Rebecca Tyler, Gemma Bond, and Sibba Hadi.



# Contents

What are the NCW and NCYW?	5
President's welcome	6
Landmarks	8
Setting up your NCYW group	11
What you can do	13
Topics to explore	19
The History of Feminism	20
Men and Feminism	24
Period Poverty & The Pink Tax	26
Women & War	28
Female Genital Mutilation (FGM)	30
Body Positivity	32
Girls' Education	34
Violence Against Women and Girls (VAWG)	36
The Gender Pay Gap	40
Relationships & Sex Education and Sexual Health	42
Stay in Touch	46
NCW 18-25	47

# What are NCW and NCYW?

## NCW's History

The National Council of Women of Great Britain (NCWGB, often shortened to NCW) was founded in 1895 (originally called the National Union of Women's Workers). It was formed to provide a forum where women could discuss and consider the social and political issues of the day, and together work towards a world where it is no disadvantage to be born a girl.

## The aims of NCW include:

- To encourage the effective participation of women in local, regional, and national affairs;
- To secure the removal of all discrimination against women and girls;
- To improve the quality of life for all;
- To provide information and stimulate discussion about issues of concern in our society;
- To make reasoned demands, seeking change, to her Majesty's Government, Members of Parliament, and other relevant bodies.

NCWGB is an internationally-recognised organisation. It is one of several National Councils of Women affiliated to the International Council of Women (ICW). It also has special consultative status at the UN (ECOSOC status), meaning it can send delegates to international conferences such as the United Nations' Annual Commission on the Status of Women (CSW) in New York. A small number of members each year are even invited to the Queen's Garden Party at Buckingham Palace, to recognise the organisation's work!

The rich and long history of NCWGB has been explored in a book – Daphne Glick's *The National Council of Women of Great Britain: The First One Hundred Years*.

**“For more than 120 years, NCW has campaigned tirelessly on a range of women's issues, including the right to vote, the creation of a women's police force, the end to violence against women and girls worldwide, and an improved quality of life for all.”**

Barbara Maddison, Vice-President.

**NCYW**



The National Council of Young Women (NCYW) is the part of NCW dedicated to reaching out to the younger generation via a network of schools and colleges linked to NCW. These NCYW schools and colleges receive regular news updates and information, and invitations to take part in national surveys or multi-school seminars on current issues.

### **This Guide & Your NCYW Group**

This guide has been produced by NCW to help you with your school or college's NCYW group (whether you want to call it FemSoc, Gender Equality Society, NCYW Group, or anything else is up to you!).

This guide contains:

- key information on landmark international agreements on gender equality;
- advice on setting up your society;
- introductions to key social issues, and ideas on how you can explore them;
- advice on how to stay in touch with NCW.

We hope this guide will be a useful source of inspiration to all members of NCYW!



# President's Welcome

I feel so privileged to be asked to welcome you to this amazing resource. Thank you to all that have worked so hard to create it.

As we celebrate the 125th anniversary of NCWGB, this extraordinary year has brought exceptional constraints and difficulties for all nations. Now more than ever we need to support each other and work together to come up with strategies to help the world cope – whilst not losing sight of the tremendous progress that has already been made and is continuing through members of NCWGB and their international partners.

Your challenge is to build on our work from the past and remember to make the journey of learning and campaigning exciting – who knows where it will lead you?

Elsie Leadley  
President, National Council of Women GB



# Landmarks

There have been a number of international agreements regarding gender equality, human rights, and improving the quality of life generally. These can be useful frameworks to measure progress and judge how close we are to achieving equality – but they can be pretty daunting if you haven't heard of them before. This section breaks down some of the landmark agreements.

1979

## CEDAW

The Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination Against Women – or CEDAW (see-daw) for short – is an international treaty adopted by the United Nations' General Assembly in 1979.

CEDAW is important because it clearly defines what constitutes discrimination against women: 'any distinction, exclusion or restriction made on the basis of sex which has the effect or purpose of impairing or nullifying the recognition, enjoyment or exercise by women [...] of human rights and fundamental freedoms in the political, economic, social, cultural, civil, or any other field'.

CEDAW also sets up an agenda for national action to end such discrimination. Any state which signs up to the Convention agrees to undertake a series of measures intended to end discrimination against women in all forms. The UK ratified CEDAW in 1986.

You can read more about CEDAW online at [un.org/womenwatch/daw/cedaw/](https://un.org/womenwatch/daw/cedaw/), or about CEDAW specifically in the UK at [equalityhumanrights.com/en/our-human-rights-work/monitoring-and-promoting-un-treaties/convention-elimination-discrimination](https://equalityhumanrights.com/en/our-human-rights-work/monitoring-and-promoting-un-treaties/convention-elimination-discrimination).

1995

## The Beijing Declaration

In 1995, the governments at the Fourth World Conference on Women produced the landmark Beijing Declaration and Beijing Platform for Action. The Platform for Action set out 12 critical areas of concern (including 'Women and Poverty', 'Women and Armed Conflict', 'Education and Training of Women', and so on) and the commitments that must be made to achieve gender equality in these areas.

No country has yet fully achieved the commitments set out in the Beijing Platform for Action. It therefore serves as a guide to governments on what concrete changes still need to be made.

You can read more about it, and explore the 12 critical areas for concern, at [beijing20.unwomen.org/en/about/](https://beijing20.unwomen.org/en/about/).





## Get involved!

Your NCYW group could do a presentation or display on these landmark agreements at your school, followed by a discussion on how useful you think they are, or a discussion on what you think could be done locally, nationally, and internationally to achieve them.

2015

2019

### The Sustainable Development Goals

The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) are a collection of 17 global goals set by the United Nations General Assembly in 2015. The aim is for the goals to be achieved by 2030.

The 17 goals include 'No Poverty' (Goal 1), 'Zero Hunger' (Goal 2), 'Climate Action' (Goal 13), and, of course, 'Gender Equality' (Goal 5). Each goal has a list of targets, which are measured with indicators. Countries must review their progress on different goals every few years.

SDG 5's targets are:\*

- 5.1: End all forms of **discrimination** against all women and girls everywhere
- 5.2: Eliminate all forms of **violence** against all women and girls
- 5.3: Eliminate all **harmful practices**, such as child, early and forced marriage and female genital mutilation
- 5.4: Recognise and value **unpaid care and domestic work** through the provision of public services, infrastructure and social protection policies and the promotion of shared responsibility
- 5.5: Ensure women's full and effective participation and equal opportunities for **leadership**
- 5.6: Ensure universal access to **sexual and reproductive health** and reproductive rights

\*These have been condensed or shortened; read the targets in full at [sdgs.un.org/goals](https://sdgs.un.org/goals).

### The Council of Europe definition of sexism

In 2019, the Council of Europe (an international human rights organisation in Europe) adopted the first ever internationally-agreed definition of sexism. This is important because it allows international discussions to start from a mutually-accepted understanding of sexism is, and immediately move on to how to tackle it!

This definition drew on elements taken from all sorts of existing legal definitions. You can read their full Recommendation on Preventing and Combating Sexism (2019) on their website, [coe.int](https://www.coe.int).

*"Sexism is: any act, gesture, visual representation, spoken or written words, practice or behaviour based upon the idea that a person or a group of persons is inferior because of their sex, which occurs, in the public or private sphere, whether online or offline, with the purpose or effect of:*

- i. violating the inherent dignity or rights of a person or a group of persons; or*
- ii. resulting in physical, sexual, psychological or socio-economic harm or suffering to a person or group of persons; or*
- iii. creating an intimidating, hostile, degrading, humiliating or offensive environment; or*
- iv. constituting a barrier to the autonomy and full realisation of human rights by a person or group of persons; or*
- v. maintaining and reinforcing gender stereotypes [preconceived social and cultural patterns or ideas whereby women and men are assigned characteristics and roles determined and limited by their sex]."*



# Setting up your NCYW group

Every NCYW group is different. Your school or college can use whatever name and whatever system it wants, so long as it commits to NCW's basic principles of equality and inclusivity. However, here are a few ideas...

## Decide upon your leaders

Everybody within the society should be treated equally, but societies are usually most effective when there are clear leaders. These leaders should organise the meetings, book rooms if necessary, make the final decisions, and, most importantly, be the ones communicating with NCW! You could have a vote, allow the previous year's leaders to nominate those they think will do well, or rotate leaders per term.

## Regular Action

We believe that the best societies are those that meet regularly, and keep up the momentum! It is recommended to meet at least once weekly or fortnightly, and setting a regular time and day will help people remember. However, we know that it is not always possible to find a day that works for everyone, so the day could alternate by week, or there could be more than one activity per week – such as a presentation one day, and a more relaxed discussion on the next.

## Who can come along?

It is your choice as to who can attend the events you put on. You might wish to restrict certain events (such as outings, or events focused on distressing topics) with a minimum age, especially if your NCYW Discussion Group is in a secondary school. NCW recognises that it is vital to get men involved in the conversation about gender equality (after all, it benefits them too!) so male students are more than welcome to NCW events such as seminars, and it is encouraged that NCYW Societies at co-ed schools reach out to the boys! However, creating a safe space can also be very important, and it is entirely understandable to want to make some events women-only, such as those where the topics being discussed are inflammatory or sensitive, or private stories are to be shared. Again, it is entirely at your discretion.

## Funding Your Society

Most of your NCYW Discussion Group should be low-cost, or free. Schools/colleges usually allow students to use rooms after school, including the technology that might be needed for events such as film screenings or presentations. However, if you want to put on a more ambitious project, or are in need of support in order to attend inter-school NCYW events, you might want to do some fundraising – see the Fundraising section in [Part 5 of this document](#) for ideas. If this is not feasible, NCW might (on a case-by-case basis) be able to provide a small grant to help – get in touch with the [NCW Administrator](#) for more information.



# What You Can Do

There are many ways that your society can raise awareness of issues relating to inequality, get people discussing it, and help people learn something new.

## Celebrating the United Nations (UN) Days

The UN Designated Days for Women's Issues are annual days which highlight and support the goal of Sustainable Development Goal 5 – and are well worth celebrating within your school/college!

