

The Death Data in CRS

What is the issue?

There has been unusually high interest in the death numbers of CRS data for 2020 because of the large number of deaths caused by the pandemic.

What is the history of CRS?

- The history of Civil Registration System (CRS) in India dates back to 1886 when a Central Births, Deaths and Marriages Registration Act was promulgated to provide for voluntary registration.
- The Registration of Births and Death Act (RBD Act) was enacted in 1969 to promote uniformity and comparability in the registration of births and deaths across the country and compilation of vital statistics based thereon.
- With the enactment of the Act, registration of births, deaths and still births has become mandatory in India.
- The Registrar General, India (RGI) at the Central Government level coordinates and unifies the activities of registration throughout the country.
- The implementation of the statute is vested with the State Governments.

What do the CRS data tell?

- CRS is a record of all-cause deaths (and births) and it does not categorise deaths by causes.
- The latest CRS data have revealed that 81.16 lakh deaths were registered in India in 2020, and this was an increase of about 4.75 lakh over the previous year.
- The 81.16 lakh registrations in 2020 would obviously include deaths caused by Covid-19 as well, but as of now we do not know the number of those deaths.
- About 1.49 lakh people died due to Covid-19 in 2020, according to official figures
- This number is widely believed to be an undercount as they have been arrived at using indirect methods, involving multiple layers of assumptions and extrapolations.

How is CRS different from SRS?

- The Sample Registration System (SRS) is a large-scale demographic survey conducted every year by Office of the Registrar General, India in all States and Union Territories.
- It relies on a regular survey-based process to estimate the total number of births and deaths in the country.
- CRS presents a count of registered births and deaths, while SRS provides an estimate of the total number births and deaths.
- The CRS data, therefore, is a subset of the SRS numbers.
- More than 90% of births and deaths are now getting registered. In other words, CRS data are slowly converging towards SRS numbers.
- The SRS data, when they come out, are expected to give a fairly accurate estimate of Covid-19 deaths in the country.

- Like CRS, the SRS also does not categorise deaths by cause, but it tries to estimate the total number of deaths in the country every year.

How have registrations increased?

- Registration of both births and deaths has increased significantly in the last few years.
- In 2017, only 83.5% of all estimated births and 78.3% of all estimated deaths were registered.
- In 2019, 92.7% of all estimated births and 92% of all estimated deaths in the country were registered.
- **Reasons for the rising trend in registrations of births and deaths**
 - Greater awareness
 - Legal mandate
 - Access to benefits and services
 - Aadhaar
 - Increase in the number of bank accounts
 - Network of government services that are linked to these

References

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