

Bridging the Care Gap: The Role of Paternity Leave in Promoting Workplace Equality in India

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Abstract

Despite the changing dynamics of modern parenthood and the growing call for workplace equality, India still lacks a clear and comprehensive legal framework for paternity leave in the private sector. While the Maternity Benefit Act of 1961 provides significant protection and benefits for working mothers, there is no corresponding law that grants similar support to new fathers, except for a limited provision available to government employees. This gap highlights a persistent imbalance in how caregiving responsibilities are legally recognised and supported.

This paper seeks to explore the legal vacuum surrounding paternity leave in India and to understand its broader impact on Human Resource practices, gender equality, and employee well-being. By adopting a comparative legal approach, the study examines how other countries have implemented paternity leave policies and contrasts these models with the Indian experience. It also looks into how HR departments in private organisations attempt to bridge this policy gap through internal measures, questioning whether these efforts align with the principles of constitutional equality under Articles 14 and 15 of the Indian Constitution.

Drawing on case studies, HR policy reviews, and employee interviews, the paper investigates the real-world and ethical challenges faced by organisations in the absence of statutory guidance. The findings suggest that without a recognised right to paternity leave, traditional gender roles continue to be reinforced, placing greater emotional and professional pressure on working mothers. This imbalance, in turn, undermines the goals of diversity, inclusion, and overall employee satisfaction within workplaces.

In conclusion, the study argues for the need for policy-level intervention—either through amendments to existing labour laws or the creation of a comprehensive Parental Leave Act. Such reform would help ensure that caregiving duties are shared more equally, while also promoting a healthier, more balanced work-life culture in Indian organisations.

Key words: Caregiving Roles, Employee Well- being, Gender Equality, Maternity Benefit Act, Paternal leave.

Introduction

Parenthood in today's world is no longer seen as the sole responsibility of the mother. Families are increasingly moving towards a model where both parents play an active role in nurturing and raising their children. The first few months after childbirth are not just critical for the mother's recovery but also for the

child's emotional and physical development. During this period, the presence of both parents can create a stronger support system at home and foster healthier family bonds.

In India, however, the law does not reflect this evolving reality. While the Maternity Benefit Act, 1961 offers mothers significant support in the form of leave and financial protection, there is no parallel legal framework for paternity leave in the private sector. This imbalance sends out a strong message—that child-rearing is primarily a mother's duty, while fathers are seen only as secondary caregivers. Such a system not only reinforces outdated gender roles but also places an unequal burden on women, making it harder for them to balance professional and personal responsibilities.

This gap in legislation also creates challenges for organizations striving for inclusivity and equality. Human Resource Management (HRM) practices across the globe increasingly encourage shared caregiving, flexible work arrangements, and equal opportunities for both genders. In contrast, the lack of formal paternity leave provisions in India prevents workplaces from aligning with these global best practices. More importantly, it denies fathers the opportunity to participate fully in one of the most important phases of family life.

Statement of Problems

India still does not have a statutory provision for paternity leave in the private sector, leaving fathers without clear rights or protections. In the absence of such a framework, HR departments create their own policies, which vary widely — some organizations provide only a few days of leave, while many offer none at all. This inconsistency not only creates confusion among employees but also highlights the lack of standardized guidelines in supporting fathers during early parenthood.

As a result, gender inequality in caregiving continues to persist. Mothers are expected to shoulder most of the childcare responsibilities, which adds to their professional and personal burden, while fathers are discouraged from playing an active caregiving role. The lack of supportive policy denies men the chance to achieve work-life balance and meaningful bonding with their children. Compounding this issue is the limited awareness among employees about the legal position of paternity leave in India, which leaves many families uncertain and unsupported at a crucial stage of life.

Review of Literature

The discussion on paternity leave and shared parental responsibility has been evolving over the past two decades, with scholars, organizations, and policymakers examining its implications for gender equality, family welfare, and workplace inclusivity.

Gupta (2019) contends that the lack of paternity leave provisions in India perpetuates patriarchal workplace norms, keeping caregiving duties confined to women. Similarly, Chatterjee (2020) emphasizes that true gender equality in labour laws can only be achieved when fathers are given equal opportunities to participate in early childcare.

According to the World Bank Report (2018), India remains behind more than 80 countries that provide paid paternity leave, revealing a significant gap between India's policy framework and global standards. The OECD Family Database (2021) further highlights that nations encouraging shared parental leave witness a higher rate of women returning to the workforce post-childbirth, demonstrating the direct link between paternity leave and gender-balanced labour participation.

At the organizational level, Bhatia (2017) explores the challenges faced by HR managers in managing employees' family responsibilities. Without structured paternity leave, the burden of balancing work and home life often falls disproportionately on female employees. Supporting this, the International Labour Organization (ILO, 2014) strongly advocates for paternity leave as a key step toward gender-equitable caregiving.

Roy (2016) observes that the absence of paternity leave policies frequently causes women to take extended career breaks, slowing their professional growth. In contrast, Williams (2013) argues that organizations offering paternity leave as part of their diversity initiatives foster a more inclusive, motivated, and loyal workforce.

In their comparative study, Evertsson and Duvander (2011) show that in Scandinavian countries, active paternal participation through paternity leave improves long-term father-child bonding and promotes gender equality within households. Closer to the Indian context,

Child well-being also features prominently in the literature. A UNICEF Report (2019) demonstrates that when both parents are present during early childhood, children show better emotional and cognitive development. Similarly, Moss and Deven (2015) found that statutory paternity leave across European Union countries significantly enhances gender parity and strengthens family stability.

From a constitutional perspective, Kumar (2018) argues that the right to equal treatment under Articles 14 and 15 of the Indian Constitution supports the introduction of paternity leave as a matter of legal equality. On a social level, Kabeer (2012) highlights how welfare policies that promote shared caregiving can dismantle long-standing gender hierarchies in the labour force. The NITI Aayog Discussion Paper (2020) also stresses that parental leave reform would contribute to higher female labour participation and overall economic productivity.

Recent literature has expanded this debate further. Desai (2022) explores the emotional and psychological dimensions of fatherhood, showing how early paternal involvement creates lasting family bonds and reduces postnatal stress for mothers. Sen and Mukherjee (2020) analyse corporate case studies in India, revealing that companies offering even short-term paternity leave witness higher employee satisfaction and retention.

Mahajan (2021) emphasizes that paternity leave is not just a gender issue but a developmental one—nations that invest in equitable family policies tend to perform better on human development indices. Similarly, UN Women (2022) underscores the role of shared parental leave in advancing Sustainable Development Goal 5 on gender equality.

From a comparative law standpoint, Blum (2019) examines European frameworks and concludes that gender-neutral parental leave laws foster cultural change by normalizing male caregiving. OECD (2022) reiterates that such policies, when supported by flexible work arrangements, reduce the gender pay gap over time.

Pathak (2023) provides a critical Indian viewpoint, noting that despite increased awareness, legislative inertia continues to prevent the establishment of a unified parental leave policy. Ramaswamy (2021) calls for integrating parental leave with India's labour reforms, suggesting that doing so would modernize workplace culture and align with constitutional principles of equality.

Finally, World Economic Forum (2023) data reveals that countries adopting inclusive parental leave policies tend to rank higher in global gender gap indices—further proving that paternity leave is not only a social necessity but also an economic imperative.

Collectively, the reviewed literature underscores a clear message: equitable parental leave benefits everyone—families, employers, and the nation. It enhances gender justice, promotes family well-being, and helps build workplaces that reflect the realities of modern parenthood. India's gradual yet uneven progress highlights the urgent need for legislative reform to ensure that caregiving becomes a shared responsibility, not a gendered expectation.

Objective of the Study

1. To analyse the absence of statutory paternity leave provisions in India.
2. To compare Indian practices with global models of parental leave.
3. To examine the impact of the legal vacuum on HR policies, gender equality, and employee well-being.
4. To assess employee and organizational perspectives through surveys and case studies.
5. To propose recommendations for policy interventions to promote equitable caregiving

Methodology

This research adopts a descriptive and analytical design, aiming to both present the current state of paternity leave in India and critically examine its impact on gender equality and workplace practices. Data was gathered through primary surveys of 50 respondents from different employment sectors using structured questionnaires, focusing on their awareness, experiences, and organizational policies.

