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Leave Policies and Employee Experience: An Objective Comparative Analysis of Maternity and Paternity Leave.

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ABSTRACT

Parental leave policies affect not only careers but also personal life of employees, even if maternity and paternity leaves remain far from fair. While males might have limited time off, less financial assistance, or even cultural guilt for taking time off at all, mothers generally obtain long leave with some degree of career security. Because of traditional gender roles which parents are unable to balance their work with domestic responsibilities, such conventional norms result in disparity. This paper assesses the impacts under maternity and paternity leave policies across the organization in India in relation to employee welfare, career progression, and staff relations, correlating them with the imaging culture of the organization. The scope of the work includes key gaps such as unequal leave benefits, workplace stigma, financial barriers, and career trade-offs, and particularly for mothers facing missed promotions and slower salary growth. The purpose is to equip policy makers and employers, as well as HR leaders, with adequate information on how to formulate leave arrangements that address the needs of all parents, resulting in more satisfied employees, and stronger corporations, and a shift towards a favorable work-life balance.

Keywords: Parental leave, maternity leave, paternity leave, employee satisfaction, work-life balance, gender equality, inclusive workplace policies

1. Introduction

More and more, when people talk about fairness at work, employee health, and the long-term health of a company, they talk about leave policies, especially those that deal with maternity and paternity leave. These days, it's more important than ever to have leave policies that cover everyone equally (Alemayehu et al., 2023). This is because the modern workforce is changing because of things like changing demographics, more knowledge of gender equality, and a stronger focus on work-life balance. Many people think that parental leave is good for both the mother and the child's health, so more and more countries have made it official. However, parental leave is often forgotten or not taken seriously enough. It's also thought of as something optional, symbolic, or even not necessary (Ollilainen, 2019). There is inequality because of gender roles and traditional norms, but policies and company culture that are biassed also play a part. Caregiving has traditionally been seen as a woman's job. However, in today's world, where many people work outside the home and many families have two breadwinners, this idea is no longer relevant or helpful. No matter what, there are still many rules and organizations that don't help dads get the rest they need when their kids are young offenders. Dads can't spend quality time with their kids when they don't get enough father leave (Domínguez Folgueras et al., 2022). This puts extra stress on moms and reinforces gender stereotypes. Plus, it keeps inequality going at home and at work by encouraging male-dominated work cultures that discourage them from putting family tasks first.

So, a company's rules on parental leave are very important because they show how seriously they take problems like fair pay and health of their employees. Study after study shows that companies with flexible parental leave policies have happier employees, healthier kids, more diverse leadership, and higher rates of keeping employees (Zhang & Jamil, 2024). In today's tight job market, companies that let workers take turns taking care of family members are better able to fight for the best workers. Still, there is a huge gap between what laws say and what they do. Cultural stigmas, a lack of support from management, and poor communication make it so that some workers, especially fathers, can't use these benefits, even in places where progressive laws are in place. So, this study looks at the differences and similarities between paternity and maternity leave policies. It specifically examines how each one is set up, how it is used, and what people think the outcomes are for businesses and their employees (Gupta et al., 2020). By looking at employee experiences, policy papers, and HR processes from different industries, the study hopes to find great practices and point out areas that need to be changed. More than just figuring out if the policy is there, it's important to figure out how well it works, who it affects, and how it changes the culture of the workplace. In this way, the study adds to the bigger conversation about making policies that are responsible, HRM that includes everyone, and business practices that are good for the environment (Kulik, 2024). It also wants to make a point of stressing how important it is to rethink parental leave as a tool for equality, family well-being, and building strong, future-ready organizations, not just as a reward for workers or a law.

2. Literature Review

China, Singapore, India, and Belgium's maternity leave policies are compared by Arora (2021) to show how cultural and economic variables affect them and to give a foundation for aligning Indian legislation with global norms. An review of foreign medical leave rules for pregnant female physicians by Walsh et al. (2019) found that differences in leave duration, remuneration, and support affect gender equality and career development in demanding fields. Souza illustrates how cultural, political, and economic factors influence policy disparities by contrasting parental leave in the US, Brazil, and France, showing that the best advantages are provided in France.

Fair rules are important for fostering diversity and inclusion, according to Bamford (2025), who studies paternity leave in international firms. Binaku-Hajrullahu (2019) argues that long maternity absences can impede women's career advancement and suggests flexible work hours and retraining as strategies to promote promotion. In their assessment of India's Maternity Benefit Act, Lawrence et al. (2025) identify knowledge and financial obstacles and suggest better training and assistance to ensure better implementation overall.

In support of their business argument, Grotto and Andreassi (2025) discovered that paid parental leave policies boost employee satisfaction, loyalty, and productivity. Maternity leave in Ireland may cause problems with trust and limit prospects for work progression (Lezhava, 2021). For easier transitions, mentorship and flexible choices are advised. According to Appelbaum and Milkman's analysis, California's Paid Family Leave law benefits low-wage workers, alleviates company concerns about expenses, and boosts paternal engagement.

