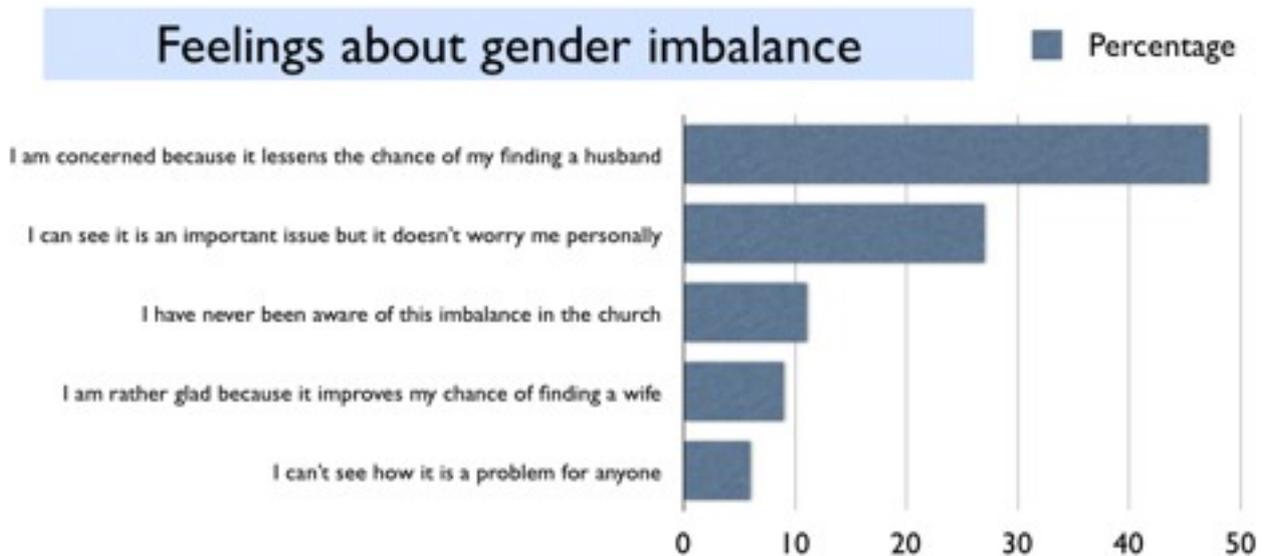


THE GENDER IMBALANCE IN CHURCH

Summary

In response to the question 'In general, there are more women in the Church than men. How do you feel about this?' respondents answered:



People are concerned about the lack of men for relationship, but not only. They also note the lack of role models in the church and need for Christian men in society.

The gender imbalance was attributed to the lack of role models in church (a negative spiral), the feminisation of the church and worship, and lack of men with whom to form friendships.

The lack of single men is unevenly distributed. Some churches have many, others have shortages.

Most reported competition between women for men, leading to unhealthy relationships and making men passive and picky. Friendships also become difficult and single women say that they are perceived as a threat to married couples.

A wide range of suggestions were made about how to get more men into the church. But there were also ideas of support for, and teaching about dating, forming relationships and how to encourage women who would probably never marry.

The imbalance of men and women in the Church

Overview

Respondents were asked their feelings about the imbalance of gender in the Church. **In general, there are more women in the Church than men. How do you feel about this?**

2,362 answered the question as follows:

- 47% I am concerned because it lessens the chance of my finding a husband
- 27% I can see it is an important issue but it doesn't worry me personally
- 11% I have never been aware of this imbalance in the church
- 9% I am rather glad because it improves my chance of finding a wife
- 6% I can't see how it is a problem for anyone

In addition, comments were invited as follows:

'Any comments? Can you comment on how the disparity might affect behaviour and relationships between men and women in the church? How could things be improved?'

612 comments were made. Because the comments were different from each other, all 612 answers were analysed in detail.

Some affirmed the question:

- *This is the number one issue that needs to be addressed nationally. (282)*

Others said that their primary concern was not about whether or not the imbalance would affect opportunities for marriage, but that the life of the church itself was impoverished as a lack of men in many churches.