As a group, you should hold at least three events each year, to mark the following days:

- **October 11th: International Day of the Girl:** On this day the rights of girls are promoted and the inequalities that remain between boys and girls as children are highlighted – from abuse and violence to everyday childhood sexism and gender stereotypes. You could watch and discuss No More Boys and Girls (BBC2), a programme highlighting everyday sexism in schools through an experiment to create a gender-neutral classroom. You could hold a discussion session to speak about times you have been unfairly treated due to your gender, or to speak about who your hero was as a young girl.
- **November 25th: International Day for the Elimination of Violence Against Women:** This day focusses on raising awareness about gender-based violence against women, and is represented by the colour orange. You can mark the day by wearing orange, hosting a presentation to inform people on the prevalence of Violence Against Women, or invite speakers from local charities supporting victims of gender-based violence.
- **March 8th: International Women's Day (IWD):** On March 8th, women's issues and rights are promoted around the world, and women generally are celebrated and their achievements recognised. Each year has a theme – check [un.org/en/events/womensday](https://un.org/en/events/womensday) to find out this year's. You could wear purple, the official colour of IWD, and organise purple-themed informative activities – involve the whole school, if you get permission! Compare the rights of women in other countries – this is a day to think internationally, not just nationally. Organise an art session creating a mural of female role models. Share your work with #IWD. You could also celebrate International Men's Day on November 19th to celebrate male role models for equality, and discuss the problems sexism creates for men – for example, the tragically high male suicide rate, which at least partially stems from the gender stereotype that men should hide their emotions.

## NCW-run Events

As part of NCYW, you will be invited to Inter-Generational and other cross-school seminars and other such events where you can meet members of NCW and NCYW students from other schools, and talk about issues relating to gender equality. Keep in contact with NCW to ensure the invites come your way!

## **Presentations**

A good old-fashioned presentation of a topic is a great way to impart information, and a Q&A session or discussion session afterwards can allow people to process and talk about what they've learnt.

## **Discussion Session ('EqualiTea')**

Presentations can often be rather formal, so consider having a relaxed Discussion Session over some tea (or other drinks!) and snacks. Set a topic and ask people to contribute their stories or opinions.

## **Debates**

For topics which might invoke different arguments and perspectives, a debate can be a great exploratory tool. Come up with a motion (motions are the statement being debated, and traditionally start with 'This House Believes...' or 'This House Would...') and assign at least one or two people per side.

An easy way to run a debate is to ask for a pre-written Opening Statement from each side setting out their argument, followed by questions from the audience to each side, and ending with a pre-written Closing Statement from each side and a vote.

Debates can get heated, so ensure that there is an impartial moderator present. The moderator should choose whose turn it is to speak and ask people to leave if they behave inappropriately.

Bear in mind that debating certain topics can be emotionally exhaustive or upsetting, as well as giving a platform to oppressive agendas. A way to avoid this can be to have a focussed debate with a nuanced motion – for example, 'This House Believes the #MeToo movement was an online phenomenon with limited real-life impact' would allow discussion on the lessons learnt from #MeToo, educate people on the impact of #MeToo, and ask the audience to consider how useful online hashtags really are. This motion is therefore more nuanced, positive and interesting than a motion asking whether #MeToo was 'necessary' or whether sexism exists.

It would also be wise to lay down some ground rules at the beginning: asking members to be respectful and sensitive, and banning any sexist, racist, homophobic, xenophobic, or other prejudiced, derogatory, and disrespectful speech.

## **Guest Speakers**

If there is somebody local who has inspired you, you could invite them to come and give a talk – though you should ask permission from your school or college first.

## **Seminars**

If you'd like to try something challenging, you could put together a seminar day on a particular theme, inviting speakers, setting topics for group discussion, and create a document at the end summarising what you have learnt and what actions you, as individuals, could take.

If you'd like to organise something like this, be sure to get in touch with NCW, who might be able to help you get in touch with relevant speakers, and help with organisation.

## **Reading Groups or Film Nights**

Stories told through word or on-screen can be great starting points for nuanced discussions and critical thinking. You could form a book or film club and meet up at lunch times to discuss what you thought of a chapter, or run an after-school film night. Perhaps one person could read a book/watch a film and then give a presentation on it? You could pick your favourite book and discuss it from a perspective of gender equality: does the book contain strong female characters? What gender stereotypes might it challenge or reinforce?







## Activism

You could try and make a difference through activism. Some ideas could be:

- Open letters or petitions – present a letter or petition to your head of school, your local councillors, your MP, to the government, or to a private company.
- Write to your MP – you could write directly to your MP about issues you feel are important, and share a template around. Doing this as a group can be particularly effective – more voices are louder than one.
- Respond to government consultations – keep an eye out for government consultations, which is where the government conducts a survey to measure public opinion, and uses the results to inform its policies. You can search for relevant consultations at [gov.uk/search/policy-papers-and-consultations](https://gov.uk/search/policy-papers-and-consultations).

Further ideas on how to engage in activism are spelled out in *Be The Change: A Toolkit for the Activist in You* by Gina Martin, a young woman who started a successful campaign to make upskirting illegal.

## Fundraising

You could fundraise to help send students from your Society to a seminar or conference being run by NCW, to pay for the travel costs of a speaker, or similar administrative costs. Ways to fundraise include a cake sale, asking the school to allow a non-uniform day, car-washing, a raffle (local companies will usually provide free or discounted products if you email them to ask!), and getting sponsored for doing something, such as running a race.

As a charity itself, NCYW/NCW cannot raise money for another charity. However, as a group within your school or college, you could raise awareness of a cause so that fellow students can choose to support a cause on behalf of that individual or the school/college.

## Out and About

Not all learning is done in the classroom; if you spy a film in the cinema, a play in the theatre, a museum, or an art exhibition which looks interesting and relevant, you could arrange a group outing to see and then discuss it. Bear in mind that for those under 18, you might need parental permission.

## Get Creative

Activism can be tiring, so a communal art session can be a way to relax and recuperate, whilst also stimulating conversation. You could create a collective mural, or work on individual pieces of art to a loose theme. You could also create an artistic 'zine' (homemade magazine) on a particular theme. Or, you could have an 'Open Mic' event where people share stories or spoken poetry related to a theme. The possibilities are endless!

## How to Research

When researching for presentations and discussions, make sure you are using accurate information. NCW recommends that you only use trustworthy sites and try to cross-check your information. Useful websites for finding statistics include [gov.uk](https://gov.uk) and [unwomen.org](https://unwomen.org). Websites belonging to internationally-recognised charities such as Unicef are reliable; statistics you read in somebody's blog post are not, unless they're linked to an original, trustworthy source. We also recommend that you make it clear where you get your information from. Taking basic precautions like this ensures that nobody falls victim to 'fake news' and spreads misinformation!



# Topics to Explore

There are an almost endless number of topics that you could explore. To give you some ideas, we've created brief introductions to 10 topics, with websites, books, films and podcasts related to that theme. There are many more topics to look at, so remember this list is only a starting point. Feel free to cover whatever interests you, so long as it is done in a factual and sensitive way.

Through NCW's history, a number of these topics have been the subject of Resolutions, passed at Annual Conference and put to the government and civil service to enact change. Some of those Resolutions are featured in this guide, when relevant, so that you can see the history of the organisation's campaigning.

## Resource information key



Books / Articles



Video / TV series



Podcasts



Film



Speeches



Websites

Education

Men and  
Feminism

Female Genital  
Multilation (FGM)

Period Poverty  
& The Pink Tax

# The History of Feminism

**“Feminist: a person who believes in the social, political, and economic equality of the sexes.”**

Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie

The word ‘feminism’ is a relatively recent invention, but the idea of equality on the basis of gender is quite a bit older – figures such as Mary Wollstonecraft and Olympe de Gouges were writing manifestos for women’s rights in the latter half of the eighteenth century. The feminist movement is changing all the time, and many different people have varying ideas of what a ‘true’ feminist is. This is precisely what makes the history of it so interesting!

The history of feminism has often been discussed in terms of ‘waves’. These are relatively useful for grouping different goals together, but should not be overemphasised because they are largely based on Western (UK and US especially) experiences.

The so-called ‘first wave’ in the mid-nineteenth to early-twentieth century most famously sought the vote for women. In the UK, suffragists such as Millicent Fawcett (one of NCW’s early members!) and Suffragettes such as the Pankhursts campaigned tirelessly until the vote was granted to propertied women over the age of 30 in 1918, and equal voting rights as men in 1928. New Zealand was the first self-governing country in the world where women had the right to vote in parliamentary elections – women there could vote from 1893. This ‘wave’ also included campaigns for improved property rights, the legal ability to work in all professions (such as law or politics) and better education for all girls. However, many arguments of the time supported women’s suffrage, education, and social participation on the basis that it would make women better wives and mothers, and improve national health, rather than supporting these rights because they allowed women to break out of that mould. You could research the history of voting rights across the globe, discuss the tactics used by UK suffragists and suffragettes, and watch the film *Suffragette* (2015).

The ‘second wave’ goals focussed on ‘personal’ issues, emerging in the west with the 1960s Sexual Revolution. Feminists sought action to contraception, abortion, childcare, and an end to female objectification, workplace harassment, gendered work and household stereotypes. It wanted these to be tackled through the political system – hence the phrase, ‘the personal is political’. You could discuss whether these goals have been met, especially considering the continuing prevalence of gender stereotypes and the new rollback on abortion and contraception in certain countries. You could also read key texts of the time, including Beauvoir’s *The Second Sex*, Friedan’s *The Feminist Mystique*, or Hanisch’s *The Personal is Political*.

