First World Report on Hearing: WHO

Why in News

The **First World Report on Hearing** was released by the **World Health Organization (WHO)** - a day ahead of **World Hearing Day on 3rd March.**

> The Report underlines the need to rapidly step up efforts to prevent and address hearing loss by investing and expanding access to ear and hearing care services.

Key Points

- **Findings:**
  - Nearly 2.5 billion people worldwide — or **1 in 4 people** — will be living with **some degree of hearing loss by 2050.**
  - At least **700 million of these people will require access to ear and hearing care** and other rehabilitation services unless action is taken.
- **Issues:**
  - **Adverse Health Effects:**
    - Untreated hearing loss can have a devastating impact on **people's ability to communicate, to study and to earn a living.** It can also impact **people's mental health and their ability to sustain relationships.**
  - **Lack of Specialists among Low-Income Countries:**
    - About 78% have fewer than one Ear, Nose and Throat (ENT) specialist per million population.
    - 93% have fewer than one audiologist per million.
    - Only 17% have one or more speech therapists per million.
    - 50% have one or more teachers for the deaf per million.

- **Hearing Impairment in India:**
  - **About:**
    Over 27,000 children are born deaf every year in India. Hearing impairment or loss is often neglected as it cannot be seen and in most cases the diagnosis is delayed.
  - **Causes:**
    - There are many **children** who can benefit through advanced hearing technology but are **missed out because of low awareness** around hearing issues in babies.
    - One major reason is the **unavailability of newborn screening programmes** at birth and low awareness among parents.
  - **Government Initiative:**
    National Programme for the Prevention & Control of Deafness (NPPCD) under **National Health Mission** aims:
    - To **prevent the avoidable hearing loss** on account of disease or injury.
    - **Early identification, diagnosis** and treatment of ear problems responsible for hearing loss and deafness.
    - To **medically rehabilitate persons** of all age groups, suffering with deafness.
    - To **strengthen the existing inter-sectoral linkages** for continuity of the rehabilitation programme, for persons with deafness.
    - **To develop institutional capacity for ear care services** by providing support for equipment and material and training personnel.
  - **Required Interventions:**
    - Holding screening programmes can help in early diagnosis, which in turn will lead to early treatment.
    - The **Universal Newborn Hearing Screening (UNHS)** helps in early detection of congenital hearing loss and this test is vital to detect hearing impairment in newborn babies and to ensure early intervention.
      While **UNHS screening is mandatory in developed countries,** it is not included in the list of mandatory health screening procedures for newborns in India, except Kerala.

- **Suggested Strategies:**
  - **Integration of Hearing Care into Primary Healthcare:** This will close the present patient-doctor gap.
  - **Clinical Screening at Strategic Points in Life:** To ensure early identification of any loss of hearing and ear diseases.
  - **Promoting Hearing Assistive Technology and Services:** It includes measures such as captioning and sign language interpretation which can further improve access to communication and education for those with hearing loss.
  - **Increasing Investments:** WHO calculates that governments can expect a return of nearly USD 16 for every USD 1 invested.
  - **Increasing Immunisation:** In children, almost 60% of hearing loss can be prevented through measures such as immunisation for prevention of rubella and meningitis, improved maternal and neonatal care, and screening for, and early management of, otitis media – inflammatory diseases of the middle ear.
  - **Maintaining Hygiene:** In adults, noise control, safe listening and surveillance of ototoxic (having a toxic effect on the ear) medicines together with good ear hygiene can help maintain good hearing and reduce the potential for hearing loss.

Source: IE