

THE CYCLE OF SUCCESS: REDEFINING WORKPLACE EFFICIENCY THROUGH MENSTRUAL LEAVE IN INDIA

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ABSTRACT:

Menstrual health has increasingly become an important concern in discussions on gender equality and workplace inclusivity. Country like India, where a significant proportion of the workforce consists of women, lack of institutional recognition of menstrual health often affects productivity, well-being, and workplace participation. The concept of menstrual leave has emerged as a progressive policy initiative aimed at acknowledging the physical and psychological challenges experienced by menstruating employees. This paper examines the idea of menstrual leave as a tool for redefining workplace efficiency and promoting a more inclusive work culture in India. The study explores the relationship between menstrual health, employee well-being, and productivity by analysing existing workplace policies, emerging debates, and global practices related to menstrual leave. It argues that recognizing menstrual health needs can contribute to improved employee satisfaction, reduced absenteeism, and enhanced long-term productivity. At the same time, the paper critically evaluates concerns that menstrual leave policies may reinforce gender stereotypes or lead to discrimination in hiring and promotion practices. Using a sociological perspective, the paper situates menstrual leave within broader discussions of gender justice, labour rights, and workplace equity. It highlights how supportive workplace policies can challenge menstrual stigma and foster a culture of empathy and inclusivity. The study concludes that menstrual leave, when implemented effectively and accompanied by awareness and supportive organizational practices, has the potential to redefine workplace efficiency by prioritizing employee health and dignity. Such policies can contribute not only to gender-sensitive workplaces but also to sustainable organizational productivity in contemporary India.

Key words: Efficiency, gender justice, workplace inclusivity, menstrual health and wellbeing etc.

INTRODUCTION

In contemporary professional spaces, conversations around workplace efficiency often revolve around productivity, technological inventions, and performance incentives. But, the most important and crucial dimension of efficiency remains inadequately recognized that is the biological realities that shape employees' lived experiences. For women it is the menstrual health, though universal for a significant segment of the workforce, continues to be a marginalized in organizational policy discourse. Redefining workplace competence requires inclusion of women, and menstrual leave emerges as a transformative step towards building equitable and humane work environments.

Conventionally, the modern workplace has been constructed around male biological standards, often neglecting the physiological realities faced by women, particularly during the cycle of menstruation. In India, where women's participation in the labour force has historically faced socio-cultural and systemic challenges, discussions about menstrual leave are gaining significant traction. Progressive organizations are starting to recognize menstruation not as a disadvantage but as an important aspect of employee health and well-being, which contributes for organisational development. Menstruation is not merely a private bodily function; it intersects with health, emotional well-being, and professional performance. Many individuals experience dysmenorrhea, fatigue, migraines, or hormonal fluctuations that can significantly affect concentration and stamina at workplace. However, societal taboos and the standardization of silent endurance have historically compelled employees to work through discomfort.

This article examines the relationship between menstrual leave, women's empowerment, and corporate effectiveness. It contends that acknowledging biological realities through structured leave policies enhances productivity rather than undermining it; such recognition leads to a committed, psychologically secure, and highly productive workforce.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

To grasp the current dialogue surrounding menstrual leave in India, it is crucial to assess recent empirical and theoretical studies. The following ten studies form the basis for this analysis:

Periods, Policies, and Prejudices, (Bhattar, N, 2026) explores "benign sexism," cautioning that although well-intentioned menstrual policies could perpetuate existing gender stereotypes if not coupled with broader inclusivity measures—leading managers to unconsciously view female employees as biologically delicate. **Indian Journal of Law and Legal Research (Singh, R. 2025)** conducted a survey among Indian professionals revealing that 86% support paid menstrual leave distinct from regular sick leave. Moreover, companies implementing these policies have observed up to a 30% increase in female employee retention rates. **SPRF India Analysis (2025)** addressed the accessibility issues relating to corporate policies; while many corporate employees benefit from them, approximately 83% of India's workforce operates within unorganized or informal sectors - a gap widening disparities among working women. **Sohil, Mahajan & Murarkar (2024)** in the **Journal of Community Medicine**, highlights the public health necessity for menstrual leave showing that between 50% to 90% of women experience dysmenorrhea (painful cramps) and advocate for normalizing menstrual leave as essential for managing chronic conditions such as endometriosis and PCOS. **BMJ Open Study on South Indian Women (2024)** an observational study involving 955 young women from Tamil Nadu found that while 75.8% favoured menstrual leave for handling dysmenorrhea, 43.4% expressed serious concerns regarding workplace stigma and the "medicalization" of menstruation.

