

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>