

# The Impact of Maternity Leave Policies on Women's Career Progression and Workplace Equality

---

## Table of Contents

Abstract	2
Introduction	2
Methodology	3
The legal framework of maternity leave in India	4
A Comparative Analysis of Maternity Leave Policies Around the World	8
Impact on Career Progression	10
Implementation Challenges and Effectiveness of Maternity Leave	11
Recommendations for Policy Improvement	12
Conclusion	14
References	15

## **Abstract**

Women's role in the workforce has changed significantly throughout history. Their contributions to the economic sectors are getting increased recognition. Maternity Leave Policies are the main reason why women can participate equally in the workforce while also being able to manage their familial responsibilities. This paper explores the impact of maternity leave policies on women's career progression and workplace equality in India.

This paper explores the evolution and impact of maternity leave policies in India, tracing historical roots and analysing existing statutory provisions. It addresses the challenges faced by women in balancing career and family responsibilities, particularly the impact of maternity leave on career progression. Drawing research by the Genpact Centre for Women's Leadership identifies individual, familial, and workplace barriers hindering successful reintegration into the workforce post-maternity leave. Implementation challenges and the effectiveness of maternity leave laws are discussed, highlighting gaps in coverage and employer concerns.

The paper concludes with comprehensive recommendations for policy improvement, including extending leave benefits, promoting inclusivity, enhancing flexibility, and proposing amendments to ensure equal pay and support in childcare. Measures to ensure effectiveness through training, monitoring, incentives, and enforcement mechanisms are also suggested. Ultimately, the paper advocates for holistic approaches to maternity leave policies to foster gender equality, support women's career advancement and promote inclusive workplaces.

## **Introduction**

Women throughout humanity have been involved in different roles. A mother, a sister, a best friend, a homemaker and now a working woman in this modern world. The PLFS (Periodic Labour Force Survey) 2021--22<sup>1</sup> indicated that about 32.8% of the female population aged 15 and above were economically active during that period. In India, where the population is highly diversified, there has been significant variation in the manner of perceiving and satisfying the needs of female workers. One important area of transition is maternity leave laws which help us learn about societal attitudes, legal frameworks as well and workplace equality.

As we enter this new era of change, women's empowerment and critical roles within economic sectors also advance with us. This paper seeks to explore maternity leave policies in India by examining their historical roots, studying what statutory provisions currently exist, as well as looking at their impact on women's careers. The maternity leave policy in India has changed over time to accommodate the unique needs and

---

<sup>1</sup> [Female Labour Utilisation in India, 2023, Ministry of labour and employment](#)

challenges that working women face. The history of these laws shows that society recognizes the importance of helping women balance their professional and family responsibilities.

#### Pre-Independence Era:

Before India's independence in 1947, the labour work environment and policies were predominantly influenced by British Colonial rule. During this period, there were limited legal provisions specifically addressing maternity leave. The conditions in the emerging industrial sector were challenging for workers, with long working hours and minimal workers' rights.

The British Empire introduced a couple of acts that touched upon labour issues but did not provide a lot of protection for pregnant or postpartum women. Notable among these acts were The Employee's Compensation Act and The Payment of Wages Act of 1936. These acts aimed to address certain aspects of employment conditions but did not focus exclusively on maternity-related concerns.

The Maternity Benefit Act of 1929 was a remarkable landmark in the history of India and the first legislation in the pre-independence era which addressed specific maternity-related issues at the workplace as the key concern. It was crafted by eminent people like Dr Babasaheb Ambedkar, N.M. Joshi, and M.K. Dixit<sup>2</sup>.

#### Post-Independence Developments:

The recognition that the condition of workers should be improved as a whole and that social security must cover women as well emerged after the independence in 1947. Under the pressure of socio-economic transformations and the entry of women into major workplaces, the government started to enact legislation that particularly considered maternity issues.

The Maternity Benefit Act of 1961, which was strongly impacted by pre-constitutional laws, was a crucial stage. It established regulations for the employment of women in specific firms, allowing the females to take leave before childbirth and after birth, granting maternity leave, maternity benefits, and other related benefits.

