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## **MENSTRUAL LEAVE AND WORKPLACE EQUITY: NON-COMPLEMENTARY TO EACH OTHER**

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### **ABSTRACT**

In the new world of professionalism, organisations are putting their best foot forward to inculcate progressive practices to accommodate a diverse workforce. Amidst such initiatives, there remains a topic that is yet to be brought to the forefront despite it being an inevitable natural phenomenon for women, which is “menstruation.” During such time, women may find it difficult to maintain a consistent level of productivity in an otherwise fast-paced work environment. Many women also suffer from disorders related to menstruation such as ovarian cysts, endometriosis, dysmenorrhea, etc. In view of the same, menstrual leave has gained attention as a potential solution to address gender inequalities in the workplace. While the intent behind menstrual leave policies is to address the specific needs of menstruating individuals, such policies may contribute to challenges in achieving true workplace equity, hence questioning their effectiveness in advancing gender justice and equality. The paper emphasizes on the need to prioritize workplace efficiency and fairness over specific accommodations for certain groups and hence to steer the conversation towards gender-neutral policies that foster a truly equitable work environment, minimizing unintended consequences associated with menstrual leave.

**Key words:** Menstrual Leave, Equity, Productivity, Workplace, Gender inequality

### **INTRODUCTION**

In this world of modernisation, we are moving towards equal contribution by women to the economy of a country. There is a rush in order to bring equality amongst both men and women. However, there exists certain physiological differences between men and women which might prove to be a hurdle in this path. As we know, women go through a cyclical change every month known as menstruation, which poses complications like cramps, nausea, etc. In order to tackle the same, working women

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take leave known as menstruation leave from their place of employment during their menstrual cycle, depending on how much it interferes with their capacity to work. The said policy permits workers to take extra paid or unpaid time off from work.

The concept of menstrual leave was first developed at Russia to protect the reproductive function of a section of women workers. Japan, in 1947 became the first country to implement the policy at national level. Post this, it originated in many other countries that were struggling to simultaneously rebuild their economies and population, wherein, the main purpose was to protect female fertility. Although the objective has changed over the past century, from the protection of female fertility, to providing time off from work for those experiencing severe menstrual symptoms, it should not go unnoticed that Russian menstrual leave policy was formally retracted in 1927, just 5 years after it was first implemented; because women workers felt it had increased workplace discrimination.<sup>3</sup>

The policy has been drawing more and more attention from the public and international media in recent years due to consistent rush towards equality. The policy is generally promoted with benevolent intentions and is framed as a progressive advancement of women's rights and health in the workplace.

In this study, we aim to examine whether women still face gender inequality at college/workplace in general, their productivity quotient during menstruation and how often they experience cramps/pain during their menstrual cycle and how intense is it. This study basically tries to fill the gaps in the research work of this topic with the help of quantitative data which may be further relied upon to proceed with the research work.

This paper discusses how the laws pertaining to menstruation leave may both mirror and exacerbate harmful and prejudiced behaviours directed against women in the workplace. Menstruation leave is one example of a sex-specific employment policy that can unintentionally, but nonetheless effectively, perpetuate false and harmful social stereotypes that portray "all women" as less capable, less trustworthy, or more costly workers than males. Furthermore, alternate solution to such policy has also been discussed in order to maintain a healthy working condition, foster a healthy mental and

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<sup>3</sup> © Springer Nature Switzerland AG 2021 J. Hassard, L. D. Torres (eds.), *Aligning Perspectives in Gender Mainstreaming, Aligning Perspectives on Health, Safety and Well-Being*, [https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-53269-7\\_9](https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-53269-7_9)

physical environment, uphold women's rights to a dignified life and further, maintain participation of women at work field.