In addition, secondary data from journals, international reports (ILO, UNICEF, World Bank), statutes, and case law was used to support the analysis. The study relied on questionnaires, HR policy reviews, and case studies as tools, with a purposive sampling method chosen to capture varied workplace realities and ensure that responses were relevant to the research objectives.

Significance of the Study

A Google Form survey was used to gather additional data and public opinion. The survey results are presented through pie charts and bar graphs, illustrating public below are the responses form the Google form survey

These survey responses provide valuable insights into employee awareness, workplace practices, and perceptions regarding paternity leave in India. Each chart and table has been examined to highlight both the numerical findings and their broader social and organizational implication. The findings of this study hold practical significance for lawmakers, policymakers, and HR professionals. Insights from the research can support the development of gender-sensitive labour reforms that align with constitutional principles of equality and international best practices. Ultimately, the study seeks to encourage a cultural and legal shift towards recognizing paternity leave not as an additional benefit, but as a shared responsibility essential for a balanced and progressive society.

Hypothesis of the Study

Hypothesis 1:

Impact of Absence of Statutory Paternity Leave

Without a clear legal framework, paternity leave in India remains inconsistent and inadequate. This gap forces mothers to shoulder most of the childcare responsibilities while fathers are discouraged from playing an equal role. As a result, gender inequality at home and in the workplace is reinforced.

Hypothesis 2:

Potential of a Statutory Parental Leave Law

If a comprehensive parental leave law were introduced, it would create space for both parents to share caregiving responsibilities more fairly. Such a step would not only support gender equality but also improve employee satisfaction and work-life balance, helping families and organizations alike.

Data Analysis

A Google Form survey was used to gather additional data and public opinion. The survey results are presented through pie charts and bar graphs, illustrating public below are the responses form the Google form survey

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1) Age of the respondents

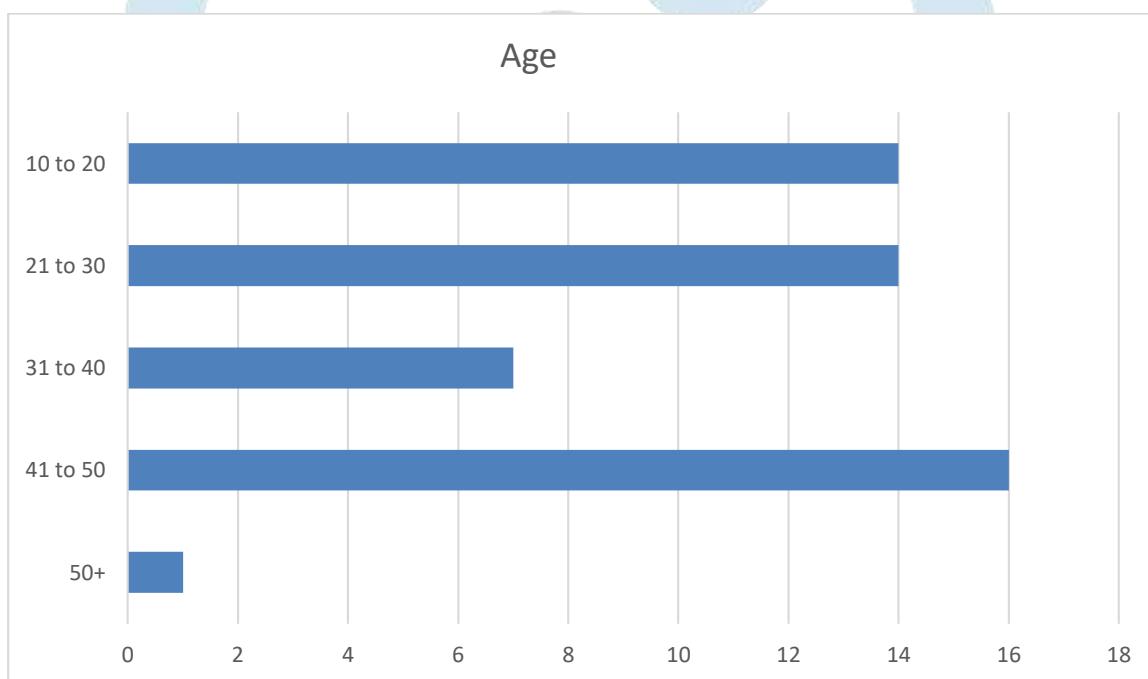


Figure 1: Age of the respondent

The largest group of respondents belonged to the 41–50 years category (32%), followed by equal representation from the 21–30 years (14%) and 10–20 years (14%) groups. Meanwhile, only 7% were between 31–40 years and 1% were above 50 years.

The dominance of respondents in the 41–50 years group shows that opinions largely came from individuals with established careers and family responsibilities, making their views on paternity leave grounded in lived experiences. The younger age groups (10–20 and 21–30) reflect a forward-looking perspective, as many are at the beginning of their professional and family journeys. The relatively smaller share of the 31–40 group and older employees indicates that while insights are spread across age brackets, the strongest voice in this survey came from mid-career professionals balancing work and family life.

2) Gender of the respondent

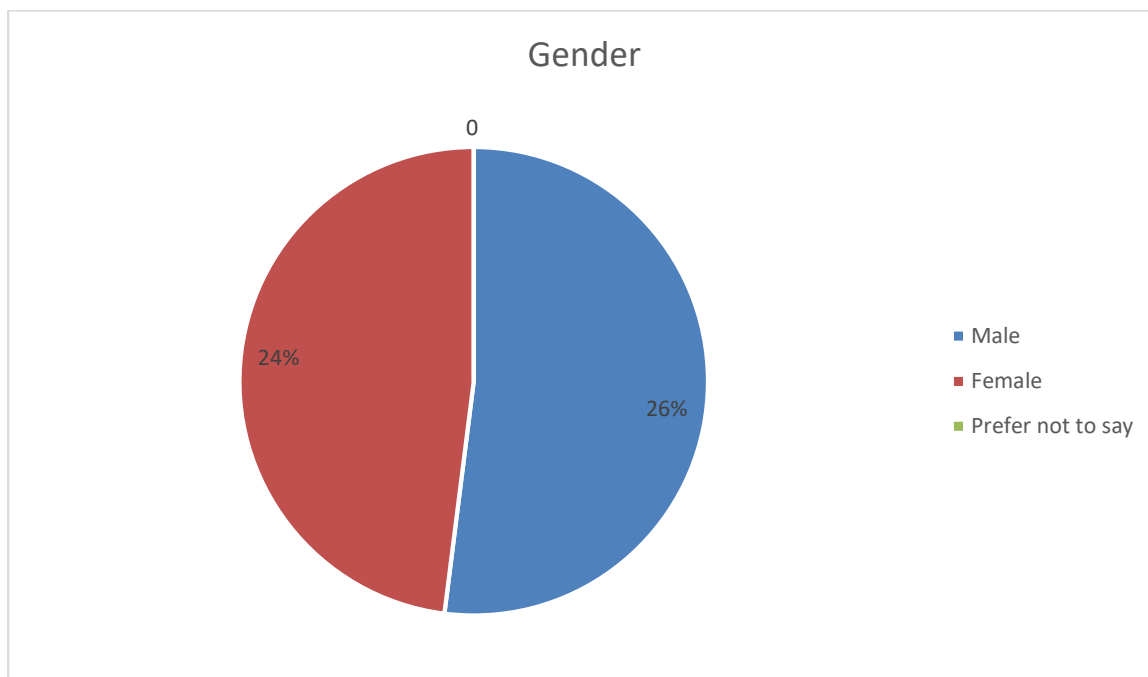


Figure 2: Gender of the respondent

Out of the total 50 respondents, 26 were male and 24 were female, making the sample almost evenly divided between both genders. This balance ensures that the study reflects perspectives from men and women alike, providing a fair representation of opinions on paternity leave.

Men's responses focused on the need for legal recognition and shared family responsibilities, while women highlighted how the absence of such policies increases their caregiving burden and affects their careers. Together, these viewpoints capture the issue from both ends, making the findings more inclusive, credible, and reflective of real workplace experiences.

