

Painful periods: 'Increase sick leave days for women employees, allow WFH'

By Tharanya Arumugam - July 20, 2022 @ 8:01pm



Women employees may be accorded a higher number of sick leave days or allowed to work from home when on their periods instead of implementing a blanket menstrual leave policy. - File pic

KUALA LUMPUR: Women employees may be accorded a higher number of sick leave days or allowed to work from home when on their periods instead of implementing a blanket menstrual leave policy.

Malaysia HR Forum and Social Compliance Malaysia chief executive officer and co-founder Arulkumar Singaraveloo said this when commenting on the issue of menstrual leave for women workforce in Malaysia.

Experts and working women in Malaysia had recently called on the government to look into enacting a national menstrual leave policy granting women suffering from severe period pain (or dysmenorrhea) at least a day off every month.

Arulkumar said companies could provide flexibility for women employees to either take unrecorded leave or other forms of paid leave at their discretion when they suffer from severe period pain or discomfort.

"Employers could also allow the affected employee to work from home and provide light duties where practical.

"I do not see this (menstrual leave) as a pressing concern for now given the various leaves provided to employees.

"A simple way forward is to leave this to the manager and employee to work this out, expanding the flexibility scope to cover this.

"Nothing stops the company from making this an added benefit to workers and (employers) do not need to wait for the government to legislate them (menstrual leave) which could help in attracting and retaining employees," he told the New Straits Times.

Earlier today, Deputy Women, Family, and Community Development Minister Datuk Siti Zailah Mohd Yusuff in Parliament said the government is in the midst of conducting a study on granting women menstrual leave.

She said the study involving more than 57,000 respondents nationwide is expected to be completed by October, this year.

Arulkumar noted that the law already mandates employers to provide sick leave or hospitalisation leave if an employee is unwell and found unfit to work by a registered medical practitioner.

Thus, he said the application of menstrual leave is not necessary.

He further said given the number of days a worker is away from work in Malaysia, which is deemed high by any comparison with other countries, additional leaves will add further financial and operational burden to companies and affect competitiveness and productivity.

Besides, he said the key challenge in introducing menstrual leave is the reliability of the evidence which is necessary for doctors and companies to grant leaves.

"The current provisions are adequate but there is some room for consideration. As suggested, a uniform entitlement practiced now for both genders could be reviewed."

"In my view, the subjectivity surrounding menstrual occurrences such as the severity of the pain will be a debatable issue and can be abused.

"The government has recently enhanced the sick leave and hospitalisation leave provisions, giving more of such leaves to workers. I do not believe it is practical to make it a policy at current times at least.

"It makes sense to use current sick leave entitlements if a female employee is unfit to work due to menstrual pain."

Arulkumar added that according women menstrual leave is not an issue of fairness or gender equality.

"We know for a fact that menstrual occurrence affects female employees only. It may make sense to provide higher sick leave entitlement for females instead as compared to male workers.

"This could be a consideration at the policy level by the government in the future.

"However, relevant stakeholders need to be consulted such as employers, due to the potential increase in operational costs, impact on productivity and competitiveness."