

Why we need menstrual leaves at work

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The Spanish cabinet recently passed a bill which will give people who menstruate the option to take days off from work during their periods. Some companies abroad also allow employees the chance to work remotely during periods.

The level of distress that is felt during periods varies from person to person. Symptoms can include both physical pain and mental health issues. Some women experience intense cramps, dizziness, bloating, exhaustion and more. Mental illnesses such as depression and anxiety can spike during periods too. Other problems include, but are not limited to, having difficulty concentrating, irritability, and mood swings.

It is difficult for a lot of women to function in their day-to-day lives during periods, let alone invest their mental and physical labour into the workplace. Apart from the women who have serious medical conditions, the best way to cope with menstrual discomfort is to rest. Working through the pain affects both their health and productivity.

There is not a lot of period awareness in Bangladesh. It has been, and still is, a taboo topic here. Personally, I had no knowledge of what periods are prior to having them. Paid leaves are also quite scarce here. A lot of workplaces are stringent about offering them. Both of these together make paid menstrual leaves a difficult conversation in the context of Bangladesh.

However, the good news is that slowly some voices have started to come through. Chaalchitra, a café in Dhaka, recently posted a job opening offering menstrual leave among the job's bene-

fits, which is commendable.

In the global scenario, only a handful of countries offer menstrual leaves at present, namely Indonesia, Japan, South Korea, Taiwan and Zambia. Spain will be the first European country to provide menstrual leave if the bill passes through their parliament.

Critics of the idea however think that it will hinder gender equality in the workplace, since people who menstruate will be treated differently than others.

The crucial point here is that the menstrual leave policy establishes "equity" among workers. The leave will be offered to those who need it. People who menstruate feel physical and emotional distress that is unique to them. Their disposition is different from those who do not get periods. So, it only makes sense that these people are accommodated.

Those who receive menstrual leaves are more likely to work better for it, according to studies. When employees get enough time to heal, it ensures that the quality of their work is not compromised.

This policy creates an environment where women feel respected and valued. It is past time workplaces started to recognise this issue.

References

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PHOTO: STAR

Why I am proud of the Padma Bridge

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Growing up as someone who had his roots on the other side of the Padma, I was often scared of going to my hometown because we had to cross the river on our way. The path across the Padma river was not only hazardous because of the swift currents, but was also lengthy and stressful as it required one to be crammed inside a tiny launch for over an hour just to cross the river.

This was the simple reason eight-year-old me hated going to my hometown: the long and arduous journey across the river. Every time I would complain about how I was scared to cross the river and how tiring the journey to our hometown was, my uncle and aunts would console me that one day there would be a bridge across the Padma river and then we could come across the river within less than 20 minutes.

Throughout the past, I have made my fair share of jokes and memes about the Padma Bridge; I have often criticised the corruption involved in the project. Now that the country has finally achieved the seemingly impossible feat of building the mighty Padma bridge, it is important that we finally acknowledge and appreciate what the bridge would mean for people in the southern and south-western parts of the country.

I have grown up hearing from my father about how my grandmother would have to wake up at five in the morning and walk about 12 miles from our village to the launch terminal when returning back to Dhaka, when she was young. In case she had missed the launch, she would have to walk back another 12 miles and return to our village because that was the only launch which was available during the entire day.

When I called my extended family living in my hometown at Shariatpur after the inauguration of the bridge, my uncle told me how he had seen two of his friends suffer because of the lack of a bridge across the river. One of them had seen their father dying inside an ambulance while waiting for a ferry, and his other friend had missed his flight abroad as there was no ferry to take him to the other side.

According to my uncle, now that the bridge has been built, no one has to face such miserable fates ever again. I was also told by one of our relatives who is suffering from skin issues about how he could easily come to Dhaka now for his doctor's appointment, and return back on the very same day.

While we all have heard about the macro level benefits of the bridge, such as how it will result in the growth of the country's economy and allow better trade and connectivity between the country's south and other regions, the bridge remains more than just an infrastructure to people like me. It is a symbol of hope and resilience for the people on the other side of the Padma river, after decades of struggles against the adversaries of not being connected with the rest of the country.

This bridge is not just a series of spans with driving lanes on the top, it represents the bundles of emotions coupled with the silent sacrifices of thousands of people!

Hrishik would like to dedicate this article to the average citizens of the country, especially those from the other side of the Padma river, as their funding and effort is what made the bridge possible. Reach out to him at hrdibbo@gmail.com