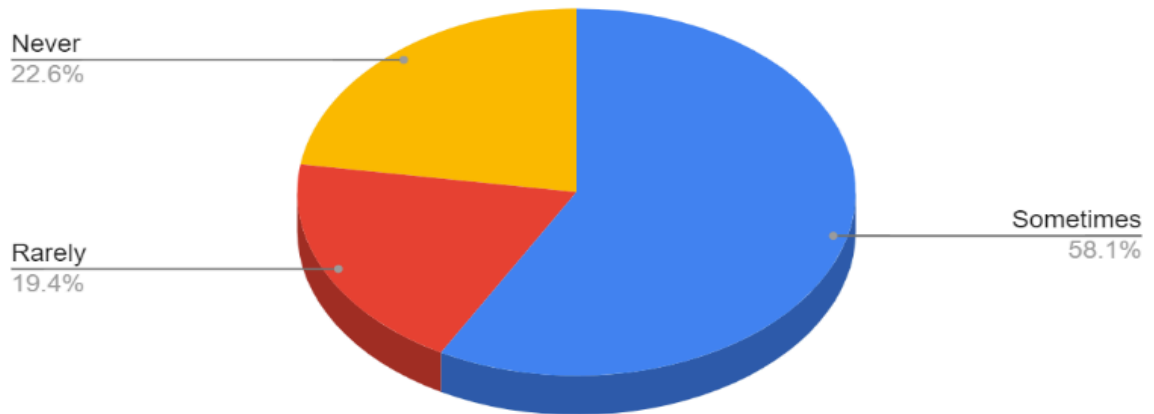
### **DATA ANALYSIS & FINDINGS**

The researchers analysed the answers to questions related to Period leave, to understand the problems faced by the women and the degree of productivity of women employees during menstruation. Therefore, with that in mind, the researchers would proceed with the analysis of individual questions.

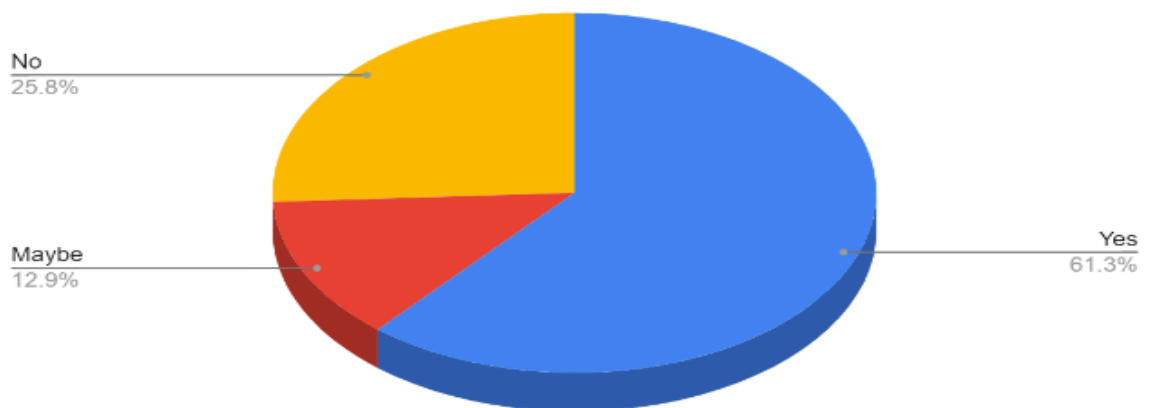
There were a few other questions that were left behind from the analysis, because the responses were greatly unanimous, and there was not much to analyse. One such was whether respondents are college students or working. Both were answered in affirmative, and hence the researchers have proceeded with the study of the responses of the queries from which can be understood as to the degree of benefits that can be derived from the implementation of menstrual leave policy. The researchers would first proceed with the analysis of the general aspects of the questionnaire and later proceed to the specific ones.

1.1. The first question that was presented was how often does the respondents face gender discrimination at workplace. The response from women was maximum for 'sometimes', followed by 'rarely' wherein the percentage for 'sometimes' seemed to have slightly on higher side. Hence, it can be concluded that the gender inequality is now declining. Another very pertinent question put forward by the researchers was whether the respondents are in favour of period leave. In this case, much like the previous one, most women are in support of this.