Implementation of Menstrual Leave Policy in Indian Companies, (Krithika, 2023) notes that unaddressed menstrual pain significantly hampers work efficiency, findings were also indicate increased error rates when women endure severe pain at work. However, there are fears among HR managers about potential policy misuse affecting workflow continuity. **Journal of Emerging Technologies and Innovative Research, (Agrawal, N 2023)** discusses the economic implications of menstrual discomfort by linking it to global estimates indicating substantial losses due to presenteeism annually; she argues that well-crafted menstrual leave policies can diminish unscheduled absenteeism while signalling organizational commitment to equity. **The Impact of Menstrual Leave on Women's**

Employment Opportunities, (Bhagyamma G, 2023) investigates how cultural norms interact with legal frameworks. The research indicates that while menstrual leave promotes gender equality, there are concerns that it may inadvertently reinforce gender stereotypes and result in hiring biases against women. **Prakash et al. (2023)** the legal review points out deficiencies in statutory support within Indian labour laws concerning occupational safety related to menstruation issues like those highlighted by the Occupational Safety Health Code of 2020; they note how leading firms like Zomato and Swiggy have voluntarily adopted these policies as talent attraction mechanisms. **Menstrual Health in India Landscape Analysis (Gates Foundation, 2023)** extensive report emphasizes ingrained stigma against menstruation within India - indicating that around 70% of mothers still consider it "dirty/impure". It further posits that workplace policies facilitating menstrual leave serve as societal equalizers by promoting open discussions about menstruation at home and within communities.

RESEARCH GAPS

Despite an expanding body of literature on this topic, notable gaps persist:

- a. **The Informal Sector Blind Spot:** With over 80% of Indian working women engaged in unorganized sectors such as agriculture or domestic work—including daily wage labour—the existing research primarily focuses on white-collar environments.
- b. **Long-term Productivity Metrics:** There is a lack of longitudinal analyses examining return on investment regarding menstrual leave over extended periods—particularly concerning promotion rates or leadership parity.
- c. **Hiring Bias Reality:** Although numerous studies caution against potential backlash whereby employers might avoid hiring women due to associated costs with extra leaves—quantitative data proving or disproving this phenomenon remains insufficient within the Indian context.

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

1. To evaluate how menstrual leave policies influence workplace efficiency alongside employee retention rates.
2. To examine socio-cultural obstacles inhibiting effective utilization of officially offered menstrual leaves.
3. To propose an inclusive policy framework aimed at bridging formal corporate employment gaps with informal female workers' needs.

SCOPE OF THE STUDY

This study focuses on contemporary practices among private sector entities—including start-ups and multinational corporations—wherein menstrual leave policies have been trailed since 2020 while also considering broader legislative efforts across various states like Bihar and Kerala.

SOCIOLOGICAL PERSPECTIVES AND THEORETICAL FRAMEWORKS

From a sociological perspective, workplace are always regulated and operated around historically male-centric norms that treat the body as neutral and unchanging. This assumption invisibilizes gendered experiences and perpetuates inequality. Recognizing menstrual health through policy intervention challenges this androcentric framework and aligns organizational practices with contemporary understandings of diversity and inclusion.

Understanding these dynamics requires applying established sociological theories:

- a. **Feminist Perspective:** this perspective explains that knowledge is socially situated, and marginalized groups have a unique perspective on systemic flaws. Under this framework, menstrual leave is not a "special privilege" but a necessary adjustment to a workplace that was historically designed without the female biological standpoint in mind. True equity requires recognizing biological differences rather than forcing women to assimilate into male-centric operational norms. It also asserts that knowledge is shaped by social contexts; marginalized groups in this case menstruating individuals offer unique insights into systemic shortcomings within male-dominated workplaces. Henceforth, recognizing biological differences rather than imposing male-centric operational norms is vital for achieving true equity.
- b. **The Socio-Ecological Model (SEM):** SEM model interprets at various levels, at **individual level** the experiences related to physical pain or internalized shame during menstruation, at the **interpersonal level:** Employee-manager dynamics involving fear over judgment, at the **organizational level** the accessibility issues regarding HR policy implementation aided by digital tools and at societal level: Cultural taboos surrounding menstruation prevalent in society.

