



## General Studies-1; Topic: Issues related to Women

### Motherhood Penalty in the Employment Sector

#### Introduction

- A large part of India still treats its women as inferior to men, largely due to socially-entrenched notions of patriarchy.
- This is evident from India's 2021 Global Gender Gap Index ranking, wherein it has slipped 28 places since 2020.

#### Gender Gap

- The gender gap in the country has also widened, especially **low gender parity in political empowerment and economic participation and opportunity**.
- **Women are paid considerably less than men**, with some research showing that the gender pay gap between women and men in the same jobs with equivalent qualifications can be as much as 34%.
- India, as of 2020, has the lowest female labour force participation rate among South Asian nations, with four out of five women neither working nor looking for jobs.
- Time Use Survey conducted by the National Sample Survey Office showed that women spent nearly 4.5 hours on childcare and other care-giving responsibilities, in contrast with the meagre 0.88 hours for men.

#### Motherhood penalty

- Among women, **mothers face higher discrimination than non-mothers**.
- Some employers perceive the former as being less competent and committed than the latter.
- They are also hired and promoted less often, and generally receive lower salaries. This is called the '**motherhood penalty**'.

- This penalty plays a significant role in low Indian female labour force participation, which according to World Bank data for 2020 is only 20.3%.
- **There still exist employer notions about women returning from maternity breaks with lower productivity.**
- The Maternity Benefit Act fortifies notions of care-giving being primarily the onus of the woman, and thus reinforces the risk of women being subject to the motherhood penalty.

## Impact of COVID-19

- The pandemic has worsened the gender divide, with women—especially mothers— suffering much more than men.
- According to Oxfam, 17 million women in India lost their jobs in April 2020, with their unemployment rate rising far higher than that among men.
- Women were found to be seven times more likely to lose their jobs during the lockdown phases.
- This was due to, **Indian women had to bear not just household chores but extra time was needed for elderly care and children’s studies, with schools shut.**

## International Examples

- Iceland, ranked as the world’s most gender-equal nation, pioneered a policy in 2018 that requires firms with more than 25 employees to prove every three years that they provide equal pay.
- Once proven, these companies receive certification. Firms without certification incur a daily fine.
- This shift of the burden of proof to the employer is reported to have improved Iceland’s workplace environment.
- Ireland is another example that requires companies with more than 250 employees to publish data on disparities between average and median hourly wages and bonuses for both genders.
- For India, adopting the Icelandic policy of mandatory certification would be beneficial.

## Way Forward

- To combat the motherhood penalty, **reorienting workplace norms to make women more gender equal is essential.**
- An explicit law for **mandatory paternity benefits** will go a long way towards equalizing gender roles and reducing employer bias.
- Strengthening of childcare facilities for working mothers are very important.
- **Mandatory publishing of data on disparities in wages** between the two genders would also compel firms to pay equally.
- This would help mitigate the gender pay gap in India and also the inequities associated with the motherhood penalty.