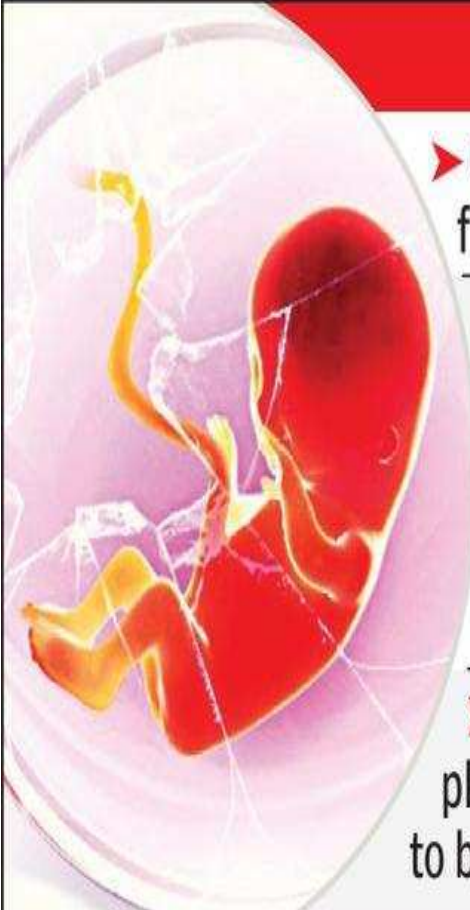




Women, uninterrupted: On access to contraception and abortion services



IN A NUTSHELL

- Over 2 crore couples in country deprived from availing contraceptives
- To result in around 23 lakh unintended pregnancies
- Since lockdown, provision of sterilization and intra uterine contraceptive devices suspended
- Overall adverse impact on family planning programme in 2020 is estimated to be between -15% to -23%

Context:

- The more serious ramifications of the pandemic has been the rather extensive, even if unintended, disruption of health-care services.

What impact did Pandemic have on Contraceptive & Abortion Services?

- Long lockdown periods led to disruption in family planning and contraception services i.e. it reduced the access to these services due to restrictions imposed.
- About two million women missed out on services between January and June; 1.3 million were in India alone.



What are the factors that caused disruption in contraceptive services?

- **Diversion of Health Services:** The bulk of health-care services shifting to cater to COVID-19 related emergencies led to shortage in abortion services.
- **Disruption of Transport:** India listed abortions as essential services under the lockdown, but the disruption of transport services hampered access to centres of care.
- **Lack of awareness** about these services being available during this period also restricted the ability to access these services.
- **Shortage of drugs:** A study in six States by the Foundation for Reproductive Health Services India, showed a severe shortage of medical abortion drugs in pharmacies.

What has been the consequences?

Reduced access to contraceptive & abortion services has led to

1. UNFPA projections indicate an additional 7 million unintended pregnancies are expected to occur.
2. Increase in **domestic violence**
3. Increased **maternal mortality**
4. Constrained the **reproductive rights** of women

Way Ahead:

- The need for contraceptive services remains high in India, with over 1 in 3 women (35%) reporting a need for contraceptive advice.
- Providing uninterrupted abortion and contraceptive counseling, devices and care services are essential to safeguard women.

Contraceptive & Abortion services must continue through measures such as telemedicine, incentives to local clinics to open their doors, resolving drug supply chain disruption.