

Why feminism 'could be bad for your health'

by CHARLOTTE GILL - [More by this author »](#) Last updated at 22:38pm on 25th March 2007

For years, feminists have fought for equality, believing it is the key to a better society.

Now researchers have found that parity between the sexes may be bad for your health.

A study in Sweden, arguably one of the most egalitarian countries in the world, discovered that men and women who are equal are more likely to suffer illness or disability.

Those who earn the same are also more likely to become unwell or suffer a disability.

People who have management jobs, male or female, were also found to die younger than those with a less pressured lifestyle.

Scientists looked at both public and private sector workers. They used nine indicators of equality, including the proportion of men and women in management jobs and average income.

These were related to local figures for life expectancy, disability and absence from work through ill health. The study compared data from all of Sweden's 290 municipalities.

The scientists, from the Swedish National Institute of Public Health, said a possible explanation for the link between equality and illness is that men's health may be adversely affected by a loss of what had been seen as traditional male privileges.

They suggested that women's health could be damaged by greater opportunities for risky behaviour as a result of increased income combined with the stress of longer working hours.

But the study, published in the journal *Social Science and Medicine*, also put forward the theory that equality has not yet been fully achieved in society and that these effects are part of a transitional process on the road to fairness.

The report said: "The results suggest an unfortunate trade-off between gender equality as we know it and public health.

"Sweden may have reached a critical point where further one-sided expansion by women into traditionally male roles, spheres and activities will not lead to positive health effects unless men also significantly alter their behaviour.

"Negative effects of this unfinished equality might be found both for women, who have become more burdened, and men, who as a group have lost many of their old privileges."

Anastasia de Waal, head of family policy at the British think-tank Civitas, urged caution in interpreting the findings.

"The danger is that the data will be interpreted as a warning against shaking up divisions of labour," she said.

"In fact, what Sweden needs is complete gender equality with, for example, men entering the private sphere to the extent that women have entered the public."

Feminism began in earnest in the early 1900s, with the Suffragettes, led by Emmeline Pankhurst, successfully fighting for women's right to vote.

Society's attitudes really started to change following the Second World War, with organisations

springing up to campaign for equal rights for women.

In the Sixties and Seventies legislation began to change women's lives, including the 1969 Equal Pay Act and the 1971 Divorce Law, which allowed women to separate on grounds of "intolerable behaviour".

In 1975, the Sex Discrimination Act was passed and the Equal Opportunities Commission was created.

Germaine Greer's *The Female Eunuch*, published in 1970, focused on gender inequality, and became a global bestseller.