

# Changes in the lives of women

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## **Women born in the C 19th**

If you had been born 150 years ago, what could you have expected from life?

1. You would have had no right to vote. Criminals, lunatics and women had no legal rights. Voting for women came in a limited way in 1918.
2. Your property would have become your husband's on marriage so he could spend it all without even telling you. Women who were married could not own property until 1870 when Parliament passed the Married Women's Property Act. Even then, women could only own up to £200. A woman's legal status was that of a child and she could not have been convicted of a crime; her husband was responsible for her.
3. Your children would have been your husband's so that if you left him, you would lose them whatever kind of father he turned out to be. A husband could divorce a woman on the grounds of adultery (sleeping with another man) but she would not have been able to sue him on equal terms until 1923. A husband would have had the right in law to beat a woman until that date.
4. You would have had no status in society as an unmarried woman. Your career would have been marriage. Women from the middle classes who did not marry either survived in poverty or became governesses (private teachers) to the children of rich families.
5. Poor women would have worked in factories and mines on equally appalling terms as the men, only paid much less well for equal work.
6. Once married, you would expect a child every two years. Most of your children would have died young and you would have feared pregnancy as so many women died in childbirth. Childbirth was very dangerous as doctors spread infection from woman to woman as they visited.
7. Your home would have been unsanitary and cold. Washing was by hand and housework was very difficult. Women scrubbed the steps

outside their front doors and would have been judged by the standard of their homes. They cooked in ovens powered by coal, and made clothing by hand.

8. Clothing would have been physically restricting and tight. Women wore stiff corsets to pull in their waists. A very beautiful figure in 1918 would have been a girl who had size 16 hips and a size 12 or even 10 waist. Skirts were long and restricted movement so walking any distance was quite difficult. Women wore their hair long. To pin up your hair in a fancy top knot was a sign that men could consider you as a potential wife. It was a sign that girlhood was over.
9. Pregnancy outside marriage was seen as dreadful and wrong. No sex education was provided. Women might become pregnant without knowing how they got that way or even where the baby would emerge. Girls who became pregnant would often commit suicide. They had to give babies up for adoption if they had them. The mothers would often end up in a prison, a mental hospital or a workhouse, which was a kind of prison for poor people. Look this up in history books.

**Read through the above information. Which three things do you feel would be the worst for you? Give a reason for each idea.**

	<i>reason</i>
	<i>reason</i>
	<i>reason</i>

## How are women's lives different today?

Use the boxes as a guide to your ideas

<i>150 years ago</i>	<i>Today</i>
No divorce	
Large families	
Few jobs	
No domestic machines	
Long dresses and corsets	
Strong views against sex	
Men did not help in house	
Women do not own money	

# **Lives have changed for modern women**

*Write down ideas and notes here.*

Why has effective contraception changed women's lives?

How has the role of women in society changed?

Why is it useful for women and men to be able to divorce?

What attitude do people take towards single parents in the modern world?

How have men's attitudes towards women changed?

Why is it useful to have lots of technology such as washing machines in the home?