

## Perceptions of Menstruation Leaves Between Genders among The Future Workforce

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**[Abstract]** The study aims to understand how Indian students perceive having menstruation leaves in the workplace. An exploratory study was carried out with a sample of 394 responses. A Chi square test and Levene's t-test were used. There is significant difference in the attitude of male and female respondents towards the perceived impact of menstrual pain on work. However, there is no significant perception gap between genders in the way they perceive pain related to menstruation, fairness to the other gender in having a leave policy, and overall support extended. Both genders perceived positive outcomes from having such leaves, but women were hesitant to use them. There is good amount of support seen to implement the leaves.

**[Keywords]** Menstruation leave policy, perception gap, women, future workforce

### Introduction

Inclusivity of women in the workplace is an issue in India, and menstruation is still viewed as taboo by many, so discussions on menstruation is limited. A study found that women who initiated such a topic were seen negatively and avoided (Roberts et al., 2002). Menstruation-related symptoms often cause women to have lowered productivity or even be absent from work in extreme cases. The concept of menstruation leaves came into existence through these issues. A bill was proposed in the Parliament in 2017 demanding two days of paid menstruation leave and better resting facilities in both public and private workspaces of India.

### Literature Review

Women today menstruate an average of 400 times in their entire lives, which is a much higher number than women in the past because of the reduced birth rate (Women's centre working towards lifting the taboo on menstruation, 2000). Studies suggest a growing need to have workplaces with adequate WASH (Water, Sanitation, and Hygiene) facilities and sufficient bathroom breaks (Latha, Jyothsna, & Belliappa, 2018). Increase in presentism due to menstrual symptoms is another factor. High levels of discomfort during work were noted among menstruating women (Schoep et al., 2019). Studies have shown that investing money on menstrual hygiene facilities reaps a fourfold benefit (Sommer et al., 2016). Work-related hazards also need equal consideration while framing menstruation policies to ensure safety and meet physical needs of menstruating women.

The menstruation leave is a unique policy that provides a paid leave apart from sick leaves; it is given to women with the intention of easing their discomfort when working during menstruation, helping them manage their symptoms better, reducing presenteeism and increasing productivity at work (Howard, 2018). Women displayed absenteeism in a detectable pattern of 28 days, which was attributed to their menstruation cycles, as a high degree of correlation was found between their absenteeism and the total number of sick leaves they took in comparison to men (Ichino & Moretti, 2016). Yet another perspective argued that reasons relating to menstruation accounted for very small percentages of the total leave time taken by women in a survey among bankers in Italy and teachers in the USA (Herrmann & Rockoff, 2012). A study found that a majority of women complained of pain that hampered their daily lives and functioning (La Rose, 2016).

Studies show that men are ready to excuse negative behaviors of women if it's due to menstruation. (Ruble et al., 1982), Some men perceive the symptoms to be more deteriorating than women perceive them to be (Ruble & Brooks-Gunn, 1979). However, most men presented a negative attitude towards menstruation (Clarke & Ruble, 1978). Men also displayed sympathy and support to menstruating women (Mason et al., 2017). Men also rated the irritability factor associated with menstruation to be less

than women did and said that menstrual symptoms weigh more over PMS symptoms in terms of impact on a woman (Brooks-Gunn & Ruble, 1986). There were also concerns over male superiors prioritizing women who don't take such leaves and perceiving them to be tough (Crocker, 2016)

Menstruating women tend to experience a variety of symptoms, and sufficient breaks need to be given during work hours to reduce their anxiety and stress levels (Nishikitani et al., 2017). Jobs that were highly stressful in nature also showed an impact by shortening the cycle duration, and stressful jobs were also linked to other menstrual abnormalities (Fenster et al., 1999). Stress can also be induced by other symptoms like migraines, headaches, and bloating, which can occur either before, during, or after periods (Weiss et al., 2008). A conflicting perspective shows that women reported no disturbance in performing intellectual tasks during menstruation (Wister et al., 2013). A disassociation was seen between menstrual dysfunction and high stress jobs (Fenster et al., 1999). Thirty percent of women in a Vietnamese factory who complained of fatigue also experienced irregular menstruation (Matsuda et al., 1997). Studies found that a woman's pain is perceived to be associated more with anxiety than with actual physical pain she may experience. Women were also found to experience pain for a longer period of time and more intensely than men (George, 2018). This becomes particularly important to note with the rise in menstruation-related disorders. Over 5.3 hours of work loss across the span of one week period was noted among women with endometriosis (Soliman et al., 2017). It not only causes physical stress but also causes mental stress to a large extent (McCook et al., 2005).

