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Teenage Pregnancy and Stunted Children

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International Food Policy Research Institute (IFPRI) study suggests children born to teenage mothers in India are more likely to be stunted than those born to adult mothers.

- India is home to more stunted children than anywhere else in the world and is one of the 10 countries with the largest burden of teenage pregnancy.
- The researchers analysed data from the **fourth Indian National Family Health Survey**.

The research probed potential social, biological, and other factors that possibly contribute to early pregnancy and child stunting.

The Findings of the Study

- Compared to adult mothers, teenage mothers had poorer nutritional status, lower education, a lower likelihood of accessing prenatal health services, and poorer living conditions.
- Prevalence of **stunting and underweight** were found to be 10% higher in children born to adolescent mothers than in children born to adults.
- First-time adolescent mothers were on an average shorter and thinner than the first-time adult mothers.
- Anaemia among them was associated with reduced child growth
- **Low-haemoglobin levels** stem from iron deficiency. Foetal and postnatal iron deficiency results in a range of adverse consequences for mother and infant, including low birth-weight, impaired cognitive development and poor immune function.
- **Poorer access** to prenatal care services, missing out, for instance, on advice to eat iron-rich food.
- **Poorer sanitation and living conditions**, thus exposing their babies to infections that aggravate stunting.
- **Consequences of Pregnancy in adolescence** sometimes has fatal consequences. It also often results in school dropout, adversely affecting young women's education, income, and health. It also significantly correlates with poor health

outcomes for the resulting children.

Projections of the World Bank

- It indicates that 127 million Indian children under five years will be stunted by 2025 if current trends of teenage pregnancy continue.
- Increased risk of degenerative diseases such as diabetes, stunting greatly affects their future livelihood and a country's economic progress.
- According to a World Bank estimate, stunting can reduce a country's gross domestic product by up to 3%

Stunting is the impaired growth and development that children experience from poor nutrition, repeated infection, and inadequate psychosocial stimulation. Children are defined as **stunted** if their height-for-age is more than two standard deviations below the WHO Child Growth Standards median.

The International Food Policy Research Institute (IFPRI)

- It is a research centre of Consultative Group for International Agricultural Research (CGIAR), a worldwide partnership engaged in agricultural research for development.
- It provides research-based policy solutions to sustainably reduce poverty and end hunger and malnutrition in developing countries.
- Established in 1975, IFPRI's vision is a world free of hunger and malnutrition. Its mission is to provide research-based policy solutions that sustainably reduce poverty and end hunger and malnutrition.

Way Forward

- **Banning early marriage** is the only solution that can banish teenage pregnancy and child stunting, the researchers say.
- **Government policies and programs:** designed to delay marriage can cash in on this mindset.

It is possible to prevent the marriage of teenage girls in low and middle-income countries through interventions such as unconditional cash transfers, cash transfers conditional on school enrolment, and livelihood training.

- A strong law to prohibit early marriage is the necessity of time.
In India, the legal marriage age of a girl is still 18, it should be reviewed in light of this report.