



General Studies-2; Topic: Issues relating to development and management of Social Sector/Services relating to Health, Education, Human Resources.

Focus on Treating Anaemia

Introduction

- In the last two decades, the prevalence of anaemia among Indian women of reproductive age, on average, has been 20 per cent more than the world average.
- While one in three women in the world is anaemic, one in two women is anaemic in India.

Causes of Anaemia and its Consequences

- The foremost is **iron deficiency**, followed by deficiencies in **folate, Vitamin B12 and Vitamin A**.
- The disease can have serious physical, social and economic consequences.
- It leads to fatigue, stress and diminished productivity and chronic anaemia can lead to cardiac failure and death.

Behavioural factors

- **Undernourishment since birth**
 - **Discrimination for a girl child** right from birth in a patriarchal society.
 - Due to **son-biased fertility preferences**, girls are breastfed for less time than boys and receive lower food supplements.
 - Women eat the last and the least at home, only after serving and catering to the other members of the family.
 - This might not have enough iron and protein required for their body.
- **Perception of anaemia**

- While many don't know the clinical term "anaemia", they recognise it through its symptoms like weakness and paleness.
- Most women have normalised the occurrence of weakness as common, especially during pregnancies.
- They believed that weakness was a product of physiological changes in the body and did not think that was serious enough.
- They sought medical care only when the situation got worse after long periods of ignoring the symptoms.
- **Inadequate uptake of IFA tablets and Misinformation about IFA tablets**
 - The NFHS-4 India report shows a consistent mismatch between the purchase/provision of IFA tablets and their consumption.
 - What we are looking at is a **low compliance rate** issue.
- **Lack of agency**
 - In some cases, mothers did not even receive antenatal care.
 - Data shows that for 22.6% of female respondents, the decision about their own health is taken mainly by their spouse.
 - Even with the presence of programmes that stand to mitigate anaemia in the country, such behavioural factors obstruct an anaemia-free India.

Government Schemes

- India has had a multitude of national-level schemes working towards nutrition and anaemia elimination for several years.
- These include
 - Integrated Child Development Services (ICDS),
 - National Nutritional Anaemia Prophylaxis Programme (NNAPP),
 - Pradhan Mantri Surakshit Matritva Abhiyan,
 - Pradhan Mantri Matru Vandana Yojana and
 - Anaemia Mukh Bharat (AMB) strategy.

Concerns / Challenges

- The lack of iron deficiency increases the risk of maternal mortality.
- India does not perform well in maternal health as well.
- National Family Health Survey-5 (2018-19) data showed that more than half of women in 13 out of 22 states are anaemic.
- According to a study, women were not aware of the risk of maternal death and believed their roles to be only that of a child-bearer who must prioritise the child's health.
- While seeking treatment, **financial constraint** is the primary reason for delays.

Way Forward

- Malnourishment as an infant can lead to anaemia in adolescence, which can get aggravated during pregnancy.
- Hence, while trying to address anaemia among women and adolescents, **programmes should also integrate solutions for less breastfeeding time and food supplements for girl infants.**
- **Interventions must recognise that** women eating last and least in the household, husbands or families dictating the need for antenatal care, women's need to take permission before visiting a healthcare facility, all constrict women's agency and contribute to their malnourishment.
- **Behaviour change communication** for drug adherence and knowledge of anaemia as a serious disease is needed.