

India's Birth Crisis

Why in news?

Recent lancet study reveals that by 2050, 1 in 5 Indians will be a senior citizen while there will be fewer younger people to take care of them.

Key terms

Total Fertility Rate (TFR)

- It is the average number of children born to a woman (15-49 years) over her lifetime.
- It's calculated by adding up all of the age-specific fertility rates over five-year intervals.

Replacement level

- It is the level of fertility at which a population replaces itself exactly from one generation to the next.
- A TFR of 2.1 is known as the replacement rate, when it is less than 2.1 the population in a given area will eventually decrease.

What are the key highlights of the lancet study?

- **Data**- The report is based on the Global Burden of Diseases (GBD), Injuries and Risk Factors Study 2021.
- **Decline in TFR**- India's TFR has fallen to 1.29 well below the replacement rate of 2.1.
- **Aging factor**- By 2050, it's predicted that 1 in 5 Indians will be senior citizens with comparatively smaller young population to support them.
- **Global trends**- TFR is globally more than halved from 1950 to 2021, declining from 4.84 to 2.23.
- Global annual live births peaked in 2016 at 142 million, then decreased to 129 million by 2021.
- Researchers estimate that by 2050, 155 of 204 countries (76% of the world) will be below the replacement level of fertility.
- **China**- It is already dealing with the demographic disadvantage of an ageing population, India too is heading in that direction.

Both India and China account for more than a third of world's population, the ageing population will increase the dependency ratio.

Why there is decline in India's TFR?

- **Effective policies**- Historical efforts to control population growth, including family planning programs and incentives for limiting family size.
- **Enhanced health**- Improved maternal and child health, leading to decreased infant mortality and increased confidence in child survival.
- **Economic changes**- The society is witnessing the reversed Inter-generational flow of wealth, children are now seen as a significant financial burden rather than an economic asset.
- **Rising female literacy**- Education empowers women, providing them with greater knowledge about family planning and reproductive health.
- **Women participation in workforce**- Career consciousness, financial returns and economic independence have meant that women are reconsidering their options of having a second child.

Steps taken by India to combat population

- **National Family Planning Program**- It was started in 1952 as part of the First Five-Year Plan, and became the first country in the world to have a state-sponsored population programme.
- **National Family Planning Indemnity Scheme (NFPIS)**- The clients are insured in the eventualities of death, complication and failure following sterilization.
- **National Population Policy, 2000**- It was launched to address the unmet needs for contraception, healthcare infrastructure, and health personnel, and providing integrated service delivery for basic reproductive and child healthcare.
- **Mission Parivar Vikas**- It was launched in 2016 that substantially increase access to contraceptives and family planning services in 146 high-fertility districts with a TFR of above 3.
- **Family Planning Logistic Management and Information System (FP-LMIS)**: A dedicated software to ensure smooth forecasting, procurement and distribution of family planning commodities across all the levels of health facilities.
- **360 degree media campaign**- Launched a comprehensive media campaign including TV commercials, radio shows, and a dedicated website in 2017.
- **Awareness generation**- Observance of World Population Day (July 11), Vasectomy Fortnight, and promotional activities in high fertility districts.

What are the long term consequences of declining TFR?

- **Increase in aged population**- By 2050, over 20% of India's population will be senior citizens, it poses challenges related to care, support, and health care.
- **Financial burden**- Healthcare for the elderly lead to increased healthcare costs and pressure on public health budgets.
- **Shrinking workforce**- A smaller working age population could lead to labour shortages and affect economic growth.
- **Lack of skilled employees**- Industries that heavily rely on younger workers, such as healthcare, manufacturing, and technology, may face challenges in finding skilled

employees, potentially leading to inefficiencies and decreased competitiveness.

- **Wage inflation-** Labor shortages can also result in increased competition for talent, leading to wage inflation and potential economic instability.
- **Gender imbalance-** Son meta preference will impact demographic structure resulting in unequal access to education, employment opportunities, and resources for women.

What lies ahead?

- Proactive measures such *as affordable childcare and health care investments* can help mitigate the negative impacts of demographic changes and ensure sustainable development.
- *Gender equity* is essential men can support women's participation in the workforce by sharing the burden of unpaid care work which would contribute to more balanced family dynamics.
- The need of the hour is *economic policies* that prioritize growth, job creation, and social security reforms are vital for adapting to demographic changes and mitigating their impacts.
- India can adapt policies and strategies of the successful models from other countries which suit India's specific contexts and needs.

Global experimental policies to boost fertility

- **Germany-** Boosts births through liberal labour laws, allowing more parental leave and benefits.
- **Denmark-** Offers state-funded IVF for women below 40 years.
- **Hungary-** Nationalised IVF clinics.
- **Poland-** Gives out monthly cash payments to parents having more than two children.
- **Russia-** It makes a one-time payment to parents when their second child is born.
- Russia reinstated the Soviet-era '*Mother Heroine*' title, who bore and raised more than 10 children amounting to Rs. 13 lakh.

References

1. [Indian Express- Lancet forecast fertility rate dip](#)
2. [The Print- India's fertility rate plunged in last 70 years](#)