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Ros Altmann: The treatment of 1950s women was a major reason I stood down as Pensions Minister

I tried to find a way to help those in hardship and I still believe that is something the Government must consider



By [Baroness Ros Altmann](#)

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The [High Court has dismissed the claim](#) brought on behalf of the millions of women born in the 1950s, alleging the Government discriminated against

women born in the 1950s, alleging the Government discriminated against them when it increased their State Pension Age without enough notification or notice.

It was always going to be difficult to prove that a policy measure intended to equalise pension ages between men and women was discriminatory against the women. Indeed, the Court suggested the previous situation discriminated against men, who had to wait longer for their state pension.

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State pensions are, legally, a state benefit, not a property right, so the judges concluded that Government can change the benefit rules to control public spending.

This is a complex argument. Although pension ages were being equalised, this certainly does not deliver gender pension equality. On average, in both state and private pensions, women receive less than men. It is true that women have higher life expectancy than men, so they may make up for the lower pension to some extent by receiving payments for longer, but the reality is that many women face real hardship in later life if they cannot work and have little or no other income.

Social norms have meant that today's older women in particular have lost out in pensions and income throughout their lives. If they can stay in work, that matters less, **but many are unable to do so**. This has not been recognised. Whether caring for loved ones, or **facing ageism in the workplace**, or being in poor health, many of these older women are struggling to make ends meet.

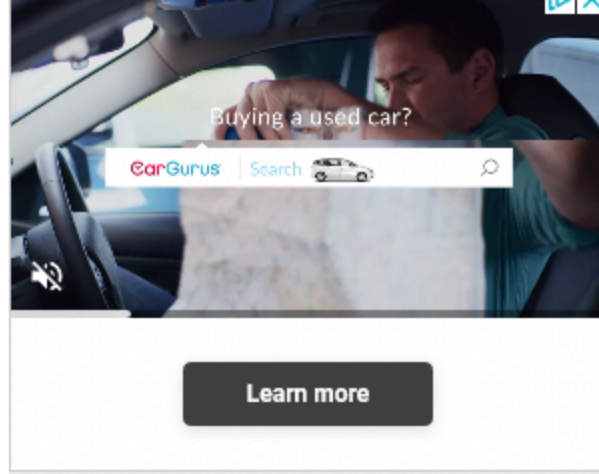
In 2011, I campaigned hard to persuade the Coalition Government's (male) Ministers that women's lives were different from those of men. I explained how these older women never had equal opportunities when they were younger. They typically earned less, were sometimes barred from private pension schemes, were more likely to have had to give up work to care for children and are increasingly now finding themselves alone in later life, as the divorce rate has risen. These women are often caring for elderly relatives and have had to stop work. They were **less likely to have private pensions** and would rely more heavily on the state pension.

There was no sympathy from Ministers

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I believe the Government

needs to investigate this more



needs to investigate this more seriously. When I became Pensions Minister I battled within the DWP to try to persuade colleagues that there should at least be help for those women facing real hardship.

Unfortunately, there was no sympathy from other

Ministers. Iain Duncan Smith, DWP Secretary of State, would not even allow me to express sympathy or meet with those affected. This was a major reason that I stood down.

I tried to find a way to help those in hardship and I still believe that is something the Government must consider.

At the very least, allowing them to claim **Pension Credit** from an earlier age would help those older men and women, who have no savings and cannot work. I would also like to see consideration of early receipt of state pension for those in poorest health. In a country with vast differences in healthy life expectancy, it is important to recognise that not everyone in their fifties now will be well enough to work longer, or have enough savings to tide them over. Our welfare policy, which already pays the lowest state pension in the developed world, should make allowances for differentials across the country.

I do feel sorry for so many women who had pinned their hopes on this High Court ruling. They will be disappointed, but I expect this will not be the end of their battle for recognition.

Baroness Ros Altmann served as minister of state for pensions between 2015 and 2016