3) Employee sector

Table No.1: Employee sector of the Respondents

Indicators	Government	Private IT	Private Non IT	Self employed	Student	Total
Male	2 (4.0)	3 (6.0)	19 (38.0)	2 (4.0)	1 (2.0)	24 (48.0)
Female	1 (2.0)	4 (8.0)	7 (14.0)	0 (0.0)	11 (22.0)	13 (26.0)
Prefer not to say	0 (0.0)	0 (0.0)	0 (0.0)	0 (0.0)	0 (0.0)	0 (0.0)
Total	7 (14.0)	7 (14.0)	26 (42.0)	2 (4.0)	12 (24.0)	50 (100.0)

Source: Primary Source

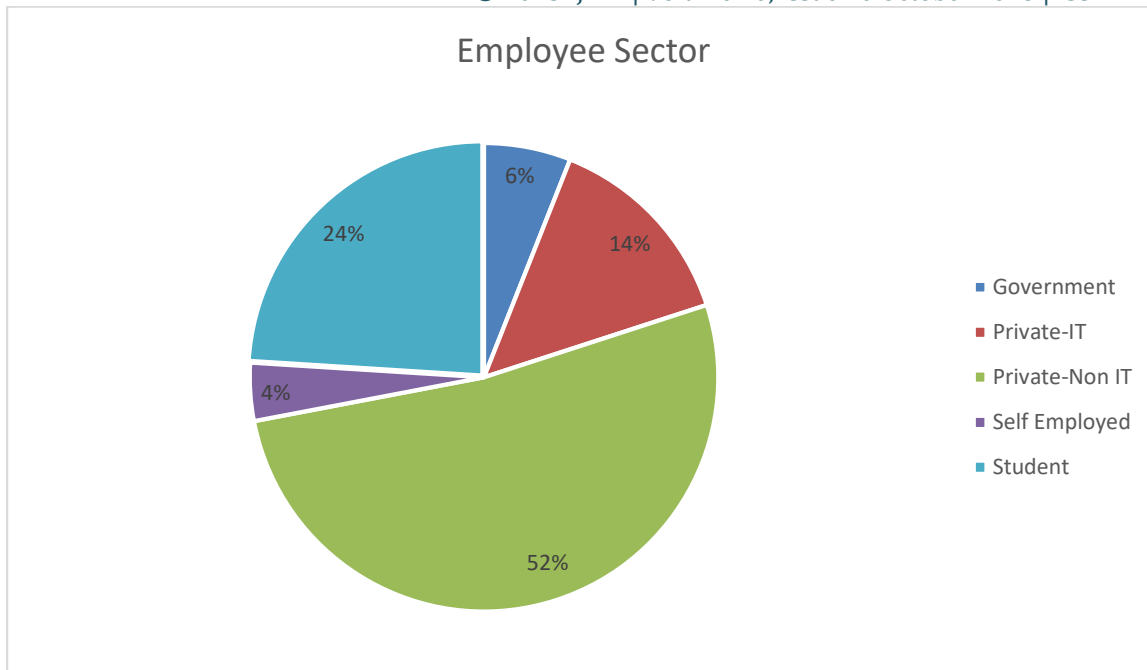


Figure 3: Employee Sector

From the above graph 52% worked in the private non-IT sector, 24% as students, 14% in private IT, 4% self-employed, 6% government employees.

Since the majority are from the private sector, where no statutory paternity leave exists, the results directly highlight the gaps in India's labour framework. The small presence of government employees shows that paternity leave there is still limited, but at least acknowledged.

4) Marital Status of the Respondent

Table No.2: Marital Status

Indicators	Married with children	Married without children	Single	Total
Male	7 (14.0)	3 (6.0)	10 (20.0)	20 (40.0)
Female	16 (32.0)	0 (0.0)	14 (28.0)	30 (60.0)
Prefer not to say	0 (0.0)	0 (0.0)	0 (0.0)	0 (0.0)
Total	23 (46.0)	3 (6.0)	24 (48.0)	50 (100.0)

Source: Primary Source

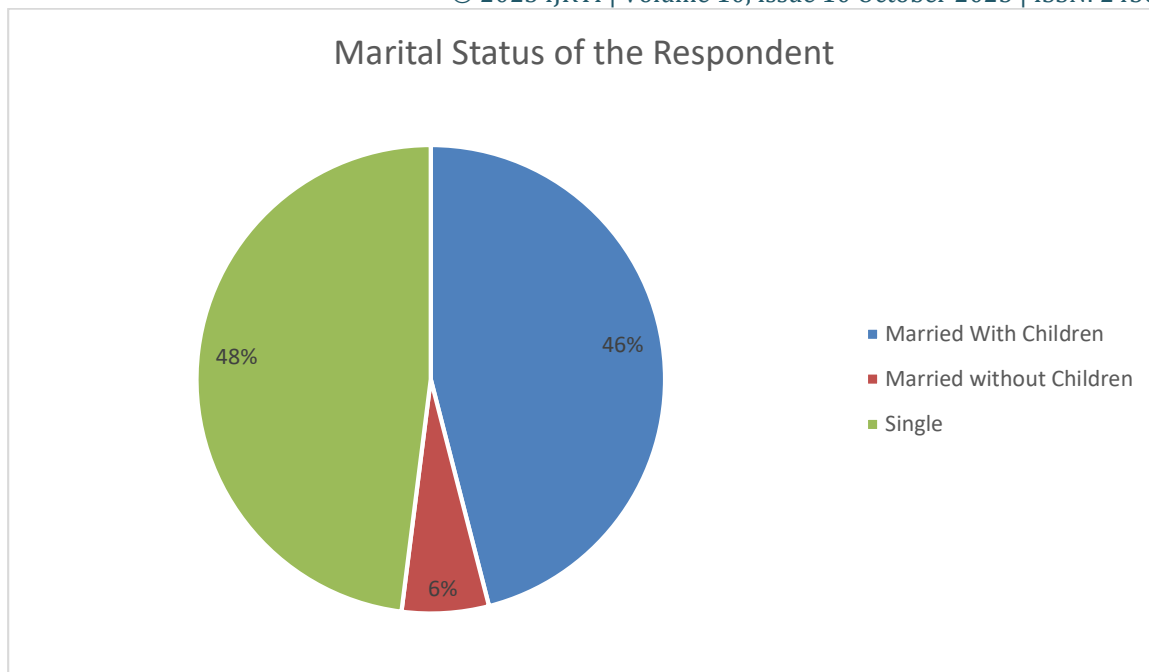


Figure 4: Marital Status Of the Respondent

The data shows that singles make up 48% of the respondents, forming the largest group. This indicates that nearly half of the participants are unmarried, which could influence trends in personal choices, lifestyle, and priorities.

Among married respondents, 46% have children while 6% do not. The majority of married participants having children highlights family responsibilities as an important factor, whereas those without children form a small minority. This distribution reflects how marital and family status may shape perspectives and decisions.

5) Are you aware of any legal provision for paternity leave in India?

Table No.3: There is awareness among the people about the legal provision for paternity leave in India.