## Do you face gender discrimination at your workplace/ school/colleges?



## Count of Are you in favour of paid menstrual leave?

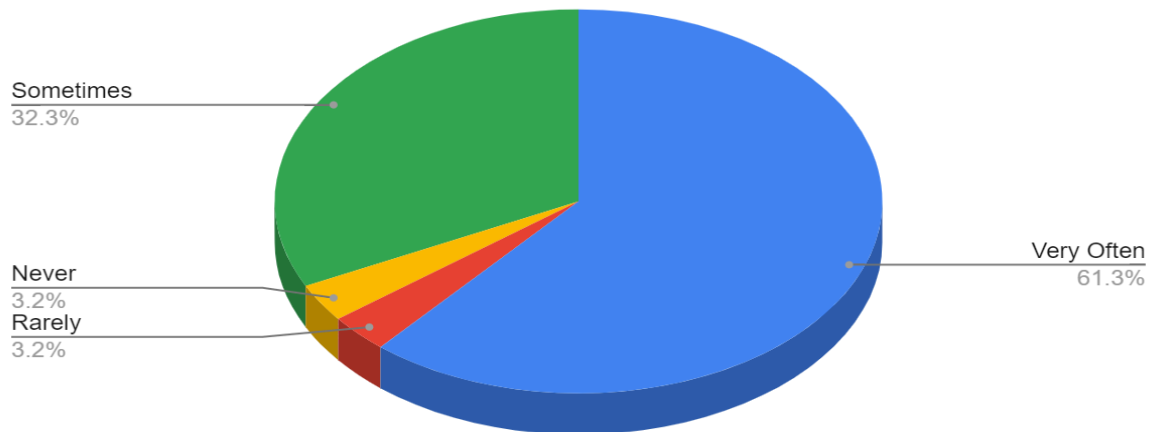


1.2. Moving on to the next question, which was how much will the women community rate their productivity quotient on a scale of 5, to which mostly women chose 2 or 3. This clearly brings out the decline in productivity rate of the women during menstruation.

1.3. Moving on to the next query, the question that the researchers had put out forward was how often do the woman experience cramps/pain during menstruation. Most women, in response of this, selected 'very often', followed by 'sometime'.

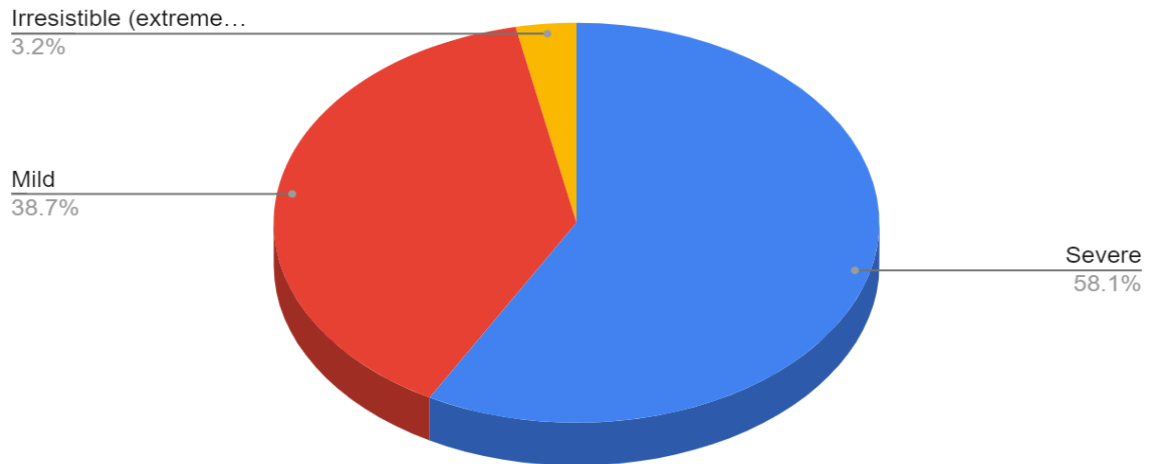
However, there are few percentages of women who do not experience any such symptoms.

