



drishti

State of the World Population 2020: UNFPA

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Why in News

Recently, the **United Nations Population Fund** (UNFPA) has released the **State of the World Population 2020 report**, titled ‘**Against my will: defying the practices that harm women and girls and undermine equality**’.

It highlights **at least 19 human rights violations against women** and focuses on the **three most prevalent ones, Female Genital Mutilation (FGM), extreme bias against daughters, in favour of sons and child marriage.**

Key Points

- **Global Data:**

- The number of **missing women** has more than doubled over the past 50 years, who were at 61 million in 1970.

Missing females/women: These are women missing from the population at given dates due to the cumulative effect of postnatal and prenatal sex selection in the past. The phrase was coined by **Amartya Sen**.

- In Afghanistan, Bangladesh and Pakistan **excess female mortality** of girls below 5 years of age was under 3%.

Excess female mortality: It is the difference between observed and expected mortality of the girl child or avoidable death of girls during childhood.

- According to estimates averaged over a five year period (2013-17), annually, there were 1.2 million missing female births, at a global level.

- **India Specific Data:**

- One in three girls missing globally due to sex selection, both pre- and post-natal, is from India, i.e. 46 million out of the total 142 million.
- India has the **highest rate of excess female deaths** at 13.5 per 1,000 female births or one in nine deaths of females below the age of 5 due to postnatal sex selection.
- In India, around 460,000 girls went missing at birth, which means they were not born due to sex-selection biases, each year between 2013 and 2017.
- India (40%) along with China (50%) account for around 90% of the estimated 1.2 million girls lost annually to female foeticide.

- **Female Genital Mutilation:**

- It involves the **partial or total removal of external female genitalia** or other injuries to the female genital organs for non-medical reasons.
- The practise has **no health benefits** for girls and women and can cause severe bleeding, problems in urinating, cysts, infections, as well as complications in childbirth and increased risk of newborn deaths.
- An estimated 4.1 million girls will be subjected to female genital mutilation in 2020.

- **Extreme Bias against Daughters, in favour of sons:**

- An extreme and continuing preference for sons over daughters in some countries has fuelled **gender-biased sex selection or extreme neglect** which leads to girls' death as children, resulting in missing females.

The report **examines the issue of missing women** by studying sex ratio imbalances at birth as a result of **gender-biased sex selection** as well as excess female mortality.

- The **advent of technology and increased access to ultrasound imaging** allow parents to terminate a foetus after knowing its gender.

Due to this, the number of girls missing due to female foeticide exceed those that are missing because of postnatal sex selection.

- These **skewed numbers change the population proportions** and result in 'marriage squeeze'.

Marriage squeeze: It happens when prospective grooms far outnumber prospective brides, which further results in **human trafficking** for marriage as well as child marriages.

- These violations result in **fewer choices** for females and putting them **under the sexual, economic and legal control of men**, curbing their human rights.

- **Child Marriage:**
 - Every day, around 33,000 girls under age 18 are forced into marriage, usually to much older men.
 - In India, child marriage is directly linked to poverty, poor education and geographic location and the rural and urban divide.
- **Covid-19 Induced Challenges:**
 - The **economic disruptions and income-loss** because of the **Covid-19 pandemic** are likely to increase **violence against girls and women** due to intensified unwantedness of daughters and gender discrimination.
 - The Covid-19 pandemic **threatens to reverse the progress** made in ending some harmful practices worldwide.
 - In India, Covid-19 has **reduced access to contraception and abortion services**, which is likely to lead to an increase in unwanted pregnancies and unsafe abortions.
- **Initiatives Appreciated:**
 - The report pointed out that successful education-related interventions include the provision of cash transfers conditional on school attendance or support to cover the costs of school fees, books, uniforms and supplies.
 - The report took note of the successful cash-transfer initiative such as ‘**Apni Beti Apna Dhan**’ in India.

United Nations Population Fund

- It is a **subsidiary organ of the UN General Assembly** and works as a **sexual and reproductive health agency**.
- It was **established as a trust fund in 1967** and began operations in **1969**.
- In **1987**, it was **officially renamed** the United Nations Population Fund but the original abbreviation, ‘**UNFPA**’ for the **United Nations Fund for Population Activities** was **retained**.
- The **UN Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC)** establishes its mandate.
- UNFPA is **not supported by the UN budget**, instead, it is entirely **supported by** voluntary contributions of donor governments, intergovernmental organizations, the private sector, foundations and individuals.
- UNFPA works directly to tackle **Sustainable Development Goals** on **health (SDG3)**, **education (SDG4)** and **gender equality (SDG5)**.

Way Forward

- The problem should be tackled by eliminating the root causes, especially gender-biased norms.
- People must foster **respect** for women and girls, by changing attitudes and practices that commoditize them.

- People must **protect** women and girls by enforcing laws against practices like child marriage and female mutilation and also by changing attitudes and norms.
- Governments must **fulfil** their obligations under human rights treaties that require the elimination of these practices and rituals.

Countries that have ratified international treaties such as the **Convention on the Rights of the Child**, have a duty to end the harm, whether it's inflicted on girls by family members, religious communities, health-care providers, commercial enterprises or State institutions themselves.

Source: TH