Son Meta-Preference

Why in news?

The newly released National Family Health Survey (NFHS-5) reconfirms that a large number of Indians have a preference for sons with the only exception of Meghalaya.

What is the NFHS?

- The NFHS is a large-scale, multi-round survey conducted in a representative sample of households throughout India.
- 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.
- NFHS-5 covers the period 2019-21.

What are the key takeaways of the report?

- **Son meta-preference**- The number of married people (age 15-49) who want more sons than daughters is several times the number who want more daughters than sons.
- However, most Indians still believe an ideal family should include at least one daughter.
- Most of the respondents want at least one son and at least one daughter.
- **Average children**- Men and women would both want to have an average of 2.1 children which is almost the same as the current total fertility rate.
- A married person who has at least one son is less likely to want more children than another married person whose existing children do not include a son.
- **Trends by states**- Among the states and Union Territories, men in Mizoram (37%), Lakshadweep (34%) and Manipur (33%), and women in Bihar (31%) show the strongest preference for more sons.
- Across all states and both genders, Meghalaya women are the only section in which a higher proportion prefers more daughters than sons than the proportion that want more sons than daughter.

Meghalaya is a matrilineal society where the ancestral descent is traced through maternal instead of paternal line.

What were the reasons for son preference?

- In India's patriarchal society, a boy is widely viewed as an asset, a future breadwinner and

caregiver while a girl, on the other hand, is seen as a liability.

- The son preference is rooted in the traditional belief that a male child would carry forward the family name.
- It is also believed that sons will look after the parents in their old age, while daughters would leave them for their matrimonial homes.
- Also, raising a daughter would cost them dowries.

References

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