



## MENSTRUAL LEAVE POLICY IN INDIA: AN OVERVIEW

**Dr. A. Sree Padmavall**

Assistant Professor in Management  
Department of Commerce and Management  
Studies, Adikavi Nannaya University,  
Rajamahendravaram, India.

**Dr. G. Alice Joy**

Assistant Professor in Commerce  
Department of Commerce and Management  
Studies, Adikavi Nannaya University,  
Rajamahendravaram, India.

**Abstract:** *This study examines the challenges faced by women employees during menstruation, their leave-taking preferences, and the existing policies in Indian workplaces. The analysis highlights the impact of long commutes, the need for paid menstrual leave, and the growing demand for work-from-home flexibility. Additionally, the study explores male employees' perceptions of menstrual leave, revealing differences between married and unmarried men. The findings underscore the need for inclusive workplace policies that support women's well-being and productivity.*

### Introduction

Menstrual leave policy has emerged as a significant topic of discussion in India, reflecting broader concerns about gender equality, workplace inclusivity, and women's health. Menstrual leave refers to a policy that allows female employees to take leave from work during their menstrual cycle, acknowledging the physical and mental discomfort that can accompany menstruation. Although the concept is not new, its formal implementation in workplaces remains inconsistent across regions and industries. In India, discussions on menstrual leave gained prominence with the introduction of policies by progressive companies and state governments. For instance, Bihar has provided menstrual leave for government employees since 1992, granting two days of special leave every month. More recently, some private companies have implemented menstrual leave policies as part of their broader gender inclusivity initiatives.

### Historical Context

Menstruation has traditionally been surrounded by cultural taboos and

stigmas in India, leading to limited discourse on menstrual health and its impact on women's professional lives. Recent movements advocating for menstrual equity have helped bring these issues into public discussion, challenging conventional norms and advocating for supportive workplace policies.

### Current Scenario

Despite some progress, menstrual leave policies remain unevenly adopted across India. While some organizations have embraced these policies, others hesitate due to concerns about productivity, potential misuse, and gender discrimination. Awareness and acceptance of menstrual leave policies vary widely, influenced by factors such as education, socioeconomic status, and workplace culture.

### Policy Adoption and Discussions in India

Menstrual leave is gradually gaining recognition in India but continues to face cultural, economic, and operational challenges. Ongoing discussions and advocacy efforts may lead to broader



acceptance and implementation in the future.

### Adoption in Companies

Several Indian companies have introduced menstrual leave policies, including:

- **Zomato:** Introduced 10 days of paid menstrual leave per year for its women and transgender employees in 2020.
- **Culture Machine:** Offers the first day of the period off for female employees.
- **Gozoop:** Another company providing menstrual leave to its employees.

### State Initiatives

- **Bihar:** Since 1992, the state government has provided two days of menstrual leave per month for government employees.
- **Kerala:** The Cochin University of Science and Technology (CUSAT) introduced a policy in 2017 allowing female students to take leave during their menstrual cycle.

### Legal Framework

Currently, there is no national law mandating menstrual leave in India. However, in 2018, the **Menstruation Benefits Bill** was introduced in Parliament, proposing two days of menstrual leave per month for women in both public and private sectors. The bill has not yet been passed into law.

### Public Debate and Perception

Opinions on menstrual leave remain divided. Supporters argue that it promotes gender equality and acknowledges the physical discomfort many women experience. Critics, however, fear that it might reinforce gender stereotypes and hinder women's participation in the workforce.

### Significance of the Study

Understanding the dynamics of menstrual leave policies in India is

crucial for promoting gender-sensitive workplace practices and improving the overall well-being of female employees. By examining the benefits and challenges of these policies, this study aims to contribute to the ongoing dialogue on gender equality and workplace inclusivity.

### Research Gap

Addressing research gaps in menstrual leave policy is essential for guiding future studies and policy development. A deeper understanding of these gaps can help design more effective and inclusive policies that support female employees and promote gender equality in the workplace.

### Objectives of the Study

This study aims to explore the current state of menstrual leave policies in India, examining their implementation, acceptance, and impact on employees and organizations. Specifically, it seeks to:

- Assess the impact of commute time on leave-taking behavior of women employees.
- Understand menstrual health challenges in the workplace.
- Evaluate leave preferences of women employees during menstruation.
- Analyze existing menstrual leave policies in India.
- Explore alternative workplace solutions.
- Examine male employees' perceptions of menstrual leave.
- Advocate for inclusive workplace policies.

### Review of Literature on Menstrual Leave Policy

#### Historical and Cultural Context

Menstruation has been a culturally sensitive topic, often surrounded by stigma and secrecy. In many cultures, including India, menstruation is considered a private matter, limiting discussions on menstrual health in public



and professional spheres (Bharadwaj & Patkar, 2004).

**Global Perspectives**

Menstrual leave policies vary significantly worldwide. Countries such as Japan, South Korea, and Indonesia have had menstrual leave policies for decades. Japan, for instance, introduced menstrual leave in 1947 under Article 68 of the Labor Standards Law (Ishii-Kuntz, 2008). In contrast, many Western countries do not have specific menstrual leave policies but focus on menstrual equity through access to menstrual health products and facilities (Bobel, 2019).

**Menstrual Leave in India**

India presents a unique case with varied responses to menstrual leave. The state of Bihar has been a pioneer in implementing menstrual leave for government employees since 1992 (Garg, 2020). Private companies like Zomato and Culture Machine have recently introduced similar policies, signaling a progressive shift in corporate attitudes (Joshi, 2020).

**Employee Perceptions and Experiences**

Studies reveal mixed perceptions regarding menstrual leave. While some female employees view it as a supportive measure that validates their health needs, others fear it might reinforce gender stereotypes or create workplace inequities.

**Economic and Productivity Considerations**

Proponents argue that menstrual leave can improve productivity by reducing presenteeism, while critics suggest that it could create an economic burden for employers and affect women’s career prospects.

**Policy Design and Implementation**

Successful menstrual leave policies require clear communication, employee education, and sensitivity training for managers. Organizations must balance flexibility with well-defined guidelines to ensure proper implementation and prevent misuse.

**Results Analysis and Key Findings**

The study analyzed various aspects of menstrual leave in India, based on a field survey conducted in 2023. The key findings are summarized below:

CATEGORY	FINDINGS (%)
Nature of Work	Government (58%), Private (42%)
Age Group	21-30 (10%), 31-40 (48%), 41-50 (32%), 50+ (10%)
Commute Time	<1 hour (27%), >1 hour (73%)
Painful Days per Cycle	3 days (55%), 2 days (35%), No pain (10%)
Preference for Unpaid Leave	Half-day (30%), Two days (20%), No leave required (10%)
Work from Home Preference	Yes (96%), No (4%)
Preference for Paid Leave	Yes (98%), No (2%)
Perception of Unmarried Men	Required (46%), Not Required (54%)
Perception of Married Men	Required (72%), Not Required (28%)
Source:Field Survey,2022.	



### Conclusion

The findings highlight the need for organizations to acknowledge and address the challenges faced by women employees during menstruation. The study suggests that long commute times increase the likelihood of women taking leave, and a significant number experience severe discomfort. While unpaid leave is currently the norm, there is a strong preference for paid menstrual leave. Given that such policies are not widely implemented in India's public and private sectors, alternative solutions, such as remote work options, may offer viable support. Additionally, perceptions of menstrual leave vary among men, with married men being more supportive than unmarried men. These insights emphasize the importance of inclusive workplace policies that prioritize employee well-being and gender equity.

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