- *I'm concerned - but not because it lessens my chance of finding a husband - it means that for some or many reasons the church isn't relevant or speaking to the men in our society (585)*
- *We need to ask why men are put off becoming Christians and engaging in a Church family as our primary concern, not about building a fish tank of potential marriage partners. (396)*

The impoverishment of the church due to lack of men focused around three areas:

- The lack of role models.
 - *As a youth worker, I'm always struggling to find men (of any age) to be role models for the young people I work with. (4)*
 - *I find it more concerned because there needs to be strong male role models in the Church, to then support and encourage other young men in their faith. Also, if I were to*

get married and have children, I would like if I had a son, for them to have several examples of Christian men in their life. (133)

- The contribution that both can make to the life of the church
 - *I would love to see more men in church as I strongly feel God designed men and women differently and men are needed to lead and be role models and a strong voice and this is what we are missing by not having more men in church. (278)*
 - *... the lack of men in the Body of Christ is rather more worrying than just solving the too many single women who want to be married situation. As I'm sure we all realise the family of believers grows when we marry and raise children in Godly family units but the Body is unbalanced and weakened when it lacks members of both genders. (370)*
 - *It is an important issue - but not just because it will lesson the chance of me finding a husband. I think the gender imbalance looks odd to those looking on from outside the church. I would be suspicious of a group of people with such an imbalance! I think it weakens our witness to the world. I think it creates problems in families. (415)*
- Society needs Christian men
 - *... bad news for men who are effectively ignoring God, and for society as a whole, which would be healthier with more committed Christian men (453)*
 - *This is, or ought to be, a major issue for the church's engagement (or failure of engagement) with the world, being salt and light etc. - what it means for salvation and redemption, and what it means for morality, ethics, in every walk of life, not least in business, finance etc, also for environmental stewardship, attitudes towards welfare state, conduct of politics etc etc etc. If church is largely seen by men as irrelevant or for those who are non- macho, not real men etc, this is a far more tragic issue for God's world, and all humanity, than whether or not single women are likely to find a man in church!! (334)*

Many also pursued the line that relationships should not be a main reason in attending church:

- *I would not think church to be a place where sexual tension would be affecting behaviour between men and women. We do need to remind ourselves that we are in the Holy presence of God, we know that we cant earn his love but that does not mean that we must not make every effort to respect His Holiness. Don't think I am making out that I am not capable of impure thoughts because I, like most of us, (I guess) am. (480)*
- *I do believe there are more women in the church than men but I don't believe most have any desire to form a relationship within the church. Church is not a place to form relationships. Quite the reverse I feel many women positively avoid friendship with men. For some reason women cant accept that guys are not constantly on the pull even in church. I avoid women in church in case I give the wrong impression. (253)*

In general, there are more women in THE CHURCH than men.

300 directly addressed the questions. Although most accepted the assertion, 14% commented that it wasn't true in their local church. The following reasons were given when this was the case:

- there were so few singles or eligible singles
 - *As regards finding a partner, there are so few single people (of any gender) in the church that this issue has little effect! (553)*
- the distribution of singleness is different between the genders
 - *The imbalance between men/women is exaggerated by single parents/mothers. With so many single mothers 30y - 50y, the rest of us (women) get tarred with the same brush. (390)*
 - *It may be true in actual figures, but not for dating because of the age distribution (lots of older widows, for example)*
- there were more single men than women
 - *Most churches in my local area have the opposite problem - far more single men than single women! I wish we had the problem of "too many women" as the chances of finding a nice godly woman might increase! Many church events and Christian parties here are very man-heavy - one BBQ had 45 single men and only 5 women (4 of whom were married) (377)*
 - *I think this is true of certain evangelically-directed churches but in traditional Anglican churches the ratio is most definitely the reverse of what you state! My church is full of young single men. (450)*
 - *I think this is much more a local issue (eg in Harrogate there seem to be more single men) whereas in other towns the women seem to be more numerous (611)*

A few disputed the figure, one saying that this was a myth and another that it is only visible because men are not sociable and so not seen.

Several pointed out that this was not only an imbalance seen in the Church. It was also seen in many other organisations that were voluntary, for example attending adult education and committees, such as for schools or the local community. Women outnumber men in most voluntary organisations, it is claimed.

