



India's Falling Fertility Rate

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India's total fertility rate (TFR) is declining. It is now **2.2 per woman**, nearing the replacement rate of 2.1, according to the latest government data.

- The government's Sample Registration System in 22 states shows that TFR for India declined to 2.2 in 2017 after being stable at 2.3 between 2013 and 2016.
- The 2017 figure is just 10 basis points more than the replacement level of 2.1%.

TFR indicates the average number of children expected to be born to a woman during her reproductive span of 15-49 years.

The replacement level is the number of children needed to replace the parents, after accounting for fatalities, skewed sex ratio, infant mortality, etc. Population starts falling below this level.

Key Points

- The total fertility rate has **more than halved in both urban and rural areas**, falling even below the replacement level in the former where it is 1.7, down from 4.1 in 1971.
 - In rural areas, TFR has fallen from 5.4 to 2.4 during the same period.
 - For rural areas, it varies from 1.6 in Delhi and Tamil Nadu to 3.3 in Bihar.
 - For urban areas, the variation is from **1.1 in Himachal Pradesh to 2.4 in Uttar Pradesh and Bihar**.
 - Of the 22 states, **only six have a TFR of 2 or more in urban areas**. There are 10 states where TFR is below 2 in rural regions.
- In different age groups, **the 25-29 age is the most fertile**, except in Bengal, Chhattisgarh, Andhra Pradesh and Maharashtra, where it peaked between 20 and 24. Only J&K hits the peak after 30.

- TFR goes below 2 in both urban and rural areas, where **girls complete schooling** and reduces further as they pass college.
Bihar, with the highest TFR of 3.2, had the maximum percentage of illiterate women at 26.8%, while Kerala, where the literacy rate among women is 99.3%, had among the lowest fertility rates.
- As more cities come up, people move for jobs and employment tenure gets shorter, TFR may fall further.

Reasons Behind Falling TFR

- Higher education
- Increased mobility
- Late marriage
- Financially independent women and
- Overall prosperity

Implications for Policymakers

- India has entered a **37-year period of demographic dividend**, which could spell faster economic growth and higher productivity.
- As such, the government needs to **engineer its policies to harness the opportunity**.
- It must also formulate policies to **take care of higher medical costs** as the population ages and productivity shrinks.
- India will also need to have an **affordable social security system** that provides pension to the elderly and takes care of their daily needs and medical expenses.

Source: Mint