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Women are more unhappy despite 40 years of feminism, claims study

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Women are less happy nowadays despite 40 years of feminism, a new study claims.

Despite having more opportunities than ever before, they have a lower sense of well-being and life satisfaction, it found.

The study, *The Paradox of Declining Female Happiness*, said the same was true for women of different ages and whether or not they were married or had children.



Torn: Working women feel the pressure of a career and motherhood

It said the results appeared surprising given that modern women had been liberated from their traditional 1950s role of housewife.

Instead, their earning power has soared, women are doing better than men in education and they are in control of decisions over whether to start a family.

The findings were released as Sir Stuart Rose, chairman of Marks & Spencer, claimed that women 'have never had it so good'.

Insisting neither gender nor motherhood is now a barrier to career to success, he said: 'You've got real democracy and there really are no glass ceilings, despite the fact that some of you moan about it all the time.'



High-flyer: Sir Stuart Rose, chief executive of Marks & Spencer, says many women are breaking through the glass ceiling

'Women can get to the top of any single job that they want to in the UK.

'You've got a woman fighter pilot who went on to join the Red Arrows.. Women astronauts. Women miners. Women dentists. Women doctors. Women managing directors. What is it you haven't got?'

Sir Stuart's comments in The Observer were contradicted by Dr Katherine Rake of The Fawcett Society, which campaigns for gender equality.

She said there was still 'no flexibility' for women at high levels of business.

'Women tend to have greater commitments at home and so need flexible working arrangements,' she said.

'While some organisations are prepared to enable this at less senior levels, many will not at the top.

'Second, there is no change at the top. Because the top of organisations are generally white and male, they stay white and male.'

The study by the US National Bureau of Economic Research found that while post-war era happiness surveys found women were noticeable happier than men, the difference had eroded to 'zero'.

Its authors, Betsey Stevenson and Justin Wolfers of the University of Pennsylvania, found that in the U.S., women's happiness had fallen 'both absolutely and relatively to that of men'.

In Europe, they found people's sense of happiness has risen slightly, but less so for women than for men.

In 12 European countries, including Britain, the happiness of women has fallen relative to that of men.



Home: Where a woman's place used to be

The authors said there was a possibility women were more 'direct' about their levels of happiness than they used to be.

'Women may now feel more comfortable being honest about their true happiness and have thus deflated their previously inflated responses,' they said.

However, Siobhan Freegard, founder of the website Netmums, whose own survey found levels of 'baby blues' have risen sharply compared to 30 years ago, said: 'We pushed so hard for equal rights, for having the right to work, for having equal status, we pushed so hard to have choice.

'But what we hear from many mums is: I have no choice, I have to work, I don't love my career, my childminder is taking half my salary and I'd rather bring up my children myself but I can't afford to.

'If you enjoy your job and it's a fulfilling career, that is a positive choice.. but if it's not, it's almost in some ways that we got it all, then found that actually it wasn't quite what we wanted.'

Erin Pizzey, founder of the charity Refuge, added: 'The hard-won freedom of choice has imprisoned women. I just see an exhausted generation trying to do it all.'

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