Indicators	Yes	No	Total
Male	3 (6.0)	24 (48.0)	27 (54.0)
Female	12 (12.0)	11 (22)	23 (46)
Prefer Not to Say	0 (0.0)	0 (0.0)	0 (0.0)
Total	15 (30.0)	35 (70.0)	50 (100.0)

Source: Primary Source

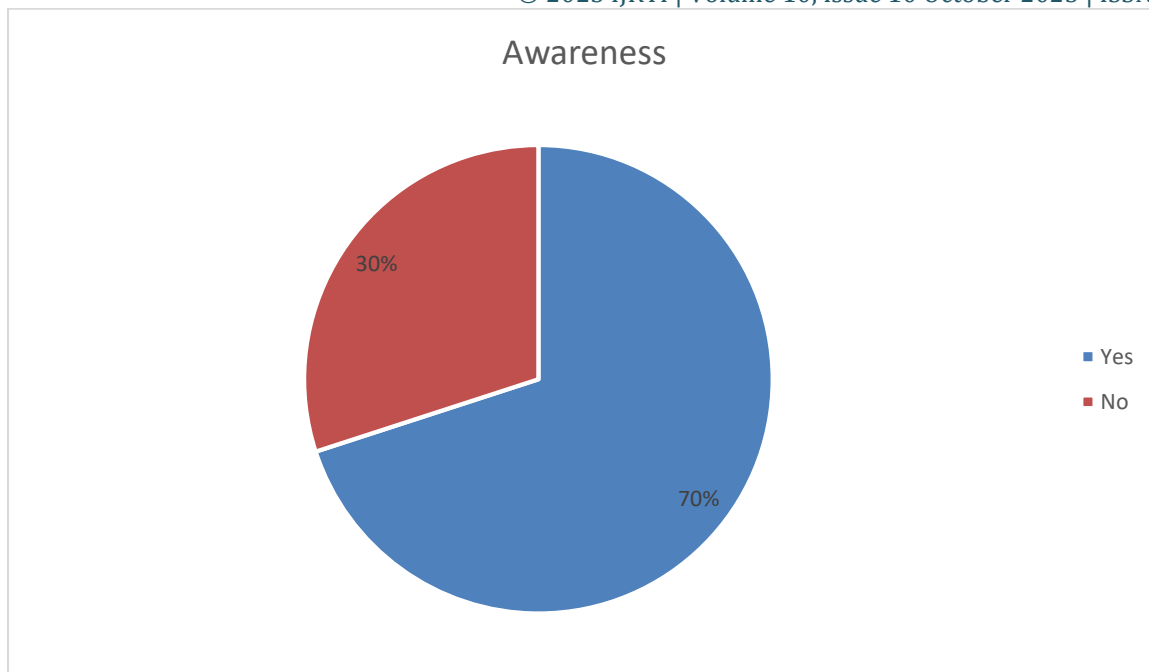


Figure 5: Awareness about Paternity Leave among the Respondents

The survey indicates that awareness about paternity leave among respondents is relatively high, with 70% reporting that they are aware of it. This suggests that most participants have at least basic knowledge of paternity leave policies and their implications.

However, 30% of respondents indicated that they are not aware of paternity leave, highlighting a gap in knowledge that could affect uptake and utilization. This points to the need for greater awareness campaigns and educational initiatives to ensure that all employees understand their rights and benefits regarding paternity leave.

6) Do you think the absence on Statutory Law on Paternity leave would affect gender Equality?

Table No.4: The Absences of a Statutory law on Paternity Leave affects Gender Equality.

Indicators	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	Total
Male	14 (28.0)	3 (6.0)	5 (10.0)	3 (6.0)	1 (2.0)	26 (52.0)
Female	7 (14.0)	8 (17.0)	5 (10.0)	3 (6.0)	1 (2.0)	24 (48.0)
Prefer not to say	0 (0.0))	0 (0.0)	0 (0.0)	0 (0.0)	0 (0.0)	0 (0.0)
Total	21 (42.0)	11 (22.0)	10 (20.0)	6 (12.0)	2 (4.0)	50 (100.0)

Source: Primary Source

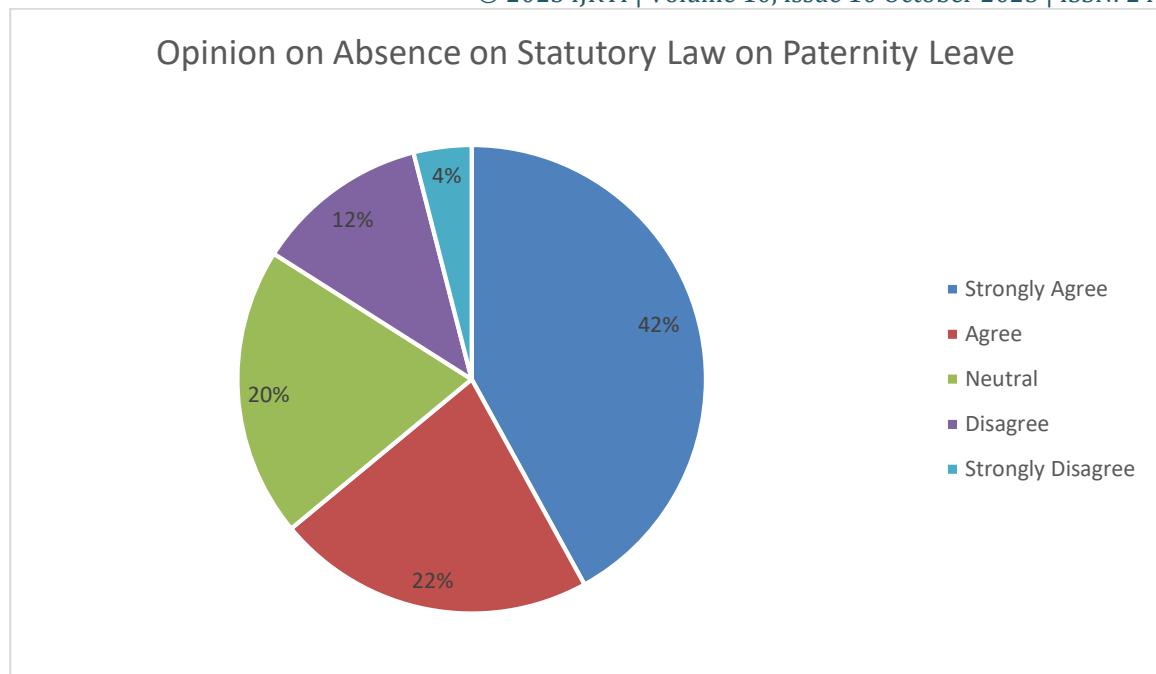


Figure 6: Opinion on the absence of Statutory Law for Paternity Leave

For many fathers, paternity leave is more than just time off—it directly impacts how they balance work and family life. Around a quarter of respondents (26%) felt it helped them manage their responsibilities better, while 18% said it gave them the chance to share childcare equally with their partners, reducing the old idea that caregiving is only a mother's role. A smaller group (6%) pointed out how such leave makes them feel valued at work, improving job satisfaction and loyalty.

What stands out most, however, is that half of the respondents (50%) saw paternity leave as supporting all of these needs together—helping balance work and home, breaking down gender bias, and making workplaces more supportive. This shows that paternity leave isn't just a benefit, but a meaningful step toward healthier families and happier employees.

7) Does Your Organisation provide Paternity Leave?

Table No.5: Most of the Organisations does not provide Paternity Leave.

Indicators	Yes, Paid	Yes, Unpaid	No	Total
Male	9 (18.0)	4 (8.0)	13 (26.0)	26 (52.0)
Female	5 (10.0)	7 (14.0)	12 (24.0)	24 (48.0)
Prefer not to say	0 (0.0)	0 (0.0)	0 (0.0)	0 (0.00)
Total	14 (28.0)	11 (22.0)	15 (30.0)	50 (100.0)

