WORKPLACE 'DRAMA': THE 'GLASS CLIFF' EFFECT, MENSTRUAL LEAVE, AND "ME TOO"

Committee For Managing Gender Issues

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1. The Glass Cliff Effect

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With the popularisation of the "Glass Ceiling" phenomenon, organisations have implemented various policies to reduce the gender gap and disparity. Though this has improved women's presence in the board room, only 40 female CEOs lead the fortune 500 companies. Moreover, in many instances, the "financial health" of the organisations was directly related to the 'timing' of their appointment. Based on recent research, it is observed that more females are appointed as leaders during times of crisis or when the organisations are performing poorly, a phenomenon known as the 'Glass Cliff Effect'. Coined by Ryan and Haslam (2005), the glass cliff effect posits that women are more likely to break the 'glass ceiling' during the time of crisis but find themselves on the 'glass cliff' symbolising a more risky and stressful position owing to financial difficulties, bad press, and the probability of leadership failure. Post the 'glass cliff effect', we observe the 'saviour effect', which refers to the phenomenon when women CEOs have failed to turn around the organisation's performance. Men then replace such women CEOs as they are perceived to be more capable.

https://www.iima.ac.in/web/about-iima/home/gender-issues-cmgi

Haslam et al. (2010) substantiate Ryan and Haslam's findings in their study on female board appointments in the London FTSE 100 and establish that poor company performance (based on stock returns) was related to a greater likelihood of women being appointed to the board, using used time-lagged correlations. Outside of the UK, Cook and Glass (2014a) focused on CEO transitions in Fortune 500 companies between 1996-2010 and found that gender and racial minorities were more likely to be appointed as CEOs in poorly performing organisations. Not only in the workplace, but this phenomenon can also be observed in politics. Focusing on the 2005 UK general election, Ryan, Haslam, and Kulich (2010) underline that women are more likely to be selected by parties to run for government seats that were difficult to win. Haslam and Ryan (2008) test the effect experimentally by distributing fictitious information about the organisation's performance (either improving or falling) and advertising a vacant senior management job to participants. They find that the female candidates received significantly higher rankings when their performance declined.

Oelbaum (2016) goes further to identify the drivers of the phenomenon and categorises them into Think crisis-Think female; Think crisis-Think not male; and Females as signals of change. In "Think crisis-Think female", individuals believe that feminine attributes are required to run a crisis-stricken organisation based on implicit gender preconceptions often held and applied to leadership positions. While the think crisis-think female explanation implies that stereotypical feminine attributes and the qualities required for leadership are compatible, the think crisis-think not male interpretation proposes that the leadership role is perceived in traditional terms as more compatible with stereotypical male qualities. Women are promoted because decision-makers want to safeguard male leaders from failure. Leaders are frequently criticised for a company's poor performance, and a failure to turn things around can be traced back to a lack of leadership skills. For a leader, such a situation can be highly destructive and career-ending. Here, women are seen as more expendable than men. Underperforming organisations want to convey to all key stakeholders that they are making a substantial shift. Appointing a woman to a prominent position sends a message that women represent a departure from the traditional leadership ideals, thus adapting progressive ideals.

Real-life instances like that of Jill Abramson (Executive Editor, NY Times), Carol Bartz (CEO, Yahoo!), and Mary Barra (CEO, General Motors), all first-time women CEOs, exhibit the glass cliff effect. Abramson, the first-ever woman executive editor of the NY Times, Abramson was fired within three years of her appointment. Initially appointed in 2011, she took charge amidst the highly publicised crises that the paper was going through. However, she was negatively evaluated on the grounds of being difficult and bossy, was highly scrutinised and criticised by her peers and supervisors, and was victim to unprecedented pressure to take the paper in a "bold new direction". Upon confronting the executives about her pay and benefits being considerably lesser than those of the former male editor, the management publicised a narrative that she was "pushy" - a characterisation with a profound and inescapable gendered aspect. The paper tried to sway perceptions about her negatively before the final she was fired and was replaced by a man who had relationships in the newsroom and with publishers, who could "save" the paper from this crisis.

"Listen, it is true that women have a better chance to get a directorship or a senior position if there's trouble. I do not believe that that would have happened to a man" - Bartz in an interview with Freakonomics. Bartz became the first woman CEO of Yahoo in 2009 when the once-internet giant was beginning to see troubles. In 2011, two and a half years after taking over the struggling company, she was fired. The impact was an immediate 6% jump in Yahoo stock price! Despite her showcasing considerable work and progress, Yahoo's board concluded that Bartz had enough time and that a change in leadership was needed. Possibly Yahoo could not be turned around, at least not this soon. After all, former leaders could not do it before her. The final decision was made during two company board meetings in which Bartz was not present, and she was fired over the phone. She attributes the glass ceiling effect to men not wanting the job. After firing Bartz, Yahoo appointed Scott Thompson, a white man, as its next CEO, highlighting yet another case of the Savior effect.

