

Beyond The Cycle: Exploring The Impact of Menstrual Leave on Work And Well-Being

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Abstract- *Many women experience physical challenges like cramps and pain during their menstrual cycle. These symptoms can be severe and disrupt concentration at work, leading to decreased productivity and potential health risks. Additionally, inadequate hygiene facilities in some offices can cause discomfort and anxiety, further impacting well-being and performance. To address these issues and promote a healthier work environment, menstrual leave policies offer employees paid or unpaid time off specifically for managing menstrual symptoms. This allows them to prioritize their well-being and return to work feeling refreshed and ready to perform at their best. This research article investigates the need for and impact of menstrual leave policies in the workplace. It explores the biological underpinnings of menstruation and the spectrum of experiences women have during their menstrual cycles and the challenges some women face due to menstrual cramps, pain, and other related conditions. The research examines existing menstrual leave policies around the world, including those in Japan, Indonesia, Spain, and Zambia. It explores the potential benefits of menstrual leave policies for both employee well-being and business productivity. The article also discusses the challenges and concerns surrounding menstrual leave, such as potential discrimination against women in workplace. Overall, the article suggests that menstrual leave policies can be a positive step towards creating a more inclusive and supportive work environment for women. It highlights the need for further research to understand the long-term impact of these policies. Overall, the article suggests that menstrual leave policies can be a positive step towards creating a more inclusive and supportive work environment for women. It highlights the need for further research to understand the long-term impact of these policies.*

Keywords- menstrual cycle, productivity, hygiene facilities, paid leave, discrimination

I. INTRODUCTION

Menstruation, the cyclical shedding of the uterine lining, is a fundamental biological process crucial for human existence. Despite its importance, the recognition of menstrual health and associated policies has been a gradual process. The

onset of the Industrial Revolution in Great Britain during the mid-1700s marked a period of significant social and economic change, where women and children were subjected to unsafe working conditions. It is remarkable that it took approximately two centuries for the concept of menstrual leave to gain attention, with Russia pioneering progressive policies aimed at women's welfare, including the introduction of menstrual leave in 1927 to address concerns over national fertility. However, this policy was later rescinded due to discriminatory practices against female workers. Japan emerged as a pioneer in enshrining menstrual leave into national law in 1947, reflecting its post-World War II concerns for maintaining population levels. Subsequently, countries such as Indonesia and Korea followed suit in implementing similar policies. Despite advancements, disparities exist in the provision of menstrual leave globally, with some countries offering paid leave with medical documentation while others provide unpaid leave with limited uptake. India's legislative efforts, exemplified by the "Right of women to menstrual leave and free access to menstrual health products bill 2022," highlight the ongoing discourse surrounding menstrual health and workplace policies.

However, debates persist regarding the mandatory nature of menstrual leave, amid concerns of potential discrimination and harassment against women in the workplace. Recognizing sanitation as a cornerstone of public health, the World Health Organization underscores the imperative for states to ensure the well-being and hygiene of their citizens. In India, the concept of menstrual leave aligns with the constitutional right to life, emphasizing the need to safeguard women's health and dignity during menstruation. Addressing the physical and emotional challenges associated with menstruation, including pain and psychological distress, underscores the importance of inclusive and compassionate governance. As nations increasingly measure governance through indices such as the happiness index, embracing innovative approaches to enhance the well-being of citizens, including menstrual leave policies, reflects the ethos of a progressive and equitable society.

II. OBJECTIVES

1. To find the need of menstrual leave policy for women within an organisation.
2. To find the relationship between Menstrual Hygiene Management and leave requirement amongst women working.
3. To find the impact of menstrual leave on employment opportunities of women.

III. REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Menstruation stands as a natural and essential biological process essential for reproduction. However, the bodily experiences associated with menstruation vary among individuals, with some experiencing severe symptoms while others experience minimal to no discomfort. Symptoms commonly associated with normal menstruation encompass cramping, back pain, bloating, headaches, fatigue, and fluctuations in mood. (National Institute of Child Health and Human Development, 2017). Illnesses associated with the menstrual cycle encompass endometriosis, dysmenorrhea, fibroids, polycystic ovarian syndrome, premenstrual dysphoric disorder, among others. Additionally, certain menstruators may find that chronic conditions such as migraines, diabetes, and irritable bowel syndrome are aggravated by the menstrual cycle. (Pinkerton, Guico-Pabia, & Taylor, 2010). These related and exacerbated illnesses can significantly impact the daily lives of menstruators, potentially necessitating time off from work. Health issues related to menstruation significantly contribute to the decline in female workforce participation rates. Moreover, they often lead to workplace discrimination, penalizing women for facing challenges inherent to their biology. Instituting paid menstrual leave is a crucial policy step towards fostering workplace equality and inclusivity. It not only initiates dialogue on menstrual health but also incentivizes female workforce participation. (Rehmat Swani 5,2020). The rationale behind advocating for this policy is generally well-intentioned, often framed as a progressive advancement in promoting women's health and rights within the workplace. (Sally King 2021) Despite worldwide endeavors to alleviate poverty among women in these circumstances, insufficient focus has been directed towards addressing water and sanitation-related obstacles, particularly concerning the management of monthly menstruation. These barriers may impede girls' and women's participation in the workforce, as well as their overall health and well-being. (Sommer M. Chandranatha 2016). Menstrual periods can impact women's overall quality of life and may result in reduced income due to the loss of working time and diminished work productivity among female workers. (Laila Nuranna, I F Tihas, Abdullah, I Putu, G Kayika, Gita Pratama

