



ORIGINAL RESEARCH PAPER

Management

AWARENESS, PERCEPTIONS, GAPS OF MATERNITY BENEFITS OF WORKING MOTHERS IN MEDIA, IT AND AVIATION SECTORS: AN OPINION BASED STUDY IN KOLKATA

KEY WORDS: awareness, crèche facility, equal treatment, paid maternity leave, work from home.

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ABSTRACT

Pregnancy and maternity both phases are very susceptible for working mothers and also their families. Special care and precaution is always required for nursing and expecting mothers for not only protecting their own health but also the health of their newborns. Adequate rest pre and post-delivery need to be provided so that they can take care of themselves and their baby. Health of working mothers is always a concern for society as it has a social interest that leads to enactment of various legislation regarding maternity benefits everywhere across all countries. On the other hand, simultaneously they need protection regarding job retention during motherhood phase. Thus, working mothers availing maternity benefits, both their health and job need to be taken care of by the government and also the organization so that they can raise their child stress-free. Work environment devoid of discrimination, equal opportunity and treatment without any gender biases will help to motivate them to join workforce. No doubt from earlier women workforce participation rate has increased but not remarkably, only change has been noticed in urban area. The present study is based on primary data collected from 300 respondents from Kolkata. For this purpose, 300 working mothers from three sectors like IT, Media and Aviation, were interviewed personally and responses were recorded. The aim of the study is to find out whether all respondents has received amended maternity benefits as per government regulations in 2017 such as paid maternity leave, work from home, crèche facility and equal treatment post maternity. In addition, we tried to understand whether there is any correlation between respondents' work experience, level of education with their awareness regarding amended maternity benefits as per government norms. Finally, we attempted to uphold our observations regarding whether implementation of maternity benefits is actually enhancing working mothers' work performance or not.

INTRODUCTION

Any social, economic or industrial system which overlooks the capability, talents and viewpoints of working women, then the aim of increasing women workforce participation will always remain a dream. So it is necessary to provide equal opportunities and protection from injustice to female employees which actually will help in the growth of Indian economy as per the National Commission on Labour, 2002. 1

An 'equal society' as defined by Equalities Review 2 states that one which protects and promotes equal, real freedom and substantive opportunity to live in the ways people value and would choose, so that everyone can flourish.

'Each human life has a special kind of objective value' (Dworkin),³ he further expressed that if all are not treated equally it implies all are not valued equally by law of nature which again violates our basic human rights as stated in Article 1 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) that is 'all human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights'.⁴

Once Amartya Sen in his book, Identity and Violence⁵, aptly stated that all people in the world belong to a particular category based on some common social perception without any logic behind is very deadly. In the same way, at present time when we all are making debates and discussions on 'gender equality' and 'women empowerment', still society treats women as a child bearing machine to extend the legacy of family or a secondary source of income. Even if a woman to support her husband and family is working in any organization, still society's perception the primary duty of a woman is to carry out all household works, taking care of infants and the entire family. But this kind of perception still is not applicable for males.

With the change of time it has been seen that the government made certain necessary changes with the old law in order to secure social justice in the society. For this reason, government made subsequent changes in the Maternity

Benefit Act, 1961 through amendments and later it was implemented in April, MB Act, 2017 which is applicable all over India to any organization having more than 10 employees. The major changes made were from 12 weeks of maternity leave to 26 weeks of maternity leave. In addition, facilities like work from home, crèche facility for organizations having more than 50 employees, equal treatment post maternity and awareness regarding maternity benefits from employer's side. Primarily, women were not given that much importance in comparison to males but books like "A vindication of the rights of woman" by Wollstonecraft has created a positive image regarding working women.

