



Hysterectomy

For Prelims: Hysterectomy, Article 21

For Mains: Issues in Women Health and Related Measures, Importance of Maternal Health

Why in News?

Concerned about the **high risk faced by poor and less-educated women**, especially in rural areas, who undergo **unjustified hysterectomies**, the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare, Government of India has **initiated measures to address this issue**.

What is Hysterectomy?

- **About:**
 - A hysterectomy is a **surgical procedure** that involves the **removal of the uterus (womb)**, the organ in a woman's body where a baby develops during pregnancy.
- **Types:**
 - When only the uterus is removed, it is called a **partial hysterectomy**.
 - When the uterus and cervix are removed, it is called a **total hysterectomy**.
 - When the uterus, cervix, part of the vagina, and a wide area of ligaments and tissues around these organs are removed, it is called a **radical hysterectomy**.
- **Indications for Hysterectomy in India:**
 - Hysterectomy is performed in India for gynecological conditions like **fibroids** (non-cancerous growths that develop in or around the womb), **endometriosis** (disease in which tissue similar to the lining of the uterus grows outside the uterus), **abnormal bleeding, and pelvic inflammatory disease**, when other treatments fail.
 - It is also utilized **as part of cancer treatment to remove cancerous tissues** and in cases of severe, unresponsive pelvic pain.

What are the Issues Associated with Hysterectomy in India?

- **Increase Hysterectomies in Younger Women:**
 - The recent **Supreme Court** judgment in Dr. Narendra Gupta vs Union Of India, 2023 highlighted that in **developed countries, hysterectomies are typically performed on premenopausal women aged 45 and above**.
 - However, **community-based studies in India** have shown an increasing number of hysterectomies among younger women, ranging from **28 to 36 years old**.
- **NFHS Data:**
 - According to the most recent **National Family Health Survey (NFHS) -5 empirical data, 3% of women aged 15-49 have had a hysterectomy**.
 - The prevalence of hysterectomy is the highest in **Andhra Pradesh (9%), followed by Telangana (8%), and lowest in Sikkim (0.8%) and Meghalaya (0.7%)** among women aged 15-49.
 - The prevalence of hysterectomy was highest in Southern region, i.e., **4.2%, which was**

also greater than the national prevalence, followed by Eastern part of India (3.8%).

- On the other hand, the **lowest prevalence was observed in the Northeast region, i.e., only 1.2%**

▪ **Unnecessary Hysterectomies:**

- A [public interest litigation \(PIL\)](#) filed in 2013 highlighted the issue of "unnecessary hysterectomies".
- The PIL revealed that in the states of **Bihar, Chhattisgarh, and Rajasthan**, women were subjected to hysterectomies that were deemed **unnecessary, endangering their health.**
 - Private hospitals were found to be involved in performing these unnecessary hysterectomies. **More than two-thirds (70%) of women who have undergone a hysterectomy had the operation in a private health facility.**
- Misuse of the procedure was also observed, with healthcare institutions exploiting it to **claim higher insurance fees** under various [government healthcare schemes](#).

What are the Efforts to Address the Issue?

▪ **Supreme Court Direction:**

- In response to the PIL, the [Supreme Court](#) directed states and union territories to **adopt the health guidelines formulated by the Centre to monitor and prevent unnecessary hysterectomies.** The implementation of these guidelines was mandated within a **three-month timeframe.**
- There has been a **serious violation of the fundamental rights** of the women who underwent unnecessary hysterectomies.
- The SC in Dr. Narendra Gupta vs Union Of India 2023 acknowledged that the **right to health is an intrinsic part of the right to life under [Article 21 of the Constitution](#).** **Life, to be enjoyed in all its diverse elements,** must be based on robust conditions of health.
- SC also urged an action plan to tackle the problem including suggestions to **create national, state and district-level hysterectomy monitoring committees and the inauguration of a grievance portal.**

▪ **Health Ministry Guidelines:**

- In 2022, the **Health Ministry issued guidelines** aimed at preventing unnecessary hysterectomies. States were **instructed to comply with these guidelines to ensure appropriate use of the procedure.**
 - Recently, the ministry has directed the states to share data on the **hysterectomies performed by medical institutions**
 - **Compulsory audits for all hysterectomies** were also advised, similar to the existing audits conducted for [maternal mortality](#).

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