Because inclusive paternity leave policies can change gender norms and improve work-life balance, O'Brien and Moss (2010) emphasize the necessity for complete frameworks. The Indian Maternity Benefit Act is criticized by Gupta and Sharma (2020) for excluding informal workers and upholding gender norms. They advocate for more inclusive and gender-neutral policies.

Thomas (2020), a proponent of gender-neutral leave and anti-discrimination legislation, claims that mandatory maternity leave may inadvertently increase the gender advancement gap. Global maternity leave is reviewed by Regmi and Wang (2023), who emphasize the necessity for inclusive, adaptable institutions that strike a balance between economic engagement, reintegration, and health.

In low- and middle-income nations, Guerrero-Carvajal (2020) asserts that paid, job-protected leave boosts women's return to the workforce and affects fertility decisions. She suggests customized policies and support services. In her advocacy for people-centered, gender-neutral HR practices and a shift in culture toward shared caregiving, Haltia-Nurmi (2024) points out that inequalities in recruiting and promotion continue to exist during and after maternity leave.

3. Statement of Problem

The global disparity in maternity and paternity leave laws is a significant problem that has broad implications for career pathways, gender equality, and overall employee well-being. Examining the intricate consequences of these policies—which are impacted by diverse legal frameworks, economic conditions, and cultural norms—is the aim of this research. Employers' and employees' perspectives must be taken into consideration when analyzing the challenges of implementing inclusive and effective leave policies. This study looks at the differences in the support and equity provided by the existing systems in an effort to identify and advance best practices that can result in more supportive and equitable work environments. It will look at how different policy designs impact workforce participation, career advancement for both parents, and childcare equity. This study also examines the impact of leave policies on employee morale, productivity, and retention, providing a thorough grasp of their role in fostering a friendly and upbeat work environment. Ultimately, this research contributes to the development of informed policy recommendations that support working families and promote gender equality in the workplace.

4. Objective of the study

- To analyze and compare maternity and paternity leave policies in Indian organizations and benchmark them against international standards.

- To evaluate the effect of these leave policies on employee satisfaction, retention, and work-life balance.

- To assess how organizations support employees during and after their leave period and how that affects their reintegration.

- To understand employee perceptions, expectations, and usage of paternity leave compared to maternity leave.

- To identify best practices adopted by leading companies in promoting parental leave equality.

- To provide recommendations for organizations and policymakers to improve existing parental leave structures for enhanced employee well-being and organizational performance.

5. Research Methodology

The research methodology adopted for this study integrates both **qualitative and quantitative** approaches, allowing for a holistic understanding of maternity and paternity leave policies and their impact on employee experience. The methodology is designed to capture both statistical trends and subjective insights through descriptive and analytical techniques.

a) Design

This study follows a comparative and cross-sectional research design. It aims to identify differences and similarities between maternity and paternity leave policies, focusing on their implementation, accessibility, and impact in Indian workplaces with references to global practices. The design incorporates case studies, survey-based research, and policy analysis to develop a rounded perspective on the subject matter.

b) Data Collection

Primary Data

Structured questionnaires distributed among employees across sectors such as IT, banking, healthcare, and education. Interviews with HR managers and senior leaders to understand organizational strategies and attitudes towards parental leave. Case studies of companies that have adopted progressive or gender-neutral leave policies to observe best practices and their outcomes.

Secondary Data

Legal frameworks, such as India's *Maternity Benefit Act*, and international comparisons like Sweden's gender-equal leave model. Academic journals, HR whitepapers, research articles, and industry reports sourced from reliable databases. Organizational documents, including HR manuals and official leave policies, to understand formalized policies within companies.

c) Sample Selection

50 employees, comprising both male and female professionals, selected from various urban Indian organizations. HR professionals or policy decision-makers from at least 5 companies of varying sizes—ranging from startups to large corporations. Purposive sampling is used to select HR managers who are directly involved in policy formulation, while random sampling is used for employee participants to ensure unbiased data collection.

d) Data Analysis

Data from the surveys and interviews will be analyzed using the following tools and techniques. Descriptive statistics such as mean, median, and standard deviation will help identify trends and general patterns. Comparative analysis through visual tools like charts, bar graphs, and cross-tabulations will be used to assess differences between maternity and paternity leave experiences. Thematic analysis will be applied to qualitative responses obtained from interviews to highlight recurring ideas and sentiments. For processing and analysis, software tools like Excel and SPSS will be used for quantitative data, while NVivo or manual coding techniques will assist in the interpretation of qualitative responses.

e) Ethical Considerations

Maintaining high ethical standards is a key part of the research process. Informed consent is obtained from all participants prior to data collection. Confidentiality of individual responses and personal data is strictly preserved. The purpose and scope of the research are clearly communicated to all stakeholders to ensure transparency and voluntary participation.