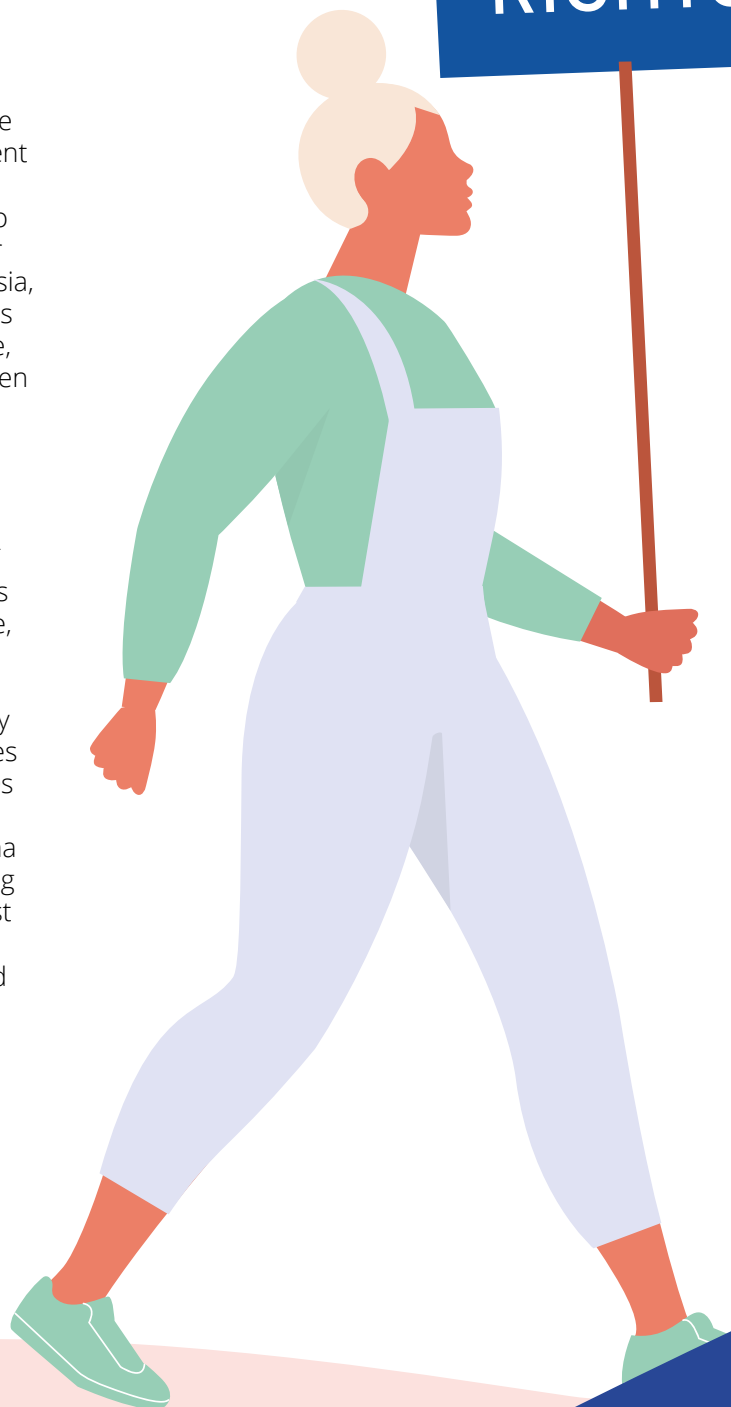
‘Third-wave’ feminism in late twentieth-century Britain began to be more intersectional; it focussed not only on middle-class white women, but looked at issues specific to women from low socio-economic backgrounds, BAME women, and LGBTQIA+ people. Its other goals include improving political representation and giving women the freedom to choose whatever path they desired, so long as they were not forced into a decision. You could discuss to what extent our choices as women are truly free now – how many of your life choices (whether it’s going for a walk, or choosing a career path) are shaped by internalised notions of gender, whether conscious or unconscious?

There is debate over whether a ‘fourth wave’ of feminism exists, or whether it is simply an expanded and more inclusive continuation of the third, with additional goals: to increase public participation in feminism, especially from men; to protect women from new online threats; to close the gender pay gap and increase institutional female representation; to end rape culture. The future of algorithms, technology and machinery could entrench and continue sexism in hidden ways: check out Caroline Criado Perez’ *Invisible Women* or Safiya Umoja Noble’s *Algorithms of Oppression*.









# WOMEN'S RIGHTS

The notion of 'waves' can be useful to group these 'goals', but it is also overly simplistic, and built upon a Western experience. Historians are now beginning to consider feminisms of different contexts and experiences – read through Dr Lucy Delap's book *Feminisms: A Global History* to understand the rich history of feminisms, as Dr Delap draws from examples from Japan to Russia, and Egypt to Germany and shows that feminists have not always agreed on a single programme, nor followed the same path. You could also listen to her interview on the [New Books Network podcast](#).

A key criticism of the 'waves' view is that it spotlights the experiences of white, middle-class women, and bypasses the experiences of women of colour, who have also been feminists through history. Feminists such as Audre Lorde, Angela Y. Davis and bell hooks have written on how feminism has privileged white women's struggles and advocated for a more holistic way of understanding oppression, one NCW believes is integral to achieving equality for all. The 1980s saw the advent of 'womanist' or *mujerista* movements among African-American and Latina women who did not find their issues were being addressed within 'the feminist movement'. Most proponents of present-day feminism agree that the movement must be inclusive of all, and understanding of intersectional oppression.



## Resources

-  **Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie, *We Should All Be Feminists* (2014):** A book-length essay speaking about the definition of feminism for the 21st century, adapted from Adichie's 2012 TEDx talk of the same name.
-  **Mary Wollstonecraft, *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* (1792):** In this, considered one of the earliest works of feminist philosophy, Wollstonecraft responds to those educational and political theorists of the 18th century who believed that women should not receive a rational education.
-  ***Suffragette* (2015):** In early 20th-century Britain, working wife and mother Maud Watts is galvanised by political activist Emmeline Pankhurst and joins women fighting for equality and the right to vote.
-  **Simone de Beauvoir, *The Second Sex* (1949):** In this book, Beauvoir discusses the treatment of women throughout history, and argues that while man is considered the default, woman is considered the 'Other'.
-  **Betty Friedan, *The Feminine Mystique* (1963):** Friedan explores what she calls 'the problem that has no name': the dissatisfaction of American suburban housewives who were confined to the house rather than exploring their own work and career paths. 'The Problem That Has No Name' is available from Penguin Modern as a separate essay.
-  **Carol Hanisch, 'The Personal is Political' (1969):** Hanisch seeks to rebut the idea that sex, appearance, abortion, childcare, and the division of labour were merely personal issues without political importance – she urges women to overcome self-blame and organise collectively against the patriarchy.
-  ***Mrs America* (2020):** As feminists from all across the American subcontinent rally to ratify the Equal Rights Amendment, Phylis Schlafy (played by Cate Blanchett), a conservative activist, opposes it. This incredible nine-part mini-series is a reminder that many women have not considered themselves feminists.
-  **Caroline Criado Perez, *Invisible Women: Exposing Data Bias in a World Designed for Men* (2019):** Did you know that women are 47% more likely to be seriously injured in a car crash? Criado Perez explores how, from government policy and medical research, to technology, workplaces, urban planning and the media, biased data results in a world not designed for women. She illustrates the hidden ways in which women are forgotten, and the impact this has on their health and well-being, and won the 2019 Royal Society Science Book Prize for this work.





**Safiya Umoja Noble, *Algorithms of Oppression: How Search Engines Reinforce Racism* (2018):** This work reveals how negative biases against women of colour are embedded in search engine results and algorithms, painting a disturbing portrait of black womanhood in modern society. You can watch Umoja Noble discuss her work in the video '*Algorithms of Oppression: Safiya Umoja Noble*' (2018) on USC Annenberg's YouTube Channel, or in her TEDx Talk '*How biased are our algorithms?*' (2014).



**bell hooks, *Feminism is for Everybody: Passionate Politics* (2000):** 'Simply put, feminism is a movement to end sexism, sexist exploitation and oppression', Feminism for Everybody begins. It is intended as an accessible introduction for all genders, asking both 'what is feminism?' and why it continues to be important today. bell hooks (stylised in lowercase) evaluates the successes and failures of contemporary feminism as she looks at reproductive rights, sexual violence, race, class, and work.



**Lucy Delap, *Feminisms: A Global History* (2020):** Delap lays out how feminism has been continually redefined by new generations and across the world, challenging the simplistic narrative of 'feminist waves' – a sequence of ever-more-progressive updates – and drawing on examples from Japan, Russia, Egypt, Germany, and more. She explores a central paradox: that feminists have demanded inclusion, but have persistently practised their own exclusions.



**Audre Lorde, *Sister Outsider: Essays and Speeches* (1984):** Essential writings of Black lesbian poet and feminist writer, Audre Lorde. Lorde explores the complexities of her intersectional identity and her experiences of oppression: sexism, heterosexism, racism, homophobia, classism, ageism. Today's understanding of intersectional feminism draws from Lorde's recognition of oppressions as complex and interlocking.



**Angela Y. Davis, *Women, Race & Class* (1983):** This powerful study of the women's liberation movement in the US – from abolitionist days to the present – demonstrates how it has always been hampered by the racist and classist biases of its leaders, and has therefore practised exclusion whilst preaching inclusion. You could also listen to Davis being interviewed for the Southbank Centre: Think Aloud podcast: '*Angela Davis: women, race and class in the post-Trump era*' (2017), available on [Spotify](#), [SoundCloud](#), and [Google Podcasts](#).



**Laura Bates, *Everyday Sexism* (2014):** The Everyday Sexism Project began as a website where people could share their experiences of daily, normalised sexism. It has now collected over 100,000 testimonies from people around the world. This book explores sexism in modern society – in all of its pervasive forms, often unnoticed by those it does not affect.





# Men and Feminism

It is important that people of every sex and gender are involved in the fight to ensure equality. You could explore the impact that men have had historically in the fights for women's rights. It is also important to look at how feminism can help men, too.

## Feminism is for men

Sexism doesn't just affect women: men are also confined by prescribed gender roles. Men are often negatively impacted in divorce settlements and issues of paternity rights, by physically dangerous work environments, by mental health stigma, and by toxic masculinity. All of these are linked to the idea that men are strong, silent, unemotional, and not naturally the carers of their own children. Toxic masculinity treats men who do not fit that mould as 'emasculated', rather than as empowered men with their own priorities.

## Campaigns for male involvement

International campaigns including HeForShe and the White Ribbon Campaign are actively seeking to engage men in feminism. Amnesty International and Womankind both host conferences on men in feminism. There are also national organisations such as MAVA (Men Against Violence and Abuse) in India and Obama's It's On Us initiative in the USA. You could look into different campaigns, how they were started, who started them, what they have been doing for feminism, and how effective you think their actions are.

**“How can we effect change in the world when only half of it is invited or feel welcome to participate in the conversation? Men, I would like to take this opportunity to extend your formal invitation. Gender equality is your issue, too.”**

Emma Watson at the United Nations (New York), 2014, for the HeForShe campaign.

