



MENSTRUAL LEAVE TO WOMEN - GS I AND II MAINS

Q. Paid menstruation leave raises legitimate concerns about productivity, gender stereotypes, and administrative difficulties. Critically analyse the statement in the light of recent demands. (15 marks, 250 words)

News: *Recognise 'this leave' as a woman's right*

What's in the news?

- Sometimes, elections throw up an acceptance of and solutions to deeply institutionalised gender biases and discrimination against women.

Key takeaways:

- In the run-up to the general election 2024, the election manifesto of the ruling political party in Tamil Nadu, the Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam (DMK), has made a promise (under the topic "Women's welfare") that the "DMK will insist that the Union government enact a law providing menstrual leave to women, emphasizing the journey towards gender equality."
- This promise has been made after a debate in the 17th Lok Sabha, in December 2023, on menstrual leave, but with no outcome.

Menstrual Leave:

- Menstrual leave, also known as period leave, encompasses all policies permitting employees or students to take time off due to menstrual pain or discomfort. In workplace contexts, it pertains to policies facilitating either paid or unpaid leave or designated time for rest.

Need for Menstrual Leave Policies:

- The pain lasts for a couple of days a month for some and for others the pain hampers daily activities and productivity. It was estimated that employees lost around 8.9 days' worth of productivity every year due to menstrual-cycle related issues.
- In India, 20% of menstruators have PCOS and approximately 25 million suffer from endometriosis.

Significance of Paid Menstrual Leave:

1. Addresses Health Concerns:

- Menstrual cramps and other symptoms can significantly impact productivity and well-being.
- Paid leave allows employees to manage their health without financial penalty.

2. Reduces Stigma:

- Openly discussing menstruation can be challenging.
- Paid leave normalizes periods and reduces workplace stigma, fostering a more inclusive environment.



3. Increases Employee Retention and Satisfaction:

- Paid leave demonstrates employer empathy and support, leading to higher employee satisfaction and reduced turnover.

4. Promotes Gender Equality:

- By addressing a biological reality specific to women, paid leave helps level the playing field and reduce gender-based disadvantages in the workplace.

5. Boosts Economic Participation:

- Paid leave allows women to maintain their earning potential and contribute more fully to the economy.

Concerns of Paid Menstrual Leave:

1. Potential for Abuse:

- Some argue employees might misuse the leave for non-menstrual purposes, creating administrative challenges and unfairness to others.

2. Cost Burden on Employers:

- Implementing paid leave adds to payroll costs, potentially impacting small businesses disproportionately.

3. Reinforces Gender Stereotypes:

- Linking leave to menstruation might perpetuate the idea that women are inherently less reliable or productive.

4. Potentially Discriminatory:

- Excluding men from similar leave policies could be seen as discriminatory, leading to resentment and legal challenges.

5. Logistical Challenges:

- Defining and verifying menstrual leave could be complex and intrusive, raising privacy concerns.

Global Practices:

1. Spain:

- Spain recently became the first European country to grant paid menstrual leave to workers.

2. Japan:

- Japan introduced menstrual leave as part of labour law in 1947. However, as per a recent study, less than 0.9% of the women had actually taken leave.



3. Indonesia:

- It introduced a policy in 1948 which said that workers experiencing menstrual pain are not obliged to work on the first two days of their cycle.

4. Philippines:

- Workers are permitted two days of menstrual leave a month.

5. Taiwan:

- It has an Act of Gender Equality in Employment. The act says employees have the right to request a day off as period leave every month, at half their regular wage.

6. There are **other countries** that allow menstrual leave like the United Kingdom, South Korea, Zambia, China and Wales. However, the U.S does not have a formal menstrual leave policy.

7. **Private Companies** like Nike and Coexist have introduced menstrual leave as an internal policy.

Paid menstruation leave raises legitimate concerns about productivity, gender stereotypes, and administrative difficulties even while it has the potential to improve the well-being of women in the workforce and advance gender equality. In light of these considerations, any choice to enact menstrual leave rules should be thoroughly reviewed and customized to the unique requirements and circumstances of both employers and employees.