### Do you experience cramps/pain during menstruation?



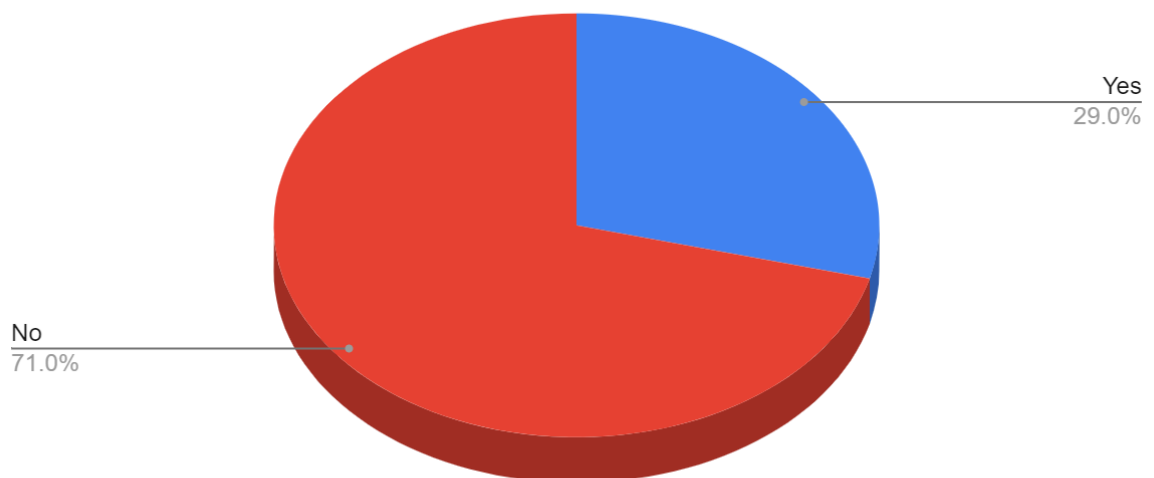
1.4. In the next section, there were two questions put forward in order for women who experience cramps/pain to answer. The first question out of these was the intensity of cramps/pain, to which most women selected 'severe', followed by 'mild'.

### Intensity of Cramps/Pain during Menstruation



1.5. The next question that was pertinent was whether the women experiencing such symptoms have taken any medical help. The interesting fact that was observed was that most of the respondents have never taken any help. This suggests that symptoms of menstruation are being taken lightly.

### Have you taken medical help?



### STUDY LIMITATIONS

The purpose of this study was to ascertain how men and women felt about the necessity of such a leave, as well as the necessity of a policy granting working women period leave. Since this study is exploratory in nature, it has the following limitations:

- a. Sample size: The analysis could not have been completed in the time allotted if the sample size had not been restricted,
- b. Absence of data: The subject of the research being done here is still in its early stages. There isn't a lot of secondary data on the topic.
- c. Technological constraint: The restriction reduced the size of the respondent pool. Only online data collection was done.
- d. Nationality: Only Indians were included in the study pool for this topic.
- e. Stakeholder: We solely gathered feedback from female staff and students. Their opinions have been taken into consideration.

### CONCLUSIONS

From above study, it can be said that not treating all employees equitably, regardless of gender or biological factors would lead to unintentional discrimination at workplace. However, it can also be not denied that women face challenges during menstruation. Therefore, it is suggested to find a middle ground in order to solve the problem. Menstrual leave even if implemented cannot be the ultimate solution. Henceforth, alternatives have to be adopted in order to cater the situation so that we do not move back to the society we came from i.e., where women were considered weak, less productive and hence, subjected to discrimination. Moreover, implementing menstrual leave policies reveals the risk of creating a segregated work environment.

### SUGGESTIONS

As discussed above, Menstrual leave Policy is not the ultimate solution, the alternative could be to provide for basic needs during menstruation i.e., sanitary napkins, separate washrooms, etc. Moreover, female medical consultants can be appointed at the workplace to guide the women during menstruation in order to avoid the maximum stress faced by women. Thus, it is suggested to concentrate on the working



circumstances and rights of all employees, as well as access to high-quality reproductive health information and medical treatment, in order to support and improve menstruation health and gender equality in the workplace.