Source: Primary Source

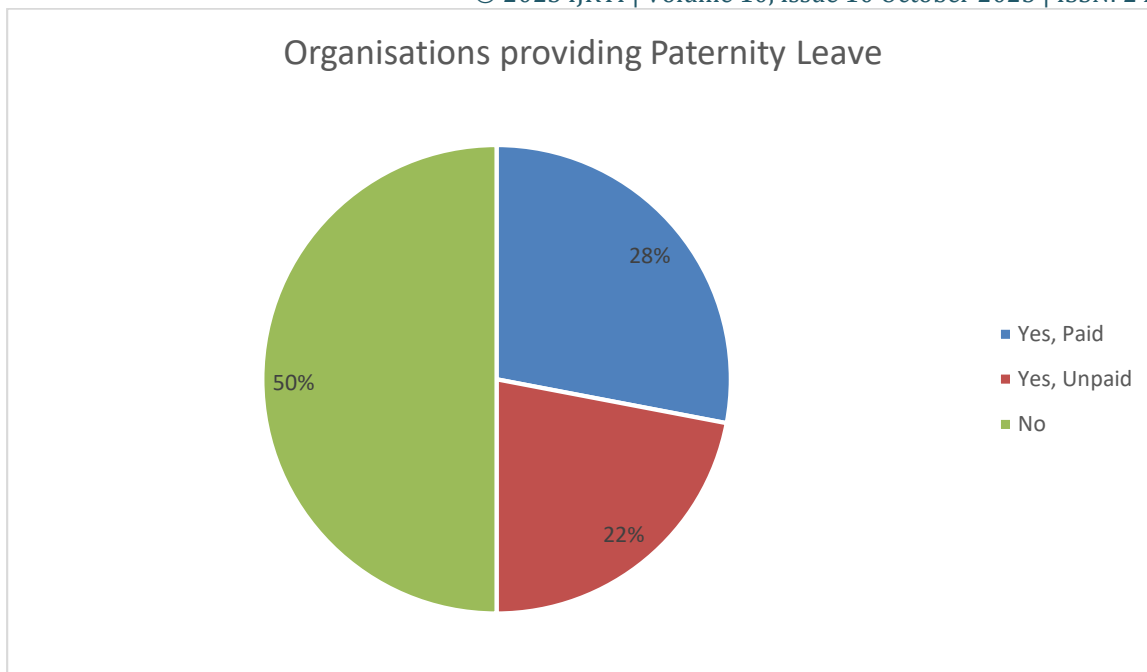


Figure 7: Organisations Providing Paternity Leave

The survey shows that 28% of respondents work in organizations that provide paid paternity leave, while 22% have access to unpaid paternity leave. This indicates that a portion of employees can avail themselves of paternity benefits, though the type and value of support vary.

However, half of the respondents (50%) reported that their organizations do not offer any paternity leave. This highlights a significant gap in workplace policies and underscores the need for more organizations to adopt inclusive parental leave practices to support fathers and promote gender-equitable caregiving.

8) If yes, how many Days of Paternity Leave are Granted?

Table No.6: Paternity Leave are provided for less than 7 days

Indicators	Less than 7 days	7-14 days	More than 14 days	Total
Male	1 (2.0)	4 (8.0)	21 (42.0)	26 (52.0)
Female	8 (16.0)	6 (12.0)	10 (20.0)	24 (48.0)
Prefer not to say	0 (0.0)	0 (0.0)	0 (0.0)	0 (0.0)
Total	9 (18.0)	10 (20.0)	31 (62.0)	50 (100.0)

Source: Primary Source

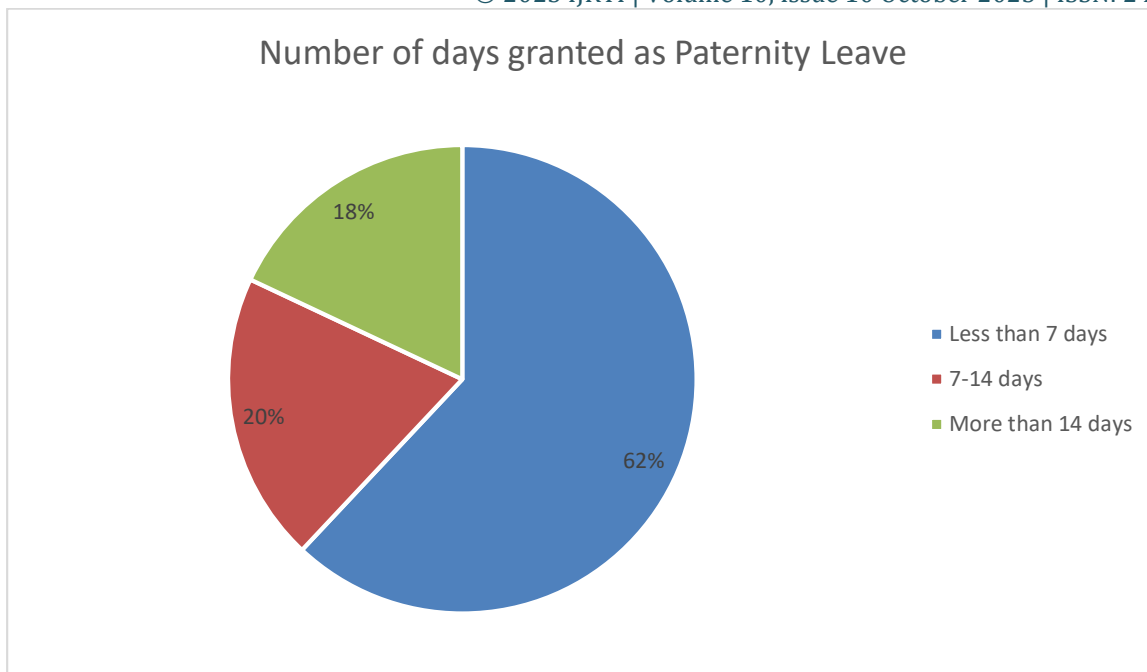


Figure 8: No. of days granted as Paternity Leave

Among respondents whose organizations provide paternity leave, 62% reported that less than 7 days are granted. This indicates that short-term leave is the most common practice.

Additionally, 20% of respondents receive 7–14 days of paternity leave, while only 18% have access to more than 14 days. This distribution highlights that extended paternity leave remains limited, suggesting room for improvement in workplace policies to better support fathers.

9) Do you believe your organisation's policy is sufficient to support fathers during childcare?

Table No.7: Organisation's Policy are not sufficient to support Father during childcare

Indicators	Yes	No	Somewhat	Total
Male	11 (22.0)	13 (26.0)	2 (4.0)	26 (52.0)
Female	8 (16.0)	10 (20.0)	6 (12.0)	24 (48.0)
Prefer not to say	0 (0.0)	0 (0.0)	0 (0.00)	0 (0.0)
Total	19 (38.0)	23 (46.0)	8 (16.0)	50 (100.0)

Source: Primary Source

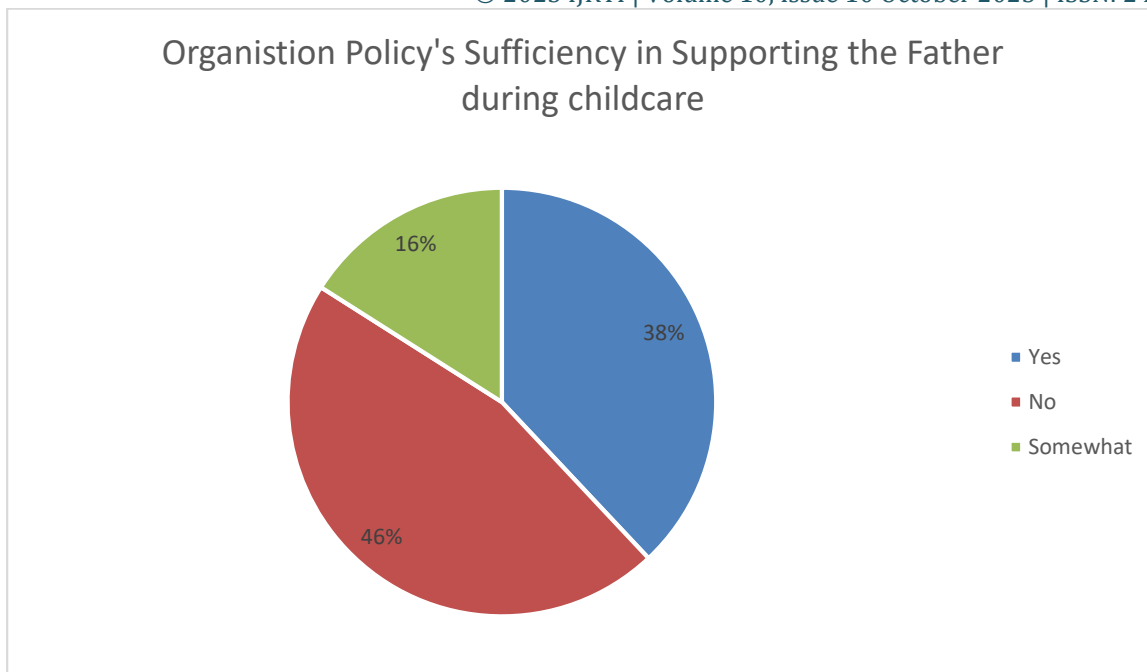


Figure 9: Organisation policy's sufficiency in supporting the father during childcare

When asked whether their organization's policies sufficiently support fathers during child care, only 38% of respondents felt that the policies were adequate. This suggests that a little over a third of fathers feel genuinely supported in balancing work and parenting responsibilities.