## Famous Male Feminists

From Parker Pillsbury in the 19th century to Harish Sadani in the 21st century, there are a number of men who have been involved in the fight for equality on the basis of gender. Men's involvement in feminism is important, and showcasing the role men have had can normalise this behaviour, and encourage more men to look at the ways they can contribute and even benefit from feminism. You could make a display showcasing the work of self-declared male-feminists, or discuss with your male friends and family why they should (or why they already do!) consider themselves feminists.

## If it's for everyone, why is it called Feminism?

A common point of discussion is the word 'feminism' itself, which many believe can alienate men. A response to this could be to point out that it is generally the so-called 'feminine' traits which are discriminated against – in men, for example, the 'feminine' traits of emotion, child-care, etc. are targeted. Being a feminist recognises these inequalities in particular, and tackles this specific inequality. 'Feminism', defined as equality between genders, can also be mistaken for 'misandry', which is prejudice against men (the opposite of misogyny). Do you think the word 'feminism' is useful? Should it be changed, or reclaimed from those who have misused it?





## **NCWGB Resolution, 2004: 'The Role of Men and Boys in Work Towards the Equality of Women and Men'**

*The National Council of Women, recognising the importance of recent discussions in the UN Commission on the Status of Women on the significance of the role of men and boys in work to promote gender equality, urges Her Majesty's Government:*

*(a) to encourage and support work at home and abroad to promote understanding of the role of men and boys as active participants in work towards equality and recognition of full human rights for women; and*

*(b) to develop and implement initiatives at all levels within the UK to ensure the fuller recognition by men and boys of the importance of full and equal responsibility of women and men in society, in the home, the community and the workplace.*

### **Resources**



**Emma Watson, 'Gender Equality is your issue too' (2014):** Emma Watson gave this speech at the United Nations (New York) as part of an event for the HeForShe campaign. You can watch it on the UN's [YouTube channel](#), or find a full transcript online.



**Ben Hurst, 'Boys won't be boys. Boys will be what we teach them to be', TedX (2019):** In this talk, Ben Hurst, Head of Facilitation and Training at the Good Lad Initiative, rejects the commonly-used phrase 'boys will be boys' as a 'get-out-of-jail-free' card for boys, men, and toxic masculinities. He talks about his workshops where he encourages conversation, provides space for men to express emotion, and builds positive masculinities.



**ManPanels.org:** Check out this website, 'Say No To #ManPanels', which contains an open letter by a large number of prominent men against male-only panels in global policymaking forums.



**bell hooks, *We Real Cool: Black Men and Masculinity* (2004):** In this work, bell hooks asserts that black men have been so dehumanised that they are in crisis emotionally and at risk within society. She argues that the greatest threat to black life in America is patriarchal thinking and practices.



**Tony Porter, 'A call to men', TEDWomen (2010):** Tony Porter makes a call to men everywhere: don't 'act like a man'. Drawing on powerful stories from his own life, he shows how this mentality, drummed into so many men and boys, can lead men to disrespect, mistreat and abuse women – and each other.



**Nancy E. Dowd, *The Man Question: Male Subordination and Privilege* (2010):** Feminist 'anti-essentialism' asserts that all women are not created equal, and privilege varies greatly by circumstances, particularly that of race and class. Yet at the same time, many feminists have tended to view men through an 'essentialist' lens, seeing them all as equal. In this work, Dowd applies the anti-essentialist model to the study of masculinities, and demonstrates how men's treatment by the law and society varies by race, economic position, sexuality, and other factors, and examines what price men pay for their privileges. Ultimately, she calls for a more inclusive feminist theory.



**Liz Plank, 'Why the patriarchy is killing men', *The Washington Post* (2019):** Liz Plank, the author of *For the Love of Men: A Vision for Mindful Masculinity*, sets out why the highest-ranked country for gender equality, Iceland, has the highest life expectancy for men in Europe, and how feminism is linked to male health.

# Period Poverty & The Pink Tax

Period Poverty occurs when the sanitary products needed to manage periods are unaffordable. This sometimes leads to products being reused, which causes infections. In cultures where periods are still taboo, girls and women are often unable to seek out help. Period Poverty is a vast and intersectional topic, affecting people across the world.

## Ending Period Poverty

Thanks to the notable recent campaigns from activists like Amika George and charities like ActionAid, Girlguiding, and the Red Box Project, every state school and college in England is now able to order period products for their students, funded by the UK government. Since the scheme launched in January 2020, however, only 40% of colleges, primary schools and secondary schools have signed up. Period poverty still affects women in the UK, and especially women in refugee camps, homeless women, female students, and women in low-income employment.

If your school or college doesn't already receive free products, why not ask them to sign up [here](#)?

## Normalising Periods

Periods are usually a taboo subject – in certain cultures, girls and women on their periods are considered 'unclean', and may be forcibly isolated from the rest of society. The Hindu practice of *chhaupadi* bans women from doing a range of everyday activities during their period and confines them to 'menstruation huts' in which they live and sleep, missing out on school or work. Menstrual huts can cause death from exposure, dehydration, snake bites, and smoke inhalation. Although the huts were made illegal in 2005 by Nepal's supreme court, only in 2019 after the death of Parbati Budha Rawat was the first arrest of a man for *chhaupadi* made. What can be done to normalise periods and eliminate harmful practices, whilst still respecting these cultures?

## What is the Pink Tax?









The 'Pink Tax' is the name given to the phenomenon where many products for women are more expensive than those for men. In 2016, the New York City Department of Consumer Affairs published a report revealing that on average, women's products in the area cost 7% more than similar products for men. Shortly afterwards, law school professor Ian Ayres revealed data in Forbes showing that some US stores charge up to 28.9% more on women's products than on men's products.

In 2019, Liberal Democrat MP Christine Jardine introduced a bill to Parliament proposing to ban the 'Pink Tax', but it did not pass through Parliament. In February 2020, Jardine again tabled a motion on the 'Pink Tax', writing that 'it is unacceptable that in 2020 women and girls pay more than men for basic products, including toiletries, clothes and haircuts', and that products are, 'in some cases, 34% more expensive than those aimed at men'. Unfortunately, Jardine's Gender-based Pricing (Prohibition) Bill did not pass through Parliament before the end of the session, meaning it has once again been dropped. Many other groups are campaigning against the Pink Tax – could you join them?





## Resources

-  **Amika George, 'Period Poverty: Breaking the Silence', TEDx Talk, 2017:** Here, student activist Amika George speaks out about period poverty. Check out Amika George's website [freeperiods.org](https://freeperiods.org) for more on the campaign.
-  Check out **The Gift Wellness Foundation** ([periodpoverty.uk](https://periodpoverty.uk)), a charity dedicated to providing sanitary pads to women and girls who can't afford them or can't access them, both in the UK and globally, in order to learn more.
-  **Nadya Okamoto, 'The Menstrual Movement', TEDx Talk, 2016:** Nadya founded Camions of Care to address menstrual hygiene among poor and homeless women – [here](#), she talks about how the taboo around periods is hindering our global development.
-  **Pravin Nikam, 'Men need to talk about menstruation', TEDx Talk, 2016:** Pravin has designed educational tools for girls and schools to learn about periods in a society where the subject is a major taboo, and is committed to the idea that men must be involved in breaking down period taboos.
-  **ActionAid, 'Chhaupadi and menstruation taboos':** This detailed website entry from ActionAid includes key information about 'period huts' and the practice of *chhaupadi* – its history, its dangers, and the female activists campaigning to end it.
-  **New York City Department of Consumer Affairs, 'From Cradle to Crane: The Cost of Being a Female Consumer: A Study of Gender Pricing in New York City', 2015:** this report compared the prices of nearly 800 products with 'female' and 'male' iterations, and found 'pink' products targeted at women were on average more expensive.
-  **Ian Ayres, 'Which Retailers Charge the Largest 'Pink Tax'?', Forbes, 2016:** In response to the above study, law school professor Ian Ayres carried out his own research on brands' gendered pricing across the United States of America.
-  **Christine Jardine MP, 'Pink Tax: EDM #227', Early Day Motions, House of Commons (February 2020):** Here, you can read the short 'Early Day Motion' by Christine Jardine MP on the Pink Tax. Early Day Motions (EDMs) are motions submitted for debate in the House of Commons which haven't had a date fixed.

# Women & War

Women often experience war in a different way to men, and have often been restricted from different types of participation. The roles of women in warfare, in ending warfare, and the different impact of warfare on women to men, are often representative of wider gender inequality.

*Content Note: contains mention of rape*

## The Home Front

Women have played a vital role even when excluded from the army. In the UK, the role of women in factories during World War I and II was vital. For example, the 'Canary Girls' were women making explosives, whose skin was turned yellow by the handling of the chemical TNT. How important was the impact of these women, and should they be more widely recognised?

## In the Army

From Boudicca to Joan of Arc, gender has not stopped many famous heroines from fighting wars. You could research the history of female participation in the army, the restrictions and attitudes still facing female soldiers today, or the efforts by the previous US President Donald Trump to exclude transgender people from the US army.

## Treatment of civilians

Emergencies and crises like wars disproportionately affect girls' education – girls are less likely than boys to have their education continued, or made up. Women and girls are also disproportionately victims of rape, which has been used by a method of warfare in many conflicts. The UK's Preventing Sexual Violence in Conflict Initiative seeks to end this horrific method of warfare. You could conduct research to find more examples, and suggest why this disproportionate impact happens.

## Women in Peace Negotiations

The International Peace Institute writes that when women participate in peace negotiations, they are 35% more likely to last at least 15 years. However, women and their needs are often excluded from negotiations, which tend to be conducted by men. Why is this, and what needs to change?