Review Of Literature

The present study tries to find out that women working in IT, Media and Aviation sectors in different areas of Kolkata are actually getting the said current maternity benefits from their employers or not. For this purpose, the following research works has been reviewed. Behera. A & Mehra. A (2021) has analyzed in their article impact of maternity benefit laws on corporate sector. They mentioned in the study that 2017 amendment of Maternity Benefit Act was very much required to protect and enhance the position of women employees with their employers in today's competitive and vicious working environment. They tried to give an overview about importance of maternity benefits in corporate sector by identifying that it helps to increase the number of working women, motivated women to find jobs as they feel secure that their needs will be taking care of. Moreover, fear of losing job due to motherhood has disappeared as they are aware of paid leave and re-joining of job post maternity. As a result, many women work hard to get promotions during initial phase of motherhood to achieve success in their respective area of work. They opined that such progressive change will help the society to develop in true sense. Dowling. D et al. (2021) in their book 'Advice for working moms' narrated how working mothers by doing household work and being a care giver towards family resulted in sufferings of their career. As a working mother, they often have to do a lot of undesirable or

excessive work out of sheer necessity. Perception of employer and co-employees were working mothers give utmost importance to family than work. Moreover, preferring your career over child's school commitments and extra-curricular activities was actually depriving their loved ones in reality. Opinions of experts and working parents were analyzed which can help them to balance between work and family.

In other words, which means one can give priority to such things which are important in their life other than work. Desouza. N (2020) in his journal tried to discuss to major important issues like gender equality and women empowerment and try to analyze these issues in backdrop of common and traditional thinking and how the concepts are changing with the change in legislation implemented for women. He further tried to redefine 'equality' by holding views that encouragement should be given to working women in a compassionate way but not any kind of consolation in terms of 'equality'. Sharma. R (2020) in his journal expressed that no doubt that female participation in labour market brings out change in position of women both socially and economically. But when the question of social security and safety arises still the result is dissatisfactory. He explains the importance of maternity benefits, objective of such benefits from Government's point of view and also how it will help to enhance female worker's potentiality to maintain work and family life at the same time. Sumpter. D & Zanhour. M (2020) in their study tries to compare between workforce reduction of males and females. They observed that either female employees are going out of job or decreasing their working hours. They focused on challenges faced by working women in their daily lives like anxiety regarding job loss of her partner, balancing work and home at the same time and anxiety over kid's school decisions. In addition, they suggested some solutions related to specific challenges. Bala. S (2019) According to her, empowering a female actually lead to empowering the entire country' this workshop study shows collectively the distinct factors of perspectives from different stakeholder regarding changed maternity benefit provisions and its effect on employment of females. She mentioned that in India the maternity provisions aren't the most effective tool for maternity protection or benefit. In India there are different legislations that cover maternity benefits. Her observation showcased on loopholes, ambiguities and causes for the shortage of motivation to provide impact on maternity protection. Mathew. J (2019) tried to emphasize on the three major changes made under maternity benefit act 2017. She observed that said changes were made to encourage working mothers to participate in workforce by overcoming pre and post maternity barriers. She suggested on three specific factors like State's interference to support working mothers, redistributing costs, overcoming discrimination. Singh. S et al., (2017) highlighted the changed maternity benefits which have been welcomed by both employees and employers. The authors feel that the new modifications should be helpful for both sides and in that aspect transparent rules need to be promulgated for employers as well without any further delay. Based on this reviewed literature, certain objectives have been framed and methodology has been adopted for further study. Collins. C (2019) in her book 'Making Motherhood Work' tries to emphasize on working women's dilemma while choosing between family and work. In today's world it has become a national crisis. She describes about everyday challenge of working women in order to balance both work and parenting where social policies actually failed to give adequate support. In respect of supportive work-family policies, United States ranks last among all the countries. In her book author has done survey through interviews with 135 middle class working mothers from Sweden, Italy, Germany and United States. She analyzed how working mothers balancing between work and family in the backdrop of different social policies of each country. She expressed by narrating women's family surroundings, neighborhood, and job place that working mother's expectations depends on

circumstances. Social policies only cannot give support to working mother's daily challenges. She further suggested that the only solution to improve this situation is to reanalyze motherhood, work and family. Indra. K (2014) focused on 'work-life balance' of working women. The author clearly described meaning, scope, concept and why work-life balance is important in life. She specifically mentioned about problems faced by working women both at work and home. Economy and financial needs compel women to work for livelihood. Women are always good in multitasking job than men. The purpose of the study is to assess the impact and requirement of family support in making work-life balance. Apart from family support, husband attitude and co-operation, parents support, children support, social support, friends and neighbours support in making work-life balance has been vividly expressed in her study. Also, taking care of aged parents or in laws or dependent children was a major challenge for working women to make work-life balance. For good work-life balance in woman's life, proper support from husband and parents are very much required. If such support one can get, then excellent work-life balance can be ensured easily. Otherwise, lack of such support will resulted in low employee retention, low employee attendance and also often leads to various health issues.