Others asserted that this was true historically from the earliest days of the Church. This is in contrast to the synagogue and probably reflected the women-friendly gospel of Jesus when compared to other Jewish teaching. Six noted that, from a sociological perspective, the church was an organisation of women led by men leading to distortion and fragmentation of healthy relationships.

Five stated that this is God's will and part of his plan.

- *So although this imbalance of men and women is a challenge, if I believe God is sovereign then he hasn't screwed up on this and there is a purpose and reason. (487)*

Attributed reasons for M/W imbalance

People generally accepted that there is a generic problem in the imbalance, although the primary problem not necessarily related to finding a spouse of the same faith (42/300, also 14%) but with the lack of men in the church, which in turns leads less men to be interested.

The reasons given included:

- Femininisation of the Church (13%) and its worship (3%) leading to passivity and the current trend towards emotionalism.
 - *Men are forgetting how to be men and the church is becoming quite feminine in many ways - some song lyrics make it sound like Jesus is my boyfriend - why would a guy want to sing that! (402)*
 - *Many men feel very uncomfortable in church these days (and there are times when I include myself in their number). Women don't seem to realise how genuinely off-putting "Jesus is my Boyfriend" worship and attitudes can be to men (9)*
- The lack of masculine role models (carefully distinguishing the male gender from masculinity). Both men and women mentioned various aspects of men in their churches as being 'not manly':
 - *Church is definitely too feminised tho - needs some good strong, manly men in leadership and congregations. Fed up with girly stuff and "wet lettuce" guys! (377 Male)*
 - *...the view from the outside of the church is that it's a place for the non-macho types... (84 Female)*
 - *Having more men in the church, particularly more overtly masculine men, would be good for church in general, and would also attract a wider spectrum of women. (607 Male)*
- Lack of friendship patterns for men.
 - *It is not a beneficial environment for men and boys to be surrounded by churches predominant with women all the time. They have their own issues which can only be effectively dealt with by other men and they need to be supported by each other. (154)*

There were some comments about psychological aspects of church. Did passivity in worship and theology of 'relinquishing control to God' (209) lead to some kind of learned helplessness?

Two commented on the difference between men who had been in the church for a long time ('willing to be controlled') versus those outside or coming in later who were perceived as more masculine.

- *...the choice of men will lessen and you will look outside for men with more character and less controlled. (274)*
- *Churches seem to be feminised, hard to be a proper man. Men need to be drivers - not passengers. Being a passenger makes men passive... affecting natural leadership. (202)*

Behaviour and relationships between men and women in the church?

Results or repercussions of imbalance.

The results in terms of relationship are reflected in various patterns.

Competition for men in many churches

In many churches there appears to be competition for men:

- *With more women in the church than men, there is more competition and with me I do have issues with jealousy and I know I am not very attractive so this is a constant threat and heartache. (549)*
- *It is often funny to see the little 'bake-off' competitions that go on between the women when a new single man enters the church. (87)*
- *It is very competitive and it is all single women talk about is meeting the right partner (556)*
- *Women buzz around eligible men in church like bees around a honey pot. I can't bear to compete (483)*
- *Women can behave badly towards the few men within the church (399)*
- this is role reversal - men should chase women, not the other way round
 - *Women feel like they have to chase and compete... role inversion! (397)*
- that friends may be lost as they turn into competitors
 - *Have seen some women getting very competitive over guys - have had friends who have fallen out with other female friends over it. (204)*
- that men get better than they deserve
 - *It seems to me that this situation has resulted in men being very passive and just sitting back while women are chasing and being quite desperate and often (forgive my bluntness) end up going for someone who does not have much going for them. There is a much wider variety and selection in wider society and the men will even ask you out and don't expect to just sit there and do nothing. This is doubly problematic when you*

consider many Churches are still preaching that the wife should submit and the husband should lead and initiate. How is that going to work when the woman has had to initiate the situation? (509)

