



WOMEN AND TB CARE - GS III MAINS

Q. Bring out the main reasons behind higher prevalence of TB among women and enumerate the steps taken by the state to reduce its impact. (10 marks, 150 words)

News: *For India's homeless women, TB care is shaped by gender norms and economic precarity*

What's in the news?

- Recently, a new study, supported by the Dr. Amit Sengupta Fellowship on Health Rights (ASFHR) said that patriarchal attitude and economic disparity are the main reasons for higher prevalence of TB among women.

Causes:

1. Nutritional Deficiencies:

- Women are more likely than men to suffer from malnutrition, which can weaken the immune system and make them more susceptible to TB.
- Iron deficiency anemia, for example, is a common problem among women of reproductive age and can increase the risk of TB.

2. Socio-economic Factors:

- Women in many parts of the world face social and economic disadvantages that can make them more vulnerable to TB.
- These disadvantages may include limited access to healthcare, education and nutritious food.
- Additionally, cultural norms that discourage women from seeking healthcare can also contribute to the problem.

3. Pregnancy:

- Pregnancy can weaken the immune system and make women more susceptible to TB reactivation. This is especially true for women who are malnourished or HIV-positive.

Consequences:

1. Much Steeper Socio-economic Price:

- While both men and women suffer the consequences of this debilitating disease, women patients pay a much steeper socio-economic price.

2. Beyond Clinical Metrics:

- From social ostracisation and lack of family support to the negative impact on marital prospects, women absorb the repercussions of TB beyond the clinical metrics.
- Stigma also acts as a strong deterrent when it comes to health-seeking behavior.
- Fewer women, therefore, get included in the available cascade of care for TB.



Government Measures:

- In 2019, the Health Ministry-Central TB Division developed a **national framework for a gender-responsive approach to TB in India**.
- The document takes cognisance of the challenges faced by women in accessing treatment and offers actionable solutions.
- **Gender-responsive policy interventions:** In December 2021, a parliamentary conference on **‘Women Winning Against TB’** was organised by the Ministry of Women and Child Development where gender-responsive policy interventions were discussed.
- The Vice-President of India urged states to take proactive steps such as ensuring nutritional support to women and children and the **doorstep delivery of TB services**, especially for women from socio-economically weaker backgrounds.

WAY FORWARD:

1. Highlight the Issue at the Relevant Forum:

- One, as elected representatives, we need to come together more to highlight the issue at all relevant forums and spaces.
- These meetings see increased participation of women leaders from all walks of life in the community going forward.

2. Strengthen Counseling Network:

- We need to strengthen counseling networks for women patients and their families.
- Irrespective of where the patient seeks care – public or private sector – build the capacity of healthcare workers to educate the patient’s family about the importance of providing her a supportive environment during the course of her treatment.

3. Nutritional Needs:

- We need to ensure that the nutritional needs of women are being met.
- Undernutrition is a serious risk factor for TB and research indicates such risks are higher for women.
- It is commendable that the government, through **Nikshay Poshan Yojana**, has effectively provided a monthly benefit of Rs 500 to enable a nutritious diet for TB patients in the last few years.
- For the 2020 cohort, the total amount paid under NPY via DBT has been over Rs 200crore.
- Additionally, we can look to further strengthen inter-departmental coordination, wherein the **Public Distribution System** can explore appropriate linkages with relevant departments of the MoHFW and even include a protein-rich diet for TB patients.

4. Amplify Accurate TB Messaging:

- At a community level, we must amplify accurate TB messaging and showcase how gender plays a role in determining the course of action on the ground.