2018). Supporters of menstrual leave argue that such policies hold the potential to destigmatize discussions surrounding menstruation in the workplace and could offer assistance to individuals experiencing menstrual cycle-related illness (Rachel Levitt and Jessica Barnack). Individuals who endure menstrual pain, including those with endometriosis, akin to others with disabilities, suffer productivity and income losses due to interruptions caused by pain during work. (Ela Przybylo and Breanne Fahs 2018).

IV. METHODOLOGY

This is a qualitative research article evolved to understand the need and impact of menstrual leave policy on employment of women and menstrual hygiene facilities at workplace on the requirement of menstrual leave policy. This paper relies on secondary data, which refers to information that has already been collected and analysed for specific purposes and may be utilized in future research frameworks. The major inputs are drawn from published journal, articles, books and newspapers like The Hindu for major developments with respect to Indian scenario.

V. FINDINGS

To find the need of menstrual leave policy for women within an organisation.

On February 16, Spain became the first European country to provide paid menstrual leave to workers, alongside other sexual health rights. Employees now have the entitlement to three days of menstrual leave per month, with the possibility of extending it to five days. In Asia, Japan incorporated menstrual leave into its labour laws in 1947, following its popularity among labour unions in the 1920s. Presently, under Article 68, employers are prohibited from requiring women experiencing severe menstrual discomfort to work during that period. Indonesia also introduced a policy in 1948, later amended in 2003, which exempts workers from working on the first two days of their menstrual cycle if they experience pain. In the Philippines, workers are granted two days of menstrual leave per month. In African nations, Zambia initiated one day of leave per month without requiring a reason or medical certificate, referred to as Mother's Day. Policies of the above countries stand as a testament to the need of menstrual leave policies at workplace. Menstrual leave will be of great benefit to those who experience moderate to severe level of discomfort and those who have menstrual related health issues like dysmenorrhea, endometriosis, ovarian cysts, and mood disorders. For some women, menstrual symptoms may interrupt their daily lives, making it more difficult to participate in normal activities. For example, in one cross-

sectional study with 762 participants, 71.5% believed that dysmenorrhea was a normal part of women's life, and on average, reported that their menstrual symptoms moderately affected their daily life activities (Chen, Kwekkeboom, and Ward 2016, 268–69). Nevertheless, the societal taboos surrounding discussions about menstrual symptoms can lead to societal pressure to conceal menstrual distress from both colleagues and healthcare professionals. (Johnston-Robledo and Chrisler 2013). This takes us to the situation prevailing in Japan.

In the case of Japan, where leave for painful menstruation is offered, it is predominantly unpaid and frequently goes unutilized. Women express reluctance to take advantage of this leave and openly disclose their menstrual status due to concerns about potential sexual harassment. Not all individuals, including those who menstruate, support the idea of menstrual leave. Some argue that it is unnecessary and could result in unintended consequences, such as employer discrimination against women. In India, in response to a plea filed in the Supreme Court, a caveat was submitted by law student Anjale Patel, represented by advocate Satya Mitra, highlighting a potential issue with menstrual leave. Chief Justice Chandrachud noted that the law student expressed concerns that mandating menstrual pain leave might discourage employers from hiring women, underscoring the policy implications of such measures. However, the bodily experiences associated with menstruation vary among individuals, with some experiencing severe symptoms while others experience minimal to no discomfort.

To find the relationship between Menstrual Hygiene Management and leave requirement.

Previous studies conducted with adolescent girls have highlighted a broad spectrum of unmet menstrual health needs across different contexts. These include challenges such as limited access to adequate materials for managing menstrual bleeding (Scorgie F, Foster J, Stadler J, Phiri T, Hoppenjans L, Rees H, et al., 2016), insufficient availability of infrastructure accommodating menstrual needs, lack of information about menstrual cycles, inadequate support for alleviating menstrual discomfort and disorders, and prevailing social norms and attitudes that restrict behaviour and participation related to menstruation. These challenges are recognized as fundamental prerequisites for achieving menstrual health and serve as the foundation for intervention design, focusing on knowledge enhancement, provision of materials and infrastructure for menstrual management, support for addressing discomfort and disorders, and fostering a supportive social environment. (Hennegan J, Shannon AK, Rubli J, Schwab KJ, Melendez-Torres GJ., 2019).

To find the impact of menstrual leave on employment opportunities of women.