### ***NCWGB Resolution, 2010: 'Protection of Women and Children from rape in post-disaster and post-conflict situations'***

*The National Council of Women (GB) calls upon Her Majesty's Government to:*

- (a) recognise the prevalence of rape of women and children in post-disaster and post-conflict situations;*
- (b) recognise the serious effects of rape on the physical and mental health and future well-being of rape victims;*
- (c) make the protection of women and children from rape and all other forms of sexual abuse as high a priority as the provision of food and medical assistance in post-disaster and post-conflict situations;*
- (d) make the education of men in the consequences of rape and other forms of sexual violence an integral part of the training of military and UN personnel.*



## Resources

-  **'The Women of the Second World War', Gov.uk (Prime Minister's Office, Ministry of Defence) (2015):** In 2015, the UK government published this brief history into the different roles women played in the Second World War.
-  **Lauren Potts, Monica Rimmer, 'The Canary Girls: The workers the war turned yellow', BBC News (May 2017):** This BBC news article introduces the female munitions workers of World War I, including interviews with women recalling their time at these factories.
-  **Sarah Hall, *Women at war: why do we still struggle with the idea of female soldiers?* in *The Guardian* (August 2011):** Sarah Hall, author of dystopian novel *The Carhullan Army*, which features a female paramilitary soldier as the main character, explores and questions our preconceived notions of war and soldiers.
-  **Michelle Bachelet, 'Women, War and Peace', UN Women (March 2011):** Available on the UN Women website, this is a lecture delivered by then-UN Women Executive Director Michelle Bachelet for the Phyllis Kossoff Lecture series. Available in both video and transcript form.
-  **Preventing Sexual Violence in Conflict Initiative (PSVI), 'About us', Gov.uk:** The Preventing Sexual Violence in Conflict Initiative (PSVI) was founded in 2012 by the UK's Former Foreign Secretary, Lord William Hague of Richmond, and the UN Special Envoy of the High Commissioner for Refugees, Angelina Jolie. Check out its '[About us](#)' section on the government website to find out what problems this initiative hopes to tackle, and how. You could also watch Angelina Jolie's speech at the opening of the End Sexual Violence in Conflict summit (2014), available on [YouTube](#).
-  **Aryn Baker, 'The Secret War Crime', *Time*:** In this harrowing report, Baker reveals the crimes committed against civilians in South Sudan, the Congo, Iraq, Syria, Nigeria, and other countries; documents what happens to these women, who are faced with pregnancies and societal shame; and suggests how these crimes can be stopped. *Please note: this report contains distressing testimonies from survivors of rape.*

# Female Genital Mutilation (FGM)

FGM is a practice in which young girls have part of their genitalia removed, with the amount of surgery being categorised into 4 different 'Types'. This serves no medical benefit and is recognised as a violation of human rights, but is still practised in many cultures. Even girls living in the UK, where it has been illegal since 1985, are vulnerable to having FGM performed on them, either in the UK or when they are taken on a 'holiday' to a country where it remains legal. The UN estimates that 200 million women and girls alive today have undergone some form of genital mutilation.

## Why does FGM happen?

Most campaigners understand that the key to ending FGM for good is engaging those who practise it in conversation, and breaking down their understanding, rather than simply forbidding them from a traditional practice. For this, a sensitive understanding of the reasoning behind FGM is needed. FGM is often heavily influenced by religious or cultural expectations about preservation of female sexuality and sexual identity, where the male experience of sexual intercourse is prioritised.

## Tackling FGM in the UK

Though FGM is illegal, it is a very difficult crime to prosecute. It is difficult to secure evidence from victims, who are usually young and frequently do not want to report offences against their family. The first person to be found guilty of FGM in the UK was a mother of a three-year-old, who was convicted in 2019.

It is essential to protect women and girls at risk and to prevent FGM happening in the first place. Measures taken in the UK towards this include mandatory reporting duties – since 2015, health and social care professionals in England and Wales have been required to report known cases of FGM in under-18-year-olds to the police. From September 2020, teaching about FGM to secondary school pupils has also been compulsory – though the National FGM Centre is calling for conversations to take place at a younger age, because most girls who become victims of FGM do so at primary school age.

There are, however, still criticisms of the government's approach. In 2020, Layla Moran MP criticised the fall in funding to tackle FGM – funding allocation fell by £2,718,000 in 2016 to £432,000 in 2020.

School closures as a result of the Covid-19 pandemic also endangered girls, whose teachers were less able to raise the alarm if there were concerns that FGM had taken place.

### ***NCWGB Resolution, 1995: 'Female Genital Mutilation – Enforcement of the Law'***

*The National Council of Women in Conference assembled, concerned about reports that some young girls from the African continent, resident in the UK, are subjected to illegal female genital mutilation, urges HM Government to take steps to enforce and strengthen current legislation forbidding this practice. Reaffirmed 2000, 2006.*

## **NCWGB Resolution, 2017: 'Type 4 Female Genital Mutilation'**

*NCW, aware that Types 1,2 and 3 of Female Genital Mutilation are clearly observable and recordable but that other forms of FGM are not, urges HMG to give a category of FGM Type 4 to those other forms of abuse. This would give professionals and victims a clear diagnosis and improve record-keeping.*

*1. Communities who practice pulling and piercing of the clitoris and other manipulation of the female genitalia are not, in their eyes, practising mutilation or abuse because there is no "cutting" involved and the procedure cannot be described under the present designation of "FGM Type 1,2 or 3".*

*2. There needs to be more awareness of the practice and training in history-taking.*

### **Resources**



**Charlene James, *Cuttin' It* (2016):** Teenagers Muna and Iqra catch the same school bus. Both born in Somalia, their backgrounds are very different, but they both share a painful secret. This play by Charlene James tackles the issue of FGM, and earned her numerous awards. You can buy and read the script, go and see the play, or even put it on yourself at your school.



**Leyla Hussein, *The Cruel Cut* (2013):** Activist Leyla Hussein presents this BAFTA-nominated documentary following her work on ending FGM.



**James Hitchings-Hales, 'FGM happens in the UK, but is obscured by a very British silence', *Global Citizen: Girls & Women* (February 2018):** This detailed but readable article contains animated videos, interviews with activists, and key information on tackling FGM in the UK.



**ShareAmerica, 'Join the Global Conversation to #endFGM' (2016):** Highlighting the stories of survivors of FGM, and also suggesting the vital role religious leaders and community advocates can play in ending the practice.



***Call the Midwife*, series 6 episode 6:** In this episode of the series following the lives of midwives in 1960s London, nurse Valerie Dyer cares for a pregnant Somali woman whose birth is impacted by FGM. Anti-FGM campaigner Nimco Ali advised the writers on how to craft this sensitive episode.



# Body Positivity

A societal focus on the female body dates back many centuries – from Ancient Greek sculptures, to 15th century Renaissance paintings, to the corsets of the 18th and 19th centuries. However, the ‘ideal’ feminine appearance has changed over time; just 70 years ago, women’s magazines advertised weight-gain products, a contrast to the ‘diet culture’ of the 21st century, idealising a slim and toned body. You could research the changes in ‘ideal’ body type over time, discussing why it changed.

## Diet Culture

The focus on a slim and toned body that most media today shows has led to a huge market for slimming foods and dieting products, many of which are not scientifically supported, and some of which are dangerous. Many of these products are advertised by Instagram ‘influencers’. In the past few years, the NHS have identified a rise in cases of eating disorders such as anorexia and bulimia. You could research this huge market and consider the morality of selling and advertising such products. You could also discuss whether there should be legislation against, or better testing of, such products.

In a similar vein, plastic surgery and editing filters can establish unrealistic expectations, and distort perceptions about what a healthy body ‘should’ look like. Teenagers can be especially vulnerable to the normalisation of misleading images and plastic surgery, and feel pressured into paying to alter their appearance in line with current beauty standards. Whilst some ‘influencers’ argue that adhering to these beauty standards made them feel empowered, others disagree. Journalist Harriet Hall argues that plastic surgery simply makes money from female insecurity, and reinforces Eurocentric beauty standards. Campaigner Chidera Eggerue started the hashtag #SaggyBoobsMatter, and revealed that, as a result, young women told her they had decided not to have plastic surgery they felt they were being pressured into. The issue of plastic surgery goes to the heart of questions around modern-day feminism: women should have a choice, but if they are pressured into something by patriarchal norms, is that choice really their own free choice? As Ono Mergen points out: ‘the fact of having a choice and making a choice doesn’t make it a feminist one’.

**“It’s genius, really: saturate the media with ideal bodies, convince women that they can only be happy if they look like those bodies, sell women products promising to give them those bodies, and when those products don’t work, tell the women that it’s their fault for not having enough willpower, and sell them more.”**

Megan Jayne Crabbe





## Body Positivity

The Body Positivity Movement has emerged to reject the pressures that society places upon a female body to look 'ideal'. The idea behind it is to, in different ways, open up a wider and more balanced discourse that challenges "diet culture" and encourages people, particularly women, to embrace their natural bodies rather than striving for unrealistic ideals forced upon them by society.

As well as weight and size, the movement also embraces all different body types, including disability, height, scars, skin conditions such as vitiligo, alopecia and basically any other societally-deemed "imperfections".

You could hold a discussion session on the movement and talk about pressures in society relating to physical appearance – such as the role of 'diet culture', Instagram influencers, and so on. You could research other figureheads of the movement, such as singer Lizzo, actress and presenter Jameela Jamil, and model and blogger Tess Holliday.



## Resources



**Sonya Renee Taylor, *The Body is Not an Apology: The Power of Radical Self-Love* (2018):** This book began as a poem ('Untitled: The Body is Not An Apology', 2010), then an online community. In the book, Taylor argues that many systems thrive off our inability to make peace with difference, and injure the relationship we have with our own bodies. She offers the concept of radical self-love as a balm to heal the idea of 'body shame' and strive for a more compassionate world.



**Megan Jayne Crabbe, *Body Positivity Power: How to stop dieting, make peace with your body and live* (2017):** Crabbe charts the mental and physical impact of body image issues, and encourages everybody to make peace with themselves.



**Michelle Elman, *Am I Ugly?: One Woman's Journey to Body Positivity* (2018):** A deeply personal memoir describing childhood experiences of life-threatening health problems, long stays in hospital and fifteen complex surgeries that left both mental and physical scars. The narrative follows Elman's journey from illness to health and childhood to adulthood as she deals with her body confidence issues to embrace her scars and her body – and helps others to do the same.

# Girls' Education

**UNESCO estimates that 130 million girls aged 6-17 are out of school, and that 15 million girls of primary-school age will never enter a classroom. Young girls are far more likely than boys to be denied an education, despite the Universal Declaration of Human Rights stating that everyone has a right to education.**

## Barriers to Education

Barriers to education can often be based on, or linked to, gender. Factors that contribute to a girl missing education include child marriage, unintended pregnancy, a lack of sanitation around school (which affects girls on their period), and poverty – families who can only afford to send one child to school will usually send a son, feeling that he will be more likely to use his education in a working job. However, these are not the only factors, and can all be applied in different ways – be sure to research more deeply on how these factors intersect, and suggest how each one could be tackled.