Meanwhile, 46% believed that the policies are insufficient, indicating that nearly half of the participants face challenges in accessing meaningful support. Another 16% felt that the support was only "somewhat" adequate, reflecting a gap between policy provisions and practical needs. Overall, these responses highlight the need for organizations to strengthen their parental support systems to better empower fathers in child care.

10) Do you think Paternity Leave helps in:

Table No. 8: Paternity Leave helps in Improving work-life balance, reducing gender bias gender in childcare, increasing employee satisfaction & retention.

Indicators	Improving work-life balance	Reducing gender bias in childcare	Increasing employee satisfaction & retention	All of the above	Total
Male	11 (22.0)	2 (4.0)	1 (2.0)	12 (24.0)	26 (52.0)
Female	2 (4.0)	7 (14.0)	2 (4.0)	13 (26.0)	24 (48.0)
Prefer not to say	0 (0.0)	0 (0.0)	0 (0.0)	0 (0.0)	0 (0.0)
Total	13 (26.0)	9 (18.0)	3 (6.0)	15 (30.0)	50 (100.0)

Source: Primary Source

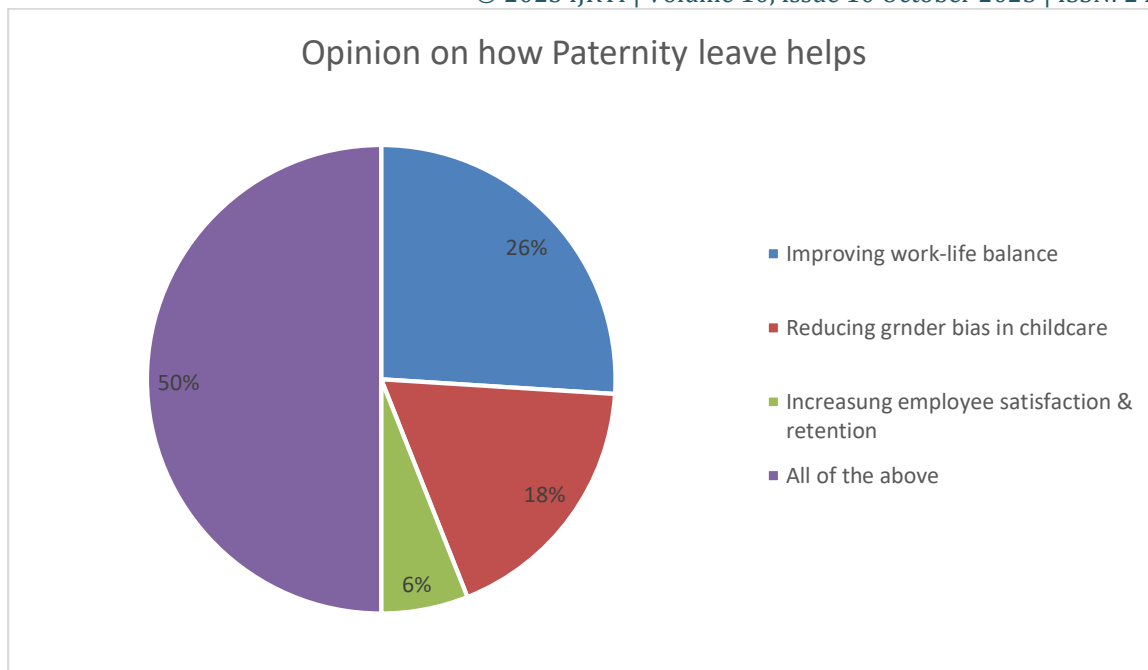


Figure 10: Opinion on how Paternity Leave helps.

The survey findings show that paternity leave plays a vital role in different aspects of family and workplace dynamics. For 26% of respondents, it helps improve work–life balance by allowing fathers to spend more time with their newborns while managing professional responsibilities. Another 18% felt that it reduces gender bias in child care, as it enables fathers to share caregiving duties more equally with mothers. A smaller share, 6%, highlighted its role in increasing employee satisfaction and retention, showing that supportive policies encourage loyalty and morale.

Importantly, half of the respondents (50%) believed that paternity leave supports all of these areas collectively—work–life balance, gender equality, and employee well-being. This demonstrates that comprehensive paternity leave policies are not just family-friendly, but also workplace-friendly, promoting healthier and more equitable environments overall.

11) What happens if paternity leave were made compulsory by law?

Table No.9: If Paternity leave were made compulsory by law, it will improve gender equality at workplace.

Indicators	Improving gender equality at workplace	Reduce women's career burden after childbirth	Increase organisational costs	Have no major effect	Total
Male	18 (36.0)	4 (8.0)	1 (2.0)	2 (4.0)	25 (50.0)
Female	5 (10.0)	17 (34.0)	3 (6.0)	0 (0.0)	25 (50.0)
Prefer not to say	0 (0.0)	0 (0.0)	0 (0.0)	0 (0.0)	0 (0.0)
Total	23 (46.0)	21 (42.0)	4 (8.0)	2 (4.0)	50 (100.0)

Source: Primary Source

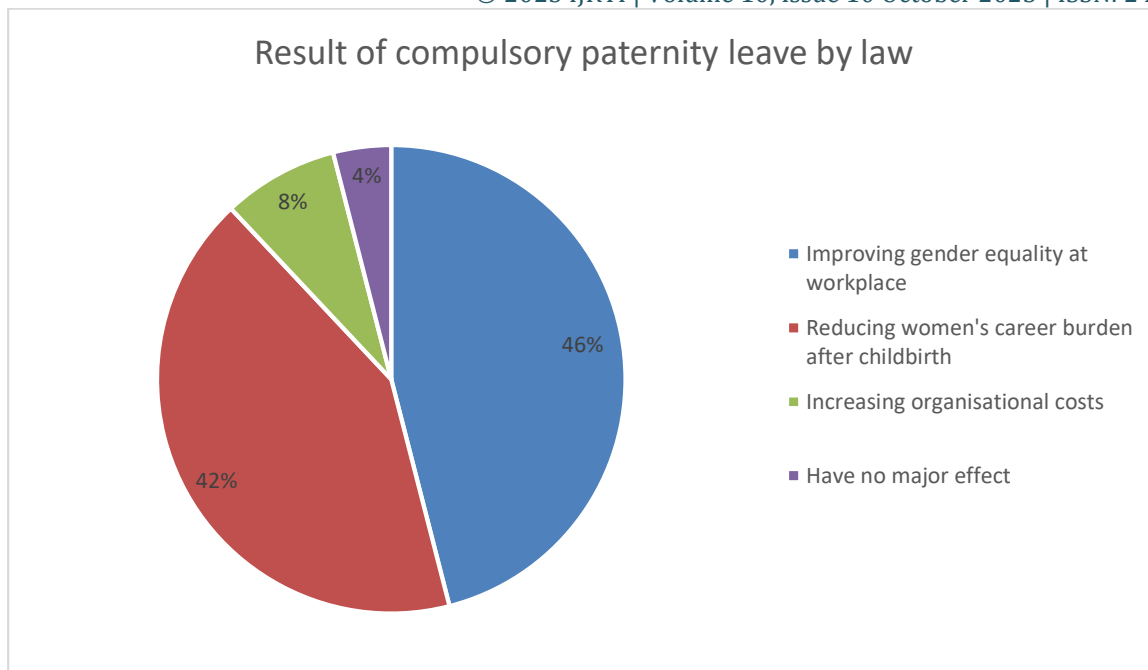


Figure 11: Result of compulsory leave by law

If paternity leave became compulsory by law, 46% of respondents felt it would promote gender equality at work, while 42% believed it would ease the career burden on women after childbirth. Only 8% thought it would raise organisational costs, and 4% felt it would have no major effect.

