



# drishti

## The Big Picture: Need to Prioritise Women's Health Needs

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### Why in News?

The Vice President of India has called for the highest priority to the health needs of women, who constitute nearly 50% of the country's population.

### Key Points

- Discrepancies among the males and females occur right from beginning with differences in the girl child to boy child ratio.
- Women despite working as caretakers both in and outside the household, are the most neglected lot.

- Promotive and preventive health of females are equally important and must be stressed upon.
- The health interventions must focus on bolstering and meeting women's health needs.

## Women and Health

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- **Sex Ratio at Birth:** The UNFPA State of World Population 2020 estimated the sex ratio at birth in India as 910, which is on the lower side of index.
- **Health of Adolescent Girls:** At the adolescent age 70% of the girls are anaemic and their problems related to their menstrual health and hygiene often go unaddressed.
- **Adolescent Fertility Rate (AFR):** The United Nations defines Adolescent Fertility Rate (AFR) as the annual number of births to women aged 15-19 years per 1,000 women. Among 22 surveyed states as per National Family Health Survey-5, Tripura recorded the highest AFR with 69 births per 1,000 women.  
The lowest adolescent fertility was recorded in Goa with 14 births per 1,000 women.
- **Teenage Pregnancies:** There are 3 times more chances of deaths of girls in teenage pregnancies. Reproductive and sexual health needs of women are often ignored.  
About 113 women in India every year lose their lives as a result of libels due to teen pregnancies. Moreover, under-reporting of such deaths are also there.
- **Reproductive Health Issues:** 70% of women of India are suffering from reproductive tract infections which may lead to infertility, abortions and similar kind of problems that are perceived as normal.
- **Maternal Mortality Rate: Maternal Mortality Ratio (MMR)** is defined as the number of maternal deaths during a given time period per 1,00,000 live births during the same time period.  
MMR of the Country has declined to 113 in 2016-18 from 122 in 2015-17 and 130 in 2014-2016.
- **Women Amid the Pandemic:** Women who are working amid the pandemic as frontline workers, many of them **don't have access to simple necessities at such times like PPE kits** which makes them more vulnerable to infections.
  - There is an unmet need for women's menstrual products while wearing PPEs. unmet need for contraception.
  - Women, besides frontline workers, who get infected also have to face double trouble as they are **supposed not only have to look after themselves but also other family members who are infected.**
  - Even the women suffering from covid-19 who are admitted to the hospital, their **mean number of days of admission are much less as compared to their male counterparts.**
  - Among the school dropouts, the majority of them are girls.

## Government Initiative to Ensure Health Facilities to Women

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- **Health and Wellness Centres:** India has about 76,000 health and wellness centres which perform screening of 5 types of health issues; hypertension, diabetes, breast cancer, oral cancer and cervical cancer.  
Total footfalls in these health and wellness centres is about 46.4 crores. Out of these 24.91 crore i.e. 53.7% are women.
- **Adolescent Friendly Health Services Program: Rashtriya Kishor Swasthya Karyakram** is there where female adolescents are sensitised about their health.  
The programme also focuses on reaching out all adolescents including Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender and Queer (LGBTQ).
- **Auxiliary Nurse Midwife: Auxiliary Nurse Midwife**, commonly known as ANM, is a village-level female health worker in India who is known as the first contact person between the community and the health services.
- **Janani Suraksha Yojana (JSY): Janani Suraksha Yojana** (JSY) is a safe motherhood intervention under the **National Health Mission (NHM)**.
  - It was launched on 12th April 2005 and is being implemented in all states and UTs with special focus on low performing states.
  - JSY is a 100% **centrally sponsored scheme** and it integrates cash assistance with delivery and post-delivery care.
- **Pradhan Mantri Matru Vandana Yojana (PMMVY): PMMVY** is a scheme for pregnant women and lactating mothers.
  - The scheme has crossed the mark of 1 crore beneficiaries.
  - Is a direct benefit transfer (DBT) scheme under which cash benefits are provided to pregnant women in their bank account directly to meet enhanced nutritional needs and partially compensate for wage loss.

## Way Forward

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- **Multisectoral Approach:** In order to ensure good health of women, the same should be tackled at multi sectoral level such as eradication of child marriages, access to contraceptives and healthcare facilities at all levels.
  - Maternal healthcare is no doubt important, but healthcare for women across her life span is where the focus should be the most.
  - Promoting better health, regular screening and preventive care are the areas that require attention..
- **Proximity to Healthcare Facilities:** There is reluctance on part of women themselves to prioritise their health.
  - Women access health facilities if it is available near their homes as they can barely take out time for themselves due to their multiple roles.
  - The mantra to ensure that women access healthcare facilities is to have reliable and good healthcare facilities near women.

- **Combined Efforts:** The empowerment shall come from within facilitated by the family members. Women must also prioritise their health and be aware of the facilities that are being provided to them by the government.
  - For pregnant women, regular checkups are mandatory and through these visits, their anaemia should be taken care of and ensure childbirths under safe circumstances.
  - Also the mindset of males in the society needs to be changed and they must also be educated.
  - Education is very critical to promote good health for women and eventually for all.

## Conclusion

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- A healthy society cannot be created if the health needs of women are neglected as they are the bedrock of a healthy society.
- Ensuring good health of women is not just a personal but national priority. India and its economy need a healthy women workforce because increasing women's labour force participation by 10 percentage points could add about 700 billion dollars to India's GDP by 2025.