



FAMILY LAW

Educational Equity and Maternal Rights: The Madhya Pradesh High Court's Progressive Stand

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The intersection of women's education and maternal rights has found renewed judicial attention through a ruling by the Madhya Pradesh High Court (*Rumaisa Arwa Versus The State Of Madhya Pradesh And Others*, Neutral Citation No. 2026:Mphc-Jbp:9089). This significant judgment addresses the fundamental question of whether academic institutions can deny educational opportunities to female students who require maternity leave, ultimately establishing important precedents for gender equality in higher education.

The case originated when Rumaisa Arwa, a student pursuing Bachelor of Unani Medicine and Surgery at Hakim Syed Ziaul Hassan Government Autonomous Unani College in Bhopal, faced academic obstacles following her pregnancy. Having successfully completed her first-year examinations in 2022 and progressing to the second year, her educational trajectory was disrupted when institutional policies failed to accommodate her maternal circumstances.

The crux of the legal challenge centered on the college's stringent attendance requirements, which mandated 75% attendance for examination eligibility. Despite Arwa's application for maternity leave, the institution offered only a marginal 10% attendance relaxation, effectively barring her from appearing in third semester examinations due to attendance shortfall caused by pregnancy-related absence and subsequent childbirth on November 20, 2024.

This institutional rigidity prompted Arwa to approach the High Court through a writ petition, seeking judicial intervention to secure her right to maternity leave and examination participation. The petition highlighted broader systemic issues within educational frameworks that inadvertently discriminate against female students experiencing significant life events such as pregnancy and childbirth.

During proceedings, the court examined existing legal precedents, particularly drawing reference from Delhi High Court orders (*Renuka v. University Grants Commission (UGC)* and ors. passed in WP(c) *Renuka v. University Grants Commission (UGC)* and ors. passed in WP(c) 3559/2023 dated 23.05.2023) that recognized women's entitlement to maternity leave within educational contexts. This comparative analysis strengthened the argument that educational policies must evolve to accommodate women's reproductive rights without compromising their academic aspirations.

The Madhya Pradesh High Court's judicial reasoning emphasized that pregnancy and marriage constitute natural life events that should not impede women's access to higher education. The court recognized that institutional policies lacking maternity provisions effectively create barriers that disproportionately affect female students, contradicting principles of gender equality and educational accessibility.

Significantly, the judgment addressed the disconnect between institutional policies and University Grants Commission directives regarding maternity and childcare support mechanisms. The court noted that educational institutions had failed to establish adequate frameworks for supporting students during pregnancy and post-childbirth periods, necessitating immediate policy reforms.

The court's decision extended beyond mere attendance relaxation, advocating for comprehensive support systems including additional classes, specialized study materials, and flexible assessment mechanisms for new mothers. This holistic approach demonstrates judicial understanding of the complex challenges faced by female students balancing academic responsibilities with maternal duties.

The ruling's practical implications are far-reaching, as it mandates that Arwa be permitted to appear for her examinations despite attendance deficiency. Furthermore, the court directed that her second semester results be declared, enabling her progression to the third semester. This directive ensures continuity in her educational journey while establishing protective standards for similarly situated students.

Beyond individual relief, this judgment is a clarion call for educational institutions across India to reassess their policies through a gender-sensitive lens. The ruling emphasizes that academic excellence and maternal responsibilities need not be mutually exclusive, provided institutions implement appropriate support mechanisms.

The decision reflects evolving judicial consciousness regarding women's rights in educational settings, recognizing that true gender equality requires institutional adaptability to women's biological and social realities. This progressive stance aligns with constitutional principles of equality and non-discrimination while addressing contemporary challenges in higher education.

The judgment's broader significance lies in its potential to catalyze systemic changes in educational policy formulation. By establishing judicial precedent for maternity accommodations in academic settings, the ruling encourages proactive policy development rather than reactive legal interventions.

Educational institutions must now consider implementing comprehensive maternity support frameworks, including flexible attendance policies, alternative assessment methods, and childcare facilities. Such measures would demonstrate institutional commitment to gender equality while ensuring that academic standards remain uncompromised.

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