

## Adolescent Girls' Nutrition

### Why in news?

To unlock the full potential of India's future, we have to prioritise the health and nutrition of its adolescent girls.

### What is the current status of adolescent girls' health in India?

- **Data** - According to National Family Health Survey-5 (NFHS-5), 59.1% of adolescent girls are anaemic.
- According to National Family Health Survey-4, over 41.9% of school-going girls are underweight.
- **Ever-growing nutritional concern** - The numbers showcase a worrying trend of adolescent girls' health in India.
- A range of factors from environmental conditions to cultural norms makes adolescent girl nutrition complex.
- Lack of gender-neutral environment within a household affects the nutrition uptake in adolescent girls.
- Irrespective of several successful health initiatives, the current health interventions do not specifically focus on the nutritional statuses of adolescent girls.

### Why adolescent girls' health is important?

- Tackling the complex issue of nutrition among adolescent girls is not just a health concern but also an investment in India's future.
- Adolescent girls are particularly vulnerable to undernutrition and anaemia due to the onset of menstruation.
- **Second window of opportunity of growth** - Adolescence is a pivotal period of cognitive development, thus improving access to nutrition.
- Adolescent nutrition compensates for any nutrient deficiencies acquired during early developmental stages in the girl child.
- **Female demographic dividend** - Adolescent health is a significant indicator of women's labour force participation in India in the long term.
- Better nutrition improves every young girl's prospect to participate in productive activities.
- Investing in nutrition interventions in adolescent girls has potential returns in the form of greater and more sustainable economic growth of the nation.

### What are the consequences of lack of adolescent girl nutrition?

- Poorly balanced and insufficient diets can lead to cognitive impairments that affect

one's academic performance.

- The lower educational attainment can limit opportunities for employment and economic self-sufficiency later in life.
- Undernourished adolescent girls are also at a higher risk of chronic diseases and pregnancy complications.
- A higher health-care burden on families and communities, potentially leads to financial instability and increased poverty.
- Complete female participation in work, politics, or community involvement is affected if girls' health and education is affected.

### **What could be the government's approach in this sense?**

- Investing in girls' nutrition is state's moral as well as economic obligation.
- **Redefine** - Focus shift to redefine interventions in adopting a life-cycle approach leaving no girls behind.
- This approach can help break the intergenerational cycle of poverty.
- Well-nourished girls are more likely to have healthy babies and provide better care for their families.
- **Modify** - A few strategic modifications to existing interventions can significantly expand the scope of its outcomes.
- The convergence of various government initiatives such as the Scheme for Adolescent Girls (SAG) within the umbrella of the POSHAN 2.0 is a step in the right direction.
- However, it could achieve success only if it is implemented effectively.
- Stronger awareness and nutrition education programmes in targeted adolescent-oriented schemes could help beneficiary compliance.
- For Example: Rashtriya Kishor Swasthya Karyakram (RKSK)
- **Social Change** - Targeted and regionally contextualised Social and Behaviour Change Communication (SBCC) efforts around adolescent girls' nutrition.
- **Implementation changes** - Effective convergence and collaborations among all the relevant departments to foster a collective endeavour.
- Routine training of health workers for effective implementation.
- Monitoring of various schemes to adapt with an evolving landscape.
- **Holistic narrative** - Evidence/data backed narrative effectively appeals to all, even to those outside the technical community.
- The nutrition of adolescent girls' and their mental and physical well-being, individual productivity and overall economic growth of the country should all be brought under one framework.

### **Reference**

1. [The Hindu - Amplify the subject of adolescent girl nutrition](#)



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