- *Also some christian men can take advantage of this as they know they have a good choice of women to choose from, and date prettier girls than they would be able to normally. (487)*
- *both women and men say that men can back off, be fearful of being 'pounced upon' and get concerned that every interaction is seen to be too significant.*
- *I can also see how this must be really intimidating for a guy to go to church because he's likely to be pounced on :) (348)*
- *The men who may be outnumbered may feel threatened if there are too many interested ladies coming onto them. This may also show women to be desperate when they are not and all they want is have some male companionship.(548)*

Some choose to look for non-Christian husbands (both because of the number and kind of men available). Others accept that the situation is hopeless and assume at much younger age than non-Church attendees that they will be single:

- *Christian women appear to make major life decisions which assume they are likely to remain single at a much younger age than non-Christian women (e.g. becoming a missionary, adopting a child) (29)*

Women say that men have too much choice

Women say that the men have great choice, and are picky, indecisive, play the field without sufficiently valuing single women.

- *I've had several men flirt with me and play one women after the other (some intentionally, some not) and this damages the women in the church because its like water in a desert when there are men around! Its confusing to be treated this way. (203)*
- *Sometimes it makes men arrogant. They can pick and choose. One man rejected all the church girls , met a non-christian at work and took her to church. Girls feel it`s not fair! (394)*
- *Sometimes it feels as though the guys have too much choice so then they don't make any choice! They are always waiting for someone better to come along, that elusive perfect person. And they can because chances are they probably will, and if not no bother, when they are ready to settle down they will find someone because there is a queue for them. Also men don't have a fertility time clock so can wait until they are a bit older. (326)*
- *Of course having very few men in the church is a problem when looking for a husband. When there are 2 men and over 15 single women, you have to be extremely attractive to even have a chance to meet someone. Single men often appear to have a high opinion of themselves because there are so many single women who are making them feel wanted and attractive. In the outside world, the balance would be redressed. (381)*

- *I don't want to stereotype but I have known many single christian men that really struggle relating to women in general. (370)*
- *I think it is part of the reason why men in church seem scared too commit, there is no sense of competition and too much choice - I think this might encourage a fear of 'what if someone better comes along' (340)*
- *Disparity leads to men not feeling they have to 'compete' for women and not always treating them well. In my experience men 25-40 in church are all interested in women in their mid-20s leaving any women over 30 "on the shelf" (602)*

Men wonder why they cannot find someone

Men, on the other hand, were more reflective in wondering what was wrong with them. If the odds were in their favour, then why were they single? It made some feel 'even more depressed'.

- *Eek... I must have two heads or look green. (267)*
- *I think that there is seen to be more women creates expectations that are unhelpful. Men are given an expectation that they will find someone and are therefore find it more difficult if they don't. (8)*
- *It doesn't matter what the odds are - its about finding someone compatible. According to the statistics I should have babes flocking at my feet. Errrr, not happening. And those single women who are around are not compatible (marital status, wanting kids etc). (562)*
- *In theory, this should be good for me. But it does make me wonder why I've not been able to find someone. And it saddens me, because many Christian women suffer because of it. It's possible, if there were a better gender balance, it would reduce my chances, but I would want that change anyway. On the other hand, it's possible it would create a more healthy church, and that might make things better all round. (291)*

Several noted how the situation hardens hearts, so that dating becomes more unlikely and singleness more accepted and so on.

- *Also I don't personally think it works in single Christian mens' favour either, because single Christian women become hardened to the chance of meeting any men at church and this just further contributes to the general distance between single Christians of both sexes. (102)*

It is hard to make friends with members of the opposite sex

One of the more common of the comments was how to be friends with the opposite gender when they were single, without everyone thinking this initiated a relationship, thereby threatening others around or married people in the church trying to match-make.

- *As someone who has, always had male friends outside of Church, regardless of my marital status, I miss male friends. (212)*

- *Working with men who are single often leads to a lot of gossip and people asking about why I'm not dating them. The church/people still don't get that you can be good friends with a man and not feel any desire to date/marry him. (447)*
- *I would find it less of a problem if it were possible to get to know men as friends without the pressure of everyone watching and waiting for something to happen, most men seem to avoid contact unless they're interested in a relationship, I would love to have male friends, as I did when I was younger. (421)*
- *Makes relationships more difficult/ uncomfortable. Harder just to be friends. Some men assume women are pursuing them just because they talk to them etc. Makes some men confused or complacent about relationship/dating. (352)*
- *The other main problem I've experienced is the way that any conversation between a single man and single woman in the church leads to ridiculous nudge-nudge behaviour from others in the congregation. When I was younger this used to put unhelpful pressure on one of my much needed platonic friendships with a guy, and made it much harder to behave naturally and flirt naturally with the one guy who did turn up on my radar. (222)*

Single women are perceived as threats to married couples

However the situation was reported as equally bad when trying to make friends with married people. In particular married men seem very fearful to talk to single women, even though they might be the only male role model around to discuss things with.