Research Gap

Most of the researchers mentioned that the changes made by the said act are appraised by everyone but various aspects of the said Amendment Act need clarity. Furthermore, the option "Work from home" is not clear and lucid. The changed provisions like crèche facilities need extra capital and operating expenditure on the employer's side. Recent changes made to the maternity bill and its major queries like applicability of the act to contractual or consultant women employees, whether women who are already in maternity leave are benefitted by the new amendment was in question. The changes may help the female employees to encourage rejoining the workplace after post maternity and can also retain women employees over time, ensuring their right to decent work and to get access to both material and non-material resources. In addition, surrogate mother or commissioning mother is entitled to maternity benefit was discussed in brief which lead to many queries and confusion. Moreover, whether women can avail benefit both under surrogacy law and maternity benefit act at the same time was remain unanswered. Many of the authors mentioned about their hope that changes made by new amendment will actually benefit the women employees but they failed to mention how to reach that goal of hope in reality. All researchers mentioned about maternity leave with pay will give a better impact on both mental and physical health conditions of a woman. But they failed to mention that for the implementation of such benefit all women need to aware of their rights regarding pregnancy at work and must be supported in vindicating those rights. There are many law provisions for women protection and empowerment under Indian Constitution but unfortunately speaking that half of the entire population is not aware of their own legal rights and researchers remain silent on what steps need to be taken to make women aware of their rights.

Objectives And Research Methodology OfThe Study:

In the present study, after identifying the gap in this research, certain objectives have been framed and they are as follows:

- I. To study awareness about maternity benefits of working mothers from Media, IT and Aviation Sectors in Kolkata.
- II. To understand the perception and gaps of maternity benefits.
- III. To find out whether maternity benefits has been provided by the organization or not as per Government regulation.

This research study is descriptive in nature and primary data has been collected from 300 respondents who are working mothers from three specific sectors i.e. Media, IT and Aviation in Kolkata. Direct interviews were conducted to record their

responses regarding awareness and feedback on organization providing maternity benefits or not. In this study the data has been analyzed with the help of simple statistical methods using charts and diagrams. Non-parametric test by using chi-square statistic has also been used to find out whether there is any relation between different socio economic variables with the parameters of the study.

5. RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

In the present study, 300 responses were collected from working mothers from three specific sectors i.e. Media, IT and Aviation in Kolkata. An analysis of such responses on each maternity benefit as per certain factors was clearly discussed with help of diagrams. Firstly, how much responses were collected from which sector was showed with the help of Figure 1 mentioned below.

Number of Respondents Based on Sectors

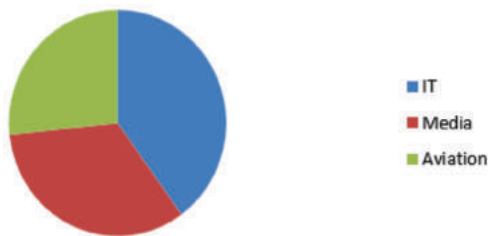


Figure 1: Number of Respondents Based on Sectors

Out of 300 respondents, 120 respondents belong to IT sector, 100 respondents from Media and 80 respondents from Aviation. Respondents are many in IT sector but it was challenging to get respondents from Media and Aviation. All age group is available in IT but it was observed while collecting data that age group is a factor especially for aviation than media. Working mothers are deployed for ground job and not airhostess.

Secondly, with the help of below mentioned Figure 2, it was shown that 'Paid Maternity Leave' benefits were received by how many respondents out of total 300 respondents.