We also have Mary Barra, one of the few women who faced a glass cliff and excelled in turning around the company. In 2014, immediately after General Motors' ('GM') controversial bail-out and the Treasury's sale of its stake in GM, the board appointed its first-ever woman CEO. Immediately after her appointment, GM began facing 100+ legal and public cases for the deaths linked to switch-ignition problems, which the management was aware of for the past 10 years but did not deal with. It was made public only when a lawyer filed a wrongful death suit. Barra reported that she became aware of the issue only 16 days after her appointment, clearly demonstrating how she was set up to fail as none of the previous male CEOs wished to be associated with the 'failure of the organisation' and thus retired from the position even before their tenure ended. However, Barra took corrective measures until the issue was resolved and turned things around.

> *"Listen, it is true that women have a better chance to get a directorship or a senior position if there's trouble. I do not believe that that would have happened to a man"* - Bartz

In our interviews with three female CXOs/corporate leaders, we find that the "glass cliff" effect continues to exist. We also found that the leeway given to female leaders was significantly lesser than that given to male leaders, i.e., stakeholders seemed to be more tolerant and patient with a male leader changing the company's strategic course than a female leader undertaking a similar task. One of the interviewees also mentioned that such biases make her believe that female leaders are more resilient and willing to take risks to succeed since they know the consequences of failing.

2. Menstrual Leaves: Period Drama?

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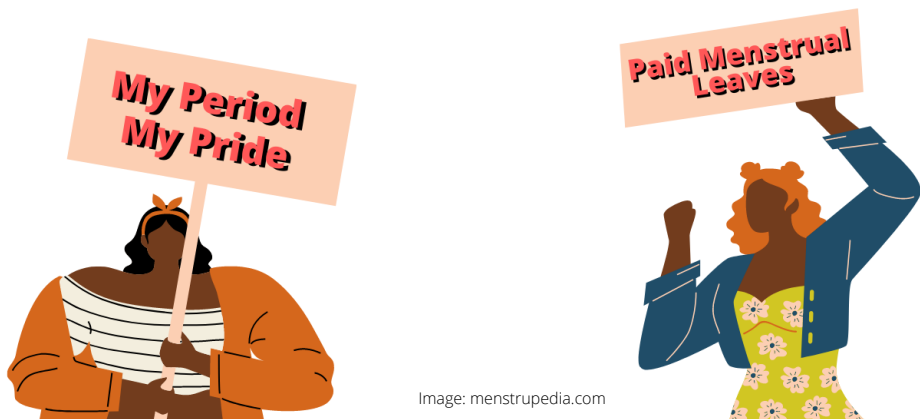
The concept of menstrual leaves, which women can avail while they are menstruating and are unable to work due to the same, has met with controversies since its beginning. While supporters claim that these leaves are a step forward in promoting gender equality, critics argue that it raises questions about women's workplace efficiency. The inception of this idea in the Indian context happened way back in 1912 when a girls' school in Kerala granted menstrual leaves to its students. Even though there has been the cognisance of the necessity of these leaves for a century, its full-blown acceptance has still not seen the light of the day.

Image: menstrupedia.com

As per CBC Radio (2017), policies like menstrual leave can help destigmatise the discussion of menstruation in the workplace, something that we have been striving for as a society for a very long time now. Wuench (2020) interviewed Joe Connolly, the CEO of Visana Health, for Forbes, who said that for women who have severe pain due to conditions like endometriosis, menstrual leaves become a necessity without which women are merely present at the office, albeit at a much lower productivity level and lower satisfaction levels. Thus, menstrual leave may result in better employee satisfaction and a low employee turnover rate. As per McKinsey & Company (2018), companies in the top 25% in terms of gender diversity in the executive teams are 21% more likely to generate higher profits and 27% more likely to create better value- all the more reason for firms to have more inclusive policies to promote diversity and create better value for all the stakeholders involved.

However, despite being legally entitled to menstrual leaves in countries like Japan, Indonesia and South Korea, women prefer not to avail them (Jain & Batar 2021). Menstrual leaves are ignored for various reasons, including the unpaid nature, thought of as another way to undermine women's abilities and project them as weak, and not wanting to miss out on developments and opportunities that might come up in the workplace. Similarly, Levitt & Barnack-Tavlaris (2020) found that menstrual leaves can inflict harm to career progression and workplace treatment of the menstruators themselves because of the stigma around it, which makes it essential to contextualise the scenario by attempting to remove the stigma around menstruation first, before going forward with radical policy changes.