Studies have shown that most negative moods experienced by women are associated with menstruation (Zaka & Mahmood, 2012). There are a host of symptoms that include, but are not restricted to, cramps, body aches, nausea, weakness, disability to concentrate, irritation, and so on (Langley, 1988). The first step to properly address this issue lies in understanding that menstruation is an experience unique to women and that it needs special care. Active attempts are needed to destigmatize it (Johnston-Robledo & Chrisler, 2013). Menstruation products like sanitary pads must be made readily available in workplaces. Women are unable to have open conversations about their periods due to such stigma (Bailey, 2017).

Japan initially provided such leaves of 1-3 days to "protect fertility of women" (Molony, 1995). Interestingly, many women were hesitant to use these leaves, and only 50% used them (Studies, 2019). Many South Asian countries like Taiwan, South Korea, and Indonesia have followed suit, especially emphasizing textile workers, and have provided up to 3 days of additional leave. Companies often make women feel victimized by asking them to "prove" their need for the leave, which is also one of the biggest barriers that prevents the usage of these leaves (The New Vision, 2018). In another study on perceptions about menstrual leaves in the USA, 42% of 600 participants in a study said they'd support a leave policy. However, 49.3% of participants said the policy would have negative effects (Barnack-Tavlaris et al., 2019).

### **Objectives of Study**

1. To understand the difference between genders in the way they perceive menstruation and menstruation leave policies in workplaces.
2. To look for possible future implications of such leaves in the Indian workplace based on current perceptions.
3. To analyze the shift in perceptions between previous literature and the current study.

### **Research Methodology**

#### ***Participants***

At a 95% confidence level and 5% confidence interval, the required sample size was estimated to be 384 using Krejcie and Morgan's method. Simple random sampling was used, and 394 responses were collected through online questionnaires. Data was collected in two stages. A pilot study was done with 105 responses, following which some edits were made, and the final data collection was carried out. Respondents were from the following streams of study: science (31.6%), commerce and management (55.7%), arts and humanities (10.7%), law (1%) and architecture (1%). Of the respondents, 34.6% were male, and 65.4% were female. Overall, participants were 17-23 years of age; the majority of them were 18-21 years old (75.6%). Respondents were spread across 22 states; however, they were predominantly from

Southern states.

### *Scales of Measurement*

A quantitative survey questionnaire with a total of 23 questions was designed with close-ended questions. A 5-point Likert scale (ranging from 1=Strongly disagree, 2=Disagree, 3=Neutral, 4= Agree, 5= Strongly agree) and checklist method was used for symptoms experienced. The questions were based on variables, namely demography, attitude towards the policy, and perception gaps between genders.

### **Findings and Discussions**

Reliability testing indicated a Cronbach  $\alpha$  value of .767 > 0.6, indicating high internal consistency of constructs used and being fit for further statistical analysis. The main symptoms female respondents said they experienced were abdominal cramps (51.5%), moodiness (50.1%), back and body aches (47.1%), physical exhaustion and lethargy (39.7%), and headache (19.3%). However, when male respondents were included to find the symptom that was perceived to be most deteriorating to a woman, it was abdominal cramping (49.4%) and physical exhaustion (18.6%). Of the men, 89.7% believed that blue collar, labor intensive workers needed this policy more than knowledge workers. Only 28% of the respondents were aware of such a policy. Eighty-one male respondents to the study highly support a menstruation leave policy in the workplace. Of the female respondents, 171 highly support a menstruation leave policy. Thus, it is very clear that 64.1 per cent of the respondents support a menstruation leave policy in the workplace.

*Table 1*

*The Mean Difference in the Perception of Menstruation Leave Policy in the Work Place Among the Gender of the Respondents*

Group Statistics					
Variable	Gender	Mean	N	Std. Deviation	Std. Error of Mean
Impact of Menstrual pain on work	Male	3.96	136	0.842	0.072
	Female	3.77	257	0.89	0.056
	Total	3.84	393	0.877	0.044
Menstruation periods are painful and deteriorating	Male	4.01	136	0.821	0.07
	Female	3.82	257	0.975	0.061
	Total	3.89	393	0.927	0.047
Supporting menstruation leave policy	Male	4.35	136	0.961	0.082
	Female	4.47	257	0.906	0.057
	Total	4.43	393	0.926	0.047
Impact of implementing menstruation leave policy in Indian workplace	Male	3.81	136	1.092	0.094
	Female	3.77	257	1.064	0.066
	Total	3.78	393	1.073	0.054
Unfair to men to have menstruation leave for policy for women	Male	3.5	136	1.148	0.098
	Female	3.4	257	1.195	0.075
	Total	3.44	393	1.179	0.059
Hesitancy to use menstruation leave policy	Male	3.37	136	1.173	0.101
	Female	3.35	257	1.303	0.081
	Total	3.36	393	1.258	0.063

