

Calculating the exact mortality figures

What is the issue?

There is a wide range of variations between the recorded and actual deaths occurred due to COVID-19 pandemic.

What is the ground reality?

- The second wave of deadly pandemic in India is taking the true death toll in excess when compared to the reported Covid-19 fatality numbers which are released on daily basis.
- In Gujarat, between March 1 and May 10, around 1,23,000 death certificates were issued as compared to only 58,000 in the same period in 2020.
- This excess deaths numbers of 65,000, when compared to an official Covid-19 death scorecard, reveals the fact of potential under-reporting factor of 16.
- But the Gujarat government has not disputed the 2021 numbers but correctly pointed out that 2020 was a problematic reference year.
- This is because national lockdown has halted the death certification process and that deaths increase every year by a certain amount any way.
- The under-reporting factor in Gujarat also varies substantially across municipal corporations, where death registration statistics are near-complete.
- These figures are seem to be larger for smaller settlement sizes like Ahmedabad (4), Vadodara (16) and Rajkot (30).
- When we compare per capita Covid-19 deaths of Ahmedabad and Rajkot, it seems that municipalities were similarly affected, but Rajkot was ten times more affected than Ahmedabad.

What can we infer from this?

- When we analyse with excess deaths rather than the reported Covid-19 death figures in Gujarat, we can observe that there is little relation with reported Covid-19 caseloads.
- For example, Jamnagar has a higher reported Covid-19 caseload and death toll per capita than other municipal corporations of its size yet its

under-reporting factor is nearly a fourth of the others.

- This means that the actual figures on Covid-19 may be useful to gauge some trends in the pandemic but they will be able to capture the scale of the tragedy.
- As Covid-19 sweeps through rural India, especially in states like Uttar Pradesh, Bihar and Jharkhand death registration statistics are incomplete.
- The death toll in these states likely to be higher than what is reported as Covid-19 death and can take the all-India death toll of the second wave to over a million.

What should be done now?

- India's death registration system started in the 1860s in response to the cholera pandemic.
- In response to the current pandemic, we need to have a real-time release of death registration statistics.
- This current invisibility on the reported Covid-19 dashboards needs immediate attention and resources for saving the lives.
- Understanding the true scale of the tragedy today will also enable better district-level planning to counter future pandemic waves.

Source: The Indian Express