## Methodology

This study employs a systematic review approach to examine articles, research papers, and legislation related to gender equality in the workplace and maternity legislation in India.

---

<sup>2</sup> [Animesh Nagavanshi, 2023, 'Maternity benefit act - bane and boon for the nation', Times of India](#)

## The legal framework of maternity leave in India

### Maternity Benefit Act, 1961<sup>3</sup>

Maternity Benefit Act of 1961 is a legislative framework to protect the employment rights of women during their maternity. It entitles female workers to 'maternity benefit,' which means average daily wages during the time they stay away from work after having given birth to look after their children. The scope of this Act includes enterprises that have more than 10 employees. Amendments were made through the Maternity (Amendment) Bill, 2017 that was passed by the President of India on the 27th of March, 2017. While the provisions of the 2017 Maternity Benefit (Amendment) Act came into force on April 1, 2017, the Part regarding the Crèche facility (Section 11A) came into force on July 1, 2017.

#### 1. Historical Background:

##### a. Maternity Benefit Act, 1929:

The first enactment in Indian history dealing with maternity benefits is the Maternity Benefit Act of 1929.<sup>4</sup> This act represented the initial recognition that specific provisions safeguarding maternal rights were needed.

The first and foremost aim of the enactment of this law in 1923 was to regulate the type of work women could do in certain enterprises and to specify the period, before and after childbirth, when they should receive leave with maternity benefits.

##### b. Post-Independence Era:

As a result of gaining independence in 1947, the community finally realised the need to improve labour laws and safeguard the interests of women in the workplace.

The Maternity Benefit Act of 1961 was brought about, eliminating and merging the various provisions of the 1929 Act. This legislation aimed at an integrative approach to handle pregnancy-related aspects which meant promotion of mothers' welfare concerning their jobs during and after pregnancy.

##### c. Maternity (Amendment) Bill 2017:

After realising that some amendments in the legislation were needed, the Maternity (Amendment) Bill was introduced in 2017. This bill was oriented toward making the norms suitable to the modern demands of working mothers and conforming with other countries' laws. This Bill made some major amendments which included an increase in maternity leave from 12 to 26 weeks, also, mothers going

---

<sup>3</sup> [Maternity Benefit Act, 1961](#)

<sup>4</sup> [Animesh Nagavanshi, 2023, 'Maternity benefit act - boon and bane for the nation', Paragraph 4, Times of India](#)

for the adoption route and commissioning mothers using surrogacy services could all avail of services. Further, the government also proposed a work-from-home option.

## 2. Eligibility Criteria:

- a. The Maternity Benefit Act provides benefits in the form of wages and certain other facilities to women employed in factories, mines, plantations, government establishments and the places where acrobats and other persons perform equestrian and acrobatic performances. The definition, also, extends to the stores or places that have the state regulation and employ ten or more people currently or used to employ them at any given time in the twelve months that have passed.<sup>5</sup>
- b. As stated by Section 5 of the Maternity Benefit Act, a woman needs to have been employed for at least 80 days during the year before her due date. However, if she migrated to Assam recently and is already pregnant, she is already qualified.
- c. The Maternity Benefit (Amendment) Act, of 2017 has provisions for giving benefits to women to adopt a child below the age of three months legally according to the act.
- d. Maternity Benefit (Amendment) Act 2017 widened the scope of the legislation by making provisions benefiting the women who adopt a child below three months through adoption.
- e. The amendment also entails a category of women known as "commissioning mothers" who are biological mothers but whose embryos are transferred to other women for embryos to take place.

## 2. Key Provisions<sup>6</sup>:

The following sections of the Act encompass the major aspects related to maternity benefits as they are after the Amendment Act of 2017:

Section 4: Employment of, or work of, women prohibited during certain periods.