The World Economic Forum (WEF) has released the 17th edition of the Global Gender Gap Report 2023, revealing a global gender gap score of 68.4%, which reflects a slight improvement of 0.3% compared to the preceding year. With the current pace, achieving full gender parity would necessitate 131 years, signalling a notable deceleration in the overall rate of progress. India continues to face challenges in achieving gender parity in economic participation and opportunity, with only 36.7% progress attained in this area. Although there has been improvement in wage and income parity, there has been a slight decline in the representation of women in senior positions and technical roles. Incorporating mandatory paid leave for periods, would end up further dissuading companies from hiring women. In the case of Japan, it held 121st position out of 153 countries in 2019 according to WEF's gender equality ranking, slipping to 125th place by 2023. Notably, although young Japanese women attain higher levels of education than men, gender disparities become evident in the workforce. Women in Japan face lower employment rates, even with comparable qualifications to men, and often receive lower wages. According to a 2017 survey published in the British Medical Journal, which involved 32,748 women in the Netherlands, approximately 14% reported taking time off from work or school during their menstrual periods. The researchers estimated that employees lost approximately 8.9 days' worth of productivity annually due to issues related to the menstrual cycle.

VI. LIMITATIONS

The research relies on secondary data, which means that it is based on information that has already been collected and analysed by other researchers. This can limit the ability of the researcher to control the quality of the data and to explore new questions that may not have been considered in the original studies.

The research does not take into account the individual experiences of women with menstruation. The bodily experiences associated with menstruation vary among individuals, with some experiencing severe symptoms while others experience minimal to no discomfort. This means that the findings of the research may not be generalizable to all women.

The research does not address the potential unintended consequences of menstrual leave policies, such as employer discrimination against women. For example, the law student Anjale Patel expressed concerns that mandating

menstrual pain leave might discourage employers from hiring women.

Overall, the limitations of the research mean that the findings should be interpreted with caution. More research is needed to explore the impact of menstrual leave policies on women's employment and well-being.

VII. CONCLUSION

The conclusion of the research is that menstrual leave policies can be a positive development for both employers and employees. The implementation of such policies can improve employee well-being and morale, and can also lead to increased productivity. However, it is important to note that there are a variety of factors to consider when implementing a menstrual leave policy, such as the specific needs of the workplace and the employees.

The research also found that there is a stigma surrounding menstruation in many workplaces, which can make it difficult for employees to take advantage of menstrual leave policies. This stigma can also lead to discrimination against employees who menstruate. In order to address this stigma, it is important for employers to create a workplace culture that is open and understanding of menstruation. Overall, the research suggests that menstrual leave policies can be a beneficial addition to the workplace, but it is important to implement them in a way that is sensitive to the needs of all employees.

VIII. SUGGESTIONS

The implementation of a menstrual leave policy represents a positive development. Studies indicate that women experience menstrual-related health symptoms differently, with variations from one case to another. Therefore, it is inappropriate to generalize menstrual leave as a universal biological disadvantage. Recognizing the diverse nature of menstrual experiences is imperative. Tailoring support and being accommodating on an individual basis fosters inclusivity, while addressing the specific needs of those navigating their menstrual cycles. Any advancement in menstrual hygiene management aligns with India's commitment to achieving the Sustainable Development Goals, particularly in the areas of good health and well-being, quality education, gender equality, and access to clean water and sanitation. India has further pledged to enhance the accessibility and affordability of menstrual products, along with establishing hygienic toilets in public spaces, workplaces, and schools.

These suggestions strike a delicate balance between acknowledging women's rights related to menstruation and their employment prospects.

Work from home policy during menstruation.

In India, companies have implemented menstrual leave policies for their employees. Gozoop, a digital communications agency, was the first to introduce such a policy in 2017. According to this policy, women have the option to work from home for one day per month during menstruation. The rationale behind this policy is to provide women with the opportunity to rest their bodies during their menstrual periods by allowing them to work from the comfort of their homes. By doing so, we alleviate the stress associated with travel, crowded environments, uncomfortable seating, and the fear of stains, among other concerns. This arrangement enables women to complete their work efficiently and effectively from home. This policy, specifically ensured that it is structured as a work-from-home option to avoid making women less hireable based on their gender. Since its implementation in March 2017, approximately 76% of the female workforce has utilized their menstrual leave. (Bansi Raja, Email to author, June 7, 2018).

Employees ensuring Menstrual Hygiene Management (MHM) at workplace reduces the need for leave.

According to WHO and UNICEF Joint Monitoring Programme (JMP) for drinking water, sanitation, and hygiene, MHM is defined as 'Women and adolescent girls using a clean menstrual management material to absorb or collect menstrual blood, that can be changed in privacy as often as necessary for the duration of a menstrual period, using soap and water for washing the body as required, and having access to safe and convenient facilities to dispose of used menstrual management materials. They understand the basic facts linked to the menstrual cycle and how to manage it with dignity and without discomfort or fear.

Creation of Wellness Room at workplace.

Wellness Rooms, a designated space equipped with comfortable seating, heating pads, and necessary amenities can provide a safe and private space for women to manage menstrual discomfort if they choose not to work remotely.

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