## Benefits of Education

Providing education to girls brings a benefit not only to them, but also to their community and country. Ensuring education has the power to decrease gender-based violence. For example, a study on Pakistan has linked a 'significant decrease in physical violence against women with increasing the level of education', whilst the World Bank states that achieving universal secondary education would virtually eliminate child marriage. Investing in girls' education also holds significant economic benefits; the World Bank believes that the loss in human capital wealth incurred today because women did not receive 12 years of schooling is between \$15-30 trillion globally.

## Overcoming Barriers to Education

The UK government has invested large sums of money in ensuring girls' education worldwide; the Girls' Education Challenge (GEC), for example, was launched in 2012 and is the world's largest fund for this purpose. You could research the GEC and evaluate its effectiveness, and suggest further actions for the government to take.

Many charities also focus on girls' education. CAMFED (Campaigning for Female Education) is a charity that has supported the education of 3.3 million girls in sub-Saharan Africa, and uses an 'alumnae network' of women who have completed school with CAMFED's support to support other women from their communities, promoting sustainable and meaningful growth.

The Covid-19 pandemic disproportionately and profoundly impacted girls' education. When meeting in the UK in May 2021, the leaders of the G7 countries pledged a new global target to get 40 million more girls into school by 2026. However, the UK government was criticised for cutting its commitment in international aid, which, according to Cambridge academic Dr Pauline Rose, puts girls' education at risk.

## Resources



**Malala Yousafzai, *I am Malala: The girl who stood up for education and was shot by the Taliban* (2013):** This is the bestselling memoir of the youngest ever Nobel Prize winner, Malala Yousafzai, the schoolgirl who stood up to the Taliban.



**Ziauddin Yousafzai, *Let Her Fly: A Father's Journey and the Fight for Equality* (2019):** Ziauddin has been fighting for equality for over twenty years – first for Malala, his daughter, and then for all girls throughout the world living in patriarchal societies. Vowing that his daughter would have an education, he founded a school so that girls could attend. This book shows why we must keep fighting for the right of girls to an education.



**Jane Robinson, *Bluestockings: The Remarkable Story of the First Women to Fight for an Education* (2010):** The focus of this book is on university-level study, but it's still an incredible story of the fight for female education in Britain. In 1869, when five women enrolled at university for the first time in British history, the average female brain was thought to be 150 grams lighter than a man's. Doctors warned that if women studied too hard their wombs would wither and die. When the Cambridge Senate held a vote on whether women students should be allowed official membership of the university, there was a full-scale riot. Despite this, women from all backgrounds persevered and paved the way for the generations who have followed them since. Bluestocking tells the story of these women fighting for a university education in Britain.



**Tara Westover, *Educated* (2018):** This is a memoir of Westover's journey from an Idaho mountain-girl who, according to the state did not exist – to a Cambridge-educated, sharply intelligent young woman. Westover charts her struggle for self-education and reflects on what an education is, and what it offers.



**Camfed (Campaign for Female Education), *Pathways* (2018):** This documentary by the NGO Camfed charts a great change in rural Zambia, where girls destined to be child brides are now recovering their futures. Visit the [Camfed website](#) to organise a film screening.



**'Transformative Political Leadership to Promote 12 Years of Quality Education for All Girls', Faculty of Education (University of Cambridge) & REAL: Research for Equitable Access and Learning:** If you'd really like to take a deep dive into this topic, take a look at this report, published by academics at the University of Cambridge, highlighting the urgent need for political leadership to address what they refer to as 'a global learning crisis in girls' education in low and middle-income countries'.

# Violence Against Women and Girls (VAWG)

**Violence Against Women & Girls is violence which is directed at women and girls specifically because of their gender.**

Examples of it include:

- Sexual violence, domestic violence, stalking and harassment;
- FGM (Female Genital Mutilation);
- Forced marriage;
- 'Honour-based' violence (such the murder of a relative who is perceived to have brought dishonour on the family);
- Trafficking;
- Online abuse.

Though some of these crimes can have male victims, the majority of victims are female and are therefore considered gender-specific. Disproportionately affected groups include young girls, older women, immigrants, refugees, indigenous women and ethnic minorities. You could conduct research into why these groups are disproportionately affected by such crimes. Further factors that lead to a higher risk of VAWG, found in both victim and perpetrator, include lower levels of education, a history of witnessing family violence, and community norms which ascribe higher status to men.

## **The Impact of VAWG**

In March 2021, the horrific abduction and murder of Sarah Everard by a serving member of the Metropolitan Police led to women across the country sharing their experiences of harassment and violence perpetrated by men, and brought to attention just how endemic this problem is.

VAWG affects a huge number of women, and has both short- and long-term effects. Women in abusive relationships have spoken about their own sense of self diminishing, as well as losing work and money and control over their children. Women who suffer sexual violence in childhood and as adults are often traumatised and can have serious long-term mental health problems as well as sometimes being less able to trust others. Global estimates published by WHO indicate that about 1 in 3 (35%) of women worldwide have experienced either physical and/or sexual intimate partner violence or non-partner sexual violence in their lifetime.

VAWG can prevent women from participating in life and exercising their rights to move around, marry, have property, express their views, and have education. Indeed, preventing women from exercising their rights can sometimes be the intention of gender-based violence. Violence Against Women in Politics can put women off from exercising their right to vote – in some countries, women are physically harassed while queueing to vote; in others, abuse directed at women for expressing political views mainly occurs online.

## Tackling VAWG

You could consider the factors that contribute to VAWG and discuss how to tackle them – for example, how can we tackle the gender inequality and stereotypes at the root of much VAWG?

You could also look at the international agreements and instruments that exist to end Violence Against Women. For example, the Council of Europe Convention on preventing and combating violence against women and domestic violence (or, the 'Istanbul Convention' for short!).

VAWG comes in a huge number of forms. Harassment can include sexual assault, groping, stalking, catcalling, and upskirting. In recognition of this, Nottinghamshire Police were the first to implement a 'misogyny hate crime policy', which recognises these actions as hate crime. Upskirting has been made illegal in the UK in 2019, following the successful campaigning of young activist Gina Martin.

You could also discuss the role of police and government in ensuring the danger of VAWG is properly emphasised. There have been controversies over police not taking complaints of VAWG seriously, such as in the Shana Grice case; Grice complained 5 times to Sussex Police about Michael Lane before he murdered her in 2016. What do you think should be done to reiterate the seriousness of VAWG? You might also consider what effective government policies should be, whether self-defence should become compulsory, and further effects of VAWG – on an individual, a community, locally, nationally, and internationally.

Finally, a number of campaigns also seek to engage men in being allies, and changing toxic ideas of masculinity that promote dehumanising treatments of women. White Ribbon UK works with men and boys to challenge the male cultures that lead to harassment.



### **NCWGB Resolution, 2020: Urgent UK Ratification of the Istanbul Convention**

*The NCW in conference assembled calls for the government to take all necessary steps to enable urgent ratification of the Council of Europe Convention on Combatting Violence Against Women and Domestic Violence (the 'Istanbul Convention'). The NCW notes that the Istanbul Convention was signed in 2012, but, eight years later, it has not yet been ratified. The UK government must ensure that services and support for survivors of domestic abuse are non-discriminatory, specialist, and without regard to residency or immigration status, so that the Istanbul Convention can finally be ratified.*

### **NCWGB Resolution, 2009: Trafficking in Women**

*The National Council of Women, concerned at the increase in cross-border trafficking in women and the significant number of women now brought into this country for the purpose of prostitution, asks HM Government to ensure that the Home Office gives urgent consideration, in its current review of the Sexual Offences Act, to the creation of a specific offence of Trafficking in Women carrying high deterrent penalties where there is evidence of corruption or coercion of the women involved. Reaffirmed 2002, 2006.*

*The UK government must ensure that services and support for survivors of domestic abuse are non-discriminatory, specialist, and without regard to residency or immigration status, so that the Istanbul Convention can finally be ratified.*

### **NCWGB Resolution, 2007: Domestic Violence**

*Reaffirming the resolution of the European Centre of the International Council of Women, urging national and local governments to take action:*

*(a) to define domestic violence throughout Europe as a criminal act;*

*(b) to undertake initiatives to raise awareness that violence against women damages peace, democracy and economic development in society;*

*(c) to introduce a policy of zero tolerance against this crime;*

*(d) to implement national and local plans to combat domestic violence, including appropriate training of police, magistrates, doctors, teachers and other professionals involved;*

*(e) to provide safe houses, appropriate medical and psychological services and financial support for victims; and*

*(f) to introduce mediation services with rehabilitation therapy for habitual offenders.*

### **NCWGB Resolution, 1991: Rape Within Marriage**

*The National Council of Women in Conference assembled, awaits the deferred judgement from the House of Lords in the case of Regina v. "R" and upholding its belief in the equality of men and women before the law, supports the Law Commission's proposal that a husband should no longer be immune from prosecution for rape within marriage, and urges the Law Commission to issue recommendations for legislation on the ancillary issues.*

*Explanatory Note: In 1991, a judgment ruling stated that a wife cannot retract consent at any point during marriage. Pleas against the judgment reached the House of Lords. In 2003, the House of Lords revoked the previous judgment, and rape in marriage was made a criminal offence under the Sexual Offences Act 2003.*

### **NCWGB Resolution, 1975: Violence in Marriage**

*The National Council of Women in Conference assembled, urges Her Majesty's Government to implement the recommendations in the Select Committee Report Violence in Marriage, giving priority to the provision of safe havens for wives and children at risk. Reaffirmed 1981, 2006.*

## Resources



**UN Women, 'In Brief: Ending Violence Against Women and Girls':** This two-page thematic brief provides an overview of UN Women's work to end violence against women. Find out more about their work on the UN Women 'Ending Violence Against Women' [webpage](#).



**Jackson Katz, 'Violence Against Women – it's a men's issue', TEDxFiDiWomen (2013):** Domestic violence and sexual abuse are often called "women's issues." But in this bold, blunt talk, Jackson Katz points out that these are intrinsically men's issues – and shows how these violent behaviours are often tied to restrictive definitions of manhood.



**Alice Walker, *The Color Purple* (1982):** Listed amongst the 100 most influential novels by the BBC (2019), *The Color Purple* is a key work of fiction about the life of a young girl who is abused by her father. You could read and discuss this work as part of a reading group.