On Table 1, the mean difference of 3.96 for male respondents and 3.77 for female respondents indicated that both male and female respondents feel that menstrual pain will be very high during work. The mean value of 4.01 and 3.82 indicated that there is a difference in the perception of how respondents feel the pain of menstruation. Both genders perceived that menstruation is highly painful and deteriorating. The mean value of 3.81 and 3.77 indicated that both genders perceive the implementation of a menstrual leave policy in a positive way, and there are no differences among them. Again, the mean value of 3.50 and 3.40, too, indicate that both genders perceive it fair to have a menstrual leave policy for women. The mean values of 3.37 and 3.35 indicate that women will be hesitant to avail themselves of such a policy in the workplace. It also found that 354 respondents, constituting 90% of the overall population, feel that blue collar workers or employees of labor-intensive organizations need a menstruation leave policy in the workplace.

**Test of Hypothesis**

*Table 1  
Significant Difference in The Perception of Menstruation Leave Policy in the Workplace*

Independent Samples Test										
Variables		Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		t-test for Equality of Means						
		F	Sig.	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
									Lower	Upper
In your opinion, how much impact does menstrual pain have on work	Equal variances assumed	4.305	<b>.039</b>	1.959	391	.051	.182	.093	-.001	.364
	Equal variances not assumed			1.993	288.670	<b>.047</b>	.182	.091	.002	.361
How painful and deteriorating do you think periods are?	Equal variances assumed	12.241	<b>.001</b>	1.861	391	.063	.182	.098	-.010	.375
	Equal variances not assumed			1.962	318.108	<b>.051</b>	.182	.093	-.001	.365
How supportive would you be of the policy?	Equal variances assumed	1.582	<b>.209</b>	-1.276	391	<b>.203</b>	-.125	.098	-.318	.068
	Equal variances not assumed			-1.253	261.238	.211	-.125	.100	-.322	.072
If implemented, what impact do you think the policy would have in Indian	Equal variances assumed	.060	<b>.807</b>	.371	391	<b>.711</b>	.042	.114	-.182	.266
	Equal variances not assumed			.368	268.963	.713	.042	.115	-.184	.268

workplaces?										
How unfair would such a policy would be to men?	Equal variances assumed	.341	<b>.560</b>	.794	391	<b>.428</b>	.099	.125	-.147	.345
	Equal variances not assumed			.803	284.813	.422	.099	.124	-.144	.342
How hesitant do you think women will be to use such a policy?	Equal variances assumed	3.854	<b>.050</b>	.131	391	<b>.896</b>	.017	.134	-.245	.280
	Equal variances not assumed			.135	301.197		.017	.129	-.237	.272

The independent sample t-test was used to test the following hypothesis:

- **H<sub>01</sub>:** There is no significant difference in perception on the impact of menstruation pain on work among male and female respondents. An independent sample test was used to test the hypothesis. From Table 2, it is found that the significance (sig.) of Levene's test for equality of variance related to the impact of menstrual pain on work is 0.039, and the relevant value of sig. (2-tailed) under the t-test for equality of means is 0.047, which is lower than 0.05. Therefore, the null hypothesis is rejected.
- **H<sub>02</sub>:** There is no significant difference in perception on menstruation being painful and deteriorating among male and female respondents. The significance (sig) of Levene's test for equality of variance related to menstruation being painful and deteriorating is 0.001, and the relevant value of sig. (2-tailed) under the t-test for equality of means is 0.051, which is higher than 0.05. Therefore, the null hypothesis is accepted.
- **H<sub>03</sub>:** There is no significant difference in perception on supporting menstruation leave policy in the workplace among male and female respondents. The significance of Levene's test for equality of variance related to supporting a menstruation leave policy is .209, and the relevant value of sig (2-tailed) under the t-test for equality of means is .203, which is greater than .05, so the null hypothesis is accepted.
- **H<sub>04</sub>:** There is no significant difference in perception on the impact of a menstruation leave policy on the work among male and female respondents. The significance (sig) of Levene's test for equality of variance related to the impact of a menstruation leave policy on the work is .809, and the relevant value of sig (2-tailed) under the t-test for equality of means is 0.711, which is greater than 0.05, so the null hypothesis is accepted.
- **H<sub>05</sub>:** There is no significant difference in perception of a menstruation leave policy being unfair to men among the male and female respondents. The significance (sig) of Levene's test for equality of variance related to perceiving a menstruation leave policy being unfair to men is 0.560 and the relevant value of sig (2-tailed) under the t-test for equality of means is 0.428, which is greater than 0.05, so the null hypothesis is accepted.
- **H<sub>06</sub>:** There is no significant difference in perception of women hesitating to use a menstruation leave policy among the male and female respondents. The significance (sig) of Levene's test for equality of variance related to women hesitating to use a menstruation leave policy is .050, and the relevant value of sig (2-tailed) under the t-test for equality of mean is 0.428, which is greater than 0.05, so the null hypothesis is accepted.

