Regional Variation of TFR

Mains Syllabus: GS I - Population and associated issues.

Why in the News?

The Sample Registration System (SRS) Statistical Report of 2021 reveals a wide regional variation in Total TFR data for States and Union Territories (UTs).

What is the status of TFR across India?

The Total Fertility Rate (TFR) represents the average number of children a woman is expected to have during her reproductive age between 15 and 49 years.

- **National TFR** - It has remained at 2.0 in both 2020 and 2021, according to the Sample Registration System (SRS) 2021 report.
- **Highest and Lowest** - The highest TFR was recorded in Bihar at 3.0 and the lowest was reported for West Bengal and Delhi at 1.4.
- **Overall Change** - The data reveals that in the decade between 2009-11 and 2019-21, TFR has been on an overall decline, in States, and nationally, albeit at different rates.
- **Below Replacement Rate** - The report further notes that the TFR of India at 2.0 has come down below the replacement level of 2.1.

The replacement level TFR is measured as the number of children each woman should have for each generation to replace the previous generation's population.

- **States above Replacement TFR** - According to the TFR data for 2021, just 6 States had TFR above the replacement level of 2.1.
- These were Bihar (3.0), Madhya Pradesh (2.6), Jharkhand (2.3), Uttar Pradesh (2.7), Chhattisgarh (2.2), and Rajasthan (2.4).
- All other States had reported a TFR at or below the replacement level.
- **Changes in Crude Birth Rate** - India's CBR is at 19.3 for 2021, which has declined at a rate of 1.12% every year from 2016 onwards.
- Among the States and UTs, the rate of decline in CBR is highest for Kerala, Tamil Nadu, and Delhi, where the CBR is declining at almost twice the rate of the national average.

What are the causes of regional variations of TFR?

- **Socioeconomic Development** - Regions with higher levels of education, especially female literacy, and greater economic prosperity tend to have lower fertility rates.
- **Educational Attainment** - Higher educational attainment is associated with delayed marriage, increased workforce participation, and a preference for smaller families, leading to lower fertility rates
- Variation in literacy rate, higher education enrolment has consequent effect on fertility level.
- **Cultural and Social Norms** - Traditional norms and beliefs about family size, gender roles, and early marriage are more prevalent in certain regions, particularly in less developed or rural areas, contributing to higher fertility rates.
- In contrast, regions such as Tamil Nadu , Kerala with progressive attitudes toward women's roles and family planning see lower fertility
- **Variations in Public Health Systems** - States with robust health systems and easy access to contraception experience lower rates of unintended births and overall fertility.

What are the potential effects of regional TFR variation?

- **Demographic Impacts** - Regions with higher TFRs tend to have younger populations, while those with lower TFRs face population aging.
- This can lead to uneven age structures across a country, affecting dependency ratios and long-term demographic stability
- **Economic Consequences** - High fertility regions may experience greater pressure on resources, public services, and infrastructure, potentially slowing economic development and exacerbating poverty
- Conversely, regions with low TFRs may face labor shortages, reduced workforce growth, and challenges in sustaining economic productivity as their populations age.
- **Policy and Governance Challenges** - Regional TFR differences can complicate national policy planning, especially in federal systems where resource allocation and representation may be linked to population size.
- For example, finance commission fund allocation and delimitation exercises.
- **Internal Migration** - Uneven fertility decline can exacerbate regional inequalities in development, health outcomes, and opportunities.
- This may lead to migration from high-fertility, less developed regions to low-fertility, more prosperous areas, further influencing regional demographics and economies.

What needs to be done?

- Quality reproductive health services, contraception access, and maternal care need to be strengthened in northern and central states (e.g., Bihar, Uttar Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh), where fertility remains above replacement level.
- Policies need to target infrastructure, employment, and social welfare in less developed regions to address root causes of high fertility.
- Southern and western states with TFRs below replacement need to strengthen social security, healthcare, and pension systems to support an aging population.

References

[The Hindu | Why is there variation in India’s fertility rates]

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