1. Subsection (1) reads as follows: Employers shall not hire women in any workplace for six weeks immediately after the day of their delivery or miscarriage.
2. Subsection (2) reiterates the fact that a woman must not be subjected to any work in any establishment during the six weeks after the day of her delivery or her miscarriage. This helps women in this situation to recover sufficiently and be able to take care of themselves after childbirth and miscarriage without having to be overloaded with work.
3. Subsection (3) confers protection to pregnant women in a manner that no employer can require a pregnant woman to carry out any work where that work is arduous for a continuous

---

<sup>5</sup> [Maternity benefit to women working in unorganised sector, 2024, Ministry of Labour and Employment](#)

<sup>6</sup> [The Maternity Benefit Act, 1961, Arrangement of Sections, IndiaCode](#)

working time exceeding 4 hours or is likely to interfere with the normal development of the foetus.

4. Subsection (4) specifies the periods relevant to the protection mentioned in subsection (3):
  - a. Paragraph (a) specifies one month immediately preceding the six weeks before the expected delivery date.
  - b. Paragraph (b) states that the protection extends to any period during the six weeks before the expected delivery date for which the pregnant woman does not avail of leave of absence under section 6 of the Act.

#### Section 5: Right to payment of maternity benefits.

1. According to Subsection (1), every woman shall be fully entitled to maternity benefits which will be paid by her employer for the period preceding and including the days of delivery and after that, for the first six weeks period. The computation of the average daily wages is based on dividing the total wage payable to the worker for the three calendar months preceding the maternity leave or one rupee a day, whichever is more.
2. Subsection (2) states that a woman has to work for a minimum period of 80 days a period preceding twelve months before the expected date of childbirth to be eligible to receive the maternity benefit with some allowable exceptions made for those women who immigrated to the state of Assam being pregnant.
3. Subsection (3) assigns the maximum period of maternity benefit to be twenty-six weeks, which covers eight weeks before and eight weeks after delivery.
4. Moreover, it also provides provision for cases where the woman dies during the period, assuring that the benefit is paid up to the day she dies or six weeks if the child which is left behind also dies.

#### Section 7: Payment of Maternity Benefits in case of death of a woman.

This Section deals with the case where a woman who is entitled to maternity benefits in this Act dies before she receives the benefit. In this event, the employer should still be committed to paying the maternity benefits and the amount that the woman should receive from the Act. In such a case where the woman would have named a single person to whom she desires the benefit to be granted, then the employer is mandated to pay the benefit to the nominated individual. If there is no appointee or trustee, the received benefits will be given to the representative of the deceased.

#### Section 8: Payment of Medical Bonus.

This section states that besides taking maternity leaves and medical benefits under the Maternity Benefit Act, every female worker can avail of a medical allowance of Rs 25 from employers. This

bonus is only given if the employer does not provide these services for free: pre-natal confinement care and post-natal care services.

#### Section 9: Leave for miscarriage, etc.

In case a woman has a miscarriage, the maternity benefit allowable is the wage for six weeks after the miscarriage. However, the woman should present proof.

#### Section 10: Leave for illness arising out of pregnancy, delivery, premature birth of a child, miscarriage, medical termination of pregnancy or tubectomy operation.

If a woman develops problems during the pregnancy period, the delivery process, the premature delivery of a child or miscarriage, she is granted an additional leave at the rate of the maternity benefit for up to one that is counted from the moment of presenting the necessary paperwork. This is in addition to any leave granted under section 6 or section 9 of the Act.

#### Section 11: Nursing Breaks.

After childbirth, each woman who returns to work will have two breaks during her daily schedule dedicated to nursing their child. These breaks, in addition to the rest period prescribed, will be continued till the child reaches 15 months of age.

#### Section 11A: Crèche facility

Section 11A requires every institution having fifty or more employees to establish a creche within a prescribed distance either as a stand-alone facility or as a common amenity. Employers must allow women to go to the creche four times a day, including during their breaks. Moreover, this Act requires women to be made aware, both in writing and electronically, at the time of their initial appointment, of all the benefits that they deserve according to the Act.

#### Section 12: Dismissal during the absence of pregnancy

According to section 12 of the Act, employers are not allowed to terminate an employee's job on the premise of her maternity due to pregnancy-related reasons. As for her employment, the employer is not allowed to terminate the employment or modify the terms of service to her detriment during the maternity leave period.