- *As a single woman, it makes it hard to have meaningful conversations with men in the church as some married men are wary of talking and there are few single men. (273)*
- *Also, you have to be careful when talking to married men as their wives appear to think you are trying to steal them! (584)*
- *Interesting that should talk about behaviour, I once made the mistake of sitting next to a married man at a social, within moments he and his wife had moved. What did they think I was going to do? Unbelievable On another occasion, I had just told the wife of another man about the aforementioned happening, she was sitting one up from me, she sympathised with me, but when her husband came over he wanted to move, she looked extremely embarrassed saying "' ' wants to sit next to so and so....." Yes ok I said but you can imagine how I felt. I can assure whatever I may do in private with someone special, it does not occur in public let alone at church, needless to say I choose very carefully where I sit at church at social occasions, in fact very often - unless a good friend is going I don't bother. (312)*
- *... married women are sometimes guarded if speak with their husbands. This is mildly depressing, as I would never, ever consider an affair with a married man, and it's not great to be perceived as a threat. (462)*
- *In addition, you are treated differently by married christian men. And most married woman see single women as a threat. I hate being a single at church and everyday I pray that I can meet something and 3 years later I only seem to meet the wrong person. (2)*

How can things be improved?

Ideas for addressing the situation ranged widely covering the church, singles and men.

Outreach to men

- Outreach to men was reported as more limited than for women. Women were more out and about in the local community, with outreach often tea/coffee/soup occasions, toddler groups, and evangelism done at school gates.
 - *It would help if people took spending time with non Christian friends seriously. Evangelism is not a tack on to your life. Church's so often demand we 'do evangelism' but actually I commit the majority of my work and social life to non -Christian friends. How else are we going to bring men in? My generation don't want to go to events! They just want to chat in the pub and engage with exciting people who think and bring hope - that's US. Why are we stuck in church meetings? Men do activities. Lets get OUT THERE.*
- Present gospel as difficult and challenging
 - *If we would occasionally show some fight, more men would be interested. The predominant mindset of my non Christian friends is that it's a place for the weak and those who need to be told about love. They don't see God as a warrior (609)*
 - *Church needs to be challenging so that men feel it has something to say to them. Church is quite comfortable for many at the moment and this attracts women. (563)*
 - *The church and events tend to be very female focused and touchy-feely. A lot of males I know says it doesn't challenge them, they need the academic argument as well as being told about a relationship. (486)*
 - *The more the authentic difficulty of following the Gospel is emphasised, the more men join. (83)*
- Famous Christian man talking openly (cf Stephen Fry and mental health)
 - *I think some men are afraid to attend and show they're vulnerable, or searching for something, maybe it's not macho or they think it's not relevant to them - maybe the church needs to "man up"!!! Maybe have famous men talk about their faith in the same way mental health was highlighted by Stephen Fry, etc... Just a thought.... (139)*
- Alpha in pubs and golf clubs
- Discuss what would bring married women's husbands to church

Supporting men in church.

