

**COSMO INVESTIGATES**

# SEARCH ENGINE

# SEXISM

Women should |  
Women should not work  
Women should stay at home  
Women shouldn't wear pants  
Women shouldn't vote

*The most popular searches about women on Google are shocking: filled with sexism, violence and abuse. But now an international campaign is trying to change things*



**W**omen should not have rights. Women should be seen and not heard. Women should not work.

Women need to be controlled. Women should stay in the kitchen. Girls should not be educated.

Do we have your attention yet?

The sad thing is, these phrases are not one-off thoughts from sexist pre-feminism a lifetime ago – they are actually the shocking results of Google autocomplete sentences in the US, used in a new UN advertising campaign to expose such backward thinking.

This means when you type terms like “women should” or “women need” into the search engine, predictive text completes the most popular searches – which incredibly are phrases such as “women should be slaves” and “women need to be put in their place”.

These sickening searches were superimposed over the mouths of silent females for the UN Women campaign, with the powerful ads quickly going viral and sparking heated discussion across the globe. It all proved that such antiquated gender inequality not only still exists, it’s widespread.

The fact is, 70 per cent of the world’s poor are women. Women do two-thirds of the world’s work, yet earn only two per cent of the world’s income. Women are not permitted to vote in Saudi Arabia. The US has no paid parental scheme. Abortion is banned in Malta and Ireland. Here in Australia we can vote, control billion-dollar companies – hell, we can run the country. But have we really come that far? Unfortunately not, it seems.

## Hitting home

Type “women shouldn’t” into Google’s Australian site, and the same archaic stereotypes will be suggested: women shouldn’t work; women shouldn’t vote; women shouldn’t drive. Other common searched phrases include “women need men” and “women can’t have it all”.

Julie McKay, executive director at the Australian National Committee for UN Women, tells *Cosmo* that gender-based prejudice remains a significant problem for women here. “The results depicted in the campaign are shocking,

and I did some trials in Australia and the results were hideous,” she says. “It highlights that worldwide, individuals are searching for things like ‘women should be slaves’ – and not just one or two people, but many.

“It shows that behind closed doors, the value we place on women and equality is still very limited.”

She adds that while Australian women are better off than most, gender inequality remains a very real problem the world over – and one being fought by those oppressed.

## Gender divided

“Women in Saudi Arabia are refusing to abide by the law prohibiting women from driving, and are starting to drive cars,” she says. “Women like Burmese democracy leader Aung San Suu Kyi are challenging oppression and seeking freedom. In Fiji, women are learning about human rights and training each other – seeking to challenge the laws and policies of the government,” she continues. “Poverty, violence and poor access to leadership roles affect women in every country in the world.

“One could argue that women in Australia are better off, because we live with the ‘rule of law’ and we have access to basic services. However, the prejudices that woman face at work, at home and in their communities remain a significant challenge.”

According to McKay, indigenous women, women from immigrant and refugee communities, and women who have disabilities still face a huge battle accessing basic services.

“One in three women in Australia will experience violence in her lifetime, women are still paid less than men, and they’re under represented in leadership roles in business and in politics. We still have a long way to go,” she says.

## Not as predicted

Lauren Rosewarne, a senior lecturer at University of Melbourne’s School of Social and Political Sciences who has written a number of books on gender issues, agrees. She says women’s rights should never be taken for granted.

“Rather, rights are something continually argued for and continually

fought for,” she says. “Sexism needs to be exposed and condemned – sexists need to be spotlighted for their idiocy and insecurity,” she adds.

A Google Australia spokesperson told *Cosmo* the autocomplete function is algorithmically operated, and offers predicted search results to help users find what they’re looking for faster.

“Suggested phrases are produced automatically based on a number of factors, including what’s available on the net and the popularity of search terms,” she explains.

But Licia Curro, a 31-year-old from NSW, was stunned by the results. “I can’t believe people still think that way,” she says. “We work so hard and we do so much, I’m really shocked that anyone could really believe these sexist sentiments are reality.”

It’s a thought echoed by Vanessa Rofe, 32, from Sydney. “I pride myself on being a motivated, strong, capable woman. This campaign really makes you think about those women around the world who aren’t as lucky,” she says. “It’s sad. But we’ve come so far and we will continue fighting to be treated as equals, because we are.” **Lisa Mayoh**

**WHAT  
CAN  
WE DO?**

**JULIE MCKAY SAYS WE  
MUST WORK HARDER  
AND SPEAK LOUDER.**

“Women can all use our voices to speak out about inequalities, we can support companies that are advancing gender equality through our purchasing power, and we can support other women in reaching their full potential,” she says.

UN Women is working across the world to put an end to policies, laws and attitudes that perpetuate gender inequality – and you can help. International Women’s Day events are being held in March. To find out how you can get involved, head to [unwomen.org.au](http://unwomen.org.au). **COSMO**