A woman can also obtain her maternity-related benefits if she is dismissed during pregnancy unless it is due to gross misconduct, in which case the employer needs to communicate this decision in writing to the employee.

When a woman is deprived of maternity benefits, or when she is dismissed during the absence resulting from pregnancy, she is allowed to appeal to the competent authority within sixty days of the

maternity leave/the leave being refused, and the competent authority is required to decide on the matter within 60 days from the date the appeal has been lodged.

Nothing contained in sub-section (2) shall affect the provisions contained in sub-section (1).

Section 13: No deduction of wages in certain cases.

Section 13 of the Act prohibits an employer, to whom a woman is employed to receive maternity benefits, from deducting wages for reasons whatsoever relating to the assigned job and breaks during nursing of the child.

Section 18: Forfeiture of maternity benefits.

If a woman has worked in any establishment during her absence for the period provided by her employer under section 6, she shall no longer be entitled to maternity benefits for that time.

## A Comparative Analysis of Maternity Leave Policies Around the World

Pregnancy and Childbirth are something that transcend national borders and is an issue to be discussed on the international forum. The International standards for maternity leave have been set by WHO and ILO. According to the World Health Organisation (WHO),<sup>7</sup> the mandatory period of maternity leave is 24 weeks while the International Labour Organisation (ILO)<sup>8</sup> has stated the same to be 14 weeks. In this paper, we will discuss the maternity leave policies in the top 3 ranking countries in terms of duration of maternity leave (Bulgaria, Greece, United Kingdom), and 2 models of developing countries (Philippines, Indonesia) that do not rank that high in longest minimum maternity leave, but have aspects that are worth looking up to for recommendations to our model.

Table 1

Country	Provisions
Bulgaria <sup>9</sup>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"><li>1. Duration of leave: 410 days (including 45 days before birth)</li><li>2. Maternity pay: 90% of the average salary for 24 months preceding maternity leave.</li><li>3. Breastfeeding breaks: Paid nursing breaks until the child is 8 months old.</li><li>4. Leave for adopting mothers: Entitled to leave for 365 days.</li></ol>
Greece <sup>10</sup>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"><li>1. Duration of leave: 105 days</li></ol>

<sup>7</sup> [Maternity protection: Compliance with international labour standards, World Health Organisation](#)

<sup>8</sup> [Maternity Protection, International Labour Organisation](#)

<sup>9</sup> [Leave in Bulgaria, BoundlessHQ](#)

<sup>10</sup> [Greece - Maternity/Paternity benefits, European Commission](#)



Country	Provisions
	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>2. Maternity pay: 100% of earnings for the first 16 weeks, then 50% for the remaining period.</li> </ol>
United Kingdom <sup>11</sup>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Duration of leave: Up to 52 weeks (1 year).</li> <li>2. Maternity pay: 90% of average weekly earnings for the first 6 weeks, then a flat rate for the remaining period.</li> <li>3. Creche facilities: Employers are encouraged to provide appropriate facilities.</li> <li>4. Leave for adopting mothers: Up to 52 weeks (1 year).</li> </ol>
Philippines <sup>12</sup>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Duration of leave: 105 days (recently extended to 150 days).</li> <li>2. Maternity pay: Full pay during maternity leave.</li> <li>3. Inclusivity: The law applies to women regardless of their citizenship status, marital status, and even in case of a miscarriage.</li> </ol>
Indonesia <sup>13</sup>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Duration of leave: 12 weeks</li> <li>2. Maternity pay: Full pay during maternity leave.</li> <li>3. In case of death: Even if the pregnant woman dies during or after delivery, the family is still entitled to receive 12 weeks of full pay.</li> </ol>

### Analysis

There is a vast difference in the duration of maternity leave, flexibility of leave, and pay rates of the maternity leave policies of Bulgaria, Greece, the United Kingdom, the Philippines and Indonesia. Countries like Bulgaria offer a longer duration of maternity leave and higher pay rates. In the United Kingdom, there is also a flexibility in shared parental leave which promotes gender equality and an equal involvement of parents in childcare. On the other hand, countries like the Philippines and Indonesia that provide a shorter leave period limit opportunities for maternal recovery and bonding with the newborn. The recent improvements in the policy of the Philippines which extended fully paid maternity leave demonstrate a commitment to supporting pregnant women and their families, promoting maternal and child health outcomes, and reducing financial insecurity during the maternity period.