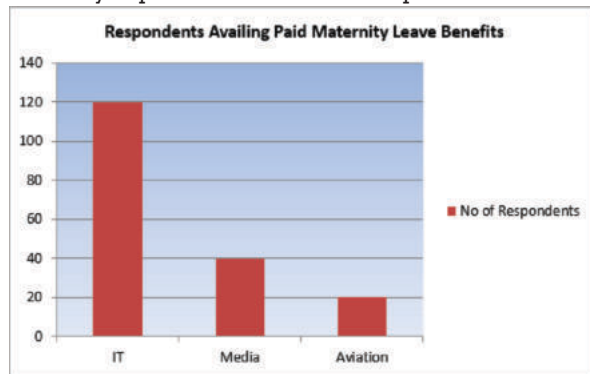


Figure 2: Respondents Availing Paid Maternity Leave Benefits

Working mothers are satisfied working in IT sector as they get paid maternity leave without hassle but in Media it was observed that renowned media houses are providing paid maternity benefits but for new or small media houses, some don't provide maternity leave and some provide maternity leave but without pay. On other hand, for Aviation same responses received as media. In addition, unlike IT and Media, it was very much evident in Aviation after becoming mother her nature of job did not remain the same.

Thirdly, with the help of below mentioned Figure 3, it was shown that 'Work from Home' benefits were received by how many respondents out of total 300 respondents.

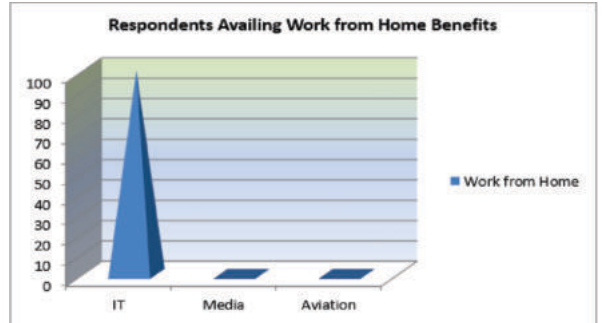


Figure 3: Respondents Availing 'Work from Home' Benefits

'Work from home' Facility as maternity benefits is only provided by IT sector without any trouble during pre and post-delivery during motherhood phase. But this facility very easily cannot be provided by organizations in Media and Aviation sectors as their nature of work don't permit them to such facility. So for them motherhood is a challenge or barrier for their career growth.

Fourthly, with the help of below mentioned Figure 4, it was shown that 'Crèche Facility' benefits were received by how many respondents out of total 300 respondents.

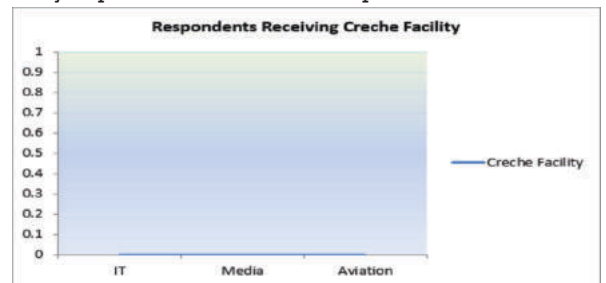


Figure 4: Respondents Receiving 'Crèche Facility' Benefits

'Crèche Facility' as maternity benefit was introduced in 2017 as per Government regulation but surprisingly in Kolkata none of the sectors having more than 50 employees have made arrangements for crèche facility.

Fifthly, with the help of below mentioned Figure 5, it was shown that 'Equal Treatment Post Maternity' benefits were received by how many respondents out of total 300 respondents.

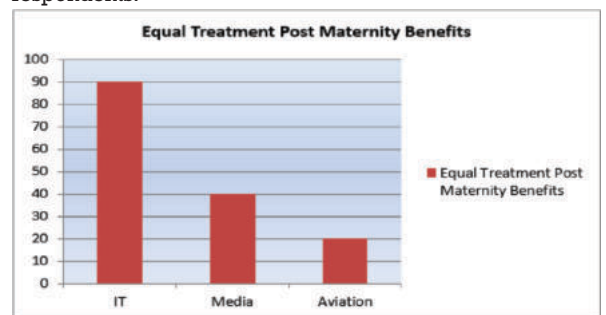


Figure 5: Respondents Getting 'Equal Treatment Post-Maternity' Benefits

'Equal Treatment Post Maternity' benefit is very much pertinent for IT sectors than Media and Aviation. Responses regarding equal treatment received from Media were average but for Aviation it was below average. As data were collected through direct interviews, certain points were identified like gender biases regarding delegation of job post maternity, promotion delayed due to motherhood, night shifts are really challenging for new mothers without family and child care support.