**IFES (International Foundation for Electoral Systems), 'Effective Protection from Online Violence Against Women in Politics' (2019):** This is a summary and recording of an event the IFES hosted at the United Nations Commission on the Status of Women in 2019. It features a panel of experts in advocacy, gender, and international law discussing what measures can be taken to help women express their political views and exercise their right to vote and stand for political positions.



**Gina Martin, *Be The Change: A Toolkit for the Activist in You* (2019):** In the first chapter of this book, Martin recounts her experience of being 'upskirted' at a music festival, and the realisation that the police had no power to prosecute those responsible. Martin discusses how she spearheaded a campaign to make upskirting illegal (it became illegal in the UK in 2019), and gives guidance on how you, too, can launch a campaign to make the world a better place.



**Amnesty International, 'Violence Against Women: Human Rights Education Resource':** This resource was produced by Amnesty International to give PSHE teachers guidance in teaching about VAWG in schools, but you could take the different talking points, statistics and article extracts it brings together and use them for your own discussion seminars or presentations.



Check out the '[Reports and Resources' page on the White Ribbon UK website](#). This charity works with men and boys to challenge the male cultures that lead to harassment, and on this page share their reports, presentations, and videos that you could use to learn more or share with your school.



# The Gender Pay Gap

**Paying men and women differently for work of equal value has been illegal in the UK since the Equal Pay Act in 1970, leading some people to state that the Gender Pay Gap is a 'myth'. However, the Gender Pay Gap is not the same as unequal pay, and its cause is a bit more complicated.**

The Gender Pay Gap of an organisation is the difference in the average earnings between women and men. A organisation calculates its gender pay gap by finding the average of the pay of all its female employees, and comparing it to the average of the pay of all its male employees. Usually, the average earnings of men are higher.

In 2018, states the UK Government Equalities Office, for every £1 received by the average UK man, the average UK woman was paid just over 82p.

This is because there are more women in lower-paid occupations, fewer women in lucrative sectors such as engineering and finance, more women working part-time, and because women are more likely to take time out of the labour force for caring responsibilities. The last one is particularly important; the gender pay gap widens significantly after people have children; having a child barely affects a man's career, but it has a huge impact on a woman's career.

## Benefits of Closing the Gender Pay Gap

Closing the Gender Pay Gap will provide economic as well as moral benefits. It has been estimated that the UK could add £150 billion to its GDP by 2025 if gender gaps are closed.

## Closing the Gap

In 2017, the UK became one of the first counties in the world to introduce compulsory gender pay gap reporting for public, private and voluntary sector employers with more than 250 staff. All the information is available to look up at [gender-pay-gap.service.gov.uk](https://gender-pay-gap.service.gov.uk).

This has prompted many companies to publish 'Action Plans' aimed at closing the gap. You could look up businesses you know about – independent schools, companies your parents work for, and so on – to see their gender pay gaps.

You could look at schemes which are trying to ensure women reach the top jobs, such as quotas and 'returners' programmes (assisting those who have taken time off to 'return' into work), and discuss whether you think they are effective, and fair. Some believe that 'artificial' quotas are unhelpful, whilst others believe that a temporary artificial quota is necessary to level the playing ground and normalise the idea of women in high positions.

You could also go beyond the UK – look at which countries around the world are taking action to close the gap. Discuss ways to make the Gender Pay Gap a more widely understood phenomenon, so that it is no longer perceived of as a 'myth'.

## Unpaid Care

Not only is there a Gender Pay Gap, but also a 'Gender Work Gap'. According to UN Women, 70% of 'unpaid work' (including chores and childcare) is done by women and girls, which limits the time women and girls have for themselves and their careers. The idea of 'GDP' (Gross Domestic Product), which is used to measure countries' economic productivity, has been criticised for not addressing the unpaid work that (mostly) women do. Have you noticed instances of unpaid work? You could discuss this with your group, and potentially investigate how economics can begin to account for unpaid work.

## Impact of Covid-19

The Covid-19 pandemic had a huge impact on women's working patterns. The UK gender pay gap reporting was suspended; women took on more childcare and home-schooling responsibilities than men; and women faced more redundancies than men. The full impact of the pandemic on the advances made to equality in the workplace and at home will soon be evident.





### **NCWGB Resolution, 2014: The Gender Pay Gap**

*The National Council of Women, in Conference assembled, expresses concern that the gender pay gap between women and men has been increasing in recent years and urges HMG to take action to remove this form of discrimination against women in the workplace.*

#### **Resources**



**Government Equalities Office, 'The Case for Change: How economic gender inequalities develop across the life course', HM Government (2019):** This recent report lays out exactly how economic inequalities develop between men and women in the UK, even when equal pay for work of equal value is illegal. It covers the impact of gender stereotypes, parenthood, the type of work women do, the impact of unpaid work on women, and the different status between men and women at the age of retirement.



**Carrie Gracie, *Equal: A Story of Women, Men & Money* (2019):** Equal Pay has been the law for half a century, but when pay is secret, women can get paid less than men. In this book, journalist Carrie Gracie documents how she challenged unequal pay at the BBC, as well as investigating why men and women are still paid unequally.



**'International Equal Pay Day: 18 September', United Nations (2020):** This page on the [UN website](#) explains why, in 2020, 18 September was designated as International Equal Pay Day. It has loads of information not only on why unequal pay is a problem across the globe, but also how different countries are tackling it.



**'Search and compare gender pay gap data', Gender Pay Gap service, Gov.uk:** Visit this page [www.gov.uk/find-gender-pay-gap-data](https://www.gov.uk/find-gender-pay-gap-data) in order to search for any companies with more than 250 employees, and see what their gender pay gap looks like.



**UN Women, 'What is the real value of unpaid work?' (2017):** This video, available on [YouTube](#), features UN Women expert Shahra Razavi revealing the value of unpaid care, and how we can reduce the burden on women by tackling entrenched stereotypes.



**Esuana Dugarova for the United Nations, 'Unpaid care work in times of the Covid-19 crisis':** This paper, prepared for a UN Expert Group Meeting, sets out the damaging global impact of Covid-19 on women's unpaid work, gender pay gap, and rights in the workplace.

# Relationships & Sex Education and Sexual Health

## Relationships and Sex Education

The UNFPA (United Nations Population Fund) states that the majority of adolescents lack the knowledge required to make responsible life-changing decisions about their sexual reproductive health, leaving them vulnerable to coercion, sexually transmitted infections and unintended pregnancy. Educating young people about sexual relationships and other relationships can protect people from abuse, reduce rates of teenage pregnancies, and help people make more informed choices.

**Comprehensive sexuality education enables young people to protect their health, well-being and dignity. And because these programmes are based on human rights principles, they advance gender equality and the rights and empowerment of young people.**

UNFPA, 'Comprehensive Sexuality Education', [www.unfpa.org/comprehensive-sexuality-education](http://www.unfpa.org/comprehensive-sexuality-education)

With this in mind, NCWGB in 2018 passed a Resolution asking the government to update the UK Relationships and Sex Education curriculum with key topics to help protect young people, including different types of abusive relationships, online issues including grooming and pornography, and challenging common (and often sexist) myths about sexual health. Currently, children in primary school are also taught about healthy relationships, including a basic notion of consent: that they should express their views if somebody touches them in a way that they don't like.

However, relationships and sex education remains a controversial topic to some – a minority of parents object to children being taught about this in school, as shown by protests outside a primary school in Birmingham over the summer of 2019 by parents who did not want their children to learn about LGBTQ+ people.

Do you think you have been adequately prepared by your Relationships and Sex Education? You could discuss this sensitively as a group, or look at how Relationships and Sex Education provisions differ across the globe.

## Access to Services

Access to sexual health services is also a highly political matter in a huge number of countries, where young people can be prevented from accessing sexual health services such as contraception, or where doing so is heavily stigmatised. In the UK, C-Card distribution schemes seek to provide young people with access to sexual health advice and free condoms – the provision of free condoms is intended to reduce the spread of sexually transmitted infections (STIs) and HIV/AIDS. Since 2004, sexual health services in the UK have been advised to advertise that their services are confidential for people under 16, which the age of consent is in the UK. In the UK, abortion continues to be regulated under criminal law, but is legally available through the Abortion Act 1967, which permits abortion under certain circumstances, when approved by two doctors. In practice, abortion is generally allowed for socio-economic reasons during the first 24 weeks of pregnancy, and beyond that for certain medical reasons.

Access to Sexual Health services has become especially politicised in recent years, with Trump's America restricting access to sexual health services in the US and around the world through the Global Gag Rule. The Global Gag Rule, reinstated by Trump in January 2017, denies US funding to organisations if they use non-US funds to provide abortion services, counselling or referrals in accordance with national law. Organisations either have to stop providing these services, or lose funding. According to the International Planned Parenthood Federation, data from previous Gag policies under previous Presidents shows that eliminating access to contraception leads to more forced pregnancy and unsafe abortions.



## **NCWGB Resolution, 2018: Comprehensive Relationships and Sex Education to Reduce Gender-Based Violence**

NCW is aware that all English secondary schools will soon be required to teach Relationships and Sex Education (RSE). 'Can Education Stop Abuse?', the recent paper published by GenPol, links 'comprehensive and quality sexuality education' to a decrease in gender-based violence. Therefore NCW, in Conference assembled, urges the government to include in the new statutory guidance for RSE, which has not been updated since 2000, topics and teaching practices recommended by UNESCO, IPPF and the European Parliament FEMM as 'essential' for 'Comprehensive Sexuality Education (CSE)'. In doing so, the government will provide better education to ensure the sexual safety and wellbeing of future students and indirectly decrease gendered violence by tackling the power dynamics at the root of gendered abuse.

Lessons should cover physiosocial and relational aspects as well as biological. They should comprehensively include topics such as: consent; challenging violence-inducing gender stereotypes and toxic models of masculinity; abusive relationships, identifying that abuse can be sexual, economic, psychological, verbal, emotional; gender-based violence, such as FGM; online issues such as revenge porn, grooming, the risks of sharing explicit images online, and the unrealistic and often violent presentations of sex in pornography; challenging common myths which lack scientific basis; sexual safety and relationships of marginalised groups, such as LGBT+ and disabled people.

To ensure these lessons are effectively taught, the government should consider implementing or supporting measures which have been shown to produce effective RSE teaching, such as: teaching without influence from religious beliefs or personal views; involvement of specialised and factual external factors such as NGOs; specifically-trained teachers, whether these be representatives from NGOs or specially trained school teachers; content consistently delivered to learners over time, rather than a one-off lesson/intervention.

