



Source 4

Task

4a. What work were women doing in the coal mines?

4b. What was being criticised in the report?

Think about the evidence in sources 2, 3 and 4.

4c. Summarise the concerns that the report raises about women and girls working in the mines.

4d. Do you think that banning women from working in the mines was good or bad for their status?

Source 4

This extract comes from the same report on mines published by Lord Ashley in 1842.

VICTORIAN BRITAIN

A Divided Nation?

In the West Riding, it appears, girls are almost universally employed as trappers and hurriers, in common with boys. The girls are of all ages, from seven to twenty-one. They commonly work quite naked down to the waist, and are dressed—as far as they are dressed at all—in a loose pair of trowsers. These are seldom whole on either sex. In many of the collieries the adult colliers, whom these girls serve, work perfectly naked. Near Huddersfield, the sub-commissioner examined a female child. He says,

“I could not have believed that I should have found human nature so degraded. Mr. Holroyd, and Mr. Brook, a surgeon, confessed, that although living within a few miles, they could not have believed that such a system of unchristian cruelty could have existed.”

Speaking of one of the girls, he says

“She stood shivering before me from cold. The rug that hung about her waist was as black as coal, and saturated with water, the drippings of the roof.” “In a pit near New Mills,” (says the sub-commissioner) “the chain passing high up between the legs of two girls, had worn large holes in their trowsers. Any sight more disgustingly indecent or revolting can scarcely be imagined than these girls at work. No brothel can beat it.”

Sir, it would be impossible to enlarge upon all these points; the evidence is

(PRO ref: ZHC 2/79, p.1327)