<sup>11</sup> [Statutory Maternity Pay and Leave: employer guide, gov .uk](https://www.employer-guide.gov.uk/statutory-maternity-pay-and-leave/)

<sup>12</sup> [Comparative analysis of maternity benefit act in India with legislations of other countries, Digvijay, 2022, Journal of Positive School Psychology, Vol.6, No.4, 883-887](#)

<sup>13</sup> [Comparative analysis of maternity benefit act in India with legislations of other countries, Digvijay, 2022, Journal of Positive School Psychology, Vol.6, No.4, 883-887](#)

## **Impact on Career Progression**

This section of the paper focuses on exploring how taking maternity leave impacts the career progression of women by analysing a research report carried out by the Genpact Centre for Women's Leadership at Ashoka University.<sup>14</sup> The research conducted involved 18 focus groups and 29 in-depth interviews with mothers from four sectors, namely: IT, ITES, Health, and Education. These mothers were categorised into three distinct cohorts: those who were currently pregnant, those who had dropped out of the workforce, and those who had returned to work but were facing challenges. Additionally, the study included five interviews with Diversity and Inclusion experts and nine interviews with HR representatives. This comprehensive research was carried out in two major metropolitan cities in India, namely Delhi and Bangalore.

The study brings attention to the obstacles faced by women in the workforce when it comes to taking maternity leave and returning to work. The results reveal concerning figures showing that a shocking 48% of women leave their jobs within four months of coming from maternity leave. This sudden exit from work highlights how impactful maternity leave can be on women's career paths.

Additionally, it illuminates the issue of women dropping out of their careers mid-way in India with around 50% leaving their jobs before turning 30 due to childcare responsibilities. These numbers underscore the pressing need to address the obstacles preventing women from progressing in their careers during maternity leave.

This study delves into the challenges faced by women who return to work after maternity leave, shedding light on individual, familial, and workplace barriers that hinder their successful reintegration into the workforce.

### **Individual Barriers:**

Returning mothers experience a lack of recognition and validation for their professional work within their families. Despite their efforts to balance home, child, and work responsibilities, their identity as homemakers often supersedes their professional identity. The relentless juggling of responsibilities leaves little time for self-care, with weekends often dedicated to completing household chores. Any attempt to prioritise self-care is met with criticism, further exacerbating feelings of disappointment and frustration among returning mothers.

### **Challenges at the Family Level:**

---

<sup>14</sup> [Predicament of returning mothers, a qualitative study on lived experiences of maternity and career, Ashoka University's Genpact Centre for Women's Leadership](#)

Family members fail to appreciate the significance of women's professional work, viewing it as a form of entertainment rather than a legitimate source of income. Men, in particular, hold negative attitudes towards women continuing to work after childbirth, citing concerns about the child's holistic development. This societal expectation often pressures women to prioritise childcare over their careers, perpetuating gender disparities in the workforce. Some couples even pre-plan that the wife will quit her job if necessary, highlighting entrenched gender roles and expectations within families.

#### Workplace Hurdles:

Returning mothers encounter subtle discrimination and challenges in the workplace, reminiscent of issues faced by pregnant women and those who drop out of the workforce. Many report low confidence and perceived deficiencies in technical skills, compounded by demotivating language and questioning of their capabilities by supervisors. This demeaning treatment fosters hesitancy among returning mothers to express opinions or discuss pregnancy-related issues with their employers. Despite existing policies supporting working mothers, their implementation often falls short of addressing the real-world challenges faced by returning mothers in the workplace.

These challenges impact women's opportunities for career advancement. These results highlight the need for interventions and support systems to tackle the obstacles faced by women reentering the workforce after maternity leave. This will help them smoothly reintegrate into their jobs and advance in their careers.