Overall, most employees see legal paternity leave as a positive move toward fairness and shared responsibility. Allowing fathers to take leave helps balance family and work roles, reducing pressure on women and promoting equality. Though a few remain unsure about its costs, the majority view it as a step toward a more inclusive and supportive workplace.

12) How should paternity leave be?

Table No.10: Paternity leave Duration

Indicators	Half of maternity leave	Equal to maternity leave	A fixed number	Not necessary	Total
Male	15 (30.0)	5 (10.0)	2 (4.0)	4 (8.0)	26 (52.0)
Female	12 (24.0)	5 (10.0)	6 (12.0)	1 (2.0)	24 (48.0)
Prefer not to say	0 (0.0)	0 (0.0)	0 (0.0)	0 (0.0)	0 (0.0)
Total	27 (54.0)	10 (20.0)	8 (16.0)	5 (10.0)	50 (100.0)

Source: Primary Source

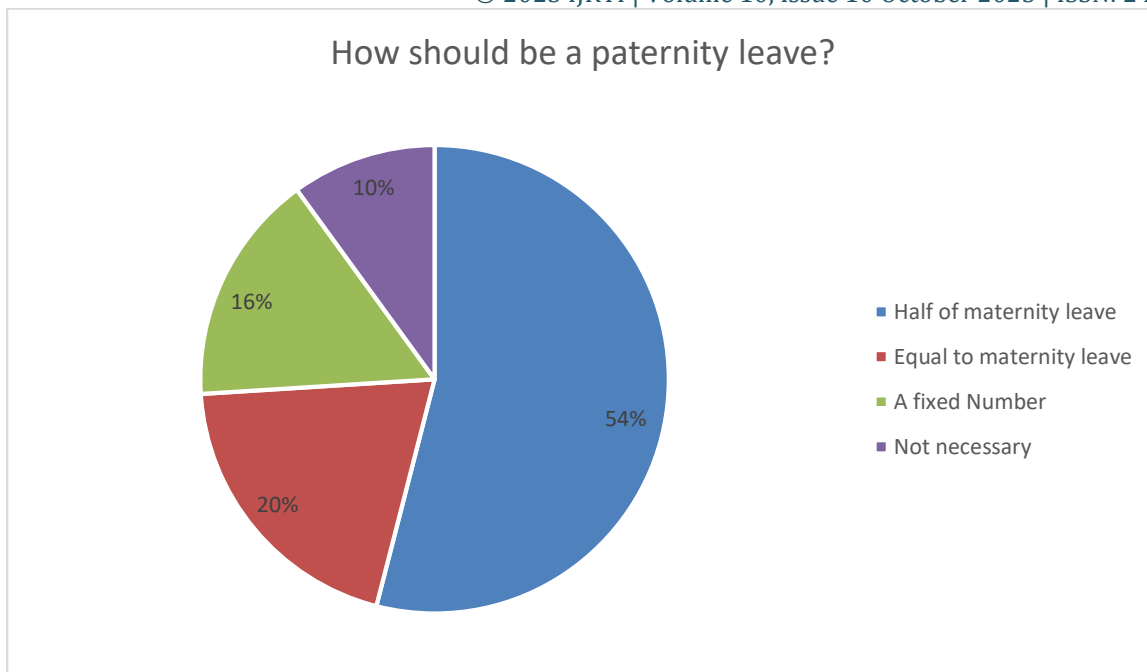


Figure 12: How a paternity leave should be

When asked how paternity leave should be structured, over half of the respondents (54%) felt it should be at least half the length of maternity leave. This shows a growing recognition that fathers also need time to bond with their newborns and share caregiving duties.

About 20% believed paternity leave should be equal to maternity leave, supporting full equality in caregiving roles. Another 16% preferred a flexible duration based on family and work needs, while 10% felt it wasn't necessary.

Overall, the responses highlight a strong shift toward making paternity leave more meaningful and balanced, reflecting changing attitudes about shared parenting.

13) Do you support the introduction of a Paternal leave Law (covering both mothers and fathers equally)?

Table No.11: Support for Parental Law

Indicators	Strongly agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly disagree	Total
Male	17 (34.0)	4 (8.0)	4 (8.0)	1 (2.0)	0 (0.0)	26 (52.0)
Female	8 (16.0)	10 (20.0)	4 (8.0)	2 (4.0)	0 (0.0)	24 (48.0)
Prefer not to say	0 (0.0)	0 (0.0)	0 (0.0)	0 (0.0)	0 (0.0)	0 (0.0)
Total	25 (50.0)	14 (28.0)	8 (16.0)	3 (6.0)	0 (0.0)	50 (100.0)

Source: Primary Source

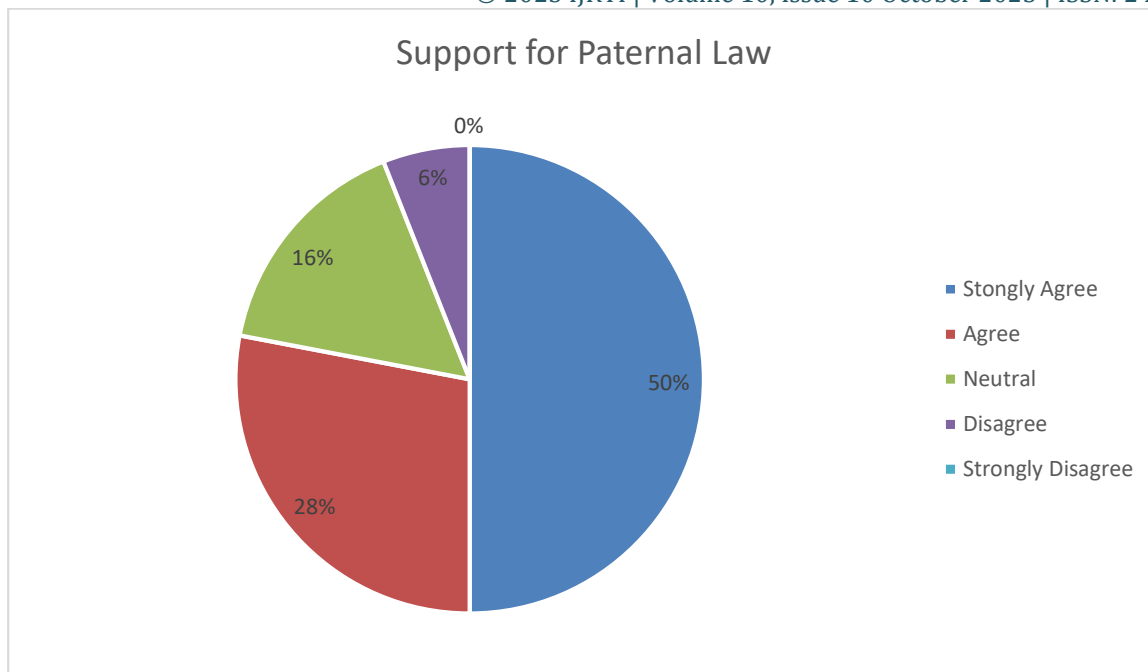


Figure 13: Support for Paternal Law

The survey shows strong support for making paternity leave a statutory law. Half the respondents (50%) strongly agreed, and another 28% agreed, showing that most people think such a law is vital for fairness and shared responsibility in child care. Many feel it's not just about giving leave; it's about letting fathers take equal part in parenting and easing the load on mothers. Meanwhile, 16% were neutral, possibly unsure how the law would work or what effect it would have. Only 6% disagreed, and nobody strongly opposed it. This clear support suggests people want more inclusive workplace policies that encourage equality and healthier family dynamics.

14) In the opinion, who should bear the cost of paternity leave?

Table No.12: The cost for paternity leave should be shared responsibility of both government and the employer.