- Men need men
 - *If the churches are full of women, it deters men from exploring church attendance - they don't like being in a minority. (584)*
- More worship appropriate to men (songs, activities)
 - *As a man, this bothers me a fair bit. The church as a whole, although generally run by men, has developed an incredibly feminine nature. A typical church service bears no resemblance to anything my non-christian male friends would go to in the course of things...we stand around and sing songs to a man about how beautiful he is, then a someone comes on stage and tells us to be nice to each other and get in touch with our feeling. Ok, so that's a bit of a hyperbole, but I generally don't feel that a church service is an event I can invite my friends to and still be taken seriously afterwards. This is not how it should be! In England we really struggle with a lack of good male role-models in the church. When my friends come along, I just don't think they see many men in the church who they can look at and say 'I want to be more like him!'. Perhaps they would if they understood who Jesus was, but they don't. There are some great men in my church but it isn't obvious at first glance. (482)*
- Preach ethics not creeds
 - *Most churches these days involve a certain amount of contradiction (e.g. teaching people to be honest, and at the same time teaching a creed which probably most of the congregation recognise has elements that are not true, or merely contingent on history having unfolded in a particular way). I think woman are either socially or biologically predisposed towards being better at dealing with conflict and contradiction, whereas men prefer things to be straightforward. I think this is the reason why there are more women in church than men. This could be improved by giving more emphasis to ethics than to theological creeds. (325)*
- Sports and activities
- Acknowledge work behind scenes (DIYers etc.)
 - *We need to focus on mens' needs and styles of relating and appreciate their masculinity. Our worship, small groups and community activities are largely feminine in their style. We should applaud the church football team, say thank you to the DIYers, do treks in the wilderness as well as pot luck lunches, point out Jesus's male characteristics (594)*
- Events with speakers (although avoid dreadful curry nights and breakfast meetings).
 - *The church needs to be more male friendly! Events to attract young men, and middle aged men. Ministry that helps men with their faith, talks about sex, marriage, and single life. We need male leaders that are modern and forward looking. My church has a lame mens curry night, that does not attract the younger men in the church, who find it boring. (266)*

- *I think the main problem is the femininity of the church. My pastor suggested a fight club for the guys - obviously a terrible idea but anything's got to be better than these pathetic 'men's breakfasts' and 'curry nights' everyone seems to be doing at the moment.*
- *How to improve the imbalance? So many men in society and in church are confused about their identity. Feminism taught them the lie that they were more or less dispensable, even for having children (you can have a sperm donor you don't even know), for some time they were told they should be softies, then they were told they needed to be Rambos. Poor guys! Good practical teaching and encouragement from man to man is necessary in church. (583)*

Singles meeting

- More local churches coming together around singles
- More singles social networking, conferences and events, with equal numbers
 - *I think there should be more conferences for christian singles promoting help for both men and women to meet their partner. In my church I will never meet anyone as there is more hope of me becoming old and grey than meeting a christian man. (2)*
 - *Improvement could be made by building a network of affordable or free events in local areas (not just London) where Christians of all ages can meet without the stigma of being a 30, 40, 50 something and where the building of relationships based on mutual interests and attraction in a non threatening and non cheesy way can be developed. The secular world seems to have embraced the social networking approach however the Christian world appears to be quite ageist and behind the times in its approach to who will be attracted to who and this then marginalises people even more. (171)*
- Support dating and how to date, teach appropriate behaviour. In addition to all the explicit and implicit issues arising from the comments above:
 - *Guys are definitely wary about any new female wanting to be friends with them as they seem to think all of us are desperate to marry them! I think that some solid understanding of male/female dynamics would be good. (443)*
 - *It's not just a case of numbers of men and women in church, it's also allowing people to make mistakes and not putting pressure on people to get married when it might not be the right time for them or the right partner. (372)*
 - *It makes it very difficult to meet any potential partner after age about 30. It means there is competition for any single man that does appear. Things could be improved by a complete revisiting of what it means to follow Christ in our culture.*

Spiritual guidance for women

Although the question about what should be done was answered by most addressing how to get more men into church. There were several who came back to supporting women who wanted to marry but who could not do so.

- *Most of my single Christian female friends and I anticipate that we will be single and childless for life as a direct result of the lack of single men in the church. We are offered no support by the church to manage our situation - in fact it is not even acknowledged or recognised as an issue the church needs to address. It is an issue that will affect us for the whole of our lives - no children, no grandchildren. And the constant elevation of family life and marriage, and the assumption by preachers that the audience are married, only enhances the experience of hurt and isolation as a single person. I know of single female friends who have succumbed to the pressure of family and friends by forming relationships with non-Christians. This is an ongoing temptation into a lifestyle of permanent rebellion against God to which the church offers no support and protection. (238)*

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