

In NFHS Report Card- The Good, The Sober and The Future

What is the issue?

Against the backdrop of the looming Omicron threat , the recently released fifth edition of the National Family Health Survey (NFHS)-5 brings some positive news.

What is the NFHS survey about?

- The NFHS is a large-scale, multi-round survey conducted in a representative sample of households throughout India.
- This year, over 6 lakh households across the country were surveyed for this exercise.
- The NFHS provides estimates on key indicators related to population, family planning, child and maternal health, nutrition, adult health, and domestic violence, among others.
- The Ministry of Health and Family Welfare, Government of India, has designated **International Institute for Population Sciences (IIPS)** as the nodal agency for the NFHS.
- NFHS was funded by the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) with supplementary support from UNICEF.
- The First National Family Health Survey (NFHS-1) was conducted in 1992-93.

What are the positive outcomes in the survey?

- **Population stabilisation-** The Total Fertility Rate (TFR) (the average number of children born per woman) has declined from 2.2 to 2.0 at the national level.
- A total of 31 States and Union Territories have achieved fertility rates below the replacement level of 2.1.
- Reasons for decline in fertility
 - Increase in adoption of modern family planning methods
 - Reduction in unmet need for family planning
 - Improvements in access to family planning related information and services
 - Improvements in female literacy
- **Improved health delivery-** Maternal health services are steadily improving.
- Reasons for improved health delivery
 - Increase in antenatal care in the first trimester
 - The recommended four antenatal care check-ups have increased
 - Increase in postnatal care visits
 - Improvement in accessing institutional births
 - Increase in institutional deliveries in public health facilities
 - Reduction in teenage pregnancy
- Concerns
 - Still 11% of pregnant women were still either unreached by a skilled birth attendant or not accessing institutional facilities.
 - A very small segment of the population is currently accessing the full range of sexual and reproductive health services such as screening tests for cervical cancer and breast examinations.

- **Discriminatory social norms-** There have been significant progress where women have the right to bodily autonomy and integrity, and the ability to take decisions about their lives.
- Reasons for improvement in gender related indicators
 - The proportion of women (aged 15-24 years) who use menstrual hygiene products has increased.
 - The proportion of women who have their own bank accounts has gone up.
 - Around 54% of women have their own mobile phones and about one in three women have used the Internet.
 - There has been significant increase in the proportion of women with more than 10 years of schooling.
 - The prevalence of child marriage has gone down marginally.
 - Sex ratio at birth has shown slight improvement (from 919 in 2015-to 929 in 2019-21)
- Concerns
 - **Domestic violence-** One in three women continues to face violence from their spouse
- **Promoting gender-equal values-** The survey also highlights the importance of gender equal values.
- Concerns
 - Women's participation in the economy continues to remain low (only 25.6% women engaged in paid work)
 - Women still bear a disproportionate burden of unpaid domestic and care work which affects their ability to access gainful employment.

To know more about NFHS-5, click [here](#)

What does this call for?

- The survey highlights the need to invest in comprehensive sexuality education as a key component of life-skills education for both in school and out-of-school adolescents.
- The full range of sexual and reproductive health services should be included while expanding the basket of reproductive health services.
- To empower women and ensure gender justice, it is imperative to address harmful practices, such as child marriage and gender-biased sex selection.
- We must challenge discriminatory social norms that drive gender-based violence and harmful practices, and empower women to exercise agency and autonomy in all spheres of life.
- Bodily autonomy is not only the foundation for a better future but also a fundamental human right.

Reference

1. <https://www.thehindu.com/todays-paper/tp-opinion/in-nfhs-report-card-the-good-the-sober-the-future/article38075081.ece>