### Theoretical and Managerial Implications

The first contribution is that there is significant difference in the attitude of male and female respondents towards perceiving the impact of menstrual pain on work. Men perceived menstruation pain to

be more painful and deteriorating than did women. They were also more empathetic towards menstruating women and perceived a higher impact on work than women did. This becomes particularly important in the modern workplace that is highly gender diverse. Results imply that both men and women see fairness in the policy, perceived positive outcomes, and they stated that they'd support the policy equally, which is likely to result in greater support in implementation stages. This is indicative of men becoming more open to understanding the experiences of menstruation, women becoming a more significant part of the organization, and women having a greater level of presence in daily functioning. With the rise of menstrual disorders, menstruation is hindering women from working normally. This will directly result in greater labor participation by women and enhanced workplace experiences.

With a similar continuing trend, it is highly likely that more organizations will be willing to adopt a menstruation leave policy and will have less resistance from men, as well. A member of Parliament from the state of Arunachal Pradesh in India had tabled the Menstruation Benefit Bill at the Indian Parliament in 2017, and the bill is still under consideration (Bhalla, 2017). The state of Bihar in India has been offering two days of leave in government jobs since 1992. The acceptance of the policy itself will be largely based on the existing socio-cultural systems, and the inclusion of such factors is necessary to assess the need and success of the policy (Roberts et al., 2002).

The second contribution is that women are hesitant to use such leaves even if they're made available. This is the true challenge that organizations will have to overcome for successful implementation. This is the one factor that has not seen much change from the past data. Many women have been bought up around social taboos and regressive notions around menstruation, especially among the lower income groups, which often leads them to believe that it's an extremely private matter and that it would bring shame on them to discuss it in an organizational setting. Women will also feel victimized if improper implementation will require them to justify taking such leaves. Women also fear that they will be harassed by their male counterparts for the same reason. Despite increasing support from men, the smooth implementation of the policy in India will remain a challenge.

The findings highly contrast from all previous studies in which there were highly significant differences between the perceptions among genders. Men now acknowledge the pain associated with menstruation and make attempts at empathizing with women. This trend is a result of increased awareness among genders about menstruation and becoming more sensitive to the experiences of the opposite gender. It can also be linked to the de-stigmatization and larger acceptance of menstruation as a normal biological process. The results suggest that the level of knowledge about the policy itself is very low and is more likely to be adopted among labor intensive, blue collar workers.

### Conclusion

There is a clear shift in the way perceptions about menstruation have changed over the years, going from a very conservative view in the past to more inclusive and progressive views now. As India's workforce is growing at a rapid pace, the need for more progressive human resource policies is higher than ever before. This need for the policy becomes strengthened given the low labor participation of women over the years. There is always a debate on how fair it would be to men in having such a policy. Since the study is inclusive of both genders, it gives a more reliable and holistic picture. It points out, further, that the scope of understanding factors that will reduce hesitance to use menstrual leaves among women. The need for such leaves is urgent, especially among women in the labor-intensive sector, who often lack adequate access to basic facilities to work through menstruation.

Underlying reasons can be mapped to increase in gender sensitization, viewing menstruation as an experience unique to women and not from an androcentric perspective. However certain issues are likely to persist, namely fear of reverse discrimination, lack of awareness about the policy, and the policy's implications or the general lack of understanding of menstruation. The practice of promoting such a policy will redefine employee welfare, which is one of the prime goals of human resource managers today. It will act as a step towards empowering women to break the glass ceilings that exist and progress further. Proper legislation is needed to facilitate smooth implementation of the policy itself and achieve its true objectives.

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