### **Implementation Challenges and Effectiveness of Maternity Leave**

Though the maternity leave legislations in India have made wonderful strides in their development over the years and they are better than sufficient for today, the actual ground reality of the implementation of these provisions is a mix of good and bad. Many loopholes and threats limit the effectiveness of this system.

The Maternity Benefit (Amendment) Act of 2017 passed in India provides 26 weeks (6 months) of paid maternity leave to women employees working in the formal sector. It is also much more than the minimum standard laid down by the World Health Organization. However, this advantage is not for those women in the unofficial sector, who form the majority of the workforce. According to the 2011 Census, there are 149.8 million female workers in India and among them, only very few of them i.e. 59.54 lakh women workers were employed in the organised sector (Public and Private Sector),<sup>15</sup> which means that the majority remains unprotected.

---

<sup>15</sup> [About Women Labour, Ministry of Labour and Employment, Government of India](#)

Although it is compulsory by law to offer maternity leave, the implementation and execution of the law by the person in charge might be a little different. The small and medium-sized companies in India, which have only limited financial resources, do not have the funds to pay for the maternity leave of their employees. This causes non-compliance with the law, and the hiring of more men, to avoid the 'maternity burden'. Another concern is that pregnant women working in the workforce are being refused employment or their employment is being terminated without valid reasons, despite the availability of legal safeguards.

There is a lack of clarity too regarding certain provisions in the Maternity Benefits Act like the provisions on nursing breaks and creche amenities which have been a challenge faced both by employees and employers. Section 11A of the Maternity Benefit (Amendment) Act, 2017 (MB Amendment Act, 2017) provides for mandatory creches for organisations with 50 employees or more, but there is some uncertainty about the standards and requirements of these creches which makes the implementation inconsistent. Likewise, the breastfeeding breaks provision is not often well enforced, thus, for nursing mothers, it is difficult to go back to work.<sup>16</sup>

### **Employers' concerns**

1. **Financial Burden:** Increased finances spent on paid maternity leaves and maternity pay are one of the main issues for employers. Small and medium-sized enterprises, with budgets operating often on a tight scale, would especially find the financial burden of providing these benefits bothersome.
2. **Temporary Staffing Costs:** Companies can incur extra expenses including but not limited to employing substitute staff whom they have to hire to take the places of maternity leave employees. Not to forget enhanced operational costs from paying the remuneration to deploy chronically absent employees and giving training to their substitutes.
3. **Impact on Competitive Advantage:** Employers may start thinking that offering rich maternity benefits will put them at a competitive disadvantage since only some employers provide benefits to them. This challenge could be of particular interest to industries in which profit margins are low and where the costs of labour are high.

## **Recommendations for Policy Improvement**

### **Lessons to learn from other Nations**

---

<sup>16</sup> [Breastfeeding at workplace remains taboo despite growing narrative around inclusion, Abhishek Sahu, 2023, The Election Budget India 2024](#)

1. **Leave for Adopting Mothers:** India should extend maternity leave benefits to adopting mothers for a duration similar to Bulgaria's of 365 days so that adoptive parents are given the right amount of time off from work to care for their new child.
2. **Inclusivity:** India can also have an encompassing model of maternity leave like the Philippines by giving entitlements to all women irrespective of their citizenship or marital status. This will ensure that all working women, including those in the informal economy, will be covered by maternity leaves.
3. **Flexibility and Shared Parental Leave:** India could consider implementing policies that promote gender equality in childcare responsibilities, similar to the UK's shared parental leave. Allowing parents to share leave entitlements encourages fathers to take a more active role in caregiving and helps address gender disparities in childcare responsibilities.