This model indicates organizational policy effectiveness diminishes if interpersonal stigmas remain unaddressed concurrently with societal perceptions surrounding menstruation.

- c. **Marxist Feminism:** Posits capitalism exploits biological differences; compelling women to utilize standard sick leaves for natural processes penalizes them based on their biology—viewing menstrual leave instead as a necessary labour right preserving workforce vitality among females.

There are multiple examples from the global perspective related to menstrual leave. Some countries and organizations have begun institutionalizing menstrual leave policies. For instance, Japan introduced menstrual leave as early as 1947, acknowledging the physical strain associated with menstruation. South Korea and Indonesia also provide legal provisions for menstrual leave, though implementation varies. Spain became one of the first European nations to grant paid menstrual leave under specific medical conditions, signaling a broader shift toward reproductive health rights within labor law frameworks. These initiatives reflect evolving global discourses that position employee well-being as integral to productivity rather than opposed to it

BREAKING THE SILENCE: CULTURAL TRANSFORMATION

The introduction of menstrual leave is not merely a procedural change but a cultural intervention. It challenges stigma and normalizes conversations around menstrual health. Silence around menstruation often reinforces shame and perpetuates misinformation. Formal recognition through policy disrupts this silence and reframes menstruation as a legitimate health consideration. The policy alone is insufficient to achieve this. Organizations must ensure confidentiality, prevent discrimination, and avoid reinforcing stereotypes that frame menstruating employees as less capable. Effective implementation requires gender-sensitivity training, inclusive language, and mechanisms to prevent misuse or bias.

With the above explanations some suggestions and interventions can be implemented at workplace in redefining efficiency via empowerment order to create equality at workplace;

- **Digital Discretion:** Implement HR Management Systems allowing confidential applications for menstrual leaves without requiring direct explanations which may foster stigma.

- **Flexible Alternatives:** Recognize not all individuals require full-day absences during their cycles—providing options like Work-from-home arrangements can maintain productivity levels while affording necessary comfort during discomfort periods.
- **De-gendering Conversations:** Frame discussions surrounding men's health inclusively—as standard wellness metrics similar those covering mental health or ergonomic considerations ensuring coverage extends beyond just cisgender females who experience periods.
- **Managerial Sensitization:** Provide training initiatives targeting middle management ensuring staff availing themselves off these authorized periods are not adversely impacted during performance evaluations nor perceived less dedicated towards roles. Despite any absence taken accordingly due period-related conditions recognized legally under new regulations passed recently into law governing workplace rights especially emphasizing fairness toward all genders equally represented therein thus, fostering healthy professional atmospheres conducive collaboration unity throughout diverse teams established together under common goals aligned strategically benefiting both sides alike mutually experienced collectively shared advancement desired ultimately achieved accordingly.

CONCLUSION

The discourse around menstrual leave in India transcends mere pain management; it represents the fundamental principles regarding workplace equality, human dignity. The reshaping traditional notions, redefining roles and responsibilities, crafting innovative solutions which are tailored to meet needs diverse populations. The dynamic ecosystems that thrives to contribute for sustainable adaption of changing demands are driven through passion and excellence to promote social justice, equity, inclusion. The cycle of success in modern workplaces must include recognition of biological cycles. Redefining workplace efficiency through menstrual leave is not about granting special favors, it is about acknowledging reality. It affirms that sustainable productivity grows from respect, empathy, and inclusion. By moving beyond silence and stigma, organizations can transform menstrual leave from a controversial proposal into a cornerstone of equitable workplace design. In doing so, they embrace a more holistic vision of efficiency—one that honors both human dignity and organizational excellence.

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