## Resources



**Sarah E Hill, *How the Pill Changes Everything: Your Brain on Birth Control* (2019):** Until recently, we knew little about how the contraceptive pill affects the non-reproductive systems of the female body, because research on these other systems was conducted almost exclusively on men. Here, Dr Sarah Hill reveals how the Pill is changing women and the world, for better and for worse.



**Rebecca Cafe, 'How the contraceptive pill changed Britain', *BBC News* (2011):** A brief look at the history of the contraceptive pill in Britain, and the impact it had on the lives of women.



**Jeanette Winterson, *Oranges Are Not the Only Fruit* (1985):** This is a coming-of-age novel about a lesbian girl who grows up in an English Pentecostal community. A semi-autobiographical novel, it follows the path of a girl into adolescence and womanhood whilst trying to navigate her attraction to another girl and her evangelist community. It has also been adapted into a TV series (1990) of the same name.



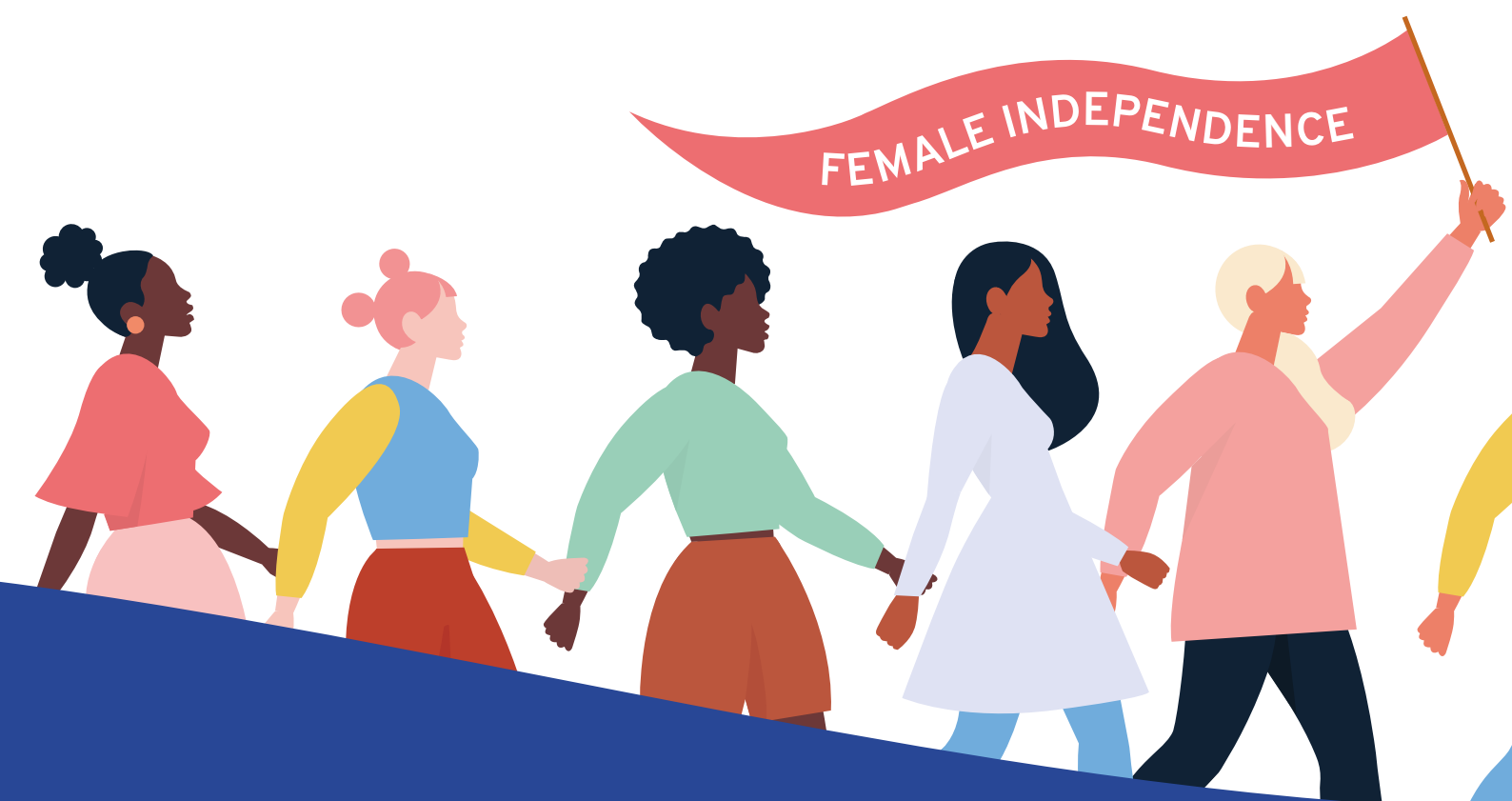
**GenPol (Gender & Policy Insights), 'Can Education Stop Abuse? Comprehensive Sexuality Education Against Gender-Based Violence' (2018):** While most analysis on Relationships and Sex Education focusses on tackling unwanted pregnancy and STIs, this report by the thinktank 'GenPol' systematically links the provision of 'sexuality education' to gender-based violence protection. It argues that by using education to dismantle ideas of gender-based inequalities and toxic masculinity, we can decrease the occurrence of gender-based violence.



**Hannah Smothers, 'What is was like to perform abortions before *Roe v. Wade*', *Cosmopolitan* (2016):** Dr Curtis Boyd and Dr David Grimes share their memories about what it was like to perform abortions illegally, and why they felt driven to do it. This is a great article for anybody interested in the historical experiences of women in America and the history of abortion legislation there.



***Call the Midwife*, Season 2, Episode 5:** Certain episodes of *Call the Midwife* cover revolutions in sexual health provisions, including the introduction of the contraceptive pill. This episode follows the story of an impoverished mother of eight children who finds out she is pregnant again, and turns to a backstreet abortion-provider. It explores the options women had at the time, and how abortion was viewed in society.





**The Guardian, 'Understanding the fight over trans rights', *Today in Focus* (2020):** This two-part podcast from the Guardian's political podcast looks at the history of legal and political progress for trans rights, examines why there was a backlash over the 2015 Gender Recognition Act, which proposed a further expansion of trans rights. Part 2 looks at the arguments of 'gender critical' feminists and those who are more trans-inclusive, and asks what the route to reconciliation can be. This podcast examines, questions, and challenges these different arguments and opinions in a factual and sensitive manner.



**Margaret Atwood, *The Handmaid's Tale* (1985):** This dystopian novel is set in a near-future totalitarian state, 'Gilead', which has overthrown the US government and subjugated women to different roles within the patriarchal society. Women are not allowed to read, write, own property, handle money, and are deprived of control over their own reproductive functions. 'Offred' is a handmaid, meaning she is forcibly assigned to produce children for the ruling class of men. This novel follows her personal struggle and the handmaid's shared plight. The outfit handmaids are forced to wear has been co-opted by some pro-choice marches, who draw a parallel between the lack of control the women of Gilead have over their reproductive functions, and restrictive laws on sexual health and abortion.



**The Guardian, 'Women's rights country by country – interactive' (2014):** This interactive tool compiles data from the World Bank and UN to bring an easy-to-understand infographic on legislation for violence, harassment, abortion, property and employment rights, discrimination and equality.



**'Resources & Research' at the Center for Reproductive Rights:** The Center for Reproductive Rights uses legal challenges to fight for reproductive rights around the world. Their 'Resources & Research' page is stuffed with interactive tools, reports, and news updates on rights to contraception, marriage, bodily integrity, medical decision-making, abortion, and procreation.



# Stay in Touch

## Speak up for Change: the NCYW Facebook Group

A new Facebook Group for NCYW members has recently been set up. Here, you can share with others what your school or college has been up to, share resources (leaflets, PowerPoints you've made, interesting news articles), ideas, and suggest collaborations (such as inter-school events or live-streaming your talks to other schools!). If you are interested in joining, email [info@ncwgb.org](mailto:info@ncwgb.org).

## Tell us what you're up to!

Please keep NCW updated with what you're doing – we'd love to hear from you! We suggest that at the end of each term, the leader emails [info@ncwgb.org](mailto:info@ncwgb.org) with the Subject as 'NCYW Group [Your School/College] Update', and the following information:

- Current leader(s)
- Leader(s) for next term/year and contact email (so that we don't lose you!)
- What you did this term: events, highlights, challenges. Just a couple of sentences is fine!
- Plans for next term
- Questions – looking for guidance or ideas? Let us know!

## Feedback on this resource

This guide was put together by a dedicated team of young women who emerged from NCYW schools or colleges and want to make it easier to keep a society running! Please let us know what you thought of this resource – suggestions for improvements, what you liked or disliked, what needs to be updated, and things which maybe aren't quite clear. Please email your feedback to [info@ncwgb.org](mailto:info@ncwgb.org) with the Subject as 'NCYW Schools' Resource Feedback'!



# NCW 18-25

## For those of you leaving school – what next?

Whether you're going to university, starting an apprenticeship, taking a gap year, or going into work, you can stay in contact through NCW as a full member and as part of the NCW 18+ Network. Young women from NCYW Societies who joined NCW as an 18+ member have represented NCW at the United Nations in New York and Geneva, and have been invited to conferences even further afield. We have proposed resolutions at Conference and had them passed; we have visited schools to give presentations; we have become Trustees and sit on the board of NCW; we have created leaflets that have been sent as far as Australia; and, of course, we have written this guide! There is plenty to get involved in, from media to policy, to administration and organisation, and so on.

The NCW 18+ Network is looking for people with enthusiasm and a willingness to learn about issues which affect women and girls; a drive for change; and the initiative to use and develop their individual skills. Joining the network is a flexible commitment, where members can give as much or as little as they'd like. For more information, email [info@ncwgb.org](mailto:info@ncwgb.org).







Alternative versions of this resource are  
available from NCW on 01325 367375 or  
email [info@ncwgb.org](mailto:info@ncwgb.org)

Call: 01325 367375

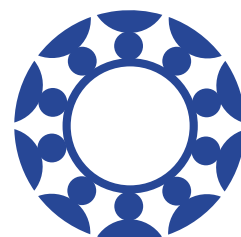
Email: [info@ncwgb.org](mailto:info@ncwgb.org)

Website: [www.ncwgb.org](http://www.ncwgb.org)

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