choosing the latter, many stereotype the working woman as either a bad mother or a distracted worker. This is not only unfair but generalised when the reality is men have to juggle home and work priorities all the time but are not at risk or in fear of losing their jobs because their stereotype says that they can handle it. This gives sustenance to the oldest stereotype of all that women are emotionally unstable and men are methodical and reliable, which is neither scientifically true nor fair to assume.

Sure, women in the west are far better off than they were a century ago. They can inherit property, vote in any election, attend the same universities as men, run in politics and be protected by the law. But just because they can doesn't mean they don't have other obstacles that hinder them, obstacles that make feminism still relevant to every society. Take the UK for example; despite the equal pay act of 1970, women still receive 17 percent less than men do for work of equal value. Every year one million women are victims of domestic violence at the hands of men, 400,000 women are sexually assaulted and a further 80,000 are raped. British women are victims of forced marriages and 'honour-based' violence – nearly 3,000 incidents of this are reported each year – a 47 percent increase in 2011. And finally in politics, the UK, an 'advanced' country, has not had a female leader since its first and only, Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher, 30 years ago. Currently there are just four women in senior cabinet posts, which is one less than a year ago.



PHOTO: AFP

School girls in Bangladesh are part of a national feminist movement and demand an end to violence against women and girls.

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Late last year, Carla Bruni-Sarkozy, the wife of former French President Nicolas Sarkozy, said in an interview with French Vogue: "My generation doesn't need feminism... There are pioneers who opened the breach... I'm not at all an active feminist. On the contrary, I'm a bourgeois. I love family life, I love doing the same thing every day." This caused anger among women across Europe and further afield because it reeked of ignorance. Carla Bruni-Sarkozy was labelled a modern day Marie-Antoinette, the 18th Century French queen famous for exclaiming: "Let them eat cake!" when the people were starving for lack of bread. Modern day women with the dilemma of working or staying at home with their kids do not always find the choice an easy one. Some would say it's not even a choice as their financial needs often force the decision. Before Carla apologised for her clumsy remarks, she may well have thought the need for feminism was gone. If that's the case however, she was blind to the fact French President Hollande thought it important to create a Ministry for Women's Rights – the first task on their agenda was to reinstate a sexual harassment law. She must've also conveniently forgotten the case of a lenient verdict in a gang-rape in October which shocked the country and sparked outrage at the legal system.

No, feminism isn't dead just yet nor does it need to be killed off any time soon. The year 2013 has already seen the whole world say that it's about time to end violence against women and girls, with the One Billion Rising Campaign last month. Today is the 102th International Women's Day, and this year's theme is aptly called 'A Promise is a Promise: Time for Action to End Violence Against Women'. Some will take this as an opportunity to honour and respect the women in their life with love and presents, others will take to the streets to demand better work, legal and social rights for women. It's not an Anti-Man Day as some might assume because it if were, the UN – which is largely composed of men – wouldn't back the day and use to the occasion to push for political and social awareness. It's not reverse sexism as there is an International Men's Day in November, which if men really cared about, they have every right to make a big deal out of that too. In a country where men feel uncomfortable standing in a room full of women in their own homes and where women are expected to stand firm in male-dominated arenas to claim their rights, the need for feminism is greater than ever. And the truth is every man is crucial to feminism succeeding in its goals – without them, women will not find their equal place in the world. ■