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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