Indicators	Government	Employer	Shared responsibility of both government and employer	Total
Male	2 (4.0)	13 (26.0)	11 (22.0)	26 (52.0)
Female	4 (8.0)	5 (10.0)	15 (30.0)	24 (48.0)
Prefer not to say	0 (0.0)	0 (0.0)	0 (0.0)	0 (0.0)
Total	6 (12.0)	18 (32.0)	26 (52.0)	50 (100.0)

Source: Primary Source

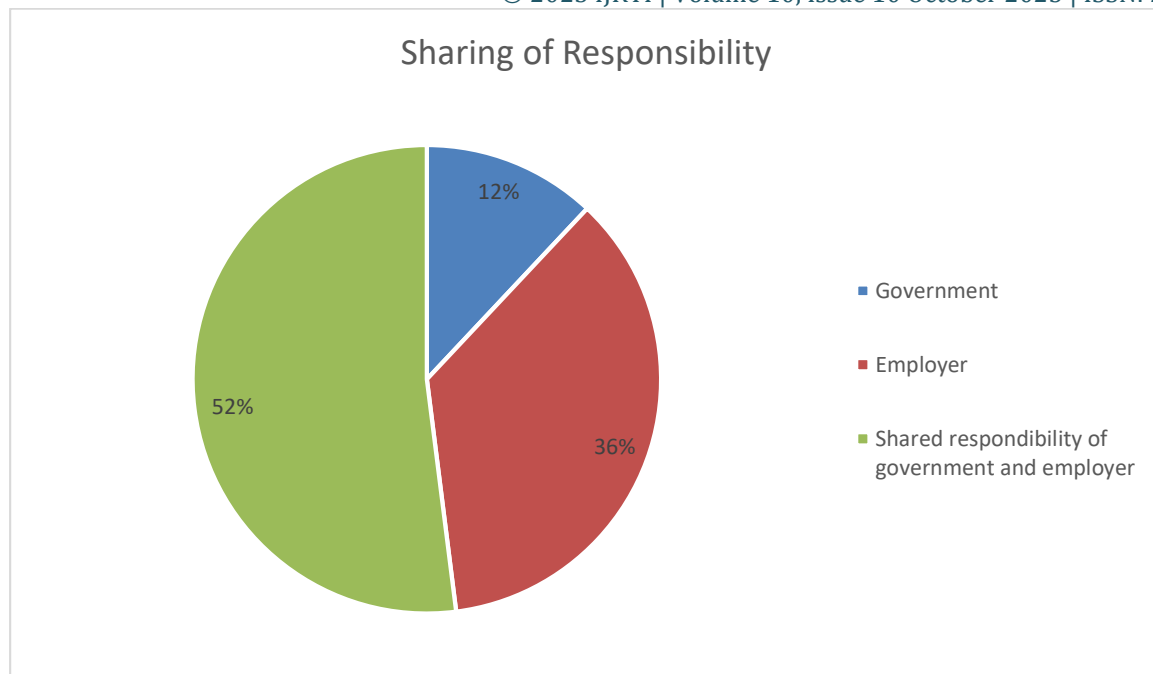


Figure 14: Sharing of responsibility

When asked who should take responsibility for providing paternity leave, most respondents (52%) believed it should be a shared responsibility between the government and employers. This reflects an understanding that effective policies need both legal backing and workplace-level support to truly benefit fathers and families.

Meanwhile, 36% of respondents placed the responsibility on employers alone, highlighting expectations that organizations should take the lead in creating supportive work cultures. A smaller group, 12%, felt it should be solely the government's duty, pointing toward the need for statutory reforms. Overall, the responses reveal that people see paternity leave not as the burden of one institution, but as a collective responsibility to create fairer, more family-friendly systems.

Data Interpretation

The findings from the survey clearly highlight the existence of a policy vacuum in India's private sector when it comes to paternity leave. A striking 30.0% of respondents were unaware of any legal provisions, confirming that both employees and organizations lack proper guidance. This supports the notion that the absence of statutory law creates confusion and leaves fathers dependent on inconsistent employer-driven policies. The fact that nearly 50% of organizations do not provide paternity leave at all, and that most of those who do provide only less than 7 days, shows that current practices are symbolic rather than substantive.

Employees themselves recognize the broader social value of paternity leave. More than half reported that it improves work-life balance, while almost half linked it to a reduction in women's career burden. These responses highlight that paternity leave is not merely about fathers; it directly supports mothers, children, and workplace equality. Furthermore, the strong support for a Parental Leave Law (54% in favour) reflects a growing demand for statutory reform to ensure fairness and inclusivity.

The survey also revealed a pragmatic approach to the cost of paternity leave. While most employees (36%) believe employers should take responsibility, a substantial group (54%) supported a shared responsibility model with government involvement. This shows that employees are open to practical solutions, as long as fathers are not excluded from caregiving roles.

The absence of statutory paternity leave provisions reinforces gender inequality in the workplace. The data confirms that inconsistent and inadequate leave provisions disproportionately burden mothers (as recognized by 42.0% of respondents). The lack of law also normalizes the idea that caregiving is a woman's responsibility, reinforcing inequality.

Introduction of a statutory parental leave law will improve gender equity and employee satisfaction. Nearly half the respondents strongly supported or agreed with the introduction of a parental leave law. Many felt it would reduce women's career disadvantages (42.0%) and improve gender equality (46.0%). Employees also linked paternity leave to higher satisfaction and better work-life balance, confirming that such a law would have positive workplace outcomes.

The evidence strongly supports both hypotheses. The absence of statutory paternity leave is clearly linked to gendered inequalities, while the introduction of a parental leave law is widely seen as a step toward equity, inclusion, and better employee well-being. The findings reinforce the need for urgent policy-level interventions to move India toward global best practices.

Suggestions

1. Amend the Maternity Benefit Act, 1961 to incorporate paternity leave.

The existing Act places all emphasis on mothers, leaving fathers out of the caregiving equation. Amending it to include paternity leave would not only balance responsibilities but also send a strong message that childcare is a shared duty.

2. Introduce a comprehensive Parental Leave Act covering both parents equally.

A standalone law on parental leave would recognize both parents as equal partners in nurturing their child. Such legislation would bridge the gender gap and bring India closer to global standards of family-friendly labor laws.

3. Implement a cost-sharing model between government and employers.

One of the key barriers for organizations is the financial burden of offering paid leave. A joint model where costs are shared between employers and the government would make paternity leave more practical and sustainable.

4. Encourage organizations to align HR policies with Articles 14 and 15 of the Constitution.

Ensuring equal treatment in the workplace is not only a legal duty but also a moral responsibility. By aligning HR policies with constitutional principles, companies can promote fairness and inclusivity in a concrete way.

5. Promote awareness programs highlighting the importance of father's involvement in childcare.

Beyond laws, social attitudes also need to shift. Campaigns and workshops can help challenge stereotypes, encouraging fathers to take an active role in caregiving and normalizing paternity leave in society.

6. Provide tax incentives to organizations offering parental leave.

Recognizing and rewarding progressive employers would encourage more companies to follow suit. Tax incentives can make parental leave policies not just a social good but also a financially viable choice for businesses.

7. Benchmark India's policy with Scandinavian models for long-term impact.

Countries like Sweden and Norway have shown how well-designed paternity leave can transform both workplaces and families. India can draw valuable lessons from these models and adapt them to its own socio-economic context.

Conclusion

The absence of a statutory framework for paternity leave in India is more than a legal gap—it is a social and cultural barrier that continues to reinforce patriarchal caregiving roles. By placing the primary responsibility of child-rearing on mothers, the system not only burdens women disproportionately but also sidelines fathers from one of the most meaningful phases of family life. This imbalance affects women's career progression, limits workplace inclusivity, and perpetuates outdated gender norms.

Although some Human Resource departments in progressive organizations have begun experimenting with voluntary paternity leave, these efforts remain scattered and inconsistent, benefiting only a small fraction of employees. Without legal backing, such policies lack uniformity and cannot bring about large-scale change.

Global experiences provide compelling evidence that statutory parental leave leads to positive outcomes for all stakeholders. Families benefit from shared caregiving and stronger parent-child bonds; organizations benefit from improved employee morale, retention, and productivity; and national economies benefit from higher female workforce participation and reduced gender disparity in employment.

For India, moving toward a balanced and gender-equal parental leave policy is not just a matter of fairness—it is a necessity for building an inclusive workforce that reflects modern family realities. By recognizing fathers as equal caregivers and ensuring equity in caregiving roles, India can take an important step toward gender justice, social progress, and sustainable economic growth.

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