# Need for Menstrual Leave in India

## Why in news?

The menstrual leave policy has been criticized for its short-sightedness in acknowledging the lasting impact it could have on the overall physical and mental wellness of citizens.

## What are menstrual leaves?

- Menstrual leave refers to a specific form of time off for those who experience period pains.
- It recommends that workers be given leave from work while menstruating, just as they would for any illness.
- These leaves are not covered and are taken in addition to the usual sick leaves provided to all employees.
- In India, there is **no legislative provision** for menstrual leave.

## How menstruation is neglected and tabooed?

- In India, menstruation is considered a taboo with **notions of purity and pollution**.
- Misinformation, superstitions, societal restrictions and poor access to sanitation facilities and menstrual products are all apparent indicators of the country's reality and levels of neglect.
- Due to the neglection, menstrual hygiene continues to be one of the most neglected issues that Indian women face.
- In a country where more than 355 million women are in the menstrual age, more than 75% of them use an old cloth during periods instead of safer and hygiene methods.

## What is the need for menstrual leave?

- **Health** - In India, 20% of menstruators have PCOS and approximately 25 million suffer from endometriosis.
- **Disturbance to profession** - Many women advocate paid menstrual leave due to the excruciating pain and disturbance to professional responsibilities that period pain causes.
- **Opportunity for women to speak up** - Menstrual leave could be an opportunity for women to speak up about their menstrual cycle and to receive treatment for health issues related to it.
- **Humane working conditions** - It was not that women needed rest while menstruating, it was just the lack of humane working conditions that made labour movements push for menstrual leaves.

## What are the debates against the menstrual leave?

- **Fear of bias in hiring -** The introduction of mandatory paid maternity leave may lead to a bias in hiring due to the financial costs to employers.
- **Labour force participation of women** – The biased hiring may lead to the decline in the labour force participation of women.
- **Health complications** - In Maharashtra's Beed district, contractors in the sugarcane industry do not hire anyone who menstruates compelling more than 10,000 female sugarcane cutters to surgically remove their uteri to secure work.
- **Human rights violation** - They are now experiencing various post-surgery health complications which is equated to the human rights violation.

## What steps were taken in this regard?

### Government initiatives

- The **Menstruation Benefits Bill, 2018** which stipulates 2 days of menstrual leave and better rest facilities at the workplace is yet to receive assent.
- **Kerala -** The Kerala government recently announced that it will grant menstrual leave to female students at state universities.
- **Bihar-** Bihar is offering 2 days of menstrual leave a month since 1992.

### Private initiatives

- Mumbai-based companies, Gozoop and Culture Machine, became the first private companies in 2017 to introduce the first day of period (FOP) leave in India.
- Zomato has introduced menstrual leaves for up to 10 days a year for its women and transgender employees.
- Swiggy and Byju's have also introduced similar policies.

### International initiatives

- **Soviet Russia** - In the 1920s and 30s, Soviet Russia relieved menstruating women from paid labour to safeguard their reproductive health, thus originating the idea of formal menstrual leave policy.
- **Japan** - In 1920s, labour unions in Japan popularised the concept that has stood for more than 70 years now.

## What is the need of the hour?

- Menstrual leave can easily allow a woman to **work from home** and work on her own terms, and at her own comfort and flexibility.
- It will in fact increase the productivity of the employee during this time rather than reduce it.
- Considering the sizable population of menstruators in India who face stigma, period leave cannot be dismissed anymore as a foreign concept.
- It is a pivotal step in ensuring proper **reproductive health equity** in India.

**References**


1. The Indian Express| No-room-for-debate-on-menstrual-leave
2. Deccan Herald | The case for a menstrual leave policy


