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### RESEARCH ARTICLE

#### BARRIERS TO FEMALE WORK FORCE PARTICIPATION IN FORMAL -SECTOR

Dr. Harish Gupta

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#### Abstract

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#### Introduction:-

“Maternity Benefit Act protects employment of women. A historic step towards #WomenLedDevelopment” - Ministry of Women and Child Development, Government of India, on X (formerly twitter), Apr 1, 2018 [1]

#### Dear Editor,

Ramakant et al. assess (status of) gender -disparity in an academic hospital and get female health care professionals' perspectives in their original article published in May 2023 issue of the Journal [2]. The investigators distributed a questionnaire to female workers of their hospital, directed them to mark its answers and then collected the answer - sheets. Afterwards they studied its results, prepared pie charts and presented their observations in such an easy- to-understand manner. I am indebted to the authors for their honest Herculean efforts to unfold challenges staring on faces of the fairer sex and having courage to pen it down.

There is a pressing need to conduct more such surveys and systematic studies and also conduct more in- depth analysis of the difficulties which hobble women and girls nowadays. Only then can we put our heads together and find some solutions. The study looks at day to day affairs of the organized sector of the society and wider applicability may be limited due to the heterogeneous nature of our work environment.

Nevertheless, there are few observations which I could not reconcile with and present my viewpoint here. Under a header of 'Results', the writers mention at several points that responders (female workers) were not sure about something- rather many things. And that reply bewilders me. Did the Residents not grasp the poser, not want to answer it or something else was its reason, I wonder. It's unlikely that highly -trained staff -members did not grasp the poser and it was possible that female workers did not want to answer simple questions asked here. That finding should disturb us all. If that is the case at a tertiary care teaching hospital located in a State capital, what would have been happening at remote/ difficult to reach and rural hospitals located in hinterlands, we can easily fathom.

The authors highlight under a heading of Discussion that Senior Residents were 'not' granted maternity leave. Nevertheless, that action is against law- of-the land. Government provides maternity- leave to *all* the pregnant women regardless of their employment status. But stubborn administrative officers with local lower- level unyielding clerical members openly violate the law. Recently the Supreme Court of India held that maternity benefits could extend even beyond contractual terms [3]. After passage of the law by Parliament of India, Residents were up in arms to avail the benefit in Maharashtra State [4]. A few months ago, PGI Chandigarh extended maternity- leave benefits to women residents [5].

Indian Railways runs several hospitals across the country to serve its large number of employees in need of indoor facilities [6]. This year the Railway Board governing Railway Hospitals issued an order for Senior Residents working in Railway Hospitals with a title of entitlement of leave including maternity leave. Then the health care workers became eligible to avail the benefit [7]. Therefore, what scenario emerges is that fight to avail genuine and legally sanctioned benefits is long one, health care experts serving at tertiary care Institutes sometimes are not aware/ abreast of updated legal status and Court orders/ judgements, we need to have long -term patience and above all; work for larger benefit of society by serving pregnant -women at their vulnerable phase of life and career.

When the base of the pyramid is weak, women don't get their kosher dues, are rampantly denied their rights and deliberately made to resign when they demand their dues, as mentioned by the authors in the article, all of us are losers of the untapped talent. If we want a large number of female specialists in our hospitals, every day should be a Women's Day. Harmonious growth of a system requires that all the social/ political/ classes/ divisions be equally and fairly represented in our public -sector services.

And that approach demands us to assess and weigh them equitably and justly. Groups with special needs should not be made to run up to the Courts every time they turn up with their application for a favorable order /remedy and the status exemplifies failure of the political executive. When gross injustice and unfair denial may be overlooked and weak sections of the social ladder may be shortchanged, we should not be surprised to find a smaller number of women at the top jobs.

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