Now, to find out whether awareness regarding the benefits

provided during the maternity phase is related with the socio-economic background of the respondents.

In the present study the socio-economic variables chosen are respondents' level of education and work experience which are being assessed with their awareness regarding maternity benefits with the help of non-parametric test as all responses are qualitative in nature. Therefore, to study first objective, the following hypotheses were been developed:

Hypothesis 1

- H0: Level of education and level of awareness are independent of each other.
- H1: Level of education and level of awareness are dependent of each other.

Tabulated $\chi^2 = .00003$
 Therefore, Calculated $\chi^2 >$ Tabulated χ^2
 Therefore, H0 rejected & H1 is accepted.

From the above result, it can be concluded that the level of education has enormous impact on the level of awareness regarding maternity benefits of the respondents. From the data of the present study it was found that 60 per cent are post-graduates, 30 per cent are graduates and 10 per cent are below Graduate. As a result, it has been observed and can be interpreted that people having higher level of education are having a higher level of awareness.

Hypothesis 2

- H0: Years of work experience and level of awareness are independent of each other.
 - H1: Years of work experience and level of awareness are dependent of each other.
- $\chi^2 = 2.2317$ (calculated)
 $\chi^2 = .693234$ (tabulated)

Therefore, H0 rejected as calculated value is greater than tabulated value.

Therefore, H0 rejected & H1 is accepted. From the above result, it can be concluded that the years of work experience has enormous impact on the level of awareness regarding maternity benefits of the respondents. From the data of the present study it was found that 30 per cent respondents are having more than 10 years of work experience, 40 per cent respondents are having more than 5 years but less than 10 years of work experience, 20 per cent respondents are having more than 3 years but less than 5 years and 10 per cent respondents are having more than 1 year but less than 3 years of work experience. As a result, it has been observed and can be interpreted that any respondent having more years of work experience were more aware about the maternity benefits provided by their companies, whereas any respondent having less years of work experience or newly joined employee were less aware about the said benefits available for them as per companies' policy.

5. Concluding Remarks

There is no doubt that India has progressed significantly than earlier where it stands. Few years back also perception of married women means doing household work at home and taking care of family as most of her primary concern. No question of equality, fulfilling dream of becoming independent and taking responsibility of their own parents besides their own family has no value or rather overlooked by the society previously. While collecting data certain viewpoints received by the respondents directly which highlighted certain social perception regarding working mothers that is if husband is well established in his career then society encourages working mothers either to do part time jobs or work from home or become a home maker as still society thinks looking after a family has to be primarily done by a female and not a male person. In this study it was

observed that working mothers can retain their jobs more in IT sector than Media and Aviation. The main reason behind this is nature of work and age factor. In case of Media, odd working hours, no option for working from home as it is mainly field based work and most importantly without family and caregiver support it next to impossible for working mothers to retain their job. On the other hand, in Aviation age is a factor upon which nature of work depends unlike IT and Media. Whereas, 'work from home' is very much welcomed in IT sector not only during maternity phase but in normal time as well. Motherhood phase is a real challenge for Aviation and Media, either their nature of work will change as in aviation, from airhostess to ground-level worker or in Media, one has to take break for motherhood which will act as barriers in their career growth afterwards or if anyone has to continue with the career, maternity leave has to be sacrificed by her. Paid maternity leave is given mainly in IT sector, rest less renowned companies have no provision for paid maternity leave for both Media and Aviation sectors. Surprisingly, it was identified during data collection that though 'Crèche facility' is incorporated in MB Act, 2017 by the Indian Government still it is not available in any of the sectors till date. Regarding 'equal treatment post maternity' positive feedback received from IT but the scenario is different for both Media and Aviation Sectors. Negative responses like change of project, degradation of post, transfer of office, delay or cancellation of much awaited promotion etc. are commonly identified both in Media as well as Aviation. As a result, job retention post maternity is a real problem in these two sectors. With the help of chi-square test, in Hypothesis 1 it was seen in the present study that where level of education is high awareness regarding maternity benefit is high. On the other hand, hypothesis 2, it was seen that where the work experience is higher awareness regarding maternity benefit is also high. So, it can be concluded by saying that socio-economic variables like education level and work experience of the respondents i.e. working mothers has a connection with their awareness level regarding maternity benefits.

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