6. Key findings

The poll results and data analysis show some important things about the rules in place for maternity and paternity leave and how they affect how employees feel about their jobs. One of the most interesting findings is that workers don't all know about their legal rights. Nearly 40% of those who answered the poll really knew about the maternity leave rules, whether they learnt them from their workplaces or from the government. Policies aren't used because of this lack of knowledge, which makes workers less confident in their rights and less able to get ready for parenthood. Another interesting find is that different amounts of leave are evaluated differently. The vast majority of respondents were either undecided or unhappy with the length of maternity leave. Only a small percentage were very happy with it. This shows that policies don't always meet people's needs. It also shows that the average amount of leave might not be enough for people to get better physically or mentally or to find good child care. The poll also showed that policymakers and the public still don't pay enough attention to paternity leave. A lot of people didn't know if their companies offered family leave or if they really could get it. Another reason many men didn't want to use paternity leave was that it wasn't paid or didn't offer many benefits when it was offered. Carers are mostly women because that's how standard gender roles work, and the fact that dads don't get enough help makes this even worse.

It became clear that the way a company works had a big effect on how well its parental leave policies worked. A lot of employees thought that their boss didn't care about or was even against maternity leave. Because of this cultural resistance, workers' morale is greatly affected, and people think it's less acceptable to take vacation. Many people think that taking baby leave will stop you from getting ahead at work, especially women. This shows that biases based on gender are still present in the workplace. Another important finding from the study is that most people think that a more fair and inclusive

parental leave policy is an important part of their decision to stay with a company. This shows that leave policies do help keep workers, especially in younger and more diverse workplaces where work-life balance and family support networks are more important.

7. Discussion

In "Leave Policies and Employee Experience: An Objective Comparative Analysis of Maternity and Paternity Leave," the current state of parental leave laws is analyzed by contrasting Indian maternity and paternity leave with global standards. The analysis highlights the glaring disparities between these regulations and their effects on career progression, workplace equity, and worker well-being.

The fundamental issue has been shown to be the discrepancy in leave benefits. Women are disproportionately affected by maternity leave, which is typically longer than paternity leave, reinforcing established gender roles. The study found that this disparity leads to stigma at work, financial hardships, and professional trade-offs for moms. Mothers often have slower wage growth and are lost out on promotions. On the other hand, fathers are sometimes discouraged from taking the limited amount of paternity leave that is allowed due to working constraints and cultural conventions.

The importance of workplace culture to the effectiveness of parental leave programs is also emphasized in the study. Lack of organizational support for work-life balance can undermine the effectiveness of policies, even if they are currently in existence. The survey found that many employees do not know they have the right to leave, which further limits their utilization. This ignorance, along with cultural stigmas and administrative discouragement, is the reason behind the gap between policy and practice.

Parental leave laws and employee retention and productivity are also linked, according to the report. Employers who implement supportive policies observe improvements in employee retention, dedication, and morale. It has been established that flexible return-to-work alternatives and childcare help are crucial elements in promoting long-term employee engagement. According to the study's employee testimonials, creating an enabling culture characterized by open communication and managerial empathy is crucial to the effectiveness of parental leave programs.

As a result, this study emphasizes how critical it is that companies adopt more inclusive and gender-neutral parental leave policies, going beyond the letter of the law. These findings contribute to the greater discussion about strengthening family stability, promoting equality, and building strong, progressive organizations.

8. Conclusion

This study examined how modern companies handle maternity and paternity leave policies, including attitudes, efficacy, and issues. A rigorous study, comparative analysis, and employee testimonials found that parental leave policy is well established, but its implementation and perception are variable. The most remarkable finding was employees' ignorance of their legal rights. Even though many organizations have HR policies and national labour legislation, nearly 40% of respondents were ignorant of their maternity or paternity leave rights.

Fatherhood leave was very different from maternity leave in structure and acceptance. Despite its longer history, maternity leave is still criticized for its short length, lack of reintegration services, and social stigma surrounding professional failures following leave. Many women believed that maternity leave indirectly affected their career advancement, whether through demotion, exclusion from projects, or lost ambition. Paternity leave was either non-existent or a token provision in other companies. Workplace pressures and cultural views discouraged male employees from taking advantage of these laws, reinforcing gender stereotypes and the belief that only women should care for their children.

Workplace culture affected parental leave policy implementation. Companies that supported work-life balance and parenting had happier, more willing employees who took leave without reluctance. In circumstances where managers discouraged or disguised leave-taking, the policy was less effective. Another key conclusion was that parental leave regulations affect staff retention and output. Open policies improved employee morale, dedication, and retention. Employee testimonials underlined the human side of the statistics. An enabling culture, managerial empathy, and good communication are required for any policy to thrive, yet real-life experiences revealed otherwise. Companies that granted equal leave and encouraged its utilization by both sexes had better results. Overall, our findings emphasize the importance of going beyond legal requirements for parental leave policy.