### **Proposed Amendments to Maternity Leave Legislation**

1. **Equal and full payment of wages:** During maternity leave, there should be provisions that make sure women receive full pay and not just average daily wage. Regular pay audits<sup>17</sup> and strict penalties for organisations practising pay discrimination can address the issue of unequal wages.
2. **Childcare support:** Support for childcare services should be extended to smaller businesses, with potential incentives like government subsidies or tax breaks that will encourage small businesses to provide better childcare facilities in the place of employment.
3. **Incentives and Tax Breaks:** The government can provide financial incentives, such as tax breaks or subsidies, to private companies that voluntarily comply with the provisions of the Maternity Benefit Act. These incentives can help offset the costs associated with providing maternity benefits and encourage employers to adopt family-friendly policies.
4. **Standardisation of Creche Facilities:** Clear guidelines should be set up under Section 11A of the Maternity Benefit (Amendment) Act, 2017 for creche facilities, covering infrastructure, safety, staffing ratios, hygiene, nutrition, and recreation, with input from childcare experts and stakeholders for the well-being of children and mothers returning to work.

---

<sup>17</sup> Pay audits help organisations take a thorough look at how and what employees are paid and how those decisions are made.

5. Training for skill development: There could be a mandatory skill development programme catered to the needs of every employment place provided by the employer to address the problem of skill gap that women may face after returning from maternity leave. These programmes will help new mothers in upskilling and reskilling to make sure that women can re-enter the workforce smoothly.

### **Ensuring Effectiveness**

1. It should be made mandatory for employers and workers on one hand and employees on the other to go through education sessions organised through training programs so that they would understand what rights and responsibilities they have as per law. Such training may touch on aspects of unconscious bias, family leave policies and gender equality in the workplace.
2. Implement monitoring systems to track compliance with maternity benefit laws and workplace practices. Employers should be required to report on their adherence to these laws regularly, and government agencies should regularly audit employers' compliance levels.
3. Other incentives can include tax deductions or subsidies awarded to companies that show commitment towards gender equality policies as well as family-friendly attitudes at workplaces. Likewise, certificates of recognition along with awards could also be presented to organisations which meet specific criteria like inclusive workplaces.

### **Conclusion**

To conclude, employee benefits for expecting and nursing mothers are key to shaping women's involvement in the job market and fostering equality in workplaces.

The evolution of maternity leave legislation from the Maternity Benefit Act of 1929 to recent amendments made last year 2017 underpins the shifts in social-economic patterns and the increasing recognition of gender rights.

The wage gap, cultural prejudices, and glass ceilings faced by women returning from their maternity leave are still there but need to be addressed. Inclusivity can be promoted through proper maternity leave policy development and employer initiatives aimed at gender equity.

The proposed changes should concentrate on expanding options for families' time off, equalisation of pay, help with childcare, as well as training offered for skills advancements.

Employers promote gender equality when they introduce bias training sessions; encourage flexible working hours; enforce statutory maternity benefit laws; and practise inclusive leadership.

To achieve workplace parity, policymakers require encouragement from employers and society to focus on women's welfare by upholding their rights thereby empowering them throughout their careers.

## References

1. Maternity Benefit Act, 1961
2. Maternity Benefit (Amendment) Act, 2017
3. Female Labour Utilisation in India, 2023, Ministry of Labour and Employment
4. Animesh Nagavanshi, 2023, 'Maternity benefit act - bane and a boon for the nation', Times of India
5. Maternity benefit to women working in the unorganised sector, 2024, Ministry of Labour and Employment
6. Article 4(1), Maternity Leave, Maternity Convention Protection, 2000, International Labour Organisation
7. Maternity protection: Compliance with international labour standards, World Health Organisation
8. Maternity Protection, International Labour Organisation
9. Leave in Bulgaria, Boundless Hq
10. Greece - Maternity/Paternity benefits, European Commission
11. Statutory Maternity Pay and Leave: employer guide, gov. uk
12. Comparative analysis of maternity benefit act in India with legislations of other countries, Digvijay, 2022, Journal of Positive School Psychology, Vol.6, No.4, 883-887
13. The predicament of returning mothers, a qualitative study on lived experiences of maternity and career, Ashoka University's Genpact Centre for Women's Leadership
14. About Women Labour, Ministry of Labour and Employment, Government of India
15. Breastfeeding at the workplace remains taboo despite the growing narrative around inclusion, Abhishek Sahu, 2023, The Election Budget India 2024