Most women face some issues either during or before their menstrual period. For instance, premenstrual Syndrome is faced by 20%-30% of women, 3%-8% of whom experience a severe form. 1.8%-5.8% of the women also face a condition called a premenstrual dysphoric disorder, which is an extreme form of premenstrual syndrome. However, the introduction of menstrual leaves would lead to a more inclusive environment for the women giving them more flexibility and a healthier environment, many voiced concerns about how it would introduce biases in hiring and reinforce casual sexism in the workplace in a country that has not yet been able to grapple with the destigmatisation of these issues (Springwala 2020). Many taboos around menstruation continue to exist in India, including mythological reasons, black magic and rationales of impurity, unhygienic and pollution. Still, some companies like Swiggy, Culture Machine, Mathrumbi, Magzter, Wet & Dry, IndustryARC, Zomato, iVIPANAN, Gozoop Online Pvt, Ltd, Horses Stable News, FlyMyBiz, Byju's have been bold enough to introduce menstrual leaves in their organisation. Most of these companies give 12 days per annum of menstrual leaves, which can be availed on the first or second day of their menstruation. The social perception of the companies changes positively as they appear to be an inclusive organisation.

The Menstrual Benefit Bill, 2017 was moved as a Private Member Bill by Ninong Ering, a member of Parliament from Arunachal Pradesh, with the primary motive of providing women (employed in both the public and private sectors) paid menstrual leave and even some time off from work. The Bill also extends to certain government schools for providing leave to menstruating girls in Class VIII and above. The act covers factories, mines, plantations (whether or not owned by the Government), shops or establishments with 10 or more employees, the unorganised sectors having less than 10 employees, and self-employed persons. Women who wish to opt-out of the leave shall be entitled to overtime pay at the prescribed rate. According to the act, there will be a provision for 30-minute rest periods to women twice a day during menstruating days. Every woman shall have the right to perceive her menstruation and the need to avail of the benefits provided under this proposed bill. Suppose she faces any difficulty in utilising the benefits of these provisions. In that case, she can approach the POSH committee [under Sexual Harassment of Women at Workplace (Prevention, Prohibition and Redressal) Act, 2013] of the establishment. Upon denial or obstruction of menstrual leave or rest period provisions, there could be imprisonment of 1 to 3 months and a fine ranging from INR 10,000 to INR 50,000.

In a country that is still very patriarchal and less supportive of women in the work field and where women are still considered less capable than men, despite having similar academic and professional achievements, gender-specific leaves can further reinforce the notion of women's incapacity and incapability to work. One of the company's female employees mentioned: "If you take menstrual leave, you are basically broadcasting to the entire office which days of the month you have your period" (Kakkar 2017). Women are uncomfortable in revealing such personal information and are concerned about workplace discrimination with the introduction of period leave, which could create problems during performance reviews, appraisals, and promotions of an individual. People are also worried that employers might be more reluctant to hire women and assign them high-demand and complex jobs after introducing such a policy, preventing them from growth opportunities in the workplace.

Further, defining the criteria for the applicability of such leaves proves difficult. Women who go through early menopause, sex change, or identify as transwomen might be questioned or asked to reveal private information to be eligible for the leave. Additionally, all women do not have similar menstrual experiences, i.e., the duration of period, severity of pain and discomfort vary from person to person. Many women want their company to prioritise a safe, comfortable and hygienic workplace before adopting such policies. When basic needs are not fulfilled, the implementation of menstrual leaves seems like a distant dream. For the benefits of these policies to be realised, it needs a shift in attitudes, both from the menstruators and non-menstruators.

3. #Metoo Movement At The Workplace For Women

WRITTEN BY POOJA UDAYABHANU, ABHISHEK RAJ, ABHINAV PANWAR, AND SOUMYA SHARMA

The MeToo movement is a global movement that enables sexual abuse and harassment survivors to share their experiences, highlight the high prevalence of sexual offences, make sexual harassment much less tolerated and create an environment where the survivors no longer feel alone. The movement first originated in 2006, when Tarana Burke (Me Too: Sexual Harassment Awareness & Prevention, 2020), a social activist who has been a survivor more than once herself, used the social media platform MySpace to publicly talk about sexual harassment against women, mostly those of colour. The movement, however, gained momentum in 2017, when actress Alyssa Milano exposed Harvey Weinstein, a former film producer. Her tweet urged people to share their experiences of sexual assault and harassment, motivating many women worldwide to respond to the tweet with the phrase "Me Too".

Image: HR Magazine May'18

In most countries, the movement achieved momentum post-2017 (The Washington Post, 2020). One observed similarity across different regions was the backlash that followed once a survivor came forward with a MeToo story. In countries like India, Australia and Japan, the criticism and defamation lawsuits against the survivors by the alleged have been a factor that deters them from coming forward. Research in France shows the different views held across generations on movements like MeToo (Diallo, 2020). It is alarming to note that sometimes older generations support sexual offenders, particularly observable in the film industry. However, those in the younger generation are more active towards creating a better workplace atmosphere for women.

It is important to note here that the Me Too movement often misses the element of diversity (Regulska 2018). For instance, The Global Impact of #MeToo Movement (2021) and Mona Eltahawy (2020) point to the difficulties Muslim women face, particularly those living in Middle East countries. Not only do they face the risk of Islamophobia, but they are also vulnerable to being dominated and controlled by their own community, which often protects men. The movement has become relevant not just in the workplace environment but also in educational institutions (Attiah 2020). The version of Me Too that became viral in Nigeria was #Sex4Grades which brought out the prevalence of male lecturers in universities making sexual advances to students. In India, too, an informal list popularly known as 'LOSHA' (List of Sexual Harassment Abusers) listed down people in academia who were alleged to be abusers.

Several large-scale studies have been conducted both among employees as well as managers to understand the impact of #MeToo on the American workplace. French et al. (2021) surveyed 200 managers and nearly 2,000 female employees on male/female work interactions and determined that female employees are less likely to receive mentorship from male managers than female managers. Atwater et al. (2021) also surveyed 600 employed men and women (nearly 50-50 split) and reported that in hiring, it was observed that positions which required significant interaction with men were less likely to be filled with women and hiring managers were looking to hire women who were not 'attractive'. The study also observed that women were excluded from meetings by men who were uncomfortable interacting with them alone. The 2018 report by Boyle and Cucchiara provides a comprehensive account of the #MeToo movement's impact on HR practices across industries. To gain insights into the ripples that #MeToo created in the "employee-workplace continuum," the authors have in-depth interviews with the HR and General Counsel leaders from companies that span 13 diverse industries. The report also considers the April 2018 study conducted by the Pew Research Center, which attempts to understand the impact of #MeToo on workplace interactions. A key finding from this study revealed that the enhanced focus on sexual harassment at the workplace, owing to #MeToo, has made it more challenging for men to know the modalities of interacting with women. With the rising reports of women employees reporting cases of sexual assault (including verbal remarks), men at the workplace are bound to feel more conscious of how they conduct themselves. This constrained communication from males might hinder effective and open communication between men and women at the workplace and severely undermine interpersonal dynamics.

Abrams et al. (2005), in their book, describe the long-term impact of exclusion of women from workspaces, i.e., how the subsequent need to belong and manage their reputation can lead to a variety of outcomes, including an attempt at re-inclusion, questioning existing power hierarchies or disaffection with the firm. Puritty et al. (2017) describe how diversity without inclusion does not yield significant benefits to scientific organisations. Sherbin et al. (2017) make a similar case for business organisations and argue that non-inclusive practices negate the potential competitive edge. Inclusion can be secured if women employees can receive mentorship from senior leaders have clear career paths and authentic interactions with colleagues. As we have seen, the #MeToo movement has curtailed mentorship at firms and is reducing male-female interactions. Moreover, the close collaboration required from authentic interactions is discouraged. The #MeToo movement's impact was diverse at the macroscopic level. Brown and Battle explore the ostracism that accompanied once the victims reported any incident of sexual harassment and revealed that owing to the #MeToo movement, ostracism linked with someone reporting a sexual harassment incident has practically diminished. Moreover, this movement has empowered survivors to come forward and report any such instances that they might have faced.

As one can observe, the impact of the #MeToo movement has manifested itself at multiple levels ranging from individuals to enterprises. While the emergence of the #MeToo movement has made women dubious about the security in public transportation services, it has also enabled them to come forward and report instances of sexual harassment with a much-reduced fear of ostracisation. However, this movement has also resulted in relatively more strained interpersonal relationships at the workplace, suggesting that the consequences of the #MeToo movement's abrupt emergence were widely diverse and have profoundly impacted the workplace dynamics in the contemporary labour force. The social and cultural factors, along with the power dynamics at the workplace, drive the conduct of the harassers. It is hence the responsibility of employers to create a safe environment for women, and thus organisations should work on implementing strict policies against sexual harassment and organise regular sensitisation campaigns to keep their employees aware of the consequences. This will enhance the faith of women employees in the organisation's determination to tackle sexual harassment and empower them to raise their voices against exploitation without fear of consequence.

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